

[Log in](#)[Sign up](#)

Play the Fool review

Mornington Modern Australian \$

JANE ORMOND July 26 2017



Avocado toast with olive crumb. Photo: Daniel Pockett

When you walk into Play the Fool, a stunning 50-seat cafe with light spilling across the Tasmanian oak-lined walls and a vaulting vase of native flowers casting artful shadows, you feel like you've fallen down the rabbit hole and popped out onto the pages of *Architectural Digest* doing a spread on Scandinavian sci-fi interiors.

It will come as no surprise, then, when you discover that Lauren Eagle, one of the brains behind this assured cafe, was heading down the career path of an architect before she decided to take a left turn and move into hospitality instead.

What may come as a surprise is that she is only in her early 20s and this is her first cafe. It's excellent.

89 Main St
Mornington, VIC 3931

[View map](#)

OPEN TODAY
 7:00 am - 4:00 pm

FEATURES	Family friendly
PRICES	Cheap (mains under \$20)
PAYMENTS	eftpos, Visa, Mastercard
PHONE	03 5902 2924



Play the Fool's oak-lined interior. *Photo: Daniel Pockett*

Heading up the kitchen is chef Leo Howard, who has worked at both Paringa Estate in Red Hill and the European in the city.

His seasonal menus are sophisticated, vivacious and lush, flipping brunch standards while making the most of the cafe's Mornington Peninsula location and the abundance of local produce from Red Hill and surrounds. (His UK roots occasionally wave hello via appearances by black pudding or a Welsh rarebit.)

Get brunching with excellent coffee roasted by Profile in Footscray before diving into the winter menu.



Ricotta gnocchi. Photo: Daniel Pockett

For those who like it sweet in the morning and go for things like ricotta hotcakes, the vanilla panna cotta cigars will flip your wig – tissue-thin pastries rolled and filled with not-too-sweet panna cotta, propped above zingy lemon curd and bedazzled with poached winter fruits and fresh citrus segments, a smattering of hazelnut praline adding toffee crunch.

For savoury sorts, jerusalem artichoke fritters come with bacon, pickled red cabbage, eggs and strawberry guava – it's creamy, salty, zippy, fruity. The charred brussels sprouts dish is a real superstar. Served with caramelised kaiserfleisch, pickled shallots and a 63-degree egg, it has an electric blanket warmth to it.

Then there's black pudding with roasted apple and sourdough, as well as more lunch-friendly dishes like 12-hour beef cheek with fermented ketchup or house-smoked kingfish with quinoa and cauliflower.

There's a real poetry to the flavours and textures of these dishes.

Friday nights take flight with a five-course degustation (\$85, excluding drinks) that changes weekly, but has included dishes such as salt-roasted beetroot with Main Ridge feta, pinenuts and jus gras, and poached and roasted duck breast with pumpkin, jerusalem artichoke and tamarillo.

And as for the name, they wanted something that had a slightly nostalgic vibe, but this one also has a double meaning. As Lauren says, "People tend to question whether you're 'up to it' at such a young age."

No doubts here.

Pro Tip: Watch out for more dinner dining when the liquor licence comes through in August.

Go-to Dish: Charred brussels sprouts with caramelised kaiserfleisch.

<http://www.playthefool.com.au/>

