



State of independence

Perth's food and drink scene has undergone a sea-change of late, with chic menus replacing the more basic fare of old. Michael Harden meets the energetic local chefs and winemakers leading the revolution

PHOTOGRAPHY BY EWEN BELL





This page, clockwise from top: Millbrook Winery; a pink bottlebrush in Kings Park; the vibrant Geraldton wax. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: mountain bells; dessert at Mandoon Estate's Wild Swan; the restaurant's dining room; ice cream on the estate; an Olive Farm Wines white; cider at Core Cider House; a golden wattle tree; the red wattlebird; fish at Wild Swan; Island Market; a cheeseboard at Olive Farm Wines; the winery restaurant's playful design; a Swan Valley mural; native banksia; Kings Park flora; clams at Pinky's Beach Club

Travel information

Perth is the capital and largest city of the state of Western Australia, aka WA. Currency is the Australian dollar (AUD) and time is eight hours ahead of GMT. Flights from the UK take around 17 hours. In January the average high is 31C and the average low is 16C.

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies direct from London Heathrow to Perth Airport. qantas.com
Qatar Airways offers flights from London Gatwick with one stop at Hamad International Airport in Doha. qatarairways.com

RESOURCES

Tourism Western Australia is the state's official tourist board and its website is packed with useful information to help you plan your trip, from upcoming events to tours, culture and wildlife. westernaustralia.com

It's 8.30am at Trigg Beach, a stretch of coastline in Perth's northern suburbs. The sky is clear, save for a horizontal formation of stratus cloud on the horizon, and the even, rolling Indian Ocean swell has attracted groups of surfers of all ages and abilities. Young teenagers are reluctantly leaving the water, rinsing themselves off and stowing their boards ahead of changing into their school uniforms. Older surfers, tanned in shorts and T-shirts, are having coffee and breakfast at Island Market, a casually sophisticated restaurant overlooking the beach with unbeatable ocean views from its outdoor deck and wall of windows. People walk dogs and stop to chat. The pace, in surfer parlance, is chilled.

If you're looking for a manifestation of the famed 'Perth lifestyle', the scene at Trigg Beach this morning is hard to beat. And while the sun-sand-surf triumvirate has long been a part of Perth's DNA, good-looking hang-outs like Island Market, with its great coffee, quality booze and excellent local ingredients cooked with skill, are a more recent phenomenon in Australia's fourth-largest city.

'The last five years or so has seen quite a revolution in the Perth dining market,' says George Kailis, owner of Island Market and three other hospitality venues in Perth and Fremantle, just south of the Western Australian capital. Kailis is ideally placed to recognise revolution in the Perth food scene, his extended family having been involved in hospitality, fish markets and pearls since his grandfather migrated to Australia from Greece a century ago.

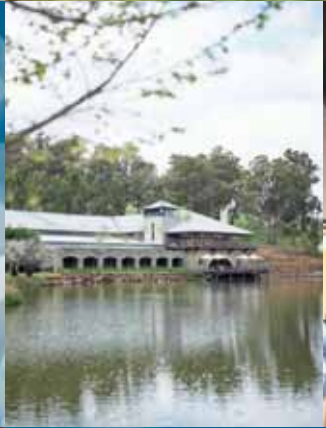
'In the northern suburbs particularly, it used to be about burgers and fish and chips but now people are more educated; they want to try something more sophisticated that reflects local produce and the things we do best in Western Australia. What's been happening in Perth marks a real and exciting shift.'

Island Market makes his case. At breakfast there's a blue swimmer crab omelette made with local crab, while the lunch and dinner menus are comprised of great local produce like Fremantle octopus, grilled and served with chorizo and local artichokes, and cured ocean trout with salmon roe and taramasalata. You might not be able to get a burger here but you can get cooked-to-order pide bread stuffed with lamb shawarma and green chilli yoghurt. It's modern, casual food, mirroring the new gastronomic wave that's rolling through Perth and its surrounding regions.

Perth is no stranger to new shifts and changes of fortune. Named after Perth in Scotland and founded on the Swan River in 1829 as a British colony, it is one of the most isolated major cities in the world, closer to Jakarta than to Sydney and more than 2,000km from any other city. The isolation meant Perth initially struggled to attract settlers but after gold was discovered in the late 19th century, the population exploded and the city —————>>







Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Fremantle street art; chef Benoit Lasplace of Mistelle café, Perth Hills; Myattsfield Winery flowers; verdant WA; a quokka; Trigg Beach views; Wild Swan; sea blue; a Rottnest Island food truck; foliage in Kings Park; catching a wave; the Perth coastline; Island Market; local colour; Millbrook Winery; Myattsfield Winery; one of the Millbrook team. This page, clockwise from top: an aerial view of the Swan Coastal Plain; a Wild Seafood Experience tour; participants enjoy wine and Rottnest Island views; local lobster



experienced a building boom that birthed many of the grand Victorian buildings and characterful shopping arcades that remain an important part of its texture and identity.

As the capital of a state rich in mineral wealth – not just gold but iron ore, nickel, diamonds, coal, oil and natural gas – Perth's fortunes are closely tied to those of the mining industry and, right now, signs of the most recent mining boom are everywhere.

New transport infrastructure projects run beside impressive structures like the recently completed 65,000-seat Perth Stadium, with its state-of-the-art lighting and video technology. The city's many parks and gardens, including Kings Park (one of the world's largest inner-city parks, at 400ha), are meticulously maintained and bursting with native plant and bird life, the raucous cries of cockatoos and galahs an integral part of the city's soundtrack.

Perth's central business district has also undergone transformation with new precincts – Cathedral Square, Yagan Square, Elizabeth Quay – bristling with street art and sculpture, bars, cafés and restaurants that are among the best in the country.

At Cathedral Square, the 140-year-old State Buildings complex (formerly the Lands, Titles and Treasury Buildings) has been meticulously and expensively renovated and restored and is now one of the city's dining and retail hubs. It also houses the city's best hotel, Como The Treasury, with its palatial rooms —————>>

Where to stay

Alex Hotel This breezy, modern hotel in the (sometimes noisy) nightclub precinct blends smartly appointed, compact rooms with excellent public spaces that offer good snacks and an honour bar. One for the young and the young at heart. Doubles from £110. *50 James Street, 00 61 8 6430 4000, alexhotel.com.au*

Como The Treasury Perth's best hotel in the centrally located State Buildings is a beautiful mix of style and grandeur, from enormous high-ceilinged suites to a light-filled swimming pool and gracious, professional service. Don't miss dinner at signature restaurant Wildflower. Doubles from £219. *1 Cathedral Avenue, 00 61 8 6168 7888, comohotels.com*

The National Hotel This beautifully restored Victorian-era pub in the heart of Fremantle has 12 spacious hotel suites with slick, contemporary bathrooms, thoughtfully stocked mini bars and a spectacular rooftop bar with top-notch views spanning far over the Freo rooftops. Doubles from £88. *98 High Street, Fremantle, 00 61 8 9335 6688, nationalhotelfremantle.com.au*

QT Perth Stylish, purpose-built, wittily appointed luxury pad in the centre of Perth that offers spacious rooms and bathrooms alongside excellent service, a great restaurant (Santini) and a rooftop cocktail bar frequented by hotel guests and locals alike. Doubles from £140. *133 Murray Street, Perth, 00 61 8 9225 8000, qtperth.com*



This page, clockwise from top: aubergine at Wildflower; street art; seafood at Strange Company; surfers; Fremantle Esplanade; Greg Leaver of Strange Company. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: the shore; city scenes; surfing before work; chef Matthew Sartori; the Alex Hotel; Pinky's Beach Club; Elizabeth Quay; Perth CBD; street scenes; a bird mural; Pinky's Beach Club clams; the Wildflower menu; one of the restaurant's starters; the pool at Como The Treasury; sea spray

and impressive views of St George's Cathedral and the beautifully manicured, palm tree-studded Supreme Court Gardens.

The State Buildings' interiors are elegant and spacious, with stone finishes and soaring ceiling heights. The businesses have all been chosen to highlight Western Australian artisans and produce and include a florist called Fox and Rabbit that deals exclusively in local flora, including prehistoric-looking banksias and the state's floral emblem, the kangaroo paw. There's also Sue Lewis Chocolatier, where Lewis, a British chef who migrated to Perth seven years ago, makes chocolates flavoured with indigenous ingredients such as lemon myrtle, macadamia nuts, saltbush and sandalwood nuts.

At Petition Kitchen, a chic warehouse-like space that highlights the building's original bones, chef Jesse Blake dishes up fresh, simple food like Geraldton snapper cured with lime and anchovies. Petition also operates Beer Corner, a designer beer hall offering 18 mostly local craft beers on tap and also a wine bar and retail space that emphasises the output from local wine regions, including the Perth Hills and the Swan Valley – both on the city's doorstep.

Just under half an hour's drive from Perth, the Swan Valley is Western Australia's oldest wine region and one of the food bowls for the city. Wine was once secondary to the fruit grown here – table grapes, stone fruit, citrus and melons – by immigrants from Greece, Italy and the former Yugoslavia, but as new generations have arrived, the region's identity has become more wine-focused. Its fertile soils and warm Mediterranean climate are ideal not just for the signature varieties like verdelho, shiraz and cabernet that have been grown here for 185 years, but also for more recent varieties: grenache, vermentino and petit verdot. —————>>

Food glossary

Blue manna crab Bay-dwelling species of crab indigenous to Western Australia with a mild, sweet flesh and high meat-to-shell ratio

Geraldton wax Plant endemic to WA recognisable for its small pink flowers and leaves that have a distinct clean citrus flavour

Goldband snapper One of the most popular species of snapper in WA and in high demand. It has a firm, flaky flesh with a sweet and mild flavour. Excellent served as crudo

Lemon myrtle Flowering native plant, indigenous to Queensland but now grown all over Australia. Its lemon-scented leaves are used in everything from sauces to soap

Muntries Green berries with a red tinge that taste like spiced apple

Saltbush Low-growing, grey-blue bush that loves a salty maritime climate and has savoury, herby leaves

Warrigal greens Sprawling green indigenous plant also known as native spinach that is often found in salads

Western rock lobster Native to Western Australia, these spiny crustaceans can grow up to 5kg and are prized around the world for their firm flesh and wonderfully rich flavour



GOURMET TRAVELLER PERTH

This page: breakfast at the Alex Hotel. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Kings Park flora; pasta at Ficus; fresh Fremantle scallops at Strange Company; Island Market's radish and beetroot salad; kangaroo paw; Kings Park grasses; salmon at Island Market; George Kallis; kangaroo paw attracts birds; the local wattlebird; banksia; juice at Island Market; the Alex Hotel lobby



Anthony Yurisich is the winemaker at Olive Farm Wines, which was bought by his grandfather in the 1930s. Olive Farm's smart and angular new cellar door and its adjoining cheese business is a good example of the generational change happening in the region.

'It used to be that Perth people would come up here on the weekends to buy fruit and would bring empty flagons to fill with wine straight from the barrel at the cellar doors,' he says. 'Now, with new generations taking on the family businesses, there's been a lot of investment and we're selling expertly made wines all over the world. We have distilleries and breweries opening in the region and places like Mandoon that are offering great food and accommodation alongside their wines. It's a really exciting time for the Valley.'

There are exciting times in the Perth Hills, too. Just a 45-minute drive east of Perth, the region has a dramatically different climate to the Swan Valley, one that's cooler and more continental, with forested valleys and rolling bush landscapes that collect cold air, making it an ideal climate for producing sparkling wines.

Josh Davenport is the owner of Myattsfeld Winery in the Bickley Valley, a subregion of the Perth Hills that —————>>

Where to eat

Prices are per person for three courses with half a bottle of wine, unless otherwise stated

Ficus Chef André Mahé is at the helm of this diner in Yagan Square, putting a classic French spin on great Western Australian produce, mostly sourced from the Bunbury Farmers' Market. His duck parfait flavoured with Manjimup truffles is worth a visit in itself. From £44. 7/420 Wellington Street, 00 61 8 6381 9140, ficusperth.com

Island Market A magnificent ocean view and 'Hamptons down under' vibe are just part of the attraction once chef David Coomer's vibrant Levantine-Med food starts landing. From £39. 364 West Coast Drive, Trigg, 00 61 8 9447 0077, islandmarkettrigg.com

Le Rebelle The newest addition to the lively Beaufort Street eating precinct is a brilliant French-accented bar and restaurant where husband-and-wife team Sarah and Liam Atkinson dish up magnificent plates like blue manna crab on brioche and duck frites. From £41. 676 Beaufort Street, Mount Lawley, 00 61 8 6161 3100, lerebelle.com.au

Long Chim This stylish basement-level State Buildings Thai haunt serves up flavour-packed curries, stews and an excellent roast duck amid low-lit, moody interiors. From £30. State Buildings, St George's Terrace/Barrack Street, 00 61 8 6168 7775, longchimperth.com

Madalena's This rollicking seafood-focused restaurant in South Fremantle is inspired by the botecos of São Paulo, Barcelona and Rome. Talented chef Adam Rees is at the pass. From £56. 406 South Terrace, South Fremantle, 00 61 405 967 469, madalenasbar.com.au

Millbrook Winery Guy Jeffreys is as much a gardener as an executive chef and the extensive veggie gardens and orchards at this magnificent Perth Hills property drive the menu at the minimal-waste restaurant. If the charred broccoli dish is available, order it. From £50. Old Chestnut Lane, Jarrahdale, 00 61 8 9525 5796, millbrook.wine

Pinky's Beach Club The eatery at Discovery, Rottnest Island's 'glamping' eco-resort, has quickly become the best place on the island to eat local seafood. Chef Karl Wulf cures local kingfish or teams whiting with orange dashi, and he also knows how to make a great cheeseburger. From £44. Discovery Rottnest Island, Strue Road, Rottnest Island, 00 61 8 6350 6170, discoveryholidayparks.com.au

Santini Bar & Grill Chef Nic Wood heads the kitchen at the QT Perth's fashionable signature restaurant, dishing up big-flavoured, Italian-leaning dishes that include an inspired goldband snapper carpaccio with grapes and chilli. From £52. First Floor, QT Perth, 133 Murray Street, Perth, 00 61 8 9225 8000, santinibarandgrill.com.au

Strange Company Whether you're after cocktails, local craft beer, wine from nearby regions or tapas-style dishes that take advantage of local produce and are served until midnight every night, Strange Company has your back. Chef Christophe Mannon-Bakaj's scallop, crab and beetroot combo is hard to beat. From £33. 5 Nairn Street, Fremantle, 00 61 8 9431 7373, strangecompany.com.au

The Vineyard Kitchen One of the prettiest places to eat in the Perth Hills region, and seriously focused on Western Australian produce. Chef Ryan Fels cooks food with a Mediterranean lean, such as fried lamb's brains with a pickled shallot and parsley salad. From £36. 5 Loaring Road, Bickley, 00 61 8 9227 7715, thevineyardkitchen.net.au

Wildflower Anyone interested in indigenous Australian flavours skilfully, respectfully and deliciously placed in a modern context should secure a table at Wildflower. Chef Matthew Sartori sources his produce meticulously to create dishes including Rottnest Island scallops served raw with Geraldton wax, finger lime and daikon. Consider ordering the degustation menu. From £82. Level 4 Como The Treasury, 1 Cathedral Avenue, 00 61 8 6168 7855, wildflowerperth.com.au





Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Petition Kitchen; State Buildings restaurant Long Chim; a wall mural; Perth's business district skyline; guestrooms at QT Perth; wines at Ficus; rosé and pâté in Yagan Square; a Long Chim sign. This page, clockwise from top left: Long Chim; fish at Petition Kitchen; Long Chim tiles; one of the restaurant's murals; Fremantle views; Petition Beer Corner



‘Wildflower’s menu is a roll call of indigenous ingredients. Think scallops from Rottnest Island teamed with citrusy Geraldton wax and kangaroo meat smoked with jarrah wood’

produces a startling variety of wine. ‘We have this great “problem” here in that the valleys are so undulating and diverse that the microclimates vary dramatically,’ he explains. ‘There are warm sites but significantly cooler ones, too, so that our selling point is diversity. Italian whites like vermentino and fiano do really well and so does durif. We can do sparkling wines, but we can also do fortifieds. I don’t know of too many other regions that can do both ends of the spectrum as well as we can here.’

The region is also perfect for growing apples, with places like Core Cider House making traditional and sparkling ciders from estate-grown varieties, including Kingston Black, Dabinett, Yarlington Mill and Pink Lady. The annual blossom show from the region’s orchards has also become a major draw card on the Perth calendar.

Back in the city, Swan Valley and Perth Hills wines feature on the list of Wildflower, the flagship restaurant at Como The Treasury. It’s an elegant, marble-floored rooftop space with views over the Swan River and an intensely local focus. Chef Matthew Sartori creates forager-focused menus that are driven by the six seasons of the aboriginal Australian calendar of the Whadjuk Noongar people.

Wildflower’s menu is a roll call of indigenous ingredients. Raw scallops from Rottnest Island are teamed with citrusy Geraldton wax and crunchy, salty sea fern. Kangaroo meat is smoked with jarrah wood and served with a blood lime and native basil dressing.

There’s a rhubarb and Davidson’s plum sorbet and local lamb teamed with saltbush and charred Warrigal greens. It’s exciting food from a young chef who has tapped into a newly forged Perth trope, blending the modern with the ancient.

This is also happening at Yagan Square, a new development of public spaces and eating and drinking venues built over the railway lines of Perth’s central transport hub. Named after an aboriginal elder and chief resistance leader of the Noongar people in the early days of settlement, Yagan Square has linked the city with the inner suburb of Northbridge, formerly isolated by the railway tracks. This new access to Northbridge has seen the suburb, once a mix of slightly seedy nightclubs, abandoned shopfronts and the city’s Chinatown, transform into a relaxed, bohemian and multicultural dining and drinking destination enjoyed by people of all ages.

‘Northbridge is the heart and soul of Perth now,’ says John Parker, owner of both The Standard, a bar and restaurant with a labyrinthine beer garden lit by fairy lights, and the beautifully renovated Royal Hotel, across the tracks on the city’s edge. ‘There’s a particular character here, like a village, with a lot of young independent operators opening edgy businesses with really good energy.’

Among these is Wines of While, Perth’s first dedicated natural wine bar, located in a relaxed art nouveau shopfront, where owner Sam Winfield stocks ‘every Australian producer —————>>





Clockwise from top left: wines at Bread in Common; one of the friendly team; freshly baked loaves; a Long Chim table setting and one of the restaurant's wall murals; a stylish guestroom at The National Hotel; Strange Company; Ficus chef André Mahé; shopping for artisan chocolates and truffles at Sue Lewis Chocolatier in the State Buildings



What to do

Kailis Bros Leederville Want to get an idea of the breadth of the local seafood offering? The Kailis family have been in the seafood trade in WA since 1926 and their retail fish market is a treasure trove of the freshest stuff, from goldband snapper to Rottnest Island scallops. *101 Oxford Street, Leederville, 00 61 8 9443 6300, kailisbrosleederville.com.au*

Mandoon Estate There's a world of hospitality at this Swan Valley winery, including brilliant food at the Wild Swan restaurant, wine tasting in the cellar door, estate-brewed beers in the brewhouse and a wonderful outdoor eating area next to the Swan River. Those with time on their hands should take the two-hour ferry ride to Mandoon from Perth. *10 Harris Road, Caversham, 00 61 8 6279 0500, mandoonestate.com.au*

Old Young's Distillery This tiny Swan Valley distillery has been turning heads and winning awards not just for its three gins and four vodkas but for the entertainingly run tasting room. Ever wanted to know what pavlova, smoked or cold-drip coffee vodka might taste like? A pit stop here will solve the mystery. *10581A West Swan Road, Swan Valley, 00 61 8 9296 6656, oldyoungs.com.au*

Two Feet & a Heartbeat Walking Tours Brilliant personalised walking tours around Perth and Fremantle led by a young, energetic and personable team that cater to all enthusiasms, from groundbreaking restaurants, cafés, bars, nightlife and providores to the region's culture, history and art. From £27pp. *00 61 8 7007 0492, twofeet.com.au*

Wild Seafood Experience A three-and-a-half-hour boat cruise around Rottnest Island, included as part of a full-day package. During the tour you'll be fed western rock lobster pulled straight from the sea and drink stellar local wines. Great views of the island and, in the winter, close encounters with humpback whales. £106pp. *Thomson Bay, Fuel Jetty, Rottnest Island, 00 61 8 9586 1136, rotnestcruises.com*

that does natural wine' and pairs them with simple wine-friendly food like house-baked sourdough with a garlicky stew of white beans.

This relaxed approach is also on display in Fremantle, a half-hour drive south of Perth. Fremantle is a port town with well-preserved Gold Rush-era architecture and a waterfront precinct where vast fish and chips restaurants line the wharves at Fishing Boat Harbour. But Fremantle has also led the way in quirky back-street diners.

Bakery and restaurant Bread in Common has a menu designed around the sourdough baked daily in ovens fired with eucalyptus wood. Strange Company is a late-night hybrid bar/café/restaurant that serves local sardines, Rottnest Island scallops, soft shell crab and Fremantle octopus in tapas-style combinations alongside local craft beer and a cocktail list that includes Doctors Orders, made with local West Winds gin and garnished with saltbush and olives.

Fremantle is also the gateway to Rottnest Island, a sandy, low-lying island 18km west of Fremantle known as 'Rotto' by locals. The former penal colony and military barracks is now a laid-back holiday destination, a protected nature reserve that's home to teeming birdlife and the quokka, a super-cute jumping marsupial.

The waters around Rottnest Island are strictly regulated to ensure sustainability and so produce an amazing variety of sea creatures. There are scallops, clams, mussels, crabs, prawns, several varieties of snapper (including the coveted goldband snapper) dhufish, tailor and flathead. The star of the seafood show, however, is the western rock lobster that thrives in the deep, clear waters off the island.

The best way to eat a western rock is via Rottnest Cruises' Wild Seafood Experience boat tour. Guests assist in retrieving lobsters from pots submerged 20-100m deep in the ocean. The crustaceans are then served on board, both as sashimi, with citrus and soy sauce, and halved, brushed with olive oil, garlic and parsley and barbecued. Eating lobster at a white-clothed table on a bobbling boat as humpback whales breach in the distance or an occasional shark glides underneath the boat is definitely one for the bucket list.

At Pinky's Beach Club at Discovery, the new eco-friendly luxury tent resort on Rotto's north-east coast, chef Karl Wulf is working to develop relationships with local fisherman so that he can serve the local seafood, something that's been surprisingly rare on the island.

'We're doing something new here,' says Wulf, delivering a bowl of local clams cooked over charcoal and flavoured with white miso butter. 'Getting reliable sources of fresh seafood on the island can be tricky, but I'm dealing directly with the fisherman and so am able to serve the ingredients that people now expect to get here.'

It's this kind of expectation that's helping to fuel Perth's food revolution. Diners now expect to eat food and wine of local provenance and a new generation of restaurateurs, bar owners, brewers and distillers are answering the call. It's an exciting time to be eating and drinking in the West. □

Michael Harden and Ewen Bell travelled to Perth courtesy of Tourism Western Australia. westernaustralia.com

