

 THE WEEKEND

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HOT  
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RESTAURANTS  
2014







EATING OUT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE EXCITING OR INFORMAL. SO WHAT ARE THE EMERGING TRENDS?

By John Lethlean and Necia Wilden

**A**uthor Michael Symons called it "one continuous picnic", and we reckon that's a nice summation of the state of dining out in Australia today. It's increasingly informal. It's very democratic. It's all about sharing. It can happen any time of day. It can be fast and furious, or languid (and liquid). The restaurant experience in Oz has never been closer to the posh picnic.

It's almost a metaphor for Australian

society: there has been a convergence somewhere around the middle. Price-wise, lower-end places have moved up by a sometimes surprising degree, usually by stealth. And higher-end dining rooms have scrambled to make themselves look and feel more accessible and affordable. The fact is, dinner out at anywhere half-decent is going to cost you \$100 a head, at least, no matter how hard your chosen restaurant may pitch the Gen Y message.





**Feel-good:**  
Peel St's Armenian  
lamb; Melbourne's  
Luxembourg;  
Guillaume Brahimi



one of his key chefs, Chris Watson, reminds us what a shrewd operator one is and what a fine chef is the other. Out with Golden Fields (too quirky, perhaps) and in with a place that retains great Euro traditions – oysters, cheeses, house-made charcuterie, bread and butter, a terrific collection of wine, beer and cider by the glass – but dispenses with clichés. Along with sea bream sashimi with buttermilk and fresh horseradish, go early enough for oyster happy hour; it can only improve your mood. Save some excellent bread to

mop up the duck egg served with artichoke barigoule and wafers of baked celeriac. Order the whole fish à la meunière and reflect on why classics are classics. Share some roast chicken with chestnuts and excellent jus, a McConnell signature. And even chocolate sceptics will recognise greatness in a baked-to-order tart with faintly sour cultured crème Chantilly. The staff? Terrific. The prices? Thoroughly fair. The result? Feet on the ground, achievement sky high.

**MUST EAT:** Chocolate tart baked to order, with cultured crème Chantilly

➔ [LUXEMBOURGISTRO.COM.AU](http://LUXEMBOURGISTRO.COM.AU)

## APPLE DAILY Perth CBD

● Part of the Print Hall collection of businesses at this St Georges Terrace power-dining hub to have emerged over recent years, Apple Daily could so easily be unremarkable yet survive. Boisterous, loud, beautifully designed around a heritage site and oh so much fun, you'd forgive this place if it merely offered fair mod-Asian food and a loose sense of service and system. We've learnt to lower our expectations in Perth. However, this pan-Asian eating and drinking experience keeps on surprising us with its professionalism, manner, service and well executed, big-impact food, most of it Thai but with regional Chinese, Korean and Malaysian excursions. Vibrant citrus, fiery chilli, pungent fermented fish and sweetness in balance: this is some of the country's best informal Asian food in a contemporary space. There's a sense of authenticity about the flavours and textures entwined in a green papaya salad, as if the modern packaging here doesn't have to compromise the "oomph". Or the timeless marriage of mandarin and braised duck with pickled red cabbage, sesame and spring onion. Or a beef cheek rendang with achar

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pickles that would make your average Indonesian or Malaysian homesick. Add to the mix an enormous sense of style and a cracking wine list and, well, this Apple should keep the doctor away.

**MUST-EAT:** Smoked trout fried rice, sweetcorn, fried egg relish

➔ [PRINTHALL.COM.AU/THE-APPLE-DAILY-BAR-EATING-HOUSE](http://PRINTHALL.COM.AU/THE-APPLE-DAILY-BAR-EATING-HOUSE)

## MONSTER Canberra

● From the brass table tops to the Mud crockery and discus-shaped cast iron teapots, everything at this most atypical hotel restaurant screams "design". Like Hotel Hotel itself. There's a renaissance of architecture and style in this part of our capital and Monster is at the centre of it all: a bustling, quirky hotel foyer space that morphs from trout hash browns and espresso in the morning to Sean McConnell's modern, unstructured food at night with a local riesling or maybe a new-wave Sicilian red. And, again like the host hotel, Monster has a collection of the city's best floor staff. Their warmth shines in the morass of hipster indifference that is modern Canberra dining. McConnell's menu is about sharing, with plenty of vegetable dishes and proteins of accountable provenance. We loved his Japanese eggplant dish with shaved, dried bonito and a combo of broccoli, Ortiz anchovy, lemon and chilli. Ditto, Palmers Island mullet served with a jumble of almond butter, broad beans, peas and mojama. McConnell's food is on trend, ingredients-wise, but not tragically so, and there's a lightness and cleanliness to most of the dishes. Monster retains a sense of humour and the gentle touch required in a restaurant with hotel guests dining in. And why wouldn't they?

**MUST-EAT:** Eggplant, smoked goat's curd, katsubushi

➔ [MONSTERKITCHEN.COM.AU](http://MONSTERKITCHEN.COM.AU)