

Angove | SA Weekend restaurant review

Angove might be better known for its fine St Agnes brandies and a large-scale winery/distillery in the Riverland, but its McLaren Vale cellar door lunch is from a different planet.

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Inside Angove's McLaren Vale cellar door.

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Whether it's sashimi or ceviche, crudo or tartare, raw fish dishes have become as much a fixture in contemporary restaurants as napkins or dessert. That's not an issue in itself. But why do 99.9 per cent of them have to feature the same variety?

Yes, the firmness and mild-to-neutral flavour of kingfish makes it a safe bet for even fussy eaters. And the consistent quality and supply of this farmed product also helps. But it isn't the only kind of seafood that can be eaten raw – or even the best.

The snapper dish at Angove's McLaren Vale cellar door, for example, is from a different planet. Chunks of the fish are ever-so-briefly torched to singe the skin but leave the pale pink flesh beneath pure, delicate and vulnerable. Translucent slices of celery and an understated "ponzu" sauce based on fennel juice gently draw out the flavour, while a fermented green chilli relish adds a lovely exclamation mark at the finish. The combination is beyond exquisite.

If the name Angove caused a double take, I'm sure you are not alone. This is the 130-plus-year-old company better known for its fine St Agnes brandies and a large-scale winery/distillery in the Riverland. Recent generations of the family, however, have worked to establish a presence at the premium end of the market, adopting organic principles and sourcing fruit from areas including the Adelaide Hills.



Raw snapper, fennel ponzu, fermented chilli at Angove cellar door, McLaren Vale.



Ricotta gnudi, mushrooms, hazelnuts at Angove cellar door, McLaren Vale.

The cellar door beside the Warboys vineyard in McLaren Vale is another part of this strategy, giving the brand a home closer to the city in a high-profile food and wine region.

On first appearances, the structure doesn't stray too far from current cellar door templates, with plenty of polished concrete, timber and panels of glass to blur the line between indoors and out. A few things stand out, however. There is the "historic" stone building to one side, a convincing reproduction of the original barrel room at Tea Tree Gully. The vine-clad slope so close you can nearly pick grapes from the deck. And, more importantly, the fact that Georgie Rogers is working in the kitchen.

While she might not have a high profile, the effervescent Rogers is no overnight sensation. Over the past 15 years, she has run a Spanish cafe/delicatessen, translated this into cooking for a wine bar (Cantina Sociale), and then the much larger East End Cellars, at the same time establishing a farm in the Eden Valley.

All these experiences have led now to Angove, which after having the cellar door for more than a decade has decided to invest in more sophisticated dining. That Rogers has delivered this so brilliantly is remarkable given the tiny galley kitchen in which the waiting staff and chefs play a precarious game of dodging doors and shimmying around each other as plates go back and forth.



Smoked duck, roasted beets, pickled cabbage at Angove cellar door, McLaren Vale.

Fortunately, a starter of smoked duck breast makes it to the table with its candy-shop pink and purple components all in place. These include wedges of pickled beetroot, cubes of grenache rose jelly, shiso leaves, the excellent breast "ham" slices and a fluoro pickled cabbage that is a bit too strident for the rest.

A larger serve of ricotta gnudi is tossed with celeriac, hazelnuts and mushrooms including baby kings and enoki. If that is sounding a tad austere, it is because I have skipped all the extra cheese and the butter in which everything has fried to a toasty golden tan and which is also the base for a "sauce" that makes this even naughtier. Hogget, a term for sheep meat between lamb and mutton in age, comes from Rogers' own farm. Today it is rump that is prepared in a braise with Middle Eastern spices, preserved lemon, almond tarator and a dark date jus, flavours as cosy as one of those sleeping-bag jackets.

To finish, caramelised figs and their sweet, treacle-y syrup lap up the creaminess and mild tang of a huge scoop of ice-cream made from sheep milk yoghurt. Simple but still rather special. A theme for the day.

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ANGOVE

117 Chalk Hill Rd, McLaren Vale
8323 6900
angove.com.au

Main courses \$28-\$48

Open

Lunch Thu-Sun

Must try

Raw Cape Jaffa snapper, fennel ponzu; caramelised figs, sheep's milk yoghurt ice-cream

Verdict

Food 16/20
Ambience 15/20
Service 13/20
Value 15/20
Overall 15.5/20

As a guide, scores indicate: 1-9 Fail; 10-11 Satisfactory; 12-14 Recommended; 15-16 Very Good; 17-18 Outstanding; 19-20 World Class