

Fog lifting

US chefs are making Prahran cool again, writes **Simon Plant**

► **Top of the chops:** lamb rack in paprika is both earthy and elegant.

► **Smash and crab:** (main picture) crab cakes with watercress and chimichurri sauce.

▼ **Fizzy logic:** Pommery is the preferred French champagne.

▼ **Fog clearing:** (bottom) the interior of Fog in Greville St, Prahran.

Pictures: DEAN CAMBRAY



► Fog

142 GREVILLE ST, PRAHRAN

Ph: 9521 3155

Lunch and dinner Tue-Sun. Licensed. Expect to pay about \$65 a head for three courses plus wine.

NOT so long ago, Greville St was losing its cool. Bland brand names were replacing the indie stores and bookshops, and bars were making way for discount fashion. When the Continental fell over as well, all seemed lost.

Happily, this once bohemian bit of Prahran has bounced back, and Fog — just nine months old — can take some of the credit.

Part-restaurant, part-bar, it has oodles of style. A turquoise carpet runner sweeps up stairs, red twig chandeliers adorn the capacious dining room, and lacquered black columns march back to a shimmering champagne bar and open roof courtyard.

"People are looking for a bit of theatre," proprietor Sam Frantzeskos says . . . and on a warm summer's night, Fog is thick with 30-somethings.

They cluster around the long main bar, basking in its moonglow lighting and sipping one cocktail after another.

Fog's expert bar staff have been known to mix 120 martinis in one night, but fun-filled Fog is not just about drink. The affordable food warrants close inspection as well.

There's an American southwest thing happening here and it's the real thing. The three amigos heading up Fog's kitchen all hail from the States so they know what they're doing when it comes to beans, chillies and quesadillas.

Start your visit with spiced prawns and a fruit-tingling green papaya salad. Then move on to light-as-air crab cakes. The ones at Fog get a mild jag of bitterness from watercress and an emphatic chimichurri sauce (fashioned from garlic and jalapeno peppers).

Don't miss roasted beetroot with shaved fennel (recipe below) either.



try

Restaurants with bars, bars with restaurants:

Melbourne has plenty of both. Check these out:

- **Comme**, 7 Alfred Place, city. Ph: 9631 4010
- **Becco**, 11 Crossley St, city. Ph: 9663 3000
- **Cicciolina**, 130 Acland St, St Kilda. Ph: 9525 3333
- **Taxi**, Level 1, Transport Hotel, Federation Square. Ph: 9654 8808

Orbited by spheres of Meredith goat's cheese, this thoughtful dish plays amusingly with colour and texture.

Grilled meats are another southwest specialty and Fog — which has its own oak smoker out back — rises to the occasion with a knockout lamb rack.

Three blushing pink chops, steeped in smokily fragrant paprika, are stacked over Swiss chard and green tomato chutney dances around the edge. Earthy and elegant all at once.

Size matters at Fog. Four big chunks of john dory ride spears of white asparagus and charred pear tomatoes.

As for the "spring chicken", it's almost half a bird: generously seasoned, roasted to perfection and squatting on short-grain calasparra rice, which soaks up all the juices.

Make sure you order a side of thick-cut chips with your mains. Fog uses cottonseed oil so these hot potatoes are bronzed outside and fluffy white within.

We matched this robust fare with chilled Pommery — Fog's preferred French fizz — and a glass or two of T'Gallant's impressive Imogen pinot gris.

Moving into sweets, you may want to check out some dessert wines. The "Chocolate Molten Cake" with treacle nut brittle ice cream demands a tawny port. A dark Pedro Ximenez sherry would sit well with "Chocolate & Rhubarb 3 Ways".

On my next visit, I'm throwing caution to the wind and ordering the \$28 caramel and coffee trifle. Seven-year-old Havana Club rum is a built-in feature.

FOG cranks up the volume as the night wears on. The place throbs with chatter and smooth grooves, which just proves Frantzeskos — a man with a background in nightclubs — really knows his market.

"People are discovering us," he says, as the doorman admits more cool, black-clad customers. "But we haven't touched the sides yet."

As for the name, Fog . . . that's easy. It's shorthand for "Frantzeskos on Greville".

Long may he stay.

Don't mist this simple little treasure emerging from the Fog

recipe

ROASTED beetroot with shaved fennel is one of many unusual treasures at this place. It is simple to prepare, so try it for yourself (serves 4-6):

- Heat oven to 200C. Make dressing by mixing 2tbs EV olive oil, 175ml verjus, 3 minced garlic, salt and pepper. Toss 3 trimmed, medium beetroot in this dressing. Wrap these in foil and bake for 90min, or until just tender. Unwrap, cool and peel.

- Clean 1 fennel bulb of stalks, wash and slice thinly on a mandoline (or by hand). Dress fennel slices with 1tbs EV olive oil, juice of ½ lemon and season. Cut beetroot into small cubes and toss with 50ml sour cream. Season.
- Roll 200g soft, fresh goat's cheese (Meredith is ideal) into grape-sized balls. Dust with coriander seeds you have warmed briefly in a pan to release flavour, then cracked.

- To serve, ideally as an entree or a side dish, place an egg ring or similar in the middle of the first plate, place the marinated beetroot in the middle of the mould, remove mould and repeat on each plate.
- Dot the balls of goat's cheese around the plates, and place the shaved fennel on top of the beetroot on each plate.
- Garnish with fresh chervil.

