



IF you know Brisbane then you know the “Ekka”. It’s the annual agricultural show complete with fashion shows, livestock in the main arena, the all important wood chop, show bags and of course, sideshow alley.

Over the past couple of years parts of the vast space on the outskirts of the city have been redeveloped and now includes an entertainment centre, a Ridge Hotel with restaurant and bar, and King St, connecting the showgrounds with Fortitude Valley and the CBD.

The tree-lined boulevard is fast attracting some big-name eateries already successful in other areas opening their second location. First to open is the **George Bar & Bistro**, also located in the “Golden Triangle” of Eagle St dining in the CBD. Owned by the Gregan Group which is headed by former Wallaby **George Gregan** who also operates coffee depot **GG Espresso**, pouring Allpress Espresso’s Carmelo blend as well as a comprehensive range of breakfast and lunch options like wraps and sandwiches, muffins and cookies, is also going in to King St. The **Fat Dumpling** is a super popular dumpling bar in the middle of the busiest part of Fortitude Valley also popping up on the newest “Eat Street” in town. Slightly larger than the Valley original, the interior features 300-year-old timber panelled walls, recycled from Chinese train tracks and a central hanging feature fashioned from dumpling rolling pins. The menu will be similar to the Valley bar, which true to its name features steamed, poached and pan-fried dumplings, shallot pancakes and spicy vegetable salads, matched with Asian beers and ending with the famous peach spring roll served with vanilla bean ice cream.

If you know Brisbane you will also know about **e’cco Bistro**, established in 1995 in a heritage-listed, century-old former tea warehouse on the CBD fringe.

Owned and operated by chef and author **Philip Johnson**, the multi-awarded bistro is one of the state’s most favourite venues,

having maintained its edge over the years by subtly morphing to stay current but still authentic and thoroughly on-brand.

The cosy dining room underwent a total refurbishment in 2014 and recently an all-new menu brought subtle Middle Eastern influence to the small but approachable and always delicious menu. Johnson’s philosophy is to source the best ingredients available and then do as little as possible to them. He describes his food as honest and real, food that hasn’t been played with or fussed over. Duck breast roasted to pink, with crispy, salty skin is served with poached quince and compressed radicchio with dukkah and caramelised yoghurt is a classic example as is Murray cod with garlic and almond sauce, pickled mussels and black lime ash.

Channelling current trends like pickling and fermenting beef is slow cooked and scented with cardamom and served with charred leek and fermented cauliflower puree, but the best comes at the end in the form of a deconstructed cheesecake of strawberry, rhubarb and rosewater with strawberry meringue shards and tangy raspberry sorbet.

Over the past decade Johnson and his partner and co-owner **Mary Randles** have steadily built up an impressive wine collection both from Australia and Johnson’s native New Zealand, as well as stellar representation from European and North American producers.

Philip Johnson Catering, a complete home and corporate catering arm, operates alongside the bistro offering delicious menus for stand-up events, formal corporate affairs, weddings and major events as well as family-style feasting menus, designed for the centre of the table. 100 Boundary Street Brisbane. Phone (07) 3831 8344.


Still with a nod to delicious Middle Eastern flavours, this time more specifically Turkey, **Downtown Istanbul** opened recently in the leafy inner northern enclave of Hawthorne.

Brick walls house wooden alcoves filled with traditionally painted plates, jugs and urns, wooden tables are sparsely adorned and the glassed-in kitchen clad in hand-painted tiles gives the place a contemporary and airy feel – there’s as many alfresco tables as there are inside.

Located next to the cinema complex and open every day for lunch and dinner, the menu is large and wide ranging. Beginning



with mezze which includes the usual dips of baba ganoush, hummus, beetroot and jajik, borek pastries and vine leaves, there’s a section for both gozleme’s and pide, salads which marry with both, and also charry items from the grill section. Lamb shish, charcoal chicken, garlicky prawn skewers and the King’s mixed grill, which features all of the above can be paired with less traditional sides like red cabbage salads, steamed greens and sweet potato chips with red pepper mayo.

Sticky orange and almond syrup cake, house-made baklava and chocolate tart with Turkish delight ice cream finish the meal on a subtly sweet note. 4/274 Hawthorne Road, Hawthorne. Phone (07) 3902 0726. 



Top left & right: Delicious food from Downtown Istanbul. Above middle: Interior view of e’cco Bistro. Above bottom: Delicious food from e’cco Bistro.