

CASTLE







LOCAVORE.

M A I N E

The gold rush may be over, but this vibrant town 90 minutes north of Melbourne has more than its fair share of treasures. Castlemaine is experiencing a gilded renaissance, with **Tim Sproal** from Boomtown Winemakers Cooperative leading the charge.

WORDS LINDY ALEXANDER PHOTOGRAPHY EVE WILSON

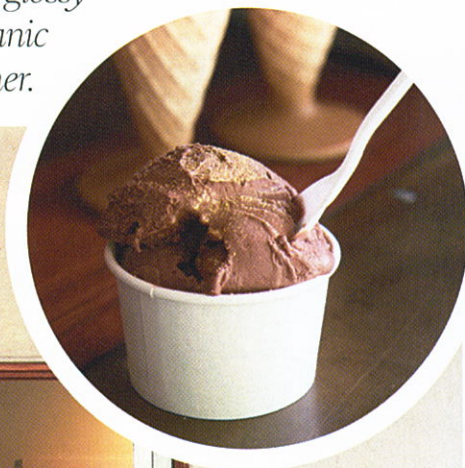
 @lindy_alexander_

 @alexander_lindy

FROM FAR LEFT: The Mill operates as a local food hub; Margot Wine Bar is classically stylish; Public Inn celebrates all that's best about the region; Das Kaffeehaus roasts its own beans in The Mill.

1 PERFECT PASTRY

Follow your nose to Johnny Baker's (rear 359 Barker St), a little shop selling pastries, tarts and pies. "The croissants are the best I've had," says Sproal. The reason for that flaky goodness? Belgian butter. "All the water has been taken out," says chef John Stekerhofs (right). "It's 99.9 per cent butterfat." The result is golden croissants, escargots and glossy Danish pastries laden with organic fruit. Don't overlook the pies either.



3 COOL SPOT FOR A COLD DRINK

The Bridge Hotel (21 Walker St) is the coolest pub in Castlemaine. "They have a really great drinks list," says Sproal. "It's Melbourne-chic – you can even get a Tasmanian sheep's whey vodka! They really support small craftspeople within the food and beverage world."

2

ARTISANAL ICES

TO GET LOCALS THROUGH SUMMER, HELEN ADDISON-SMITH (ABOVE) WHIPS UP SMALL BATCHES OF ICE CREAM AND SERVES THEM OUT OF A LITTLE HOLE IN THE WALL AT THE MILL (6F/9 WALKER ST). "MY FAVOURITE ICE CREAM SOCIAL FLAVOUR IS THE GRAPEFRUIT AND LOCALLY MADE MAIDENIE VERMOUTH," SAYS SPROAL. "IT'S UNREAL." OTHER FLAVOURS TO TRY INCLUDE 'CHEER UP EMO KID' (CHOCOLATE AND BLACK SESAME) AND 'GOLD DIGGER' (CHOCOLATE WITH HONEYCOMB AND FLECKS OF GOLD).

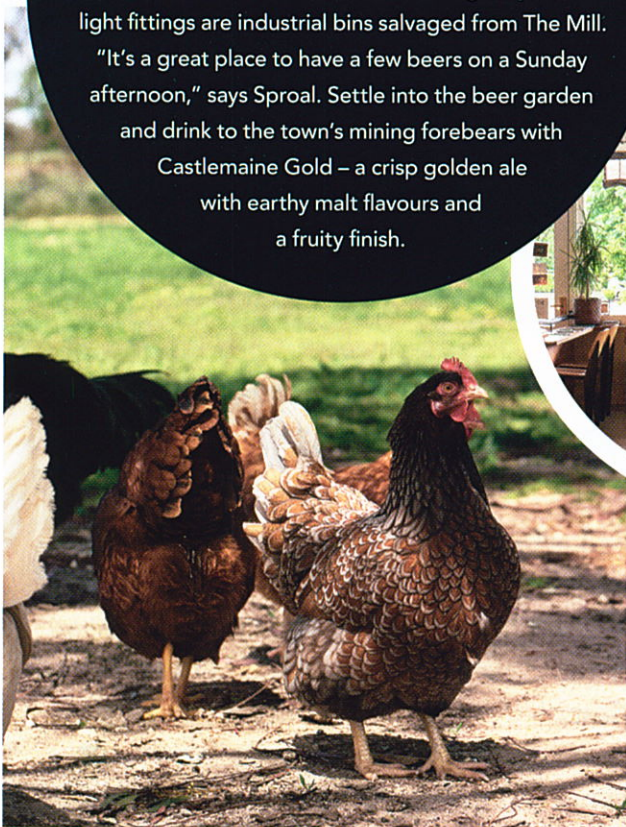


HANDMADE ICE CREAM
Peanut butter fudge
Gingerbread
Apple Crumble
Chocolate
Cheer Up Emo Kid
Zin Garden (DF)
Sugar Daddy
Strawberry (DF)
Licorice
Kids cone \$3
Single \$4.50
Double \$6
Veggie \$11
1/2 L \$8

7

GET TAPPY

It's been a long time since Castlemaine XXXX was brewed in town, but beer is back in a big way with Castlemaine Brewing Company having only recently opened the **The Taproom** (5A/9 Walker St – above). A stripped-down hangout, the bar is made from a reclaimed bowling alley and the light fittings are industrial bins salvaged from The Mill. "It's a great place to have a few beers on a Sunday afternoon," says Sproal. Settle into the beer garden and drink to the town's mining forebears with Castlemaine Gold – a crisp golden ale with earthy malt flavours and a fruity finish.



9 THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Pay homage to the humble chook at **Bress** (3894 Harmony Way, Harcourt), an artisanal restaurant, cidery and winery named after France's finest fowl. A three-course set menu (\$60) is the best way to navigate the seasonal offerings – think broad bean croquettes with preserved lemon mayo, slow-roasted lamb leg, and orange and polenta cake – all while you sit outside gazing up at the granite outcrops of Mount Alexander.



8 VIEW FROM THE TOP

Set high, overlooking the town, **The Governor's Cafe** (36-48 Bowden St), is a welcoming space in the former governor's residence at the Old Castlemaine Gaol. Its menu is divided into 'naughty' and 'nice' sections, but the truth is, all the food is stellar.



WINE TIME

OPEN TILL LATE, **MARGOT WINE BAR** (114 HARGRAVES ST) IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO DROP IN FOR PRE- OR POST-MOVIE DRINKS AND NIBBLES. THE DECOR IS SIMPLE BUT REFINED, WITH GLASS ORBS SUSPENDED OVER THE TIMBER TABLES AND CHURCH PEWS. "MARGOT IS A REALLY STYLISH PLACE THAT HAS A BEAUTIFUL ATMOSPHERE," SAYS SPROAL. "IT'S BOTH WARM AND SOPHISTICATED."

