



April sees The World's 50 Best Restaurants awards ceremony held in Australia for the first time – and Melbourne is doing the honours. So there's no time like the present to tour this eating-obsessed city's latest hotspots in the company of local food writer **Sarah Gamboni**.

PHOTOGRAPHY ALICIA TAYLOR

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TOP (left to right): industrial chic at Higher Ground; Bar Liberty makes an impact.
MIDDLE (left to right): tuck in at Pickett's Deli & Rotisserie; The Alps delivers on choice; enjoy a Tropic Thunder cocktail at Long Chim.
BOTTOM (left to right): eat your way around the city; pull up a stool at Host.



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THE MELBOURNE RESTAURANT SCENE IS A MOVEABLE FEAST, SO TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE A RAFT OF NEWCOMERS, SARAH GAMBONI HAS CHERRY-PICKED 15 VENUES THAT ARE SURE TO HIT THE SPOT, FROM DARING DEGUSTATION MENUS TO CHIC BISTROS AND SLEEK CAFES.

HOT IN THE CITY

WINE DINING

Don't let its wine-bar billing fool you: the food at **Embla** (122 Russell St; embla.com.au) is equally rave-worthy. From Christian McCabe and Dave Verheul, of Town Mouse fame, comes this CBD stunner lined with rich timbers, brass fixtures and black leather. Settle in for a glass of Grand Cru Chablis or biodynamic Australian pinot, matched with punchy share plates of pippies with Serrano ham and basil, or smoky grilled trout with saltbush.

2 FLYING THE FLAG FOR FRANCE

French is flavour of the month in Melbourne, and one of our favourite examples is the gorgeous **French Saloon** (First Floor, 380-384 Little Bourke St; frenchsaloon.com) from serial restaurateur Con Christopoulos (Siglo, The European,

City Wine Shop). Amid a bright bistro space of white walls and lipstick-red ceiling, head chef Todd Moses brings a light touch to dishes such as wagyu tartare or cured salmon with pillowy blinis. For casual bites, the breezy rooftop patio is the perfect place to linger over an aperitif and house-made charcuterie.

3 TURNING UP THE HEAT

Arriving with a roar in January was David Thompson's **Long Chim** (8 Whiteman St, Southbank; crownmelbourne.com.au), bringing the fiery delights of Thailand to Crown. Taking its cues from the street food of Bangkok, the Long Chim menu packs a serious flavour punch, studded with bird's eye chillies, Sriracha sauce, turmeric and holy basil. Nab a table on the riverfront terrace or within the edgy wood-clad interiors, then settle in for smoky wok-tossed noodles, crunchy school prawns and the signature sour orange curry. Lip-tingling cocktails strike a balance

between sour, sweet and spicy, and the durian ice cream will make you change your stance on that malodorous fruit.

4 BIRD IS THE WORD

There was a collective sigh of disappointment when Philippe Mouchel closed PM24 in early 2014 – with it went the city's best rotisserie chicken. So there was an audible squeal when Philippe came back to the fold with his eponymous **Philippe Restaurant** (115 Collins St; philipperestaurant.com.au) in June. Yes, the burnished bird is back, and so too the deliciously boozy rum baba, supported by polished service and a stellar selection of French and Australian wines.



LONG CHIM PHOTOGRAPHY CROWN MELBOURNE, RIVERWALK



CLOCKWISE (from above): Embla is as much restaurant as wine bar; the cocktails at Long Chim are lip-tingling; settle in among the wood-clad Long Chim interior for David Thompson's Thai street food; French Saloon's beautifully light blinis; shellfish at Embla.



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CLOCKWISE (from left): SPQR nails Neapolitan-style pizza; head to Queen Victoria Market for Scott Pickett's rotisserie chicken; Asian-accented drinks at Hot Sauce at QT Melbourne; breakfast pudding at Higher Ground; the soaring surrounds of Higher Ground; Melbourne's vibrant street art.



5 ALL FIRED UP

With restaurants such as Lee Ho Fook, IDES and Rosa's Canteen to his credit, Melbourne restaurateur David Mackintosh has a knack for nailing the dining zeitgeist. He's done it again with **SPQR Pizzeria** (26 Liverpool St; spqrpizzeria.com), a pared-back laneway eatery with a focus on Neapolitan-style wood-fired pizzas. Order the textbook-perfect margherita on a sourdough base with San Marzano tomatoes, basil and bubbling mozzarella. Oh, and did we mention they have Aperol Spritz on tap?

6 SHARE MARKET

When top chef Scott Pickett is at the helm, you know this isn't going to be your average deli. Located at the edge of the Queen Victoria Market, **Pickett's Deli & Rotisserie** (cnr Elizabeth and Therry sts; pickettsdeli.com) is a timber and marble temple to gourmet fare. Scott snapped up an old rotisserie from a cafe in Oakleigh and has fired up the vintage beast to turn out glossy roast chickens, served with hand-cut chips or bundled into a bun. He's also offering hangover-busting breakfasts of thick-cut bacon and egg rolls, and elegant, wine-friendly fare in the evenings, such as oysters or rabbit rillettes. While you're there, stock up on the knockout range of pickles, preserves and wines to go.

7 BOUTIQUE BEAUTY

QT Melbourne (133 Russell St; qthotelsandresorts.com/melbourne) is the boutique retreat the city has been hankering for. Not only does it offer arty rooms and sassy service, it also presents a stack of drinking and dining options. There's handsome, leather-clad Pascale Bar & Grill offering globe-trotting breakfasts (congee, huevos rancheros) and an indulgent bistro menu. Downstairs, slip into hip Korean bar-eatery Hot Sauce for Asian-accented drinks and fluffy bao stuffed with fried chicken, kimchi and yellow cheese. The chichi patisserie serves eclairs and cocktails, and the

view-blessed Rooftop at QT pours a mean Yarra Valley Sour of Four Pillars gin, lemon, orange blossom and a splash of pinot noir.

8 HIGH AND MIGHTY

It'd be difficult to find a cafe with better aesthetics than **Higher Ground** (650 Little Bourke St; highergroundmelbourne.com.au). From the team behind Top Paddock comes this industrial-chic space of double-height ceilings, tall windows, exposed brick and lush potted greenery. The cuisine is equally Insta-worthy, with flower-topped hotcakes and breakfast puddings, and lunches garnished with a flurry of micro herbs. There's plenty of substance to match all that style, including small-batch wines, wicked espresso martinis and top-shelf whiskies.

NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS

9 SHOCK AND AWE

For a dinner you won't soon forget, buckle in for the boundary-pushing degustation at **Nora** (156 Elgin St, Carlton; noramelbourne.com) delivered by chef-owner Sarin Rojanametin (right, with co-owner Jean Thamthanakorn), which might start with crunchy fried fish bones and finish with toffeed tripe. You won't see a menu until after you've eaten – and that may be just as well if you don't normally go in for chicken hearts and the like – but it's worth stepping out of your comfort zone for Nora's weird but wonderful food and wine pairings, with a high-energy soundtrack to match.



10 MARCH TO IDES

Attica alumnus Peter Gunn took his pop-up permanent last March, making **IDES** (92 Smith St, Collingwood; idesmelbourne.com.au) a full-time proposition. The gentle Kiwi crafts inventive six-course dinners, which see the kitchen team desert their posts to deliver each dish. The ever-changing menu means you're unlikely to happen upon the same creation twice, but cross your fingers that the sticky beef cheek with pomegranate and toasted seeds is on. Sommelier Raffaele Mastrovincenzo comes to the party with exciting natural-leaning wines that can stand up to Gunn's bold flavour combinations.



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11 BEST BAR NONE

We're going out on a limb and calling it: Melbourne's best bar snack comes courtesy of **Bar Liberty** (234 Johnston St, Fitzroy; barliberty.com). In a pared-back space, enjoy a glass of minimal-intervention wine, cherry-picked by former Attica sommelier Banjo Harris Plane, and the GLT sandwich: golden shards of gribenes (chicken skin) with lettuce, tomato and white bread.

SOUTHERN STARS

13 GLOBAL ROAMING

One of the most ambitious openings of late comes from young-gun chef Charlie Carrington, who's manned the pans at *Vue de Monde*, *Marque* and *Firedoor*. Yet it was an overseas trip taking in 15 countries over eight months that provided the inspiration for **Atlas Dining** (main image; 133 Commercial Rd, South Yarra; atlasdining.com.au). The 22-year-old is keeping things fresh by changing cuisines every four months. But from the street food of Vietnam to the bright flavours of Israel, one thing remains constant: Charlie's fascination with – and flair for – cooking over an open flame.

14 NATURAL HIGH

Just down the road from Atlas is blink-and-you'll-miss-it wine bar **The Alps** (64 Commercial Rd, Prahran; thealpsprahran.com). Settle into the cosy candlelit space for interesting Australian and imported wines with a natural bent, and French/Med-leaning share plates of rustic pork terrine or blush-pink vitello tonnato. It's the kind of place that lures you in for a post-work glass of wine, then before you know it, you and your friends are a few bottles deep.



15 A NEW LEAF

Serving some of Melbourne's prettiest breakfasts, **Fourth Chapter** (above; 385 High St, Prahran; fourthchapter.com.au) promises feel-good food in clean, bright surrounds. On weekends, expect to queue for their photogenic raspberry granola with coconut panna cotta, virtuous smoothie bowls layered with fruits and flowers, and beetroot and cheddar waffles with hot-smoked salmon. Your Instagram feed will thank you for it. ✂

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12 DESIGNED TO PLEASE

When two graphic designers open a restaurant, you know it's going to be schmick. **Host** (4 Saxon St, Brunswick; hostdining.com.au) from husband-and-wife team Nedim and Majda Rahmanovic (above, right of picture, with chef Florian Ribul) is lined with raw brick, subway tiles and geometric timber panels. Slip into a booth for Ribul's attractive seasonal fare: perhaps raw tuna with the pop of finger lime, daikon and sesame.

