

LOCAVORE.

## 11 SWEET SPOT

AN AGED FARMHOUSE TABLE, LIME-WASHED WALLS AND EARTHY CERAMICS ADD TO THE FRENCH PROVINCIAL FEEL OF **FIG CAFE** (31 TEMPLETON ST). "WE LIKE FEEDING PEOPLE WITH THE BEST LOCAL PRODUCE," SAYS VICKY FALCONER WHO, TOGETHER WITH HER DAUGHTER, JULIA BANDELLI, CREATES A SMALL BUT PERFECTLY BALANCED MENU THAT CHANGES WEEKLY. THE GLASS CABINET HOLDS ALL MANNER OF SWEET TREATS. SPROAL'S FAVOURITE? THE CARAMELISED PORTUGUESE TARTS.

## 12 ON TRACK

It's not the prettiest, but **The Railway Hotel** (65 Gingell St) makes up for it with locally sourced, punchy food like a radicchio and quinoa salad (right). "Chef Brunno Rocha Melo is doing things that your regular pub might not," says Sproal. Order the trout if it's on – chances are he caught it himself.



## 13 MARKET MEET-UP

Saturday mornings are all about **Wesley Hill Market** (149 Pyrenees Hwy). Sproal likes to pick up a loaf or two of bread from the **Sprout Bakery** stall where baker Paul Demchy has an open-door policy, welcoming different people to use his space to bake goods. "Change keeps it fresh," he says. "But if I took away the brownie (left) from **Peddling Pastry** I'd see a revolt."



## 14 SMOKING HOT

Housed in the cosy old fire station with a wall of oak wine barrels, **Public Inn** (26a Templeton St) is the most acclaimed restaurant in town. "It's the most refined food offering," says Sproal. "It plays a great role in communicating what this region has to offer in terms of food and wine." It's hard to go past the beautifully plated autumnal roast duck spelt, duck farce and lardons. ✕

FIRE BRIGADE STATION

CASTLE MAINE

1906

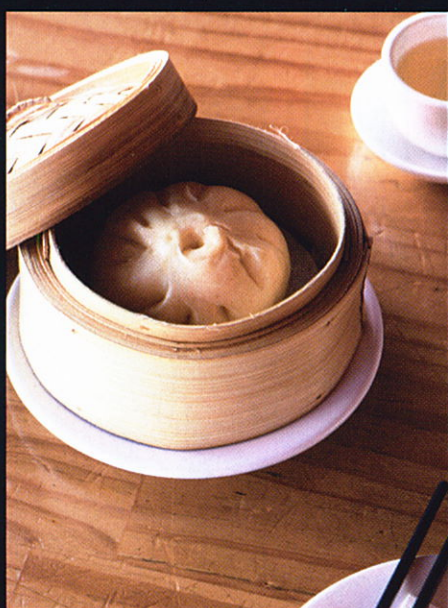


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### 4 A TASTE OF EUROPE

In a grand room at the bottom of the 93-year-old red-brick chimney of The Mill is

**Das Kaffeehaus** (9 Walker St). The lavish Viennese-style cafe (right) transports you to another time with its marble-topped tables, enormous teardrop chandelier and red leather banquettes. The food is deliciously modest compared to its extravagant surrounds, but "there's something really wonderful about a boiled egg, a bit of cheese, cured meat, some bread and a coffee", says Sproal. "It's very continental." The coffee, roasted on site, is superb.



### 5 ORIENT EXPRESS

They've been called the best steamed pork buns in the nation. Joe Lam tucks juicy pieces of free-range pork into pillowy, house-made white dough (above) at **Taste of the Orient** (233 Barker St). "It's ridiculously good quality," says Sproal. Other winning dishes include delicately pleated mushroom and water chestnut dumplings, and steamed egg-custard buns made with organic coconut cream.



### 6 PEACHY KEEN

"Katie and Hugh Finlay (above) from Mt Alexander Fruit Gardens (69 Damns Rd, Harcourt) are two of the best growers in the region," says Sproal. "Their white peaches are a reason to move to Castlemaine." You can pick up some of the 90 varieties of certified organic stone fruit, apples, plums and pears from the monthly Castlemaine Farmers' Market or from their farm gate, which is open through summer.



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**T**here's a transformation happening in Victoria's goldfields, the beating heart of which is an old red-brick industrial woollen mill in Castlemaine. The Mill Castlemaine (1/9 Walker St) has been revitalised by the arrival of winemakers, brewers, bakers, coffee roasters and a vintage bazaar.

"For a relatively small town, people are so engaged with their food and wine," says Tim Sproal (right), one of three friends who have joined forces to form Boomtown Winemakers Cooperative. "Jarad Curwood, Patrick Underwood and I share our knowledge and winemaking equipment at The Mill, where we create wines under the Boomtown brand as well as our own individual labels," says Sproal. "The Mill is a new precinct full of great food and drink makers, and other creatives. The gold rush and big industry has left this space, and an awesome local family has come in and made it available to small producers who have a common passion."

Sproal's approach to winemaking is indicative of the food movement throughout the area, which respects seasonality and place. "The Boomtown wines are regional blends made without adding anything," he says. "We let the grapes ferment spontaneously using wild yeasts. We are trying to give people an honest interpretation of what Central Victorian wine is like."

The food and wine scene in this Central Victorian town is undoubtedly booming – here Sproal shares his top picks for a gold-plated experience.

