

KER & DOWNEY

QUEST

THE LUXURY MAGAZINE FOR WORLD TRAVELERS



TANZANIA

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Luxe Down Under

Kathryn Romeyn chooses a sampling of Australia's greatest experiences for the ultimate adventure.

We overuse superlatives, reciting words like “awesome” and “amazing” until they are, ironically, meaningless in the face of something actually magnificent. It is during a week visiting three of Australia’s top destinations, overloaded with out-of-this-world sights, experiences and flavors, that I come to this realization. “Cool” simply doesn’t cut it when you’re sailing the Whitsunday Islands alongside a 180-degree rainbow as the sun sets in a baroque blaze of gold, mandarin and lavender.



Photos courtesy of Shangri-La Sydney

THE MELTING POT

Flying into Sydney, I catch my breath as sunlight gleams off the elegant scalloped shells of the famous Opera House and glitters over the sailboat-strewn port leading to the 134-meter-long Harbour Bridge. (The world’s largest steel arch bridge is worth a walk, if not a climb, for adrenaline junkies.)

In Sydney you are never far from water. I get closer by checking into **Shangri-La in The Rocks**, the city’s 18th-century historic district. I’m confident I have the best

view—a 180-degree aerial panorama from bridge to Opera House—in the entire city from the 35th floor of the sophisticated 565-room hotel. But my spacious blue and silver-hued perch can’t claim the only photo-worthy vista: the hotel’s revamped Horizon Club offers the same top-of-the-world lookout from 30, along with afternoon tea, canapes and bubbly. After a crystal-aided realignment courtesy of Chi, The Spa’s Healing Chakra Treatment, I make it to 36 in time to watch the sky turn a breathtaking shade of orange.

Opposite page:
Bayview of Sydney;
Right:Coffin bay
oyster grilled sea
foam; Below: A
chef prepares fish

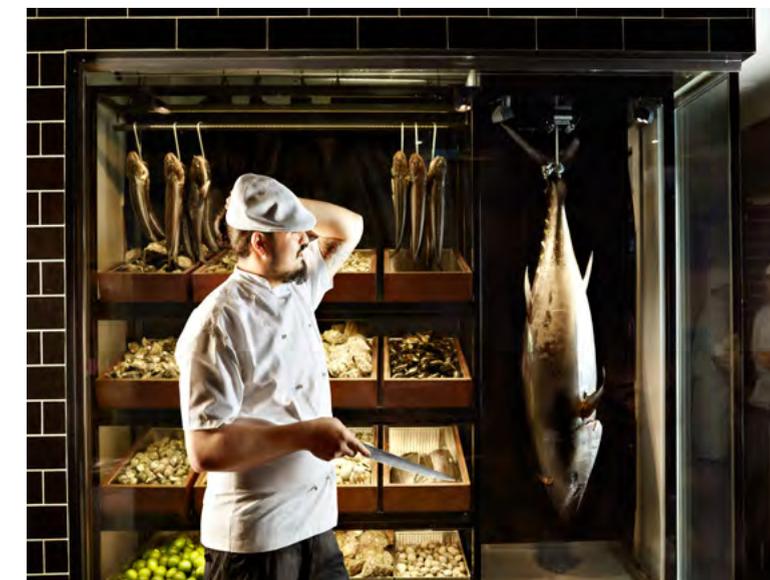


Here at Altitude restaurant, high above the sparkling city, time ceases as leisurely courses stretch on until almost midnight. Each locally sourced plate is impeccably presented, like the black slate that artfully holds delicate kingfish, icy blood orange granite, gazpacho “caviar,” crispy turnip leaves and violet petals. Not one but two desserts, cheese and truffles follow my braised Riverina lamb. Blissfully satiated, I barely make it under the silky sheets of my just-firm-enough king bed.

A jam-packed day of sightseeing offsets last night’s indulgence, starting with the peculiar kangaroos, majestic giraffes, sleepy koalas and hilarious monkeys at Taronga Zoo. During a fascinating Opera House tour I anticipate the conclusion to the legend of its construction as I would the climax of a nail-biter. Bubbles at the recently redone Opera Bar and a stroll through the Royal Botanic Gardens follow.

Later I visit Marque, in hip Surry Hills, for an epic adventure in innovative new Australian fine dining. Owner Mark Best is a gold mine electrician-turned-chef who cut his teeth in France before opening this award-winning restaurant in 1999. Inside the elegant dining room, the wine-paired nine-course degustation menu begins with a sea urchin and salmon mousse bang. Courses follow highlighting virtually every protein imaginable, from spanner crab with almond gelee, popcorn powder and herring roe—a dish Best credits as the first time he “found his voice”—to crispy fried octopus, bass grouper with dehydrated scallop “scales,” and impeccable seared Wagyu sirloin with gherkins.

Like Los Angeles, the capital of New South Wales is made of suburbs, each with their own charms. I pop into a hot spot: the 200-suite **QT Sydney**, a former theater now lined with vintage movie posters, colorful furniture and a gift shop of curiosities. A trip to the award-winning SpaQ for a tarry in the hammam-inspired steam room and a tension-melting Mastery Massage eases my travel weary muscles.



Photos courtesy of Marque | QT Sydney

There are heaps of luxury designer boutiques, countless cafes and top restaurants just steps down the bustling sidewalk. After a gin cocktail in the QT’s hip streetside Parlour Lane Roasters (order a flat white by day) I’m introduced to Sydney’s beautiful people, food and wine at the brasserie-style Gowings Bar & Grill upstairs. The low-lit dining room is buzzing with conversation and music; chic diners crowd around the glowing metallic bar as I devour beer-steamed prawn cocktail, spit-roasted chicken, black truffle mac and cheese and spicy Tasmanian Pinot Noir.

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

The next day takes me from an ocean-centric city of 4.5 million to a sea of red dirt in the middle of nowhere—460 kilometers from the closest large town, to be exact. I'm literally seeing red as the plane lands and I catch my first glimpse of Uluru, the immense, iconic rock at the heart of Australia's outback. My eyes stay glued to the ancient Northern Territory landmark—a 348-meter-tall sedimentary sandstone mass surrounded by rusty desert—as I step into the warm breeze. Immediately I'm whisked through the thick heat into a black SUV, A/C cranked up.

On the short drive to **Longitude 131°** I learn that while it's frequently called Ayers Rock, Uluru is its original name, given by the indigenous Anangu tribe. The inimitable monolith is the focal point here. We pull up to the intimate, all-inclusive Baillie Lodges resort where I'll be glamping, with heavy emphasis on the "glam" part. Amid red dunes, pristine white peaks mark the 15 recently renovated, beautifully appointed "tents," main lodge and pool.

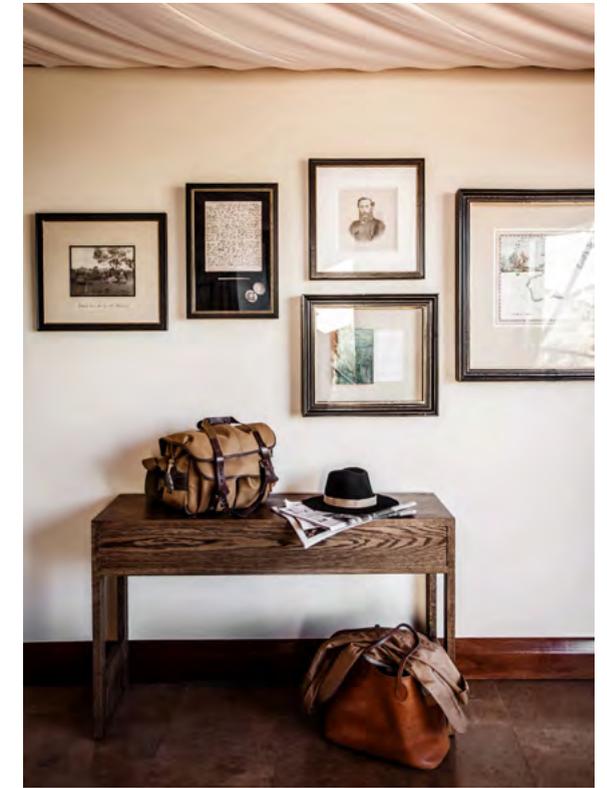
Over a lovely flower-strewn lunch of beef tatami, chicken with pistachio quinoa and Western Australia rosé, I gaze at the now-rusty orange rock. Later, over canapés and cocktails with the South African guide Nico at Kantju Gorge, I watch a vertical face of Uluru glow bright coral in the setting sun. And at dawn the next morning when I flip a switch and the blackout shade rises, deep aubergine is all I see, as rays of light seep through the clouds in slits creating bluish shadows in its crevices. Of course the tent, clad in vibrant aboriginal artwork, is oriented to face Uluru. Because watching it shift color is the preferred pastime here. The Anangu ask that visitors not climb the rippling landmark. And though I hardly touch it, the rock and I get intimate, thanks to comprehensive tour experiences by Longitude's incredible guides. During outings with Nico and Blythe, I learn that Uluru was formed

underground over hundreds of millions of years, emerging two million ago. Its height only represents 10 percent of its mass (it may reach down another six to seven kilometers). It is part of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site based on natural, aesthetic and cultural beauty—only the second place on the planet to be recognized for the latter.

Visible stories painted or drawn into the dirt with a stick reveal that each gash, outcropping and cave has a meaning in the mystical Anangu creation story. I'm also educated on the uniquely-adapted flora and fauna. After a light rain which produces a stunningly-wide rainbow en route to the chunky sedimentary domes of sacred Kata Tjuta, I find that Uluru's massive neighbor has a similarly humbling effect.

My second night, an impressive electrical storm begins during the sunset sand-dune walk, and I stubbornly stand in the quickening rain as long as it's safe to watch the sky melt into fiery splendor and lightning strike down around the rocks. This prevents me from dining under the stars, but it means I witness the desert's version of fireworks from inside, while sipping a sweet and sour passion fruit gimlet and indulging in exquisite bites of buttery lobster tail and dessert featuring quandongs, a native bush fruit. Overnight I really experience my surroundings, as extreme winds shake my tent and me, while ensconced in the heavenly bed. Still, within minutes, like a baby, the wilds of nature lull me into the deepest of sleeps.

Before departing I get my favorite Uluru view yet, at Mutujulu Waterhole. There are lilies clustered on the surface and a vivid reflection in the rippling pool of the textured rock and brilliant blue sky above. Standing there silently feels almost spiritual. I hate leaving this fascinating place, but the tropical waters of the Great Barrier Reef beckon.



Photos courtesy of Kara Rosenlund

Photos clockwise from top: Longitude 131°; Aboriginal artwork fills the tents; A day exploring Uluru; The cozy interior of the tents.

“Visible stories painted or drawn into the dirt with a stick reveal that each gash, outcropping and cave has a meaning in the mystical Anangu creation story.”



THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Just minutes after landing on Hamilton Island, I board the luxury yacht Sun Goddess, a glass of Azahara Pinot Noir bubbly in hand. Less than an hour later we dock at the recently reopened 160-room **One&Only Hayman Island**, the only destination on the private Whitsundays islands encircled by white sandy beaches and picturesque palm trees. As with the red rock, life here revolves around one thing: water. Mere minutes after entering my airy, spacious suite, I find myself taking a running leap off the wooden deck into the turquoise saltwater of the Southern Hemisphere's biggest pool.

But I'm not here to simply laze around with icy One&Only Coladas, however delicious they are. With seven restaurants (including Aquazure for tasty tapas), two pools, a beachfront full of watersport equipment and boats, a gym and spa, guests can be as busy or as relaxed as they like. Not wanting to miss anything, I dive right in.

My first order of business is a life-changing pedicure. Created by Parisian podiatrist Bastien Gonzalez, the water-free and lacquer-less treatment is more medical than it is indulgent—a drill and scalpel make appearances. But the final result, after a rigorous buffing that I'm fairly certain leaves my therapist Jeremy in a sweat, is absolute magic. My naked tootsies haven't looked this pristine since the day I was born. Next up: coddling. The Rebalance Ritual treatment involves a therapeutic back massage using steaming poultices of camphor and orange, plus a facial using wild-harvested Amala skincare and scalp massage.

Fitting of my postcard-perfect surroundings, sleeping here is a dream—there's even an extensive pillow menu. (Guests who've racked up five stays are awarded their own personal sets of sheets and towels.) It's the next day, fol-

lowing a punishing early-morning workout session, that I discover rain can be a blessing. If not for overcast skies, I would have flagged in the scorching sun when a speedboat drops me at Langford Island's long sandbar to snorkel and picnic. I might not have followed one gorgeous iridescent green and cobalt parrotfish as he too explored the undulating reef, taking nibbles of colorful coral as he swam. And without the rain during a sublime evening catamaran cruise I wouldn't have gotten to swoon over the overwhelmingly-spectacular rainbows and sunset.

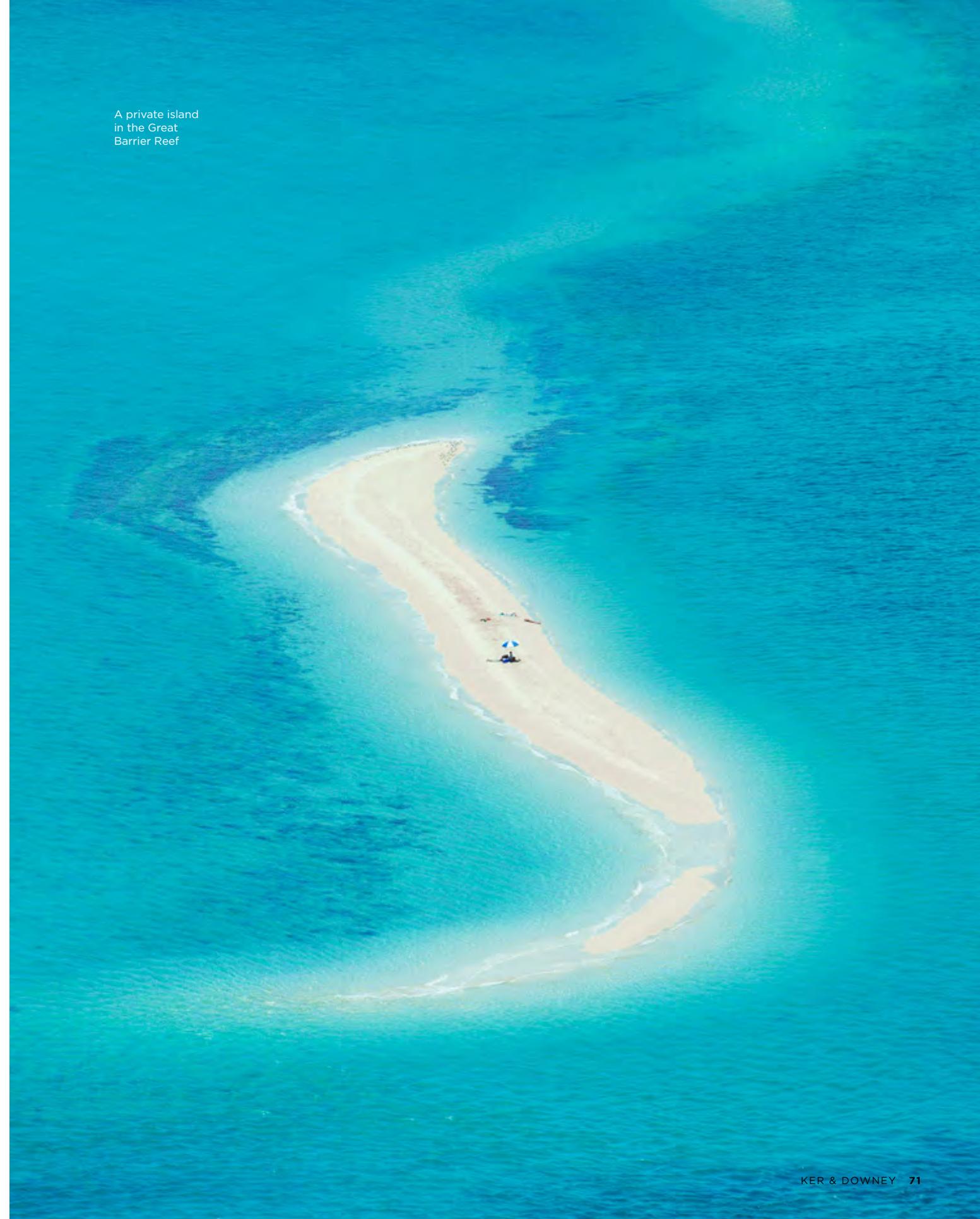
With a heady post-sail buzz from the glowing sky and champagne, I settle in at Fire, the resort's fine-dining restaurant. I'm fixated on one thing: the imposing tomahawk steak, which general manager Guenter Gebhard has advised shouldn't be missed. The tableside fanfare that comes with the some two-and-a-half-pound salt-crusted cut from Sydney's famed Victor Churchill butcher works, mounting anticipation for the first bite, which appropriately actually melts in my mouth.

When it comes time to leave this adventure playground—after squeezing in one last paddleboard session—I get my biggest thrill yet: the ultimate exit courtesy of the resort's gleaming white helicopter, set to take me over the Great Barrier Reef before the airport. My time in the heli is spent soaring over wonders of the world—Hardy Reef, Hook Reef and finally the must-see Heart Reef—formidable sea life (sharks, stingrays, turtles), and one of the world's most impressive whitest-sand beaches. I marvel at phenomenal shades of blue I didn't know existed, frenetically snapping photos and taking mental notes of the soft sands and hypnotic underwater swirls I'll visit next time. Because without a doubt, this is a place to which I'll return.



The Hayman Family Suite

A private island in the Great Barrier Reef



Photos courtesy of The One&Only Hayman Island

EAT & DRINK IN SYDNEY

In the past, Melbourne claimed Oz's most talked about food scene, but thanks to a spate of ambitious young chefs leaving legendary kitchens to start their own cool ventures, plus continued innovation at the city's finest establishments, Sydney is now a gastronome's paradise.



The exterior of Bar H

With a cool, edgy feel, the intimate Bar H, opened in the fashionable suburb of Surry Hills in 2010 by a husband-wife chef-sommelier team, puts a twist on wine bar cuisine via nods to China, Japan and indigenous Australian ingredients. Part of the joy of dining here is watching the incredibly precise cooking and plating, thus the bar has the best seats in the house. The tasting menu expertly showcases not only gorgeous protein but vegetables as well (you'll dream of the simple yet mind-blowing tempura-fried corn), with interesting pairings ranging from cider to sake to vino, of course.

While much of the food in Sydney is currently Japanese-influenced, Cho Cho San in Potts Point is pure Tokyo. The modern white-on-white restaurant—opened last summer—is where diners sip inventive cocktails like the Ryeuchi, which combines Bulleit rye whiskey with yuzu, Luxardo, sour cherry, lemon and ginger, and share plates of fluffy pork steamed buns, savory soy-glazed wagyu beef with pickled veggies, crunchy karaage fried chicken with lime, and absolutely fantastic raw kingfish with ginger, soy and cucumber. Careful: it's addictive.



Photos: One of Cho Cho San's exquisite dishes and dining area



Photos courtesy of Bar H | Cho Cho San | The Bridge Room | Sepia

Thanks in part to his diverse CV and time in Europe and Asia, South African chef/co-owner Ross Lusted has made The Bridge Room one of Sydney's best eateries since opening in 2011. With a chic, relaxed atmosphere, adventurous wines and flawless service, he turns out artfully-plated dishes (atop ceramics he designed) that are almost too beautiful to eat: grilled calamari with dandelions and pomelo- and watermelon-topped kingfish sashimi among them. Then there are concoctions like the cubes of robata-grilled raw beef with shitake mushrooms and puffed jobs tears, and whipped black sesame with melon and coconut that will have you seriously considering ordering seconds.



Sepia offers perhaps the most exciting culinary adventure around. At this swanky Restaurant of the Year 2015 (Sydney Morning Herald), chef Martin Benn's degustation menu is a long and extremely rich journey through dishes that surprise and totally wow—think a simultaneously smoky and bright yellowfin tuna sashimi tube filled with jamon Iberico cream along with wasabi and pork cracklings, and something simply called The Pearl which, once shattered with a spoon, reveals a delightfully-crunchy, cool interior of gingerade “snow,” finger lime and raspberry. Even the bread—Japanese milk bread—is memorable. Of course the wine game is spot-on, too. Sommeliers share everything about each pairing, from the history of the Sicilian Marsala grape to the orientation of the sparkling Shiraz's vineyards in South Australia.

Photos left: An elegant dish at The Bridge Room; Right: South African chef/owner Ross Lusted; Below: a decadent dessert at Cafe Paci; Bottom left: The interior of Sepia



Finnish chef Pasi Petanen and his restaurant-manager partner, Zoltan Magyar, are young guns who set out together after years at Marquee. From a gray-toned second floor spot in the hip 'hood of Darlinghurst, the pair seem to be running for longest pop-up ever with their wildly creative Cafe Paci. Start with a “snack”—dried rainbow trout “floss,” dill and smoked sour cream on crispy rye—then move along to kingfish sashimi with white onions and oyster cream, and delicious Muscovy duck breast with cherries and chewy dried-then-rehydrated beetroot. Desserts pair unexpected elements to stunning results: corn powder with butter-flavored cotton candy, carrot sorbet with licorice cake, and pork crackling with chocolate and fennel.