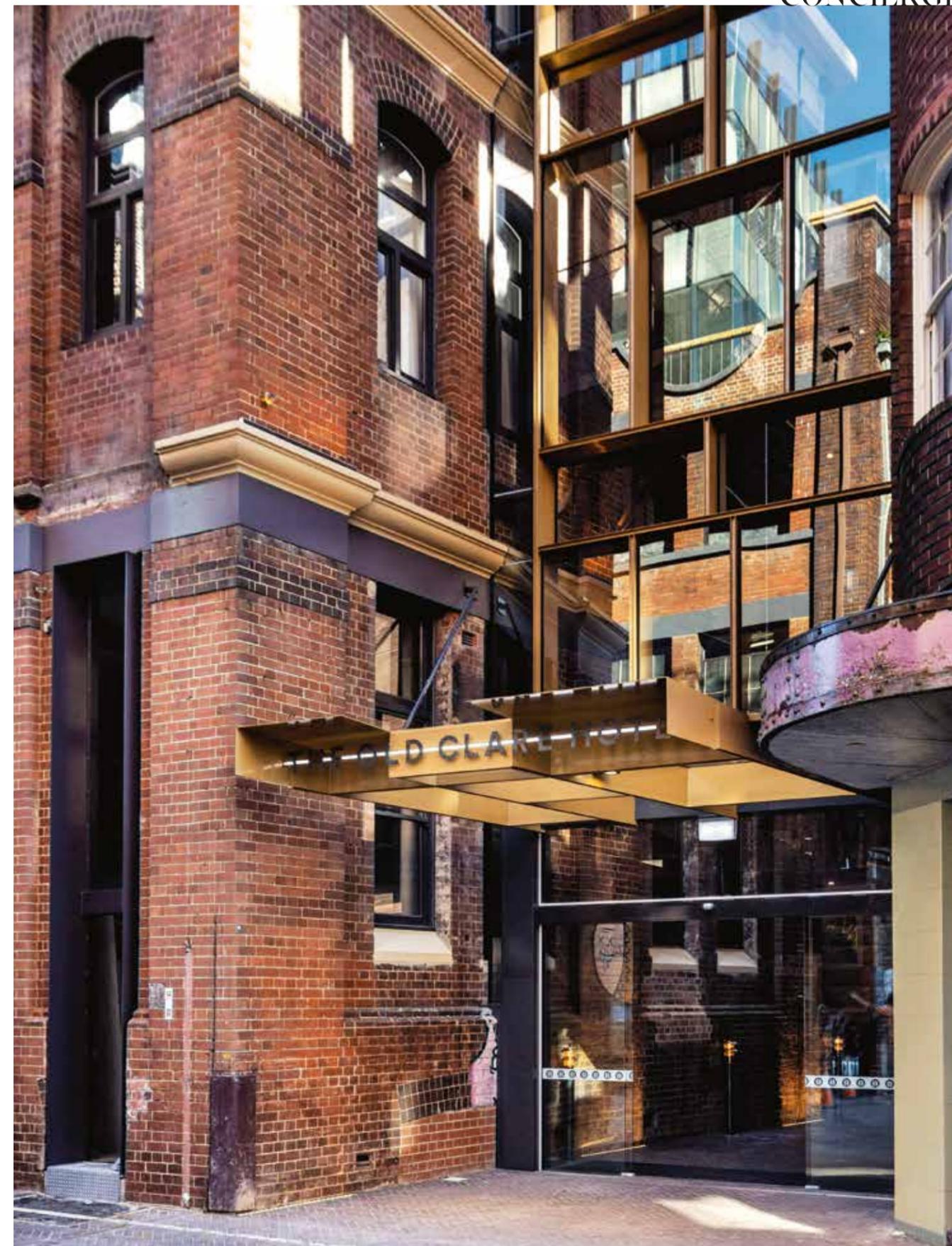


THIS PAGE: A curved inner stairwell in The Old Clare Hotel leads from Silbereye restaurant to The Clare bar below. Raw concrete walls are illuminated by a large 'Topaz' pendant by Melbourne's Copper ID. OPPOSITE PAGE: The hotel entrance sits between the old brewery administration building (on the left) and the Art Deco-style former pub. A glass box, designed by architect Tim Greer, ties everything together, enclosing an old laneway to form the hotel lobby.

DECENT *ex*POSURE

Sydney's booming inner-city Chippendale quarter welcomes a Nordic-inspired restaurant and a boutique hotel whose deconstructed design reveals its layered past.

By Leah Twomey
Photographed by
Michael Wee



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CHEF SAM MILLER SETS DOWN a plate with a fish carcass stripped of flesh, deep fried and re-dressed with its own salted and smoked meat, topped with creamed Pacific oysters and beach herbs that smack of Sydney's coastal air: beach cabbage, young shoots of bladderwort, samphire and warrigal.

Miller, a Yorkshireman, has arrived in Sydney following five years as executive sous-chef of Noma in Copenhagen (under co-founder René Redzepi). When he joined, the kitchen was number 32 on the San Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants list. It swiftly moved up to number three, then number one.

Silvereye, which opened in September in Chippendale, is his first solo restaurant. It's part of the redevelopment of the former Clare Hotel and Carlton & United Breweries administration building by Unlisted Collection, owned by Singaporean hotelier and restaurateur Loh Lik Peng. The brewery closed in 2005 and part of its site was redeveloped as the Central Park complex. The neighbouring hotel (built during World War II in Art Deco style) and Victorian-era administration building have now been reimaged as three restaurants, a bar and The Old Clare Hotel.

For the 52-seat Silvereye, Miller has brought with him sous-chef Tom Halpin and restaurant manager James Audas — also both ex-Noma. His tasting menus (one is 11 courses; the other 17) not only elevate delicate flavours but underline weightier, counterpointing ingredients, creating balance and subtlety scored with sharp, bitter, punchy and sweet elements.

"We cook with a lot of vegetables, herbs, seafood and shellfish, and just a small amount of meat," Miller says. "We take experience from where we've worked, but I don't think you'd class the food as 'new Nordic' — we've got our own touches. We want it to be light and fresh. Everything should be delicious. It doesn't matter how creative you are; if it doesn't taste good there's no point."

He brings out a butter-soft suckling pig leg, cooked sous vide for 36 hours and finished in the pan to crisp the skin, served with a sharp compote of pickled radicchio and blueberries and a brown butter and pork sauce. Dessert is a mix of savoury, sweet and cooling flavours. The milkiness of house-made fresh cheese is heightened with pineapple sage and a lemon myrtle granita. Piled alongside are strawberries warmed in smoked bone-marrow fat, freshened again with herbs: wild sorrel and sorrel flowers.

Having honed preserving techniques in the Nordic kitchens, at Silvereye they salt, cure and make vinegars in-house, with flavourings like rhubarb, celery and fennel. "You're not going to have a lot of starch and carbohydrates to fill you up. So even though you're having a lot of food, you should still feel nice and fresh," says Miller. "Having a lot of things pickled and salted helps to cut it and aid the digestion."

A long menu that does not overstuff is a splendid thing. And Miller is dedicated to making vegetables the stars of his dishes. "I don't find meat that interesting to cook. I find there's more variation in how vegetables can taste on a daily basis — if it's been raining, if it's been drier, where they're grown — all these nuances."

Food is served on handmade ceramic plates and vessels in earthy browns, creams and blacks, custom-made by Byron »

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT: One of the hotel's rooms, with mid-century furniture, original brick walls and floor lamp by London upcycling firm The Rag and Bone Man. A silvereye bird by artist Stacey Keating on the restaurant wall. Curves soften Matt Darwon's refined-yet-rustic interior, with American oak tables by Beclau and a perimeter-hugging banquette upholstered by The Recover Centre. The Art Deco-inspired lines of the exterior boast a timeless elegance.



CONCIERGE

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Large zinc-plated pendants are a hallmark of Silvereye. Vintage barber chairs from the collection of botelier Loh Lik Peng (left, with architect Tim Greer) are dotted around the hotel. Beer-bottle amber glass squares in the reception area and bar (left) evoke the site's brewery history. Atmospheric light fixtures by The Rag and Bone Man. A dessert of cheese, lemon myrtle granita and strawberries. A room in The Old Clare shows off exposed brick walls and original features.

CONCIERGE



« Bay ceramicist Anna-Karina Elias. This natural palette echoes the restaurant's restrained design, by architect Matt Darwon in collaboration with GP2 Projects. Darwon, who has worked on such high-profile restaurants as Firedoor, Pony and Toko, has created a casual space where diners feel welcome to chat with Miller over the Italian Calacatta Oro marble kitchen island bench.

The design is soothing in its fluidity; curves are everywhere: on timber walls, joinery corners and the tapered edges of American oak tables custom-designed by Beclau's Dominick ter Huurne. A banquette covered with Warwick 'Budapest Ebony' fabric hugs the perimeter of the room and mural artist Stacey Keating has decorated the walls with silvereye birds — some in flight; others perched sweetly on sconces. "The curved lines soften the place," says Darwon. "I think it will be quite a romantic and serene experience here; the food is definitely going to be that, and the dishes and fit-out will work in harmony with one another."

Underneath, on the original pub site, is a new bar, The Clare. Across a glass-enclosed laneway, the old admin building features two more restaurants (Automata, headed by Sydney chef Clayton Wells, formerly of Momofuku Seiōbo and Quay; and Kensington Street Social, by British chef Jason Atherton), as well as hotel rooms and a rooftop pool. A day spa will open next year.

Peng hired architect Tim Greer of Tonkin Zulaikha Greer — whose résumé includes Sydney's Carriageworks and the redesign of Bennelong restaurant — to bring the boutique hotel to life. Greer's design plays with historical references inherent in the walls — from crumbling bricks to original tiles — and creates a destination that is a progression of its past. Steel trims and handles alongside timber joinery echo their older counterparts and enhance the materiality of the property. "What you see is what you get. It's real and it's solid," says Greer. "Another key move was the idea of 'unbuilding'. We strategically cut away bits of the structure; you can see it unravelling back through time, and then you see us projecting into the future with the new additions."

The provenance of each guest room determined its shape, lighting and atmosphere. Some are angled to appreciate morning sun, while others have been left with the markings of age, such as unfinished walls, exposed bricks, original windows. "You rarely get uniformity in old buildings," says Peng. "There are no right angles, walls aren't always straight and there are columns in strange places, so it forces you to design rooms that are interesting and different."

Peng wants the individuality of the experience to shine as guests and locals come by The Old Clare, have a cocktail in the bar, dine on some of the best food in the city and, if they choose to book a room, dream a hedonist's dream. *VL*

The Old Clare Hotel, cnr Broadway and Kensington St, Chippendale NSW; (02) 8277 8277; theoldclarehotel.com.au. Silvereye, (02) 8277 8520; silvereye-restaurant.com.au.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP:

The process of 'unbuilding', cutting into layers and leaving them open, has revealed the history of the site. Silvereye chef Sam Miller, formerly executive sous-chef of Noma in Copenhagen, voted world's best restaurant during his tenure. The rooftop pool. Miller's suckling pig leg with pickled radicchio and blueberries. The original office door in one of the suites salutes the building's rich past. Details, last pages.

