

MELBOURNE has gone all royal - no, we're not expecting any visits from the royal family soon nor have we broken away from the rest of the country to create our own kingdom - but we have seen two cafes open in recent months and close to each other, both inspired by all things Brit and one in particular shining a light on the Duchess of Cambridge. **Middletown Cafe** - that's Middleton with an extra letter - owned by **Randy Dhamanhuri** and partner **Valerie Fong**, who also own cafe Operator 25 in the city, has a very elegant air to it and Dhamanhuri has been quoted as saying that the intentional vibe of the venue is, "royal but still close to the people". With this in mind, you'll see fresh flowers throughout the cafe coordinated to complement the plush look of the 70-seater with its brass light fittings, terrazzo floors, champagne-coloured banquettes and rich royal-blue wall panels. The menu is hearty - perhaps not what the Princess may order - but think of lamb neck with pickled beetroots and smoked yoghurt or wagyu brisket on house-made brioche with mustard aioli and relish, but we did enjoy the pickled mackerel with bullhorn capsicums, Manchego cheese, a fried egg, jamon on a baguette. High Street, Prahran; phone (03) 9530 2288.

Just down the road from Prahran in Malvern is the new cafe **Saint James**. The owners - **Phil Gijbsbers, Craig Tate** and **Rich Donovan** - are not paying homage to the royal family - they've named the cafe in honour of St James' Park, in the UK and home of the Newcastle United football team, but they are giving British-themed food a good nudge and the inner-south-east is



lapping it up. The cafe is smart in its fit out and immediately approachable in its use of warm woods and soft blues in an otherwise pared-back space. There are plans to make the outdoor courtyard a beer garden in the summer months and a liquor license is well-and-truly in the pipeline. The menu by chef **Nick Woolard** has a strong bent towards sandwiches, called Sarnies on the menu and include, a fish finger butt with local white fish, cabbage and dill salad doused in a crushed pea aioli, all squidgy on fresh white bread. If you pop in earlier for breakfast be sure to give the bubble and squeak a try, it's laced with a beurre noisette hollandaise and topped with a fried egg, roasted tomato but we give kudos to the XO Crab. This is a creamy mix of scrambled eggs, with fleshy spanner crab and XO sauce tumbled over toasted sourdough. Rule Britannia, indeed! Malvern Rd, Malvern; phone (03) 9078 8150.

We have a new hotel, smack-bang in the middle of the CBD. The **QT group** opened its seventh hotel and first Melbourne outpost and with its ethos of clean, contemporary design and gorgeous, high-end accommodation they have also kept up their side of the bargain with an equally luxurious food offering.

The flagship restaurant **Pascale Bar & Grill**, has a European-influenced menu that has been designed by the hotel's executive chef **Paul Easson**. The extensive menu covers most tastes - what a hotel should do - with milk-fed veal & ox-beef tartare as a starter alongside Cobia sashimi and shuck-to-order oysters.

The grill and spit-roast features strongly on the menu. Easson has a spit-roast chicken (seen on many menus here right now) served with an immediately comforting Paris mash and giblet and shallot chicken gravy. There's also a Steak au Poivre - a pasture-fed sirloin - and a beautifully cooked bavette-skirt steak with a Mâche salad. And for the seafood lovers, there's a simple fish dish of pan-fried snapper fillet, braised red witlof and a spot-on lemon and caper butter sauce among other dishes.

QT also boasts a smaller venue called **Hot Sauce Laneway Bar**. Here you'll find Korean- and Japanese-inspired dishes just right to match a late-night drink. Think fried chicken with hot sauce, kimchi and American yellow cheese, Taiwanese Hot Dogs or a broad selection of yakitori skewers.

Then, there's the **Cake Shop** - an elegant patisserie with touches of Marie Antoinette in the logo and in its decadent fit out. Here is where you can stop for a tea or coffee and tuck into pastries all made in-house by a Robuchon-trained pâtissier.

QT Melbourne has been quickly embraced by visitors and locals alike. The modern, striking architecture, the luxe fabrics and finishes of the accommodation and the food offerings are created to please a diverse and discerning market, it's working. 133 Russell St, Melbourne, phone (03) 8636 8800. 🍷

Top: Interior of Pascale Bar and Grill.
Left: Napoleon Blanky from Pascale.