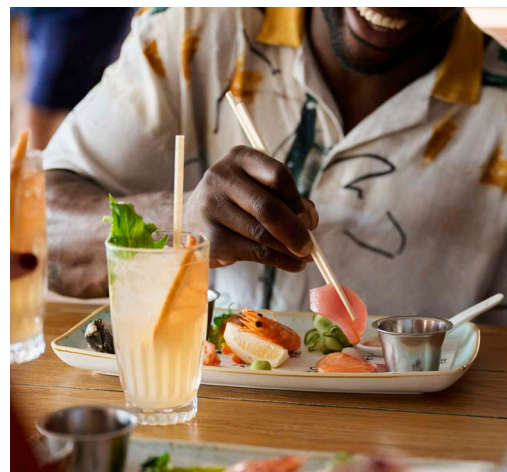




CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A pavlova at Bennelong crafted in the shape of the iconic structure it sits in; Newly opened Midden by Mark Olive spotlights native ingredients; The finished product of a cocktail-making class is enjoyed with a seafood platter at Opera Bar.



# Culinary Theatre

The SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE is *FAMOUS* for its architecture. But its *DINING* options are certainly something to *SING* about, writes Elizabeth Whitehead.

YOU NEED NOT ENTER the theatre to experience a showstopping performance at the Sydney Opera House. Simply head to one of its many restaurants, where chefs and bartenders are consistently whipping up a symphony of flavour. The venue's varied epicurean offerings epitomise the quintessence of modern Australian dining – all showcased in one of the most archetypal Aussie settings imaginable.

Today, the Opera House's nested shells carve their signature shape into a cloudless sky. This year marks 50 since the structure was immortalised as an architectural icon, transforming an otherwise unremarkable cityscape into one of the world's most recognisable. But I'm not here to feast my eyes upon the impressive architectonics. I'm partaking in a true feast of epic proportions, as part of the Opera House's monthly Taste of the House dining experience (undoubtedly the tastiest tour in Cultural Attractions of Australia's portfolio).

For our first stop, our group ambles down to the glittering harbour for a cocktail-making class at Opera Bar. Led by the bar's former manager Steve Davis, we

assemble the ever-popular Sydney Sling, a summer drink that Steve was inspired to create "for the city", pulling together a bittersweet flavour profile perfect for balmy days lingering by the water. Muscle memory from my long-gone bartending days kicks into motion as I empty shots of botanical gin, amaro, lime and grapefruit into a shaker – each one alchemising with the last to build an increasingly intoxicating olfactory sensation.

Accompanying our handcraft creations is none other than one of Opera Bar's signature cold seafood platters. I slurp down a succulent oyster slick with brine, its iridescent shell glittering in mimesis of the mighty ones looming over us. There are silky sheets of kingfish sashimi and fleshy Yamba prawns that menu curator and celebrity chef Matt Moran insists are "some of the best in the world".

The House Canteen, which serves up casual Asian-inspired fare, is next. We receive a pairing of crisp, light rice beer with umami handmade dumplings. A poke bowl follows – a harmony of texture comprising tender bites of salmon, crunchy dried edamame beans and crisp shredded seaweed.

When our guide informs us that it's "time for lunch," I laugh. But he's not joking – instead leading us to newly opened Midden by celebrated Indigenous chef, Mark Olive. Midden draws upon bush tucker and native Aussie ingredients to showcase the flavours of Country. It's in keeping with local Indigenous tradition, given the millennia-long history of Bennelong Point as a gathering and feasting place for the Gadigal Traditional Owners. We tuck into fluffy damper with whipped eucalyptus butter and hearty shanks of braised wallaby, plated up with native tomatoes and warrigal greens.

A Sgroppino cocktail with lemon sorbet is a welcome digestif, and pavlova at upscale restaurant Bennelong caps off a day of unrelenting grazing. This is where Taste of the House gets literal, as we're each served shards of meringue sculpted into the shape of the iconic structure we're sitting in, presented atop a harbour of passionfruit and cream. From the yawning jaws of the Opera House's atrium, I savour a mouthful of the structure in miniature like a *Matryoshka* doll in dessert form. It's a finale worthy of a standing ovation. [culturalattractionsofaustralia.com](http://culturalattractionsofaustralia.com) 