



# Pierre at last

A top chef decides to mix it under Canvas, writes **Bob Hart**



▲ **A steal:** the '05 Scorpo pinot rose from the Mornington Peninsula.

► **Tasty tagine:** broth laced with saffron-enhanced kipfler potatoes, mussels, prawns and flathead tails.

► **Dish of the day:** (main picture) roasted hapuku fillet on crushed potatoes, green olives and parsley, flanked by anchovy fritters.

▼ **Distinguished:** Pierre Khodja is a wizard in the kitchen.

▼ **Welcome:** inside the sleek and stylish Canvas.

Pictures: DEAN CAMBRAY



► **Canvas**  
302-320 BURWOOD RD, HAWTHORN  
Ph: 9819 2200

Lunch and dinner daily. Licensed. Expect to pay \$60 a head plus wine for three courses.

IT IS five years since he arrived in Victoria, but at last one of our most gifted international chefs has chosen to move to civilisation.

Since Pierre Khodja migrated from London, where he was rated by many alongside a promising newcomer called Gordon Ramsay, his talents have blushed almost unseen.

He chose to settle, with his wife and three daughters, on the Mornington Peninsula, where he opened a restaurant at which his wizardry was seen by a few but not nearly enough.

So this year he gave up the battle — just as the creators of a fine, new Hawthorn establishment, as luck would have it, were looking for a chef as distinguished as the gleaming premises in which they intended to open a sleek and stylish restaurant called Canvas.

Mercifully, their eyes met. And the result, as a brilliant lunch demonstrated this week, is possibly the best food to have been offered in this gastronomically deprived sector of Melbourne.

My mate and I inevitably threw ourselves at the mercy of Khodja — a Frenchman of Algerian extraction — which resulted in a meal that was both extraordinary and excessive. Which is by no means a complaint.

We began with one of the finest quail dishes (recipe below) either of us had eaten — a small bird each, split, partly boned, seared and gently steamed,



*Eating well in the inner east was a challenge until Canvas came along to support the other handful of decent spots, which include:*

- **The Undertaker**, 329 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn. Ph: 9818 3944
- **Centonove**, 109 Cotham Rd, Kew. Ph: 9817 6468
- **Estivo**, 330 High St. Kew. Ph: 9853 1727
- **Tea House**, 911-913 Burke Rd, Hawthorn East. Ph: 9882 9088

and the hint of mid-eastern flavours infused into the dish made it magical.

Next, a conical tagine arrived. Inside lurked a delicate broth laced with saffron-enhanced kipfler potatoes, mussels, prawns and flathead tails.

AND again, things such as chips of preserved lemon, cinnamon and other subtly applied exotics brought the dish together exquisitely.

Meltingly tender and richly flavoured roasted rump of lamb was presented with braised fennel and sections of fiery merguez sausages, all meeting in a gloriously accented lamby jus.

And just as we were assuming we had eaten our main courses, another arrived

Was this, in fact, the dish of the day? Neither of us could quite remember.

Our wine choice had been an inspired one: the '05 Scorpo pinot rose from the Mornington Peninsula befriended every morsel served, and was a steal at \$45.

Chef Khodja, however, had no intention of quitting when he was this far ahead.

Cheeses arrived — three, all French: a Pont l'Eveque, a St Andre and a magnificent Roquefort, all soft, ripe and remarkable enough, one would hope, to shame those dim-witted food regulators who rail against real cheeses.

After which, inevitably, came pudding: for me a caramelised pineapple parfait with a jasmine sorbet and mango salad; for my mate a plate of