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ON THE UP

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coolest capital?

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A photograph of a long, arched corridor. On the left, a series of tall, light-colored stone arches recede into the distance. On the right, a wall is covered in a dense, textured pattern of small, reddish-brown objects. The floor is dark, and a series of bright, elongated, oval-shaped light patterns are cast across it, creating a strong sense of perspective. A person is standing in the far distance at the end of the corridor. The overall atmosphere is dramatic and architectural.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT

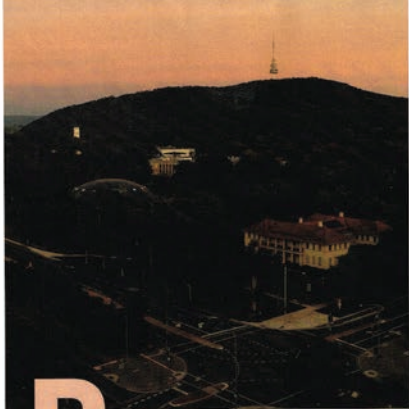
There's an exciting new Australian city in our midst, filled with history and culture, great new bars and eateries, and quite possibly the coolest hotel in the land. And that city is Canberra.

WORDS PAT NOURSE PHOTOGRAPHY JASON LOUCAS

CANBERRA TIMES

Lonsdale Street Roasters
in Braddon. Opposite: the
Australian War Memorial.





Picture, if you will, a city that's a magnet for artists and craftspeople, athletes and intellectuals. A city crammed with cultural institutions, its jumble of Deco and Modernist buildings housing the corridors of power, but also a city interlaced with parks and bushland, rows of stately oaks and poplars and thickets of dense wilderness. A city that's home to the greenest building in Australia, a building that's also quite possibly the coolest hotel in the land. A town where readers and riders rule, a town surrounded by vineyards and rich farmland. That city exists and it belongs to you. That city is Canberra.

Canberra is now as Aesop-scented, single-origin, fixed-gear, bespoke and artisan as any other city, certainly, but there's so much here that makes it special in its own way. Its skies are big and crowded with stars, its breezes scented with a very particular mix of eucalypts and pines that catches in my heart. The Brindabellas, the ranges that ring the city, glow a musky purple and the 1920s brick cottages smoulder with the red of clay dug at Yarralumla, near the governor-general's residence.

I know Canberra. I grew up here. I know its secrets and its magic. I know why all the numberplates start with a Y, and I get nostalgic when I see roundabouts. I can use the words "booner" and "Beico" in a sentence (it's often the same sentence). I know that behind the clichés and stereotypes lies a city that's harder to pigeonhole than it seems, as much Chandigarh as it is DC. A town stacked with fine arts institutions that's also been home to a seething hardcore and metal scene, a town that Nick Cave said had too many punks. I also know it's time to shed the old tropes and look at the capital anew.

A few short years ago, if you told your mates you were nipping down to Tasmania for a weekend of

culture and great eating, you'd get blank looks in return. Say that you're going to Hobart today and you'll elicit sighs of envy, followed quickly by talk of the brilliance of MONA and Garagistes and requests for Sweet Envy caramel pecan scrolls and Pigeon Whole Bakers' doughnuts. Canberra might not have a game-changing destination restaurant quite like Garagistes, but the breadth of its food offering is far greater and more dynamic than that of its southern cousin, and its wine scene punches far above its weight. Craft brewing has a proud history here, and if the ACT has come late to the coffee revolution, it has made up for lost time.

Seasoned local operators are branching out with kick-arse new projects. Veteran Italian restaurant Mezzaluna has just sprouted Du Rosario, a funky little hole-in-the-wall offshoot its owners call a "pizzicheria" specialising in simple, elegant pizza and panini. Sean McConnell, of perennially hot Moan & Green Grouse, has just unveiled the menu for his new eatery, Godzilla; expect roast Brussels sprouts with bacon and brioche, not to mention a mandarin soufflé with chocolate sorbet. Meanwhile, Ben Willis, chef-patron of Aubergine, the city's top fine-diner, has just opened Temporada, a bar-eatery offering punchy eats such as short-rib, cucumber and horseradish rolls, and crab salad with pork crackling alongside a wine list that would turn heads in Fitzroy or Darlinghurst.

Talk Canberra wine with any serious bottle-stroker or grape nerd in Melbourne or Sydney and they'll sing the praises not just of Clonakilla's shiraz vignier (which my learned colleague Max Allen named in his top 10 benchmark Australian wines last month), but of Lark Hill's groundbreaking grüner veltliner, of Bryan Martin's work at Ravenworth and Nick Spencer at Eden Road, and the fine wines being made at Collector, Mount Majura and Helm. And if you like your fun to clock-in at a higher proof, a clutch of hip new cocktail bars (speakeasy-style Molly, hotel bar Lucky's and the updated Hippo Co chief among them) has you covered.

The biggest spike on the city's new cultural readout has been the arrival of Hotel Hotel and QT Canberra. The opening of just one such bold designer property in a town of 380,000 would be notable; two popping up within months of each other on the same street is downright remarkable. And though they're both pretty outré establishments, they're also very different. The QT is a rebrand and thorough refurb of the Lakeside, a '70s building that was one of the city's most prestigious accommodations in its day, while Hotel Hotel has been built from the ground up by Canberra's Molonglo Group. QT's food offer is big and brassy, very much in the order of what former Icebergs chef Robert Marchetti designed for QT Sydney; Hotel Hotel's offer, in keeping with its overall ethos, is site-specific, packed with local produce.

QT Canberra is all about bally good times – about a \$45 shave, an icy Martini and a big, juicy steak, and calling for a second and third bottle. It's not shy about its charms. Hotel Hotel's pleasures are more considered. Its owners, Canberra brothers Johnathan and Nectar-

CIVIC MINDED

Above: the view of Black Mountain from QT Canberra. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Lonsdale Street Roasters; Lonsdale Street Traders; The Cupping Room; QT Canberra's wall of politics, and its rebranded building; chef Sean McConnell; the entrance to Hotel Hotel's lobby.





This is, after all, the city with the highest concentraton of **sharp grey bobs** in the country.

CANBERRA CONFIDENTIAL

Above, clockwise from top left: a façade of the Nishi building, home to Hotel Hotel; a DIY Old Fashioned cocktail kit at QT; Capitol Bar & Grill; Lonsdale Street, Braddon. Opposite: A Baker; the National Arboretum; Lonsdale Street Traders; Godzila's soft chocolate, lemon, hazelnut and olive oil.

Efkarpidis, have put an awful lot of thought into its every nuance. The hotel's furnishings, for instance, were produced after the brothers engaged Broached Commissions, a design company, to "theorise about how to place the hotel within the history of Canberra design... and to create functional objects for the hotel lobby that communicate these theorisings". I'm not making this stuff up. The work of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, the Chicago Group architects responsible for Canberra's original plan, has been a key source of inspiration. The construction of Hotel Hotel, notes the hotel blog, has been about "rediscovering the beauty of the primitive modernism and environmentalism of the Burley Griffins". Translated into tables and chairs, paintings and beds, it adds up to a deeply appealing design of striking vision.

Between the two hotels lies the New Acton precinct, a mixture of flash new Fender-Katsalidis-designed residential towers and carefully resuscitated heritage buildings that are home to a bundle of excellent eateries and watering holes. It's one of the new neighbourhoods that's a lightning rod for Canberra-cool circa 2014.

Braddon, immediately north of Civic, Canberra's city centre, is the other lifestyle beachhead. It used to be most notable for its pool-shark pub and mechanics' workshops. You can still get a grease and oil change here, but while you're at it you can wander Lonsdale Street and peruse its yoga studios and vendors of Dutch bicycles and Danish design with a Lonsdale Street Roasters piccolo in one hand and an Autolyse Bakery hot roast pork and rémoulade sandwich in the other.

A poke around Lonsdale Street Traders is essential. It's a warehouse filled with micro-shops, including Sweet Bones organic vegan bakery (kale and chipotle pesto burritos, pumpkin sandwiches), the stunning Elsewhere (antiques and collectibles), Moxom & Whitney florists ("Massive fig branches – like, really quite huge") and Shredders Board Store ("for the homies").

What the Kingston Foreshore development lacks in Braddonesque organic charm and tyre shops, meanwhile, it makes up for in lake frontage. Here, under the waterfront apartment buildings, you'll find the likes of Moxes, a slick new iteration of the city's best Thai restaurant, the self-explanatory Rum Bar, and Remedy, a branch of Lonsdale Street Roasters.

The capital's art scene remains formidable. (This is, after all, the city with the highest concentration of sharp grey bobs and chunky jewellery in the country.) Beyond favourites such as the National Gallery and the National Library and landmarks such as the houses of parliament and the National Museum, there's a web of smaller galleries (notably Drill Hall and M16 Artspace), and lesser-known institutions. Update your knowledge of Australian cinema and have a go at remixing Goyte in real-time at the National

Film and Sound Archive, sited within the superb 1930 Institute of Anatomy building, or wander the bowers of the National Arboretum, built on the site of a plantation destroyed by the fires of 2003, and recently host to their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

I should note, too, that the Canberra's evolution is by no means confined to the moneyed milieu and hipster hoods. Way down south, for instance, there's Tharwa Valley Forge, a bladesmithing school where you can craft your own folded-steel chef's knife, and the Saturday farmers' market at Exhibition Park in the city's north is one of the best of its kind anywhere in the country. Hell, there's even cold-drip coffee and a good Filipino restaurant at Cooleman Court now.

Speaking to chef Marchetti about what he and the QT team want for the Canberra hotel, he said his aims were simple: "We just want people to leave us feeling better than they did when they arrived." That chimes with the experience of the new Canberra: come to your capital, feed your mind and your soul, drink and eat your fill, and leave the richer for it. >





STAY

HOTEL HOTEL

There's Nick O'Leary rieling in the minibar, fresh A Baker coffee in the cupboard, a long-sleeved grey linen robe on the hanger. In the lobby you'll find Goodspeed bikes, a winning mix of materials, giant flokati-style cushions, rhomboid tables and vases of Australian natives. Fender-Katsalidis did the building, and Tokyo's Suppose Design Office did the interiors. There's recent Dylan, classic Reed and the cheerier end of the Elliott Smith catalogue on the playlist, upcycled wine-bottle carafes on the counter, and designers cutting dress patterns in the marketplace. But there's more to Hotel Hotel than just excellent curatorial work. Staff are switched on, the rooms are comfortable and functional, and Sean McConnell is following in the footsteps of his brothers, noted Melbourne chefs Andrew and Matthew. In producing quietly distinctive dishes, McConnell is chef at nearby café-restaurant Močan & Green Grouit, but also looks after the food at the hotel, and, as of this month, complements his breakfast, bar and room service menus with a carte for the lobby eatery that reads more like that of a proper restaurant. Under a new name, Godzilla, the restaurant serves snacks such as yabby jaffles with horseradish and bacalao churros alongside larger share plates like twice-cooked duck with chestnut and quince. Michael Gray, the former *Vue de Monde* staffer who heads the group's F&B department, has put



together a rollicking drinks list that draws together essential Canberra-region wine with incisive picks from around the globe and a battery of grower Champagnes, smart aperitifs, digestifs and hard liquor. The two key room types are a study in contrasts: those facing the fern-filled atrium are dark, quiet and an ideal retreat, whereas the outward-facing rooms have the light and the views; definitely check when you're booking. Is this the coolest hotel in Australia? New Acton Nishi, 25 Edinburgh Ave, Canberra, (02) 6287 6287, hotel-hotel.com

QT CANBERRA

In typically bold style, QT wears its landmark Canberra location on its sleeve. You'll find Kerr, Curtin and Gorton on the luggage tags and the wallpaper by the lifts is a dizzying kaleidoscope of Abbots, Rudds, Gillards and Howards. There's a mural on one wall of the restaurant lit up with the likes of Merkel, Keating, Bush (GW) and Clinton (HR), and its Capitol Bar & Grill lists a "Polles Pie" (beef and mushrooms braised in Barolo, served as a floater) and a (Roman) "High Court" artichoke omelette. In refitting the former Rydges Lakeside, the company has laid the brash humour on with a thick brush. But the location offers sublime views, the rooms are mighty comfortable, and there are flashes of brilliance here, too. Anyone old enough to remember Bobby McGee's will be struck by its transformation to Lucky's, home to a good, strong, grown-up cocktail. The restaurant is the contemporary steak and seafood house the city

CAPITAL ASSETS

From far left: Eighty-six lodgings at Hotel Hotel; chef Ben Willis at Temporalis; and his crab salad with pork cracker. Opposite, from top left: Hotel Hotel's manager, Tracy Atherton, and food and beverage manager, Michael Gray; a suite at QT Canberra; Da Rosario's spaghetti cacio e pepe; Močan & Green Grouit.

has been missing and group executive chef Robert Marchetti's breakfast buffet is a game-changer. Zucchini and ricotta tart is offered alongside simple sliced heirloom tomatoes, salt and olive oil from Yass, and details such as lemon zest over the smoked salmon and a battery of hot sauces (including sriracha) by the egg station add up to a compelling package. 1 London Cct, Canberra, (02) 6247 6244, qtcanberra.com.au

EAT

A BAKER

It's a bakery, a café, a wine bar, a restaurant. Whenever and however you choose to investigate A Baker, Australian cheese, salumi, oysters and good drinks are constants (Hello Martinis made with a choice of Aussie gins). Gotta love the spaghetti topped with a yolk, silverbeet, parmesan and fine shavings of smoked and cured lamb's liver. New Acton Pavilion Unit 2, 15 Edinburgh Ave, Canberra, (02) 6287 6150

CAPITOL BAR & GRILL

Robert Marchetti's obsession with golden-era dining continues with a grand, Delmonico's-esque menu crammed with detail. Go full-tilt retro-luxe with vol-au-vents filled with poached oysters and caviar, or play things straighter with the likes of a grilled rib eye, crusty and nude on the plate bar a cheek of lemon (the carrots with tarragon are the side to beat), or the excellent Lakes Entrance flathead, served whole with a simple salad and lemon caper butter sauce to the side. The dining



The beautiful, *slightly maddening* space at Močan & Green Grout is always in demand.

room is vast, laid out on a carpet patterned to resemble a giant Argyle sock. Strange to find so little Canberra wine in the cellar, but there's little chance you'll go thirsty regardless. Expect this place to become a fast favourite among the city's savvy wheelers and dealers. 7 London Cct, Canberra. (02) 6247 6244, qtcanberra.com.au

DA ROSARIO

A day-only, mostly outdoors eatery specialising in classic pizze (Margherita, Reginella), panini (porchetta, salumi, veal cotoletta) and the likes of the confidently al dente and properly pungent spaghetti cacio e pepe. 59 London Cct, Canberra. (02) 6230 0025

EIGHTYSIX

Eightysix was recently shortlisted for the Australian Interior Design Awards, and its caramel popcorn sundae has graced the cover of this magazine. Its staff don't want for confidence, and it's not a place for a quiet night out, but if you want a scene and like your gnocchi and anchovy ragu with a side of buzz, they've got your number. Mode 3 Building, cnr Elouera & Lonsdale sts, Braddon. (02) 6161 8686, eat-86.com

MOČAN & GREEN GROUT

"Mochan". There. That's the tough part out of the way. Well, that and landing a seat; whether it's at breakfast (killer toasties, broad bean and potato soup) or dinner (a texture-rich tartare of Crookwell beef; sautéed shishito peppers, crunchiness with funikake), this beautiful, slightly maddening space is always in demand. They're unlicensed, too, so it's the perfect place to road-test your cellar-door haul. 1/19 Marcus Clarke St, Canberra. (02) 6162 2909, mochanandgreengrout.com

MORKS

Did somebody say seared scallops and pig's ear terrine with grilled spring onions? Not your average Thai eatery. 18/19 Eastlake Pde, Kingston. (02) 6295 0112, morks.com.au

TEMPORADA

Good food and a great drinks list (once more with feeling: a great drinks list) from the team behind starred fine-diner Aubergine. Bypass the twee cocktails for the smarter likes of Bridge Road Golden Ale on tap, Equipo Navazos manzanilla, vin jaune, Jansheed chardonnay and Barossa touriga nacional by the glass, and

Ochota Barrels grenache and Scholium Project verdehlo by the bottle. We like. 15 Moore St, Canberra. (02) 6249 6683, temporada.com.au

DRINK (BOOZE)

BENT SPOKE BREWING CO

After 17 years of microbrewed magic at the Wig & Pen, master brewer Richard Watkins has stepped away to open a new venue, the whopping Bent Spoke in Braddon, opening as we go to press. Cnr Mort & Elouera sts, Braddon, bentspokebrewing.com.au

HIPPO CO

In morphing from Hippo to the rather more grown-up Hippo Co, this veteran of the capital cocktail scene has taken more than a little inspiration from lauded Sydney bars Shady Pines and Baxter Inn. (Rolling library ladder? Check. Reception-board whisky list? Check. Swing tags on the bottles? Check.) They're far from the only bar to do that, though, and it's no bad thing. Drink your way from the sublime (the Charlie Chaplin, a 1920s concoction of sloe gin, apricot brandy and lime juice) to the ridiculous (Stop the Floats: spiced rum, salted caramel ice-cream, house-made sarsaparilla, creaming soda). 17 Garema Pl, Canberra. (02) 6247 7555, hippocandco.com.au

LUCKY'S SPEAKEASY

The ghosts of under-age dance parties at what was once Bobby McGee's may linger on, and some of the decorative notes may be a bit off (the flat-screens have to go), but with Las Vegas transplant Riley Berry the smiling face behind the bar making drinks from QT group bartender Jared Thibault's ambitious list, fortune favours the brave. Try the Smoking Gun: mescal on Charreuse and a habanero shrub. C'mon, get Lucky. 1 London Cct, Canberra, (02) 6267 1270, qrcanberra.com.au

MOLLY

Hexagonal floor tiles, Tokyo-style mixing glasses, industrial lamps, Edison bulbs, bottle lockers, a "secret" location, no signage - you know the drill. There's CW Stoneking on the stereo, ties on the staff, and a smart variation on the classic Sazerac in the glass in front of you. This is the most ambitious cocktail bar to have opened in the territory in many a moon. Hobart Pl, Canberra, molly.net.au

THE RUM BAR

With a couple of hundred cane-based distillations on offer, TRB certainly does what it says on the packet. 6/2 Trevillian Quay, Kingston, (02) 6162 1256, therumbars.com.au

DRINK (COFFEE)

THE CUPPING ROOM

Hands-down the coolest café in the capital, The Cupping Room is that rarity - a coffee-nerd haven where the eats very nearly hold their own with the java. Love that gallo pinto - a fried egg and chorizo on rice hot through with barberries and smoked paprika. 1/11-13 University Ave, Canberra, (02) 6257 6412, thecuppingroom.com.au

TWO BEFORE TEN

Along with Harvest, around the corner, and The Cupping Room, this roastery forms a Bermuda Triangle of superior caffeination. 40 Marcus Clarke St, Canberra, (02) 6162 1260, twobeforeten.com.au

LONSDALE STREET ROASTERS

The funkiest roasters in town, LSR is as much about the scene and the setting as the coffee. Gotta love the ever-changing poster art exhibition. There are two branches on Lonsdale Street (opt for the original, down the Cooyong Street end), plus a new offshoot at the Kingston Foreshore. Remedy, 7 Lonsdale St, Braddon, (02) 6156 0975, lonsdalestreetroasters.com

SEE

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Consistently surprising, deeply moving and curated with great sensitivity, the AWM is an essential stop on any Canberra visit. Our war myths are not about triumphalism but about sacrifice and mateship, and those qualities are celebrated here in a way that transcends the jingoism taking over the larger conversation about Australia's martial history.



The exhibition on Afghanistan, featuring works by painter-of-the-moment Ben Quilty, ought to be at the top of your to-do list. Treloar Cres, Campbell, (02) 6243 4211, swm.gov.au

CANBERRA GLASSWORKS

Did you know Canberra is the capital of glass art in Australia? This cultural centre in the former Kingston Powerhouse building is a working studio for glass artists, a home to workshops for aspiring glassworkers, and an exhibition space. It's also now the permanent home to Brodourger, the cult burger joint that was until recently Canberra's favourite food truck (okay, food caravan). 11 Wentworth Ave, Canberra, (02) 6260 7005, canberraglassworks.com

LONSDALE STREET TRADERS

A remarkable collection of micro-tenancies under one warehouse roof, taking care of all your shopping, fashion, collectible, floral, longboarding, spray-painting, asymmetrical hairstyling and vegan baking needs. 27 Lonsdale St, Braddon

DRILL HALL GALLERY

Part of the ANU, Drill Hall has kept up a cracking pace of innovative programs of contemporary art since 1992. Kingsley St, Acton, (02) 6125 5832, dhg.anu.edu.au

M16 ARTSPACE

This newer visual arts centre combines studio and work spaces with three galleries. 21 Blaxland Cres, Griffith, (02) 6295 9438, m16artspace.com

NATIONAL ARBORETUM

Set on land cleared by the bushfires of 2003, the arboretum is a repository of 94 mini-forests of rare, endangered and symbolically important trees from around the nation and the globe. Refresh yourself after a wander with a bite in the Sprout café or romp through the acorns of the fantastic Pod Playground. Forest Dr, Weston Creek, 15 22 Bt, nationalarboretum.act.gov.au



NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE

More suited to a quick hit than an entire afternoon, the archive is as notable for the splendour of its Hawkesbury sandstone structure and Deco detailing as it is for its small but intriguing public galleries. Its Arc cinema screens everything from *The Fringe Dwellers* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* to *Pink Flamingos* and the original 1978 *Superman*. McCoy Cct, Acton, (02) 6248 2000, nfsa.gov.au

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Daryl Braithwaite (and the rest of Sherbet) shot nude by Lewis Morley in 1972. John Brack's two-part painting of Kym Bonython (1963) and his seaway cap (1966). Nick Cave in spray paint by Howard Arkley, and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu in oils by Guy Maestri. Clifton Pugh's 1975 picture of Sir John Kerr beside Ralph Heimans' 1998 portrait of Justice Michael Kirby. All Australians, all depicted with flair, all together under one roof. King Edward Tce, Pankes, (02) 6102 7000, portrait.gov.au

The construction of Hotel Hotel has been about
"rediscovering the beauty of the primitive *modernism*
and environmentalism of the Burley Griffins".

**NATIONAL
TREASURE**

Hotel Hotel's lobby eatery
and bar, Godzilla. Opposite:
the National Portrait Gallery,
drinks at Molly and Two
Before Ten's cold-drip coffee.

