

Taste

Food, wine and the hot gourmet destinations.

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Pinbone: barbecued octopus and fermented purple cabbage with melon seeds cooked in molasses

What are the restaurants to keep an eye on this year? Our reviewers – reluctantly! – share the hot places that have been flying under the radar.

WATCH THIS SPACE

REVIEWS BY ✦ PAT NOURSE (NSW) ✦ GARETH MEYER (ACT) ✦ MICHAEL HARDEN (VIC) ✦ SUE DYSON & ROGER McSHANE (TAS) ✦ NIGEL HOPKINS (SA) ✦ PETER FORRESTAL (WA) ✦ JOHN BIRMINGHAM (QLD)



Pinbone: Crisp pork belly and chargrilled pineapple; brioche with mascarpone and fish roe (left); chocolate crackles and chicken liver parfait (far left)

NEW SOUTH WALES

Pinbone

3 Jersey Road, Woollahra. (02) 9328 1600. pinbone.com.au

There's something entirely natural about the Buzo team asking their friends Gemma Whiteman, Berri Eggert and Mike Eggert to take over their Woollahra site now they have moved their beloved trattoria to the CBD. Where Buzo was all about a wonderfully dark, boozy Italian experience, Pinbone is all light, bright freshness. No less boozy, though: accompanying the palate-popping likes of chicken liver parfait chocolate crackles (it works!) and lamb rib crusted in five-spice and almond is a thoroughly personal list that celebrates all that's interesting in wine right now. It flits from Margaret River to the Mosel, but it's clearly the Rhône, Loire and Languedoc that have captured these kids' imagination.

Open: brunch Sun, dinner Wed-Sat. Licensed. Shared plates \$12-\$28.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Gardel's

Upstairs, 358 Cleveland Street, Surry Hills. (02) 8399 1440. porteno.com.au

Hidden in plain sight atop one of the busiest restaurants in the city, Gardel's has a secret: it sells food. While the wait for its parent establishment is always worthwhile, the bar's menu has charms all its own. A recent switch to a menu entirely of pintxos, the Basque country's answer to tapas, has mixed things up in a good way. What's not to like about a miniature croissant with house-made ham, cheese and dill pickles? Lamb and pork meatballs on a hash brown is a rib-sticker, while a vol-au-vent of sorts

filled with vine-smoked tuna, grilled corn, peppers and green olives is an invitation to lean a little deeper into that booth, drink a little deeper from the swashbuckling cocktail list and savour the good life.

Open: dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Pintxos \$6-\$16.

Izakaya Fujiyama

Shop G09/52 Waterloo Street, Surry Hills. (02) 9698 2797. www.izakayafujiyama.com

Can a restaurant this loud and merry be called a quiet achiever? Kenji Maenaka and his team consistently take care of business, and their regulars find ample

reward in the specials menu. It's here that the more interesting pickings from Maenaka's daily visits to the fish market turn up. That could mean sushi and sashimi made with the lesser-seen likes of gurnard, tempura of trevally with green tomato, or sizzling smoked tuna belly with garlic, chilli and soy. In true izakaya style, grilled fish heads are a feature: work your chopsticks bravely and be rewarded with morsels of rare deliciousness.

Open: dinner Mon-Sat. Licensed. Mains \$14-\$35.

Moon Park

34 Redfern Street, Redfern. (02) 9690 0111.

Has Korea's culinary moment arrived in Australia? With Moon Park on the rise, the signs are good. Two of the co-owners are gun chefs. Ben Sears worked at Cutler & Co in Melbourne and Eun Hee An worked at Izakaya Fujiyama before they met at Claude's, where Sears was head chef. Their passion for Korean food has produced a scorcher of a menu like nothing else in the country. The third co-owner, Ned Brooks, an old MoVida hand, brings charm on the floor and a superb, concise wine list to the party. The room is very basic, but the eating and drinking are top-notch. Down ➤

PHOTOGRAPHY: SCOTT HAWKINS

Mocan and Green Grout: heirloom tomatoes, Shaw River buffalo mozzarella, dehydrated olive (left); diamond shell clams, chorizo, oloroso (below)



plates of airy zucchini and mussel pancake or soft rice cakes with Patrick Sullivan's Yarra Breakfast Wine, or punch a can of OB lager with fried chicken and beef jerky: it's win-win. **Open:** lunch Fri & Sun, dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Large share plates \$15-\$20.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Mocan and Green Grout

19 Marcus Clarke Street, New Acton South. (02) 6162 2909. mocanandgreengrout.com
By day, it's a funky hole-in-the-wall cafe. By night, chef Sean McConnell conjures magic within the poky open kitchen. Embrace the rustic informality on kitchen-side seats, sharing as many of the half-dozen dishes on offer as you can. It's all about seasonal local ingredients and influences that range from Europe to South-East Asia. Gently smoked trout arrives as a croquette. Crookwell beef is the basis of a punchy tartare seasoned with freshly grated wasabi. Vegetarian dishes, such as slow-cooked organic leek with the tartness of pickled onion and smooth Meredith chevre, impress. **Open:** breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Fri. BYO (after 6pm). Mains \$16-\$23.

Morks

18/19 Eastlake Parade, Kingston. (02) 6295 0112. morks.com.au
With a shift from the suburbs to new digs near Lake Burley Griffin, Morks' secret is

getting out. Traditional Thai flavours meet fine dining. A starter of angel prawns is a signature dish, sizzling in an intense kaffir lime and coconut sauce. Crisp rice with red curry paste and grilled cured pork runs a close second. Main dishes also track the contemporary theme, such as a slow-cooked duck Maryland with red curry sauce, lychees and a beautifully crisp rice cake. Keeping things in the family guarantees a quality of service that's hard to match, while spice-friendly aromatic whites mean Morks is about to get a whole lot more attention. **Open:** brunch Sat-Sun, lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Mains \$24-\$28.

VICTORIA

Bar Nacional

727 Collins Street, Docklands. (03) 9252 7999. barnacional.com.au
Dockland's patchy reputation for dining can make people look the other way when contemplating a meal, but recent arrival Bar Nacional is providing good reason to recalibrate perceptions. Modelled on San Sebastian's pintxos bars, the irregular-shaped space is all theme-appropriate tiles, leather, timber and terrazzo with cured meat hanging above the bar and a penchant for bar stools and window benches. The attractive set provides an excellent background to sharp, inventive, artfully presented food from the Jospir

oven-equipped kitchen. This ranges from classic pan con tomate (tomato bread) and fiery morcilla served with apples and celeriac puree, to charred Brussels sprout croquettes and whole flathead roasted on pine wood and teamed with eggplant. Brilliant desserts, such as a burnt-orange crema Catalana flavoured with bay leaf and fennel, are alone worth the trip. **Open:** breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri. Licensed. Mains \$12-\$21.

B'Stilla

30b Bray Street, South Yarra. (03) 9826 2370. bstilla.com
Tucked under an apartment block in a South Yarra backstreet, B'Stilla is not exactly under the radar (owner/chef Jason Jones has a following after helping put Mexican juggernaut Mamasita on the map), but it does take a bit of finding. It's worth the effort. Jones' vibrant, aromatic modern Middle Eastern food served in a clean-lined contemporary space (complete with a timber-topped bar, the source of excellent original cocktails) is not only lots of fun to eat and share, but can lead to revelatory moments. The rffisa is a knee-weakeningly good mix of scallops, lentils and fenugreek with a msemen (pancake), while the signature b'stilla (Moroccan pie) is a spiced pastry filled with chicken, duck,



Pope Joan: smoked eel croquettes, organic carrots, ricotta and candied nuts

VICTORIA Pope Joan

75-79 Nicholson Street, Brunswick East. (03) 9388 8858. popejoan.com.au

Pope Joan has been operating as a breakfast and lunch cafe for more than three years and does a very good job of it. But a few months ago, the Pope began opening at night with a separate menu and, with candlelight illuminating the mismatched furniture and bone-handled cutlery, a completely different feel. Co-owner and chef Matt Wilkinson's food pops with big flavours – classic, butter-oozing chicken Kiev; chewy biltong with chilli radishes; a plate of smoked things from beetroot to eel; squid-ink gnocchi; slow-roasted lamb – expertly teamed with a wine list that favours boutique Victorian labels. It's the kind of local every neighbourhood should have.

Open: breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Mon-Fri. Licensed. Mains \$22-\$28.

egg and cinnamon. Vegetarians are well catered for with such dishes as spring vegetable tagine and saffron and yoghurt. B'Stilla label beer is available on tap. **Open:** lunch Fri-Sat, dinner Tue-Thu. Licensed. Share plates \$4-\$32.

Gangnam Pocha

141 Bourke Street, Melbourne. (03) 9078 8882. gangnampocha.com.au
It might seem odd that a restaurant decorated with flock wallpaper, ornate

upholstered couches, patterned carpet and a plasma TV screening K-Pop videos could fail to get attention. But as part of what has become a mini-precinct of hip Asian restaurants in the city, Gangnam Pocha blends in with the crowd. Once the food starts landing at this modern Korean tavern, though, things take off in a good way. There's very good fried chicken, excellent seafood and spring onion pancake, and a fiery seafood stew with wonderfully sticky rice cake. Don't miss

the pork ssam, squares of pork belly teamed with kim chi and raw cabbage; nor the mood-enhancing drink Mix It Cool that sees a bottle of soju upended on a bottle of plum wine to combine in a surprisingly food-friendly way. **Open:** lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily. Licensed. Mains \$18-\$30.

TASMANIA

Pigeon Hole

93 Goulburn Street, West Hobart. (03) 6236 9306. pigeonholecafe.com.au
This West Hobart hole-in-the-wall is something of an institution for its panini, breakfast eggs and baked beans. But change is in the air. Last November, new owners Richard and Belinda Weston, who also grow some of the best vegetables in Tasmania, took over, and they've had the wisdom to install self-described "demented fermenter" Tom Wescott in the kitchen. Breakfast goes *haute cuisine* with house-made malted barley and buckwheat cereal teamed with Tongola goat curd and hazelnuts. And congee has never been as pretty as it is here, topped with house-pickled ginger and fermented greens. The pickled spring onion garlic panini is a left-field success while a creamy, just-set egg-white pannacotta with candied grapefruit peel and cinnamon-flavoured crumbs is downright seductive. Wescott's edgy experiments are adding a whole new dimension to eating at Pigeon Hole. **Open:** breakfast & lunch Tue-Sat. BYO. Mains \$9-\$13.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Golden Boy

309 North Terrace, Adelaide. (08) 8227 0799. golden-boy.com.au
Nu Suandokmai was the golden boy of Gouger Street a decade ago with Nu's Thai restaurant. Now, following a long stint in Sydney, he is back in Adelaide, somewhat hidden away beside the adjoining Botanic Bar. The styling is industrial chic with high marble-topped tables supported on scaffolding, combined with low leather banquette seating and a kitchen table. Nu's opening menu includes some of the gutsy, authentic dishes that made his

name – basically, his mother’s cooking from central Thailand broadened to include street-style dishes such as caramelised pork hock with watercress and nam jim salad. A charcoal grill features for dishes such as crying tiger – chargrilled wagyu beef with roasted chilli, tamarind and lime; or chargrilled banana chilli stuffed with pork and kaffir lime. **Open:** lunch Fri, dinner Wed-Sun. Licensed. Mains \$18-\$35.

Daniel O’Connell

165 Tynte Street, North Adelaide. (08) 8267 4032. danieloconnell.com.au The Daniel O’Connell was just another Irish pub until early last year when it became Adelaide’s front-runner in the nose-to-tail stakes. The lofty restaurant extension has a comfortably dated feel, but the cooking is up-to-the-minute – not surprising, as its sister restaurant is the acclaimed Hentley Farm in the Barossa. This is pub food of the highest order. Pig

trotters are braised, shredded and served on grilled sourdough with a fried egg and crisp, dehydrated crackling. Beef shin is shredded, compressed into a rich gelatinous slab and served with steamed spring vegetables. And Dead Romance is a chopped ox heart and oyster tartare with cornichons. For those who don’t fancy nose or tail, there are alternatives. **Open:** lunch & dinner daily. Licensed. Mains \$12-\$42. Five courses \$65.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA SunMoon Resort

200 West Coast Highway, Scarborough. (08) 9245 8000. sunmoon.com.au This smallish hotel near the beach holds a surprise packet from chef David Walker, whose food is carefully sourced and imaginatively presented. The menu is sensibly limited to four entrees and five mains plus specials. Carpaccio of beef fillet is wonderfully tender and succulent, while duck and Parma ham compression

is dense, textural and satisfying with its pomegranate and plum salad. A risotto of seasonal spring vegetables with ricotta labne is wetter than most, but neatly cooked and full of flavour. Rack of lamb is gently pink and served with a highly individual caponata. There’s a decadent tart that’s a playful version of a Cherry Ripe, or a rum-spiced jelly with seasonal berries to finish.

Open: dinner daily. Licensed. Mains \$28-\$39.

Mojo’s

Grand Cinema Complex, Victoria Street, Bunbury. (08) 9792 5900. mojosrestaurant.com.au

No-one expects food this good or a wine list so cleverly thought-out from a restaurant in a cinema complex. That’s why Mojo’s remains a far too well-kept secret. A starter of Japanese fried chicken, or karaage, offers a succulent, crunchy morsel to whet the appetite, while a soft,

butter-poached Donnybrook marron tail comes with asparagus and a blini with avruga and crème fraîche. All delicate and delicious. Mains include the White Rocks veal shoulder, slow-cooked for 24 hours – tender and full-flavoured with spring-fresh green vegetables and a subtle jus. Dessert is hard to resist – a perfect crème brûlée with an orange and cardamom twist. The wine list is one of the state’s finest. **Open:** breakfast, lunch & dinner daily. Licensed. Mains \$30-\$45.

QUEENSLAND Champ

114 Grey Street, South Brisbane. (07) 3844 4470.

champkitchenandbar.com.au

To passers-by, Champ presents as a chic, open and very modern bistro where comfort and style have found a rare balance. However, the high ceilings, polished stone and bent wood are but camouflage for the rustic charms of the

kitchen’s bakery. Hot loaves, flaky pastries and jaunty muffins attract morning crowds. What might surprise fans of the Champ’s simpler charms is the polish applied to the menu at lunch and dinner. From simple tasting plates, best suited to theatregoers late for a show, to midsize crowd-pleasers such as a beautifully turned-out duck prosciutto and roasted leg with plum and mandarin, Champ is a winner. Settle in for a long dinner with the heavy-hitting duo of wagyu tenderloin and brisket, or have a cocktail at the bar and take in the city lights with a crab salad and dainty yoghurt spheres.

Open: breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Mains \$27-\$42.

Grappino

226 Given Terrace, Paddington. (07) 3367 0033, grappino.com.au

There are bigger, flashier and more significant restaurants than Grappino in hilltop Paddington. But the trattoria has

long been a favourite for those with inside knowledge. The simple fit-out of formica tables and wood panelling never short-changes on atmosphere because in Grappino, Theodor Roduner has created the sort of intimate, welcoming, family-run diner that has fed generations in Italy – and the southern reaches of Switzerland, from where the clan originates. The scent of a slow-cooked hunter’s veal stew seems to waft in from a dark forest, rather than the kitchen. Porcini mushroom and white truffle soup longs for another slice of Roduner’s ciabatta to mop up the last puddles. Little puffs of potato gnocchi are coated in a rich sauce of pinot grigio, mushrooms, cream and truffle oil. The wine list is generous, with lovers of grappa well looked after. It may not be the first place that comes to mind, but a night with friends or family at Grappino will be a meal you’ll recall fondly for a long time. **Open:** lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Mains \$25-\$40.