

MY FAVOURITE TABLE

Roger Walker, architect, at The Tasting Room

IT'S ALWAYS very civilised when you say, "the usual please", and the staff don't have to ask you what that is. You feel as though you belong and that's the case for me here. The Tasting Room is my second home. I've been coming here for 16 years.

I'm a bit obsessed with the Tasting Room's schnitzel and mash dish and it was a near tragedy when it was taken off the menu. I reprimanded them and had to stay away for two weeks in protest until they brought it back. That's a long time for me as I usually come here about three times a week. I'm sorry to say it but I've probably eaten a dozen bambis since I've been coming here.

I gave them a bit of a shock one day because I sat down and they brought me out a plate of schnitzel and a glass of Jim Barry red wine, which I always have, and I said, "I was going to order the fish." I was half joking. It was funny.

I've been coming to this site since John McGrath started it as Cafe Brava. Opening night was huge. I wasn't there but Winston Peters had a run-in with a journo and instead of saying, "My restaurant is going to have a reputation because of that," McGrath realised it was a dream launch. People flooded in for days wanting to see where it happened.

I used to have my architectural office in Mt Victoria and I fell in love with sitting in the outdoor area, especially in summertime.

It was Downstage's cafe before that but when they turned it into Cafe Brava, it became quite visible. They did some sort of deal with the council where they turned one of the angled car parks into a paved outdoor area. I discovered sitting there and, like a lot of other places in the world, you can watch the world go by. In the 40-odd

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2 Courtenay Place, Te Aro
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Hours: Monday to Friday, 11am to late; weekends, 10am to late

years I've lived in Wellington, there has been this huge growth in alfresco dining. Apparently in France and Spain you pay extra to dine out on the footpath but let's not tell them that here.

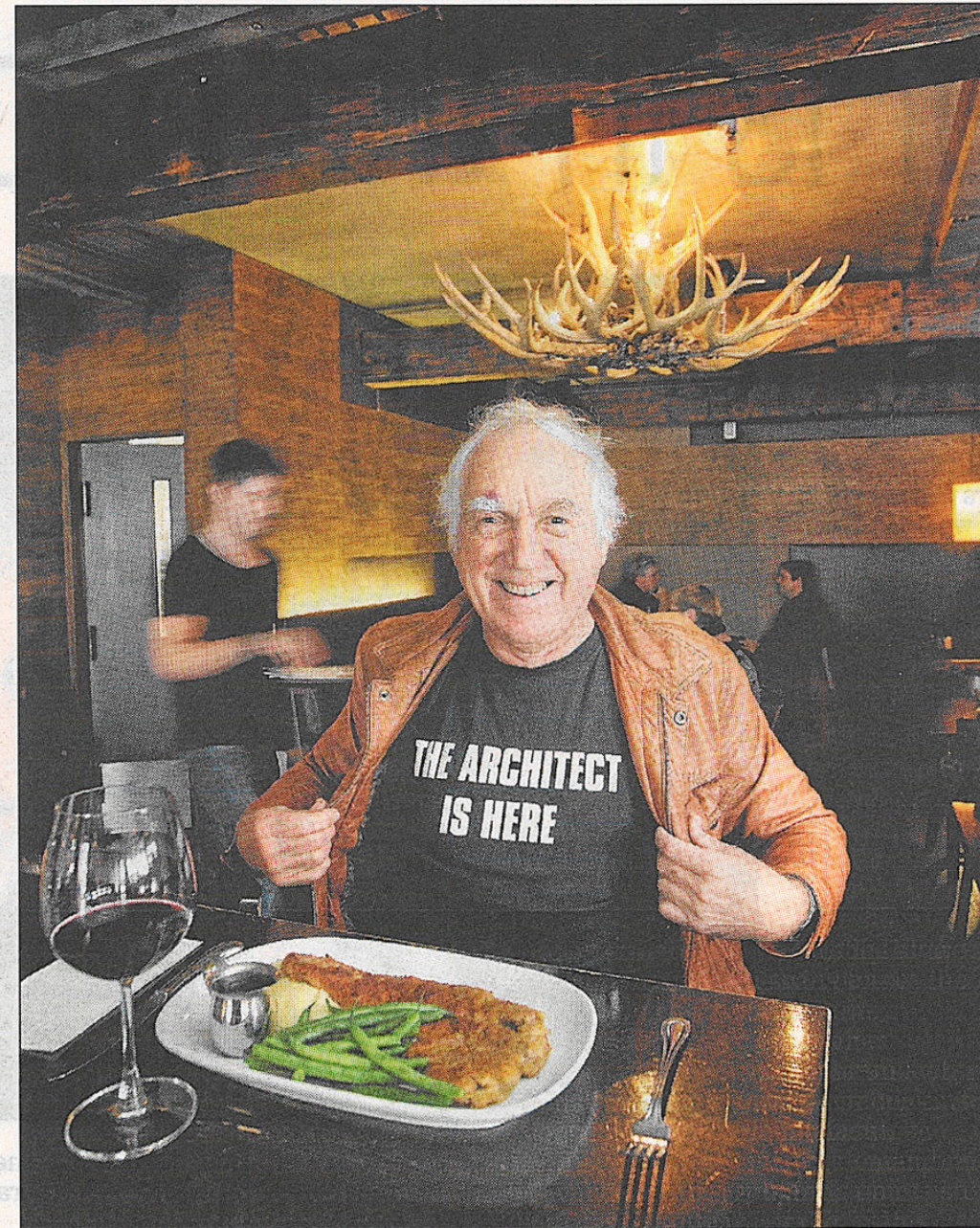
I'm a car man and one of the things I love is that there aren't just a lot of people to watch but cars to watch, too. I'm a car culturalist I suppose. I was entertaining a Scottish architect here one day and he was saying, "There are some interesting people to look at but all the cars driving by are Japanese imports", and no sooner had he said that than two Lamborghinis, a Ferrari and a McLaren F1 drove along so I was delighted.

Lots of people seem to be eating the schnitzel today. It's hearty food and I like the way that it's crumbed. But they've missed one thing off it today which I'll have them on about. I adore anchovies and they normally have them in the dish.

Anchovies apparently help with longevity, which is something we architects value. One of my heroes is the architect Oscar Niemeyer who is 105. I'm 69 now.

I'm a bit of a scaredy-cat when it comes to eating meat. I financed my way through university working at a meatworks. I have difficulty eating obvious animals like quail. Schnitzel is meat in disguise. I once ate horse at Cafe Bastille. A woman next to me told me I was a cannibal and she said, "You're eating Black Beauty."

This building is apparently about



Straight up: Roger Walker likes the honesty of The Tasting Room with its exposed pipes. Photo: MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

to be listed as a heritage site. People are finally realising that a city is a library of buildings. The place has to feel right inside, too, for me to want to go there. I was born with almost no sense of smell so I've got an over-developed visual sense I think. I like the fact that the interior of The Tasting Room is honest. You can see all the pipes in the ceiling and the columns – I like to see the bones and structure of a building. They've spent money on extra bits like antler lights and that interesting material below the bar.

My favourite table is actually outside, the second table along under the eaves. You'll find me there even when it's raining. I met my darling girlfriend, Moerangi, at this very

table and we come here regularly.

She's a great cook too and she lives in Mt Victoria so I go up there quite a bit for dinner, or she'll come to my apartment next to my office in Egmont St.

Often I come down here and think and doodle. You can't be creative when the phones are ringing all the time and now you have two going – the landline and the mobile. A fax bleeps away too. I couldn't eat lunch in the office. I'd get indigestion.

AS TOLD TO SARAH CATHERALL

The New Zealand Institute of Architects national awards are being held in Wellington on Friday evening at Te Papa National Museum.