

melbournegrapevine

HILARY McNEVIN

THE inner-north of Melbourne gets a vegetarian pub, an old-school pub gets a makeover in the south-east and one of our favourite chefs opens her first restaurant. As always, Melbourne dining is on the move.

Chef **Jerry Mai** has opened her first restaurant proper. The chef who owns and operates city lunch haunt Pho Nom, earned her stripes working for names like David Thompson at Nahm and Geoff Lindsay at Pearl, and after the success of her Pho outlets, she opened **Annam** on Little Bourke St where the Japanese restaurant Kunis used to sit. Mai has based her menu at Annam on the Vietnamese and Cambodian dishes she ate growing up but her time with Thompson sees some Thai influences, too. Annam has quickly become a favourite among families and city dwellers looking for comforting, seasonal fresh flavours swiped with a broad Asian brush. Don't expect big whacks of chilli or obscure, unfamiliar ingredients, Mai wants you to feel at home. She's done this not just in the menu but in a welcoming dining room dressed in blacks, reds, mirrors and comfy seating. There's also a screen projecting old black-and-white Kung Fu movies. Be sure to try the sarsaparilla-braised oxtail dumplings with a sticky, sweet, salty sauce that should be sold by the bottle. A meaty fillet of fresh Cobia is marinated in miso paste and roasted, its salty flesh lifted by slabs of pickled kohlrabi, and the ever-present salt-and-pepper squid is given the Mai treatment with cuttlefish fried in a batter of Sichuan-pepper and rice flour. Its crunch works beautifully against the numbing heat of the peppers.

Mai has long utilised the produce of local Victorian farmers and she takes a Milawa chicken and cooks it into her Jungle Curry, a jumble of fresh vegetables, mild, complex



spices and the earthy chicken. Drinks include a creative cocktail list - the Archangel is a straightforward mix of Plymouth gin, Aperol and cucumber, while the Kingdom and the Beauty sees Maker's Mark, Amaro Montenegro, lemon, passionfruit, Martell VSOP and apple juice slurried together. The wine list is a smart list of aromatic whites and lighter-style reds designed to complement the spice. 56 Little Bourke St, Melbourne; phone (03) 9654 6627.

You won't find a chicken parma or a rump steak anywhere in the **Green Man's Arms** in Carlton. Right on the corner of Elgin and Lygon streets, its prime position used to be home to Percy's Bistro and The Astor, where The Roving Marrow once operated. But when new owners **Alison Whyte** and **Fred Whitlock** moved in, they gave the space a refit, warming it up with retro finishes, parquet flooring, wall panelling and a green leafy wallpaper that could have come from your Aunt Peg's house in 1972. Whyte and Whitlock - an actress and teacher respectively - moonlight as pub owners, they had The Terminus in Abbotsford for many years, so they know their stuff. Deciding to open a vegetarian pub was a natural progression to them and is a right fit in Melbourne's inner-north as it becomes heavily populated with veggie and vegan eateries. They've employed the skills of Israeli-born head chef **David Raziel**, whose menu of vegetarian and vegan dishes includes his heritage's staples of tabbouleh, house-made falafel and hummus. House-made cous cous is another highlight, and you may also find a grilled salad of beets, red cabbage, onions, almonds on Labneh with pomegranate or perhaps, a Catalan dish of eggplants, peppers and onion with Romesco sauce. As many of the ingredients as possible come from Whyte and Whitlock's 4ha property in the Yarra Valley and their drinks list includes seven beers on tap, next to a tap dedicated to Bucha of Byron kombucha. With the couple's collective background in the arts they are also planning live music and book readings along side the ever-evolving veggie menu. 418 Lygon St, Carlton; phone (03) 9347 7419.

Another refurbished pub on the other side of the city has meat and more meat. The **Mount Erica** in Prahran in the city's inner-south-east has been bought and refurbished



by the team also behind the Marquis of Lorne in Fitzroy - **Will Benjamin, Matt Vero, Callan Hitchens**. The trio has joined forces with chef **Sean Donovan**, who owns and operates the Fitzroy Town Hall hotel. They fitted out the old girl, built in 1853, with loads of woods, retro paraphernalia and comforting spaces that allows locals and visitors a perch for the cricket or footy - in the front bar, at least - and selection on the menu that will keep all ages sated. The bar menu includes a dressed chicken and watercress sandwich, and a blue cheese and leek tart. The counter meal section is all about burgers, a minute steak with chips and an egg or a chicken schnitzel. The dining room and lounge area, with its original fireplace in tact, has some textured flourishes such as tartan, tiles, carpeted areas and upholstered seating. Donovan's dining room menu has a rotisserie section; try and go past the half-chook with Tuscan-style tomato and bread salad, and all the steaks on the menu are served with hand-cut chips and a choice of pepper or bearnaise sauce. The drinks list is varied and broad to satisfy fussy wine lovers and those seeking a quiet spot at the bar. 420 High St, Prahran; phone (03) 9529 8250.



Top: Interior of Annam restaurant.

Far Left: Braised Pork Hock from Annam restaurant.

Middle & Above: Drinks and smoked mackerel from Annam restaurant.