+ LA's secret food neighbourhoods
+ Neil Perry's best-ever bakery
+ Wines of Sicily (no, not Marsala)

Winter hotspots
Restaurants that will warm you up.



Willem-Dirk du Toit

↑
Neighbourhood Wine
in Fitzroy North,
Melbourne

Quisine.

Unlocking LA

Beneath the seemingly impenetrable glitz and glamour of Los Angeles are some genuinely cool neighbourhoods with a diverse (and delicious) dining scene. **Naomi Chrisoulakis** shares her insider secrets on where to go.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAVE LAURIDSEN**

ARRIVE in New York and its appeal is immediately evident – you don't have to look hard for a pretty streetscape or a clutch of celebrated restaurants and bars. In Los Angeles, though, gratification is rarely instant. The city keeps its charms close to its heart, revealing them only with a bit of digging, a lot of local knowledge and an Uber account.

Having gained some insight over four years of living in the city, I've decided LA is a wonderful place to live but a tricky one to visit. It's not an easy town to get to know, thanks to its vast, sprawling topography and limited public transport network (see: Uber). But step off the grim boulevards, wind around its hidden suburbs – often just off those huge freeways – and you'll discover a multifaceted metropolis full of rich ethnic enclaves, eclectic architecture, incredible food and fun dive bars.

So consider this a public-service announcement: visit these under-the-radar 'hoods and discover the city in a way most tourists never will.

(Above and right) Pig out on The Oinkster's pulled-pork sandwiches and chilli fries


2005
A
O SMOKING



(Clockwise from right) All'Acqua's bar stays open "until 1.30am or empty", while the restaurant serves Italian dishes such as meatballs and wood-fired pizza pie (American for pizza)





EAGLE ROCK

Low key and a little bohemian, laid-back Eagle Rock has retained its cool countercultural vibe, thanks to cheap rents and the presence of Occidental "Oxy" College (where Barack Obama studied for two years). But it's also become known as the place where hipsters go to grow up.

The family feel is evident along the north-east neighbourhood's Colorado Boulevard, with its old-school diners and '50s-era pizza-pie joints. Casa Bianca (casabiancapizza.com) is a notable mention. Original neon sign? Check. Vinyl booths? Yes. Great pizza? Absolutely. Or maybe you'd prefer another American staple: a burger. The Oinkster (theoinkster.com) flips the city's best from an old A-frame restaurant that's equally famous for its pastrami.

For something a little less student and a bit more date night, the contemporary American fare at Little Beast (littlebeastrestaurant.com) can't be beaten. And its fairy-lit patio is all kinds of charming.

BOYLE HEIGHTS

The heart of LA's Hispanic community, Boyle Heights is no Beverly Hills, which is exactly why it's worth a visit. Colourful, bustling and culturally rich, its busy thoroughfare, Cesar Chavez Avenue, is a pleasant assault on the senses: banda music blares from passing cars; men in cowboy hats stop for mango peppered with chilli, sold by street vendors under brilliant murals; and shopfronts advertise everything from eyebrow threading to evangelical church services.

One of LA's oldest neighbourhoods, it was predominantly a Jewish and Japanese quarter until the 1940s (the famous Canter's Deli, in the Fairfax District, was originally located in Boyle Heights), before giving way to a new wave of Latino immigration and becoming one of modern LA's most beloved ethnic enclaves. For how long, who knows? The area, next to trendy Downtown, is also being eyed for gentrification. But for now it's deliciously authentic, packed with panaderías, Mexican "mom and pop" stores and lunchtime favourites.

Guisados (guisados.co) is here, too; the local institution has become a byword for the best tacos in LA. Handmade tortillas, slow-braised meat and serious heat make this Boyle Heights original – and the three other locations it has spawned – a popular no-frills lunch spot. If you find the choices overwhelming, try the mini-taco sampler.

Want more options? El Mercado de Los Angeles (elmercadodelosangeles.com), a busy old marketplace that's been around since the late 1960s, has everything you could ever want – including a shrine to La Virgen de Guadalupe in the car park. Tortilla presses, black Jesus statuettes, leather huarache shoes, cowboy hats and traditional Mexican dresses crowd the first floor. The second overflows with food: mole sold by the pound, esquites, churros, aguas frescas and gorditas galore (it helps if you speak a little Spanish and carry cash). The third floor, meanwhile, hosts a chaotic restaurant with a live mariachi band.

Boyle Heights isn't entirely a Little Mexico, though. Fifties-era Otomisan (2506 1/2 E 1st Street) is the only remaining Japanese restaurant in the area; the tiny hole-in-the-wall with comfort food and diner-style booths has stood the test of time.

ATWATER VILLAGE

Broad Glendale Boulevard bisects this homey, residents-only neighbourhood – adjacent to ultra-hip Silver Lake – where kids ride their scooters on pavements, creative types sip cold-brew coffee at outdoor tables and everyone hits the farmers' market on Sundays. Working class and urbane at the same time, it's











Guisados taqueria is a local institution (top left to right); European-style Proof Bakery (from far left)

where you can find a $2 taco alongside a $10 cold-pressed juice. The place is at its best in the mornings, when cafés spill out onto the streets and locals mingle in that hazy LA light.

Proof Bakery (proofbakeryla.com) has become a European-flavoured linchpin of the community, both by feeding patrons Valrhona chocolate croissants and providing them with a chic meeting hub where they can catch up over locally roasted coffee. New kid on the block Dune (dune.kitchen) is shaping up to become just as cherished. The small shop offers the best falafel in town, with house-made pita and craft pickles. (Also on the menu: tender pasture-raised lamb.)

The neighbourhood isn't all about daytime fare, though. Bigfoot Lodge (bigfootlodge.com) – a log-cabin-cum-dive-bar – is made for casual nights, with karaoke and strong, cheap drinks, while celebrated All'Acqua (allacquarestaurant.com) is an of-the-moment Italian hotspot with pizza ovens, a chef's counter and enough pasta to overdose a carb-loading fun-runner.

LOS FELIZ

Nestled at the eastern base of sprawling Griffith Park (LA's lungs, outdoor gym and wildlife haven), Los Feliz puts prettiness on the map, thanks to its village feel and quietly glamorous old Hollywood architecture.

Leafy and wealthy north of Los Feliz Boulevard and quirky and stylish to the south, it's one of the only truly walkable LA neighbourhoods – and one where you can easily spend a balmy evening entirely on foot. Wander the bookstores, restaurants, cafés, boutiques and bars that line the main, parallel drags of Vermont and Hillhurst avenues and soak up the small-town vibe that has made the suburb a favourite of indie celebs, creatives and young families.

Little Dom's (littledoms.com) is an unpretentious '40s-styled Italian restaurant where you can't walk to the loo – sorry, rest room – without bumping into a celeb (they love a bargain as much as anyone else). It's the place to be on Monday nights, when Little Dom's puts on its $18 three-course special (plus $18 bottles of house wine). Pull up a stool at the moodily lit bar, order a Sanguinello Swizzle and keep your fingers crossed you score one of the sexy semicircular booths for an evening filled with spaghetti and meatballs.

Skip dessert and stroll down a couple of blocks to Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams (jenis.com), the finest example of LA's current obsession with artisan iced treats. While you're waiting in the inevitable line, trying to decide between Intelligentsia Black Cat Espresso, Brambleberry Crisp and Bourbon Salted Pecan, enjoy some good old-fashioned people-watching (or a surprisingly difficult game of Spot the Unbearded Man).





(Above and right) Authentic but unassuming Parks BBQ, in Koreatown

Now to the American dive bar of your dreams: Ye Rustic Inn (+1 323 662 5757). Perched on the end of a shabby strip mall, its tacky faux-Tudor exterior hides a fun, kitschy drinking hole packed with friendly locals, a killer jukebox, cheap liquor and surprisingly good food (don't leave without trying the mozzarella sticks or chilli cheese fries, or both).

For a little light entertainment to round off the evening, head over to Vermont Avenue, where you'll find two slightly surreal options. You'll need tickets to catch Jeff Goldblum playing with his jazz band at Rockwell Table & Stage (rockwell-la.com), a slick supper club that regularly hosts the star. You won't need anything but your sense of humour at The Dresden (thedresden.com), a mint-condition mid-century restaurant and lounge where living legends Marty and Elayne Roberts have been playing old standards – and taking requests – six nights a week for 35 years.

KOREATOWN

When its neon-lit streets weren't hosting LA's 1992 riots, Koreatown was known as gang territory. But these days, the district is the comeback king of the city and is undoubtedly at its best late at night.

A new subway line and an influx of boutique hotels and sophisticated bars – combined with a rediscovery of its Art Deco architecture, ethnic food, karaoke and spas – have helped Koreatown get back to its roots. (It was once the fashionable heart of Hollywood's golden age – the famous Ambassador Hotel, Cocoanut Grove club and The Brown Derby restaurant all called it home in the first half of the 20th century.)

First, fuel up: you can't do K-town without doing Korean barbecue. Parks BBQ (parksbbq.com) has the art of grilling succulent slabs of meat and pairing them with tiny bowls of banchan down pat.

If Korean isn't your thing, don't worry. Guelaguetza (ilovemole.com) is a celebration of Oaxacan cuisine and a reflection of K-town's majority Latino population. It's also one of the best Mexican restaurants in the country. Particularly good? The tlayudas, a pizza-esque disc of tortilla topped with their famous mole, queso fresco and three different types of meat.

Then the bars: there's one on every corner and a favourite is retro-tastic The Prince (theprincela.com), which you might recognise from TV's *Mad Men* and *New Girl* and the film *Chinatown*. Slip into a red-vinyl booth, ring for the waiter using the doorbell at your table and order Korean-style fried chicken and a Hite beer.

And finally, what every food lover needs: a little respite. Find some in K-town's plethora of Korean bathhouses, where nudity is mandatory. The biggest, Wi Spa (wispausa.com), is a 24-hour multistorey temple of relaxation packed with hot tubs; jade, ice and clay saunas; and even a restaurant. Don't miss out on being exfoliated by middle-aged Koreans in their underwear. And prepare to be shown the dead skin they've sloughed off as evidence of their hard work. ●

Flight path

LAX

Qantas flies to Los Angeles from Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, with connections from other Australian capital cities. qantas.com

Cold comfort

For a meal to warm the cockles this winter, ensconce yourself in a restaurant offering a feel-good feed, cosy ambience and perhaps even a crackling fire.



VIC

NEIGHBOURHOOD WINE

1 Reid Street, Fitzroy North; (03) 9486 8306
neighbourhoodwine.com
Open seven days for lunch and dinner

Once a clandestine gambling salon run by the infamous Carlton Crew – now in more law-abiding hands – Neighbourhood Wine steps back in time with its brocade wallpaper, moss-green trimmings, full-size pool table and all-round parlour cosiness aided and abetted by an open fire. It's beloved by locals for its punchy wine list and impressive vinyl collection (hello, Steely Dan), as well as the French-inspired food of co-owner Almay Jordaan, a chef blessed with an intuitive gift for simple and satisfying fare. There are salads (baked fig and goat's cheese with hazelnuts, grilled pickled onion and pomegranate) and soup (spiced lentil and cauliflower with labne and dill) or go the whole hog with braised pork shoulder, winter greens and quince aïoli.

EMBLA

122 Russell Street, Melbourne; (03) 9654 5923
embla.com.au
Open Monday-Friday for lunch and Monday-Saturday for dinner

The winter ideal of an open fire becomes redundant when you've got Embla's mighty wood grill with open coals and wood-fired cast-iron oven forming the backbone of this city wine bar's menu. Pull up a ringside pew to watch chef Dave Verheul scorch rainbow trout into caramelised beauty (it's then topped with horseradish and purslane) and conjure the world's finest roast chicken (cooked with a shedload of garlic and finished with a deeply flavoured chicken-bone jus). In his hands, even a simple head of broccoli, licked by the flame and drenched in creamy sunflower-seed miso, becomes a headline act. The food is smart – as befitting the crew who brought a grateful Melbourne The Town Mouse – while the drinks list, from the natural but non-pretentious school, is equally arresting.

LAZERPIG

9-11 Peel Street, Collingwood; (03) 9417 1177
lazerpig.com.au
Open Thursday-Sunday for lunch and seven days for dinner

As is to be expected of a venue called "Lazerpig", this pub-slash-pizzeria-slash-disco sets the dial to fun. Housed in backstreet Collingwood's former Star Hotel, it matches its traditional red-brick front bar with a dining room clad in red gingham tablecloths (irony alert!) and a wood oven that churns out minimalist Roman-style, pun-happy pizzas with names such as The Fun Guy (mushrooms, Taleggio and thyme) and The Cauli Meldrum (roasted cauliflower, blue cheese and walnuts). Add a few extras – a mighty double-patty Wagyu cheeseburger with bacon and hot sauce, for example, and a Salty Perro cocktail of tequila and fresh grapefruit juice with coriander and lime – plus two working fireplaces and DJs on Fridays and Saturdays, and you have one hot place.

NSW

FOUR IN HAND BY GUILLAUME

105 Sutherland Street, Paddington; (02) 9326 2254
fourinhand.com.au
Open seven days for lunch and dinner

Yep, rockstar chef Colin Fassnidge has left the building but a chef just as influential – Guillaume Brahimi – has picked up the tongs. For the most part, the much-adored "Four" looks the same, except the tablecloths have been removed and there's a relaxed bistro buzz. It's quaint, cosy and possibly the best pub-bistro dining room in Sydney. The food plays a clever balance between traditional French and modern Australian; produce of the moment is treated to stunning French technique yet the combinations remain simple. Confit quail legs and roast breast star in a salad of quail egg, frisée and pancetta. Crisp-skin snapper wades with mussels in a parsley sauce. The clean acidity of milk gelato cuts through a rich chocolate cookie. If this is pub food circa 2016, we truly are the lucky country.

INDU

350 George Street (entry via Angel Place), Sydney; (02) 9223 0158
indudining.com.au
Open Monday-Friday for lunch and Monday-Saturday for dinner

Nothing warms the soul like an Indian feast and newbie Indu is putting the fire in the belly of the city, with considered spins on classic Indian and Sri Lankan dishes. The subterranean space features turquoise-and-gold banquettes, copper lights and – giving it a chic industrial atmosphere – rust-washed walls. But at its heart, Indu is a celebration of village culture in a contemporary context – much like the food. Coconut vinegar and green chilli reel in a cured sea bass. Eggplant and bitter melon ride a garam masala wave. And 48-hour slow-roasted lamb gets a kiss from fresh mint yogurt. Smart, sophisticated and very satisfying.

BUZO

3 Jersey Road, Woollahra; (02) 9328 1600
buzo.com.au
Open Sunday for lunch and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner

One of the original trattorias to raise the bar on what it means to dine *cucina Italiana* Down Under is back after a two-year hiatus – and it's better than ever. Downstairs there's a small bar, high-top tables and dining by candlelight. Upstairs is the dining room proper, with white walls, crisp linen and classic bistro furnishings. It's charming and the food dances in the realm of the classics, albeit with a light touch. Pickled white anchovy and celery salad gets zing from lemon. A crisp crespella (crêpe) encases pumpkin, goat's cheese, sage and burnt butter. Lasagne balances rich luxury and homey hug with porcini and prosciutto, plus a good shaving of truffle. Simple and honest, Buzo is the conduit of happiness.

Winter warmer: pumpkin and green-mango curry served with paratha at Indu

Reviews

QLD

THE LONG APRON

68 Balmoral Road, Montville; 1300 252 380
spicersretreats.com/spicers-clovelly-estate
Open seven days for breakfast and dinner and Friday-Sunday for lunch

Queensland doesn't really *do* winter but neither is it all just endless sunshine. Head to Montville for crisp mountain air and exceptional European-inspired fare within the plush, private surrounds of Spicers Clovelly Estate. During the day, you'll want to lunch on the terrace overlooking the green hills beyond. After dark, the muted tones of the genteel dining room are in stark contrast to the creative, colourful fare emerging from the kitchen. Tasting menus transform local produce into edible art; begin with a miniature Zen garden of caraway grissini branches and parmesan-filled stones. Sweet Mooloolaba prawns come with velvety roasted prawn crème, rose and gin, with crunchy spikes of sea greens peeping out from among the rose petals. Green rhubarb sorbet with goat's milk pudding, freeze-dried apple, thyme and coriander is a sweet surprise, as is a glass of Calvados by the fire after dinner.

THE CATBIRD SEAT BISTRO

2/888 Stanley Street East, East Brisbane; (07) 3392 2645
catbirdseatbistro.com.au
Open Tuesday-Friday for lunch and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner

Squint and pretend you're in Paris as you settle in at this snug, bustling bistro with the requisite low lighting, bentwood chairs and blackboard announcing the day's specials. While classic European techniques and ingredients prevail, the menu reveals a clever contemporary slant by owner-chef James Guldberg. Start with foie gras and plum-cream profiteroles then perhaps move on to the Glass House Mountain snails, which come with mushroom pâté and an olive crumb, along with garlic and parsley. Moreton Bay bugs are perfectly paired with sweet-corn vichyssoise, while wattleseed is a welcome addition to the venison. Naturally, there's a decent selection of Australian and European cheese over which to linger. If the name of the place seems a tad peculiar, it's from an old saying that means "being in an enviable position" or "sitting pretty". And by the end of an evening here, you'll understand why.

WA

GALILEO BUONA CUCINA

199 Onslow Road, Shenton Park; (08) 9382 3343
galileorestaurantperth.com
Open Tuesday-Friday for lunch and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner

Don't come to Galileo Buona Cucina looking for the cutting-edge; diners swarm to this suburban favourite for the reassuring comfort of the familiar. Gutsy Italian is the game and Sicilian chef Vincenzo Soresi wants to ensure all his guests are winners. Galileo loyalists will tell you the polpettine jotta are unmissable and they'd be right. What's not to like about juicy veal meatballs served in a white-wine sauce? The menu shuffles with the seasons' ebb and flow but asking about the night's beast in the wood-fired oven is never a bad idea, especially during winter. Otherwise, satisfying homemade pasta – rigatoni paired with 'nduja (a spicy pork sausage) and broccoli, perhaps – is another go-to. A formidable cellar filled with local and Italian bottlings has the potential to turn any meal into an event.

LIBERTÉ

162 Stirling Terrace, Albany; (08) 9847 4797
Open Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner

Albany, as anyone who's been will attest, gets mighty chilly in the winter. One of the surest ways to combat the cold is to make camp at Liberté, an intimate Parisian-themed wine bar in one of the state's first licensed premises. You'll feel the warmth the moment you step inside, from the unfailingly social staff behind the bar to the robust liquor cabinet and cocktail list. And, most importantly, the French-Vietnamese cooking of owner Amy Hamilton, who isn't afraid to wield the chilli. Take, for example, the potent hot and sour mussels that live up to their billing and an addictive Indochine steak tartare, heaped on a circle of grilled rice paper and adorned with no small amount of pickled chilli. Prefer your comfort more West than East? Choice charcuterie and steak frites are your salve.

ACT

BLACK FIRE

45/38 Mort Street, Braddon; (02) 6230 5921
blackfirerestaurant.com.au
Open Thursday-Sunday for breakfast and seven days for lunch and dinner

What better way to warm the soul during a long, cold winter than by feasting on meltingly tender suckling pig, roasted for eight hours over an open fire? Mediterranean-style meat dishes are Black Fire's specialty and Canberrans can't get enough of them. Locals descend on the place for their fix of wood-fired lamb, chicken or Angus beef (all organic and local), cooked with sides of taroz (Italian mashed potato topped with green beans and sautéed onions) and white beans simmered in rich, chilli-chorizo soffritto. There's fresh fish daily for those wanting something lighter but meat is the main event here. Make yourself comfy under mellow lighting thrown out by medieval black chandeliers and let the sangria flow.

MOČAN & GREEN GROUT

1/19 Marcus Clarke Street, NewActon South; (02) 6162 2909
mocanandgreengrout.com
Open Monday-Sunday for breakfast and lunch and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner

Reclaimed timber décor, fresh-cut proteas and rustic earthenware make Močan & Green Grout homey and welcoming. Hipsters love it here, as do hungry locals after an energising lap of Lake Burley Griffin. Relax with a fair-trade coffee as chefs prepare breakfasts laden with locally sourced ingredients. Baked eggs come with silky charred eggplant and spicy harissa, while creamy elderflower labne gives golden granola a wholesome touch. After dark, perch on cushioned stools or tuck yourself away at a table in the corner, grazing on share plates of tender lamb shoulder with smoked yoghurt and pomegranate or sweeter offerings like buttermilk panna cotta.

(Opposite, clockwise from top left) Tuna with lime verbena and serrano chilli by Liberté; Robbie Brown's; seared scallops with smoked parsnip foam, beetroot and chervil at Apothecary 1878; Močan & Green Grout









Naomi Sherman, Lee Grant

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Reviews

TAS

ROBBIE BROWN'S

32 Osborne Esplanade, Kingston Beach; (03) 6229 4891
robbiebrowns.com.au
Open Tuesday-Sunday for lunch and dinner

Huddle around the fire in the room behind the bar or watch the moon rise over Kingston Beach (15 minutes south of Hobart) from a seat in the front bar. Wherever you sit, this is an intimate venue where you can trust bartender Niall Maurici to deliver food and drinks to suit your mood. Warm your belly with a stirred-down classic winter cocktail such as The Bijou (made with Shene Estate Distillery's award-winning Poltergeist Unfiltered Gin) and snack on some sweet potato arancini with aïoli. Or you might prefer a Little Rivers European Dark Lager from Scottsdale, poured from the copper beer taps, alongside a lamb kofta with minted yoghurt. Maurici is a big fan of sheep-whey vodka from Hartshorn Distillery; head distiller Ryan Hartshorn's family also run Grandvewe Cheeses so their products also appear on the menu. And be sure to ask about the burger of the day. You're in luck if it's the blue-eye fish burger or the Tasmanian Angus eye fillet.

SA

BALLABOOSTA

289 Halifax Street, Adelaide; (08) 8232 1853
ballaboosta.com.au
Open Monday-Saturday for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and Sunday for breakfast and lunch

From the outside, it looks like an oversized garage, with customers spilling onto the street when the weather's fine. But when winter closes in, so do the foldaway doors and inside is one of the cosiest dining spaces in town, sitting almost on top of the huge wood oven that fires much of the menu. "Ballaboosta" is a Yiddish term for a perfect mother and homemaker – and that's the warmth that infuses this restaurant. Start with classic Lebanese meze and move on to hearty soups such as lentil with rice and spinach. Then try a main course like samak harra – literally "spicy fish" – that's oven-baked and served under a tahini and chilli sauce. To top it all off, the wine list features highly individual local winemakers.

APOTHECARY 1878

118 Hindley Street, Adelaide; (08) 8212 9099
theapothecary1878.com.au
Open seven days for dinner

Apothecary 1878 has just the medicine for winter chills. A range of warmly furnished dining spaces are spread over several floors, from a rustic brick-lined cellar to a snug mezzanine and the top-floor "Dispensary" (open on Fridays and Saturdays). Chef Frank Hero has lifted what was already a very good dining experience to a new level via dishes such as seared scallops with smoked parsnip foam and beetroot, lightly smoked eye-fillet carpaccio with mustard-infused truffle oil, and a richly braised alpaca roulade with juniper berries and shimeji mushrooms. Even more warming is the range of wines on offer – go for the small tastes with each course.

NT

THE PEARL

Shop 9, The Vic complex, 27 Smith Street, Darwin; 0435 821 648
thepearl.com.au
Open Friday for breakfast and lunch, Saturday-Sunday for brunch and Champagne high tea, and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner

Striped wallpaper, heavy ornate mirrors, a less-is-more menu and service from people who know their stuff. Yes, this is evocative of Paris but, no, you're in Darwin. And The Pearl is a lovely little spot to spend a cool dry-season night. Maybe start with oysters and Champagne or beef carpaccio with pickled enoki mushrooms and Grana Padano. Then move on to lobster tortellini with scallops on cauliflower purée or lightly battered garfish on baba ghanoush. If you want something light, the fig and goat's cheese salad is justly popular. Co-owner/chef Elle Burgan aims for Australian food with a French twist – available à la carte or in a dégustation menu – and she rarely disappoints. Okay, so Darwin doesn't actually get a winter but this bijou hangout is a gem all the same. ●



Brother-and-sister team Kate and Cameron Reid prepare their pastries in the glass Cube

Lune rising

Neil Perry visits his favourite bakery in Fitzroy – not France – where the croissants have earned cult status and the pastries are pure perfection.

LUNE Croissanterie in Melbourne's Fitzroy makes some of the world's greatest pastries. Believe me, I know my pastries. I've eaten a lot of them in countries that are famous for their pâtisseries. And I'm not the only one who thinks this place is sensational; the 60-odd people queuing with me clearly agree.

It's not just the pastries that make Lune an incredible experience. It's also the story, the process, the beauty of the space and the endeavour of the team that captivates me.

The story is this. Kate Reid trains as an aerospace engineer but after three years as an aerodynamicist for Formula One cars at Williams in England (yes, really!), she decides it's not for her and returns home for some R&R and a stint in hospitality. She reads a French pâtisserie cookbook and can't stop looking at a close-up shot of beautiful, flaky croissants. That picture alone compels her to take a holiday to Paris to find the baker, Christophe Vasseur of Du Pain et des Idées. She asks him for a three-month internship and upon seeing her passion and commitment, he agrees.

Funnily enough, her experience in design and engineering helps her to become an incredibly thoughtful pastry chef. Making the perfect croissant, she says, "can be harder than designing a car". Milk, butter, eggs and even flour change seasonally (and almost daily), which means nothing can be taken for granted.

Enter Kate's brother, Cameron, who has front-of-house experience in restaurants and bars. Together they open Lune Croissanterie, a hole-in-the-wall bakery in Elwood where customers routinely arrive before dawn for their pastry fix. Two years later, in 2015, they – and partner Nathan Toleman – move to a warehouse at 119 Rose Street, Fitzroy.

Lune brand design by A Friend of Mine Design Studio



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SARAH ANDERSON**

(Clockwise from left) The bakery's chic warehouse space; a selection of sweet and savoury pastries; "Lune-atics" line up for their treats







It's at this time that Cam says to Kate: "If we are going to grow this business, you're going to have to teach me everything you know about croissant-making." A great baking partnership is formed, the queue just keeps getting longer and *The New York Times* weighs in, saying Lune's croissants "may be the finest you will find anywhere in the world".

Today I'm sitting at the counter, looking into what Kate calls "The Cube". It's a glass temperature-controlled box that houses a massive marble table (where the croissants are formed), the dough sheeter, large mixers and a number of fridges. Kate says they took the large warehouse and simply created the most functional space in which to make impeccable croissants. That's something of an understatement – the bakery's premises are almost as beautiful as the pastries.

Despite the queue, Kate and Cam never rush the customer. Patrons are gently guided through the menu and their chosen pastries are then lovingly placed in a box to treasure. It's only fitting that each flaky gem is treated with care – it has taken three days to get it to this state of perfection.

And the taste? A crust of earth-shattering, brittle crispness, the perfect lamination of the pastry giving way to a warm, melting interior that coats your mouth with a buttery flavour that's clean and delicious. This isn't a greasy pastry to eat while rushing to work; this croissant needs to be considered and appreciated for its craftsmanship.

As I indulge in a ham-and-cheese croissant (life-changing, by the way), I'm overwhelmed by the sense of generosity and warmth all around me. I see poise and precision, passion and commitment, joyfulness and togetherness – not just of a sister and brother working as one but also of an entire team driven by the commitment of these two extraordinary young people.

It's been a while since I walked into a place, watched a team at work and left spellbound. Time is what these beautiful, delicate pastries demand. If there's a queue, join it! Trust me, it's worth the wait.

If you have limited time, there is another option. Kate and Cam offer a Lune Lab experience. For $50 (per person), you'll get a seat at the bar (no queuing), three croissants (traditional, savoury and sweet) and unlimited coffee. That sounds pretty sweet to me. ●

chefneilperry

Salute, Sicily!

The Mediterranean island is more than just Marsala, says **Peter Bourne**.



↑
2014 Mandoleto Nero d´Avola IGT
$14

A top-value, super-slurpable red that captures nero's essential DNA. It has raspberry and cherry flavours with mouth-coating yet modest tannins – perfect with spicy sausages and tomato relish.

SICILY is the pivot point of the Mediterranean, its ethnicity marked by Greek and Roman occupations interwoven with Arab and Norman invasions. Throughout those tumultuous times, wine was a constant. Sicily's historic calling card was Marsala, a fortified wine in the style of the great sherries, ports and Madeiras of its Mediterranean and Atlantic neighbours.

But Sicily has undergone a revolution in the past 50 years, moving on rapidly from old fortifieds and its reputation as a producer of bulk table wine (to stiffen the "thin and weak" wines from the cooler climes of mainland Italy). Sicily has 120,000 hectares under vine – that's about 80 per cent of Australia's vineyards but on a much, much smaller island.

The introduction of comprehensive wine laws in the 1960s gave Sicily an opportunity to focus on quality rather than quantity. French varieties such as chardonnay, merlot and cabernet sauvignon were planted, yielding credible but unexciting wines. The focus soon moved to the white varieties traditionally used to make Marsala that have been rebirthed as clean, bright whites. Inzolia and catarratto are exciting alternatives to everyday sauvignon blanc, with fresh citrus flavours and an intriguing texture uninhibited by oak.

Sicily's red hero is nero d'Avola, a bold, flavoursome red grape with lots of juicy mulberry, blackberry and boysenberry flavours. It's the tannins that set "nero" apart – they're potent but not harsh or bitter. Nero happily accepts some oak but doesn't really need it. (As an aside, recent plantings of nero d'Avola in Australia's warmer regions are very encouraging.)

Despite its location, Sicily is not all hot; snow-clad Mount Etna soars to about 3350 metres and its ice was reputedly used to make the earliest sorbets and gelati. A new wave of quality wines from the Etna region is attracting the attention of hipster sommeliers and wine heads. The whites are made with a citrus-fresh variety, carricante, but the real star of the Etna region is nerello mascalese and its sibling, nerello cappuccio.

Qantas epiQure

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Both nerellos are intriguing, sharing the perfumes of pinot noir and nebbiolo with their own unique flavours – abundant red fruits, exotic spices and fine balance between refreshing acid and gentle tannins. Etna reds are hot property and prices are soaring.

Want something a little more mainstream? Try a red from the southern coast under the Cerasuolo di Vittoria appellation. Here, nero d'Avola rubs shoulders with frappato, a red grape close in DNA to sangiovese. Cerasuolo di Vittoria is more structured and refined, with a drinkability that rivals spicy shiraz.

Price points vary but there's plenty of good-value Sicilian wine on the market and it's definitely worth trying. ●

Spiegelau "Willsberger Anniversary Burgundy" glass, $120 (set of four), riedelglass.com.au

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **EDWARD URRUTIA**



↑
2013 COS Cerasuolo di Vittoria Classico DOCG
$54
The COS team dabbles with biodynamics. For this statuesque red, which is 60 per cent nero d'Avola and 40 per cent frappato, expect dark cherry and ripe plum aromas with a whiff of star anise and smoked meats. Complexity is the key; roast lamb is the dish.



↑
2014 Planeta Etna Bianco DOC
$42
Planeta are modernists, with a portion of this 100 per cent carricante aged in oak. It has almond blossom and yellow peach with a whiff of vanilla. The palate echoes the nose, with the structure to match swordfish and caponata.

↓
2014 Feudo Arancio Inzolia DOC
$20
From Ragusa, on Sicily's south-eastern coast, this citrusy, bright white displays aromas of fresh pear and honeysuckle. Its intense flavours, creamy texture and zesty acidity would suit deep-fried calamari served with aïoli.

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2014 Girolamo Russo Etna Rosso 'a Rina DOC
$46
Orchestrated by pianist turned winegrower Giuseppe Russo, this nerello mascalese blend displays lifted perfumes of red cherry and wild thyme. A swathe of spicy tannins adds thrust to the finish. Serve with barbecued quail.





Wine snob



Samantha Payne

Wine program director, Nomad, Sydney

You've got $20 to spend. What wine would you buy? Tyrrell's Part & Parcel, a white wine that's a crowd-pleaser. **And if you had $50?** I'm in love with the 2013 Syrahmi Mourvèdre from Heathcote [in Victoria]. It has everything I want in a wintertime red. **What hot new variety of grape should we be trying?** Mencia, a native Spanish red variety with limited plantings in Australia. It's perfumed, textural and really versatile with food. **What wine would you drink with Chinese food?** The 2015 S.C. Pannell Aromatico white blend, which, according to the winemaker, was made for Asian food. **And with Indian?** I'd reach for a juicy, off-dry riesling. Nick O'Leary Wines, in the Canberra District, does some kick-arse rieslings. **What country is producing the best wines?** I believe Australia is producing the world's most innovative and interesting wines. **What's the best Champagne?** Jacques Selosse Les Carelles Grand Cru Extra-Brut. It's like dying and going to heaven. **Which five wines would you put away for 10 years?** The Best's pinot meunier; Bindi Quartz Chardonnay; Bartolo Mascarello Barolo; Joh. Jos. Prüm rieslings; and Lake's Folly cabernets. **What do you drink when no-one's watching?** An Aperol Sour.