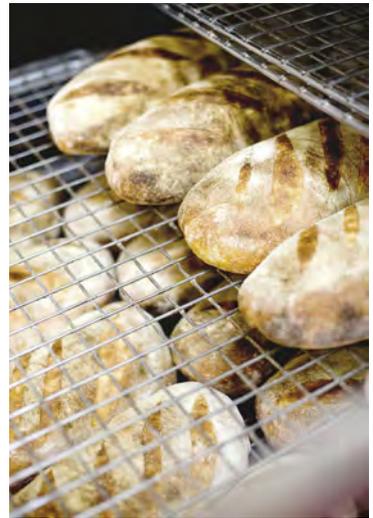


Spin the Bottle

Macedon Ranges

Some of Australia's best boutique wineries are just outside Melbourne. This month, we visit their cellar doors, sample the food and stay a night or two.



STORY BY PETER BOURNE

THEY'RE JUST one hour's drive from Melbourne but the grapevines of the Macedon Ranges largely fly under the radar, playing second fiddle to the area's bigger stars: Geelong, the Yarra Valley and the Mornington Peninsula. Still, it's a mistake to discount a region that produces some of Australia's best sparkling wine.

The Macedon Ranges' charming towns – such as Gisborne, Woodend, Lancefield and Kyneton – are assembled within a triangle formed by Sunbury, Daylesford and Castlemaine. The region is chilly, as the locals will attest, but it was the cool climate that enticed Melbourne restaurateur Tom Lazar to Kyneton in 1968. Although he first planted black cherries that failed, his Virgin Hills became one of Victoria's first boutique wineries and quickly acquired a cult following. The likes of Granite Hills (trial plantings in 1970), Cope-Williams (1977) and Hanging Rock (1982) followed, before being joined by artisan winegrowers Bindi (1988) and Curly Flat (1992).

Because of the cool and sometimes cold, wet early vintages and the minuscule scale of the pioneering wineries, the Macedon Ranges wine district evolved slowly. But grow it has. The high altitude and chilly conditions are perfect for quality sparkling wine – a focus led by Cope-Williams and Hanging Rock, which both proudly badge their bubbles as “Macedon brut”. Ethereal aromatics (think riesling and sauvignon blanc) and spicy reds complete the area's vinous profile.

Many wine producers predominantly sell through family-owned cellar doors and function venues. Cope-Williams has multifaceted facilities – there's even a cricket pitch – and you'll receive a warm welcome from the stalwarts at Granite Hills and Hanging Rock.

Arguably the most spectacular cellar door is Shadowfax. It can claim to be Melbourne's closest vineyard and has a highly lauded restaurant, too. With drawcards this compelling, the Macedon Ranges shouldn't be overlooked.

(From top) Hanging Rock Winery takes its name from the nearby geological formation; stock up on sourdough at RedBeard bakery



Tasting notes

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**BINDI
KOSTAS RIND
CHARDONNAY**

2016 / \$55

Michael Dhillon draws from a 1.5-hectare site planted in 1988 for this chardonnay, named in honour of his father's vinous mentor. White peach and crushed quartz define the nose, with intense fruit flavours of a similar ilk echoed on the palate. The texture is subtle with a pleasing tannin grip that goes perfectly with roast chicken.

QANTAS EPIQUIRE

Buy these wines and more at qantasepiquire.com.

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**CURLY FLAT
PINOT NOIR**

2015 / \$52

Things are changing at Curly Flat, with ex-Shadowfax winemaker Matt Harrop joining the team. However, this delightfully pure, sweet-fruited gem predates Harrop's arrival. Red berries and subtle oak-derived tannins dominate. Serve it with duck.

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**GRANITE HILLS
RIESLING**

2016 / \$25

Llew Knight has helped to lift his parents' pioneering winery to new heights, with this piercingly bright riesling leading the way. It's tight and steely with a fine-boned palate. Its mouth-watering lemon sorbet flavours and zesty acidity are made for freshly shucked oysters.

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**COPE-WILLIAMS
MACEDON BRUT**

NV / \$50

Winemaker Gordon Cope-Williams is a sparkling-wine specialist and his Macedon brut combines intensity and complexity in a restrained, savoury style. Aromas of warm bread and glacé fruit with a lift of lemon thyme round out the rich flavours. Enjoy it with salmon cakes.

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**COBAW RIDGE
L'ALTRA SYRAH**

2013 / \$36

The Coopers (father Alan and son Joshua) farm biodynamically at their elevated 600-metre site. The result? Pure and intense wines. Spicy aromas of raspberries and star-anise mingle with dried herbs and hints of sweet mocha in this syrah. Pair it with a steak-and-kidney pie.



Craig Mall



Cellar doors

Shadowfax

Named after the wizard Gandalf's steed in *The Lord of the Rings*, this is the region's showpiece winery (shadowfax.com.au).

Grapes from the on-site vineyard are augmented with Macedon and Geelong fruits.

Drink now Minnow red blend
Cellar Glenfern Chardonnay

Hanging Rock

Ann and John Ellis have carved a niche with their super-complex, Bollinger-style Macedon sparkling (hangingrock.com.au).

Drink now The Jim Jim Sauvignon Blanc
Cellar Macedon NV Cuvée XV

Passing Clouds

Graeme Leith relocated from the vineyard he planted at Bendigo in 1973 to Macedon in 1998, opening his cellar and dining room in 2012. A hands-on winery not to be missed (passingclouds.com.au).

Drink now Passing Clouds Pinot Noir
Cellar: The Fools on the Hill Pinot Noir

Gisborne Peak Winery

Gisborne Peak has the lot: a picturesque vineyard and working winery next to cosy eco-cottages (gisbornepeakwines.com.au).

Drink now Estate-grown Semillon
Cellar Estate-grown Pinot Noir

Wine and the Country

Jen and Owen Latta run a bar and shop showcasing regional wines at nearby Daylesford (wineandthecountry.com.au).

Drink now Silent Way Serpens semillon blend
Cellar Joshua Cooper Doug's Vineyard Pinot Noir



Have an aperitif before lunch at The Parkland (left); Source Dining's roast duck breast with croquettes, figs, pickled cherries and lentils



Food and drink

STORY BY KATE BARRACOSA

For breakfast and coffee MR MACEDON

📍 23 Victoria Street, Macedon
🌐 mrmacedon.com.au

Although this café has an extensive all-day breakfast menu that hits the right notes (eggs, smashed avo, pancakes and the Mr Big brekkie), it's really all about the bagels. Go classic with bacon, cheese, tomato relish and an egg, sunny side up, or opt for beetroot-cured salmon, dill cream cheese, avocado and house pickles.

For lunch THE PARKLAND

📍 37c Piper Street, Kyneton
🌐 theparklandkyneton.com

This new local favourite and its share plates are tailor-made for a long, lazy lunch. The smaller

nibbles are salty, crunchy, fried morsels – of note are the haloumi chips and the fried olives stuffed with lamb or cheese – while the bigger plates feature hearty cuts of meat and fish, with sides such as sautéed brussels sprouts. The duck salad with goat's curd, almonds, endive and satisfying bursts of pomegranate is a much-loved special.

For dinner SOURCE DINING

📍 72 Piper Street, Kyneton
🌐 sourcedining.com.au

A place where you can feel comfortable soaking up the last, creamy drops of cauliflower and fennel soup with your sourdough? Yes please. Expect to find greens fresh from the nearby kitchen garden slick with tangy dressing; duck, lamb or kangaroo sourced as locally as possible; and impressive, decadent desserts. Or simply

enjoy the dégustation menu, where every course is matched with a regional wine.

For taking home REDBEARD HISTORIC BAKERY

📍 38a High Street, Trentham
🌐 redbeardbakery.com.au

Order coffee (full-cream and full-strength only, though soy is offered) and something to nibble from the kitchen at this specialist sourdough bakery. Take home a sourdough loaf (there are several styles) or choose from the bakery's own muesli, biscuits (the almond and aniseed amaretti are especially delicious), jams and chutneys.

Stay

THE OLD RECTORY

📍 61 Ebdon Street, Kyneton
 🌐 kynetonoldrectory.com.au

Built for a parish priest in the 1850s, this charming three-bedroom bluestone house has been lovingly restored, from the floorboards to the walls and the chimneys. While the classic furnishings include antiques, this guesthouse isn't without the trimmings of 21st-century life. There's a Bose speaker in every room, heated towel racks and a kitchen stocked with all the goodies (olives, pickles, peppery crackers) you could want to accompany afternoon drinks. Just don't spend all your time inside; walk down the tree-lined path, past manicured hedges, to discover the glorious 160-year-old walnut tree, which is lit up at night.

MACEDON RANGES HOTEL & SPA

📍 652 Black Forest Drive, Macedon
 🌐 macedonrangeshotelspa.com.au

The view is king here. Each of the property's 36 guestrooms has a spa bath set against a window overlooking the eucalypt-covered slopes of Mount Macedon. For something extra-special, book the Deluxe Starlight Suite, so named for the floor-to-ceiling windows that offer unparalleled views of the great outdoors and its colourful wildlife.

If you don't want to drive HIPPO TOURS

Hippo Tours (hippotours.com.au) only kicked off last September but host Kwabena Ansah has already built close relationships with the local wineries. Tours are available for groups of two to 12 and pick-up from your accommodation or one of the designated spots in Melbourne's western suburbs can be arranged. Just don't expect to drink and dash; these tours are about taking your time, relaxing over lunch (they often visit Mount Towrong Vineyard for an Italian feast), getting to know the producers and sharing your opinions. ●



The Old Rectory is listed by the National Trust of Victoria



Wine Snob

Peter Watt

Sommelier, Du Fermier,
Trentham



What wine sums up the Macedon Ranges in a bottle?

Michael Dhillon at Bindi is doing fantastic pinot noir and chardonnay, as is Alan Cooper at Cobaw Ridge – lovely structure, very considered and they drink beautifully.

What local wine would you cellar? Pinot noir from good producers. And if I could get hold of the 2010 Cobaw Ridge Syrah, I'd put that down. The 2012 vintage is one you could drink now or cellar.

And what pinot noir would you recommend? For a good one, Bindi Dixon, and for a lazy afternoon, Shadowfax. And if I want to be challenged, I'd go for one of the better wines from Bindi, Curly Flat or Cobaw Ridge.

What about a chardonnay? The same wineries, except I'd toss in Passing Clouds as well.

You've got \$20 to spend. What wine would you buy?

The 2014 Banyandah Pinot Gris [the vineyard has since been sold to the owners of Shadowfax]. It's lovely to drink an older style of pinot gris that's been allowed to sit and gather concentration.

If you were hosting a lunch, what wines would you serve? I'd start with a Curly Flat or Passing Clouds sparkling then move on to pinot grigio and chardonnay. With duck, I'd serve Bindi Block 5 Pinot Noir; with lamb, I'd have a syrah from Cobaw Ridge.