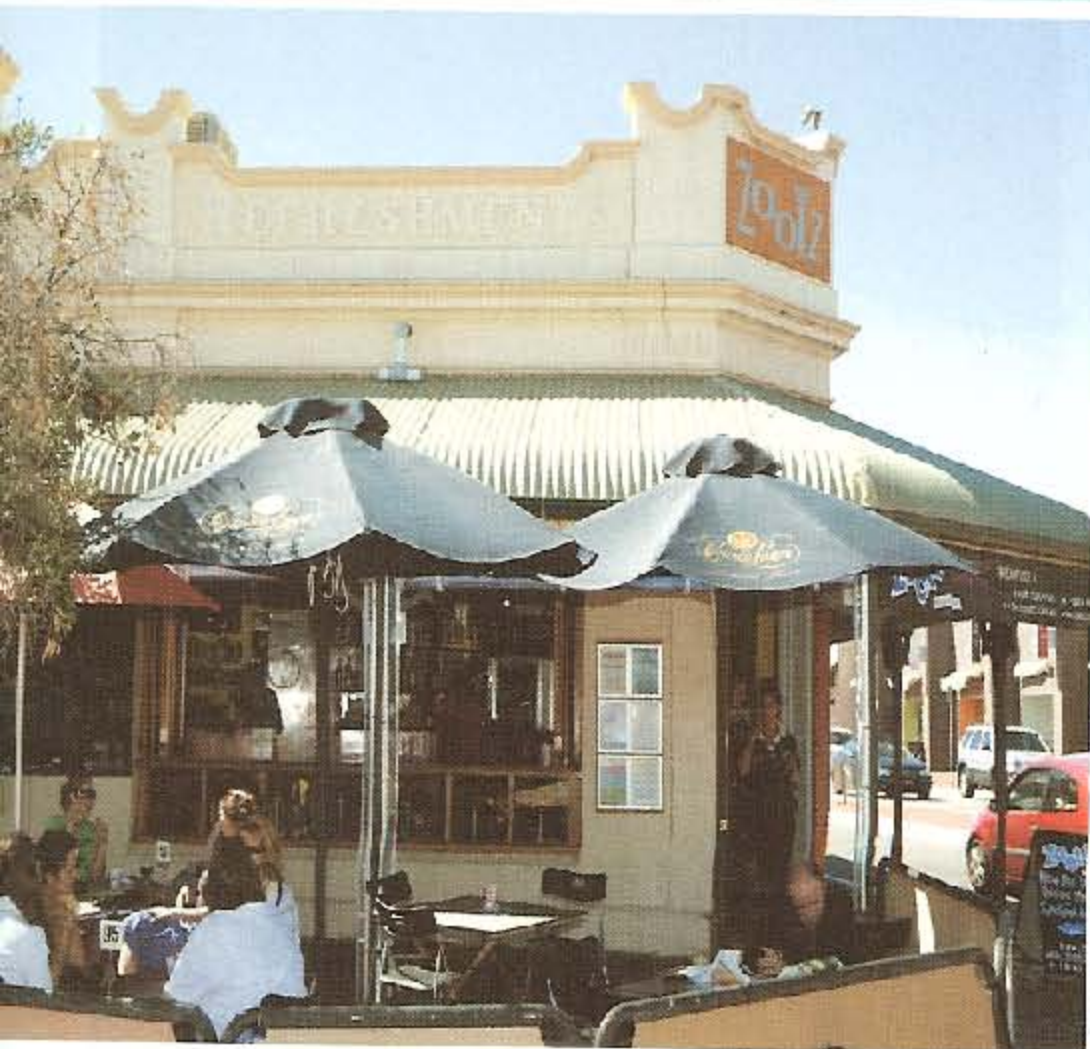


Zootz Kitchen and Bar

SEAVIEW RD, HENLEY BEACH



GO ON, LET THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT AND THE location sweep you away. Have a Bloody Mary with your breakfast, and order champagne for your partner. You're lazing by the sea; the sun is dazzling, and Zootz Kitchen and Bar promotes an air of mischievous hedonism that virtually demands that you splurge. It feels like the sort of funky beach bar that you stumble upon near a summery resort – only it's right in the heart of Henley Square.

Zootz, with its interior walls splashed in vibrant slabs of bold colour and huge open windows, is an antidote to suburbia's mundane, generic café culture, largely because it's not prescriptive about its function. Its doors open at 7am each day and close late, what happens in between is largely at the whim of the customer. They'll serve you breakfast in the mid-afternoon, offer wines if you're not hungry but be quick with an all-day menu once your appetite arrives, and shake some highly original cocktails when you're in the mood for lounging. It's the type of breezy arrangement that owners Bec Paris and Kym Hewitt envisaged when they opened Zootz three years ago, a café, a diner and a funky lounge bar, and, as such, it's unique in the neighbourhood.

Having taken over a large expanse of the Henley Square pavement with tables and chairs shaded beneath market umbrellas, Zootz presents itself as the sort of place where it's easy to linger with friends. And that can start in the early morning, over coffee or breakfast. It's a favourite haunt of cyclists and coastal walkers (dogs are looked after with a bowl of water and a free dog biscuit) and you'll often be hard pressed to find a vacant outdoor table (there are plenty more inside, but alfresco is the more popular option).

If you order breakfast, it's necessary to bring a large appetite; the Belgian waffles (\$13.50) and stack of pancakes (\$10.50) are extravagant, while the big gourmet breakfast (a \$15.90 fry up with eggs, kranisky, chorizo, beans, hash browns and everything else) is nothing short of overwhelming.

The all-day menu offers standard pub-style plates that are unspectacular but appetising – a chicken, leek and mushroom pie; salt and pepper squid; fish and chips; roast and pasta of the day – priced from \$13.60 to \$22.90 for a generous Surf'n'Turf (steak topped with prawns and calamari).

It's not really meals that are the star feature of Zootz – it's the drinks, especially the list of original "Cock and Pussy-tails" created by Bec. She won the 2006 State cocktail making competition at the Adelaide Hospitality Expo from 123 entrants with her Fruit Bomb (apple, orange, lime and banana with blackcurrant and a hint of lavender), which is now a popular feature of the Zootz menu.

Be warned that placing orders can be slow at peak times, because Zootz has a pay-as-you-order system at the main bar; weekend breakfasts and dinners are always very crowded – and the bar becomes an over-18 only zone after 9pm, so families need to have eaten and gone by that time. Rightly so, because in the evening it transforms into a different type of place with a different mood: cooler, younger, sexier, with a resident DJ spinning some smooth tunes on Friday and Saturday nights. Most places that try to be this eclectic fail. Zootz succeeds mainly because of the mood of its owners and staff. It's sunny, friendly, unfussed – the perfect sort of place to be while drinking in a glimpse of the sea.