

# SA Weekend restaurant reviewer Simon Wilkinson reveals his best 23 dishes of 2023

From starters to sweets and everything in between, SA Weekend restaurant reviewer Simon Wilkinson has revealed his 23 most memorable dishes of 2023.



[Simon Wilkinson](#)

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SA Weekend restaurant reviewer Simon Wilkinson has embarked on a gastronomic journey during 2023.

Here are his favourite 23 dishes – from starters to sweets and everything in between – that have tickled his tastebuds the most.

## SMALL DISHES

### BOBIBAO

*Pork belly bao*

It looks like your average suburban cafe but the mostly Taiwanese kitchen team at this Bowden surprise packet have better things to do than poach eggs and smash avocado. They are too busy rolling their own homemade bao buns that are at their best loaded with pork belly braised in a master stock with star anise and dried chilli until it is as wobbly as a barely set custard. The stock is reduced to make a potent sauce, while pickled mustard greens are the perfect counterpoint. Best bao I've eaten.

[bobibao.com.au](http://bobibao.com.au)



Pork belly bao at Bobibao, Bowden.

## **KIIN**

*Burrata, green nahm jim, roti*

The daggy snack of Philly cream cheese and sweet chilli was the inspiration for Ben Bertei's signature dish at this CBD hotspot. The Philly is replaced by a ball of soft-centred burrata that is plopped into the middle of a pool of green nahm jim, the Thai salsa that has more zip than a punk concert. And what do you serve to accompany an Italian cheese and a Thai sauce? The flaky Malaysian flatbread roti, of course. Use that roti as a scoop and see how the sweet milkiness of the cheese plays against the heat and tang of the dressing.

[kiinrestaurant.com.au](http://kiinrestaurant.com.au)



Burrata and green nahm jim at Kiin restaurant, Adelaide. Picture: Supplied

## **DOLLY**

*Jamon, melon, cucumber*

I've never understood why the Italians would waste perfectly good prosciutto by wrapping it around a slice of fragrant rockmelon. The version at Dolly, opened this year on Unley Rd, shows how it should be done, using melon that isn't too ripe and shaving it into slices that mirror the weight of the meat, this time a Spanish jamon. Add cucumber, basil, tangy sumac and, most surprisingly, an Asian sesame and soy dressing, and this inspired combo was the best salad-y thing of the warmer months.

[dollyadl.com.au](http://dollyadl.com.au)



Jamon, melon, cucumber at Dolly, Unley. Picture: Supplied

## **PATCH**

### *Parmesan flan, ragu*

High-profile chef Andrew Davies (Press, Oggi) has left the big smoke to open this user-friendly eatery near his home in the Hills, cooking a brand of contemporary soul food that is honest and free of pretension ... just perfect for the locals. Want an example? Try a slice of his baked flan, a fluffy custard packed with parmesan and a lovely ragu dolloped on top so that its juices are just starting to soak through.

[patchkitchen.com.au](http://patchkitchen.com.au)



Parmesan flan and ragu at Patch, Stirling.

## **GAO**

### *Banh khot*

One of the wonderful array of street snacks that has seen this off-the-beaten-track Vietnamese develop a big following. Little crisp-edged pancakes are golden with turmeric but it's the coconut milk in the mixture that is clearest in the flavour. A whole, peeled prawn is nestled on top of each one, along with a drizzle of spring onion oil. Decide between gutsching in one mouthful or wrapping in a lettuce leaf with mint, cucumber, pickled carrot and a splash of nuoc cham dipping sauce.

[instagram.com/gao\\_adelaide](https://www.instagram.com/gao_adelaide)



Banh khot (coconut pancake with prawn) at Gao Restaurant, Croydon Park.

## SEAFOOD

### ANGOVE

*Raw snapper, fennel ponzu*

Energetic chef (and sheep farmer) Georgie Rogers has taken the dining at this McLaren Vale cellar door to a more sophisticated level. Take this snapper dish in which chunks of raw fish are ever-so-briefly torched to singe the skin but leave the pale pink flesh beneath pure, delicate and vulnerable. Translucent slices of celery and an understated “ponzu” sauce based on fennel juice gently draw out the flavour, while a fermented green chilli relish adds a lovely exclamation mark at the finish.

[angove.com.au](http://angove.com.au)



Raw snapper, fennel ponzu, fermented chilli at Angove cellar door, McLaren Vale.

### **FINO AT SEPPELTSFIELD**

*King prawns, XO butter*

Daniel Murphy has returned to the kitchen where he spent some of his formative years, bringing the exquisite sauces and broths that are his specialty. The XO that he makes from the dehydrated offcuts of last winter's bluefin tuna, for instance, is a juggernaut of power and complexity. Mounted with butter, it provides an awesome backing track to butterflied king prawns that have been brushed with some of the unctuous juices from the heads as they grill in their shells.

[fino.net.au](http://fino.net.au)



King prawns, XO butter at Fino at Seppeltsfield, Barossa Valley.

## **A PRAYER FOR THE WILD AT HEART**

### *Bouillabaisse*

Stephane Brizard's cooking is like a love letter to his homeland of France. Take his bouillabaisse that includes prawn, mussels and pieces of barramundi, all cooked to the minute. But what really gets the heart pumping is a rust-coloured broth, made in a two-day process, an essence of fish bits, fennel, pastis, saffron and much, much more, combining to a flavour of Mariana Trench depth. Allow it to soak into pieces of dried baguette slathered in rouille, the traditional garlicky accompaniment. Mon dieu!

[aprayerforthewildatheart.com.au](http://aprayerforthewildatheart.com.au)





Bouillabaisse at A Prayer for the Wild at Heart, Adelaide. Picture: Dan Shultz, Sweet Lime Photo

## **THE DONBURI HOUSE**

*Unagi chazuke (eel rice bowl with dashi soup)*

Donburi means rice bowl in Japanese but, as this humble city eatery shows, the staple is a starting point with endless possibilities. Here the rice is strewn with filaments of nori (seaweed), egg and the occasional sour plum, then adorned with deeply lacquered, soy-brushed fillets of eel. As the waiter promises, however, it is taken to a different level when the hot dashi and green tea broth known as chazuke is poured over the top. It's a magic potion for the eel, particularly.

[thedonburihouse.com.au](http://thedonburihouse.com.au)



Unagi chazuke (eel rice bowl with dashi soup) at The Donburi House, Adelaide. Picture: Supplied

## PEEL ST

*Red snapper, caponata, pancetta*

Head chef Phil Helyard treats a pan-fried flank of red snapper with the full southern Italian playbook – dollops of caponata and tapenade, fried cavolo nero leaves and scattered pieces of pancetta. There are more big personalities here than the streets of Naples and keeping them all in check, and the lovely, pearly flesh of the fish shining through, is quite an achievement. Classic Peel St cooking.

[peelst.com.au](http://peelst.com.au)



Red snapper, caponata, pancetta at Peel St restaurant, Adelaide. Picture: Supplied

### **1802 (Coffin Bay)**

*Dry-aged kingfish, fennel, white bean puree*

British chef Andy Williams and his partner Clare Martin have created a dining experience that couldn't be better suited to this idyllic holiday hotspot. Seafood, naturally, is the focus, including signature dry-aged kingfish kept in hay for more than a week so the moisture can slowly dissipate, allowing the flesh to become a denser, tighter texture and the skin, when put into a hot pan, to bubble and crisp like a piscine crackle. With shaved fennel, a white bean puree, smoked tomato consomme and basil oil, it has the sophistication one might expect at a high-flying city restaurant.

[1802oysterbar.com.au](http://1802oysterbar.com.au)



Dry-aged kingfish, fennel and white bean puree at 1802, Coffin Bay.

## **PASTA**

### **SILVER SANDS BEACH CLUB**

*Tagliolini, baby calamari, bottarga*

An inspired expression of our aquatic bounty with an ocean view to match. The background of chef Stefano Longhi shines through in the tender strips of local baby squid tossed through tagliolini pasta blackened with the creature's carefully harvested ink. A sauce of roasted cherry tomatoes adds extra body, while the final blast of salty sea breeze comes from the golden shavings of bottarga, an Italian specialty made in-house from the cured roe of local mullet.

[silversandsbeachclub.com.au](http://silversandsbeachclub.com.au)



Taglioline, baby squid, bottarga at Silver Sands Beach Club, Aldinga Beach.

## **CHIANTI**

*Farfalle pasta, rabbit and Sicilian olives*

The Chianti kitchen, led by Englishman Josh Cooke, makes farfalle in-house, the small pasta sheets pinched at the centre to form the classic butterfly/bow tie shape, then plunged in boiling water just long enough to become silken and supple. A ragu of wild rabbit is the ideal partner, the ground meat adding its gamy oomph to a sauce that is finished with plenty of fresh sage. A few dollops of zesty, pulverised Sicilian (green) olives also work a treat.

chianti.au



Farfalle pasta, rabbit and Sicilian olives at Chianti, Hutt St, Adelaide. Picture: Jack Fenby

## **MEAT**

### **HENTLEY FARM**

*Kangaroo, chimichurri, radicchio*

Picking one highlight from Clare Falzon's cavalcade of thrilling morsels at Hentley Farm is nigh on impossible but this more substantial dish, showcasing an under-utilised protein, is as worthy as any. Grilled loin of kangaroo is seasoned in curry leaf powder, daubed with chimichurri and shrouded beneath a grilled radicchio leaf that has been brushed with anchovy butter. The meat is sublime, the whispers of bitterness, salt and spice controlled like an orchestral movement. (Note: Falzon left the kitchen at Hentley during the year).

[hentleyfarm.com.au](http://hentleyfarm.com.au)



Kangaroo, chimichurri, radicchio at Hentley Farm.

## **MAISON CLEMENT**

### *Pork bouillon*

Clement Labaere wants everyone to know French bistro cooking shouldn't be posh or expensive. Rather than spending big on lavish accoutrement or ingredients, he invests the time it takes to slowly simmer bones until they finally relent and let go of their goodness. You can taste it in the large jug of pork and chicken broth that comes with pork belly rolled into a hefty puck and poached until its fat is wobbly and delectable. The shallow bowl also contains a stack of steamed veg – broccolini, beans, carrots – and bundles of herbs. Some of the broth is poured over but the jug is left to add more as required. The cost of this feast is a measly \$28.

[maisonclement.com.au](http://maisonclement.com.au)



Pork bouillon at Maison Clement, Adelaide.

## **THE LANE**

*Homemade lamb sausage, fennel jam, mountain pepper*

Tom Robinson and the team at this Adelaide Hills cellar door are in the midst of an ambitious project to grow enough vegetables, fruit and other ingredients to sustain the restaurant and also provide help to the local community. The sausage, made from the minced belly and other parts of a lamb from the property's resident flock, is one early example of the possibilities. Taking inspiration from the spice and underlying sweetness of a South African boerewors, the coarsely ground meat, dried apricot and sticky glaze of the spiral is something special, while pops of colour from preserved peppers add a little eye candy.

[thelane.com.au](http://thelane.com.au)





House-made lamb sausage, fennel jam, mountain pepper at The Lane, Hahndorf.

## VEGETABLES

### THE ODD PLATE

*Charred broccoli, almond cream, currant escabeche*

A fire in August closed this special little restaurant but plans are afoot to update the space as part of a major redevelopment. Hopefully Dylan Pitallo and Yolandi Cronje will be back one day to serve up food such as this vego combination. A sharp knife is provided to carve up a charred head of broccoli that comes with its fried leaves and a fabulous Spanish/Moorish mash-up of silky almond cream, roasted chickpeas, sweet/sour currants “escabeche” and a sprinkle of tangy zaatar.



Charred broccoli, almond cream, currant escabeche at The Odd Plate, Kingscote.

## **KOYO**

### *Tempura curried pumpkin, whipped feta*

The starting point for the cooking at Koyo is Japanese but alongside all the soy and shiitake and dashi are plenty of additional elements you are unlikely to find in Tokyo. Saltbush crunch, for instance. Or feta and maple syrup. Those last two are the keys to an inspired teaming of tender slices of pumpkin encased in a smashing tempura batter and drizzled with the syrup that has been spiked with a bold sprinkling of two types of dried chilli. The cheese is underneath, whipped into a creamy emulsion that makes everything sing in harmony. It's naughty but you won't be able to stop at one piece.

koyoadl.au



Tempura curried pumpkin, whipped feta at Koyo, Prospect.

#### **ELEMENTARY BY SOUL CO**

*Grilled cabbage and onion, nasturtium, buttermilk*

The finer details of this latest venture from the talented Mount Gambier-based chef/entrepreneur Kirby Shearing and his company Soul Co are best left as a surprise. Shearing sources many of the vegetables from his own backyard patch as seen in this cabbage roll filled with cauli, broccoli, onion and herbs that are all homegrown. After steaming, the roll is cut into pucks that are grilled until the brassicas take on some char, then placed on a puddle of buttermilk and nasturtium oil. Light and uplifting, it's a pure expression of the season.



Grilled cabbage and onion, buttermilk at Elementary, Mount Gambier. Picture: Supplied

## **DESSERT**

### **TOPIARY**

*Foraged blackberry and elderflower honey creme brulee*

Given the restaurant's nursery setting, it makes sense Topiary's owner/chef Kane Pollard is mildly obsessed with plants and spends considerable time either growing his own or picking what is available in the surrounding bush. Different versions of this brulee appear frequently on his menus, depending on the season. Here the set custard with torched sugar cap is topped by fresh and poached blackberries, as well as dainty little elderflowers. Visit in the next few weeks and stone fruit is likely to feature.

[topiary-dining.com](http://topiary-dining.com)



Foraged blackberry and elderflower honey at Topiary, Tea Tree Gully.

### **THE ENCHANTED FIG TREE**

*Meringue, honey figs, Fleurieu cream*

A starlit dinner beneath the twisted boughs and dense canopy of a century-old fig tree on Kangaroo Island is an experience that you will long remember, especially with the local wildlife for company. When a visit coincides with the tree coming into fruit, then figs are a must. For this visit, chef Alana Brabin poached them in whey to create a delectable compote that is served beneath a meringue lid with thickened Fleurieu cream.

[gastronomodining.com.au](http://gastronomodining.com.au)



Meringue, honey figs, Fleurieu cream at The Enchanted Fig Tree, Kangaroo Island.

## **JOLLEY'S BOATHOUSE**

### *Lemon tart*

Classic desserts and puddings are popping up on many restaurant menus as diners gravitate towards familiar comfort foods. Harry Bourne and his team at Jolley's have taken this lemon tart to a different level by baking it fresh for each service, ensuring the vanilla shortcrust shell maintains maximum snap and the tangy custard still gives a little quiver. The surface is dusted with icing sugar and torched, before serving with creme fraiche from local heroes, Alexandrina Cheese.

[jolleysboathouse.com](http://jolleysboathouse.com)



Lemon tart at Jolleys Boathouse, Adelaide.

## **ST HUGO**

### *Peach clafoutis*

Is it a pudding, a crustless tart or a pancake? None of the descriptions really do the old-fashioned dessert of clafoutis justice, particularly when it is as good as the version at this cellar door restaurant in the Barossa. Made in a pie tin, its fluted crust is all crisp and biscuity, the edges just starting to catch and turn to a dark toffee. Heading towards the middle, where the batter has been poured over slices of fresh peach, it gradually becomes more like a set custard, to the point where it is hard to believe this has all been made with the same mixture. To the side is a plum sorbet the deep red of an old-fashioned rose petal and another quenelle of sour ice cream.

[sthugo.com](http://sthugo.com)



Peach clafoutis, plum sorbet at St Hugo cellar door, Barossa Valley.