

UNEXPLORED TERRITORY

Cafe Kazari Prahran

Where: Kazari Collector gallery, 450 Malvern Road, Prahran, 9510 2528
Prices: Soup or dumplings \$9.50; lunch sets \$15-\$19; desserts \$4.50-\$5
Cards: AE MC V Eftpos
Open: Mon-Sat (cafe 10am-4pm, lunch noon-3pm)
Web: kazari.com.au
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The art of Zen dining

I ONCE lived in a monastery. While the whole wearing robes thing was an attraction, what really made me want to stay was the calm at meal times. At breakfast, talking was banned, which seemed like an excellent idea if you'd had a big night out on the altar wine, and at lunch someone read you tales of devotion, intoned in the sort of monotone that became soothing aural wallpaper.

Contrast this, if you will, to the usual prospect of foraging for lunch out in the big bad city. The crowds, the glass sarcophagi filled with mortified, pre-pared food, the angry decor of strident colours designed to move you on, and noise. Oh the noise, that relentless jack-hammering of modern life that's all squealing airbrakes and shouted mobile conversations.

Heaven, then, to find a table at Kazari. Japanese chef Emiko Rogers has taken over the back of this modern art gallery, full of Japanese-inspired canvases and interesting ceramics, to run about the calmest little cafe in Melbourne.

On a warm day, take one of the few tables in the courtyard, which are surrounded by huge granite sculptures by Ashika. It's a Zen space of decking and pebbles that perfectly matches a beautifully



**Matt
Preston**

light and blissfully short menu of homestyle Japanese cooking.

Basically there are just five choices on our visit — a relief from the very modern dilemma of the tyranny of too much choice. The steamed, and steaming hot, chicken dumplings are all silky pasta skins filled with moist chook mince that are more reminiscent of sui mai than gyoza. They come with a zippy little ponzu sauce for dipping. The cafe also does a clear soup — just as subtle and light as the dumplings — which lets the flavours of its vermicelli-like somen noodles and chunks of oyster mushroom come through.

Then there is a standard bowl of tempura-coated vegies, silver whiting and a prawn served with an unusual mix of steamed rice, wheat grains and red beans, which

is both texturally interesting and filling.

Less restrained is a paste of thick dark red miso slathered over a slab of milky tofu, which probably should be reserved for those who like to eat miso paste — or Promite — straight from the pot.

The tempura, dumplings and the tofu can all be ordered as part of a lunch set that comes with a little bowl of clear soup, with the noodles substituted for surprisingly unremarkable hunks of watermelon, a crisp salad of mixed leaves, a small bowl of three-grain mix and a little appetiser dish. On our visit, this was an interesting, moist and gently savoury tofu powder tossed with peas and carrots.

The compound effect of having all this for lunch is to leave you feeling like you've indulged in something virtuously light and healthy.

To drink, there's boutique Tasmanian mineral water, a range of Asian leaf teas and a hip-looking plastic bottle of Japanese juice. They also make a frothy bright green latte and cappuccino out of a powdered green tea leaves — choices that help you wring the few last drops of calm from your lunch here.