



## Hanabishi

187 King Street, Melbourne 03 9670 1167

JAPANESE

14/20

Hanabishi's exquisite subtlety runs from its interior through to its cooking, in contrast to the men's clubs that do their showy thing further along King Street. Settle easily into the tranquil dining room, with its turquoise-coloured wall insets, plush chairs and lacquered surfaces. Armed with a flask of sake, 'ooh' over artfully presented entree specials, such as scallops served in shot glasses on shaved ice with pompom-like plants as whimsical garnishes. The long menu includes scampi encased in shredded potato and fried to crunchy perfection, and California rolls packed with fresh and delicate steamed spanner crabmeat, avocado, cucumber and mayo. A fluffy (complimentary) pork meatball may prepare the way for mains such as tender teriyaki wagyu beef or green-tea soba noodles, refreshingly served cold. End, perhaps, with a dessert platter comprising six or nine tastes that might include a memorable green-tea creme brulee and exquisite egg custard served in an eggshell – not too sweet nor too rich.

**Open** Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm, 6–9.30pm

**Typical prices** E \$21 M \$38 D \$14

**Cards** DC AE MC V eftpos

**Drinks** A strong list of premium wines (12 by the glass), sake, shochu and exotic teas

**Owners** Akio & Eiko Soga

**Chefs** Akio Soga, Masahiko Iga & Shin Tsunazawa

**Seats** 70

[www.hanabishi.com.au](http://www.hanabishi.com.au)

**And ...** Ask staff for help with the sakes and shochus or refer to the food-matching notes.



## Hare & Grace

525 Collins Street, Melbourne 03 9629 6755

CONTEMPORARY

15/20

Hare & Grace may be Melbourne's most polarising restaurant. Raymond Capaldi's food – bright, inventive, enthusiastic – shoots for the skies, but some elements can flame out like Icarus. Most dishes fly, among them an entree of heirloom carrots and stuffed olives. Exquisitely plated with nasturtiums, onion flowers and goat's curd, it exemplifies the 'bistronomy' movement's focus on natural flavours. Capaldi is known as an ideas chef and his kitchen has the skills to execute them. Otway pork belly, with sweet roasted onions and tart 'compressed orange', is crisp on top, tender underneath. Milk-fed lamb rump is another textural triumph, medium-rare with rhubarb, sheep's curd and a wrinkled sheet of translucent dehydrated potato. Desserts may push some diners beyond their comfort zone, with elements such as squid-ink grissini and basil powder called into play. But in a sometimes conservative marketplace, risk deserves applause.

**Open** Mon–Fri noon–3pm, 6–10pm  
**Typical prices** E \$20 M \$42 D \$15

**Cards** DC AE MC V eftpos

**Drinks** About 30 thoughtfully selected, mostly Australian wines; a dozen by the glass

**Owners** Raymond Capaldi, Caitlin Ingram & Jessica Stuart

**Chefs** Raymond Capaldi & Buddha Lo

**Seats** 70; outdoor seating; bar

[www.hareandgrace.com](http://www.hareandgrace.com)

**And ...** Check out the avant-garde, forest-like canopy created by Joost Bakker.



## Yak Italian Kitchen & Bar

150 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 03 9654 6699

ITALIAN

14/20

With a wrap-around bar that takes centre stage, newly renamed Yak Italian Kitchen & Bar is still about that bar. There's a generous selection of wines available by the glass and a drink-friendly range of assaggi (small plates) that invites grazing. The chef's father makes a selection of cured meats, including spicy, salty capocollo (dry-cured pork neck) drizzled with olive oil and accompanied by crunchy grissini. Perfectly pink and tender vitello tonnato served in a warm brioche bun is another must. But the menu's focus is on handmade pasta. Delightful lemon and potato agnolotti with butter and sage sauce is still going strong, and it's worth ordering arso (burnt) flour pasta alla chitarra with a hearty, flavourful pork neck ragu, heightened with a bit of warmth from fresh green chillies. For dessert, freshly fried doughnuts, coated in crunchy sugar and filled with white chocolate and mango ice-cream, are almost impossible to resist.

**Open** Tues–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sat 5.30–10pm

**Typical prices** E \$16 M \$35 D \$15

**Cards** DC AE MC V eftpos

**Drinks** Wallet-friendly list of Italian, Australian and NZ wines; more than 20 by the glass

**Owners** Leo Gelsomino, Chris McIntyre & Linda Durnan

**Chefs** Leo Gelsomino & Dario Di Clerico

**Seats** 80; outdoor seating; bar

[www.yakbarfood.com.au](http://www.yakbarfood.com.au)

**And ...** Dark, toasty arso flour pasta, made from leftover wheat husks burnt by harvesting machines, is rarely seen outside Puglia.



## Yu-u

137 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 03 9639 7073

JAPANESE

15/20

Push through the nondescript laneway door and down broad timber stairs to a spacious basement restaurant that exudes cool and calm. With jazz in the background, gentle lighting, noise levels that barely rise above a murmur and a simple Japanesque fitout of concrete, timber and flashes of midnight blue, Yu-u feels uniquely romantic. Sit at the intimate bar or a communal table and await the well-paced procession of elegantly proportioned share dishes. Verdant broccoli florets come blanketed in a deeply addictive, orange-speckled cod roe mayonnaise; charry calamari and asparagus retain a beautiful crunch; plump prawn dumplings arrive wrapped in a delicate wrinkly skin; and sashimi mackerel topped with shredded ginger makes a noteworthy departure from the usual tuna-salmon double act. Contemplating dessert? As the green-tea ice-cream is no mind-blower, opt instead for skewers from the grill – chicken thigh, breast or even liver. Service is attentive: water is replenished, plates changed and sake poured, adding to the polished experience that is Yu-u.

**Open** Mon–Fri noon–2pm, 6–10pm

**Typical prices** E \$9 M \$18 D \$8

**Cards** AE MC V eftpos

**Drinks** A succinct and predominantly Australian wine list with sake and shochu available

**Owners** Yoshiki Tano & Miho Nakao

**Chef** Yoshiki Tano

**Seats** 28; private room

**And ...** The lunchtime teishoku boxes are excellent value.