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Comme makes way

News that St Kilda's Stokehouse is moving to the city in May while the Jacka Boulevard **site** is being rebuilt after the January 17 fire came as a surprise to staff at Comme, who will make way for the Stokehouse team. "No one was expecting it but we're all understanding of the news," says Daniel Southern, who has headed the Comme kitchen since 2009.

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He will remain at the Alfred Place **site** until it closes on April 20 and is unsure what he'll do after that.

In a statement, owner Frank van Haandel said: "We thank Daniel for his understanding of the situation that we find ourselves in. We are very sad and very reluctant to let him go ... Daniel has made an extremely significant contribution to Comme, and we have no doubt he will be snapped up by a respected operator in no time."

Last October, Espresso reported van Haandel was going into business at Comme with Maurice Terzini, owner of Sydney's Icebergs, and his consultant chef Paul Wilson.

Terzini says he hasn't shut the door on the deal but has postponed it because of the Stokehouse's move to the Alfred Place **site**.

"I've spoken to Frank and I told him to do what he has to do and we'll regroup in a year's time," says Terzini. "You can't control what's happened here. The Stokehouse burned down and people's livelihoods are at stake."

Comme will close on April 20, reopening mid-May as the Stokehouse after a Pascale Gomes-McNabb makeover. Work is expected to start on the new St Kilda restaurant in July.

PICCOLO

■ Albert **Park** restaurant the Point has been **sold** to **Chinese** investors. Rabih Yanni, who has owned the restaurant on Albert **Park** Lake since February 1996, says head chef Justin Wise and manager Bryan Lloyd will stay on, while he plans to take a short break with his family before plunging into his next venture. "I've done 80-hour weeks for the past 21 years; I'll definitely get back into it soon."

■ Scott Borg, co-owner of the Smith in Prahran, will join his High Street business partners, chef Michael Lambie and restaurateur George Sykiotis, as co-owner and director of operations at their new city venture, Lucy Liu's Kitchen & Bar, previously the **site** of Philippe Mouchel's French bistro PM24. The 140-seat Asian fusion diner is scheduled to open mid-June after a refit.

■ Stefano's head chef Jim McDougall is following up his first side project, the Black Stump Bistro at Mildura's historic Settlers **Hotel**, with more of the same. He and Liam Wood have taken over the nearby Red Cliffs **Hotel**, which will get a spit and polish before a second Black Stump Bistro opens there in June.

■ Elwood restaurant Sails on the Bay (pictured) is marking 20 years in business with retrospective specials drawing on some of its most popular dishes of days past, including Japanese hors d'oeuvres (2004), and blue eye wrapped in kaiserfleisch with autumn vegetables (1995). On the menu since day one is seafood melange, a four-course seafood extravaganza (\$75 a head).

■ Craft beer bar Two Row, an offshoot of Richmond craft beer retailer Slowbeer, opened last week at 351 Smith Street, Fitzroy. To drink: rare and boutique craft beers, bourbons, whiskys and wines. And to sop up the booze: grilled cheese sandwiches, including one in a pretzel bun.

■ Prahran-based catering **company** Tommy Collins is stepping up its food offering, hiring Emile Avramides as executive chef and Michael Fox as head chef. Avramides has worked with Jason Atherton in Gordon Ramsay's Maze in London and at Cutler & Co in Fitzroy, while Fox was The Age Good Food Guide Young Chef of the Year in 2011, at Cecconi's.

Just Open

Fonda Mexican

Fonda Mexican's third and biggest **site** was unveiled in the CBD last week - splashing life and colour across the sprawling Flinders Lane **site** that once housed Virginia Plain and, briefly, Mercy Bar + Eatery. "We wanted this one to feel warm, casual and fun," says co-owner Tim McDonald (above, right, with business partner David Youl). Design studio Techne has nailed the brief, giving the light-filled, open-fronted 200-seater a vibrant fitout. CBD diners can now score the same fast, accessible and fresh mod-Mexican that has made Fonda a hit with locals in Windsor and Richmond.

Fonda Mexican, 31 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 8686 2660, fondamexican.com.au- Leanne Clancey

A month of yum days

Good Food Month is on its way for 2014, expanding this year to four states and territories (NSW, Victoria, ACT and Queensland). Mega-star chef Ferran Adria (right) makes an appearance at this year's first official Good Food Month event, a preview of planned events, today at Queensland's Gallery of Modern Art.

And last week's competition to win a money-can't-**buy** invitation to meet Ferran Adria tomorrow night attracted poems, limericks and even prayers, but there could be only one winner. Reader Cathy Anderson will meet Adria at his only Melbourne engagement, a reception at the Essential Ingredient Prahran.

Hatted Italian

Cecconi's has a handsome new look. Designed by Scott Mollard of Mollard Interiors, it's a combination of clean lines, interesting textures and a palette of black, white and hints of copper.

In the cellar bar, black geometric print banquettes, black bentwood chairs and mink parquetry contrast bright white walls and whitewashed timber tables edged in copper, remodelled by craftsman Don Bennett, Maria Bortolotto's husband. Copper wedge wall lights spotlight photographs saluting Italian heritage and

la famiglia.

Replica skygarden dome pendants and original marble bars link the more casual eatery with the elegant linen-clad dining space clustered in plush black and white high-backs. Michelle Potts

Cecconi's, Basement, 61 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 8663 0500, ceconis.com

The whole box and dice

Drop an artwork-adorned shipping container equipped with a kitchen into a vacant block off Geelong's main drag, and lo! Instant cafe. Box Office has an enclosed deck with rustic furniture out front, a tiny courtyard with faux lawn, potted herbs and a sandpit out back. The menu uses local ingredients such as Barwon lamb in souvlakis and Otway pork in sliders, plus there's a cabinet full of sweets, and coffee from Axil Coffee Roasters. Open Mon-Fri, 7am-4pm, Sat-Sun, 8am-4pm. Gail Thomas

Box Office, 77 Preston Street, Geelong West (no phone).

Northern Seoul

The folk behind popular Abbotsford Korean restaurant Seoul Soul have flung the doors open on a stylish Northcote outpost. Stop when you spot the pink neon signage. Inside, there is the moody, industrial-chic fitout that co-owner and interior designer Insu Kim has made a signature, as well as some really good bibimbap. Open daily for lunch and dinner (liquor licence pending). Seoul Soul, 315 High Street, Northcote, 9481 3027. Leanne Clancey

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