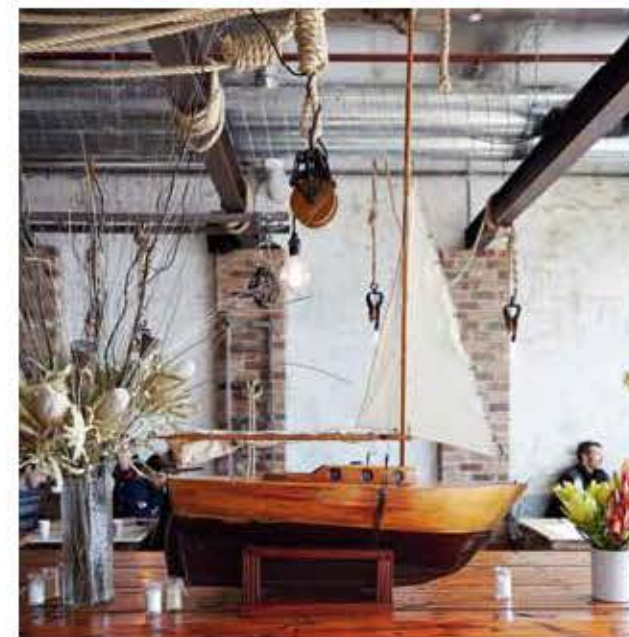




Monster Kitchen and Bar at Hotel Hotel. Opposite (clockwise from top left): the National Carillon; A. Baker's duck breast with Jerusalem artichoke, mushroom and watercress; Lake Burley Griffin; chef Sean McConnell; Local Press Cafe.



## Canberra LOCAVORE

Canberra has been revived as a hot foodie destination thanks to a new wave of openings. We count down Monster Kitchen and Bar chef Sean McConnell's favourites, along with other local hotspots.

WORDS HEDI FINNANE PHOTOGRAPHY ANDY LEWIS & VISIT CANBERRA





## 1 BREAKFAST WITH A TWIST

The daily 11am coffee cupping sessions at **The Cupping Room** (1/13 University Ave, Civic) are just one reason to visit local coffee roaster Ona's new venue. The other is their fantastic breakfast menu featuring jamon and peas with poached eggs and Persian feta (pictured), or the benedito with poached eggs and 'guacacassa' – avocado with Tobasco. Staff will advise what coffees are on offer and their best method of delivery.

**C**anberra is cool. There, we said it. The new wave of cafe, bar, restaurant and hotel openings adds to favourite top-tier restaurants such as Aubergine, Sage and Ottoman Cuisine, putting our nation's capital on the foodie map. The city's bad rep for being 'boring' (thanks to school excursions and long-running question time) is long gone, and now a visit to the National Gallery, Parliament House or Questacon goes hand-in-hand with a crisp pastry, quality coffee or locally brewed beer. Leading the charge is this month's Locavore, chef Sean McConnell, from the same Melbourne culinary dynasty as Andrew and Matt, at the newly opened Monster Kitchen and Bar at Hotel Hotel. "The food scene here's rapidly changing, people are demanding better quality and there's been a huge response with new openings pushing the boundaries and doing really unique things," says Sean. Based in Canberra with wife Jenny and 15-month-old son Arley, Sean loves the Canberra lifestyle. "It's pretty, it's not complicated and you don't have to spend an hour in traffic to go anywhere," says Sean. Here's a taste of the venues shaping the new Canberra. Thanks to Visit Canberra for their assistance, visit: [visitcanberra.com.au](http://visitcanberra.com.au).

## 2 FRESHLY ROASTED

If you haven't used up all your daily caffeine points, **Two Before Ten** (40 Marcus Clarke St, Civic), a few blocks from The Cupping Room, also offers the specialty coffee experience, including pour overs, batch brew and aeropress, along with the usual espresso suspects. Order your coffee, then watch as head roaster Sam Burns (above left) does his thing on the 12kg Diedrich roaster each day. "Sam is incredibly knowledgeable. He's sourcing unique beans and treating them with respect," says Sean.

## CASUAL LUNCHING

Sean started out at **Mocan & Green Grout** (1/19 Marcus Clarke St, New Acton South), the same group behind Hotel Hotel, in 2012. What started as a daytime cafe has now evolved into a fantastic all-day eatery that offers a popular BYO dinner menu. "The food's uncomplicated and true to the ingredients," says Sean. "We try to limit the food miles and work with local producers." Sit at the green marble bar and watch the action at the burners or sink into one of the leather chairs. Order a fresh grapefruit juice or organic fair trade coffee with one of the daily specials or Sean's pick – the Tripoli baked eggs.



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## WHOLEFOODS FIX

**Local Press Cafe** (129 Trevillian Quay Kingston), part of the new Kingston Foreshore development, is the ideal spot to kick back for a lazy Sunday brunch. Pull up a stool made from recycled fence palings at the communal table and try one of the cold-pressed juices made fresh onsite. Highly recommended on the wholefoods-focused menu is the green pea pancake made with poached eggs, feta, avocado, mint and drizzled with a pomegranate and balsamic reduction. Wander down the boardwalk after your meal – the development may still be underway but there are signs that this could be a fantastic new dining precinct.



# 5

## CANBERRA'S BEST CRONUT

If you're in need of a sugar hit, **Penny University** (15 Kennedy St, Kingston), opened by young-guns Effie Kochinos and Ellie Raymond in November 2013, is your go-to destination. Bask in the eclectic, homey ambience as you peruse the paint-worn timber dresser groaning with 19-year-old pastry cook extraordinaire Eliane's creations - think lemon curd tarts, raspberry bakewells, salted caramel chocolate tarts and choc hazelnut croissants. Hang outside on the milk-crate seating with vintage crochet blankets or inside next to the exposed brick wall featuring illustrations of anthropomorphised animals in waist coats, as you devour an orange citrus cronut.



# 6

## ALFRESCO ITALIAN

**Da Rosario** (59 London Circuit, Civic) is the brand-new hole-in-the-wall eatery from the Trimboli family, who also own Italian and Sons and Mezzaluna. Seating is outdoors only, panini and coffee come from the tiny shop and larger items come from the Mezzaluna kitchen next door. Serving breakfast and lunch only, this is simple alfresco eating at its best. Start with a negroni paired with the battered south coast sardine fillets with orange, pine nuts and currants.



## 7 BURGERS, BURGERS, BURGERS

A trip to Canberra wouldn't be complete without eating a famous flamegrilled **Brodburger** (Canberra Glassworks, 11 Wentworth Ave, Kingston). "Whenever we have visitors we always go there," says Sean. Order at the American diner-style red counter, then grab your buzzer and find a seat out back, or head next door where artists are blowing glass. It may be considered 'fast food' but you don't want to be in a hurry when you go there, advises Sean. "Sundays are my day for burgers. I always get the Brod deluxe with cheddar - it's my go-to," says Sean.



# 8

## BREW ON TAP

**BentSpoke Brewing Co** (38 Mort St, Braddon) is the brand-new industrial-chic microbrewery from Richard Watkins, the award-winning head brewer from Canberra institution Wig and Pen. Check out the brewing tanks lining one side of the two-story space, then choose from one of the 18 beers and ciders on offer such as Morts Gold, a hoppy and refreshing pilsner, or the crisp hand-pressed Adam's Cider. If you're after a snack, try the grain-crusted hot wings with malted blue cheese dipping sauce.

## 9 BEST BREAD

Just around the corner from BentSpoke Brewery is artisan bakery **Autolyse** (5/21 Lonsdale St, Braddon), which has recently opened in Sydney's Central Park precinct, and specialises in handmade sourdough, cakes and wickedly crisp and buttery pastries. Order a coffee from local roaster Ona with one of their killer choc or almond croissants, then watch head baker David Damour hard at work.





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## SPEAKEASY SESSION

Although not exactly secret, **Molly** (Hobart Place, Civic) is the uber-cool underground bar found via GPS coordinates or with a little ingenuity – just follow the groups of people huddled over their phones in Hobart Place. Look for the unmarked wooden door with a single light globe above, then head down the stairs to the bar. “I love Molly, they’ve nailed the speakeasy vibe. You half expect Frank Sinatra to walk in and hang up his hat,” says Sean. Owners Antony Arena, Dean Brown and Lorenzo Focarile have created the first bar of its kind for Canberra, one where bartenders know their craft, shaking, stirring and setting alight their creations with deft ease – a gin martini or old fashioned are the order of the day. “You can order a whisky sour and a charcuterie plate at 11 pm, it’s great,” says Sean.

10

11

## TOP TRATT

“For an authentic experience, **Italian and Sons** (7 Lonsdale St, Braddon) is outstanding,” says Sean. One of the first to set-up shop on Lonsdale street five years ago, the hatted trattoria by the Trimboli family (owners of new Da Rosario, p 143) delivers refined, Italian flavours with attentive and knowledgeable service. The open kitchen is dominated by the woodfired oven that pumps out perfect pizzas, along with roasted meats. Wines are mostly Italian, try the chianti classico with the *patate* (potato and rosemary) pizza (left), then finish off with tiramisu.



## 12 WHISKY HOUR

If it's whisky you're after, **Hippo Co** (Garema Place, Civic), the stalwart of the Canberra drinks scene that was lovingly refitted and rebranded from Hippo Bar 12 months ago, is your destination. Look to the comprehensive top shelf or the golden-lettered peg board next to the bar to make your selection. Cocktails also come recommended, try the West Side martini made with gin and absinthe. “It’s a great venue, these guys really know their cocktails,” says Sean. ►



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## 13 HEAVENLY FRIED CHICKEN

**Eightysix** (Elouera St, Mode 3 Building, Braddon) is busy. Always. Book ahead and try and get a seat at the kitchen bar, as the action upfront is too good to miss. There are no menus, instead diners are invited to check out owner Gus Armstrong's elegant graffiti-esque scrawl on the blackboard that lines one wall. Waiters expertly guide diners through the flavours of each dish, all designed to be shared – a stroke of luck when you want to try everything on the menu. Start with the duck buns with pickled cucumber, before ordering the crisp, fried chicken with housemade mayo, lemon cheek and an entire bottle of Sriracha. It's quite possibly the best fried chicken this side of the Mississippi. The menu changes daily with small tweaks based on seasonality and availability. Rocking the cult status is the popcorn sundae, order it, you won't be disappointed.



## 14 DAY TO NIGHT

Drop-by bakery, restaurant and bar **A. Baker** (NewActon Pavilion, 15 Edinburgh Ave) at any time of day, whether it's for a coffee or sit-down dinner. Downstairs the sleek basement bar is all concrete and candlelight and the perfect spot for a postprandial drink. Perch at the bar under the huge Hollywood film lights as you order a glass of local sangiovese from Murrumbateman and peruse the small bites menu – try the Australian cheese board with muscatels and house bread (above). "They've got a great spirit selection with a focus on Australian distilleries," says Sean, who enjoys a neat pour of Bakery Hill whisky from Victoria. "Plus they have board games on Monday nights."

## 15 SLUMBERLAND

Walk into the brand new boutique **Hotel Hotel** (25 Edinburgh Ave, NewActon) and you'll find yourself standing in chef Sean McConnell's hot new restaurant,

**Monster Kitchen and Bar**. Recline under the atrium skylights and golden-hued filament bulb feature before ordering a regional wine from the carefully curated list by Michael Gray (ex-Vue de Monde). For dinner try the crowd favourite – the pulled lamb shoulder with yoghurt and pomegranate, a dish inspired by a kebab Sean once ate in eastern Turkey. "The menu is meant to be fun and everything is designed to be shared," says Sean. Open from 6am to 1am, the late finish encourages a supper crowd who come to try the amazing 38-hour pork neck bao with cucumber kimchi. The beautifully designed space uses a rich palette of textures including concrete and wood along with leather and wool. These chic details continue upstairs in the glamorous Hotel Hotel rooms (right; from \$265 per night). If you're lucky enough to score a Meandering suite, take a relaxing soak in the egg bath that's built for two. **d.**

