



THERE'S PLENTY happening at Albion, a previously unsung suburb in the inner north of the city. The high street has always been home to cheap and cheerful Thai and Indian restaurants but now there's **Vaquero**, a Spanish-influenced restaurant that you access via a boutique butchery at the front of the complex.

And that's where the "Brisbane feel" ends. Dark, moodily lit, with high ceilings bedecked with dripping greenery, it's cave-like and cosy, begging newcomers to perch at a high table and get amongst the list of cocktails, beers on tap and interesting wine list. The next step is into the dining room, whitewashed brick walls and comfy banquets, each table has a box for your bibs and bobs (phones, wallets, sunnies and the like), the menu sheathed in leather, the wait staff confident and knowledgeable about the eclectic offering. From there is a leafy courtyard which twinkles under candle light at night and is shaded from the Queensland extremes by day.

There's a coal-fired oven that can turn some simple carrots into something quite special, ditto the sheep's brains with green chilli sauce and octopus with sobrasada oscura and spiced tomato chutney. You can play Russian roulette with the Maleny padron peppers, one in 10 will blow your head off, or so they say; these ones served with bonito soy mayo and house mojama. It's a delicious and slightly dangerous starter but well worth the risk as the season for peppers is relatively short. Dry-aged beef arrived with roasted baby gem lettuce halves, lightly charred with fries and horseradish cream is charr and delicious as is leek and ricotta filled pasta with porcini puree and cavolo nero and smoked organic

chicken leg, roasted and served with corn puree and spiced popcorn is sticky and falling off the bone. A little browse through the butchery on the way out is the perfect way to end the day. 344 Sandgate Rd, Albion; phone (07) 3862 3606.

Also at Albion is the all-new **Manufactory Provisions**. Located in a new precinct called Albion Fine Trades, **Albion Provisions** is where all the magic happens - both the bread bakery and the main cake and provisions kitchen are now located here - and there's a small shop adjacent with plenty of parking. The James St flagship store is still just as popular as ever and celebrating 21 years in business, and the new facility, decked out with state-of-the-art European ovens and equipment, has the capacity to dramatically increase production while also maintaining the same high standards and home-style baked goods. By far the most popular is the "choc-sour", a rich chocolate and sour cream cake which is topped with a thick layer of vanilla bean icing, but the salted malted layer cakes and dense flourless chocolate cakes with Belgian chocolate ganache and toffee shards



are also very popular. In the last couple of years the innovative kitchen has branched into ready-to-go meals using only the best local produce to create an extensive menu of meals perfect for entertaining or simply feeding the family. Artisan bread, slow fermented sourdoughs, spiced Turkish loaves, deliciously chewy baguettes and ciabatta are a daily staple as are the comestibles such as onion marmalade, spicy kasoundi and red pepper and tomato relish. Stay tuned for a timetable of cooking classes and other activities to get those home cooks baking like pros. 97 Sandgate Rd Albion; phone (07) 3852 3799.

Waves of excitement pulsed through the industry as the rumour circulated around town that the **Rockpool Dining Group** had secured a tenancy and was moving into the Brisbane dining scene imminently. Rockpool Brisbane has a great ring to it, some thought, while speculating if co-owner **Neil Perry** would put his famous franchise in the so-called Golden Triangle, a strip of CBD waterfront real estate that is home to Sydneysiders offerings, including Matt Moran's Aria, Sake and Pony as well as Brisbane icons Cha Cha Char, Il Centro and Jellyfish. Trouble was it is his burger franchise, **The Burger Project** that was slated to open in early 2017 in a new development at Southbank in Brisbane's inner south. Perry says that Brisbane has been on the groups' radar for some time and, once they found the right spot - Southbank is a burgeoning precinct, popular with tourists as well as locals - and the venue features a minimal black and white decor with vast windows and an open kitchen in the centre of the room. The company motto is "fast-food with slow-food values" so instead of using any old ground beef, The Burger Project use 36-month grass-fed beef from Cape Grim that is then hand minced and formed into patties. This prevents shrinking and also prevents the patty from losing those all too delicious juices that keep the burger moist. And it's not just beef that features in the 14-item strong menu -there's a bacon version, magic mushroom, spicy chicken katsu to have alongside a range of soft-serve ice cream, classic milkshakes, wines by Grosset and Urban Craft Brewing Co. beers on tap. 271 Grey St, Southbank.

Top: Albion Provisions interior showcase of cakes.
Bottom: Delicious cakes from Albion Provisions.