



Ever-changing Brisbane has plenty of surprises and delights in store

By **JENNIFER SCOTT**

THE first time I experienced Brisbane's Riverfire I was a wide-eyed teenager. As a girl from the country keen to get in amongst it, I headed straight into the thick of the excited crowd, which was surging like a mosh pit as people jostled to get themselves into position. The atmosphere was incredible as thousands of people craned their necks to take in the light show unfolding in the sky above.

This year I had a very different experience. My companions and I took our places on the veranda of the sophisticated Siana restaurant in the late afternoon. Attentive staff kept topping up our wine and proffering delectable Asian nibbles as we watched the day turn to night in a relaxed atmosphere away from the crowds.

Situated on the river at Eagle Street, Siana is an ideal vantage point from which to watch the city light up for Riverfire. This year the

Saturday event fell on the first day of spring, and the weather was everything the organisers could have hoped for.

Several boats dotted the river below us in readiness for the dazzling pyrotechnics display, which kicked off at 7pm and continued for a solid half hour. Fireworks in the shape of love hearts exploded in the sky, a waterfall of gold sparks cascaded from the Story Bridge and the smoke haze was reflected in the glass of the city's skyscrapers.

The deafening roar of an F-111 strike jet sweeping low over the crowd as it performed the spectacular "dump and burn" manoeuvre provided the finale.

Riverfire, held annually in early September, is a perfect excuse to reacquaint yourself with Brisbane, which has changed a lot in the few short years since I last lived there. The Novotel Brisbane on Creek Street, a short walk from the many

attractions of the CBD, provided a great base for my weekend explor-

ing the capital.

Brisbane is now home to Australia's largest modern art gallery, the five-level Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) at South Bank. German artist Katharina Grosse has worked with the impressive design of the building to create her art, using a paint spray gun on the walls, floor and ceiling for the imposing Picture Park. Massive painted balloons hang above a pair of canvases emerging from a multi-coloured dirt mound in GoMA's long gallery. Picture Park is on show until October 28.

Yayoi Kusama's Soul Under the Moon, a mirror or infinity room, is one of the gallery's most popular pieces and it's certainly an experience. The Japanese artist has utilised ultra violet lights, mirrors and water to create a darkened realm in which art lovers can see neon spheres floating and shimmering into infinity.

Another recent addition to the state's capital is the upmarket



QueensPlaza, with speciality stores offering up-to-the-minute fashion, upmarket jewellery and cosmetics. It joins such retail destinations as Brisbane Arcade, The Myer Centre and Wintergarden in the CBD shopping mecca centred around the historic Queen Street Mall.

The city also offers plenty of choice when it comes to places to eat and drink. The first floor balconies at a Brisbane institution, Jo Jo's restaurant, offer a different view of the busy shopping mall. Diners can choose from an extensive menu of cuisine from around the world as they take in historic building facades and watch the crowds below.

If you like a more interactive meal, you can try one of Brisbane's Teppanyaki restaurants. At Kabuki, on the corner of Edward and Margaret streets, an Asian chef bearing the name tag Alfred put on a fine meat cleaver-juggling, egg-tossing show as he cooked our meals in front of us. The bibs handed out to diners,

while unflattering, certainly came in handy as many fell short in their attempts to catch flying eggs in tiny white bowls.

If it's liquid refreshment you're after, the Belgian Beer Café on Mary Street has a staggering array of brews on tap, and the bustling Zenbar on Adelaide Street is a stylish place to enjoy a Friday night drink. Watt: Modern Dining at the Powerhouse, riverside at New Farm, is a great place to meet up with friends for coffee or a relaxing Sunday morning breakfast.

If all the shopping, nightlife and culture on offer in Brisbane has tired you out, there are plenty of places you can recuperate with some pampering. I enjoyed a luxurious 90-minute pedicure at Stephanie's Spa Retreat at Sofitel Brisbane. The new addition to the five-star hotel includes a Turkish steam temple, twin spa suite and tranquillity room. For my 'Exotic Sole Ritual' I donned an incredibly soft, fluffy robe and reclined in a heated massage chair, controlling



the temperature and the intensity of the massage via remote.

Here on the beautiful Sunshine Coast, it's easy to forget what's on offer just down the road in the state's capital. Brisbane is always growing and changing, and whether you visit for an event like *Riverfire*, or just a short break, you might be pleasantly surprised by what you find.

