



## Birdcage

**The George Lobby, 129 Fitzroy St, St Kilda**  
**Phone: 9534 0277**

**Hours:** Lunch Tues-Fri, dinner Tues-Sun

**Licence:** Fully licensed

**Cost:** About \$36 for two

**Verdict:** Excellent Japanese-ish food. Great wine list. St Kilda informality. One for the books.

**B**irdcage is on one side of the George building in St Kilda. It boasts a Peter Walsh mural, mosaic tiles, a long wooden bar and dark wood tables edging the small space.

The menu here is Japanese-ish – daringly borrowing little touches from the rest of Asia, not to mention Scandinavia and Italy.

We chose an Alsatian gewurtztraminer which blended perfectly with the tart and sweetish flavours of the food.

Try a bowl of steamed, salted soy beans as you wait. Delicious and, I imagine, good for you. They certainly set the tastebuds a-humming and go well with the house specialty rieslings.

We tried a little traditional sashimi to test-drive the freshness of the tuna, salmon and squid. Just fine. But the more unusual dishes were more fun.

Pork meatballs (*niku-dango*) were airy and light as a feather – served in a dark-brown Japanese tomato sauce with a mesclun salad. A treat.

*Tori no karage* is sort of Japanese for KFC: chicken pieces marinated in sake, tossed in “French and Asian herbs”, then deep-fried. Not bad, but I would have liked some kind of piquant sauce with it.

The mixed mushroom wontons were not the best but the *sukiyaki udon* was terrific – rare beef poached in wine, honey and soy, slivered and served over udon noodles with a few julienned vegetables and some Korean *kimchi* – and hot.

Excellent was the traditional *unagi don*: braised eel served over rice with slivers of omelette, cucumber and some salmon roe.

For dessert we shared (because it is rather large) some *daifuku* – top-notch vanilla ice cream wrapped in rice curd and served with strawberries and a strawberry sauce. Delightful.

Birdcage is a groovy place to be. And I will go back to taste the Kobe beef. Farmed in Victoria, it is evidently the real thing.

**Graham Pearce**