

Forget the lamb, it was steak 'well done'

Shrimp cocktails, scallops mornay, banana fritters. Wintec journalism student David Tilson talks to Hamilton's long-standing restaurateurs about food fashions 20 years ago.

HAMILTON restaurateur Peter Stark remembers the 1980s for steak and chips and Cold Duck.

The steak (filet mignon) was preferred "well done", he says, and always served with chips. Cold Duck and mueller thurgau were the wines of choice followed by Asti Spumante and Asti Riccadonna.

There was not a drop of pinot gris or Stellar Artois in sight and rack of cervena and creme brulee were unheard of. Coffee was black or white.

In 1987, Stark ran Montana Restaurant in Victoria St, one of the city's most popular eating houses.

He says Hamiltonians dined out on Saturday nights and their favourite foods were shrimp cocktails, crumbed scallops, the aforementioned filet mignon and banana fritters for dessert.

But he also remembers the affluence of 1987.

"Before the stockmarket crash (in October), there was a Hamilton 'in' crowd who had very long lunches and ordered Moet & Chandon.

"They always managed to mispronounce the French - ordered a bottle of 'Mow-aye'. There were about 30 to 40 of them, but they disappeared after the crash."

The stockmarket crash couldn't have come at a worse time for Stark.

About a week before shares tumbled, he and his then business partner Bob Christey bought another restaurant - Seddon House - from Brian Milicich, who now owns Domaine Restaurant in Victoria St.

He says it was a "very nerve-racking" experience, "but somehow we survived".

The Left Bank Restaurant in Marlborough Pl was another popular Hamilton eatery in 1987.

Owner and chef Brian Anderson says his menus featured pate, scallops mornay, steak ("very well done"), chicken breast with apricots or sesame seeds, escargots, john dory and crayfish a la Newberg.

"We also used snapper and tarakihi in those days, but any other fish was considered cat food," he says.

"Dessert was Black Forest gateau and fruit salad. The restaurant had a special dessert of Greek lemon pastry. Cona coffee was the norm before flat whites arrived."

Before he bought the Left Bank, Anderson owned Anderson's Restaurant in London St with his brother



DINING OUT: Going to a restaurant used to be a much more formal affair, with people dressing up to dine out.

Diners were usually greeted by the maitre d' and escorted to a smoking or non-smoking table.

The service was formal, tables were covered in damask cloths and there were candles and heavy carpets. Classical music sounded softly in the background.

Al fresco dining had not arrived; nor had blackboard menus.

In 1987, there were only three or four licensed restaurants in Hamilton's central business district.

Liquor licences were issued from Wellington and, under the Sale of Liquor Act 1962, applicants had to pass a "needs" test to get a licence. One regulation was that 1.2sq m of space was needed for every restaurant patron.

It was difficult to fight objections to new licences, which were issued sparingly.

Today Hamilton City Council oversees licensing laws and there is no set limit on the number of licences that may be granted. There are now more than 264 licensed premises in Hamilton and a further 300 off-licences and clubs.

On the fast food front, Hamiltonians also had a limited choice 20 years ago. Beefeaters Burger Bar in Hood St was a popular outlet and there was one McDonald's and one KFC. The city now has six McDonald's and three KFCs.

There were no large wholesale liquor outlets and wine was not sold in supermarkets.

The drink-driving message was also not preached with the same force.

Anderson and Stark say drink driving was a major problem, but it wasn't until 1998 that police "booze

Clive where live theatre was a popular drawcard. Theatre was also part of the Left Bank for many years.

Anderson and Stark recall that lamb was not a popular dish on their menus 20 years ago and was offered only at tourist destinations such as The Chateau.

"It was quite hard to get restaurant quality cuts of lamb at reasonable prices," says Stark. "Hogget was available, but not very popular."

Anderson says there were changes in the late 1980s. Dishes such as sushi and sashimi, crepes and venison were making an appearance, along with New Zealand wines.

The style of dining was also very different in 1987. Eating out was a much more formal affair and people dressed up to go to a restaurant.

buses" arrived in the city.

In 1987, 15 to 20 drink drivers were charged each week in Hamilton compared with about 45 now, according to Leo Tooman, who was head of the Transport ministry's Hamilton district in 1987.

Despite the restrictions and regulations, Anderson and Stark say the quality of food in the 1980s was exceptional and the preparation and service was sometimes better than today. They both look back on those days with affection.

Stark, who now owns Montana Catering, says he still has ideas for new restaurants.

The city could do with a "serious" steak or Italian restaurant, he says. "But my wife wouldn't let me."

While most of the restaurants from the 1980s have closed or been reinvented, one is still going strong. Beefeaters in Hood St is a popular late-night diner and it still does a mean hamburger for less than \$7.