

Capital Eats

Bar superstars and a chef-driven culinary scene have made Canberra a must-visit for gastronomes. Here are a few of the brightest spots that have helped make the city's ever-changing mosaic more vibrant.

WORDS CARLA GROSSETTI



IMAGE BY SHAE WAITE

Canberra is having its day. It's not that the city's treasures have only just been discovered – it is the national capital after all – but extolling the virtues of the region has become a bit of a thing, as a quick flick through most photo-sharing apps will tell you. Although daytrippers have long been drawn to the Houses of Parliament, national museums and galleries, the city's reputation as a great weekend escape is now cemented thanks to a spate of hot hotels, and a slew of inventive bars, chic cafes and hatted restaurants.

BREAKFAST & BRUNCH

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better brew in the morning than at The Cupping Room (thecuppingroom.com.au) – especially when reigning World Barista Champion Sasa Sestic is manning the new San Remo Opera machines. Arrive early to claim a spot among the bearded, nose-ringed crowd at this concept cafe, designed by the team from Ona Coffee specialty roasters. Geek out over an Ona education, then cap it off with a chia and sago pudding with strawberries and lychee.

Bookish types should also cross over Capitol Hill to Muse (musecanberra.com.au), a newish nook in East Hotel, between Kingston and Manuka, which is dedicated to enjoying food, all-Australian wine and books. Make your first meal of the morning one of brown rice with sprouts, avocado,

crispy beef, fried egg and chilli jam. Buy a great literary work or brainstorm your next novel at this convivial cafe, which celebrates Canberra's modernist heritage. Head east to Silo Bakery (silobakery.com.au) in Kingston for a plate of chilli jam eggs with tomato, and a baguette to go. Continue the Kingston crawl at Penny University (pennyuniversitycafe.com), which serves a righteous slab of brioche French toast, topped with strawberries and cream, or join the queues at Patissez in Manuka (facebook.com/patissez.pty.ltd) which is now a destination in its own right, after the infernally evil and divine concoction known as the 'freakshake' broke the internet. Make the freak show complete with its blueberry cheesecake number, the Blue Ballz. →



FROM TOP: Come to The Cupping Room for a coffee geek moment - Patissez's 'freakshakes' have gained notoriety, via the internet - Silo Bakery's pastries are also famous, statewide. LEFT: Literature, modernism and a fresh start to the day at Muse. OPPOSITE: The Farmhouse Restaurant at Pialligo Estate.

THE CUPPING ROOM IMAGES BY DYLAN KOVACEVIC, PATISSEZ IMAGE BY SHAE WAITE

Canberra



The 27-year-old and his team are part of the push-through of young, creative talent redefining the nation's capital.



FROM TOP: Bacaro: an Italian-style speakeasy · Chef Damian Brabender embraces fresh ingredients from the garden, like these nasturtium leaves · Wood-fired tapas and oysters await you at Temporada. **BELOW:** The earthy tones of the Temporada dining space.



LUNCH

Join the Kingston community bustling along the boardwalk, and linger for lunch at Brodburger (brodburger.com.au), where you can whack down a huge, abundantly flavourful Broddeluxe burger with the lot. You can also sandwich yourself in between locals at Local Press (localpresscafe.com.au) for cold-pressed juices and wholefood salads. For coffee and lunch on the go, ramble on to Remedy (lonsdalestreetroasters.com), an offshoot of Lonsdale Street Roasters, for a Lebanese-style zaatar bread stuffed with meat or falafel, tomato, greens and dry slaw. Another top spot for a power lunch is Braddon's Sage Dining Rooms (sagerestaurant.net.au), where simple, seasonal ingredients are taken to a higher place, such as roast carrot, elevated with hazelnut and parsley and the artful addition of Binnorie feta. Take your time over a three-course lunch at Courgette Restaurant (courgette.com.au), with a menu created by chef-wunderkind James Mussillon, while at the chef's-hatted Aubergine, Ben Willis makes good use of the region's bounty. His dishes include White Rocks veal, parsnip, baby spinach, red cabbage gel, artichoke, thyme and port jus, or Cowra lamb cutlets, lamb shank, tomato chilli jam, baby fennel, celeriac and mulberry.



DINNER

Chef Brendan Walsh developed his eye for composition at the acclaimed Vue de Monde in Melbourne, and The Dorchester in London, before starting his new adventure here at the Farmhouse Restaurant at Pialligo Estate (thepialligoestate.com.au) a year ago. The restaurant picked up a hat in its first year thanks to the 27-year-old and his team, who are part of the push-through of young, creative talent redefining the nation's capital. Walsh's six-course prix-fixe menu changes daily, with recent highlights including the Fraser Island spanner crab with watermelon, smoked cream and young radishes, or red venison with a cranberry and truffle granola. Those looking for a more casual affair should try Temporada (temporada.com.au). Claim a stool at this indie darling of ACT eateries and ask one of the hipster waiters to help you navigate the wine list, which features a strong local influence. Dig into creative takes on tapas and wood-fired food, such as the barbecue mackerel, beetroot, smoked eel parfait and horseradish. Bring your posse to Malamay (malamay.chairmangroup.com.au), in the Barton hub, for spirited Sichuan fusion fare made to share in the Shanghai-style dining room, or head to the hatted restaurant Water's Edge (watersedgecanberra.com.au), the second of James Mussillon's properties. You can also taste the city's more innovative side at Aubergine (aubergine.com.au), where dishes such as seared wagyu rump cap, walnut pesto and parmesan make it clear why this is a two-hatted foodie temple.

DRINKS

Joe's Bar (joesateast.com) offers a wry wink to Canberra's Brutalist architecture with its centerpiece, a custom concrete curtain, which contributes to its theatrical and quirky vibe. This 'small bar celebrating big things' is a more lofty bookend to its sister cafe Muse, and is mobbed by locals wanting to indulge in rustic Italian fare such as *polpettine di carne* (meatballs) and cocktails such as the Bitter Pig, featuring pancetta-washed bourbon. Back across town in Braddon, head down the dinky lane off Lonsdale Street, marked with a red neon light, to find Bacaro (italianandsons.com.au/bacaro), the tucked-away small bar attached like a speakeasy sidecar to Italian & Sons. The main draw here is the aperitivo menu. Once you're inside, sidle up to the marble-topped

bar and order an amaro and a selection from the enviable cheese and meats list. Honky Tonks (drinkhonkytonks.com.au) is a top spot for tacos, and has the largest selection of tequila in town, while Canberra's new Cuban-themed bar, Highball Express (highballexpress.com.au), has more than 300 varieties of rum on offer. Mint Garden Bar (sagerestaurant.net.au/mint-garden-bar) is also a magical spot for a few cocktails, under trees festooned with fairy lights. Molly's (molly.net.au) is another chic, well-designed throwback to the Prohibition era and a dark, discreet place to go when you're in party mode. If it's an old-school pub experience you're after, however, the owners of Sydney's The Hive Bar have taken over the reins of The Old Canberra Inn (oldcanberrainn.com.au), which was built as

a coach house in 1857. This atmospheric, low-ceilinged pub in Lyneham, not far from the Federal Highway, is now a fun, low-key family-friendly flophouse with a leafy beer garden, DJs and a more sophisticated take on pub food, as well as taps from which flow a variety of craft beers. ■

RIGHT: Two-hatted restaurant Aubergine sets the standard. **ABOVE:** The chilled confines of Mint Garden bar. **TOP:** The six-course fixed-price menu at The Farmhouse Restaurant at Pialligo Estate changes every day, depending on what's in season.

IMAGES BY JASON LOUCAS; CHRIS WHITFIELD; SHAE WAITE