

The mysterious closure of one of Auckland's most expensive restaurants

[Charlotte Muru-Lanning](#)

Staff writer

10/06/2023

THE SPINOFF MEMBERS



Image: Archi Banal

The doors to Pasture, a regular on local best restaurant lists, quietly closed last month, leaving many questions – and phone calls – unanswered.

Visit Pasture’s Parnell Road site during opening hours this week and you’ll find the

lights out and no sign of activity. A smattering of rubbish lies outside a side entrance to the restaurant. The abundantly-windowed Alpha, Pasture’s bakery appendage, surely designed to lure passers-by, looks decidedly unkempt – a disarray of unpolished wine glasses, a forgotten black jacket on a shelf and a yellow menu languishing on the floor by the door. The doors are locked at Boxer too, Pasture’s bar offshoot. Panes of glass are streaked with worn out window paint outlining now-meaningless opening hours and announcing a pop-up collaboration with burger joint Baby G at Alpha two weeks ago. News of this collaboration also happens to be the last post on any of the venues’ social media accounts.

In recent years, Pasture and its two sibling eateries have been the focus of both [praise](#) and [criticism](#). Now, the restaurant group appears to have quietly shut, leaving many questions unanswered and customers’ hefty deposits in limbo.

Since opening in 2016, the tiny, seven-seater Auckland degustation restaurant, Pasture, has earned ongoing accolades from critics both locally and overseas – earning a reputation for its ever-changing menu, experimental dishes, boisterously dramatic atmosphere, as well as extraordinarily splashy prices. “We serve innovative, edgy food in a fun atmosphere. We’re fine-dining, but with our own spin,” reads its [website](#).

In a room designed around an open kitchen and wood fire, upon which most of the food is cooked, diners sit at the chef’s counter and are guided through a dizzying number of seasonally driven courses – often more than 20 – over the course of three hours.

A set menu, without drinks, is priced around \$320 per person. Adding a drinks match menu costs a further \$205 per person. In August last year, the restaurant launched “steak Sundays”, a meal that cost \$497 per person and included a glass of Krug champagne, oysters, scampi, “fancy bread”, a pot of caviar, “oversized” wagyu steaks and sides. Plus, the option to BYO for a corkage cost of \$150 per bottle.



Ed Verner at Pasture. (Photo: Samuel Flynn Scott)

The restaurant was originally opened in 2016 by current chef and owner, England-born Ed Verner and his then wife, Laura Forest.

In 2018, in a [feature](#) about Pasture for The Spinoff, Samuel Scott wrote: “There is no hiding poor quality in a setting like this. It is a very different kind of dining experience, and in a way it’s a perfect fit with Ed’s style of food; ingredient-driven, fierce flavours, uncompromising.”

Since opening, Pasture has been through various iterations and transformations. The service shrunk from 25 seats to six (which was later bumped up to seven) in July 2018, and later that year Verner and Forest separated, with Forest leaving the restaurant permanently. Later, Pasture expanded to include its two sibling establishments – Boxer, a bar which opened in 2020, and Alpha, a street-facing bakery and test kitchen, which opened in 2021. The triptych of venues are in separate but adjoining spaces on Parnell Road in Auckland. And all are now closed without warning.



The front window of Alpha on Parnell Road. (Image: Charlotte Muru-Lanning)

Since being made aware that bookings at the restaurant had been cancelled, multiple attempts by The Spinoff to call the restaurant since last Friday have gone unanswered. An email sent on Tuesday remains unanswered too. The Spinoff has made two visits to the adjoining eateries during their listed opening hours over the last week, with no sign either time that they were still operating.

It's not unusual for restaurants to shut their doors, either temporarily or permanently, but it is unusual for this to happen without any announcement on the restaurant's social media, website, Google profile or at the very least, a note on the front door. In fact, unless you actually physically visit the restaurants, there's no way to tell that they are closed.

But despite these three eateries being shut for almost two weeks, with no sign of reopening, reservations with compulsory deposits can still be made at the three establishments on their website. For Pasture, this means a deposit upwards of \$75 per person.*

Then there is the issue of those who have already made bookings and paid deposits for a restaurant that is no longer operating. One source spoken to by The Spinoff, who wishes to remain anonymous due to the booking being made for a work event, had a reservation for seven

people on Friday June 2 (last Friday). They'd paid a deposit of \$1,755 for what was to be a "big celebration for a bunch of team members' birthdays".

Two days prior to their planned dinner, the reservation was cancelled by way of a voice message. The cancellation voicemail explained "that it was a family emergency and we would be refunded," the source said. "We then got a generic cancellation email."

It's been over a week since the booking was cancelled and they're yet to receive a refund or an update. "We've tried to call every day and it just rings out," the customer said. "We can't talk to anyone." They said they were aware of other people who were in a similar position of chasing down refunds for cancelled reservations at the restaurant. [Update: Pasture emailed the customer on Friday June 9 with confirmation that the refund had been actioned.]



In October last year, Verner launched a year-long membership programme costing between \$1,000 and \$4,000, which included benefits like discounts at the trio of eateries, access to exclusive events, a tote bag, the ability to make bookings and complimentary bubbles on arrival. For anyone signed up to this membership, it is unclear how this will now be honoured.

Speculation is rife as to the reasons for the closure and The Spinoff has spoken to numerous people connected with the restaurant who were unwilling to go on the record. Multiple people spoken to by The Spinoff mentioned a belief that Ed Verner had "skipped town". His partner Hillary Eaton is based in California. A representative for Eaton told The Spinoff that Eaton was "dealing with serious health issues" and that Pasture "has been in discussions with regards to the

lease". The Spinoff has seen an email suggesting that the lease for a planned restaurant at another location on Parnell Road had been defaulted on by Verner halfway through works last month.