

DINING OUT

Braided Rivers Restaurant

Burnett St
Ashburton
Phone 03 307 2541

Tuesday to Saturday nights
from 5pm. Bookings
advisable

Please don't rush through Ashburton. You won't want to miss the town's newest dining experience. Turn off State Highway One and on the corner of Burnett and Cass streets is the Braided Rivers restaurant and bar where chef Andrew Bain (ex *Le Bon Bolli* and the Crumpet Club) is serving up fine food. Manager Mark Milmine says it is better described as contemporary dining "rather than the cliched fine dining".

"Just because we're not a big city, it doesn't mean you can't eat well. In fact if you're living in Christchurch, it's an easy hour's drive to our venue with its charm, fantastic service and a great chef."

Braided Rivers is only the second restaurant in New Zealand, and the only one in the South Island to boast a Montague broiler, which Milmine says creates delicious steaks. "It really does a good job of sealing in the juices."

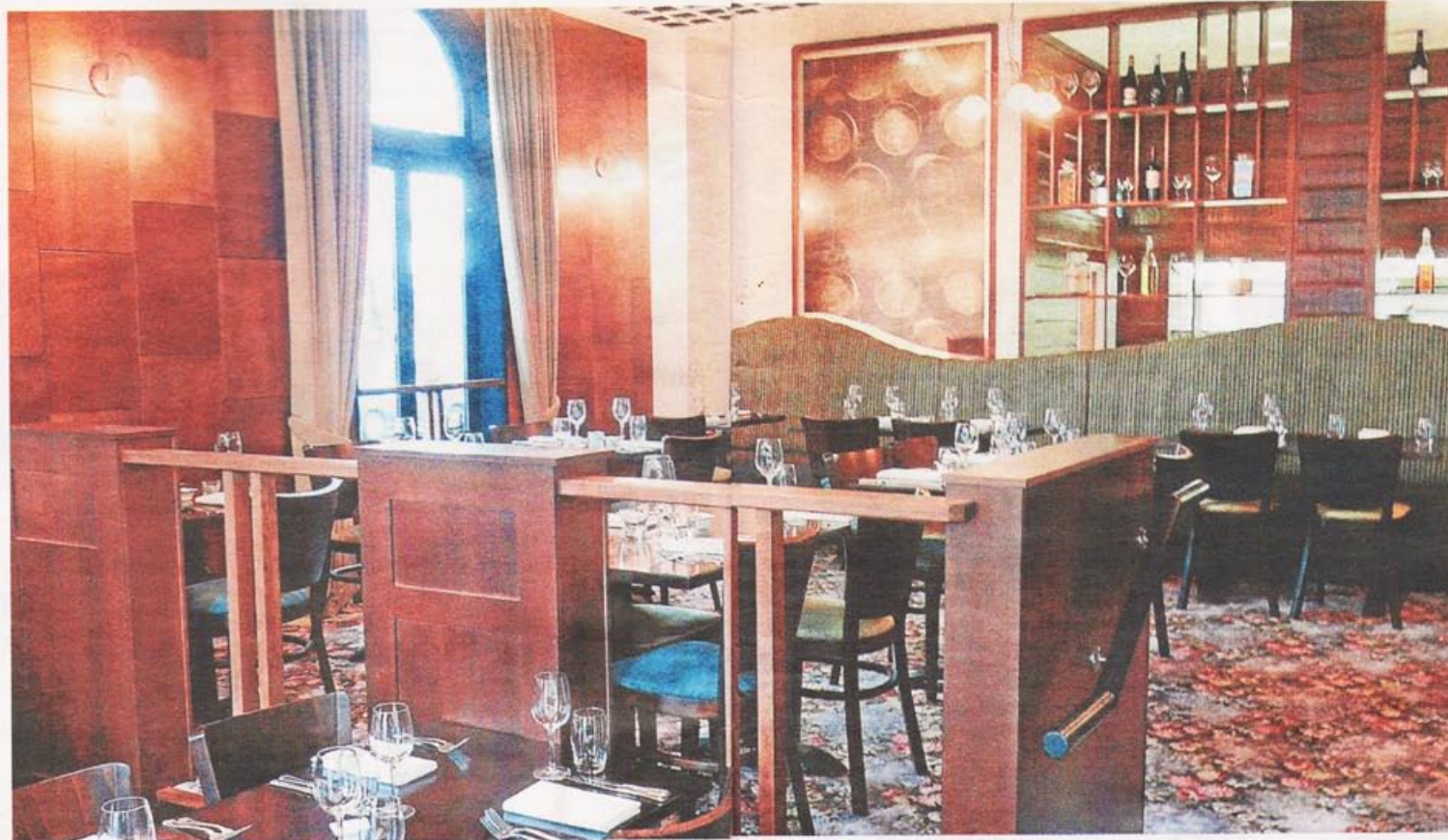
I made the journey south to find out for myself.

The building is a renovated garage and the designers have kept many of the traditional features including old beams and arched windows. You'll either hate the carpet or love it.

The menu starts with a choice of two soups (\$14): caramelised cauliflower with black pudding and apple essence, or mutton and bean soup with lardons and vegetables.

Interesting as they sound, we skip soups and head for the entrees.

These include salmon marinated in dill served with orange, fennel and radishes (\$19) grilled prawns with prosciutto, herb gnocchi, poached egg and rocket (\$20) and a pork belly dish



Olden times: Many of the architectural features of the former garage remain in the Braided Rivers restaurant.

Photo: KIM TRIEGAARDT

Small town; big flavours

(\$18) as well as our orders of apple-cured courgette with green beans, pear salad, goat's cheese and hazelnut dressing (\$17) and pork and ham knuckle terrine with a puree of black plums and bread and butter pickles (\$19).

Both dishes are delicious. The courgette concoction was light and refreshing with an apple tang and gorgeous crunch, while the pork terrine had a deep, rich flavour with good texture.

The selections for the main dishes were equally varied and included grilled lamb saddle and crumbed sweetbreads with yams, brussels sprouts and roasted-

in-duck-fat potatoes (\$34); and pork loin on braised red cabbage, with green lentils, peppercorn sauce and bacon (\$32). Vegetarians might like the potato tortellinis with almonds and sage butter, baby onions, mushrooms and rocket (\$25). As well as Montague-broiled steaks, the menu includes the Angus flintstone on potato puree and mushroom sauce (\$38), Ocean beef fillet with ox tongue, wholegrain mustard sauce and brioche and Ocean beef ribeye with onion rings, onion marmalade, bearnaise and hand-cut fries (\$34). We wanted a steak so the latter was our choice - and the pan-fried salmon on

chorizo sausage and paella rice with saffron sauce and green lipped mussels (\$32) because the combination sounded bizarre.

The steak was disappointing. It was on the skinny side, lacked any real flavour and was overwhelmed by the onion rings and the onion marmalade. However, my dining companion did rate the fries as the best.

The salmon was an explosion of tastes, all good. The chorizo was wonderfully peppery, the salmon creamy and the paella rice full of flavour. A baby Caesar salad - liberally sprinkled with bacon - went down well

We couldn't resist sampling the chocolate brownie with raspberry ice cream and a minted orange salad, although it was not an easy choice with a tiramisu, rum soaked dried fruits and frozen sweet wine sabayon, and pear and ginger cake with apple icecream (all \$14) all featuring on the dessert menu. The chocolate brownie was melt-in-your-mouth delicious, with its rich chocolate offset perfectly by the homemade raspberry ice-cream.

The service was faultless and our waitress was quite delightful, enduring our questions and demands with good humour.

KIM TRIEGAARDT