



# restaurants

**Stephen Downes**  
the food critic  
with bite

**eat**  
9/15

Conceived quarterly by Ramon Freixa, a Michelin-starred Spanish chef, Nuevo's offerings seem to be more fine-end European than strictly Iberian. We're going for superlative subtlety here, and some things - like a block of carrot "gel" - were not only very faint but quite unappetising for me. You might like them.

There's an awful lot of fats (in emulsions of various sorts) and sugars in the savoury dishes, too, and I would have liked a bit of citrus astringency here and there to balance them. Platings are very pretty.

Two fixed-price multi-course lists lead off followed by fairly limited a la carte fare that repeats several menu dishes.

A Moreton Bay bug tartare (\$22.50) amounted to terrific slugs of raw bug tail in an excellent, perfumed mayonnaise-style emulsion. Beneath strewn shoots were various "escabeche" vegetables - broccoli and cauliflower, green beans and a baby carrot. "Escabeche" suggests they'd been steeped in a hot flavoured vinegar and left to cool. Deep-fried squiggles of tempura-battered and deep-fried salad leaves also made the cut.

I couldn't get the hang of my entree of coffee-flavoured salmon (\$22.50), failing to detect either caffeine or its effect in two smallish blocks of good cured fish. The plate partners threw me even more: two bits of raw baby carrot, two blocks of the carrot gel that had a mild and unappetising medicinal flavour, and an oval of carrot ice cream that I simply didn't like (you might).

Suckling pig (\$35) was the eat of the meat, a block of melt-in-mouth meat topped by paper-thin crisped skin. It sat partly on a long smear of roasted-apple puree, deftly cooked almost to the point - but not quite - of taking on burnt flavours. Texturally contrasting caramelised eggplant bits and pistachio nut crumbs also contributed. Notice the sugar.

Less successful but nonetheless adventurous was a lamb shank (\$30.50) on loosely tossed "Catalan" spinach. A smeary prune attended on a skid of chocolate, and in a depression in Nuevo's ritzy plates was a pine nut emulsion I thought was a bit chalky and dull. A very sticky and concentrated red wine juice was poured over the top of the shank.

The night's most integrated offering was a chocolate dessert (\$18.50) of four lobes of mousse, custard, ice cream and yoghurt of various terrific flavours and textures. A triangle of "white chocolate brownie" and tiny chocolate cubes garnished. The tartness of the yoghurt balanced the unctuousness of other elements and the result was terrific.

Nuevo serves no bread and with all those smears and sauces it should. It should anyway, of course. In Hilton dining rooms, I imagine they don't like diners to lick their plates.

**drink**  
5/10

If you're a wine buff with serious money, Nuevo's wine list will appeal. It didn't to me, mainly because the poorer among us will look long and hard for something to drink among bottles bearing prices beginning in the \$40s.

Ten table whites and the same number of reds are slated between \$9 and \$16 a glass, most of them around \$13, and a long Spanish list begins with a few bottles in the low \$40s. Oddly enough, the Spanish offerings almost certainly offer better value than their Australian counterparts. A Shadowfax 2007 chardonnay, for instance, comes in at \$72.

It retails somewhere between \$25 and \$30.



## Nuevo 37 (Hilton Melbourne South Wharf)

2 Convention Centre  
Place, South Wharf

Ph: 9027 2124

Chef: Philippe Perrey

Open: Noon-3pm Mon-Fri;  
6-10pm seven days

Parking: Nearby commercial car park or  
valet parking

Cards: AE, DC, MC, Visa

Seats: 100, fine-weather terrace 20;  
private room 10

Liquor status: Licensed

Cost: Three-course menu \$65,  
five-course \$115; about \$70 for three  
courses a la carte

**31**  
out of 50

### Would I go back?

Not before seeing how food, service  
and prices develop.



**value**  
6/10

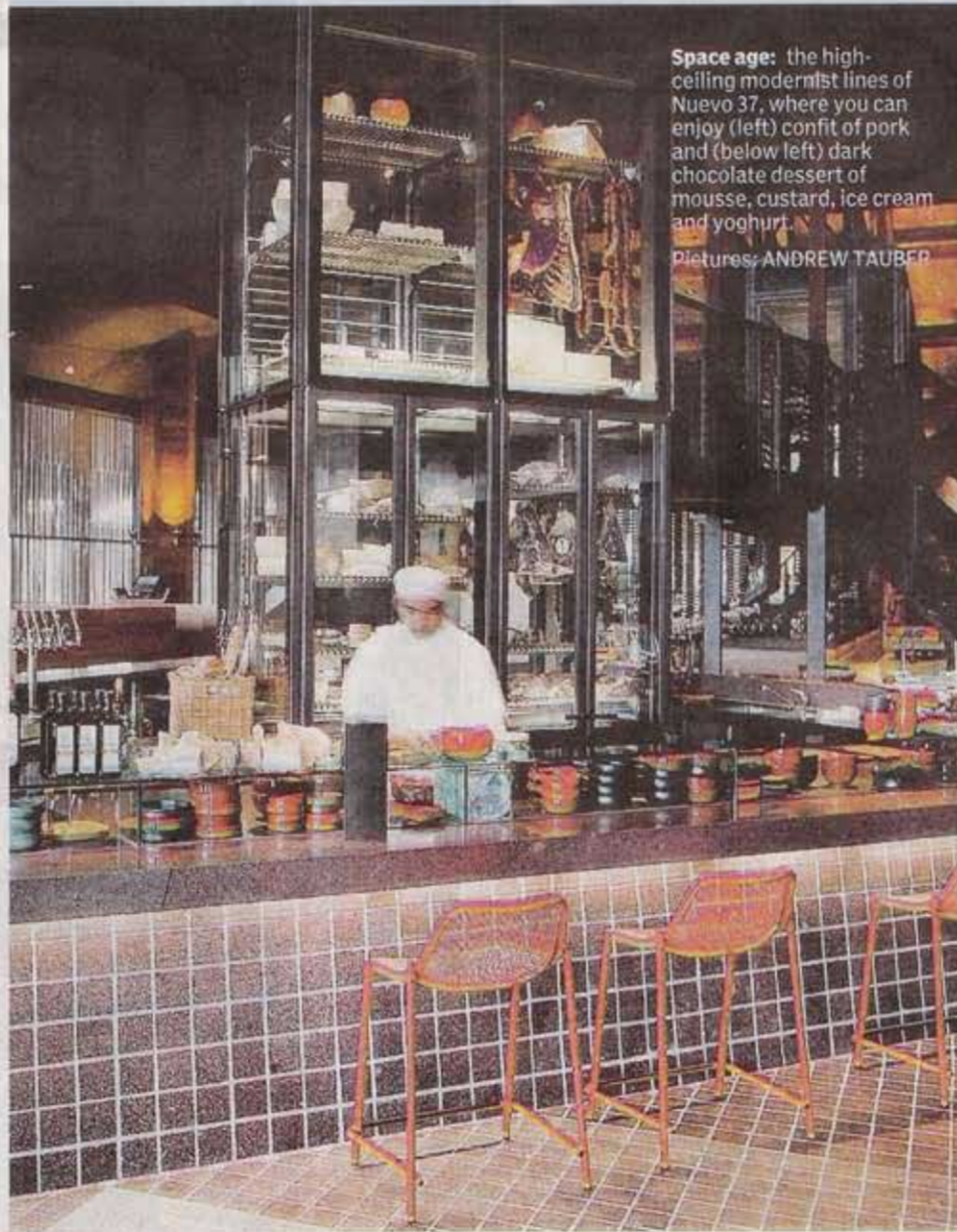
If you're searching for high refinement, then you're bound to find something to like here. But at its prices - I imagine they will increase once the restaurant and hotel are more established - it's barely a bargain. Wines prices offer no favours.

**staff**  
7/10

An all-in-black keen young team in ties did a hospitable job the night I visited, which was soon after the restaurant opened. But even an army of them failed to be completely battle-ready, and there were several truces in the attack on our table. With practice, I expect service will become more efficient.

**style**  
4/5

A wonderful space the size of a basketball stadium, Nuevo has a high ceiling of modernist panelling in spotted gum pine, glass hung with grey gauze on two sides, the finest glassware, snazzy cutlery, white napkins and comfy seating. I loved its even, low lighting. Dark solid-timber tables are fairly close.



**Space age:** the high-ceiling modernist lines of Nuevo 37, where you can enjoy (left) confit of pork and (below left) dark chocolate dessert of mousse, custard, ice cream and yoghurt.

Pictures: ANDREW TAUBER



You'll see more skid marks at Nuevo 37 than at the Hoddle St end of the Eastern Freeway. They'll be on plates, of course, and be made by food in various forms. Nuevo serves some super-refined flavours and textures. But I wasn't convinced that the many parts of some dishes made satisfying wholes, and prices are high. For all that, it's an exquisite room.

## MELBOURNE FACTORY OUTLET GUIDE

To advertise within this special shopping feature to appear in the *Herald Sun* on Tuesday June 16, please contact Brunetta Stocco on 9292 2660 or [stoccob@hwt.com.au](mailto:stoccob@hwt.com.au)

**Herald Sun**