



ON THE RADAR: CANBERRA

New Acton

Could Australia's capital city also be the new centre of cool? Explore New Acton, a meeting place for the green, the arty, the hip and the happening.

LOCATED BETWEEN Lake Burley Griffin and the Australian National University, New Acton brings a trendy, inner-city vibe to this lakeside corner of Canberra. It's the Australian capital's most awarded private development, and it's very much stamped with the passions and creative personalities of its developers: second-generation Greek-Australian brothers Nectar and Johnathan Efkarpidis from the Molonglo Group.

As a precinct, New Acton has a mixture of residential and commercial buildings of a high environmental standard, attracting locals to its eclectic mix of hotels, bars and cafes. Its flagship building, the Japanese-inspired Nishi apartments, demonstrates that being environmentally sound can also be quite beautiful, with features such as internal 'thermal skins' that capture any heat and release it back into the apartments to reduce heating costs.

For the Efkarpidis brothers, developing the cultural life of the city is just as important. Their art collection decorates the Diamant Hotel, and the public spaces in New Acton are adorned with sculptures

they've commissioned. The brothers also sponsor an annual festival. Called Art, Not Apart (to be held on 15 March next year), it fills the New Acton neighbourhood with musicians, poets, painters, sculptors, filmmakers, street artists and all kinds of creative people (care for some Gothic-fusion belly dancing, anyone?) While you're being entertained, you can feast at the food stalls, which serve everything from crepes and pâté to *bánh mì* and Nepalese food.

STAY

The slightly older kid on the block is the 80-room Diamant Hotel, which has been refurbished following a fire a couple of years ago. The new kid in town is the eagerly anticipated boutique Hotel Hotel, due to

open shortly. The foyer's grand staircase, made up of thousands of wood planks, is a dramatic reinterpretation of classic hotel foyers. Its 99 rooms, from cosy hide-outs to sprawling suites, are furnished with both modern and vintage pieces.

EAT

The hipster factor is high in New Acton, so good coffee is de rigueur. Local residents, out-of-towners, university students and office workers have a wide choice to keep them full of caffeine, and they like to move around: from the Urbanfood Store + Café for organic produce and fair trade coffee; to Močan & Green Grout cafe for seasonally inspired breakfasts, lunches and, from Tuesday to Friday, shared-plate dinners. ►

TAKE A SOUVENIR

The Suitcase Rummage, a market for artists and craftspeople, is usually held at the same time as the Art, Not Apart festival. It's a great place to score a one-of-a-kind find, like a modestly priced artwork or preloved clothing. www.suitcase-rummage.blogspot.com.au.





Check out the art in the cafe, which often features the work of emerging local artists and photographers.

EXPERIENCE

By nightfall, a different buzz radiates in this area. A Baker is an eatery and bakery by day, but at night it transforms itself into a bar. It's not far from the long-lamented Parlour Wine Room — which has recently been reopened, rising like a phoenix after it was also destroyed by a fire in 2011. The new Parlour's drinks menu has a focus on local and Australian boutique wines, as well as Spanish wines, and Brad Warton has returned as its head chef.

You can linger on the pink and orange banquettes for a drink at the Palace Electric Cinema's glamorous Prosecco Bar, and even the Diamant Hotel is embracing the new two-for-one trend, with its casual Italian restaurant BiciCletta doubling as a cafe during the day. With free wi-fi, the hotel's Library Bar is another great place to work until 4.30pm, when it turns into a drinking den with smooth jazz and even a fireplace for the cooler Canberra nights. Next, order a tailor-made bicycle at the Goodspeed Bicycle Company, with its frame designed

and assembled locally by Myles Chandler, co-owner of Močan & Green Grout cafe, and set about seeing the town. Indulge in a spa and beauty treatment package at the Soma Day Spa — you can enjoy more than five hours of escapism here. Blokes may like to try the 'men's empowerment facial'.

If movies are more your thing, head over to the Palace Electric Cinema, where eight theatres show art house, new release and foreign-language films. Your visit may even coincide with one of the many free festivals, fun musical soirees and outdoor cinema screenings that tend to pop up in the precinct, as well as the parties to celebrate new exhibitions at the National Gallery of Australia. It's the largest art museum in the country, and this month, it's hosting some of the activities that are part of the Canberra International Film Festival's Body of Work event — a three-day celebration of movies by one of Hollywood's most influential directors and producers, Harvey Weinstein (from 22–24 November).

GETTING THERE To book your Virgin Australia flight to Canberra, visit www.virginaustralia.com or simply call 13 67 89 (in Australia).

(clockwise from top left) The National Gallery of Australia (NGA); inside Močan & Green Grout; Italian fare at BiciCletta; a Roy Lichtenstein exhibition at NGA; Myles Chandler with a bike frame; the fun and funky A Baker transforms into a bar by night.



LITTLE BLACK BOOK

A Baker 2/15 Edinburgh Ave;
www.abaker.com.au.

Diamant Hotel 15 Edinburgh Ave;
www.8hotels.com.

Goodspeed Bicycle Company
1/19 Marcus Clarke St; +61 2 6100 000.

Hotel Hotel 25 Edinburgh Ave;
www.hotel-hotel.com.au.

Močan & Green Grout 1/19 Marcus Clarke St;
www.mocanandgreengrout.com.

National Gallery of Australia Parkes Place,
Parkes; +61 2 6240 6411; www.nga.gov.au.

Nishi Edinburgh Ave; www.newacton.com.au.

Palace Electric Cinema 2 Phillip Law St;
+61 2 6222 4900; www.palacecinemas.com.au.

Parlour Wine Room 16 Kendall Lane;
+61 2 6257 7325; www.parlour.net.au.

Soma Day Spa 12 Kendall Lane;
+61 2 6162 3636; www.soma.net.au.

Urbanfood Store + Café 21 Marcus Clarke St;
+61 2 6162 3440; www.urbanfoodstore.com.au.