

# Melbourne's

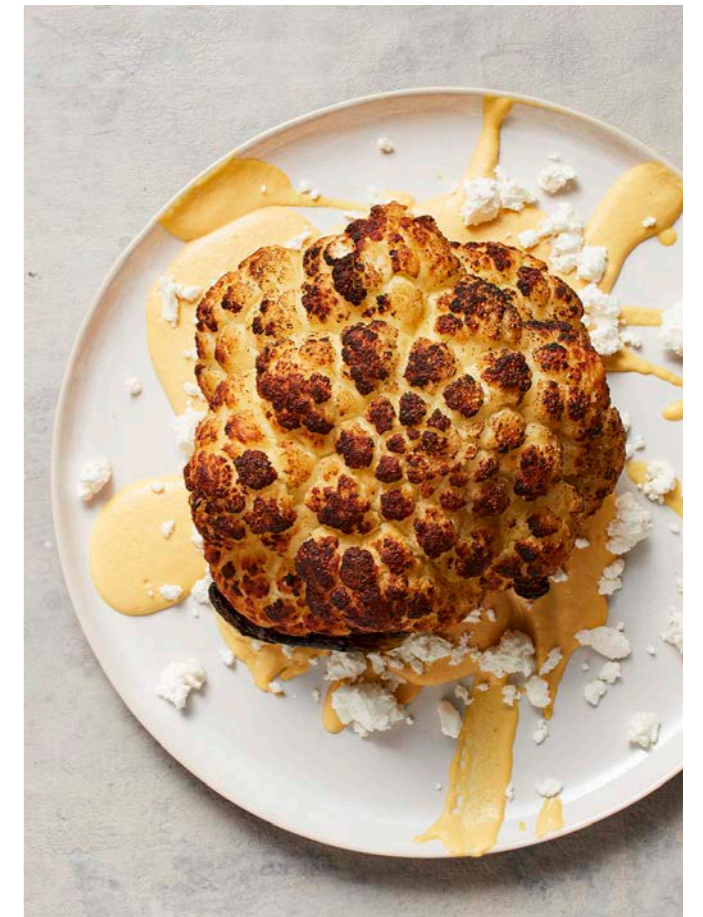
Already known for its vibrant dining scene, proudly progressive Melbourne is taking foodie sustainability to new levels – and the results taste better than ever.

STORY CATHERINE MCGREGOR



# new order

This page: The oyster station at Vue de monde. Opposite page clockwise from top left: Maha; Claypots Evening Star at South Melbourne Market; Atlas Dining's burnt cauliflower with ocopa sauce; Shannon Bennett (left) and Hugh Allen of Vue de monde.







YOU'RE GREETED BY an elegant young man dressed in fashionably draped black. He directs you to a silent waiting area, as cool and empty as a Tesla showroom, and informs you that the elevator will be arriving shortly. Your destination: the 55th floor of Melbourne's Rialto building, and a dining experience like nothing else in the city.

At Vue de monde, the restaurant founded by star chef Shannon Bennett and now helmed by 20-something wunderkind Hugh Allen, the degustation meal unfolds in a series of tiny, joyful moments. A palate cleanser of sea-parsley sorbet is served atop a bed of icy, powdered herbs and flowers. The greenery is frozen with liquid nitrogen at your table, then you take a pestle and pulverise it yourself. A crab-and-prawn 'snag' (Aussie for sausage) is arranged onto a Lilliputian tabletop barbecue alongside kohlrabi coleslaw and tarragon sauce, allowing you to assemble your own brioche-bun 'hot dog'. Salty-sweet Tasmanian sea urchin forms an indulgent trio with a scoop of

Clockwise from top: Vue de monde; chef Hugh Allen; beautifully presented oyster at the restaurant.



**The chef who spoons lemon-myrtle dressing over your oysters also tells you about a project that uses oyster shells from restaurants and markets to rebuild shellfish reefs in Port Phillip Bay.**

caviar and another of creamed *bunya*, a rare native pine nut. You don't have a menu; all you know is that delicious, surprising things will keep on arriving. With service that is meticulous but never self-serious, this is fine dining at its most ambitious.

You wouldn't expect a high-end culinary temple like Vue de monde to concern itself much with quotidian matters such as cutting waste. But reducing the restaurant's ecological footprint is a core focus, says Allen, who talks of making it a "closed loop"

– waste free – within the next few years. In so doing, he's part of an expanding cadre of Melbourne chefs who are prioritising environmental care and eschewing industrialised, carbon-intensive food production. In this proudly progressive, socially conscious city, that's hardly surprising – but what may be is how widely the sustainability call is being heeded.

Up on the 55th floor, the chef who spoons lemon-myrtle dressing over your oysters also tells you about Shuck Don't Chuck, a project that uses oyster shells from restaurants and markets to rebuild shellfish reefs in Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay. Your waiter explains how the kingfish is line-caught using *ikijime*, a Japanese fish-killing method that is not only more humane, but makes the fish on your plate taste better, too.

You wash your hands under a waterfall of eWater – an electrolysed saline solution that eliminates the need for soap – and sit at tables covered with sustainable-luxe (and wipe-clean) kangaroo leather. No bleached-white linens means less laundry, and fewer harsh chemicals down the drain.

**MARKETS ABUZZ**

Take binoculars with you to Vue de Monde and you may spot something unusual on the rooftops below: beehives. Small-scale honey production is an increasingly popular business across Australia, and Melbourne City Rooftop Honey is the indie start-up that introduced



From above: Melbourne City Rooftop Honey's Mat Lumalasi and Vanessa Kwiatkowski; some of their city hives.







From above: Stalls at Prahran Market; Queen Victoria Market.



From above: The Rose Street Market; South Melbourne Market; charcuterie at Queen Victoria Market.

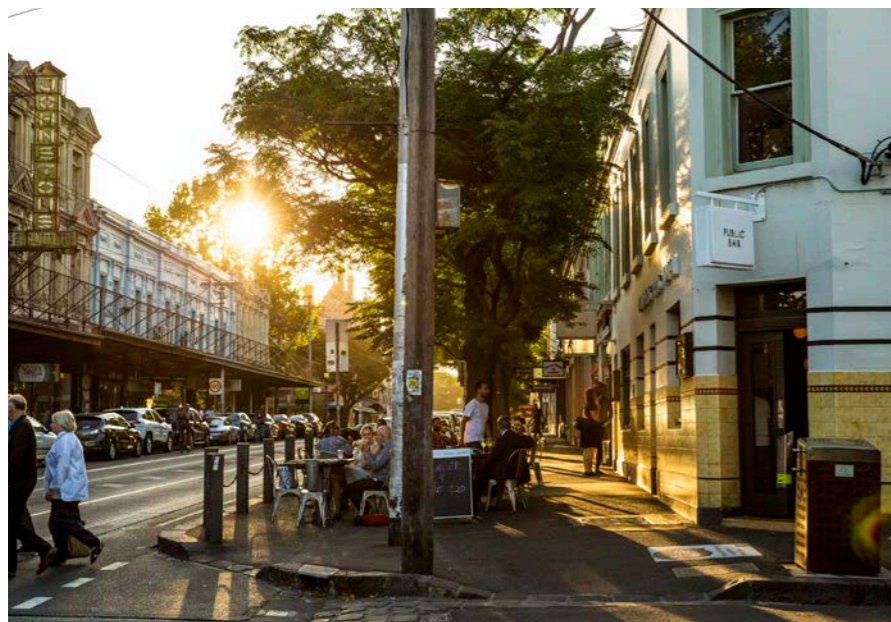
city-slicker beekeeping to the nation. A good place to learn about the bee boom is The Land of Soy and Honey, where the amber jars are labelled with the Melbourne suburbs the bees called home: Albert Park, Alphington, Doncaster, Windsor. The store is one of a bewildering number of culinary specialists at Queen Victoria Markets, situated on the edge of the central city.

With its focus on independent operators and local produce, the Queen Vic is sustainable down to its 19th-century bones. Constructed long before the birth of air conditioning, the market buildings were designed with louvred roofs and lots of marble to keep both people and produce cool. Today, the market continues to champion environmentally friendly policies that touch almost every one of its 600-plus small businesses. Initiatives include recycling rainwater, and any meat scraps are turned into fertiliser. Like all retailers in the state of Victoria, the Queen Vic is a plastic-bag-free zone.

Trawling markets is a great way to get under the skin of a city – and that’s doubly so if you’re a food lover visiting Melbourne. The shelves of covered markets in South Melbourne and Prahran are crammed with local, independent food brands, as are the folding tables at weekend farmers’ markets







across the city. Visit a few and you'll notice some names keep cropping up. There's Holy Goat, a Victorian farm that treats its goats with (sorry) kid gloves, leading to truly spectacular cheese. Holy Goat's organic Nectar *tomme* is widely considered the best goat cheese in Australia. There's Monsieur Truffe, an artisan chocolate-maker based in the suburb of Brunswick East, where visitors to the on-site cafe, East Elevation, can watch the chocolatiers hard at work.

And there's Mount Zero Olives, with olives that come from one of Australia's oldest groves, located on the northernmost outcrop of Victoria's Grampian mountains. As well as biodynamically grown olives, the Mount Zero range includes pink salt hand-harvested from a local lake in collaboration with the area's traditional owners. It's a good reminder that respect for the land also means respecting those who have been its guardians for thousands of years.

**SUBURBAN SHOWCASES**

On a sustainable food tour of Melbourne, all roads lead to Fitzroy. This inner-city neighbourhood is where activism and environmentalism meet creative cool, forming a 100ha Petri dish for ethical, independent initiatives of every description. If you're there on a weekend, don't miss Rose Street's artisan markets, showcasing everything from vintage clothing to raw treats from the Canine Wellness Kitchen, 'Australia's first food truck for dogs'. While you're in the area, stop by Rose Street Pantry; owner Meridith Stevens clearly delights in sharing her love for Australia's culinary bounty and the food-obsessed people who produce it.

Turn the corner and you're on Fitzroy's main drag, Brunswick Street. It's one of the most vegan-friendly streets in the world, according to Melbourne Vegan Tours' Jess Ivers, who has counted 52 restaurants that

are either wholly vegan or significantly so on the stretch. Her vegan tour of Fitzroy includes eating and drinking places that could make almost any carnivore abandon carbon-intensive meat.

Stops include plant-festooned Transformer, an all-vegetarian restaurant in an old electricity substation; the vegan-friendly pan-Asian eatery Rice Paper Scissors, which holds regular vegan degustation (or 'Vegastation') dinners; and cocktail bar Polly, where the drinks on the menu are topped not with beaten egg white but foam made from aquafaba, or chickpea cooking water. It's all but impossible to tell the difference.

According to stereotype, Melbourne's inner northern suburbs belong to self-serious hipsters, while south of the Yarra is nothing but glossy-haired socialites. While there's some – okay, a lot – of truth to the caricatures, even in deepest South Yarra the ethical-eating movement has taken hold. At Atlas Dining, the cuisine changes every four months, hopping the globe from Asia to the Americas to the Middle East and back again.

One thing that never changes, however, is chef-owner Charlie Carrington's commitment to sustainability. Like Hugh Allen at Vue de monde, Carrington has plans to eliminate waste entirely; he's already getting close, not only by composting, but by working with suppliers to find alternatives for their standard plastic packaging. Carrington is also one of a small but growing number of



From top: The Builders Arms Hotel on Gertrude Street, Fitzroy; chef Charlie Carrington at Atlas Dining.



From above: Fitzroy; Mount Zero Olives are grown in rural Victoria, several hours west of the city.







Australian chefs who have joined the Good Fish Project, pledging to serve nothing but sustainably sourced seafood.

It started at a dizzying height, but this food tour ends down low, in Melbourne's centre – in the basement space occupied for the past 11 years by Maha, a restaurant known for big, spicy Middle Eastern flavours. A meal here might include Mount Zero Olives marinated in olive oil and *felfel*, a type of chilli paste; a bowl of diamond clams steamed with fennel and anise-flavoured *arak* (a spirit); and Maha's slow-cooked lamb shoulder, rubbed with cumin and coriander and roasted until the meat falls from the bone.

Maha's vegetarian menu – any dish can be made vegan – is a showcase for Australian fresh produce, a lot of which is sourced from Victoria. The vege scraps? In style capital Melbourne, the latest must-have restaurant accessory is an oh-so-fashionable composting bin. You heard it here first. [visitmelbourne.com](http://visitmelbourne.com)

From above: The 2018 MPavilion by Spanish architect Carme Pinos, in Queen Victoria Gardens; one of the city's laneways.

## Play

### THE JOHNSON COLLECTION

On a quiet East Melbourne side street is a remarkable museum. The life's work of a prominent collector who donated his treasures – and his home – to the city, the Johnson Collection is both a fine-art museum and a modern gallery where local craftspeople and artists display their work among the antiques. Due to the museum's location on a residential street, its address is private; all visitors must arrive by pre-booked courtesy bus. [johnstoncollection.org](http://johnstoncollection.org)

### QUEEN VICTORIA GARDENS

Every summer, the riverside Queen Victoria Gardens become the centre of Melbourne's cultural life. The MPavilion is a temporary structure, designed anew each year by a top architect. It plays host to a programme of events including yoga classes, art workshops, cinema and live music – all absolutely free. [mpavilion.org](http://mpavilion.org)

## Eat

### TAXI KITCHEN

From its prime position above Federation Square, Taxi Kitchen looks over what may be Melbourne's most sustainable achievement of all: Flinders Street Station, icon of the city's envy-inducing public transport network. The restaurant's menu is an adroit fusion of Australian ingredients – sustainably produced and locally sourced, wherever possible – with Asian flavours and techniques. And the view? One of the best in town. [taxikitchen.com.au](http://taxikitchen.com.au)

### JULIET

If you ever want to understand what 'the tyranny of choice' means, just try to decide where to have a drink in Melbourne. The city has a bar for every taste, but with one thing in common: they're generally dominated by blokes. So at Juliet, they're redressing the balance by championing women winemakers (more often than not, the wines on the list are female-made), spirit-makers and brewers. [julietmelbourne.com.au](http://julietmelbourne.com.au)

## Sleep

### ALTO HOTEL




At Alto Hotel on Bourke, the environmental commitment goes well beyond 'hang your towels' half-measures. Sustainability awards attest to the hotel's green efforts – some apparent to guests, such as recycling bins, refillable toiletries and free parking for e-vehicles; others behind the scenes, including comprehensive energy efficiency, waste reduction and carbon-offsetting policies. But this isn't a hair-shirt operation: expect uber-comfy beds and modern style. [altohotel.com.au](http://altohotel.com.au)



## Getting there

Air New Zealand operates daily non-stop flights to Melbourne from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and flies from Queenstown three to five times a week.

 MELBOURNE

-  Contact Centre  
0800 737 000
-  Holidays Travel Brokers  
0800 737 767
-  [airnewzealand.co.nz](http://airnewzealand.co.nz)

AIR NEW ZEALAND 

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

PHOTOGRAPHY: ATLAS DINING, VUE DE MONDE, ROOFTOP HONEY, TOURISM VICTORIA, VISIT VICTORIA