



New kid ON THE BLOCK

Secret bars, lively markets and top-notch eateries are making Newcastle one of Australia's top dining destinations

WORDS MITCH BROOKS

NOVOCASTRIANS ARE CHEERING (that's the natives of Newcastle, for the uninitiated). The source of their joy is a revitalised dining and drinking scene giving this once industrial town a cosmopolitan, big-city vibe.

Speakeasy-style whisky bars, specialist coffee roasters, sleek wine bars and quirky markets are just some of the boutique operations flourishing in the urban chic surroundings of former banks, warehouses and workshops. Hunter Street, in the city's centre, was the focus of the not-for-profit Renew Newcastle project that filled empty commercial and studio spaces with artists and small businesses, to entice shoppers, and in turn, cafés and restaurants, to the area.

Locals and those who have moved from afar nailed the brief, finding niche markets for their unique food, drink and event offerings. The city council is also investing in the CBD and surrounding suburbs and rejuvenating the popular Merewether beachside area and the Honeysuckle foreshore precinct east of Hunter Street.

Turning the tables: restaurants

Reserve Wine Bar might sit behind the grand facade of a former bank on Hunter Street, but its intention is to be "entertaining, not intimidating," says owner and wine director Patrick Haddock. Reserve takes a balanced approach to Australian and international wine, using known labels as its mainstay, but keeping an eye on fledgling boutique operations too.

Tasting plates, dumplings, tacos and sliders are dished up to complement a punchy by-the-glass selection that changes every three weeks.

Reserve maintained its maximum three-glass rating in the *Australian Gourmet Traveller* 2015 Restaurant Guide and notched up a few other accolades, including Best Small Bar at both this and last year's Restaurant and Catering Association Awards.

Patrick says Reserve is in good company, with exciting venues popping up nearby, including Napoli Centrale, run by a Neapolitan chef and musician, "a casual pizzeria with

a classic Italian focus" and Fortunate Son, beneath the Boulevard on Beaumont Hotel. "The food is really firing and the wine list is quirky and interesting".

Others worth the trek include Grain Store, in a former Tooheys Brewery keg and grain warehouse, offering 21 Australian craft beers on tap and excellent chicken wings, pizza and share plates; Parry Street Garage, an Italian bar and dining venue in a former mechanic's workshop, and the renowned Restaurant Mason, tucked beneath an apartment block and helmed by awarded restaurateur and chef Chris Thornton.

Out on the town: drinks

Newcastle's night-time economy was the key to success for Coal & Cedar owners Ethan Ortlipp and Ryan Hawthorne. They recognised that new players with fresh ideas were changing the landscape.

"It's the same thing that happened in [Sydney's] Surry Hills, or Leichardt. It comes down to people saying, 'If we're going to survive' ➡➡➡



MARKET DAYS
Newcastle's markets offer everything from organic goodies to multicultural treats



we have to do something different” Ethan says. Coal & Cedar is a prohibition-style speakeasy hidden behind an unmarked door on Hunter Street. Patrons must send a code to a mystery phone number for access before they can pull up a stool at the long bar in exposed-brick surrounds. There’s a top-shelf wine offering in the welcoming, mood-lit space. Ask the bartenders for their drink suggestions.

“We want it to be an experience in every way, from the second you get to the door and a host comes out and grabs you, and we serve you the best drinks you’ve ever had; it’s very personable service,” says Ethan.

Looking to offer more late-night options, the team opened cured meats eatery and cocktail bar, Bowery Boys, named after the New York gang, earlier this year. The kitchen is open midday to midnight. Late-trading barbershop The Alibi Room, next door to Coal & Cedar, has joined the stable too.

Also hooking into the late-night

scene, grungy industrial bar The Koutetsu proffers great cocktails and a sense of mystery (they won’t give out the address, but it’s across from the TAFE on Hunter Street). Check out Cazador up the road for cocktail and tapas, and MoneyPenny, a small, intimate joint with craft beer and share food, in the waterfront Honeysuckle precinct too.

Make a day of it: markets

Fashion, lifestyle and vintage wares, music, food and coffee bring Pacific Park at the east end of Hunter Street to life each month. Gemma Slattery moved to Newcastle eight years ago and was unexcited by the existing scene, so she and her sister Karla Cowper founded Hunt and Gather markets.

“In the last three or four years we’ve seen a shift happening in Newcastle,” Gemma says. “We’ve noticed lots of trendy bars opening, as well as creative restaurants.”

A Mexican food truck, gourmet

burgers, plus Greek, Vietnamese and German food, add a multi-cultural element to the green, open space, with the city as its backdrop.

“We could see that there was a gap in the market for something with a boutique feel, something that wasn’t just a market but an experience for people to come together, listen to great music, purchase quality products and grab some awesome food and coffee,” says Gemma.

The Hunt and Gather team will hold the Sunset Gather event in the park on November 7 and December 5. “It’s a celebration of Newcastle, with a lot of pop-up restaurants, the Coal & Cedar guys doing the bar, the best market stalls, and Baked Uprising bakers and Cheese Mongrel deli are doing platters for the event so ➤➤➤



Novocastrians have a passion for coffee that rivals Melburnians'

you can sit down in the sun and enjoy some cheese and bikkies ... we're going all out!"

Newcastle also boasts the City Farmers Market, held most Sundays at Newcastle Showground and offering food products from the area and around NSW.

The bean scene: cafés

Novocastrians have a passion for coffee that rivals Melburnians'. Boutique coffee roasting companies are finding their mojo across the city and the caffeine-educated population to support their endeavours.

"Everyone's experienced a good coffee now, and it's demand-driven," says Ross Ciavarella, owner and head roaster from Sprocket Roasters. "There are a lot of options and people like to explore them." Sprocket has an eponymous café in the CBD, The Social in Newcastle West, and Secret Garden Espresso in Charlestown Square.

Other popular local roasting companies include Drop Bear Coffee, Silverskin Coffee Roasters and Peaberry's Coffee Roasters. Diversity is proving the key to the appeal. "You have a large selection in terms of coffees, cafés and sellers," says Ross. "There's no dominance of one roaster in the city."

Celebrated cafés include Wickham Motorcycle Café, serving its own coffee blend in a warehouse space with motorcycles on display; Estabar, overlooking Newcastle Beach, a highlight for coffee and gelato; and One Penny Black, in a chic industrial-edged space on Hunter Street, serving up wholesome grub and snappy espresso. It's next door to Doughheads, maker of probably the tastiest doughnuts you'll ever eat.

Once known as Steel City, Newcastle has reinvented its eating, drinking and shopping scenes, and well and truly come of age in style. ★

Travel Info

Jetstar has great low fares to Newcastle from Melbourne, Brisbane and the GoldCoast.

Visit jetstar.com to book



SEE AND DO

EAT

Reserve Wine Bar

102 Hunter Street
reservewinebar.com.au

Grain Store

64-66 Scott St, Newcastle East
grainstorenewcastle.com.au

Bowery Boys

5/107 Darby Street, Cooks Hill
theboweryboys.com.au

DRINK

Coal & Cedar

380-382 Hunter Street
coalandcedar.com

Cazador

148 Hunter Street
cazador.com.au

MoneyPenny

The Boardwalk
moneypenny.net.au

CAFFEINATE

Sprocket Roasters

68 Hunter Street
sprocketroasters.com.au

Estabar

62 Shortland Esplanade
facebook.com/EstabarGelatiandEspresso

Wickham Motorcycle Café

3 Throsby Street, Wickham
wickhammotorcyclecafe.com.au

One Penny Black

196 Hunter Street
onepennyblack.com.au

