



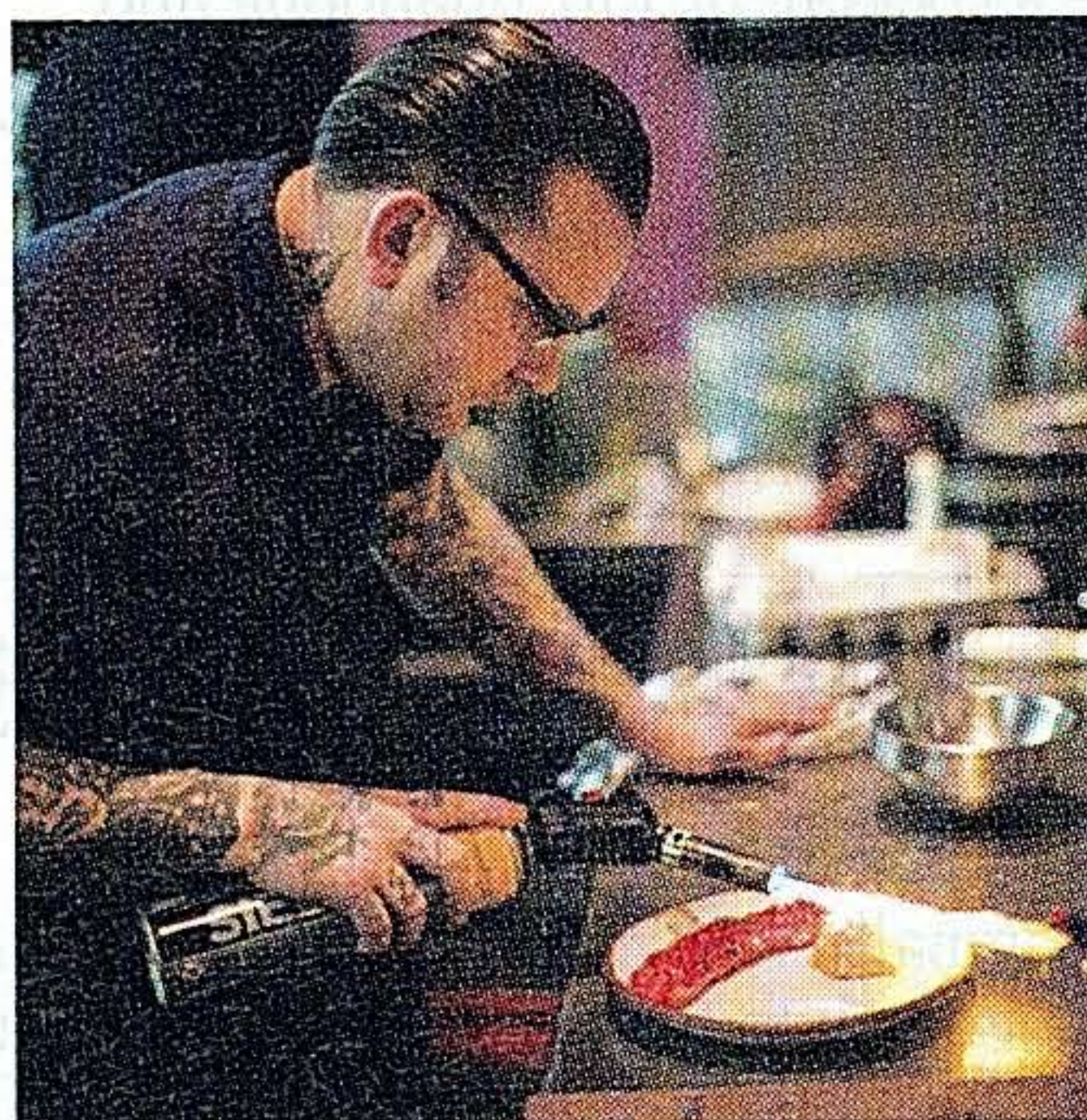
Bodega tapas

Bodega's new menu and fitout takes South American food to new heights. By Myffy Rigby

★★★★★

Bodega's got its groove back. Not that it really went away: it just took a little breather while chefs Ben Milgate and Elvis Abrahamowicz opened Argentine barbecue pit to the stars, *Porteño*. They're back now, splitting their time between here and there, working their brand of denim-clad, Brylcreemed magic and frying some mean eggs while they're at it. The little Surry Hills tapas bar's been given a whole new look. From the plush, dusty-blue bar seats and banquettes to the black lacquered ceiling and an antique pink flamingo hiding among a tangle of plants, the place as a whole is lighter, fresher and sleeker. It's certainly a little more them.

'Them', by the way, is Milgate, Abrahamowicz, Sarah and Rachel Doyle and Joe Valore. The close-knit family all rolled up their sleeves, chipped a few nails and got the whole job done themselves in just under three weeks. The menu is a flamboyant mash-up of South American and Spanish snacking, and also features a short cocktail list. Beer and a Smoke is a beer spiked with hot sauce and



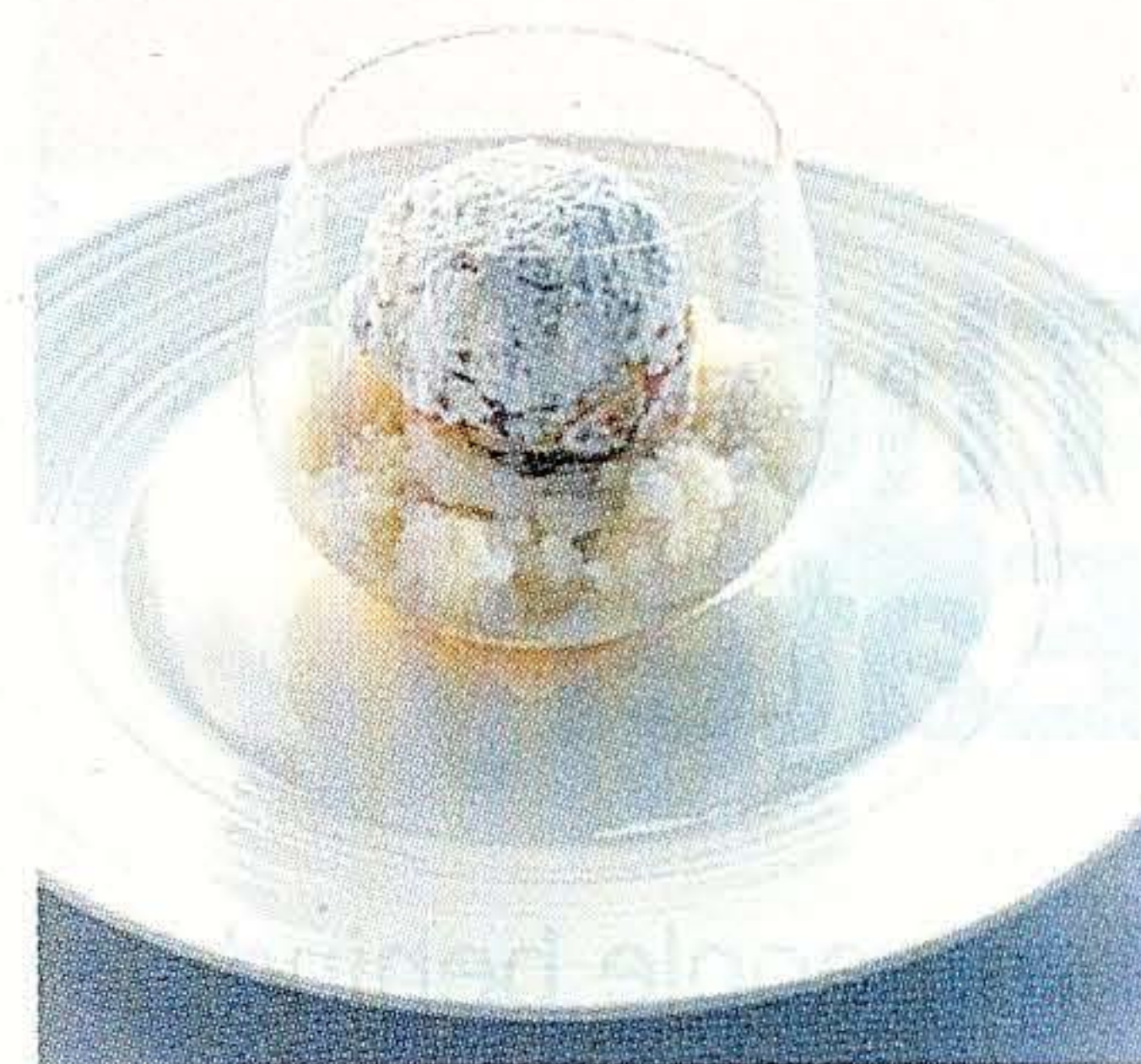
garnished with a smoky mezcal float, rimmed with a peppery coriander salt crust. Or get trashy with a *Kalimotxo* – that's a red wine and Coke, innit.

Don't miss the fluffy buttermilk pancakes with maple butter topped with a rough, deep-golden puck of salt cod and slow-cooked egg and a shower of green onion. It's eyes-roll-to-the-back-of-your-head good. They're also dipping into Abrahamowicz's Polish-Argentine roots with the hefty pork and sweetbread cabbage rolls. These were a mainstay when Bodega first opened in August 2006 and we're very pleased to see them back. Fish fingers are still on the menu, of course (there'd be uproar if the toasted sourdough topped with raw

kingfish, cuttlefish and shavings of cured tuna were taken off). They're joined by crisp corncakes filled with fresh cheese (*casa fresca*) and refried beans. And – oh boy! – devilled eggs with soft, silken rags of house-smoked ham. Veggos, go for the Andean salad, a mess of quinoa and crisped-up potato skins. And if you dig on a steak, the *wagyu skirt* comes with a super-dense, almost paste-like béarnaise sauce. For an extra \$8, you get a plate of fried eggs covered in onion rings.

If you're not shallow breathing and meat-blind by now, you haven't done it right. But it also means you can order the cheesecake sundae with the surprisingly refreshing and not-too-carrotty carrot ice cream. Bodega remains as no-bookings-y as it ever has been, apart from one vital fact: you can book if you're a table of five or more. Go early, or put your name down and hammer a few cocktails at nearby *Button Bar*. This Surry Hills stalwart is firing on all cylinders – get down and tilt some glasses.

Bodega Tapas Restaurant & Bar
216 Commonwealth St, Surry Hills 2010. 02 9212 7766.
www.bodegatapas.com. Lunch Thu-Fri noon-2.30pm; dinner Mon-Sat 6pm-late.



Hot five September restaurants



The Morrison

This place is catnip to business lunchers. They do a hell of a burger with a side of chips cooked in duck fat, or just go straight for the pork chop cooked over hot coals and served with creamed cauliflower. 225 George St, Sydney 2000. 02 9247 6744. themorrison.com.au.



Mr Wong

Beautiful dark-wood furniture, Asian knick-knacks aplenty and a chalky mural of a fetching woman drawn across two floors of exposed brick wall. Dan Hong's Cantonese diner is sure to be a quick Sydney favourite. 3 Bridge Ln, Sydney 2000. 02 9240 3000 merivale.com.au/mrwong



Milk Bar by Ish

The latest venture from the Café Ish team offers burgers, PB'n'J milkshakes and spicy chicken wings. Plus: jukebox and a lolly pick'n'mix. 105 Regent St, Redfern 2016.



Spice I Am

Go for the massaman curry, the som tum and the fermented rice noodles with fish curry sauce. 90 Wentworth Ave, Surry Hills 2010. 02 9280 0928. www.spiceiam.com.



Quay

Quay's at its best at lunch. Not just because of those views, either – the Sydney Opera House, the ferries chugging through the bay, the Harbour Bridge crawling with tiny bridge climbers are all well and good, but you'll really want to see chef Peter Gilmore's art-on-a-plate. *Overseas Passenger Terminal*, The Rocks 2000. 02 9251 5600. www.quay.com.au.