

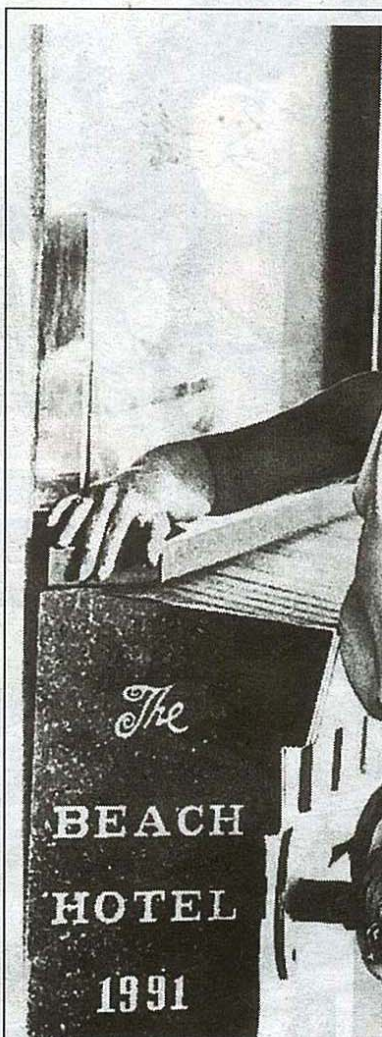
ESPRESSO

Michael Harden

The inside stories on the restaurant world

Enter the dragon

One of the few sounds to be heard over the gale-force winds hurtling around the Docklands towers is the noise of doors slamming as one restaurant after another bites the dust due to lack of interest. But there are a few operators who are not only surviving the tricky Docklands terrain but thriving. The Rivers Group, led by Lou Jovanovski, already had six places at New Quay and Waterfront City (BlueFire, Steakhouse at Docklands, Saganaki, Fish, Bellissimo and Hot Chocolate) and has now opened a seventh, a modern Chinese-Asian restaurant on the site of Mario Di Nardo's ill-fated Cocamo, called Yum Cha Dragon. While Jovanovski's restaurants may not always get enthusiastic critical acclaim, they do draw a crowd, some feat considering the often ghost town-like atmosphere in Docklands. But with Yum Cha Dragon, he may be able to score both acclaim and a crowd, given that he has James Tan onboard to create menus, train kitchen and floor staff and give the restaurant its casually luxurious feel. Tan says Yum Cha Dragon is similar in style to, but "a bit more upmarket" than, Pacific Seafood BBQ House in South Yarra. "Good food is still the beacon," says Tan. "But to be successful you must look at the whole package from the plating to the service to the wine list." Consultancy work like this is keeping Tan busy but he says he is looking to open his own place next year. "I want to go back to the old concept, like at Mandarin



'Strop', De

John and Lisa van Haandel are spreading Byron Bay's iconic Beach Hotel (inset) for John "Strop" Cornell and his wife Delver live music venue and gaming area. The v changes to the pub, planning to "retain a handover" not so much the passing of an northern exposure will affect their Melbo

Duck," he says. "With a small room, a nice venue and good honest food." And the secret to Jovanovski's success? "He reads the customer well and is not precious about giving people what they want, rather than what he wants to give them."

