

Herald Sun



📷 A glorious vision of timber awaits at Play the Fool. Pictures: Rebecca Michael

— VIC News —

Mornington's Fool's just gold

Dan Stock, Herald Sun

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📌 Subscriber only

COULD the peninsula really be home to one of Melbourne's best-looking cafes serving up one of the best breakfasts around?

Hiding in plain sight on Mornington's Main St, you'll find Play the Fool, Lauren Eagle's year-old cafe that's making a very persuasive case for the affirmative.

At just 22, Eagle, having (briefly) studied architecture before being bitten by the "hospo bug", has created her first cafe in a glorious vision of timber, a slight curve to the wall that makes sitting as comfortable as it comes, with a large communal table providing stool-high brunching.

It looks like a stylish sauna. And the cooking is equally hot.



📷 Poached and roasted duck breast, pumpkin, beetroot, Jerusalem artichoke and tamarillo at Play the Fool. Picture: Rebecca Michael

FOOD

Young chef Leo Howard, 26, originally from the UK but who now calls the peninsula home, has done time in kitchens down here (Paringa Estate) and in the city (The European) and merges that experience into a menu that celebrates local produce in creative and delicious fashion.

Yes, you can still get avo on toast, but here it comes with house-made chilli jam, smoked tomatoes and a sprinkle of olive crumb (\$18), while Howard's heritage shines in a Welsh rarebit that's elevated with pulled duck and finished with a duck egg (\$20).

Serves are as generous as they are interesting. Case in point: a large fritter made with earthy Jerusalem artichoke comes topped with crisp, smoky bacon, a pile of pickled red cabbage and two perfect poached eggs.



📷 Brussels sprouts and kaiserfleisch at Play the Fool. Picture: Rebecca Michael

Add crunchy fried artichoke skins, black garlic puree and tiny quarters of strawberry guava for pops of sweet acid and you have a clever, terrific dish (\$22).

Even better, a bowl of roasted and caramelised brussels sprouts (\$19, right) served with chunks of smoky kaiserfleisch, pickled shallots, chestnuts and a slow-cooked egg. Along with a slice of house multigrain and whipped butter, it's a smashing way to start the day. It's a real winner.

DRINK

Profile coffee in Footscray roasts the beans that are transformed into a great flat white, while tea comes courtesy of Larsen & Thompson. Milkshakes and fresh juice round out the daytime offering.

SERVICE

Eagle looks after the room with easy charm, and it's easy to get swept up in hers.



📷 Play the Fool owner Lauren Eagle and chef Leo Howard. Picture: Rebecca Michael

X FACTOR

On Friday nights a five-course degustation is offered (\$85) and here you'll see Howard's ambitions really shine. Highlights include a salt-baked beetroot stuffed with red cabbage and Main Ridge feta, and a roasted duck breast with pumpkin and tamarillo. It's cooking that takes the familiar and gives it a twist, where tastiness isn't forgotten in the pursuit of cleverness. Howard is a talent and one to watch.

A small range of local-focused booze is also offered this night by the glass and bottle.

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Generous in size, clever in creation and executed with real class, some dishes break the \$20 barrier but they all over-deliver in pleasure.

VERDICT

What a find. Don't play the fool and miss out on this Mornington cafe that could be the best of the brunch.

Play the Fool

89 Main St, Mornington. Ph: 5902 2924

FOOD Contemporary cafe

HOURS Wed-Mon, breakfast and lunch; Friday dinner

CHEF Leo Howard

BOOKINGS Yes

TIME BETWEEN ORDERING AND EATING 14 mins

PERFECT FOR Five-star brunching

DESTINATION DISH brussels sprouts with kaiserfleisch

NOISE LEVEL Pleasant

ONLINE playthefool.com.au

IF YOU LIKE THIS, YOU'LL LIKE THESE

CENTRAL

Higher Ground, 650 Little Bourke St, city

Destination dish: Spiced cauliflower eggs

NORTH

Nomada, 412 Brunswick St, Fitzroy

Destination dish: Charred carrot salad

WEST

Copper Pot, 105 Victoria St, Seddon

Destination dish: Truffle kasespatzle

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📷 Jerusalem artichoke fritters and poached egg and bacon at Play the Fool. Picture: Rebecca Michael