

Cumulus Up,
Melbourne:
grilled scampi

Taste

Food, wine and the hot
gourmet destinations.

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Bar with good food or
restaurant with good bar?
Take the dilemma out of
the decision and enjoy the
best of both worlds with
our round-up of equal-
opportunity eateries.

SPLIT DECISIONS

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Lobo Plantation:
Communist Sour

NEW SOUTH WALES

Lobo Plantation

Basement, 209 Clarence Street, Sydney. (02) 9279 4335. thelobo.com.au

This lush fantasy of the Caribbean has been one of the big breakthroughs on the boozing scene for 2013, a beautifully kitted-out space with serious cocktail chops. Admittedly, the food doesn't quite match the sterling standard of the beverages, but that's not to say the beef and chorizo meatballs and the ropa vieja (flank steak, that is, braised in beer and brown sugar) don't hold their own. It's more a measure of the talent behind the bar.

Open: Mon-Thu & Sat 4pm-12am, Fri 2pm-12am. Bar food \$5-\$13.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Mary's

6 Mary Street, Newtown.

There's more to Mary's than meets the ear and eye. First impressions are of plenty of noise and not much light in this split-storey tavern, but squint into the darkness and there's more to see. Kenny Graham tends serious bar, while co-owner Jake Smyth has run the floor of the Neutral Bay and Glebe Point Diners and Bodega, which might explain the presence of some surprise stunners on the wine list. And then there's the menu, designed by former Tetsuya's head chef Luke Powell: it's fried chicken and hamburgers and not much else. Good thing, then, that they're truly the best burgers and chicken in town.

Open: Mon-Fri 4pm-12am, Sat 12pm-12am, Sun 12pm-10pm. Bar food \$12-\$28.

Longrain Bunker Bar

85 Commonwealth Street, Surry Hills. (02) 9280 2888. longrain.com

It's a tribute to the quality of this bar that many diners never actually make it to a table in the restaurant upstairs. Whether the plan is to try to score a seat for dinner or make a meal of the snacks, the menu comes up trumps. Drinks-wise, there's still plenty to be had in the fresh-and-fruity style that made Longrain's name, but there's also bite in the likes of the Drifter, a long glass of mescal, ginger beer and pineapple accented with orange bitters, lime juice and chilli. It's a great match with the smart little buns stuffed with pork, pickled carrot and daikon, and chilli jam; while the salt-and-pepper tofu, one of Sydney's best, goes with just about everything.

Open: daily 4pm-12am. Bar food \$10-\$18.

VICTORIA

Cumulus Up

Level 1, 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. (03) 9650 1445. cumulusinc.com.au/up

Like its wildly popular downstairs sibling Cumulus Inc, Cumulus Up resists easy categorisation. A sizeable open kitchen and darkly glamorous dining space that's all banquette seating, marble- and timber-topped tables and angular mirrors says "restaurant". But Andrew McConnell's menu of wine-friendly food in flexible snack and share portions, and a drinks list that mixes aperitifs and cocktails with a generous offering of wine by the glass says "bar". That said, the quality food - addictive duck waffles topped with foie gras parfait; raw bonito dressed with ginger vinegar; anchovy toast with fresh curd and fennel seeds - plus a cleverly curated wine list, precision service and the comfortable sophistication of the room make labelling Cumulus Up seem less important than having an excellent time.

Open: Tue-Thu 4pm-12am, Fri-Sat 4pm-1am. Bar food \$5-\$65.

Neighbourhood Wine

1 Reid Street, Fitzroy North. (03) 9486 8306. neighbourhoodwine.com

With its full-sized billiard table, couches and flatteringly lit, timber-panelled social club feel, Neighbourhood Wine fits comfortably into local watering hole territory. But just as the relaxed and hospitable vibe masks a colourful history (the space was once an illegal gambling den), it also downplays the excellence of its food and wine. Quality oysters, house-made terrines and rillettes, slow-roasted meats and return visit-inspiring steak and fat chips sit alongside a 14-page wine list that ranges across the globe, but keeps prices reined in. Keeping the standard high and the menu tightly focused, this is the kind of dream local that should be *de rigueur* in every neighbourhood.

Open: Mon-Thu 4pm-late, Fri-Sun 12pm-late. Bar food \$15-\$32.

VICTORIA

Ombra

76 Bourke Street, Melbourne. (03) 9639 1927. ombrabar.com.au

The cheeky younger sibling of next door's venerable Grossi Florentino, Ombra manages to keep it loose and fun while maintaining a tight grip on service and quality ingredients. Billing itself as a salumi bar, the designer-rustic space does a great line in cured meats - including a growing range of salumi created exclusively for Ombra - but is equally adept with the cicchetti (snacks such as crisp lamb ribs and cured sardines), salads, pickles, cheese and admirably simple pizza that's perfect for draping with slices of capocollo or prosciutto. Add a drinks list with both beer and wine on tap, a cocktail menu that includes a pretty decent Bellini, and a smart, Italian-leaning, price-conscious wine list, and it's little wonder that the downstairs bar stools and tables in the upstairs dining room are becoming harder and harder to come by.

Open: Mon-Sat 11.30am-late, Sun 11.30am-10pm. Bar food \$9-\$35.



The cryptically named
braised intercostal
3am buttermilk rolls

The Woods of Windsor

108 Chapel Street, Windsor.

(03) 9521 1900. thewoodsofwindsor.com

One of the finest cocktail bars in the neighbourhood, The Woods certainly looks the part with timber shelves chock-full of quality liquor (the whisky selection is a highlight), curved timber bar and taxidermy. It also comes up with the goods with original cocktails and sharp lists of beer and wine. Good times await with the food as well, including pig's trotter fritters with onion marmalade and a soft quail egg; barramundi with diamond clams and seared scallops; barbecued octopus with pickled daikon; and a

tacos are delicious with lamb belly and Auntie G's pickled onion and chilli sauce, or with potato, peppers and a chilli sauce. Battered beef balls (mogo mogo) with chipotle crema are deceptively substantial. The brownies are delicate and light.

Open: Mon-Fri 5pm-late, Sat 4pm-12am, Sun 4-10pm.

Bar food \$9-\$24.

Lalla Rookh Wine Store

77 St Georges Terrace, Perth.

(08) 9325 7077. lallarookhwine.com.au

This is a wine bar. It has beer, cider, spirits and a short cocktail list,

but the big draw is the stunning collection from local winemakers, cutting-edge Australian producers and well-known and new-wave Italian wineries. This year, it earned three glasses in Australia's Wine List of the Year Awards. Drink from the very good list by the glass or bottle. The bar has subdued, moody lighting and a (generally) tranquil ambience. Best of all, it has access to the Lalla Rookh kitchen and Joel Valvasori's sharp, detailed modern-Italian food. There are salumi nibbles and small platters of roasted baccala with sweet onions, kipflers and crispy pangrattato; or soft, creamy polenta with braised pork meatballs. The wine-friendly mains include rich, satisfying pappardelle with wild rabbit, chestnut and prune ragu; the lighter touch of smoked eel with garlic and chilli in white wine; and tender veal osso buco with crunchy rice and peas.

Open: Mon-Fri 11.30am-12am, Sat 5pm-12am.

Bar food \$9-\$24. Mains \$25-\$36.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Peel Street

9 Peel Street, Adelaide.

(08) 8231 8887. peelst.com.au

In a street rapidly being populated by smart new bars that pay little more than lip-service to food,

owner-chef Jordan Theodoros' long-awaited new restaurant stands out for the full-flavoured, fresh and gutsy cooking he was renowned for at his previous coastal restaurant, Aquacaf. Peel Street has a pared-back, semi-industrial style and a long, polished-concrete bar where daily lunchtime On The Concrete specials are displayed at room temperature, such as nettle and cheddar frittata or southern fried chicken with lemon mayo, along with baskets of fresh produce. A blackboard menu has dishes such as the mulloway fish pasty made famous at Aquacaf, along with generous, robust dishes such as chargrilled corn-fed chicken with roasted carrots and kasoundi; or orecchiette with cuttlefish, peas, cavolo nero and speck. There are plenty of wines by the glass for those who get no further than the bar.

Open: Mon-Fri 7.30am-5pm, Thu-Sat 6.30pm-late.

Mains \$19-\$47. Tasting menu \$68.

mushroom tart with chestnut puree. They all make great arguments for staying put after a martini or Old Fashioned.

Open: Tue-Sat 4pm-late, Sun 12pm-late. BYO Tue. Bar food \$15-\$39.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

El Publico

511 Beaufort Street, Highgate. 0418 187 708. elpublico.com.au

The emphasis at this vibrant, noisy, two-level bar is on the street food of Mexico and its tequila and mezcal in all their glory. There's a small, carefully chosen wine list, a raft of mainly Mexican beers and a potent range of cocktails. The food may be exotic and unfamiliar, but it's scarcely confrontational. Fresh, crisp tortilla chips make a more-ish starter with guacamole; the subtle and supple cuttlefish salad with corn and jalapeno peppers, served on a fried tortilla (tostada), is not to be missed. Soft, freshly made



El Publico,
Highgate, WA

Apothecary 1878

118 Hindley Street, Adelaide.

(08) 8212 9099. theapothecary1878.com.au

Better known as a wine bar with an award-winning wine list, The Apothecary also works exceptionally well as a restaurant with a range of dining spaces, from rustic cellar to snug mezzanine, serviced by executive chef Natalie Homan. The menu offers main courses such as pork belly and spelt ragu with braised cavolo nero, but the savvy way to eat here is to order from the range of smaller dishes and ask for them each to be paired with a tasting glass of wine. Owner Paolo Cora enjoys any opportunity to lead her customers through a procession of tastes and flavours, choosing wines to go with dishes such as chargrilled lamb backstrap on creamed split pea with smoked almonds and mint; or warm cured Atlantic salmon with white gazpacho and radish salad.

Open: daily 5pm-late. Mains \$26-\$35.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Soju Girl

41/43-45 Northbourne Avenue, Canberra.

(02) 6257 5328. sojogirl.com.au

Wine and cocktail bar, bistro, and casual eating lounge – Soju Girl offers three different experiences across a sprawling and busy space within the historic Melbourne building. Derek Brown's (formerly of Parlour Bar) pan-Asian menu also works well for different configurations, the tasting plates in particular. A zingy taster of smoked trout and coconut chili dressing on betel leaves references Martin Boetz of Longrain. Pork hock morsels with a palm-sugar caramel are unctuous, sweet, sticky and salty all at once. The wine list is packed with interesting and spice-friendly aromatic whites, and there are plenty of creative cocktails on offer, from a Milo Martini to a Hanky Panky and even a Concubine, featuring Korean soju and Japanese plum wine.

Open: Mon-Thu 5pm-late (lunch Wed-Fri 12-3pm), Fri 12pm-late, Sat 2pm-late. Bar food \$4-\$27.

Thirst

20 West Row, Canberra. (02) 6257 0700. thirstwinebar.com.au

Recognised on this year's *Australian Gourmet Traveller* wine awards list, Thirst offers a smart little selection packed with Thai-friendly aromatic whites such as gewurztraminer, riesling and chenin blanc. They partner well with a smart and punchy menu inspired by the street food of Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Small plates include crisp corn fritters livened up by red curry paste, coriander and chilli, or spring rolls packed full of carrots, bean sprouts, rice noodles and coriander. For something more substantial try a laab gai, a particularly punchy take on the Lao chicken salad; or a green curry of taro and mushroom dumplings. The space is as lively and colourful as the cuisine, with brightly-lit lanterns and striking orange and crimson motifs stretching across a back wall.

Open: Mon-Thu & Sat 5-9.30pm (Wed-Thu 12-2pm), Fri 12-9.30pm. Bar food \$13-\$25, street stall banquet \$30.



NORTHERN TERRITORY CHOW!

Shops D1 & D2, 19 Kitchener Drive, Darwin.

(08) 8941 7625. chowdarwin.com.au

For pan-Asian dishes with a focus on Vietnam and drinks to match, this new venue from Jason Hanna (owner of Arch Rival and The Deck) is the place to be. The menu has something for everyone from the solo diner – pho or laksa – to those wanting combinations of bar snacks or share dishes. The crisp chilli salt chicken wings are great, as is the luscious, locally grown eggplant with minced pork and XO sauce. Hot and sour soups are designed for sharing. Drinks include Ka-pows, cocktails inspired by the fruity drinks sold on Asian streets and served in a jar with a stirring stick, the vodka-based Ping Pong, or the Vietnamese affogato martini. Plus sake, shochu, whole coconuts, Vietnamese coffee and bubble tea. The drinks alone warrant a return visit.

Open: Tue-Sun 11.30am-2.30pm, 5.30-9.30pm. Mains \$18-\$29.

TASMANIA

Mud Bar & Restaurant

28 Seaport Boulevard, Launceston.

(03) 6334 5066. mudbar.com.au

As a venue, Mud ticks most of the boxes. Its covered outdoor terrace beside the North Esk River is perfect for lunch or drinks. Inside, floor-to-ceiling windows, comfortable banquettes and colourful chairs make for relaxed dining. The eclectic menu covers many bases. Some dishes are almost Asian, such as prickly ash salt and pepper squid with chilli and coriander sauce; or sugar-cooked pork with a Vietnamese pancake omelette. There's good beef on the charcoal grill and even Italian-inspired comfort

121BC NEW SOUTH WALES

4/50 Holt Street, Surry Hills. (02) 9699 1582. 121bc.com.au

With a focus on the small, the artisanal and the strange in Italian viticulture, 121 has always had an out-there wine list, and now its menu has taken a turn for the unusual thanks to young-gun chef Mitch Orr. Standouts of his smart, concise menu of share plates include bruschetta smooched with broad beans and draped with lardo; a dish of slender leeks, charry outside and sweet within, sauced with mussel meat and spicy 'nduja salumi; and purple broccolini smothered in a deeply savoury hash of anchovy-flavoured breadcrumbs.

Open: Tue-Thu 5-11pm, Fri-Sat 5pm-12am. Bar food \$10-\$20.

food such as slow-roasted lamb shoulder with soft white polenta. At the bar, the options are more limited, but they're available all day. Choices such as freshly shucked oysters, slow-roasted lamb ribs, pork and veal meatballs with tomato sauce, and sumac-spiced chicken wings are unpretentious and flavour-packed.

Open: daily 11am-late. Bar food \$4-\$15, mains \$32-\$40.

QUEENSLAND

Canvas

16b Logan Road, Woolloongabba.

(07) 3891 2111. canvasclub.com.au

This is not a beer hall. There is beer to be had, with the most prosaic tittle being a Peroni lager, after which things become more obscure, but interesting. Why travel to drink mere ale, however, even if your tastes run to a complicated, time-taking sipper such as Trappistes Rochefort 8? Canvas has won a swag of awards and is serious about its mixology. The food isn't an afterthought, either. It's nibbly, but varied and filling enough to stand in for dinner. Spicy chicken wings with cold, crunchy, freshly made slaw team nicely with the fruity cheek of a Half Blood Gringo – a generous pour of Cazadores Blanco Tequila, a true firewater made only from blue agave, with lemon, plum and

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At 121BC (left): octopus tentacle, whipped bone marrow and spiced pangrattato

chardonnay vinegar and a side of beetroot chips. Chicken liver pate is a soft, chocolatey mousse of a treat, while the bourbon-infused short ribs are a meal in themselves.

Open: Tue-Fri 3pm-12am. Mains \$12-\$24.

Era

102 Melbourne Street, South Brisbane.

(07) 3255 2033. erabistro.com.au

If there's a good band playing outside on the shaded concourse at Era, it can sometimes be hard to pull yourself away from one of Brisbane's better wine lists and more-ish treats. The open-air bar, with its long, raised benches invites you to knock over just one more glass and maybe a couple of nibbles from the tapas menu. Overlooking the street life of the Southbank cultural precinct, it's a popular place to while away a couple of hours while grazing on pork belly and boudin noir; or seared tuna, snow peas and black sesame dressing. Inside at the restaurant, chef Marcus Turner steps it up with confit duck, poached quince and chestnuts, pearl barley risotto and salt-baked root veggies; or a hearty beef fillet with spinach and golden taters.

Open: Mon-Fri 11.30am-2.30pm, 5-10pm, Sat 12-11pm.

Bar food \$14-\$23, mains \$34-\$42.