



Cafe culture

DONNA COUTTS gets into feelgood food, cafe style



Welcome inn: the food's good and the atmosphere cosy at Olmecs.

OLMECS BAKERY BAR CAFE

410 Bridge Rd, Richmond
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WE ARE well-fed little Vegemites this week, after a false alarm involving a reasonable bite but not enough fodder for a 500-word review.

Our first attempt begins much like any other meal the fella and I eat. We have in our hot little hands a vague recommendation, two substantial appetites, an idle hour and no desire to scour our own pots and pans.

The tucker at venue No.1 is uninspiring but edible; no better or worse than much of the stuff that makes its way on to bargain-shopper's plates the length of Bridge Rd.

It's the vibe that's the matter.

Yeah, yeah. I know I once used a whole week's words fleshing out the theory that you can't eat ambience.

I'm about to go some way to eating my words.

We are the only eaters at venue No.1. No problem, except the staff take the opportunity to slouch around like they'd rather be elsewhere and we have little else to do but run a critical eye over the open kitchen. We feel too self-conscious to talk. We eat quickly and leave in search of vibe-er pastures.

Sure, vibe is nothing more than a feeling. But cafes, perhaps more than colleague Mr Downes' silk-department restaurants, are a place to be. Food's fundamental, but if you're honest you could whip up cafe-style stuff at home with help from the supermarket deli lady and a flick through a Jamie Oliver book.

Cafes are about reading the paper in the sun. They're about not dithering over when you'll wash the dishes. About sharing a feed with the mates you can't be bothered inviting home. About getting out of the office under the guise of a meeting. About becoming a regular (and not being required to speak your order). And about catching a good vibe and riding it for all it's worth.

Take two.

Venue No.2 is a different kettle of fish.

At 8pm on a school night Olmecs is almost as empty (Melbourne's cafe culture vultures are clearly hibernating), but it's cosy in here. The beautiful faux-log gas fire is warming the room, there is plenty of good-looking food on display, the staff are friendly and energetic and we're right at home (without the pot-and-pan scrubbing).

Yep, this is the kind of place you meet

hot tips



FOOD

Beef burger, caramelised onions, bacon, swiss cheese, lettuce, fried egg. \$13.50



DRINK

James Boag's Premium Lager, \$5



DRESS CODE

Pick your strides to suit your own vibe

