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SAVOURING THE FRUITS

SHAWS ROAD WINERY, ARTHURS CREEK

For those in search of undiscovered gems in the Yarra Valley, Shaws Road Winery in Arthurs Creek provides a true sense of bucolic charm and hospitality. Nestled among rolling hills and farmlands, this family-owned winery has recently undergone significant renovations where food, wine, panoramic views and a relaxed approach to sharing rural life brings renewed focus to this unspoilt destination, just twenty minutes from the outskirts of Melbourne.

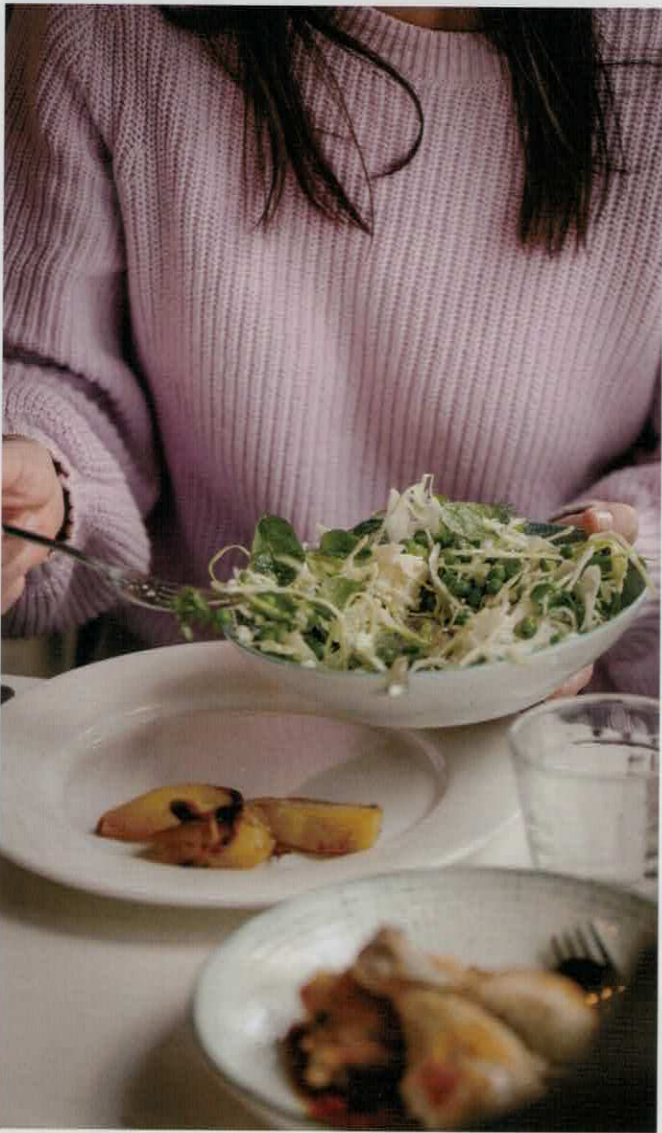
For Jan Miles and her husband George Apted, the past two years have been an opportunity to contemplate the future of their vineyard and set in motion a future-orientated plan that was 'ripe for development.' "We realised we wanted to invest the time, money and energy needed to create something really special here," says Jan, "and evolve into something that had serious wow factor with an experience for guests that could be savoured."

Extensive restaurant renovations, the establishment of two bed and breakfast apartments and new native gardens and landscaping now provide visitors to Shaws Road Winery with a uniquely Australian rural experience which is unpretentious, enjoyable and deeply embedded in country life. "We have always enjoyed visiting similar style farms where you are invited in to experience the full expression of rural life. There is wonderful food, amazing wine, and no apology for the farm life going on around you. There is luxury in simplicity and hospitality. We wanted to create a place where you can stop, be still and let your senses soak it all in."

For the past 35 years, George and his fellow winemakers John Graves and Karl Helper have spent every Saturday morning working in the vineyard before enjoying lunch together. They each bring a bottle of wine wrapped in aluminium foil for 'blind tasting' to share at the table and say this has helped them develop great palates for the nuances of wine.

The cellar door is open every Saturday and Sunday from 11.00am to 5.00pm while the restaurant offers a three-course lunch on weekends.





The family property, which has been home to 14 acres of vines for the past 35 years (the Apted name is also well known in the region for their 1,400 acres of beef and apple farming), is situated above the Yarra Valley, producing distinct wines that reflect the unique position of the vineyard on the northern slopes of the valley at an elevation of 400 metres. "We are a low irrigation vineyard and while this means our yield is lower, our fruit develops more intense flavours. We produce a different style of wine to the Yarra Valley generally, and we love to share it in our restaurant and at the cellar door."

The love for the Australian countryside is reflected not only in the wines, which can be seen being made in the downstairs production and tasting area/cellar door, but also in the restaurant, which offers a quintessentially modern rural menu. "We felt that being in a country setting, eating food that was reflective of that setting made sense. We are not about pretentious food – we bring honest, fresh, made-on-site food to the table that represents good value. And our wines complement a total experience," says Jan. "The food offers one layer of taste, wine another layer and then the experience of both provides a third dimension. We are careful to create a subtle sensory experience from the moment you arrive, soaking in the views, the clean air and the soft sounds."

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The native garden attracts abundant birdlife, including eagles swooping in the valley, and the rural location means sharing space with the resident cow herd, kangaroos and the farm dogs, two Border Collies, who are delighted to greet visitors for a pat. The couple observe a careful balance between farm life and conservation and have preserved pockets of land on their property as virgin bushland that has never been cleared.

Arthurs Creek, where the vineyard is located, is home to approximately only 200 residents and is an idyllic location where crowds are replaced by quiet, gentle calmness. This is reflected through every moment of enjoyment at Shaws Road Winery, where even the music in the restaurant is at a minimal level so that the chorus of birdsong provides a real soundscape.

"People who stay in our accommodation love the immersion in country life. It's a time to pause and rest, to move slowly and enjoy the changing of the seasons, a sunrise and sunset from the balconies. The restaurant offers 180-degree views across the open farmland to the Kinglake Ranges. It is like living inside a great work of art. Regardless of the weather, the pristine views can be enjoyed from the seclusion of the restaurant providing diners with a sense of being part of it all."

Built from a genuine love for wine and the rhythm of country life, George and Jan's philosophy of sharing their table with good friends and having great conversations is one that is certainly worth savouring. ■