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# Just desserts

When asked what matters on a menu, for many diners, mains are not the main event. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

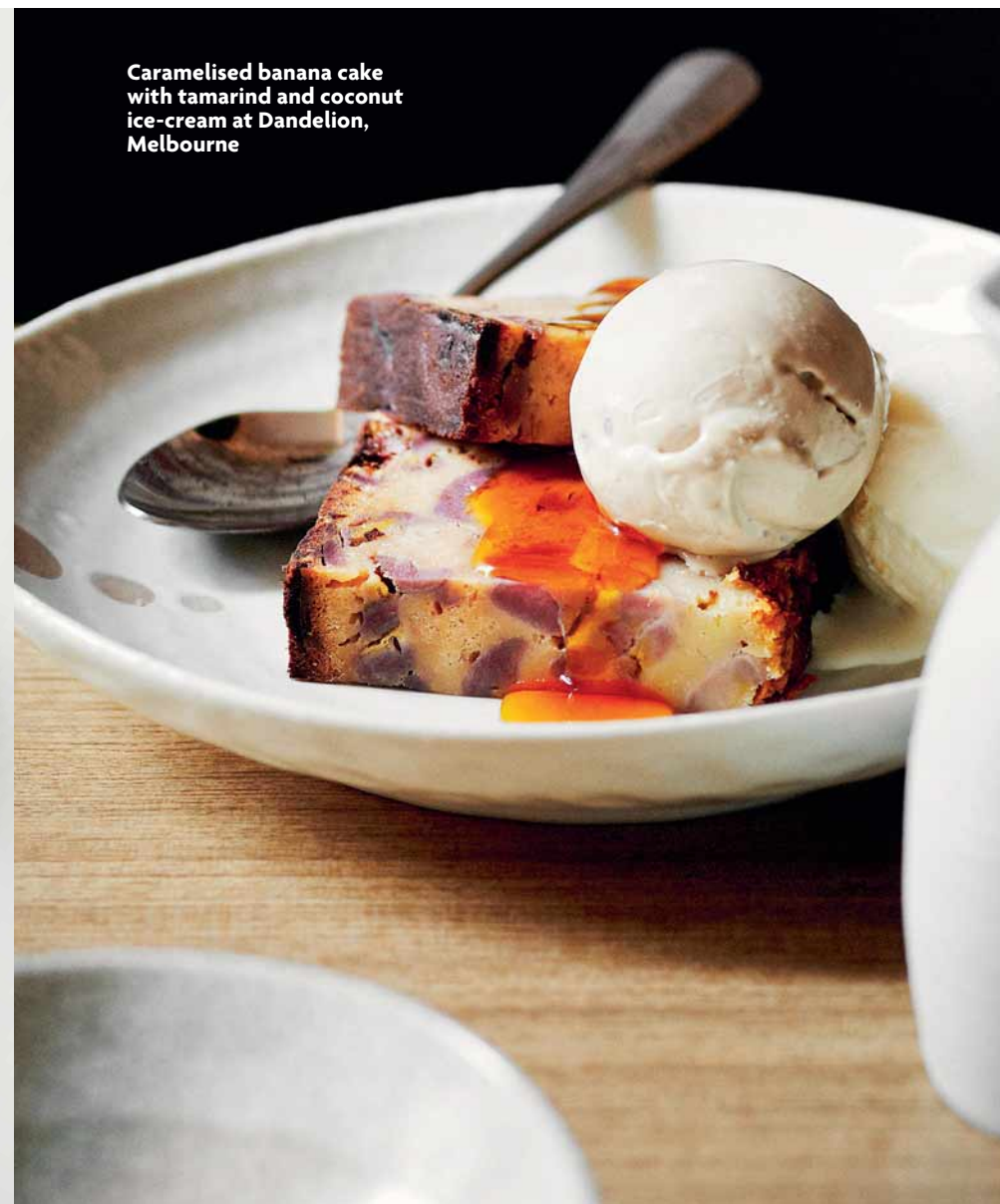


## Arras NEW SOUTH WALES

204 Clarence Street, Sydney.  
(02) 9283 1922. [restaurant-arras.com.au](http://restaurant-arras.com.au)  
Banana sandwich, banana meringue and toasted coconut. Malted chocolate, chestnut, peanuts and caramel. White goat's cheese, white asparagus and white chocolate. Arras' desserts have been known these last few years for being pretty darn good and, yes, pretty darn out-there. But when it comes to the pretty-darn-out-there stakes, not much tops the petits fours plate. Arras upped the ante when it made the move this summer from The Rocks to its new Clarence Street digs, and the sweet finish is bigger and bolder than ever: a vast perspex sheet covered in a pancreas-tightening display of lavender lollipops, peanut brittle, mint fairy floss, chocolates, sorbet cones, pop rocks and more. Help yourself? This certainly isn't the time for restraint. **Open:** lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat. Licensed. Prix fixe \$120. Degustation \$140.

Banana meringue and toasted coconut at Arras, Sydney

Caramelised banana cake with tamarind and coconut ice-cream at Dandelion, Melbourne



## RESTAURANTS

### VICTORIA

## Dandelion

133 Ormond Road, Elwood.  
(03) 9531 4900. [www.dandelion.ws](http://www.dandelion.ws)  
Taking its cue from the rest of Geoff Lindsay's menu at Dandelion, the dessert list here is all about channelling street food, in particular the sweet snacks found across Vietnam, which feature tropical fruit, Asian flavours and the occasional French influence. Dessert here can be as simple as ripe melon (or mango, according to the season) teamed with an excellent black sesame ice-cream. But it can also run to a wonderfully textured caramelised banana cake accompanied by both tamarind and coconut ice-cream, or the pick-me-up of Vietnamese coffee granita with buffalo milk yoghurt and condensed milk ice-cream. And for those who have a deep-fryer fetish, the crunchy little banana spring rolls will prove irresistible. **Open:** lunch Thu-Sun, dinner daily. Licensed. Desserts \$14-\$18.

## NEW SOUTH WALES Flour And Stone

53 Riley Street, Woolloomooloo.  
(02) 8068 8818. [flourandstone.com.au](http://flourandstone.com.au)  
It means nothing to most of Nadine Ingram's admirers that she counts London's Le Gavroche or local luminaries MG Garage and Bourke Street Bakery among her previous employers. They know her simply as "the gingerbread queen". And, golly, her creations, pastel-perfect iced rainbows, clouds and more are impressive, not least in the foot-wide versions. But they're just one string to the bow in this cafe/pastry kitchen. The macarons? Just so. How about a fig, almond and brown butter tart drizzled with honey? Apricot custard doughnuts? All this, plus coeliac- and vegan-friendly stuff, too. A win. **Open:** breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat. Dishes \$6-\$14.

ARRAS PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS CHEN/ACPSYNDICATION.COM;  
DANDELION: SHARYN CAIRNS/ACPSYNDICATION.COM

## Black Star

277 Australia Street, Newtown.  
(02) 9557 8656. [blackstarpastry.com.au](http://blackstarpastry.com.au)  
In Christopher Thé's world, gingerbread men are recast as ginger ninjas, their iced-on eyes gleaming with a confectionary killer instinct. Thé recast himself, too, not so long ago leaving the world of top-flight restaurants (Claude's and Quay among them) and setting up shop for himself, bringing a level of pastry gentility to Australia Street that Newtown had never known. Here, display cases teem with handmade truffles, chocolate caramel tarts garnished with the tiniest twinkle of salt crystals, superb eclairs and airy macarons. Strawberry watermelon cake, its sweet fruit, Iranian pistachios and almond dacquoise striated with rose-scented cream, is a worthy signature and demands a detour. **Open:** breakfast & lunch daily. Dishes \$5-\$8.

## Sepia

201 Sussex Street, Sydney.  
(02) 9283 1990. [sepiarestaurant.com.au](http://sepiarestaurant.com.au)  
It's a good thing Sepia isn't harbourside, and better still that it doesn't have a pond. Its "Japanese stones", a startling *trompe l'oeil* rendered in crisp, glossy chocolate, are an almost irresistible invitation to the pebble-skippers among us. But one bite and any thought of flinging them is quickly replaced by the need to keep them close and savour the sensation as their marmoreal shells give way to cream and jelly centres and the flavours of chocolate, cherry and coconut, balanced with a dusting of dry green tea and yuzu citrus. It's just one of a host of dazzling desserts, each a fitting finale to the shows of deft kitchen technique that precede them. **Open:** lunch Fri-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Desserts \$25.

## RESTAURANTS

Torched citrus  
marshmallows,  
Sepia, Sydney



### AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY Sage Dining Rooms

Gorman House Arts Centre,  
Batman Street, Braddon.

(02) 6249 6050. [sagerestaurant.net.au](http://sagerestaurant.net.au)

A tranche of meringue rests atop a filling of lemon verbena-infused custard. To the side is a crumbled shortcake pastry and cinnamon basil sorbet for contrast. This is Sage's take on lemon meringue pie. Equally audacious is a dish of sour cherry "cloud", toasted coconut ice-cream and chocolate "variations". And with the planned addition of a pâtissier who has spent time in the avant-garde kitchens of northern Spain, Sage's sweet credentials are on the rise. Chef Clement Chauvin applies the culinary trickery of his hometown of Lyon to wider selections. Take the creative play on surf and turf in the form of delicately poached chicken and squid, crispy wild rice, samphire and rouille. With a smart wine list and the new Mint garden bar area, there are good reasons to kick on after dessert.

**Open:** lunch & dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed.

Two courses \$60, three courses \$70, four courses \$80. Seven-course degustation \$120, 10-course tasting menu \$150.

### TASMANIA

#### Sweet Envy

341 Elizabeth Street, North Hobart.

(03) 6234 8805. [www.sweetenvy.com](http://www.sweetenvy.com)

It may be a cafe rather than a restaurant, but Sweet Envy is the laboratory of Tasmania's undisputed dessert king, Alistair Wise and, as such, is a destination of choice for the sweet-toothed. Wise, who ran the pastry kitchen in Gordon Ramsay's eponymous New York restaurant before returning to Tasmania a few years ago, has a fertile imagination to complement his pastry skills and the mix makes for great eating. Some dishes, such as Melba, are unique interpretations of the classics, while Crouching Strawberry Hidden Pandan is pure whimsy. Oh Pierre is a macaron-inspired homage to French pastry chef Pierre Hermé. Likewise, his opera cake and salty caramel chocolate tart are simply class. There are even a few savoury pastries

at this Hobart cafe – the beef tongue in cheek pie is particularly recommended.

**Open:** breakfast & lunch Tue-Sat. Desserts \$4-\$9.

### VICTORIA

#### Albert St Food & Wine

382 Sydney Road, Brunswick.

(03) 8354 6600. [www.albertst.com.au](http://www.albertst.com.au)

Philippa Sibley may well see her executive chef gig at this Sydney Road newcomer as a chance to peel off the "dessert queen" label, but the fact is, her desserts here – though pared-back and simpler than the elaborate concoctions that brought her widespread attention, such as her take on a Snickers bar – more than hold their own against her impressive savoury courses. Strawberries are tossed with white meringue sticks and teamed with a pale-violet balsamic ice-cream. Amaretto semifreddo shares a plate with a gold-flecked roasted peach, while a green pistachio pannacotta surrounded by fresh berries is a picture of elegance and restraint. She may not want the label, but Sibley's ability to nail the sweet stuff will probably see it sticking for a little while yet.

**Open:** breakfast, lunch & dinner daily. Licensed. Desserts \$14-\$18.

#### Bistro Guillaume

Crown Complex, Southbank,  
Melbourne. (03) 9292 4751.

[www.bistroguillaume.com.au](http://www.bistroguillaume.com.au)

Sometimes, particularly at the dessert end of a meal, it's best to stick with the classics and Guillaume Brahimi's French bistro does sweet classics very well. Topping the charts here is the tarte tatin, a textbook version of the species. Shiny and meticulously formed, it has just the right amount of gooey, caramel-apple sweetness, upping the ante with cinnamon ice-cream. Then there are the profiteroles, puffy pastry morsels perched next to house-made vanilla bean ice-cream, dripping with chocolate sauce, or a crème brûlée with a brittle, burnt-sugar lid that shatters satisfyingly to reveal passionfruit-flavoured custard. There is no reinvention of the dessert wheel, just the spectacle of a restaurant playing to its sweet strengths.

**Open:** lunch & dinner daily. Licensed. Desserts \$14-\$18.

## RESTAURANTS

### Donovans

40 Jacka Boulevard, St Kilda.  
(03) 9534 8221.

[www.donovanshouse.com.au](http://www.donovanshouse.com.au)

Donovans is celebrating its 15th birthday this year and a big part of its enduring success (beyond the bayside location, admirable and lengthy wine list, and Gail Donovan's boundless talent and energy for redecoration) can be attributed to the luxury beach-house vibe that encourages relaxation and indulgence. Desserts are, of course, the perfect way to tap into such a vibe, and there is plenty of indulgent sweet stuff to be had here, whether it's the simplicity of a tart lemon granita fortified with a generous slosh of grappa, or the more multi-layered commitment of a dark, molten-centred chocolate cake with mint ice-cream, berry compote and coconut truffle. And that's not forgetting the crème brûlée, admirably accessorised with warm cinnamon doughnuts and a knockout raspberry frappé. The ice-cream sundae on the kids' menu makes sure the fun stays inclusive.

**Open:** lunch & dinner daily. Licensed. Desserts \$14-\$21.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

### River Cafe

War Memorial Drive, North Adelaide.  
(08) 8211 8666. [www.rivercafe.com.au](http://www.rivercafe.com.au)

Most customers remember the River Cafe for two things. First, the panoramic view across Torrens Lake to the city from what feels like a floating pavilion, with ducks, geese and a fountain in the foreground, is as attractive by day as it is spectacular by night. Second is head chef Sarah Whetstone's cooking, which draws on her Italian heritage with traditional dishes such as brasato, a slow-cooked beef cheek with truffled potato mash, or pappardelle with a ragu of slow-braised rabbit. But those who make it through to the end of the menu will be richly rewarded because desserts are taken very seriously here. Whetstone's pannacotta is rated the best in town, especially if flavoured with limoncello and served with candied lemon. Her

white chocolate parfait with passionfruit curd and citrus fruits, and the vanilla and amaretti cheesecake with blood orange curd are every bit as splendid as the view.

**Open:** lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat. Licensed. Desserts \$14-\$16.

### Celsius

95-97 Gouger Street, Adelaide.  
(08) 8231 6023.

[www.celsiusrestaurant.com.au](http://www.celsiusrestaurant.com.au)

Chef Ayhan Erkoç stepped into the creative stratosphere when he cooked at Copenhagen's acclaimed Noma. He carried that experience on when he opened Celsius, serving dishes such as his "vegetable patch", a colourful assembly of snails, baby vegetables, flowers and coffee-flavoured soil; or a succulent Coorong angus onglet wrapped in milk skin, carrot and turnips. Erkoç tends simply to list ingredients rather than name a dish, which is why "chocolate, coffee, banana, caramel" is an inadequate description of what is really one of Adelaide's benchmark chocolate terrines. Similarly, "yoghurt, pistachio, rose water, sumac" does little to convey the ethereal flavours of these perfect quenelles. There is a fine list of dessert wines by the glass.

**Open:** lunch Fri, dinner Tue-Sat. Licensed. Desserts \$17. Five- or eight-course degustation Sat, \$90/\$125.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### Dear Friends

100 Benara Road, Caversham.  
(08) 9279 2815.

[www.dearfriends.com.au](http://www.dearfriends.com.au)

Kiren Mainwaring's menu is driven by his almost obsessive interest in tapping into the bounty of his Swan Valley locale and his enthusiasm for making things from scratch (bread, yoghurt, cheese). Desserts are a treat – light, fresh and intriguing. The palate-cleanser is a bunch of iced grenache grapes – juicy and refreshing. The pre-dessert comes as a small jar of fresh strawberry, freeze-dried blackberry, blueberry and milk with crunchy toasted oatmeal and yoghurt. The rhubarb is from a nearby farm at Muchea. Atop a firm-ish rhubarb carpaccio is a semi-frozen ➤

## RESTAURANTS

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anglaise of rhubarb and white chocolate – light, cold and crisp. Complexity is added by a few strips of rhubarb and purple yam, and a couple of tiny white chocolate pannacotta. Another dessert offers pieces of aerated dark chocolate, honeycomb and marshmallow, enlivened by a touch of eucalyptus ice-cream (from a young bush on the property).

**Open:** lunch & dinner, Wed-Sun. Licensed. Three courses \$89. Eight-course degustation \$115, with matched wines \$70 extra.

### **Rochelle Adonis**

193 Brisbane Street, Northbridge.

(08) 9227 0007.

[www.rochelleadonis.com](http://www.rochelleadonis.com)

With an impressive CV, including a spell as head pastry chef at Aria, Rochelle Adonis started out making her signature nougat at home. The business has since grown astronomically and her name is now synonymous in Perth with desserts of

the finest quality. The Brisbane Street studio in Northbridge is Adonis' public face from which a panoply of cakes (such as Valrhona-enriched "glamingtons") and ice-creams (vanilla bean and brandy, dark chocolate with salted caramel praline) are available. The venue also offers an elegant and alluring high tea, where chef Sandro Puca struts his seasonal stuff with a plate of four savoury tastes – one of which is the ultimate feather-light cucumber sandwich – before a palate-cleanser heralds the arrival of a spectacular ever-changing dessert platter that is a triumph of imagination and technique. The flavours on offer are delicate and subtle, yet intense and lingering. The monthly dessert degustation offers sweet-toothed diners a decadent feast – but it's usually advisable to book in advance.

**Open:** brunch & lunch Wed-Sun. High tea \$45 per head. Monthly dessert degustation \$120.

## **NORTHERN TERRITORY**

### **Pee Wee's at the Point**

Alec Fong Lim Drive, East Point Reserve, Darwin. (08) 8981 6868.

[www.peeweess.com.au](http://www.peeweess.com.au)

Pee Wee's signature dessert should come with a warning: not for the faint of heart. The lavishness of the Chocolate Slut is as provocative as its name. A slab of lush Belgian chocolate ganache pudding, vanilla sable, white chocolate ice-cream and a slick of berries dare the diner to take them on. Tackle it with a friend, or try the nicely tart lime and passionfruit posset served simply with a little shortbread, pouring cream and half a passionfruit. None of the desserts is earth-shatteringly innovative, but each is a pleasant follow-on from the mod Oz dishes that draw the punters. And the setting – a broad, breezy terrace overlooking the sea and, beyond, the Darwin skyline – is perfect.

**Open:** dinner daily. Licensed. Desserts \$15-\$17. >

## RESTAURANTS

### QUEENSLAND

#### Pearl Café

28 Logan Road,  
Woolloongabba.  
(07) 3392 3300.

People leave after the second course in other, perfectly good restaurants to take their desserts in the cosy, bare-brick and dark-wood surrounds of Daniel Lewis' cafe.

A large part of the reason is pastry maven Jade Halloran, whose counter cakes appear fresh every day and always promise something chocolatey, something cheesecake, something fruity and something small, such as a perfect little square of lemon delicious awesomeness or a chocolate and peanut butter brownie that makes small children cry when it disappears from the menu. Even those who dine on the fabulous bistro menu can't seem to resist something sweet. Was the slow-cooked duck leg sandwich with spiced figs,

ONLINE

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**Open:** breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat.  
Licensed. Cakes \$8, desserts \$14.

#### E'cco Bistro

100 Boundary Street, Brisbane.  
(07) 3831 8344. [eccobistro.com](http://eccobistro.com)

E'cco is where you go when you absolutely, positively have to get it right. Important business dinner? Grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary? First date? The team at E'cco Bistro will never disappoint. Philip Johnson introduced the river city to modern dining, opting for the freshest local ingredients and drawing on a respect for

mum's pickles and cress too much? Well, too bad, because there is fig and berry clafoutis in white chocolate mascarpone to follow, or a plum and port wine jelly trifle with vanilla custard cream.

classical technique. When it comes to dessert, he likes to play with tropical flavours and the fruits of the deep north. The result is a creative tour de force, such as the passionfruit parfait with lychee mousse and kaffir lime sherbet. Old-fashioned palates, meanwhile, will love the dark, heady chocolate gâteau with soft-poached cherries, white chocolate caramel and milk gelato.

**Open:** lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat.  
Licensed. Desserts \$18.



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