



This is MELBOURN

by CATHERINE VAN BRUNSCHOT



Melbourne

WHERE ON EARTH



...Melburnians had new reasons to stay downtown...

I TURN INTO THE LANEWAY AND THERE THEY are: the world's top chefs in repose against a brick wall. Massimo Bottura of Osteria Francescana. Joan Roca of Spain's El Celler De Can Roca. New York's Daniel Humm of 11 Madison Park. And Heston Blumenthal of The Fat Duck. Hosting the gathering is Ben Shewry, chef-owner of Australia's highest-ranked restaurant, Attica.

It's the kind of happy serendipity that might precipitate handshakes, selfies, and — dare I hope? — sage morsels of inspiration to fuel my culinary dreams.

Save for the fact that these faces are eight feet tall, their giant grins immobilized in paint by street artist Heesco. And while they mark an auspicious gathering of these culinary powerhouses at the World's Best 50 Restaurant Awards in Melbourne, I've missed their 2017 tête-à-tête by nearly two years.

The encounter falls, perhaps, a mite short of food-fan heaven. But this little corner could be Melbourne in a nutshell: the arguable culinary capital of Australia, whose forward-focused energy pulses through its street art and re-invented laneways. And with the guidance of Martina Jennings, owner of **This Is Melbourne** food tours, I'm well-poised to discover its beating heart.

My explorations with Martina and three fellow travellers began two hours ago on the south bank of the Yarra River, outside the BearBrass Cafe. The rendezvous point was apropos: the city was originally known as Bearbrass — an Anglo-mangling of *Birrarung* (meaning 'river of mists'), the decidedly more poetic name given to the area by the indigenous Wurundjeri people. (The Bearbrass moniker proved too coarse for the discerning teenage Queen Victoria, who quickly renamed the town in 1837 after her mentor and prime minister, Lord Melbourne).»

PHOTO THIS SPREAD
Mural by artist Heesco commemorating the 2017 gathering of top chefs in Melbourne.



SERVES 4

Asadillo de Pimientos

CHEF FRANK CAMORRA OF MoVida restaurant shares his recipe for this Spanish dish of roasted vegetables, traditionally served as tapas or as a side to meat dishes.

Sweet Red Peppers

6 whole

Onions 2

Garlic 2 full heads

Extra Virgin Olive Oil¹ 250 ml

Sea Salt

to taste

Tomatoes

500 g, peeled, seeded, and roughly chopped

Flat-Leaf Parsley

½ bunch, roughly chopped

Sherry Vinegar

125 ml

Cumin Seeds

1 Tbs, toasted and crushed

- PREHEAT** oven to 350°F. Place whole red peppers, onions and heads of garlic in a baking dish. Drizzle with some of the olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Roast for 30 minutes or until onion is soft.
- TRANSFER** to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap (the steam will help loosen the skins), and set aside until cool enough to handle.
- PUT** tomatoes and parsley in a separate bowl.
- SQUEEZE** the onions from their skins onto a cutting board, chop roughly and add to the bowl of tomatoes.
- CUT** tops off the heads of garlic and squeeze the garlic cloves into the bowl.
- PEEL** red peppers and discard the seeds. Tear flesh into strips and add to the bowl.
- POUR** over the remaining oil and the sherry vinegar. Sprinkle with cumin. Add salt to taste. Toss well with your hands.

¹ Use arbequina, or other top-quality olive oil.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE FROM LEFT
Gelateria Primavera
at Spring St Grocer;
Interior of MoVida.

«Early settlers were attracted by the river's stunning blue colour, a hue no longer apparent from the pedestrian bridge that we cross into the central business district (CBD). Now the Yarra's waters are perpetually muddied with clay unleashed by early widening of the river's course — for until a 1990s urban redevelopment initiative, Southbank was a grimy, hardworking port. Today its gleaming towers harbour a vibrant arts and entertainment enclave, including the sprawling Crown Casino, whose genesis has an unexpected link with the CBD laneways into which we plunge next.

Among the shoppers bustling about DeGraves Street, it's difficult to imagine the lane as a dingy alley considered best avoided by Martina's younger self. Like many cities, Melbourne in the late twentieth century was hollow at the core; the orderly grid of streets and service lanes that was once the pride of city planners had become — with the proliferation of cars and the attendant focus on suburban development — mostly abandoned by its citizens at day's end. A series of events began to change that. Liquor laws requiring bars to have full-service kitchens were set aside in 1997 for the development of Southbank's Crown Casino. The CBD lobbied successfully for equal consideration, and small bars popped up in downtown's cheap rental spaces. New bylaws requiring active retail at street level, and favouring small spaces over large, brought independent



shopkeepers to the core. Laneways were pedestrianized. Regulations permitting street art in designated areas raised the bar on the genre and reduced the incidence of graffiti elsewhere. Melburnians had new reasons to stay downtown — and so they did.

Now on DeGraves, cafes and bars clamour for our attention from every angle. Martina points us toward the orange Vespa marking the entrance to Clementine's, as she ducks into Little Cupcakes to pick up our first tasting. The former offers up a wide range of locally made artisanal gifts, while the latter introduces us to the flavours of Australia's Cherry Ripe chocolate bar by way of dark cake and berry-swirled buttercream.

Melbourne's downtown revitalization retained much of its Victorian-era architecture, and the Block Arcade is one of its finest examples. Modeled after Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II and opened in 1892, the Block is a light-filled space of glass ceilings, carved stone and wrought iron, complete with its original mosaic floor. Here, the elegant Hopetoun Tea Room offered a place for women to discuss the issues of the day; now, as then, it draws ogling crowds to its huge display case of cakes and pastries. Across the aisle, we sniff and taste our way through Gewurzhaus Herb & Spice Merchants, a welcoming self-scoop emporium helmed by sisters Maria and Eva Konecsny.

It's a stark contrast to Presgrave Place, where we have our first glimpse of Melbourne's laneway art: a weird amalgam of paste-ups, tags, framed images and 3D mounts, including a tiny, inexplicable doorway to nowhere. A few blocks away, Hosier Lane ups the ante with what's considered to be Melbourne's best street art: large-scale, ever-»



AUSTRALIA

SERVES 4

Pollo a la Braza Peruano

Peruvian-Style Roast Chicken

IMBUE YOUR NEXT ROAST chicken with the flavours of Peru, by marinating the bird overnight in this savoury marinade created by Chef Saravia of Pastuso restaurant.

Whole Free-Range Chicken
1.4 kg

Marinade

Whole Black Peppercorns
75 g

Cumin Seeds
85 g

Garlic Cloves
3 large

Canola Oil
185 ml

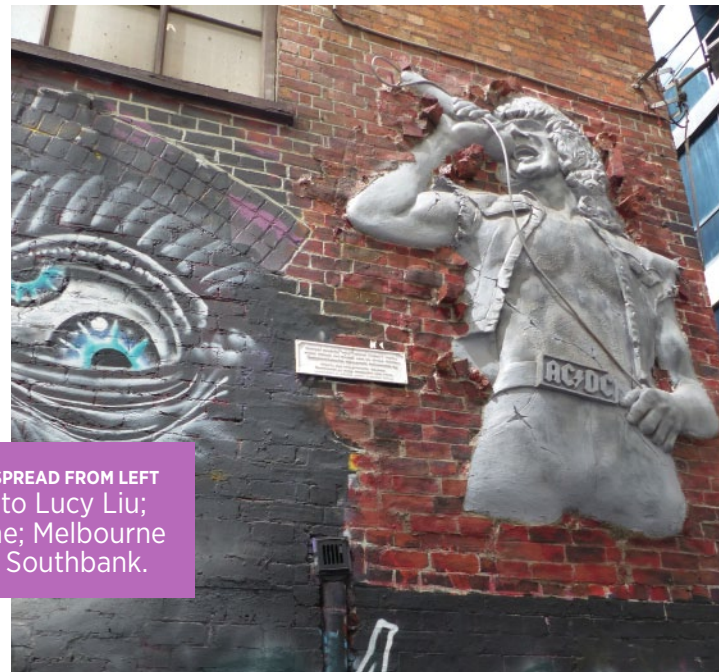
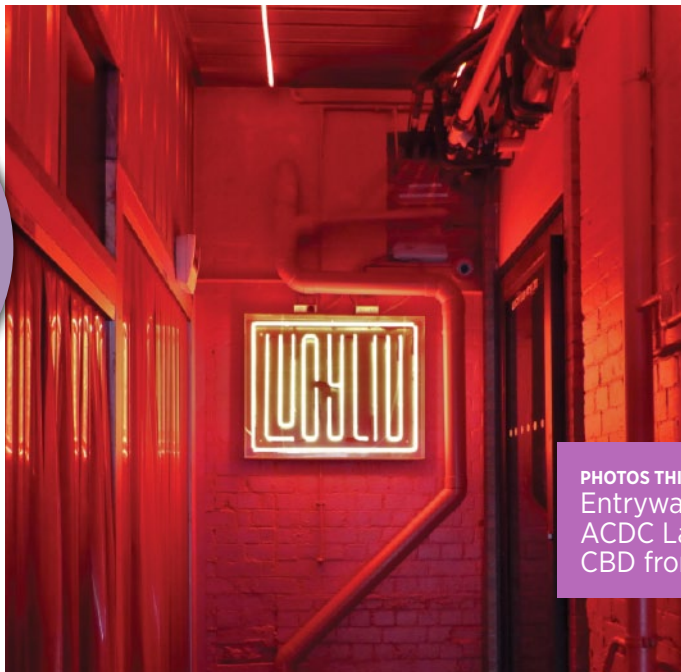
Red Wine Vinegar
225 ml

Superfine Sugar
75 g

Salt
35 g

Dark Beer
375 ml

- PLACE** the peppercorns and cumin seeds in a dry frying pan and shake over medium heat for 1–2 minutes or until fragrant. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Finely grind spices in a mortar and pestle or spice grinder. Set aside.
- BLITZ** the garlic and oil in a blender until garlic is finely chopped. Add the vinegar and blend well. Transfer to a large bowl and add the beer, sugar, salt and ground spices. Stir until dissolved.
- PLACE** the chicken into a deep ceramic dish, pour over the marinade and rub all over to coat well. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
- TO** roast the chicken, preheat oven to 425°F. Lightly grease a roasting pan and place a wire rack inside. Place the chicken on the rack, then pour over the marinade.
- TIGHTLY** cover the pan with baking paper, then with foil, and bake for 15 minutes. Remove foil and paper and bake for a further 15 minutes or until golden and juices run clear when the thickest part of the thigh is pierced with a skewer.
- REMOVE** from the oven and let stand for at least 15 minutes before carving.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT
Entryway to Lucy Liu;
ACDC Lane; Melbourne
CBD from Southbank.

«changing, and often political. Here we duck into MoVida, a Spanish tapas bar whose neighbourly interior and gritty location belie its ten-year status as a 'hatted' restaurant (Australia's answer to Michelin's stars). Chef-Owner Frank Camorra's signature plate is *anchoa*: crispy flatbread topped with hand-filleted Cantabrian anchovies and smoked tomato sorbet, whose salt-chile zing gives us an inkling to the accolades. Share plates were a new concept to the city when the Barcelona-born Australian introduced them in 2003, but Melburnians' appetite for them is clear: Camorra's food empire now spans five dining venues, a bevy of cookbooks and an online shop.

I indulge in the recommended pairing, sipping Spanish vermouth with the spinach-and-mancheiro croquetas up next. Martina and the staff chat comfortably; she's a respected insider, a fellow food-devotee, teammate more than patron — a relationship that seems to hold true for each of the stops that follow.

On Oliver Lane, the glow of red neon lures us down a dark passage to Lucy Liu Kitchen & Bar, where the sinister entry gives way to an architectural interior. The pale wood that cross-hatches the industrial space has been likened to bamboo scaffolding common to Southeast Asian construction sites — an ideal setting for the menu of Pan-Asian streetfood. It's the brainchild of two successful veterans of the Melbourne dining scene, Chef Michael Lambie and restaurateur George Sykiotis, who've partnered with Scott Borg and Lambie's protégé from a previous restaurant, Executive Chef Zac Cribbes. How the place became named for an Asian-American actress known for her feisty screen roles remains a bit of a mystery; the popularity of its food does not. Our little posse debates which of our three dumpling samples wins the tasting battle (my vote goes to the siu mai prawn entry), but on the star of the table we are all agreed: the jianbing roll of softshell crab in a delicate crepe wrapper is a slam-dunk. The recommended pairing is the Floating Market, a concoction of rosemary-infused vodka, pear, apple and lime that goes down far too easily.

Which might explain my slight giddiness at the encounter we have next with Chefs Shewry, Bottura and the gang on the wall of Higson Lane. Heesco's portrait work here is quite remarkable. But beyond its capacity for generating wistfulness among starry-eyed food fans, some giddiness might

THIS IS MELBOURNE offers several food tour options in addition to the *Foodies Bucket List Tour* booked by the author. These include *Palate and Pairings*, *Street Eats*, as well as private and custom tours. Note that beverage pairings on the Foodies Bucket List Tour are optional and incur an extra charge. See www.thisismelbourne.com for more information.

Clementine's
www.clementines.com.au

Little Cupcakes
www.littlecupcakes.com.au

Gewurzhaus Herb & Spice Merchants
www.gewurzhaus.com.au

MoVida
www.movida.com.au

Lucy Liu Kitchen & Bar
www.lucylius.com.au

Pastuso Peruvian Grill
www.pastuso.com.au

Spring Street Grocer and Gelateria Primavera
www.springstreetgrocer.com.au


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be warranted for its testament to the year that culinary Melbourne declared itself on the global stage and the world listened.

Nearby AC/DC Lane offers tributes to heroes of a different sort. On the street named for the Australian rock band, the art leans predictably toward the music world. We pause before a duly irreverent memorial to the band's guitarist and songwriter, Malcolm Young, who died of dementia in 2017 — then shift emotional gears in the buoyant environs of Pastuso Peruvian Grill. The mostly-modern Peruvian fare here is the creation of Chef Alejandro Saravia, an alumnus of Le Cordon Bleu Peru, who soared through several prestigious European and Sydneyside restaurants before moving to Melbourne to open Pastuso. From the marble-topped ceviche bar, we sample a vegetarian dish of silken tofu, seaweed, fried shallots and jalapenos that easily trumps the more conventional ceviche of red snapper and caramelized sweet potato. Alpaca tartare offers a velvety introduction to an unfamiliar protein, but it, too, is upstaged by a vegetarian offering called Pastel de Choclo: sweet corncake with whipped feta, black garlic, zucchini, leek and smoked tarragon vinaigrette. We round out the tastings with a wagyu beef *rollo* and — what else but — a pisco sour.

A change of ethos emerges on Spring Street, as we stroll past the grand Victorian edifices of Hotel Windsor and the State Parliament. Here, Con Christopoulos — a 1990s pioneer of laneway restaurants — has established a bastion of retro-clubby venues with partner, Josh Brisbane. Spring Street Grocer is one of their latest ventures, an epicurean shop inspired by the *alimentari* of 1940s Italy. Their tour-de-force was hooking Australia's pre-eminent cheesemonger, Anthony Femia, to found their underground cheese cellar, where an explanation of the art of *affinage* (cheese maturation) accompanies our tastings. My favourite's the manchego-style queso that whispers of the eucalyptus beneath which the sheep graze.

Back at the storefront, we make our selections from the day's list of all-natural housemade gelatos, kept perfectly tempered in traditional stainless steel *pozzetti*. Here Martina says goodbye, and I weigh today's laneway experience against my missed rendezvous with the Best 50 glitterati. With a creamy mélange of coconut and basil melting on my tongue, there's really no contest. 



SERVES 12

Andalusian Spiced Beef Skewers

CHEF FRANK CAMORRA OF MoVida restaurant recommends marinating these skewers overnight to fully capture the Andalusian flavours in his recipe.

Lean Beef Rump 1 kg,
sinew removed, cut into
1.5 cm cubes

Marinade

Sweet Smoked Paprika
1 Tbs

Hot Paprika ½ tsp

Turmeric 1 tsp

Ground Cumin 2 Tbs

Dry White Wine 125 ml

Nutmeg 1 tsp

Garlic 2 cloves, finely
chopped

Salt ½ tsp

Olive Oil 60 ml

Parsley 1 cup, chopped

Basting Sauce

Dry White Wine 60 ml

Smoked Paprika 1 tsp

Lemon Juice of 1 lemon

1 MIX marinade ingredients thoroughly. Add cubed beef and work in marinade. Marinate at least 2 hours or preferably overnight.

2 PRE-HEAT barbecue grill to medium. Thread beef onto long metal skewers, spacing loosely so that meat cooks evenly.

3 IN a small bowl, mix together all basting sauce ingredients. Brush meat with basting sauce.

4 PLACE skewers on a hot grill and cook for 8–10 minutes, turning and basting several times with a brush. Remove from heat and allow the skewers to rest for 5 minutes before serving.