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A look back at the Canberra food scene in 2017

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And we thought 2016 was a frenetic year for the Canberra hospitality industry. In 2017 you could have dined out somewhere new every week and still not kept up – and the quality just seemed to get better and better.

We said hello to venues like Kokomo's, Agostinis, Olive at Hawker, Bourbon Street Kitchen, Highgate House, Courtyard by Milk Crate, Department, The Kingston Collective, Circula Restaurant, Ollieyville, The Goods Wholefoods, Capital Brewing Co brewery and taphouse, RAKU, Highroad, East Street Canberra, 88mph, Podilato, Baked, Mama Dough, and Meadow amongst others.

The 'Italian farm egg' at the revamped Pulp Kitchen at Ainslie shops. Photo: Jamila Toderas

Lonsdale Street well and truly cemented its title as the capital's main dining strip, with new building developments bringing both plenty of new residents and eateries, including Lazy Su, Tipsy Bull, Kith and Nosh and Catch. The attention of developers has now turned to neighbouring Mort Street, with plenty of new commercial spaces expected to bring even more food and drink options to Braddon.

Renewal and revision were also a bit of a theme. Ainslie's Pulp Kitchen had a change of ownership, with Nathan Brown and Dan Gierdani selling to eightysix's Gus Armstrong. He reopened the venue in May under the same name as an energetic 'Australian bistro', with a young team. And a whole other Gus got a major refresh. Having sat empty since last year, Gus' Cafe was reopened as Gus' Place in September by new owners Fish Zafar and Hazel Tate. The all-day cafe is a modern take on what was a Canberra institution, with plenty of nods to its predecessor. Ona on the Lawns also had a significant refresh back in April, and now goes simply by Ona Manuka, and the longstanding Benchmark Winebar in Civic reinvented itself as 65 Northbourne, with a stronger focus on food.

Natural Nine and Pialligo Estate went the opposite way and got a make-under of sorts, switching from degustations and fine dining to more relaxed offerings. Speaking of which, it was a rough year for Pialligo Estate, with the picturesque property's main building completely destroyed by fire in October. The owners and staff recouped quickly, reopening by that weekend to serve diners in the garden pavilions, and continue with all wedding bookings.

In February, Civic bar Treehouse made international headlines for its new upstairs drinking spot Maple Bar, where men are forbidden from approaching women and women have to make the first move – kind of the Bumble of bars, if you will. The rules were both applauded by some women, and attracted widespread criticism.

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Canberrans had more reasons to stay home during meal times with the arrival of UberEats and Deliveroo. Local online dessert parlour Sugar Deli also launched, delivering sweet treats on demand.

The *Good Food Guide* chef's hats for 2018 were unveiled in October, with Canberra is now home to a pair of two-hatted restaurants.

Canberra's previously only two-hatted restaurant Aubergine retained its status, continuing as one of the capital's most decorated restaurants, and was joined by Ottoman Cuisine, which picked up its own two hats.

Chairman & Yip, Eightysix, Italian & Sons, Lilotang, Monster Kitchen & Bar, Otis Dining Hall, Pulp Kitchen, and Temporada were all awarded one hat.

Canberra's wine region punched above its weight, with a riesling from Gallagher Wines winning the Canberra International Riesling Challenge in October, and Mount Majura Vineyard's 2015 shiraz won the Chairman's Trophy at the National Wine Show of Australia in November. There were also quite a few changes in ownership out at the vineyards.

To finish up the year, we have again put together a list of our favourite Canberra restaurants according to our critics. Myself, Catriona Jackson and Kirsten Lawson hashed it out to settle on a final list. We usually do a top 20, but this year there was just no separating a few, so we settled on a top 21.

This is different to the Fairfax *Good Food Guide* – although many do overlap. These are the restaurants that we believe continue to consistently, keep us coming back, and the newcomers that have bowled us over. There is no order to the list – we've run it in reverse alphabetical order.

And with all of the new openings for the year, we've also put together our top 10 favourite new restaurants and bars.

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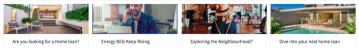

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