

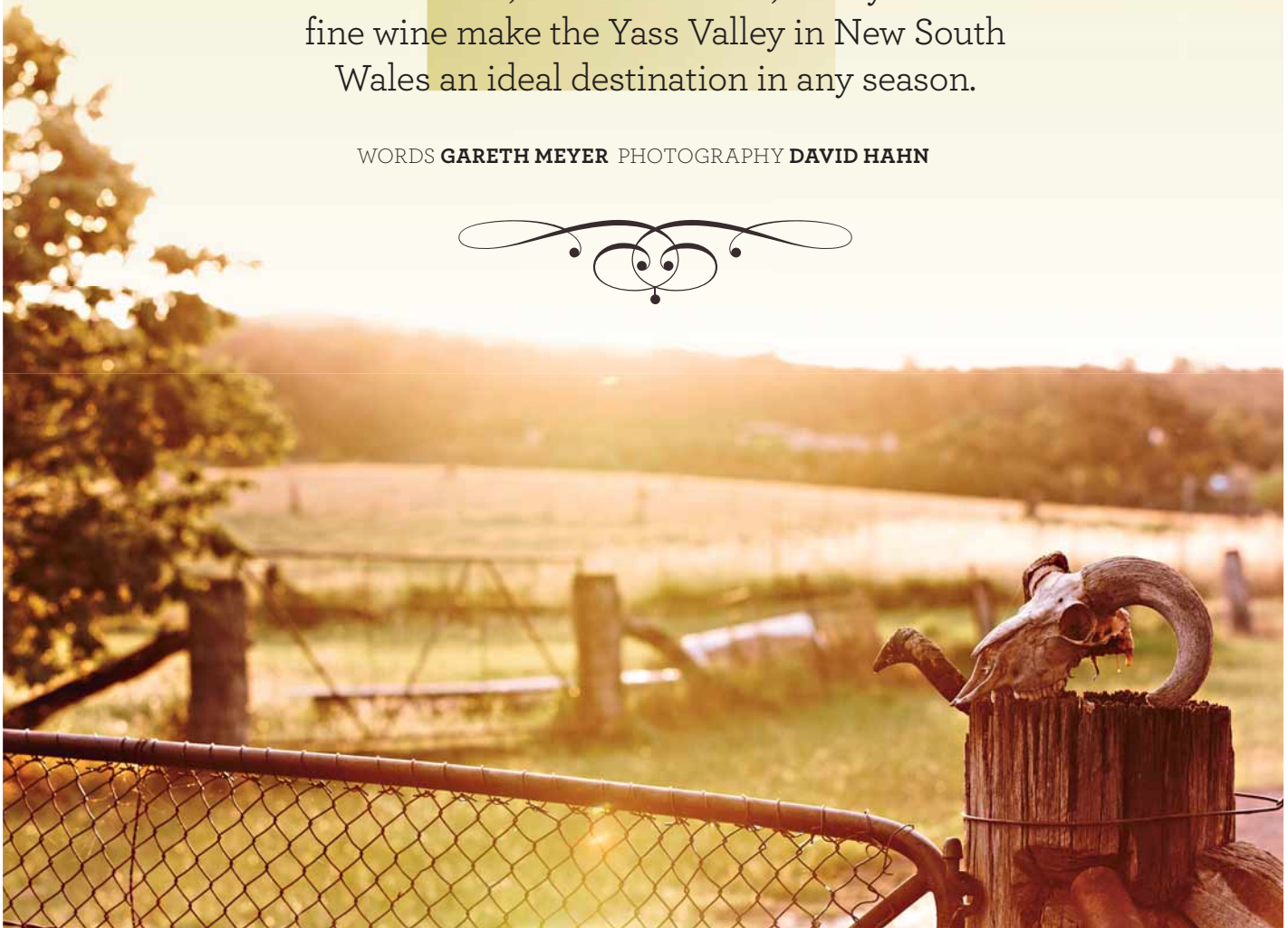
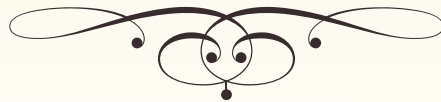


*just say*

**YASS**

Historic hotels, horseback rides, hearty food and fine wine make the Yass Valley in New South Wales an ideal destination in any season.

WORDS **GARETH MEYER** PHOTOGRAPHY **DAVID HAHN**



## IN THE MID-1800S,

the Yass Valley was a bustling rest stop for travellers between Sydney and Melbourne. The to-and-fro of Cobb & Co coaches, drovers, the horsemen of the Murrumbidgee and gold prospectors stoked the creative imagination of a local boy by the name of Andrew Barton “Banjo” Paterson. But since those early days, the region hasn’t really warranted its own postcard. When neighbouring Canberra became the nation’s seat of power, the polities settled to the east and left the region to merino sheep and grain farmers.

Even now, a GPS system offers limited help in navigating this McCubbinesque landscape of stringybark and scribbly gums. Fortunately, pioneering locals and passionate ring-ins are putting the valley firmly on the discerning food and wine traveller’s map.

*Australian Gourmet Traveller Wine* 2013 winemaker of the year Tim Kirk is among the local heroes. He has toiled hard to produce a drop described by Andrew Caillard of Langton’s wine auction house as “perhaps one of the most important advances in the development of Australian shiraz since the release of 1952 Penfolds Grange Hermitage”. Other winemakers are following his lead, crafting great cool-climate shiraz, viognier and riesling.

Restaurateurs have found inspiration in the local wines and fine regional produce that includes winter truffles, lamb, mushrooms and olives. Jennie and Mark Mooney have transformed Gundaroo’s charming 1865 Royal Hotel into Grazing, the region’s standout gastropub. Former stockbroker Susan Bruce took an educated punt on her Poachers Pantry – part restaurant, smokehouse and cellar door – in the gentle hills of Hall. Jai and Kate Dawson have recently

abandoned city life to apply their passion to Flint in the Vines, a superb cellar door-restaurant in Murrumbateman.

Scratch the cultural surface of the area and one finds an eclectic, but equally committed troupe of artists, among them world-renowned film-score composers, classical musicians and glassblowers. A month of artistic activity will be launched this year with YASSarts Spring (October 3-26), incorporating Sculptures in the Paddock, which made its successful debut last year. This month, Yass hosts the Turning Wave Festival of Irish and Australian music (September 19-21, [turningwave.org.au](http://turningwave.org.au)), while November brings Classic Yass (November 1, [classicyass.com](http://classicyass.com)), a day of classic cars, billycart races and live music.

The collective creativity of artists and artisans is helping to forge a distinctive regional identity. February’s Summerside and August’s Fireside festivals connect diverse experiences offered by the region’s Poacher’s Way collective ([thepoachersway.com.au](http://thepoachersway.com.au)). Enjoy a horse ride, sample Robyn Rowe’s artisanal chocolate, hunt for truffles and warm up over slow-braised ox cheek at Grazing.

While Canberra offers boutique accommodation within reasonable driving distance, the valley promises a relaxed and warm rural experience for those who’d prefer to stay local. The lovingly restored 1847 Georgian-style Globe Inn in Yass is the place to book for a romantic getaway, while the Country Guesthouse Schonegg and Redbrow Garden are studies in tranquillity. The Yass Valley may be reinventing itself, but locals are determined to preserve its charming, rural identity. Look out for future postcard releases. ➤

**Saddle up with Burnelee Excursions On Horseback  
at an idyllic property in Murrumbateman**





SCULPTURE PHOTOGRAPHY: MEGAN CASSIDY

Clockwise from top left: Sculptures in the Paddock; Wilhelmina + Celeste; Jai Dawson of Flint in the Vines at Shaw Vineyard; Murrumbateman Farmers Market



From above left: Clonakilla, Murrumbateman; Homeleigh Grove Olives, Wallaroo; Capital Wines, Gundaroo

## STAY

### COUNTRY GUESTHOUSE SCHONEGG

381 Hillview Drive,  
Murrumbateman.

(02) 6227 0344. [schonegg.com.au](http://schonegg.com.au)

With its serene rural setting, Country Guesthouse Schonegg offers smart and comfortable rooms with private courtyards that look out on unbroken vistas. From \$120.

### REDBROW GARDEN

1143 Nanima Road,  
Murrumbateman.

(02) 6226 8166.  
[canberraguesthouse.com.au](http://canberraguesthouse.com.au)

James and Debbie Gordon are busily revamping their charming farm cottage. Set in a beautiful lakeside garden, it is popular with groups keen to relax over a barbecue, table tennis and local wines. From \$160 (with breakfast).

### THE GLOBE INN

70 Rossi Street, Yass.  
(02) 6226 3680.

[theglobeinn.com.au](http://theglobeinn.com.au)

This delightful guesthouse has five bedrooms and a guest living room with an open fire, original timber

floors and working gramophone. Hosts Greg Miller and David Small offer cooked breakfasts for all bookings and home-cooked meals for full-house bookings. From \$130.

## EAT

### POACHERS PANTRY

431 Nanima Road, Hall.  
(02) 6230 2487.

[poacherspantry.com.au](http://poacherspantry.com.au)

The traditional smokehouse has been producing gourmet smoked meats for 21 years and these, along with Wily Trout wine, can be purchased from the farm shop and cellar door. Better yet, sample them over a slow lunch in the cafe. A dish of smoked lamb loin, heirloom carrots and lentils goes well with a glass of Wily Trout pinot noir.

### GRAZING

42 Cork Street, Gundaroo.  
(02) 6236 8777. [grazing.com.au](http://grazing.com.au)

Chef Kurt Neumann harvests heirloom vegetables from the back of the pub and sources local black truffles during the winter Truffle Festival. Ox cheek slow-cooked in Pedro Ximénez sherry comforts locals and big-city foodies alike.

Tarte tatin, crème brûlée and similar dessert classics feature alongside modern must-haves such as frozen caramel and salted peanut butter custard with chocolate.

### FLINT IN THE VINES

Shaw Vineyard Estate, 34 Isabel Drive, Murrumbateman.

(02) 6227 5144.

[flintinthevines.net.au](http://flintinthevines.net.au)

The wood-fired pizzas are great, but don't skip smartly-plated dishes such as slow-cooked pork loin with cauliflower puree and charred onions. A tart of local mushrooms is simply a stunner.

### CAFÉ DOLCETTO

129 Comur Street, Yass.  
(02) 6226 1277.

With art deco fittings, books for sale and an open fireplace, this is a cute and friendly spot for breakfast or a light lunch. Local stuffed mushrooms are hard to pass up.

### CORK STREET CAFÉ

Cork Street, Gundaroo.  
(02) 6236 8217. [corkstcafe.com.au](http://corkstcafe.com.au)

The Cork Street gang mastered the art of wood-fired pizza well before

it became ubiquitous in smart city diners. Open for lunch and dinner from Thursday to Sunday, and breakfast on weekends.

### CAPITAL WINES

42 Cork Street, Gundaroo.  
(02) 6236 8555.

[capitalwines.com.au](http://capitalwines.com.au)

Capital Wines cellar door and cafe occupies the old stables of The Royal Hotel and offers fine food options. Enjoy platters and wine pairings from Kyeema Vineyard's The Ministry Series with an epicurean lunch (\$36 for four wines matched with food).

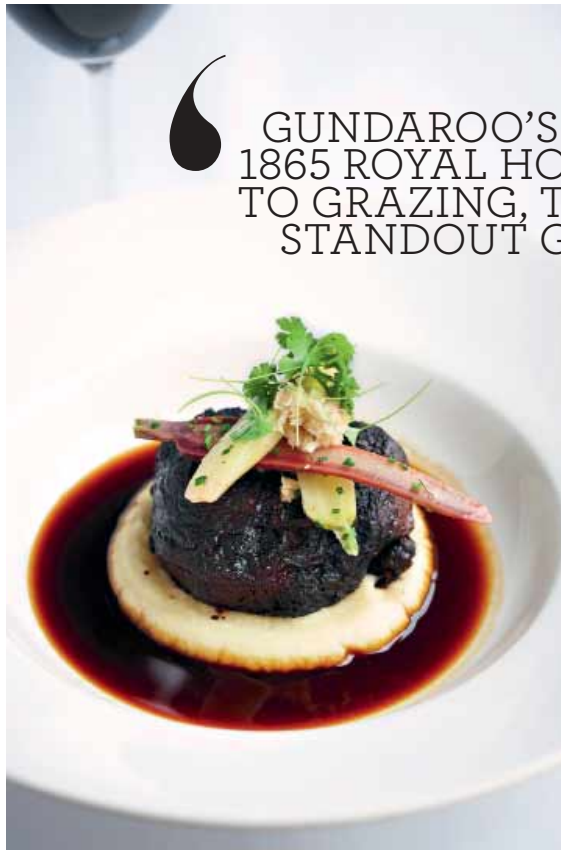
### ROBYN ROWE CHOCOLATES

1153 Nanima Road,  
Murrumbateman.

(02) 6227 0550.

[robynrowechocolates.com.au](http://robynrowechocolates.com.au)

Rowe's late career change entails crafting preservative-free artisanal treats from Belgian couverture chocolate. Aromatique Poire (pear), Open Sesame (tahini) and sea-salted caramel (produced for Canberra's centenary) are standouts. Hang around for a chat and an outstanding hot chocolate. ➤



## GUNDAROO'S CHARMING 1865 ROYAL HOTEL IS HOME TO GRAZING, THE REGION'S STANDOUT GASTROPUB

**Grazing:** frozen caramel and salted hazelnut custard with chocolate parfait (far left); ox cheek braised in Pedro Ximénez sherry on parsnip mash with glazed heirloom carrots and horseradish

### THYME TO TASTE

60 Comur Street, Yass.

0403 999 899.

[thymetotaste.com.au](http://thymetotaste.com.au)

This part-deli, part-cafe is introducing locals to good coffee and fine local produce. A good option for those approaching Yass from the south.

### HOMELEIGH GROVE OLIVES

50 Wallaroo Road, Hall.

(02) 6230 2931.

[homeleighgroveolives.com.au](http://homeleighgroveolives.com.au)

Peter O'Clery says local temperatures match those of Tuscany, even if the rain falls at the wrong time. His Ligurian-style Frantoio olives are the perfect option for a platter.

### DRINK

#### FOUR WINDS VINEYARD

9 Patemans Lane, Murrumbateman.

0432 060 903.

[fourwindsvineyard.com.au](http://fourwindsvineyard.com.au)

Love and a love of winemaking brought Bill and Jaime Crowe together in California's Napa Valley. Now they're making wine here the old way – hand-picked, and basket-pressed. Try some of their elegant shiraz among the vines and wood-

fired rosemary, potato and gorgonzola pizza turned out by magistrate-turned-pizzaiolo (and winery founder) Graeme Lunney.

#### YARRH WINES

440 Greenwood Road, Murrumbateman.

(02) 6227 1474.

[yarrhwines.com.au](http://yarrhwines.com.au)

The Yarrh cellar door is smart and sleek, tucked away in the stringy bark forest. Winemaker Fiona Wholohan produces fine riesling and shiraz, and draws on local produce for occasional Sunday lunches (first Sunday of the month, September-May) and daily antipasti plates.

#### TALLAGANDRA HILL

1692 Murrumbateman Road, Gundaroo.

(02) 6236 8694.

[www.tallagandrahill.com.au](http://www.tallagandrahill.com.au)

A small family-owned winery, Tallagandra is a great place for a relaxed drop of Sassy Red (cabernet

franc), coffee and part-owner Annemarie's scones – the choice of local cyclists on their regional loop.

#### CLONAKILLA

3 Crisps Lane, Murrumbateman.

(02) 6227 5877.

[clonakilla.com.au](http://clonakilla.com.au)

An understated cellar door matches Tim Kirk's resolute focus on the quality of the fruit and winemaking. His celebrated shiraz viognier is the highlight of the tasting, but there's plenty of good stuff along the way.

### SEE & DO

#### BURNELEE EXCURSIONS ON HORSEBACK

320 Dicks Creek Road, Murrumbateman.

(02) 6227 5850. [burnelee.com.au](http://burnelee.com.au)

Lindsey Butt and his daughter Rachel usually guide riders on two-hour treks across the family's idyllic property, and they'll help you select a mount that's appropriate for your skill level.

#### MURRUMBATEMAN FARMERS MARKET

Recreational grounds, Murrumbateman.

The fortnightly market (second and fourth Saturdays of the month) has stalls selling everything from alpaca wool scarves and dog beds to jams.

#### PETER CRISP GALLERIES

Gap Range, Bowning.

(02) 6227 6073. [petercrisp.com.au](http://petercrisp.com.au)

Crisp's glassmaking is fit for former presidents (George W Bush), royals (Prince Charles) and global brands (Bombay Sapphire). An avid supporter of the arts, Crisp hosts concerts within his gallery space.

#### KIM NELSON FINE ART & EDITIONS

67 Comur Street, Yass.

(02) 6226 1796. [kimnelson.com.au](http://kimnelson.com.au)

Australian symbolist artist Kim Nelson is a driving force behind regional arts initiative YASSarts. See his work on display at the Yass Oddfellow's Hall.

#### WILHELMINA + CELESTE

198 Comur Street, Yass.

(02) 6226 6415.

[wilhelminameetsceleste.com.au](http://wilhelminameetsceleste.com.au)

Julie Anne Laidlaw threw in her job to pursue her love of interior decorating. Her whimsical range includes hand-poured candles, restored wool classing tables and jewellery made from vintage cutlery. ➤

# ON THE WINE TRAIL

Wine writer Tyson Stelzer casts an eye over some other wine regions in NSW.

## HUNTER VALLEY

50km west of Newcastle and 160km north of Sydney, the Hunter Valley is the state's oldest and most important wine region, but it is far from a staid historical destination. In the past decade, the Hunter has burst from its "old-fashioned" stereotype, establishing itself as a breeding ground for a new generation of talented young winemakers. The latest trend is single-vineyard, with small and large estates increasingly reserving their top vineyards for special bottlings.

Hunter semillon is unique in the wine world, a refreshing sauvignon blanc substitute in its youth, yet possessing a remarkable ability to grow depth and complexity for decades in the cellar. The elegant, medium-bodied finesse of Hunter shiraz is finding appeal among modern palates seeking savoury, food-friendly reds.

❖ **Key cellar doors:** Tyrrell's (1838 Broke Road); McWilliams Mount Pleasant (401 Marrowbone Road); Brokenwood (401-427 McDonalds Road); Small Winemakers' Centre (426 McDonalds Road) – all in Pokolbin.

## TUMBARUMBA

In the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, Tumbarumba is the coolest wine region in NSW. Cool climate is crucial for the production of premium sparkling wine and

more is sourced here than anywhere else in the state, much of it destined for the blends of large brands outside the region. Sadly, many are not labelled as Tumbarumba, so it has taken a long time for this small region to gain recognition in the market.

Recent warm, dry vintages have encouraged the planting of varieties such as shiraz and merlot, which may not otherwise ripen at altitudes of 500-800m. Chardonnay is the region's most promising grape, producing sparkling wines of elegant and refreshing style, and table wines that contrast concentration with tangy vitality.

❖ **Key cellar door:** Courabyra Wines (805 Courabyra Road).

## ORANGE

The high plateau around the flourishing city of Orange, 260km west of Sydney, is home to an abundance of produce and wine. Defined by a minimum altitude of 600m, this is a region of cool nights and sunny days, basking in intense ultraviolet light. This has the effect of deepening colours and flavours in the wines of the region, producing distinctive and characterful wines.

Its cool, sunny weather and wide range of altitudes and aspects makes Orange suited to ripening everything from sparkling wines to full-bodied reds. Sauvignon blanc thrives

under these conditions, but it is chardonnay that makes the region's best whites, driven by fruit intensity and high-altitude acidity. Home to reds of many varieties, shiraz and cabernet sauvignon are particularly well suited here.

❖ **Key cellar doors:** Printhe Wines (489 Yuranigh Road); Philip Shaw (45 Caldwell Lane); Bloodwood (by appointment, 02 6362 5631).

## HILLTOPS

On the south-west slopes of the Great Dividing Range two hours' north-west of Canberra, Hilltops is a region fast establishing a reputation for distinctive, characterful and age-worthy shiraz and cabernet sauvignon. With altitudes above 400m, the cool extremes and rich red soils of the region have long been famous for cherries and now increasingly for elegant red wines of tangy acidity and textural mouth feel. The reputation of Hilltops has been championed largely by outsiders such as Clonakilla and McWilliams Barwang. In recent times, the best estates within the region have established sufficient winemaker experience and vine maturity to put forward head-turning wines of their own, with more great things to come.

❖ **Key cellar doors:** Moppity Vineyards (by appointment, 02 6382 6222); Grove Estate (4100 Murringo Road, Young).

