



WEEKENDS | Barossa Valley



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Enjoy a gin tasting flight at Seppeltsfield Road Distillers; Blend your own perfume at Vasse Virgin; Tscharke's new wine venue, The Protagonist, encourages visitors to linger over a glass or two. OPPOSITE (from top): The rolling vines of Seppeltsfield; The Louise is located in the heart of wine country.



Good vibrations

From TASTE and touch to the intangible, the *BAROSSA VALLEY* taps into all SENSES. Imogen Eveson experiences it all from her base at The Louise, in the *HEART* of the renowned WINE COUNTRY.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIEL WESTERGEREN (SEPPELTSFIELD WINERY); BAILLIE LODGES (THE LOUISE); SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION (VASSE VIRGIN); TOURISM AUSTRALIA (SEPPELTSFIELD ROAD DISTILLERS)

NOTHING WILL SHAKE OFF the stultifying mundanity of a flight delay – five hours, one cup of consolation coffee and a complimentary pack of desultory mini biscuits later – quite like hearing Damien Tscharke describe the esoteric principles of biodynamic winemaking. We're talking lunar cycles and vibrations. Energies and frequencies. Order and chaos. We're on another plane, figuratively – and mercifully not literally – speaking.

Through Tscharke Wines, Damien is evolving Barossa Valley traditions with a single-minded dedication to sustainable winemaking of the highest degree; today it is one of just three certified organic and biodynamic wine producers in this South Australian region. Damien blurs the line between science and art with his innovative development of grape varieties such as albariño and montepulciano. And while he comes from six generations of grape-growing farmers, he is the first winemaker of the family and his vision, informed by this heritage, is focused squarely on a sustainable future. "We're telling a story about winemaking today. There's significant history [here], but it's more about where we're at now," he says.

We're in the antique green interiors of The Protagonist, Tscharke's new wine venue concept that breaks from the tradition of cellar door culture – more often focused on fill-your-boot bottle sales than the enjoyment of the experience. It invites Barossans and visitors alike to swing by for a glass of wine plucked from the Tscharke collection; sip at the bar or retire to a nook in the eaves upstairs. An evocative soundtrack and intermittent cries from the resident peacocks outside add to the atmosphere. So too the knowledge that wine is stirred to music, because, as Damien says, "it all comes back down to a vibrational level".

A few fathoms beyond organic, biodynamic farming is a holistic approach to agriculture initially developed by Austrian philosopher and social reformer Rudolf Steiner in 1924. Treating the farm as a self-sustainable living organism, it takes

its cues from the cosmos. "I can't explain a lot of it, but what I do know is that we've consistently won more medals and trophies and have had more consistent yields in recent years than ever before," says Damien. "Sometimes people want to know scientifically. They want to see the evidence. But the proof is in the pudding; it's working."

The discovery of Tscharke and its hidden-gem wine venue, tucked unassumingly off Seppeltsfield Road in Marananga, is one of the many boons of staying at The Louise; the luxury accommodation is just a peacock's saunter across the road and I find a bottle of Tscharke's ruby-red grenache, A Thing of Beauty, waiting for me in my suite upon arrival. A Barossa Valley stalwart, The Louise reopened in September last year following a 'glamover' courtesy of its new owners, Baillie Lodges. And it prides itself on offering a backstage pass to the best bits of the region.

Not that you'd want to leave. Private villa-style suites each open to sun-dappled courtyards lined with rosemary and undulating vineyard views. My Stonewell Suite echoes the outside with its vine-green accents and specially commissioned artwork, *Restore*, by local artist Janelle Amos that connects guests back to that landscape. This elegant wine country escape has more than an air of Tuscany about it; the Barossa enjoys a warm Mediterranean climate that provides perfect grape-growing conditions. And as I stroll the property to take in my surrounds before dinner that evening, the deepening light gilds the vines and the mellow heat that settles on my skin makes me imagine for a moment that I'm in Italy.

At Appellation, The Louise's destination diner, it's a dead heat between sunset and sustenance. I see the sky bruise orange and purple through the expansive windows of the elegant dining room. But a finely crafted trio of amuse-bouche – kohlrabi ceviche, tapioca saltbush and kimchi beignet – arrives on my plate to kick off tonight's degustation and wins my attention back. Each evening at →



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

An in-suite artwork by Janelle Amos reflects the landscape outside The Louise; Elegant onsite restaurant, Appellation; Seppeltsfield's famous Avenue of Palms; The charming grounds of Seppeltsfield; Dine in at Otherness Wines, a dynamic wine bar.

Three more senses to tap into

Scent

Create your own signature scent with a perfume-blending workshop at **VASSE VIRGIN**, housed within the grounds of the iconic **SEPPELTSFIELD** winery, and pick up small-batch skincare made onsite. vassevirgin.com.au

Touch

Experience for yourself how the shape of a glass really does influence the taste and enjoyment of wine with a **ST HUGO X RIEDEL MASTERCLASS**. sthugo.com

Taste

Head to **YALUMBA**, one of the only major Barossa wineries still under family ownership, to taste its fine wines and a platter of local produce while touring the historic estate and cooperage. yalumba.com
Sip 100-year-old fortified wine direct from the barrel as part of a unique **SEPPELTSFIELD** experience. seppeltsfield.com.au

Appellation, the culinary team, led by executive chef Joel Grudnoff, presents diners with a creative reflection of not only the season and landscape but the region's community of farmers and growers. Sommeliers join the dots by presenting each dish with a paired wine to tell a Barossan culinary story of connection, collaboration and passion.

I wake to a blanket of vines all around me the next morning, ready for a day of sensory exploration. The Louise can craft an itinerary based on your interests and tastes. Or, you can follow your nose; locals talk of a 'Barossa referral system' indicative of the region's community spirit, where businesses are more than happy to recommend the next cellar door, cafe or restaurant that visitors should head to. The Louise's alumni are spread out across the valley and you're bound to run into them.

We meet Bec Henderson, the former restaurant manager at Appellation, a stone's throw down the road at Seppeltsfield Road Distillers. As head of customer experience here, she leads us through its range of handcrafted gins with labels, by artist Janelle Amos again, that feature unique mandalas made with the fruits and botanicals that go into each bottle. We try a flight including the Barossa Shiraz Gin, which, mixed with dark tonic, tastes like Christmas in a glass, and the navy-strength Musician's Cut Gin; head distiller Nicole Durdin is

also a classically trained musician. We leave in high spirits and armed with Bec's tips on where to go next, David Franz and Paulmara among them.

Otherness Wines is another producer doing things differently. "I don't think I've got derivative in my DNA," says Barossa restaurateur Grant Dickson (ex-fermentAsian) who launched his latest project to allow winemakers the latitude to experiment and innovate in a way they might not be able to for Barossa's legacy wine brands. This concept finds its expression in a dynamic wine bar and cellar door space on the main street of Angaston, where wines using alternative varietals such as Italian aglianico depart from traditional big, bold Barossan shirazes and are showcased alongside dishes by head chef Sam Smith (ex-Fino Seppeltsfield). As Grant introduces us to these wines over lunch, his other passion is revealed. The name of each Otherness wine uses a musical reference; his three rieslings, Urth, Verthandi and Skuld, are named after the three Norns from Norse mythology, which appear in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, and which Grant has played several times in his life as an oboist with Australia's best orchestras.

I ponder these connections between music and winemaking – a synaesthetic meeting point of the senses perhaps? Meanwhile the trail of vibrations and resonances continues throughout the Barossa, as tightly interwoven as its patchwork of vines. **AT**

