



LONGEVITY is not necessarily measured by survival of the fittest but by who can adapt most appropriately, and in Melbourne we are seeing high profile and well-established operators shifting their focus, listening to their market and adapting to it accordingly. In the pursuit of feeding us, and all our visitors, some of the best chefs and owners in town are extending their offerings. Take chef **Scott Pickett**. Already known for his Northcote empire - Estelle Bistro and Estelle by Scott Pickett as well as co-owning Saint Crispin on Collingwood's Smith St, the chef has opened in the historical and much-loved Queen Victoria market with **Pickett's Deli & Rotisserie**. The former cafe and takeaway shop on the corner of Therry and Elizabeth streets is prime real estate for walk-by trade and Pickett has already got the place heaving with shoppers and those looking for some sturdy comfort food. First, he's had the place fitted out with dark timber produce shelves, a marble charcuterie counter and a long communal table. It has a Parisian feel to it. The menu is developed around an upright rotisserie where Pickett and his team roast free-range chickens from suppliers Bannockburn and Milawa, and then serve in pieces with chips or whole with veg. The menu, while steeped in familiarity, definitely raises the bar on the general food offering of the market. His all-day menu includes crumbed lamb's brains, leeks & sauce diable; steak tartare, bottarga and pomme paille or the textural gnocchi with prawn bolognese. If you visit in the morning it's hard to go passed the house-smoked bacon with a "secret" dry rub that is an integral part of the bacon and brown sauce breakfast roll. There's bar snacks of oysters or charcuterie for the afternoon and a solid list of craft beers and wine. Pickett is also offering a take home option for the lovely roast chook. Delivery is in the pipeline so he's just about got all bases covered. 507 Elizabeth St, Melbourne; phone (03) 9328 3213.

The most recent venue from restaurateur **David Mackintosh** - who co-owns Rosa's Kitchen, Lee Ho Fook and Ides - is a pizza joint called **SPQR** in the



CBD (SPQR is Latin for "the senate and people of Rome"). It's strictly pizza-only with a few snacks (try the fried dough with tomato and basil; it's ridiculously good), in addition to some decent, very approachable wines - on tap and in bottle. You can order whole pizzas and by-the-slice at the bar. The room takes the term pared-back to a new level with tiled floors and simple chairs, partitions between dining room and bar - it's about function over form - but this works for the execution of such a straightforward concept.

The wood-fired oven churns out chewy, salty, sourdough base pizzas with toppings of top-notch quality. The pizza menu is divided into red (with tomato) and white (with olive oil) pizzas, including the marinara with the simple addition of tomato, basil, oregano and olive oil, or the parma, a mix of tomato, Fior di Latte, Parma ham, rocket leaves and parmesan. The white pizzas include salsiccia with house-made pork and fennel sausage with potato, Fior di Latte or the fungi provola with mixed mushrooms and Provola.

There are good local drops to enjoy with your pizza; fianos - Australian and Italian - prosecco, aperol and okar Australia's answer to campari).

The dessert menu offers just two - tiramisu or panna cotta - but these two are spot-on, uncomplicated and of quality. Like every other element of SPQR. 26 Liverpool St, Melbourne; phone (03) 9671 3326. If you're in Fitzroy and visit the **Builders Arms Hotel** on Gertrude St for the first time in a while, you'll notice the front bar - all wood and beer taps - as always (punters have been meeting in this bar for the last 160 years) but take a few steps past the bar and there's a whole new ball game to consider.

Builders Arms owner and entrepreneur, chef **Andrew McConnell**, wanted to refresh what was on offer at the Builders. Behind the bar was the bistro and the fine-diner Moon Under Water but he didn't just refresh it, he gave it a complete make over, creating a new Chinese-inspired dining room **Ricky & Pinky**.

You can't compare the former space to what it is now. Both spaces have become one and the room is dressed in rich greens, blues and golds - gold pipes bend and gleam throughout the space; silver-coated skylights amp up the sense of light - and McConnell has installed a fish tank filled with live pipis, abalone and barramundi.

The live seafood anchors the menu focused on regional and authentic Chinese food with an undeniable McConnell touch. His head chef is **Archan Chan** who worked for McConnell at Cutler & Co, Supernormal and Golden Fields (now known as Luxembourg) and her menu, while not as large as your late night China town local with pages and pages of dishes, is a generous list of snacks, small dishes, large dishes, dumplings, rice and noodles and vegetables.

Chan grew up in Hong Kong and McConnell lived there, and in Shanghai, so collaboratively they're putting up dishes such as crisp rice cake, homemade Chinese sausage, Sichuan pork dumpling, garlic chive and chilli oil, pippies and XO sauce with fried doughnuts and cold marinated eggplant salad with chilli.

Larger dishes may include steamed whole snapper, coriander and ginger and grilled Wagyu rump cap with XO and mushrooms.

The drinks list is comprehensive - 35 pages - but keeps up with the sense of fun and colour laid out through the room and menu. Remember the Japanese slipper cocktail? You can enjoy one again at Ricky & Pinky as well as classic drops from here and Europe.

For years McConnell has often been right on the money in telling Melburnians what they want to eat and drink, and it looks like he's done it again. 211 Gertrude St, Fitzroy; phone (03) 9417 7700.



Top: Interior of Ricky & Pinky restaurant.  
Above & Left: Food from Ricky & Pinky.