

Reviews



BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Dinner or drinks? Bars in restaurants used to be little more than glorified waiting rooms but now many of them are as inviting as the dining spaces beyond. Here are our favourites.

REVIEWS BY

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
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Cosy up to the bar at
The Glass House, Hobart,
to sample the finest
Tasmanian whiskies



TASMANIA

THE GLASS HOUSE

📍 Brooke Street Pier, Hobart; 0437 245 540

🌐 theglass.house

🕒 Open seven days for lunch and dinner

Yes, the restaurant at Hobart's newest waterfront venue is great but life is mighty fine when you nab a seat at the stunning copper bar, too. This is a venue with five styles of ice, a collection of old and new crystal glasses and a "bottle keep" that sees your chosen whisky locked away for your next visit (and gives you priority bookings). You'll want to treat yourself to one of the unique cocktails made with an eclectic mix of premium Tasmanian ingredients (including Belgrove whisky and Arras sparkling wine). Chef Ikuei "Kin San" Arakane is best known for his stint at Melbourne's Taxi restaurant and his food is assured, ranging from three types of steamed bao (soft-shell crab, pork belly, Cape Grim beef) to baby octopus with kimchi.

WESTEND PUMPHOUSE

📍 105 Murray Street, Hobart; (03) 6234 7339

🌐 pumphouse.com.au

🕒 Open on weekends for breakfast, Sunday for lunch and Tuesday-Saturday for lunch and dinner

All of the activity at the Westend Pumphouse centres around its large bar. Locals crowd in after 5pm on Fridays, ready for a cider, craft beer (try the Stark Raven oatmeal stout from Willie Simpson's Seven Sheds) or something from the top shelf. With a drink in hand, peruse the menu and select dishes to enjoy at the bar or in the main dining space. Chef Tom Westcott (who goes by the delightful moniker of @dementedfermenter on Instagram) is the master of umami and his fried chicken, pickles and gochujang mayo (a savoury fermented Korean condiment) has won him many fans. If you're feeling really hungry, you might want to go all out and order the "Feed Me!" banquet for \$65. Or, if you've booked in advance (and have nine friends to share with), you can order a whole roasted pig.



VICTORIA

GOGO BAR

📍 125 Flinders Lane, Melbourne (enter via Higson Lane); (03) 8663 2020

🌐 gogobar.com.au

🕒 Open Saturday for lunch and Monday-Saturday for dinner

The unenlightened consider it a holding pen for the hordes waiting on a table at the perennially pumping upstairs Chin Chin but GoGo has transcended any second-tier status. Bathed in the Lucas restaurant group's trademark neon glow (here, it's a plaintive sign reading "Lonely for you only"), the murky basement digs are packed with dark corners and broad booths where drinkers get down with cocktails that stick to the Thai theme (from a pineapple-infused tequila to a chilli-salt margarita). Food-wise, consider it an express elevator to the upstairs kitchen minus the interminable wait for anyone unlucky enough to arrive after 5pm. The perky bar menu features pulled pork sliders, chilli-salt chicken wings and stuffed roti.

PASTUSO

📍 19 ACDC Lane, Melbourne; (03) 9662 4556

🌐 pastuso.com.au

🕒 Open seven days for lunch and dinner

Boasting the coolest address in Melbourne, Pastuso glows hot with the love of the hip young things drawn down ACDC Lane to its high/low design mash-up of riotously fluoro chicha posters, beautiful marble-topped cevicheria and copper-clad pisco bar dedicated to the celebration of Peru's national drink. A 10-strong list of pisco cocktails made by dapper bartenders lets you go "classicos" (pisco sour with lemon, lime and eggwhite) or "el futuro" (try the pisco disco with chilli, coriander and ginger beer). Grab a spot at the bar and indulge in selections from the menu, which features a section dedicated to street food such as golden pastries stuffed with smoked pork and sun-dried chilli paste, or simply a serve of yucas (cassava chips).

LE BON TON

📍 51 Gipps Street, Collingwood; (03) 9416 4341

🌐 lebontonmelb.com

🕒 Open Tuesday-Sunday for lunch and Monday-Sunday for dinner

A mysterious portal to America's Deep South, Le Bon Ton is a party-hard kind of place, as evidenced by its 6am close on weekends. Opened by Will and Mick Balleau – brothers hailing from New Mexico who have a palpable love of "real" barbecue – it's a candlelit, copper-clad salon complete with attractive courtyard and parlour furniture, all channelling New Orleans without toppling over into theme park. Absinthe is a thing here, although the bartenders will smooth the green fairy's rougher edges in drinks such as Minnie the Moocher (with dry vermouth, lime and mint), plus there's a brilliant cocktail list with New Orleans classics including the hurricane (rum, grenadine and citrus). Soak it all up with pit-smoked brisket and chilli-cheese fries from a kitchen headed up by Alabama-born, Texas-raised brothers Jeremy and Christopher Sutphin. It's nothing short of finger-lickin' good.

Monster Kitchen and Bar's eggplant with smoked goat's curd (left); Le Bon Ton brings a touch of New Orleans to Melbourne



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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

EL PÚBLICO

📍 511 Beaufort Street, Highgate; 0418 187 708

🌐 elpublico.com.au

🕒 Open seven days for dinner

Hablas Español? It matters little. This lively Mexican cantina's brand of eating and drinking translates to a good time in any language, especially if you've nabbed a stool at the bar. How else, after all, would you get first-hand tuition from chatty bartenders about El Público's impressive mescal and tequila stocks and the snappy cocktails they shake, stir and serve through the night? The offer of crunchy fried crickets puts paid to any notions of cookie-cutter food, ditto atypical taco fillings like smoked leek, tender cuttlefish and beef tongue. And when was the last time you spied mogo mogo balls (slow-cooked beef in banana-flour batter) on a menu? A heads-up: the bar gets busy on weekends so visit early.

ROCKPOOL BAR & GRILL

📍 Crown Perth, Great Eastern Highway, Burswood; (08) 6252 1900

🌐 rockpool.com

🕒 Open Sunday-Friday for lunch and seven days for dinner

If you're partial to an *apéritif*, you've come to the right place. Nightcap? The options are pretty much endless. There's no denying that Rockpool's dedicated bar makes an ideal preface and/or footnote to a night out but it's just as capable of being the main event. Sandwich aficionados will certainly approve of the bar's new burger-centric menu, not least the introduction of a grass-fed beef option to complement Rockpool's celebrated Blackmore Wagyu burger. Those looking for a relaxed, low-key feed can choose between four beef-between-brioche combinations. In more of a celebratory mood? Pick out a bottle (or two) from the restaurant's powerhouse, world-renowned cellar and really upgrade your meal deal.

Sydney's bar scene is in good shape with Gardel's (above) and Bentley slinging cocktails that will put a skip in your step



NEW SOUTH WALES

BENTLEY RESTAURANT & BAR

📍 Corner of Pitt and Hunter streets, Sydney; (02) 8214 0505

🌐 thebentley.com.au

🕒 Open Monday-Friday for lunch and Monday-Saturday for dinner

Bentley has redefined contemporary dining in Australia. The flagship establishment of culinary crusader Brent Savage and wine wizard Nick Hildebrandt delivers sexy sophistication to the city and its bar is just as sharp. Cool your heels on classic cocktails, dine on the restaurant menu proper or quaff quirky drops as you enjoy one of the best bar menus in town. Stylish simplicity sees cured cobia given a pickled ginger kick while fennel flatters blushing Wagyu skirts. So very Sydney.

GARDEL'S BAR

📍 358 Cleveland Street, Surry Hills; (02) 8399 1440

🌐 gardelsbar.com

🕒 Open Tuesday-Saturday for dinner

When Argentinian-inspired *Porteño* opened back in 2010, it put some much-needed fire into the belly of Sydney's dining scene. That swinging mix of slow-cooked meats, pickled treats and toe-tapping beats reminded us to loosen up and enjoy the fine feast. That same party sensibility is embodied in its first-floor bar, Gardel's. Have a pre-dinner drink upstairs, where waitresses who look as though they're straight out of the 1950s pirouette through a room of raucous revellers, and snack on house-made charcuterie and weekly specials like pickled octopus and chilli. It's one of the best nights out Sydney has to offer.



BENNELONG

📍 Sydney Opera House, Bennelong Point, Sydney;
(02) 9240 8000

🌐 bennelong.com.au

🕒 Open Friday-Sunday for lunch and seven days for dinner

One of our most influential chefs, Quay's Peter Gilmore, on stage in one of the world's most recognisable landmarks, the Sydney Opera House: it's no dream. You'll want to experience Gilmore's restaurant menu, which champions Australian produce in the most sophisticated of ways, but the beauty of the new Bennelong lies in its options. Arrive in time for sunset and graze at the bar. Book a spot at the "Cured and Cultured" counter and indulge in a glass of Gosset rosé while watching chefs prepare poached yabbies with lemon jam, cultured cream and buckwheat pikelets. Or reserve a table in The Circle, a casual 30-seater in the upper level. It's still early but Bennelong may be Gilmore's defining moment.



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SEAN'S KITCHEN

📍 Station Road, Adelaide; (08) 8218 4244

🌐 seanskitchen.com.au

🕒 Open weekends for breakfast and seven days for lunch and dinner

Everything about Sean's Kitchen is on a grand scale, including the vaulted ceilings, vast east-facing windows and kitchen, with its wood-fired grill and oven that runs the length of the restaurant. Just as impressive is the bar, all gleaming brass and copper with marble benchtops. Segue from cocktails in copper mugs to a menu that features lobster rolls with crème fraîche, dry-aged kimchi burgers and a meltingly tender hunk of lamb shoulder to share. While there is a steak or two on the menu, the focus is South Australia's seafood, with scampi crudo, freshly shucked oysters and king crab legs among the highlights.

2KW

📍 Level 8, 2 King William Street, Adelaide; (08) 8212 5511

🌐 2kwbar.com.au

🕒 Open seven days for lunch and dinner

Although executive chef Nick Finn is a rising star in the Adelaide dining scene, it's easy to see why 2KW's stunning rooftop bar is as packed as the restaurant. The views into the gardens of Government House and across the river to Adelaide Oval are Instagram heaven and the tempting bar menu includes wood-fired pizza and toasties. If you duck inside for dinner, opt for the 16-hour slow-cooked pork Scotch fillet finished in the charcoal-fired Jospier oven.



AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

MONSTER KITCHEN AND BAR

📍 25 Edinburgh Avenue, Canberra; (02) 6287 6287

🌐 hotel-hotel.com.au/eat-drink

🕒 Open seven days for breakfast, lunch and dinner

With sling-back Danish lounges, classic dry martinis and open gas fireplaces, Monster is a beast that rarely sleeps. The eco-chic bar, fitted with repurposed raw timber and steel, is located in Hotel Hotel and is a magnet for travellers (and locals in search of a quiet tipple). Sip on a Languedoc picpoul de pinet and tuck into Sean McConnell's famous yabby jaffles. A share plate of soft, silky eggplant with smoked goat's curd, katsuobushi (dried bonito flakes) and sesame goes down beautifully with a local wine, such as the Clonakilla O'Riada Shiraz. There's also a well-considered selection of European wines but it's the violet gin that's guaranteed to send you smiling to the restaurant next door.

The view of Jørn Utzon's sails are just as impressive from inside the Opera House at Bennelong

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A. BAKER

📍 15 Edinburgh Avenue, Canberra; (02) 6287 6150

🌐 abaker.com.au

🕒 Open for dinner Monday-Saturday

After Flint restaurant burnt down in 2011, A. Baker was built in its place with a sophisticated speakeasy-style basement bar as part of the fit-out. Funky modern art hangs from industrial concrete walls and mellow maritime lights dangle from above the stone-top bar. Hip foodies huddle in at tables within a whisper of each other, while the friendly bar staff proudly show off the Victorian whisky, Tassie vodka and West Australian gin, or tempt you with wines made within an hour of the nation's capital. "Local" is paramount here at A. Baker bar; even the bread is made in-house. Try the intensely dry and aromatic 2014 Helm Classic Dry Riesling as you savour delicate Wagyu bresaola or longaniza oscura, a Spanish pork sausage stained with squid ink.



NORTHERN TERRITORY

OYSTER BAR

📍 19 Kitchener Drive, Darwin; (08) 8981 2242

🌐 oysterbar.com.au

🕒 Open seven days for lunch and dinner

It's a winning formula that has the punters flocking to Darwin's waterfront strip: serve up oysters variously chilled and grilled, food for non-oyster fans, on-tap beer and cider, cocktails and wines (including lots of bubbles by the glass). There's also live music and happy-hour specials a couple of times a week. The décor is ordinary but that's a small quibble considering the view across the lagoon. The oysters are all from Coffin Bay; purists wouldn't dream of having them any way except natural but there are other options, including with caviar and sour cream or the traditional kilpatrick.



QUEENSLAND

GERARD'S BAR

📍 13A, 23 James Street, Fortitude Valley; (07) 3252 2606

🌐 gerardsbar.com.au

🕒 Open seven days for dinner and Friday-Sunday for lunch

Claim a stool at the contemporary-chic concrete bar, order an apéritif and ogle the best selection of charcuterie the city has to offer, including jamón Ibérico (from acorn-fed black-hoofed pigs) and salami made from Australian wild boar. There are also fun snacks like the Sobrassada Dagwood Dog and baked clams with smoked potato velouté and chorizo. The drinks list, like the food, has a Spanish focus and is a drawcard in its own right. Sip a glass of sherry, split a jug of sangria or try Gerard's Smoke, a cocktail with house-smoked Pedro Ximénez, Havana aged rum, salted vanilla and dry vermouth.

THE SERVERY

📍 Upstairs, 28 Logan Road, Woolloongabba; (07) 3392 3301

🕒 Open Wednesday-Saturday from 6pm until late

Less a bar and more a clandestine supper club, The Servery is up a flight of narrow, hidden stairs adjacent to Pearl Café's kitchen. The menu is always changing but on Wednesdays you can count on the slow-roasted organic Byron Bay Berkshire pork. Sample wines from the concise chalkboard list on the wall – which leans towards natural and biodynamic – smug in the knowledge that you are experiencing one of Brisbane's best-kept secrets. ●

More choice than natural at Oyster Bar, Darwin (left); king crab legs with a martini at Sean's Kitchen, Adelaide

