

## Eating out in and around Hobart

16 Feb 2012 by Nick Lander/FT

On the waterfront at Hobart, the capital of Tasmania and the home to what I was reliably informed is the best-preserved collection of Georgian buildings outside the UK, is a large noticeboard. On it is a plethora of useful civic information such as the times of the church services and local taxi numbers as well as a number of business cards from local restaurants that gives the mistaken impression that the local cuisine is predominantly Indian.

In true understated Australian fashion, the tone of all this is also rather low key because within immediate walking distance of this noticeboard are four very different, exciting and distinctive places to eat.

The first two, the Tricycle Café and Smolt, are tucked away just off Salamanca Avenue, where the major farmers' market takes place every Saturday morning.

The former, close to the entrance to the Peacock Theatre, is run by Adam Jones and Megan Quill with an obvious and heartfelt passion for top quality ingredients. We had two excellent meals here, a lunch of chickpea fritters and salad and a toasted sourdough sandwich stuffed with ham and cheese, and a breakfast in the sunshine where the star of the show was Tricycle trifle, a tall glass layered with fresh local apricots, granola and yoghurt, pictured above by Chris Crerar. Their coffee is excellent, too.

Smolt is only a few hundred yards away but very different. It is set in a modern building with a low ceiling, that, combined with an open kitchen and some obviously very happy customers when we walked in at 7.30pm, meant that the place was as noisy as anywhere in London or New York.

But Smolt's team, ably led by Kif Weber, are highly professional and handle not just their boisterous clientele with charm but also a wide ranging menu that takes in pizzas, pasta and a wide range of main courses. Particularly impressive were a dish of grilled tuna; a creamy risotto topped with juicy scallops; and a series of vegetable small plates.

Both Smolt and Fish Frenzy, right on the waterfront and specialising in Tasmania's popular food and wine combination of fish and chips with a glass of the local Pinot Noir, would be fun for anyone travelling in a group.

Only a few hundred yards from the water, and close to an outpost of Lark's Distillery that makes the island's excellent whisky, is The Mill on Morrison which was so full of 25-35 year olds having a good time on a busy Wednesday evening that it reminded me of a bustling restaurant in London's Shoreditch.

The interior, once the ground floor of the city's flour mill built in the 1850's, combines cast iron columns and thick wooden beams with an ultra-modern menu: a large paper table mat that encompasses a whole range of small, medium and large plates all at different prices. Excellent oysters from Bruny and Woody Islands; fried squid with lemon jam and octopus with celeriac remoulade (\$10 each); plates of ham and a dish of crisp slices of Spring bay abalone with vanilla fennel (\$15); and for the more adventurous, a grilled wallaby porterhouse (\$30).

The following day I was to get an inkling of why menu prices in Australia seem so high to anyone visiting with weak sterling or euros in their pockets during a conversation with Joseph Burton, manager of The Source, the restaurant at MONA, the extraordinary museum created by David Walsh, a half an hour's boat ride from the city.

While the Australian dollar is pervasively strong, the country's restaurateurs are also having to cope not just with rising food and labour costs but also the long established practice of BYO, that allows customers to bring their own wine for free or only a minimal charge, but simultaneously deprives them of what is in every other part of the world, any restaurateur's biggest source of profit.

At The Source, set in the Moorilla vineyard that Walsh also owns, Burton does not allow BYO and he and chef Philippe Leban run a restaurant of great distinction. Their own, excellent beer-fermented bread and stunning first courses of a shrimp consommé with onion ravioli and warm jack mackerel with a wasabi cream were the culinary highlights. But the most memorable moment came when a young Australian at the next table, wearing shorts, thongs and sunglasses

perched on his head, took his first sip of the excellent Grosset Polish Hill Riesling Burton had just poured, nodded his approval and then nonchalantly added, 'Come back soon and we can talk about the red burgundies.' Restaurateurs in the rest of the world would love lunchtime customers like this!

The architecture of another restaurant set in a winery, Meadowbank close to the airport, makes such effective use of glass and wood that it reminded me of the seminal design of the initial Robert Mondavi winery in Napa, California. But that aside, everything else is pure Tasmania: uninterrupted views of the bucolic countryside that are the lure for the rapidly growing number of visitors from Asia; crisp red and white wines; a tartare of ocean trout; plump Spring Bay mussels with cream and herbs; and, the shock for anyone from the Northern Hemisphere, fresh apricots in February.

Tricycle Café, 77 Salamanca Place, 03 6223 7228

Smolt, 2 Salamanca Square, [www.smolt.com.au](http://www.smolt.com.au)

Fish Frenzy, [www.fishfrenzy.com.au](http://www.fishfrenzy.com.au)

The Mill on Morrison, 11 Morrison Street,

The Source, [www.mona.net.au](http://www.mona.net.au)

Meadowbank, [www.meadowbankwines.com.au](http://www.meadowbankwines.com.au)

See also [Jancis on the Tasmanian wine scene](#).