

theage (melbourne) magazine



Annual fashion issue

Hollywood romance: the local lads who dress Kylie, Dannii, Delta and Dita

The Melbourne look: have you got it?

Wearable art: women who spend \$70,000 a year on clothes

On the prowl: hunting for models

Guess who: Livinia Nixon, Rebecca Twigley and more as you've never seen them

PLUS 50 fab fashion finds

Photography Marina Oliphant

dishitup

John Lethlean shares his favourite dining moments of the month.

Fried barramundi at Seamstress

Barramundi seems to have triumphed in a public relations campaign. Among some, anyway. A friend refuses to eat it, and the only chance it has of impressing me is deep-fried and with an Asian accent. Seamstress does the right thing with the often-mushy, sometimes tasteless whole farmed barra: the flesh is removed from the frame, cut into large cubes, and the whole lot floured, seasoned and deep-fried. The carcass and flesh are served together, and while this makes eating the prime cuts easy, there's plenty on the bone for chilli/vinegar dipping sauce and a brilliant green mango and coriander salad, all tart and clean against the fried fish. Barra as it should be. And if the barramundi is off – depending on the season – they do an equally good version with snapper.

Price: \$26. Seamstress, 113 Lonsdale Street, city, phone 9663 6363



Lasagna pizza at Pizza e Birra

The second wave of Melbourne's pizza renaissance is in full swing. In the north corner we have Carlton's D.O.C. We like. In the south corner, St Kilda's hot-as-Hades Pizza e Birra. We like very much, too. The southerner has gone the wood-oven route, which adds a little something in my view, and with a pizza named "lasagna" they may just have an instant classic on their hands: a big base layered up with tomato sugo, thinly sliced smoked ham, mozzarella, multiple dollops of creamed ricotta and a judicious scattering of grated parmesan at the end producing a salty, golden brown patina. Fresh basil leaves and olive oil finish the job.

Price: \$17.50. Pizza e Birra, 60a Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, phone 9537 3465



Chilli cucumber and calamari salad at Mahjong

Deep within the bustling Fitzroy Street facade of Mahjong is a seriously elegant, smarter-again dining room.

The feel is contemporary, cossetting, luxurious and a million miles from the St Kilda melee outside. A new kid on a crowded block, Mahjong does modern Asian food with a Cantonese inflection but this is the dish that really blew us away: a salad of scored calamari horseshoes with abundant fresh chilli, long, thin fronds of slippery, cooling cucumber, pink grapefruit segments, herbs and soft salad leaves with slivers of red onion. Clean, piquant and vibrant are the words that spring to mind.

Price: \$14. Mahjong, 165 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, phone 9534 8833



Pan-fried flounder at Seagrass

Flounder seems to have gone out of fashion on menus around town. I don't understand why. Maybe it's because too many different flat fish are tagged with the name.

There are three common species of flounder in Victorian waters – the long-snouted, the greenback and the small-toothed – but at Seagrass, they serve yellowbelly or sand flounder from New Zealand. And when it's flour-dusted, pan-fried and served with a vinaigrette-style dressing of cubed tomato flesh, baby capers and toasted hazelnuts, as is the chef's wont here, its sweet, firm flesh comes into its own. Done properly, with fine produce – simply wonderful stuff.

Price: \$36.50. Seagrass, mid-level, Southgate Precinct, Southbank, phone 9696 7655