

Winter escapes SPECIAL REPORT

Warm the cockles

Winsor Dobbin finds the cold snap most agreeable - when served with a fine drop in a cosy winery.

It is cold outside, the vines are enveloped in mist and an icy wind is blowing. This is no time to be traipsing between wineries. Far better to find one cellar door where you can settle down to a tasting, followed by a warming meal, or maybe a glass or two of wine in front of a roaring log fire.

NSW has dozens of great cellar door options, places with a real winter ambience where you can kick back and enjoy sampling some of the state's best drops.

Mayfield Vineyard at Orange is the perfect winter destination, with a cosy cellar door and a crackling fire to keep diners in the School House restaurant warm as toast on even the chilliest of days.

The century-old former school, which houses the cellar door and restaurant, overlooks Mayfield's vines and a lake stocked with geese. It radiates warmth, at any temperature.

Chef Shaun Arantz and his partner, Willa McDuie, entice you to settle in for a seriously long lunch or dinner over the French-inspired modern Australian cuisine partnered by Mayfield wines. After lunch, the hardy, or foolhardy, can take a walk around the lake. Warming winter dishes on offer include braised and rolled lamb shoulder and ratatouille served with zucchini flower stuffed with goat's cheese mousse.



Hungerford Hill's modern cellar door is one of the most popular with visitors to the Hunter Valley, who now have an extra reason to linger.

The winery has added to its cellar door and Terroir - one of the best regional restaurants in the state - with Terroir Bar and Dining, a less formal dining venture which gives visitors the chance to enjoy a relaxing meal overlooking the vines or snuggle up by the fireplace.

Chef Hayden Ellerton's bar menu features dishes such as truffled mushroom risotto and salt and pepper squid with crunchy Asian salad and nam jim. More adventurous diners can create their own degustation from the tasting plate selection.

Visitors are invited to relax on the terrace while enjoying the heat



Toasty tasting ... (from left) cheese and a fine drop at the School House, Orange; and Hungerford Hill's cosy terrace. Cover photo: geese on parade at Mayfield Vineyard.

pumped out by a blistering fire. Throw in a couple of glasses of wine (the list features anything from a Billecart-Salmon bubbly to Hungerford Hill's own stellar pinot noir) and you have an indulgent afternoon of al-fresco dining without being chilled to the bone.

In Mudgee, Tricia Hennessy's rustic Wild Oats Cafe, part of the Oatley Wines complex, is the perfect spot to chase away the winter chills.

The atmospheric cellar door and barrel room here date back to 1858

and you can taste Robert Oatley, Wild Oats, Craigmoor, Driftwood Bay and Montrose wines (make sure to sample the outstanding sangiovese), or explore the wine museum and a range of local produce.

Hennessy's warming creations include wine-braised veal shanks on a white bean roasted garlic mash.

At Hall, just outside Canberra, Poacher's Pantry is a splendid winter destination; quintessentially country in a restored old farm cottage.

In addition to selling gourmet

> TRIP NOTES

- The School House at Mayfield Vineyard, Orange. Dinner: Thursday-Saturday; lunch: Saturday and Sunday. Phone (02) 6365 9295; see www.mayfieldvineyard.com and www.tasteorange.com.au.
- Hungerford Hill, Pokolbin. Dinner: Wednesday-Saturday; lunch: seven days; wine bar: 10am-5pm seven days. Phone (02) 4998 7666; see www.hungerfordhill.com.au and www.winecountry.com.au.
- Oatley Wines, Mudgee. Wild Oats Cafe: lunch: seven days, dinner: Friday and Saturday. Phone (02) 6372 4320; see www.oatleywines.com.au and www.visitmudgeeregion.com.au.
- Poachers Pantry/Wily Trout, Hall, ACT. Cafe: Friday-Sunday and public holidays. Phone (02) 6230 2487; see www.poacherspantry.com.au and www.visitnsw.com.

meats smoked on the premises, it is the cellar door for Wily Trout wines, made from grapes grown on the surrounding hills, and home to the welcoming Smokehouse Cafe, where you can linger over dishes like emu prosciutto or smoked duck breast, paired with a glass or two of Wily Trout pinot noir. Winter specials include spicy smoked duck ragu on potato and roast garlic ravioli.

The Poacher's Pantry is this month hosting *Smoke, Steel And Wood*, an exhibition by sculptor John Wood.