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CAPA Regional Airline of the Year 2007
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OUTthere

Christmas In Melbourne

Beach cricket, BBQs
& bustle on Burke

Tasmania's King Island

Deliciously cheesy

Northern NSW

Top Food & Wine Trails

Mark Occhilupo

Old surfers never die

+ CountryBIZ 44-PAGE REGIONAL BUSINESS MAGAZINE INCLUDED INSIDE



Vintage Crop

Australian gourmets have never had it so good. While cities like Melbourne and Sydney have long been foodie meccas, it's now possible to eat and drink well right around the country. WORDS: WINSOR DOBBIN

Farmers' markets, an increasing number of food and wine festivals, the emergence of casual restaurants that serve serious food and a new wave of wine bars are all good news for anyone who loves eating well. As *OUTthere* reflects on the year that was, wine and travel writer Winsor Dobbin unveils some of the affordable places that impressed him most during 2008 – and pinpoints some of the best spots for a truly Australian getaway.

WHERE TO STAY

Casa Luna Gourmet Accommodation

North-east Victoria is a treasure-trove of wine and food discoveries, and there is no better base from which to explore this fascinating region than Casa Luna at Myrrehe. With views over the Symphonia vineyards, this stylish and elegant mini-guesthouse is close to the cellar doors of Milawa, the King Valley and – slightly further away – Rutherglen. There are just two architect-designed suites, and host Gwenda Canty serves sumptuous three-course dinners on request. Phone 03 5729 7650 or visit www.casaluna.com.au.

Turon Gates Country Retreat

Turon Gates offers a quintessentially Australian bush experience less than three hours' drive from Sydney, between Lithgow and Mudgee. Choose from seven rustic log cabins or eight mountain retreat cottages. Kangaroos abound, as do wild goats, wombats, echidnas, goannas and eagles. The pleasures are simple ones: trout-fishing, bushwalking, horse riding, canoeing along a 15-kilometre stretch of river, panning for gold, or perhaps relaxing in a hammock with a glass of wine made on the property. This is the ideal spot in which to re-energise – and pets are welcome. Phone 02 9969 3818 or visit www.turongates.com.

Cloud Nine Spa Chalets

Set in the heart of the Porongorup Ranges in West Australia's vast Great Southern region, these chalets offer the perfect country break within striking distance of several cellar doors. You can sit on the deck and soak in the views, enjoy a spa or sauna, sup on complimentary bubbly, watch satellite TV, or explore the 40-hectare farm and meet the animals. There are fully equipped kitchens or you can order any of a selection of home-made, wood-fired pizzas to be delivered to your chalet. Phone 08 9853 1111 or visit www.cloudninespachalets.com.au.

Left: Ten Minutes by Tractor is a Mornington Peninsula standout.





Top: Outside Deshons RETREAT

Above: George's Boutique B&B bedroom



deshons RETREAT

The South Burnett in Queensland is emerging as a serious wine-producing region, and deshons RETREAT makes a great base in the area. This classy getaway boasts two very well-equipped cottages and welcoming owners. It's a peaceful country retreat on 23 hectares of bushland about two-and-a-half hours' drive from Brisbane. The Crane Wines cellar door is your neighbour and if you don't fancy driving the 9 kilometres to Kingaroy, deshons serves excellent meals. Phone 07 4163 6688 or visit www.deshonsretreat.com.au.

George's Boutique B&B & Culinary Retreat

The Mornington Peninsula, just over an hour's drive from Melbourne, is one of Australia's most beautiful wine regions. George's is a new, architect-designed B&B at Arthurs Seat with private balconies offering sweeping views of Port Phillip Bay from its upper-level rooms. The suites are beautifully furnished, with large, well-appointed bathrooms, and the breakfasts are superb. George's hosts regular hands-on cooking schools under chef Duncan White-Robertson. There is a range of packages including a golf and gourmet combination. Phone 03 5981 8700 or visit www.georgesonarthurs.com.au.

Gattonside Heritage Accommodation

Gattonside is a beautifully renovated Victorian homestead that now operates as one of Hobart's most popular guesthouses. There are eight rooms, seven with spa baths, and thoughtful details such as fresh flowers and chocolates add to the welcoming feel. The bathrooms are modern and well equipped, featuring high-end toiletries and nice fluffy towels. Breakfasts are served in a lovely dining room, which looks onto the English-style gardens. Excellent restaurants including Monty's

on Montpellier and Smolt are just a stroll away. Phone 03 6224 1200 or 1800 223 410 or visit www.gattonside.com.au.

Eco Point Murramarang Resort

There is a wide range of accommodation options at this lovely resort on the New South Wales South Coast, but it's worth splashing out on one of the absolute beachfront villas to best enjoy the sound of waves crashing onto the beach, the rock pools and the superb views of Murramarang National Park nearby, which teems with wildlife. An Aussie beach holiday in bush surrounds. Phone 02 4478 6355 or 1300 767 255, or visit www.ecopoint.com.au.

BEST SPLURGE

Sydney's swish InterContinental Hotel offers a range of Insider packages to delight any gourmet. The Insider Occasion package includes a harbour-view room and the keys to a nippy Mini Cooper Convertible. The \$649 package includes breakfast for two people at Café Opera, 24-hour use of the Mini, complimentary valet parking, late checkout and a picnic hamper that includes a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. The \$519 Woollahra Experience includes a reservation at Bills Woollahra to taste the "world's best scrambled eggs", a \$100 voucher to spend at Simon Johnson, Sydney's leading fine food purveyor, and afternoon tea in the Cortile lounge. Phone 02 9253 9000 or 1800 760 668, or visit www.sydney.intercontinental.com.

WHERE TO EAT

Peppers Calstock

You need to be an in-house guest to dine at Peppers Calstock, outside Deloraine, a 45-minute drive from Launceston, but that's no hardship: the circa-1837 Georgian mansion has a lovely



REGION TO WATCH OUT FOR:

Orange, New South Wales

This funky town 3 ½ hours' drive west of Sydney is regarded as one of the best cool-climate wine-producing regions in the country, and is also home to some of Australia's best regional restaurants.

Shiraz, cabernet sauvignon, merlot, pinot noir and several Italian grape varieties thrive here, alongside chardonnay,

sauvignon blanc, riesling, pinot gris and gewürztraminer.

Philip Shaw, former chief winemaker for Southcorp and Rosemount and a two-time winner of the prestigious International Winemaker of the Year award at The International Wine and Spirit Competition, makes wines under the Philip Shaw Wines label from his own Koomooloo vineyard, as well as for the

Rolling and Climbing labels.

Other stand-out wineries in the area include Patina, Printhe, Word of Mouth, Millamolong Estate, Mayfield Vineyard, Canobolas-Smith, Bloodwood and Cargo Road.

Lolli Redini, Selkirks, The School House Restaurant at Mayfield Vineyard, Union Bank wine bar and Tonic at nearby Millthorpe are all excellent eateries.

Right: Upstairs
at Hollick

Below: The lounge at
Sean's Kitchen



country-house atmosphere. French chef Daniel Tourancheau and his Australian wife Linda use some of the best available Tasmanian produce in dishes such as lemongrass-marinated Tasmania scallops with a crisp julienne vegetable stir-fry or locally-farmed eye fillet on a sweet and binyte potato fondant, baby carrots, grilled asparagus, snow peas and a cognac and green peppercorn jus. Phone 03 6362 2642 or visit www.peppers.com.au/calstock.

Satiate

The mid-north coast of New South Wales has enjoyed a surge in quality restaurants of late, and this little spot at Bangalow is a real find. Chef Shannon Debreceeny, formerly of Tetsuya's in Sydney, serves up five-course degustation dinners for \$65 a head (for an additional \$45, wines can be matched with each course) and the food is outstanding. Dishes to look out for include Bangalow sweet pork belly with eastern king prawn ravioli and prawn oil, and ox cheek with celeriac cream and carrot puree. Phone 02 6687 1010 or visit www.ate.net.au.

Upstairs at Hollick

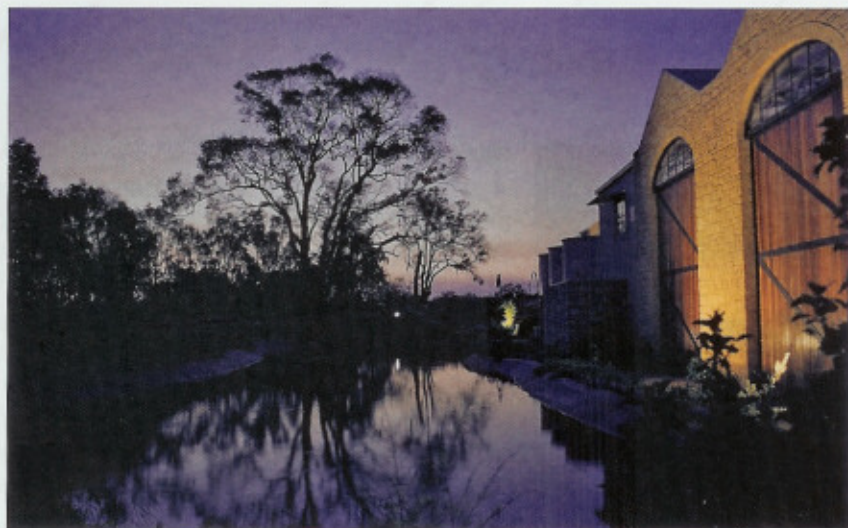
The first, though not the only winery restaurant in the Coonawarra district is one of the best in the country. Enjoy views over Hollick "Neilson's Block" vineyard or the winery's barrel storage room while you sample dishes such as blue swimmer crab and salmon cakes with wakame seaweed salad and ginger lemongrass broth, or wild rabbit with Swiss brown mushroom and pancetta ragout, orecchiette pasta and gremolata. There's an excellent wine list featuring Hollick, local and imported wines. Phone 08 8737 2318 or visit www.hollick.com.

Terroir

Hungerford Hill's modern cellar-door restaurant has undergone a makeover and now, Terroir offers a casual dining option and the chance to enjoy a relaxing meal overlooking the vines or by the fireplace. Chef Hayden Ellerton's bar menu features a number of tasty as well as light dishes. More adventurous diners can create their own degustation from the tasting-plate selection. The wine list ranges from Billecart-Salmon Champagne to Hungerford Hill's own stellar pinot noir. Phone 02 4998 7666 or visit www.hungerfordhill.com.au.

Ten Minutes by Tractor Wine Co. Cellar Door & Restaurant

This Mornington Peninsula winery produces some of our best chardonnays and pinots and is also home to a very smart, bistro-style restaurant, the Restaurant & Tractor Wine Bar. There are more



than 400 wines on the award-winning list and weekly wine flights are available, but the food shines, too, making this a "must-visit" eatery. Salad greens, herbs and vegetables come from the on-site garden and the menu is French-influenced and seasonal: highlights include rack of spring lamb served with basil flavoured royal blue potato purée, slow roasted, vine ripened tomatoes and Judd olives. Phone 03 5989 6080 or visit www.tenminutesbytractor.com.au.

La Sala Restaurant

Sydney is full of good restaurants, but La Sala ticks a lot of boxes without costing the earth. It's a bar and a restaurant, at which Executive Chef Ruben Martinez creates some outstanding dishes. There are plenty of good charcuterie and pasta options, while mains include the likes of yellow fin tuna with spiced tomatoes, and organic chicken with mascarpone, lemon and oregano. The service is slick and there's an excellent wine

list. It's quintessential Sydney dining and it won't break the bank. Phone 02 9281 3352 or visit www.lasala.com.au.

Capel Vale

Capel Vale has vineyards throughout Western Australia but is based at Capel, approximately 200 kilometres south of Perth near Geographe Bay. Both the cellar door and restaurant, open for lunch only, offer superb vineyard views. The menu changes seasonally and fresh local produce is used whenever possible, in dishes such as grilled Mediterranean vegetables with feta, pine nuts, rocket and balsamic reduction, or Margaret River venison rolled in pistachio crumbs. Phone 08 9727 1986 or visit www.capelvale.com.

songbirds in the forest

Mount Tamborine is a beautiful spot that's also home to one of Queensland's best gourmet experiences. songbirds in the forest won the

Above: Capel Vale
Left: Sean's Kitchen

THREE OF THE BEST FOR SUMMER



GROSSET POLISH HILL Riesling 2008

You can either enjoy this in its youth or cellar it for 15 years. Winemaker Jeffrey Grosset describes it as "an exceptionally powerful and vibrant dry riesling" and, while it certainly has the backbone and structure to reward cellaring, I'd drink it now and enjoy the citrus and mineral characters. \$45.



HEGGIES VINEYARD Riesling 2008

Some very good 2008 rieslings are beginning to creep onto the market, but you can't do better than this delightfully crisp and refreshing wine from high-altitude, cool-climate Eden Valley vineyards. It's a nicely structured wine with oodles of flavour, citrusy minerality and lovely finishing acid. \$21.



HOUGHTON The Bandit Chardonnay Viognier 2008

The perfect wine for summer, this is a fresh and fruity white blend with peach and almond aromas, and a nice balance between zippiness and creaminess on the palate. Enjoy well chilled. \$20.



Top: Bilson's Number One Wine bar

Above: Brown Brothers 2008 Pinot Grigio

Queensland Restaurant of the Year Award for Excellence in 2006, and has racked up a hatful of honours over the past 12 months. Chef de cuisine Philip Edwards's food is wonderful, the service is spot-on, and there's a fine wine list with several Queensland offerings. There are also six lovely villas in gorgeous gardens at Songbirds Rainforest Retreat. Phone 07 5545 2563 or visit www.songbirds.com.au.

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Sean's Kitchen, Tony Bilson's Number One Wine Bar in Sydney, and Melbourne's **Cumulus Inc.** are all so new, they missed out on listings in the 2009 editions of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age Good Food Guide*.

All, however, offer superb experiences and are worth visiting when you hit their respective cities.

Bustling Sean's Kitchen (02 9777 9000), the new Pyrmont offering from Astral (at Star City) chef Sean Connolly, includes several dining options: a tapas bar, the chic restaurant, a jamon room and a private dining room, as well as a seafood bar. The wine list features more than 300 wines from around the world, with 25 offered by the glass.

Veteran chef Bilson's wine bar (02 8252 9296) faces onto Sydney's Circular Quay: here, chef Miguel Maestre serves dishes with a French accent including Basque specialities. A blackboard menu highlights the day's specials. Wines start from \$7 a glass.

In Melbourne's Flinders Lane, you'll find the very funky **Cumulus Inc.** (03 9650 1445), the latest project of superstar chef Andrew McConnell (of Circa and Three One Two). It's hip, it's modern, and the food and wine are outstanding.

The hottest new cellar-door experiences include the superb Sam Miranda cellar and café in Milawa, Victoria, and the new Mandala Wines facility in the Yarra Valley, with its terrific tasting room and fabulous restaurant.

BEST INNOVATION

Visitvineyards.com, Australia's most comprehensive wine website, has just launched online memberships. Foundation members, who pay only \$49 to join until March 1, 2009, receive offers from more than 100 partners (wineries, restaurants, provedores, accommodation and more) – everything from add-ons at cellar doors to special barrel tastings and exclusive, tutored tastings; accommodation benefits; and deals at leading restaurants, golf courses and spas. Members also have access to exclusive online content. To join, go to www.visitvineyards.com.

WHAT TO DRINK

2007 Wynns Coonawarra Estate Shiraz

Sue Hodder is making some extraordinarily good wines across the board, but this old favourite can't be beaten when it comes to value for money. You get great rich, ripe fruit (plums and dark berries to the fore), hints of pepper and spice, and a lovely smooth finish for under \$20.

Brown Brothers 2008 Pinot Grigio

This is the way pinot grigio should taste: fresh, vibrant and full of life. The perfect match for fish or chicken dishes, it's a medium-dry, savoury wine made in the Italian style, with a crisp finish and bracing acidity. \$18.

Koonowla Clare Valley The Ringmaster Cabernet Sauvignon 2006

This is a big, complex red that's not too high in alcohol but boasts spice, fruit intensity and great length. The price is right and it would be great with steaks. \$16.

FOUR STARS

De Bortoli Noble One 2006

The De Bortoli family pioneered the production of high-quality botrytis semillon in Australia, and Noble One just gets better every year. It's a rich, sweet and complex wine with some nice acid on the finish; an Australian benchmark. \$28 for 375mL.

2006 Petaluma Chardonnay

Petaluma is one of those wineries that can always be relied upon to deliver. This is a sensationally good wine with lovely stone-fruit characters prominent and some nice minerality, with complexity and creaminess added by barrel-fermentation. \$49.

Henschke Henry's Seven 2006

The Henschke family make red wines far more expensive than this but you won't find one that's better value. A blend of shiraz, grenache and mataro, with a dash of viognier, this is lovely red wine – soft and succulent, with gorgeous berry-fruit flavours. \$28-\$32.

Cape Mentelle 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon

You just can't go wrong with Cape Mentelle, one of the great wineries in Western Australia. This is the epitome of fine Margaret River cabernet, powerful but elegant with up to 15 years of cellaring ahead of it. \$80. ■

Northern accent

The strip between the Gold Coast and Port Macquarie used to be totally devoid of interest for gourmets. But during the past decade, verdant and beautiful Northern New South Wales has emerged as a culinary hotspot with exciting food trails and top-notch restaurants. WORDS: WINSOR DOBBIN

Ever wondered where chefs like Tetsuya Wakuda source rare ingredients like yuzu and finger limes, or where spice merchant Ian 'Herbie' Hemphill finds some of the fabulous herbs and spices he sells?

Cast your eyes towards the Tweed Valley and the tiny village of Chillingham, inland from Murwillumbah. Behind a humble roadside stall with the unpromising name 'the Banana Cabana' is a treasure trove of trees and bushes. The bush tucker garden here is the life's work of Gerard 'Buck' Buchanan and his wife Anne.

Buchanan, who farms around 162 hectares, grows kaffir limes, curry leaves, lemon myrtle, aniseed leaf, bunya pine nuts, warrigal greens and dozens of other sought-afters.

The store sells exotic and tropical fruits (try the Davidson plums), a huge range of vegetables, several varieties of banana, mangoes and avocados, local honey, bush tucker biscuits, jams and pickles made from fresh local produce.

☺☺
The store sells several varieties of banana, mangoes and avocados, local honey, bush tucker biscuits, jams and pickles. ☺☺



Of particular interest is the rare Buddha's hand fruit (or fingered citron), native to the foothills of the Himalayas and used as a moth repellent and a source of fragrance by the Greeks and Romans. The Buchanans, who have what they believe to be the only tree in Australia, suggest grating the skin of the fruit to add zest to a salad.

At nearby Tropical Fruit World at Duranbah you'll find an abundance of tropical fruit plants and can take a tour of the farm plantation and try to identify the cherry guavas, jackfruits and mangosteens before sampling black sapotes and yellow papayas at a post-tour tasting.

Birds Bay Oyster Farm at West Tweed Heads offers the chance to sample freshly harvested rock

oysters and learn how they are produced. Three-hour catch-a-crab tours are also held daily.

Valentino Giannoni at Gelateria Vernazza in Kingscliff sells some of the most authentic (and delicious) gelati in the state, while The Byron Bay Cookie Company and Wildbite, both in Byron Bay, produce delicious ranges of handcrafted biscuits.

In the Byron Bay hinterland, Zentveld's Coffee at Newrybar offers magnificent views and the chance to buy cool-climate coffee direct from the roastery, while Byron Gold Macadamias sell macadamia nuts and nut oils grown, processed and packaged on site and Brookfarm produces outstanding muesli.

Left: The dining room at Gaia.

Top: Mavis's Kitchen at Uki.

Above: Northern NSW produces gorgeous produce.



Left: Murray's Craft Brewery.

Below: The Banana Cabana grows a range of fruits and vegetables.

Bottom: A feast at Tropical Fruit World.



The Northern Rivers region is also the birthplace of the now ubiquitous weekend market culture, which originated at The Channon Country Market, just out of Lismore.

These days, country markets are held in several towns and villages every weekend. Northern Rivers Tourism has published a useful guide – *On the Gourmet Food Trail* – that lists all the places where you can sample local products.

The far north of the state is not conducive to producing wines, but if you travel south you'll find the North Coast Wine Trail, comprising several wineries in and around Port Macquarie. Regional pioneer Cassegrain is the flagship winery and the on-site Ça Marche restaurant serves seriously good food.

There are also two very good micro breweries; Murray's Craft Brewing at Taylors Arm (part of The Pub With No Beer complex) and recently opened Little Brewing Company at Port Macquarie, open for brewery tours on Saturdays.

In a far cry from the past, there are plenty of top-notch Northern NSW restaurants at which to try the best regional produce. Just over the border, favourites include Bamboo at Kingscliff (part of the Santai Casuarina resort), Roughies and Steven Snow's new venture Fins at Salt.

There are a host of good Byron Bay eateries including newcomer Byron Beach Café and long-time stars of Dish, Rae's on Watego, and Fresca in Bangalow.

If you want to relax in style while enjoying simple but superb cuisine, check out Mavis's Kitchen, a wonderfully restored homestead at Uki in the foothills of Mount Warning, where they serve organic slow food. The dishes here are created with real care and attention by partners Peter Clarke and Charlie Ebell, and chef Sandi Allaway. Sample the likes of home-made cream of mushroom soup served

“ The Northern Rivers region is also the birthplace of the weekend market culture, which originated at The Channon Country Market, just out of Lismore. ”

How to Take Advantage of the Fiji Festival Days



Above: Kukura House at Gaia.

Bottom: Great views from the Gaia deck.



with garlic toast, free-range chicken breast filled with spinach, ricotta and preserved lemon wrapped in filo pastry served with a sweet roasted red pepper sauce, or organic eggplant pasta bake with Napoli sauce and goats fetta.

Many of the ingredients come from the restaurant's own biodynamic, organic gardens and the blackboard lunch menu changes daily according to fresh produce (if it's available, don't miss the pizza topped with baby carrots, goat's cheese and caramelised onions). Choose from the main menu for dinner and after a big night you can also stay overnight in the Log Cabin, or the Old Dairy.

When all the eating and drinking becomes too much, then check in for a couple of nights at Gaia Retreat and Spa, part-owned by Olivia Newton John, at Brooklet, just down the road from Bangalow.

There are plenty of exercise and treatment options, peace and quiet and, because this is a land of plenty, the food is healthy, but terrific. ■