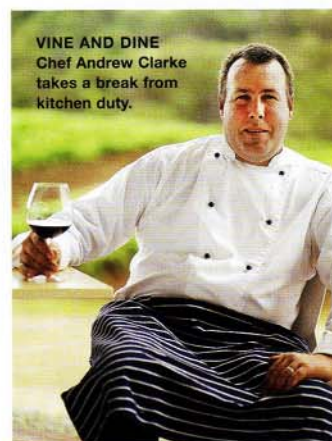


## WINERY RESTAURANT

TEXT JUDY SARRIS

# Roll up to Rock

Chef Andrew Clarke swaps Sydney for a new restaurant in the Hunter Valley.



**VINE AND DINE**  
Chef Andrew Clarke  
takes a break from  
kitchen duty.

Our suspicion that Hunter Valley dining has come a long way was confirmed by Rock, the restaurant recently opened by Macquarie Bank chairman David Clarke at his Poole's Rock winery in Pokolbin. It's clear to all that the bottom line was not much of an issue when it came to creating this modern glass-and-steel structure, perfectly angled to give diners a view across the vineyard lake to the original block of 90-year-old shiraz vines.

During the day, when the building is flooded with light and the doors to the balcony are flung open, the room operates as the Firestick Café, serving snacks, casual lunches and grown-up pizzas pulled from the flaming wood-fired oven at the far end of the room.

When the sun goes down and crisp linen and smart stemware are strewn across the tables, the magic begins. Michael Mandl from Architects Group GSA designed the room, and it's perfectly lit to showcase his sophisticated interpretation of traditional agricultural buildings. The kitchen becomes a bright open theatre where a brigade of chefs performs.

This is the realm of chef Andrew Clarke, David's nephew and business partner, who earned his stripes in some of Sydney's top restaurants, including Claude's, with Tim Pak Poy, and the Bather's Pavilion, under



Serge Dansereau. As one would expect, he's an advocate of fresh, seasonal ingredients, confirmed by a quick glance at the menu.

Before heading for your table, spread yourself across one of the sofas in the adjoining bar for an aperitif or two and ponder the moon across the vines. When you do get around to browsing the menu, you will notice that dishes are offered in three portion sizes, tasting, entree and main – choose a couple of courses or launch into a full degustation.

Our party was up for the latter and kicked off with poached marron, mushroom, artichoke and caviar with tomato and herb sauce, washed down with 2005 Poole's Rock Chardonnay. A delicate scallop, endive and apple salad followed and was the perfect foil for the

2005 Poole's Rock Semillon. Perhaps my favourite dish was the deep-fried squab with fennel, blood orange and baby cress that simply melted in the mouth between sips of 2004 Cockfighter's Ghost Premium Reserve Tasmania Pinot Noir; others may have voted for the slow-roasted veal loin with spinach and bone marrow butter, with 1983 Penfolds Grange.

And yes, the wine list does feature labels other than those from the Poole's Rock portfolio, with a fair selection available by the glass. There's strong support of other Hunter wineries and some good choices from Geelong, Coonawarra and Margaret River. If you're willing to part with big bucks, you can enjoy a 2002 Meursault Chevalier Henri Germain or 1999 Francois Lamarche Grands-Echezeaux, listed with the imported wines.

We sipped on a 2002 La Rame Traditionnel, Sainte Croix du Mont, served with excellent fig and raisin tart and homemade honey ice-cream. I think it was at that point we decided we might roll up to Rock again. !

*Rock Restaurant, DeBeyers Rd, Pokolbin, NSW, (02) 4998 6968, [www.rockrestaurant.com.au](http://www.rockrestaurant.com.au). Note on prices: dishes are served in three portion sizes: tasting, \$8-16; entrée \$16-32; mains \$24-48.*