

## A warm welcome in the heart of the Barossa

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The shiraz vines are in leaf along rows that dip and fold into the distance this late-October afternoon. The sun emerges and retreats, misty rain drifts like gauze against a sky that shifts from pewter to pale denim, then a dazzling sunset infuses the horizon in ribbons of gold and copper. The views are deep and wide. And all this without leaving a window-side table or semi-circular booth at Appellation, the in-house restaurant at The Louise in the heart of the Barossa Valley.

Whoever coined the term “picture window” must have had just such an encompassing panorama in mind.

Debate could rage long and loud about which Australian wine district deserves the accolade of “prettiest” but surely the bountiful Barossa would figure in the top few. There are big skies and heritage hamlets, an abundance of producers who have diversified beyond growing grapes, and ease of access from a capital gateway city that makes day trips a piece of cake. Did someone mention cake? Make that generous country baking, a legacy of the Lutheran settlers of Silesian heritage who arrived in the 1840s and brought vine clippings and long-held recipes for the kind of sturdy buns, pies and filled pastries to nourish you through a tough, cold winter.

The temptation to dine and recline and recover, and then repeat, as one local describes, is the way to go. And the newest option for a few nights of Barossa-style indulgence and hospitality is at The Louise, fresh from a substantial structural and design makeover by Baillie Lodges. A few friends who know this property from its previous incarnations tell me of burnt orange and yellow colour schemes and a “comfy” motel vibe.

The 2022 iteration is resoundingly contemporary but with long, hunkered lines that mimic the scale of the countryside. Fifteen villa-style single-storey suites are arrayed along paths radiating from the main building and come in categories of Stonewell, Marananga and the two-bedroom Bethany. In these spacious chambers, the nods to best environmental practice can be clearly appreciated, from the bottled water, filtered in-house from collected rainwater and carbonated for sparkling options, to low-energy lighting technology. Minibars are replenished daily, canapes and turn-down treats arrive with a flourish, and there’s a sense of generosity and care in the features and fixtures, from luxury marble bathrooms and additional outdoor showers to plush bedding and carpeting, and efficient fireplaces.

The main building is all about drinking, dining and lounging, with a sinuous layout of open and curved spaces, including a walk-in semi-circular wine room. The focal point is Appellation and those massive windows framing views that seem unearthly amid changes of light, clouds scudding past and swallows dipping and looping as if threading the sky.

This is the spot for substantial country breakfasts and inventive degustation dinner menus that reflect the seasons and draw on parish ingredients from a tight radius of producers who practise traditional and sustainable methods. These are not tiny plates but a succession of proper courses with matched wines or small-batch brews, if desired, served with an easy flow and bright smiles by young waitstaff in black shirts and loose pants. Team members remember guests’ names and I like management’s egalitarian notion of no badges. I get mixed up at first as to who’s who but soon there’s an easy familiarity in greeting Renee, Hannah, Cally, Sean, chef Zak and the crew and answering their questions at day’s end. Where did you go? Who did you meet? And, always ... What did you eat?

Against exposed stone and a palette of greys and denim blues, the interior look is pretty low-key, perhaps even bare in a no-fuss way, and dress code is country comfort. It’s the ongoing collaborations with neighbour-



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hood artisans and a growing collection of key commissioned pieces by artists such as Emma Hack, Janelle Amos and Tanya Wales that add a sense of people, place and context. There are very subtle details in this mix, such as Deb Jones’s installation of 28,000 pieces of glass that make up the runnel in the arcade that has led to The Louise’s front door since the early 2000s. Tip: Look for Renee de Saxe’s cyanotype work and make an appointment with the concierge to visit her new independent gallery Wonderground, nestled in an immaculately restored cottage.

In this vein of discovery, The Louise has

## GREEN AND GOLD



Vineyard views from The Louise, main; new-look Appellation restaurant and guest suite at the property, below left; The Protagonist Bar, above; kingfish crudo at Fino, Seppeltsfield, inset

developed a network of operators and local businesses that offer bespoke experiences, from tours with specialist providers such as Ben Shillito of Barossa Taste Sensations and Wine Legends, to cooking classes at Maggie Beer’s Farm Eatery and Experience Centre with chef Tim Bourke, ex Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island. Or go the

easy route and have lunch in the adjoining eatery run by

Maggie’s daughter, Elli, and try not to scoff an entire loaf of warm bread before the first share plate arrives.

Or just cross the road from your lodge suite to the family-operated Tucharke Wines, so close as to be almost an annexe of The Louise, and settle in at the seriously hip new The Protagonist Bar (“three decades of wines, direct from the cellar, by the glass”)

and bijou champagne corner or book a tasting in its underground barrel room at an illuminated counter that has a spy-fi 007 vibe. If winemaker Marco de Martino is in the house, ask him about his peacock design for the label on A Thing of Beauty certified organic grenache. The backstories at a place that “grows its own grapes, makes its own wine and sells directly via its website”, are genuinely uplifting.

Meantime, back at The Louise, a day spa is mooted, and a well-equipped fitness centre and sauna adjoin the wet-edge lap pool with views of vines and sunsets. Get up early enough for a dip, and a hot-air balloon may drift past as kookaburras call and picnic baskets are being made ready by the kitchen brigade for a “breakfast with kangaroos” excursion. Hop to it, I say. Yet more “locals” to meet and greet and lift the lid on another vintage Barossa day. The Louise’s concierge staff will also suggest lunch venues, such as the delightful Fino at Seppeltsfield, run by legendary maitre-d’ Sharon Romeo, shopping at the adjoining Jam Factory craft and design gallery and its atelier studios (drop in to chat with milliner Julie Fleming and knife-maker Barry Gardner), and a visit to the Saturday-morning farmers’ market at Angaston. This produce hall and co-op is widely known as a “living grocery store” and packed with goods that are easy to carry home such as freshly made lemon cordial, bagels, nougat, jams, and pastries. While I’m doing the rounds, Maggie Beer spots me and I’m almost co-opted as her fellow judge for a cook-off that’s about to start, but I sidle out, returning in time to hear her announce that there’s only one champion. “The winner is the Barossa!” The cheering is long and loud and wholeheartedly deserved.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Baillie Lodges.

## IN THE KNOW

Contour, The Louise’s casual bar and kitchen, is due to open in December, with a firepit area beyond and terrace seating, and will be available for in-house guests and visitors from Thursday to Monday evenings inclusive. Appellation is also open to visitors for dinner daily; advance bookings essential. Both venues feature an emphasis on local beers, spirits and wines. Accommodation packages include breakfast, evening drinks and canapes, dinner and replenished in-suite bar; check website for seasonal packages and specials. The Louise is a member of Luxury Lodges of Australia.

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