

melbourne grapevine

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IN April, Melbourne closed the curtains on what was broadly considered one of the greatest culinary shows on Earth. The World's 50 Best Restaurant Awards were held, which coincided with the 25th Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and anyone with even a passing interest in chefs, restaurants and cooking jumped on board and got involved in dinners, tastings, talks and kept on eating through the city and the State. While this energy amped the city up for a few weeks, Melbourne stayed steadfastly on-script with openings, closings and even some refreshing renovations giving well-loved dining rooms a fresh contemporary look and feel. One of these fresh new looks has been given to **Oriental Teahouse** on Chapel St in South Yarra. Originally established in 2004 by restaurateur **David Zhou**, the transformation of the much-loved teahouse experience simply raises the bar in terms of dim sum and tea service. Tea is the central theme of the venue. It's used in many dishes such as Oolong tea-smoked chicken fillet with raspberry tea mayonnaise as well as in cocktails, including an apple Sencha tea-infused martini. Zhou has kept many of the popular dishes on the menu such as the lucky prawn and chive dumplings and chilli wagyu beef dumplings, while he's added new creations such as flame thrower pulled pork dumplings and fried peanut butter



and chocolate walnut wantons. There's a lovely warmth to the room with a thoughtful mix of the old and new worlds not colliding but meandering quietly together. Think blues, whites and greys, with warm textures and clever lighting. 455 Chapel St South Yarra; phone (03) 9824 0128.

There's a buzz about the new dining venue **Etta** that opened in mid-March with some serious hospitality chops behind it. The modern-Australian, neighbourhood-style bistro has a strong seasonal menu with a nod to comfort food yet with a good dousing of experience. The trio behind Etta are front-of-house professional **Hannah Green**, chef **Hayden McMillan** (ex-Roving Marrow in Carlton) with his wife Dominique McMillan. Green and McMillan were colleagues at Rosetta (Neil Perry's Italian restaurant in Melbourne's Crown). The trio employed the talents of Iva Foschia from IF Architecture (she designed Andrew McConnell's Marion wine bar and is working with Ben Shewry on his reworking of Attica) to design the dining room filled with lots of Australian stone, banquettes in rich burgundies and greens, and warm wooden finishes. The menu treads familiar territory which is a smart decision given its inner-city suburban location. One dish that's popping up all over social media is the mozzarella pasta with zucchini and black olive, a simple play on classic flavour combinations, and texturally buoyant. There's some tasty vegetarian options such as tamari-roasted buttercup pumpkin with horseradish and sunflower or charred carrots dressed with orange, haloumi and hazelnut as well as the go-to meaty dish of roasted Milawa half-chicken with broccoli and tarragon. The wine list is a dance through interesting Victorian winemakers - Athletes of Wine and Jamsheed are two standouts - with a boutique selection from parts of Europe and New Zealand. 60 Lygon St, Brunswick East; phone (03) 9448 8233.

It's a big commitment to close for eight months (and that was just in the building). There was clearly a long stretch of planning

that went into the redesign of Southgate restaurant **Pure South** which opened in early 2017 bigger and more enticing than it ever had been before. The restaurant, with a singular focus on promoting great Tasmanian cuisine, was always comfortable and reliable, but the decision to expand and refurbish the two-levels adding a private dining room, raw bar, open kitchen and double capacity, catapulted it into the present with a slick and inviting design. Lots of blonde woods, sand and limestone open out on to the promenade (it's impossible to miss it) allowing the view to pour into the dining rooms. Pure South opened in 2004 to a welcoming audience. Hiring Michelin-starred chef Ashley Davis (who now has his own venue, Copper Pot Seddon in Melbourne's inner-west) took it to another level and then the decision to shut and rebuild, while a huge one, was certainly the right tack to take. They've appointed chef **David Hall**, who has created menus to satisfy the different aspects of the business. Take in three-courses upstairs or drop by first thing in the morning for breakfast of a bacon and egg roll using Scottsdale free-range bacon and tomato relish. Drop in at promenade level for a glass of wine and a snack - smoked Huon ocean trout taco with finger lime or a broccoli doughnut with gooey Pyengana cheddar - and in the restaurant the beef selection is outstanding. King Island grass fed beef - including eye fillet, scotch fillet or rib eye on the bone - from the chargrill with a choice of mushroom, garlic, bone marrow. And don't forget all those lovely Tassie Pacific oysters to choose from. The wine list isn't just anchored to Tasmania. The rest of the country gets a look-in alongside some European smatterings. The thing to take in here is the food, the friendly service and the view of Melbourne. A sure-fire win for visitors and locals alike. 3 Southgate Ave, Southbank; phone (03) 9699 4600. 🍷

Top right: Smoked Trout Taco in nori shells with fingerlime from Pure South restaurant.

Left: Fried Peanut Butter & Chocolate Walnut Wontons With Ice Cream from Oriental Teahouse restaurant.