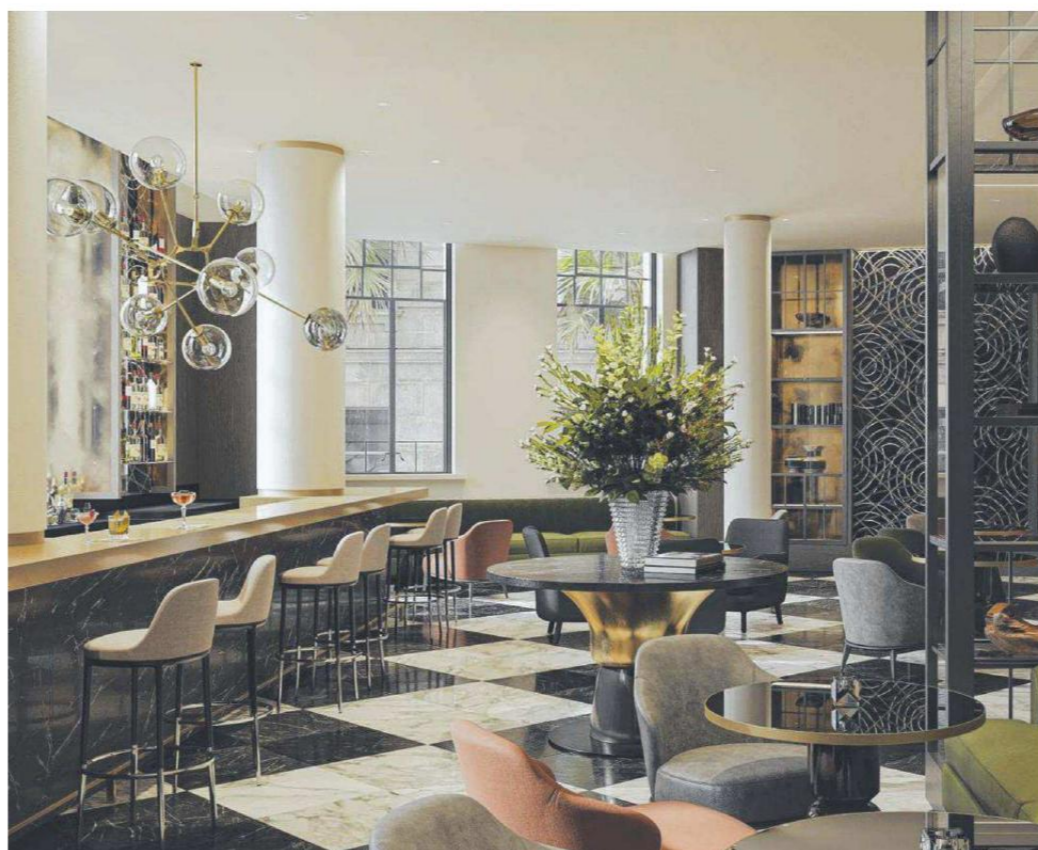




6 LUXURY hotel openings WORTH TRAVELLING FOR IN 2023



WILL LENNOX

It will be a year of monumental hotel openings.

While several projects stalled under the pressures of the pandemic, border closures have done little to deter chains such as the Ritz-Carlton and W Hotels from forging ahead with plans to unveil five-star properties.

Among the highlights: Sydney will lay claim to the largest W Hotel in the world, a mega complex set to transform the harbour foreshore; Australia's tallest hotel will welcome guests in Melbourne, and; one of South Australia's beloved lodges will make its triumphant return.

Here are the hotels travel and luxury editors are most looking forward to checking into this year.

W Sydney

Location: The Ribbon, a new hotel-hospitality development set to transform Sydney's waterfront precinct of Darling Harbour.

Opening date: October
In one of the most anticipated openings across the country, Marriott's W Hotels is set to launch its

third Australian property, after W Brisbane and W Melbourne. It will be one of the largest in Sydney upon completion. The build was plagued by pandemic-related delays. Recently released renders of the rooms are stunning examples of London design agency Bowler James Brindley's vision for the space.

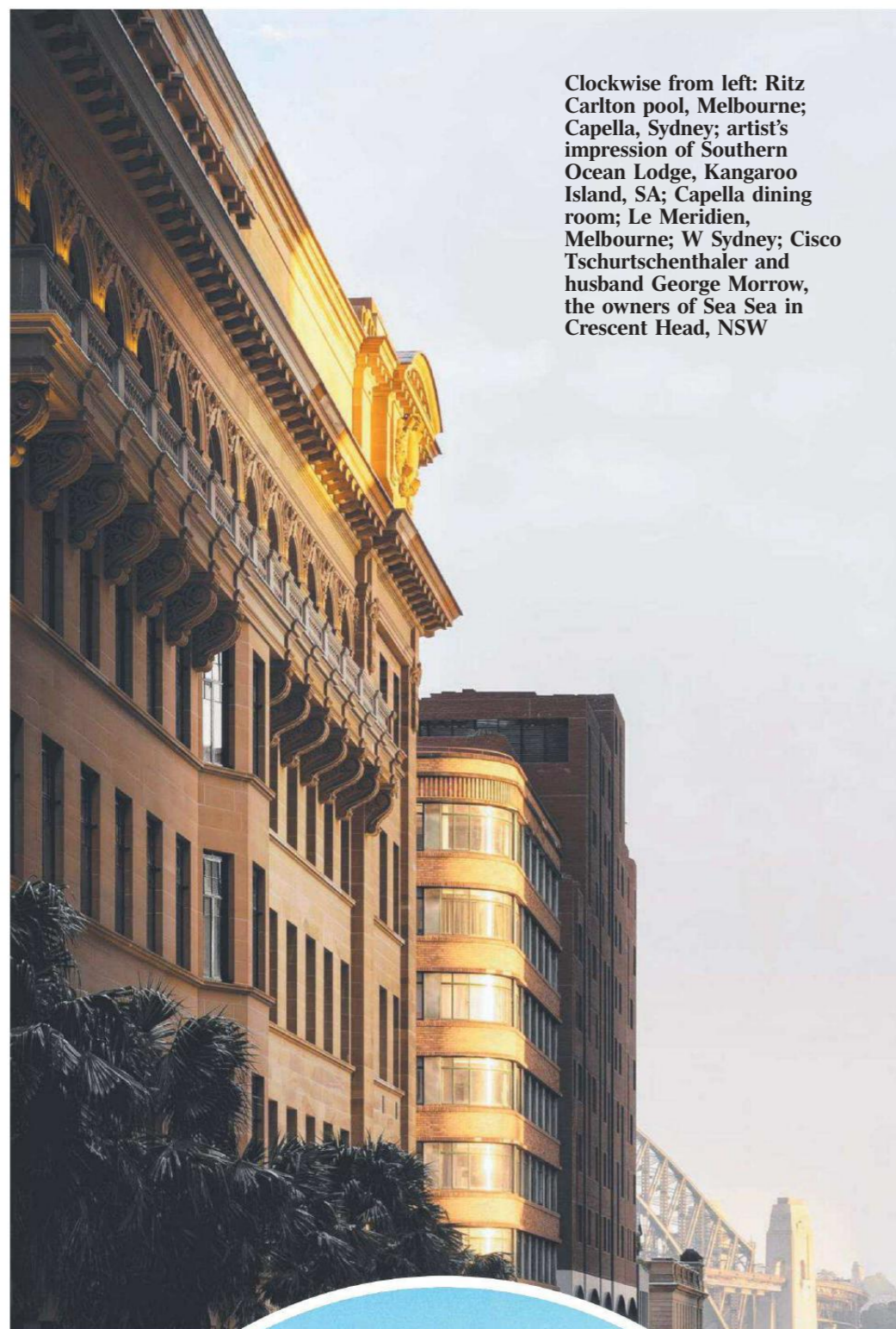
The hotel boasts a massive 585 rooms and occupies 25 floors of the Hassell-designed building, which will still retain its IMAX theatre and retail spaces.

The Ritz-Carlton, Melbourne

Location: On Spencer Street in the heart of Melbourne's CBD.

Opening date: March
Melbourne might be well known for its thriving laneways and subterranean bars, but the Ritz-Carlton's new property promises visitors a different vantage point of the city.

Housed in a gilded 80-storey skyscraper in the heart of the CBD, it will be Australia's tallest hotel, with 360-degree, sky-high views of the city below.



Clockwise from left: Ritz Carlton pool, Melbourne; Capella, Sydney; artist's impression of Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island, SA; Capella dining room; Le Meridien, Melbourne; W Sydney; Cisco Tschurtschenthaler and husband George Morrow, the owners of Sea Sea in Crescent Head, NSW



Upon entry, guests will be whisked away to check in at the "sky lobby", a vast glass-wrapped reception area housed on the 80th floor. With 257 guest rooms and suites, the hotel has been confirmed to have a yet-to-be-named restaurant and bar. That's just a taster of what's to come: it also boasts an indoor plunge pool with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the cityscape and, of course, a Ritz-Carlton Club, perched 79 storeys above street level.

Capella Sydney

Location: Bridge Street in the centre of Sydney's CBD.
Opening date: March
Singapore-headquartered Capella Hotels and Resorts will unveil its first hotel on Australian soil in March: a 192-room property in Sydney.

Taking up residence in the former Department of Education, a heritage-listed building in the centre of the city, the project aims to contrast the heritage charm of the building's original sandstone features with sleek, contemporary design for its interior.

With 192 generously sized guest rooms and suites, Capella Sydney has set itself the goal of becoming the ultimate urban sanctuary in the heart of Sydney's CBD. This grand hotel will include conference rooms, dining spaces and an indoor pool set below a large heritage lighting fixture.

The Capella Sydney is the hotel group's latest venue, adding to its existing portfolio of five-star properties across Singapore, Ubud, Hanoi and Bangkok.

Southern Ocean Lodge

Location: Kingscote, on the southern side of Kangaroo Island.
Opening date: The second half of the year.
Kangaroo Island's beloved Southern Ocean Lodge will make its

grand return, following the devastating fire that obliterated the original structure. Although technically a reopening, SOL 2.0, as it is affectionately dubbed by its owners, is a brand-new ground-up build and qualifies for our list of the best hotel openings to look forward to next year.

So how did architects Max Pritchard and Andrew Gunner improve upon their original design? Championing sustainability and environmental regeneration, the new lodge will follow the contour of the surrounding landscape. Its 25 suites have been reoriented slightly south, so as to capture even better views of the ocean.

They have also added an ultra-premium Ocean Pavilion, which sits apart from the other suites, boasting an extensive outdoor terrace with its own wet-edge pool and private accommodation within, including four bedrooms and bathrooms.

The lodge has made space for three specialised treatment rooms, a gym area, a sauna, and hot and cold plunge pools, all of which are surrounded by pristine views.

Sea Sea

Location: Crescent Head, NSW
Opening date: May
The brainchild of former Ksbi creative director and creator of The Slow in Bali, George Gorow, Sea Sea will be a new 70s-inspired surf club hotel on the NSW north coast. The 25-room boutique hotel blends the pillars of Gorow's life: surfing, fashion, music, hospitality and art.

Contributions from his friends across the industries he remains close to will be incorporated into the property; including P & V Wine + Liquor Merchants, world

traveller and mixologist Antonello Arzedi, and chef Daniel Medcalf. But what's most exciting about the project is that beyond the rooms there will be a revolving curated selection of music performances, mix tracks and art exhibitions within the space.

A melting pot of everything alluring about the laid-back lifestyle of the north coast of NSW, the hotel will be a place to unwind in style, with all the quiet luxuries that come with being outside a capital city.

Le Meridien Melbourne

Location: Bourke Street in Melbourne
Opening date: First quarter of 2023.

Paris-born hospitality group Le Meridien is returning to Australian soil with the opening of a new hotel on Bourke Street in Melbourne's theatre district. The 235-room property boasts a plush restaurant and bar, as well as an expansive rooftop pool deck with views of parliament, Fitzroy Gardens and the CBD skyline.

The original building has come full circle, constructed as a hotel in the 1850s before being used as a cinema and live performance venue. Guests will discover a 12-storey building behind the art deco facade, created by Melbourne-based architecture firm Peddle Thorp.

Inside, curved velvet banquettes, fluted glass and wood panelling create an elegant, intimate atmosphere that pays homage to its theatrical heritage.

It's not the first time the upscale brand has had a presence in the Victorian capital: Le Meridien previously occupied the Rialto skyscraper on Collins Street, which is now the InterContinental Melbourne.

On the road to satisfaction: restaurants worth the trip

Heading out of the city to sample regional dining is time well spent

WILL LENNOX

Have you ever travelled to eat? That doesn't mean down the road when you could have ordered in. I mean really travelled. Outside the capital cities of Australia lie restaurants waiting for pilgrims to make the journey, and enjoy a meal away from the urban landscapes. But what makes any of them worth the trip? Why set up your gastronomic ode to brilliance in a smaller city or town? The answer to that depends on who you ask.

Predictably, the concept of a "destination restaurant" can be traced back to France, where its Michelin Guide rated restaurants on whether or not they were worth visiting when driving around the country.

Absent our own Michelin, many restaurants that have cropped up outside the state capitals are using other means to lure visitors. Is it for a signature dish? Is it for a degustation unlike any found in their home city?

It's often the rustic simplicity of a meal sourced from a farm that can be seen from the restaurant's dining room window. Considering that the modern patron is becoming increasingly interested in, and judgmental about, the provenance of their food, having that source in clear view has proved a pivotal part of the appeal of a destination restaurant.

Take the Agrarian Kitchen in New Norfolk, about half an hour from Hobart. Housed in a former mental asylum and originally opening as a cooking school, it has since graduated to a farm-to-table restaurant. Produce is harvested from the walled garden or greenhouse on the one-acre property, and whisked straight to the kitchen, before emerging on plates the same evening.

Constant liaison between gardeners and chefs about future plantings keeps the menu seasonal. Under head chef Stephen Peak, Agrarian Kitchen celebrates local food and drink at its long communal tables. Eating local is a concept that is no doubt also found in the Tasmanian capital, but the proximity at the Agrarian Kitchen is pretty hard to match.

It's not just food that is tempting city-dwellers, they are also drawn by our fantastic wine-growing regions. South Australia, one of our earliest wine producers, is an ideal place for restaurateurs to set up shop at the source.

The Summertown Aristologist opened in Adelaide Hills, just outside the SA capital, in 2016. It was the brainchild of three now well-known winemakers from the nearby Basket Range: Anton van Klopper from Lucy Margaux, Jasper Button from Commune of Buttons, and Aaron Fenwick from Chateau Comme Ci Comme Ca (although Fenwick was involved primarily in the restaurant and wine bar before deciding to try his hand at winemaking).

Aristology is the art or science of cooking and dining, and an aristologist is the type of scientist everyone wants to be.

The bar's wine list highlights the new wave of local makers, although there is a smattering of international producers there too. The proximity to the estates gives an unrivalled sense of place to the eating and drinking at The Summertown Aristologist, and patrons often find themselves sharing the room with the makers of the wines they are drinking.

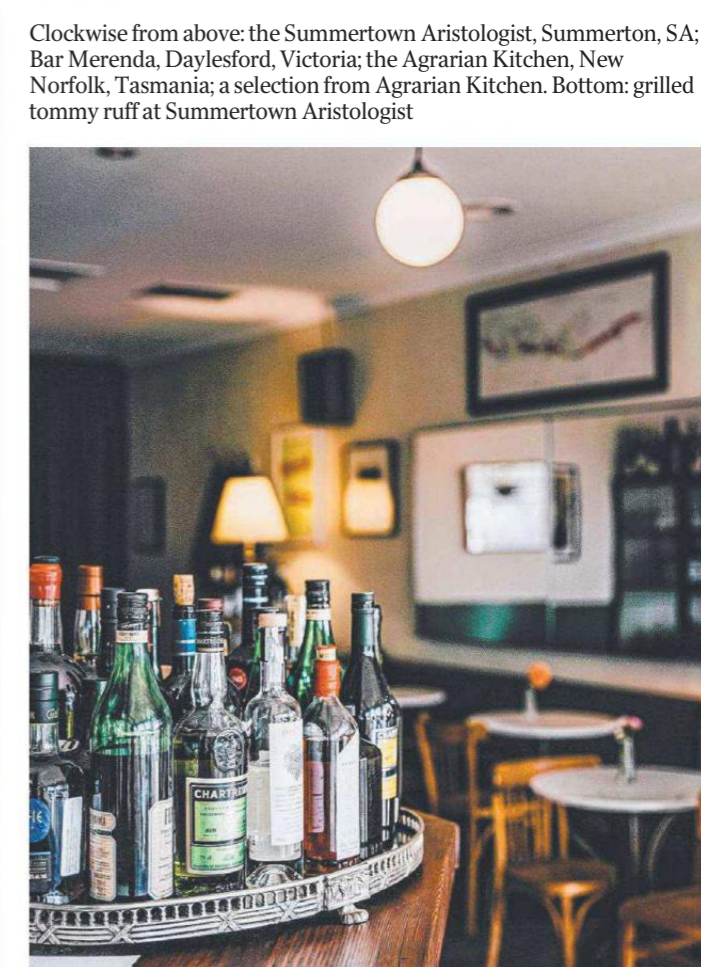
Other than the search for a novel experience of food or wine, it's reputation that brings city-siders into the country, drawn by favourable word-of-mouth reviews, or looking for chefs who have conquered the urban dining scene and sought their next challenge in a different landscape.

Andy Ainsworth was formerly the head sommelier at Sydney's 10 William Street, an iconic spot nestled in the heart of the city's east. Then, almost a year ago, he packed up and headed for rural Victoria, where he opened Bar Merenda, in the town of Daylesford in the Macedon Ranges. It has become a magnet for city-slickers.

Ainsworth wants his small project to embody the wealth of talent and agricultural produce on offer in the region. It's a "very,



Clockwise from above: the Summertown Aristologist, Summertown, SA; Bar Merenda, Daylesford, Victoria; the Agrarian Kitchen, New Norfolk, Tasmania; a selection from Agrarian Kitchen. Bottom: grilled tommy ruff at Summertown Aristologist



kind of old-world, European idea of something tasting or feeling like it's from that place", he says.

The simplicity of "you're in that place, you're eating that food" is something Ainsworth thinks is easily lost in the city and a destination restaurant's mission is to create "a feeling of, 'we couldn't eat this anywhere else'".

He also credits his success in Daylesford to the proximity of established wineries such as Bindi and Cobaw Ridge, which have shone a spotlight on the area, alongside new names such as Josh Cooper.

This is very different from the restaurant's acclamation was built on its ability to fly in premium Wagyu beef or Alaskan snow crab from tens of thousands of kilometres away.

Now, Ainsworth says, diners much prefer to know the restaurant's neighbour raised the lamb that's on their plates, or that the wine was bottled and aged only a few hun-

Destination dining is culinary storytelling in its purest form



ded metres away. Destination dining is culinary storytelling in its purest form. "I speak directly to the people that grow my leeks and raise my pigs," he adds. Ainsworth thinks we should be more aware of the proximity of what's on our plates. Asked if he would be able to replicate the success of Merenda in a hip suburb of Melbourne, he is quick to point out that a lot of what makes Merenda so special would be lost in such an exercise.

The "tiny little market gardeners, or pig farmers who just sell locally to the local community at markets" with whom he has developed close ties simply can't be found at the level he wants in the city.

"That's exactly the message we wanted to talk about, the idea of exchange: extremely friendly, local, and creates a sense of place through food and wine," he explains.

To the many patrons, much of the glamour of a destination restaurant is tied to its novelty: dining in the city is convenient, but the relative inconvenience of travelling often makes the reward sweeter.