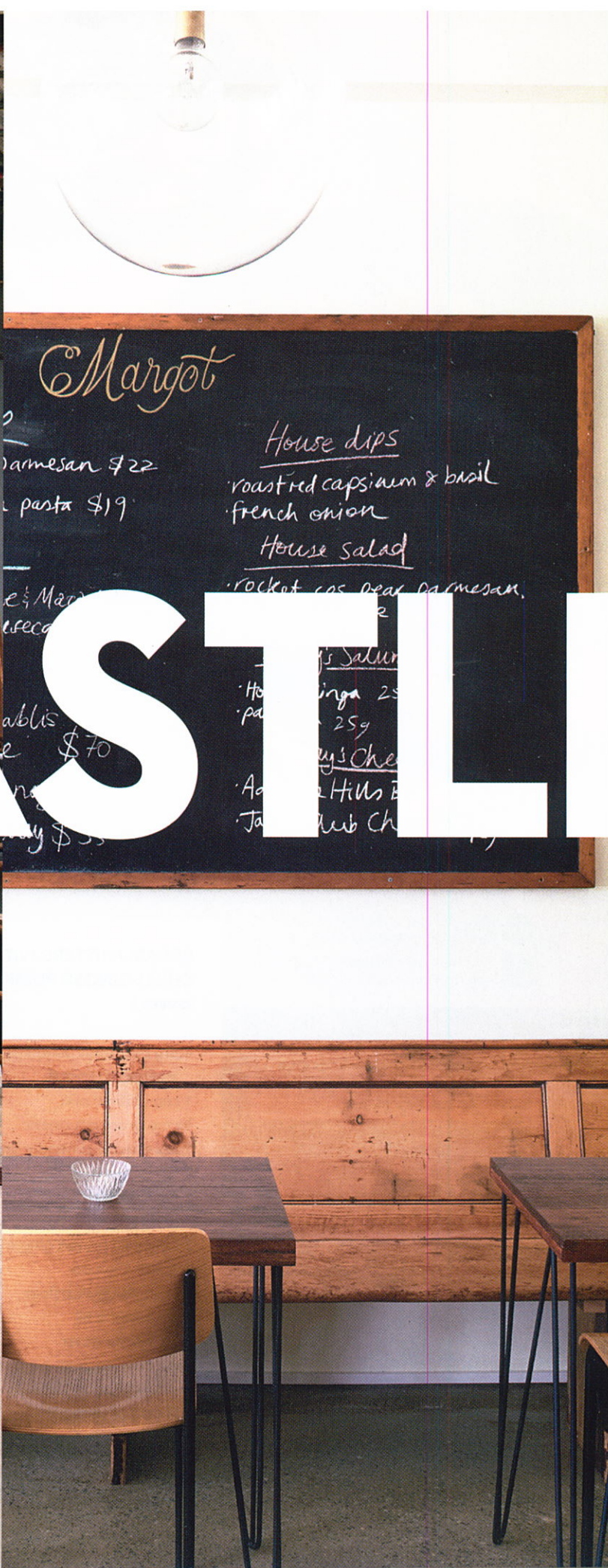


CASTLE





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



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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.

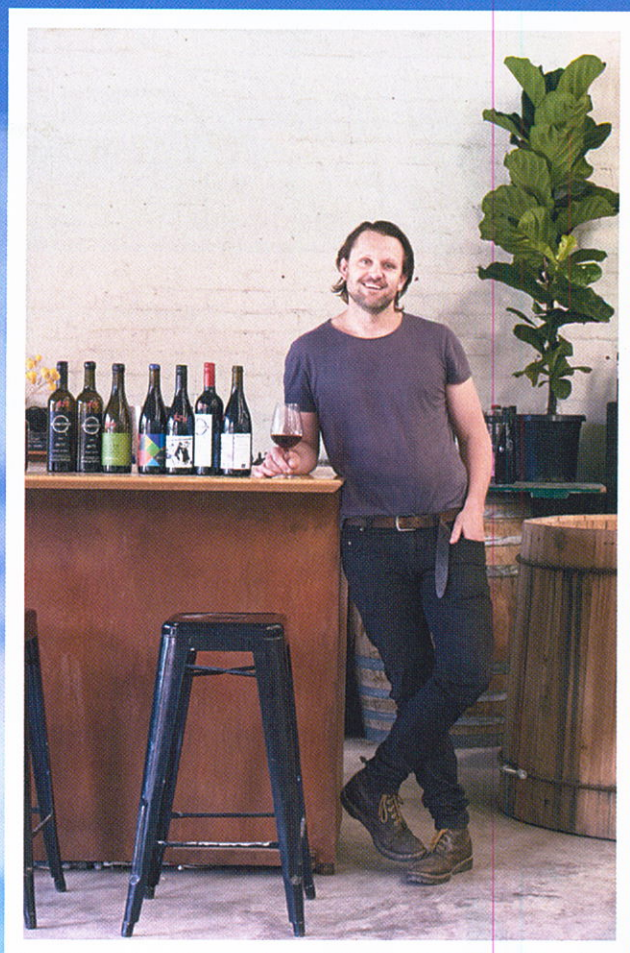
LOCAVORE.

There'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.

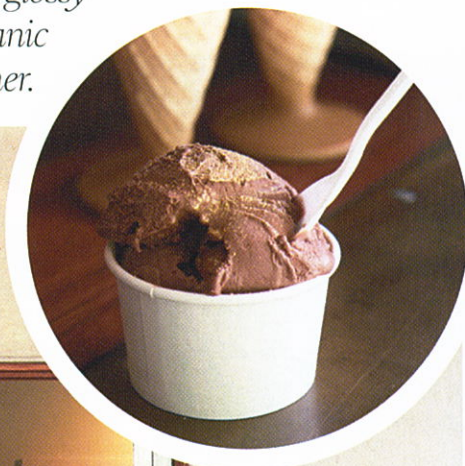


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1 PERFECT PASTRY

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).



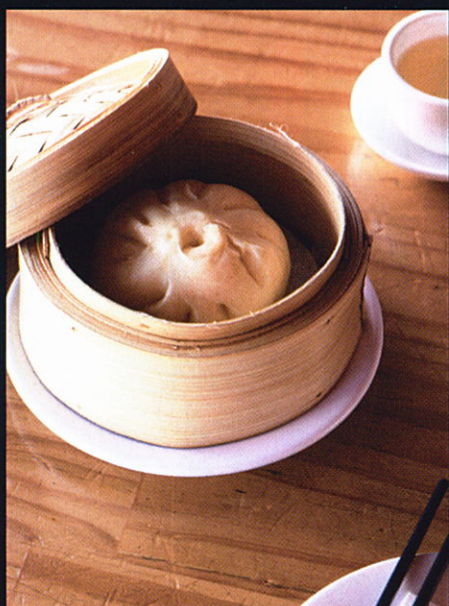
HANDMADE ICE CREAM
Peanut butter fudge
Gingerbread
Apple crumble
Chocolate
Cheer Up Emo Kid
Zin Garden (DF)
Sugar Daddy
Strawberry (DF)
Licorice
Kids cone \$3
Single \$4.50
Double \$6
Vine 1L \$15
1/2 L \$8

LOCAVORE.

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.



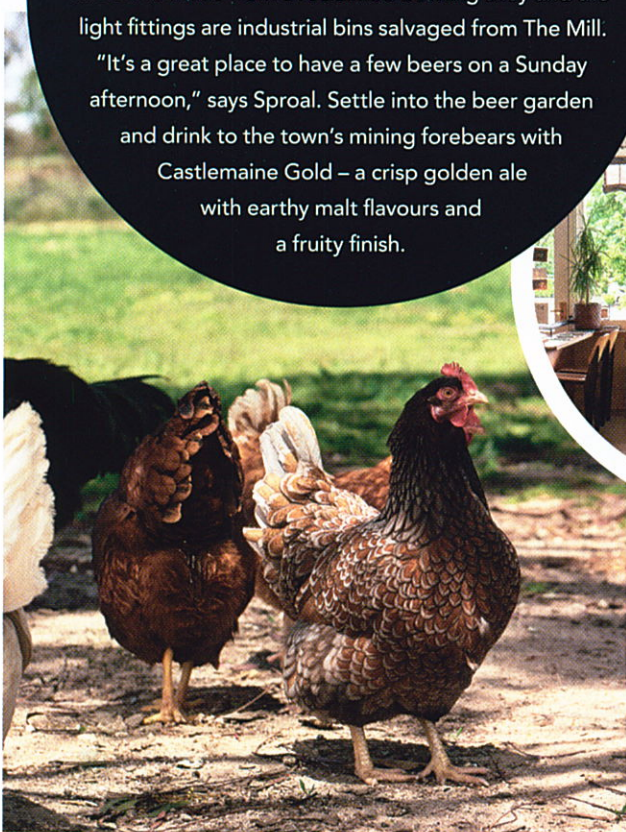
6 PEACHY KEEN

"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.

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.



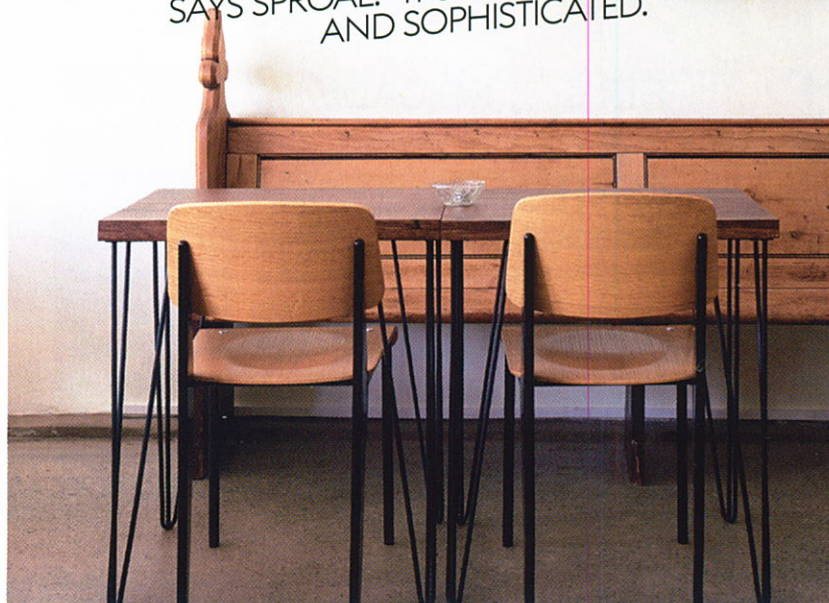
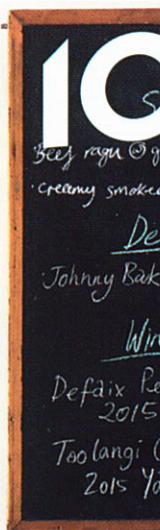
8 VIEW FROM THE TOP

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."



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