

IT MAY sound odd that restaurateurs and chefs are embracing seafood more than ever before in Melbourne restaurants, but there has definitely been a resurgence in pushing more seafood dishes on menus - rather than opening strictly seafood restaurants - and emphasising the goodness of Australian produce and the rising demand of quality tinned seafoods, mostly imported from Europe.

Neptune, in the suburb of Prahran, is a collaboration of long-time hospitality professionals **Nic Coulter** and **Simon Blacher** who own Hanoi Hannah, Saigon Sally and Tokyo Tina alongside brothers **Dave** and **Michael Parker** who are two of the owners of Peruvian and Argentinian dining rooms Pastuso and San Telmo.

The four have set up a wine bar, bottle shop and eatery and taken influences from far-and-wide sailing mostly through the Mediterranean. When it comes to seafood, there's roasted sardines, snapper crude, fritto misto as well as meaty dishes like hanger steak and roasted hen. They have a premium canned seafood section on the menu where preserved seafood like Arroyabe tuna belly comes with pickled onion, capers and parsley; cockles (Cabo De Pena) are dressed with Calabrian chilli oil and fleshy Cuca anchovies are served with tomato and red pepper. The 300-bottle wine list is an intelligent and broad selection, and the 140-seater is rich with moody lighting, dark woods and against bare-brick walls. 212 High St, Prahran; phone (03) 9533 2827.

Chef **Jesse Gerner**, the brains behind Fitzroy's Anada and Bomba in the CBD, and Green Park, his cafe in Carlton North, has opened **Nomada** at the other end of Fitzroy in what was formerly cafe Hammer & Tong.

Gerner has gone into business with chefs **Jesse McTavis** and **Greg McFarland**, who were both on the pans at renowned cafe Kettle Black, **Shane Barrett**, from wineshop Samuel Pepys and **Michael Burr**, also of Bomba. They have started with brunch and lunch emphasising tapas, with a view to eventually be an all-day eatery with a license until 1am. Small, medium or large dishes are priced at \$5, \$9 or \$15 each. The commitment to the production of the elements of the menu is outstanding - cabbages



are fermented, dried and ground into a salt substitute, olives are aged in hessian sacks for two weeks and anchovies are locally caught from Lake's Entrance. There are montaditos (little Spanish sandwiches), blue eye croquettes with fennel emulsion, orange-laced pumpkin porridge with almond milk among a seasonal, quality selection of plates. It's small, only 50-seats, but has been given a splash of Euro-touches with hand-pressed tile bar, hand-stitched leather upholstery and touches of (fake) fur. Filter and espresso coffees from their own roastery keep all the inner-northern tastes sated and there's a quirky list of wines and sherries. Sherry for brunch? They'll encourage you to go there. 412A Brunswick St, Fitzroy; phone (03) 9416 4102.

If you've been to Melbourne and committed to the wait for a bowl of pasta at Tipo00 on Little Bourke St, the good news is that they've opened a second restaurant - **Osteria Ilaria** - next door. The not-so-good-news is that it's not a pasta venue, well, so say the owners, but there is a handful of pastas on this menu that are grabbing as much attention as the asparagus tortellini did when Tipo00 opened in 2014. There's the prawn-oil-infused paccheri, hefty tubes of pasta over sweet tomato and herby sorrel sauces, with the plump prawns and their oil both balancing the dish out. The nettle gnocchi is another dish that has sent social media into overdrive tossed with blue cheese and chopped roasted almonds, it's a dish all its own or is proving a wicked match for the roast corn-fed duck with crisp skin, juicy confit leg, grilled radicchio and toasted hazelnuts. But there certainly are other dishes - the no pasta dishes - where calamari is served with saffron and baccala, or a pork liver sausage

is served against spiced sourdough and sweetened with rhubarb. A baby octopus, flattened, grilled until its slightly charred, is on top of a feisty 'nduja sauce and whole whiting stars in a dish of simple execution with pippies and sea herbs. **Andreas Papadakis** will head up the osteria with Tipo00's co-owner and manager **Luke Skidmore**. This leaves Tipo00 in the safe hands of co-owner and chef Alberto Fava, who has been at Tipo00 since day one.

Like Tipo00, Osteria Ilaria has been designed by Skidmore's architect sister Briony Morgan. It's a contemporary space framed with bare white brick walls and timber. There's room for 90 seats plus a private dining room for 16. So you may have to wait, but hopefully not as long. 367 Little Bourke St, Melbourne; phone (03) 9642 2287. 🍷



Top: The team from Neptune restaurant.
Above: Delicious food from Nomada restaurant.