



GATHERINGS 2022

GREAT WESTERN

New Vintage Exhibition





Gather the people of Great Western's wine industry and one thing stands out; their connectedness. To the earth, the seasons, the past, and most importantly, to each other.

Chris Thomson, of Bests Wines, summed it up perfectly. When asked what she has loved most about life on her family's 1866 vineyard, her answer was swift and definitive: the people.

During the autumn of 2022 photographer Marcus Thomson, also of Bests, and writer Lauren Mitchell, journeyed the Northern Grampians, meeting those people who grow, make and champion the region's wine.

Vignerons were asked to down secateurs and winemakers to forget the harvest, to share a little of what drives them, within and beyond their life's work.

Marcus and Lauren found a bunch of guitar-making, hound-wrangling, Harley-riding, hare-hunting, passion-fuelled folk forging authentic lives among the vines.

The stories and photographs gathered tell of an historic, iconic Australian wine region, where 160-year-old vines stand alongside new varietals. They tell of 13 passionate people, from a fifth-generation Great Western grape grower, to the recently-arrived winemakers unearthing new tastes from ancient silt and clay soils.



Scan the QR code for more information on Gatherings 2022 Great Western



MARCUS THOMSON

Photographer

Marcus Thomson is a commercial photographer with extensive experience working in Melbourne, regional Victoria and around Australia. His signature lies in industrial, urban and rural landscape photography, and environmental portraiture.

Marcus nails the essence of his subjects in a broad range of urban and remote settings—from boardrooms and inner-city developments to mountain ranges and sheep stations.

He thrives on challenging projects. Clients value his commitment to excellence, and his ability to accurately interpret and successfully deliver their project brief.

Marcus's recent work has included collaborations with photographers, designers and artists from Australia, Europe and the United States.

His personal work has featured in exhibitions throughout Australia and overseas.

marcusthompson.com.au



LAUREN MITCHELL

Writer

Writer Lauren Mitchell has been telling people's stories for more than 20 years, for newspapers, magazines, books and online publications.

She is the author of five books, including *Mixed Cases: Stories of the Bendigo Winegrowers*, *Artist Spaces of the Victorian Goldfields* and *Artist Spaces of the Northern Rivers*.

Lauren is a former Bendigo Magazine editor, and former digital producer at La Trobe University.

She says at their heart, good stories are like good wine: to be shared, savoured and remembered.

laurenmitchellwriting.wordpress.com

ADAM RICHARDSON

ATR Wines

Virtuoso winemaker Adam Richardson sees parallels between his profession and his new-found love, crafting Spanish guitars from locally-sourced timbers.

"Because I'm making something that I think is beautiful, out of materials from my environment," he says. "It's also a good escape in that it has nothing to do with the business of wine. When I'm building a guitar, I'm not thinking about anything else."

Music has long influenced Adam's work and life. When he opened his ATR Wines tasting room in 2019, he did so with an event matching wine, food and music. The idea was inspired by his wine blend Mule Variations - also the name of a Tom Waits album. "The best album to make wine to," Adam says. "Tom Waits' voice is really

gravelly and considered harsh, but he also makes beautiful music."

For the blend, Adam had likewise combined three varieties often thought of as rough and robust styles, and made them sing. Suffice to say, he's bringing new tastes and experiences to this old winemaking region.

"I could have picked anywhere in Australia when I was looking for the right place to grow grapes, and I picked Great Western because of what the grapes would offer me here, and because of its history and what Bests and Seppelt had created," Adam says. "But I didn't come with the view of making the wine they were making."

Adam has been a winemaker for more than 25 years. He was working in America when he purchased a

Great Western sheep paddock in 2005 and began planning the vineyard. By the time he moved here permanently with his wife and twins in 2016, the Shiraz, Riesling, Durif, Nebbiolo and Tannat were exhibiting the region's renowned textures and quality.

"Great Western is a treasure," Adam says. "I think we've got some of the best grapes in Australia. I saw this place as an open slate where I could focus on planting my grapes, and I knew they would be good quality. I'm just trying to make honest wines that represent my Hard Hill Road vineyard and that epitomise this part of the region."

PETER LEEKE

Kimbarra Wines

The guitar is gently lifted from its green velvet-lined case. "Can I touch it?" asks photographer Marcus Thomson, recognising the gravitas of the 1960s Fender Stratocaster.

This was the instrument of choice for Jimi Hendrix, the Claptons, "basically anyone who was anyone in '60s rock and roll". Including Peter Leeke, of Finders Keepers.

True, the band's not infamous like those aforementioned, but if you frequented the Ararat Town Hall dance back in the day, you'll likely know them.

"We loved it, it was all good fun," Peter says, on the 25 years Finders Keepers rocked the region. His handwritten playlist is still tucked inside the Fender case, featuring songs

such as Me and Bobby McGee, Midnight Moon and Long Tall Sally.

It all began when Peter, his brother David and a couple of school mates from Great Western got together in the Leeke family basement, armed with 12-months of guitar lessons and an inherited enterprising spirit.

Around the same time the band played, Peter's family diversified their 1200-acre merino farm, and planted grapevines, inspired by the time-honoured tradition of winemaking that has characterised the northern Grampians for more than 160 years. Today, Kimbarra Wines' Riesling, cabernet and shiraz are found in hotels and restaurants from Daylesford to Warrnambool.

After starting out playing social nights

for Great Western Football Club (where Peter is now a life member), the band progressed to regular shows in Ararat and Stawell. For two years Peter saved his gig earnings to purchase the Fender, for \$1000 from a Melbourne music shop.

The last time the guitar was aired was at the request of Peter's former "roadie", his wife Margaret, during her 60th birthday party, as a surprise for their children. They had never seen or heard him play before.

Peter laughs he was a little rusty, and these days prefers to hear the originals, via vinyl. "I like nothing better than hearing a little bit of Credence, or some of those old rock and roll songs - with a glass of wine - and I picture myself playing. I sing along of course, because I know all the words!"






BRUCE AND HEATHER ANCHOW

Seppelt, Salingers Café and the Great Western Hotel

Heather Anchow has been photographed in her happy state: paint splattered and limb tired. She's just finished renovating one of Great Western's original goldfields cottages, which is now ready to welcome guests as a boutique accommodation house.

"The white ants had got into it, so we had to rip up the floor and concrete it right through, re-plaster the walls and re-frame doors," Heather says.

"The young builder who helped us out originally asked, why are you fixing it? Why don't you bulldoze it? To pull down a heritage building in Great Western would have been totally frowned upon. You need to keep things as best as you can for the heritage of the town."



Number 100 Main Street is just one tiny example of how Heather and husband Bruce are rolling up their sleeves to help build up Great Western.

The couple had raised their family in Ararat, before later moving to Melbourne, always with an eye on the place they considered home. When they bought a holiday house in Great Western 10 years ago, they semi moved back, to discover half the town was for sale.

"The garage was for sale, the shop was for sale, the pub was for sale, and Salingers Café has closed down, the owners just walked out," Bruce says. "Seppelt was also talking about winding down its wine production. All the business people in town had become tired. So, after a wine-filled conversation with friends, we offered to buy the garage." And that was just the beginning.

Today, the Anchow family manage many of Great Western's businesses.

Thanks to their foresight, Salingers Café is now gourmet and the pub features every single wine produced in the Grampians region: effectively extending the cellar door hours of the vineyards.

But the cellar they're most concerned with, is Seppelt. "The winery was going to be closing down and we didn't want that for the town, because you close down a winery, you lose tourism, you lose locals and it makes the town smaller," Heather says. "So, we took over the running of the cellar door, accommodation, events and tours."

The couple is hands-on in all businesses. It's common to find Bruce pouring pints at the pub or taking a history tour down Seppelt's 3km-long cellar.

"Every time you take people on a tour, you reinforce the value of this place to the community, to the wine industry, and to the entire history of the region," Bruce says. "Nobody else has what's here, it's entirely unique. They're not just bottles of wine down there, they're bottles of wine with a story."

Bruce's favourite tale is of Hans Irvine: politician, gentleman, vigneron. "He was annoyed at everything in parliament being toasted with French champagne," Bruce explains. So, Hans bought Seppelt in 1888, went overseas to learn to make wine, constructed the longest cellars in the country and created an Australian sparkling wine industry.

When the first Australian parliament sat on May 9, 1901, it was toasted with Great Western sparkling. "It's mind-blowing," Bruce says. "It's inspirational. That's the story I like telling."



LUCY JOYCE AND HADYN BLACK

Hounds Run

Hunting the rabbits, hares and foxes on Hounds Run is more than a hobby for winemaker Hadyn Black.

"It's better than using baits," he says. "And if I do get a couple of rabbits, I'll often leave them out in the vineyard for the kites or wedge tailed eagles, and that helps with bird control. Especially when you've got cockatoos and various other birds trying to eat all your grapes. You get rid of one pest, and it helps control another one as well."

It's all part of Hadyn's plans for a sustainable future at the property he bought with partner Lucy Joyce in 2016. "We're also looking to the future with climate change," he says. "As things get hotter, we'll need grapes that can handle the heat, and with less water."

As such, Hounds Run is poised for change. While the 20-year-old shiraz vines are being nurtured, the merlot will soon be replaced with some "pretty interesting stuff". Think dolcetto, Nebbiolo and Hadyn's loved Spanish red varietals, which he already sources elsewhere for his wine label.

Along with business partner Darcy (Ginger) Naunton, Hadyn makes small batch wines under the label Black & Ginger, bringing fresh blends to the Great Western staples. He first fell for the region when he moved here to work at Bests Wines. He'd long dreamt of his own vineyard, but believed it to be financially out of reach.

"Hadyn always said he would never plant a vineyard because they're so expensive to put in, but this one came established," Lucy says. "We bought this place for less than you'd pay for a shoebox in the city. We weren't even in the market for a property... It's taught me

anything is possible. You just don't know what's going to happen in life."

For Lucy - who is also now brand manager at Bests Wines - the purchase cemented the end of city life. "I love the views. The space. Just the quietness. The community is really lovely, and they've really welcomed us," she says, adding even Irish wolfhound Hunter is happier having swapped the Prahran dog park for the run of 230 acres.

"They're both hunters, too," Lucy says of the Hounds Run namesakes. "Paddy's particularly good on foxes. Once he ran after one down the fence line at the back of the property. Hadyn went looking for him, and lucky he did, because the fox and he had locked jaws. That's why he's covered in scars."

Occasionally, Hadyn will keep his own catch for the camp oven. "A nice slow-cooked rabbit ragout's pretty hard to beat," he says, paired with a Black & Ginger Cinco Rojas. "The last one I made, I had a chef mate from Melbourne up here, a French guy, and he was very impressed."

Really, what's not to love at Hounds Run, where a tiny house B&B nestles in the vines, with 360-degree views of the Grampians, Black Range and Sugarloaf Hill.



BEN THOMSON

Bests Wines

Tradition is a key value of Bests Wines, the iconic circa 1866 vineyard having been in the Thomson family since 1920. But there's one object fifth generation winemaker Ben Thomson is particularly sentimental about, and it's got nothing to do with the vines.

"I got this old plough disc when I was 19 and working in Western Australia on wheat farms," he says. "I welded three legs onto it and still use it to cook on every time I go camping."

"My wife Nicole and I often just go out into the vineyard. We've made a little spot in the middle of the plantation on our Sugarloaf property. It's a nice, sheltered spot where I can't see any vines, so I can't see

any work! It doesn't matter if you're 100 metres or 100 kilometres from home, as long as you've got a nice fire and a good view in the morning."

Ben laughs there's nothing gourmet sizzling on the plough disc, just sausages and chops, chicken kebabs and burgers, eggs and bacon for breakfast. "Anything that can be cooked with a headlamp on," he says.

"We enjoy packing up at 3pm to go camping, lighting a fire, opening some wine... if I have to go back to work the next day at least I've gotten away."

In between mini breaks, Ben can be found managing the winery his great, great grandfather purchased from the Best family.



"People ask me about the history, but I never really think about that until I'm asked," he says of being managing director of one of Australia's oldest wine enterprises, where 150-year-old vines flourish alongside fresh plantings.

"Most of my knowledge comes from my dad, Viv, (industry legend and OAM recipient) and he's an invaluable source of knowledge. But as you get older you create your own knowledge as well."

"With the grape growing side of things, the question is how to manage Mother Nature. And when she throws a curve ball at you, not to panic. What she does is what she does, and you've just got to take her as she comes."

DIANNE RADFORD AND CHRIS THOMSON

Great Western wine champions

It took two powerhouse women to help kickstart a resurgence in demand for Great Western wine. A little potted history is needed to understand what Chris Thomson, of Bests Wines, and her friend Dianne Radford did for the local industry.

By the late 1800s, Australian wines were in demand and world-renowned, however the industry suffered a blow during the 1920s depression, and lay largely dormant for 40 years.

In the 1970s, a new breed of winemakers formed the Great Western and District Grape Growers Association, largely as an industry network, organising field days and guest speakers to bolster local knowledge. In time, they all had plenty of wine to sell, so the group moved its attention to marketing, which is where Chris' creativity and Dianne's chutzpa came to play.

Together, they initiated the Grampians Gourmet Weekend, now famously

known as the Grampians Grape Escape, which both are life members of.

Chris says they met at the age of 16, when Dianne quit school to work as a secretary at Bests Wines, and Chris was dating future husband and winemaker, Viv Thomson.

Chris went on to play an integral role in the business, such as label and packaging designer, direct marketer, event and entertainment manager and, importantly, "peacekeeper" she adds.

Dianne later completed a viticulture course and worked in the Bests vineyard, before stepping into sales, marketing and cellar door management at Seppelt. Between them, they had the skills and passion to champion the region.

"I'm a bit of a go-getter and I like things to be done really well," Dianne says. "Chris had the artistic talent - she's

very creative, and had a great passion, being part of a winemaking family. We complemented each other, we had a vision, we wanted to see the region succeed, and people came on board as we went on that journey. We worked hard together to build Great Western winemakers to another level."

The pair saw the first gourmet weekend launch in 1993. "It was another great steppingstone for the region," Dianne says. "The following years were very exciting for us. Great Western wineries were producing fantastic wine, winning lots of awards and getting recognition."

Dianne left the wine industry in 2000 to forge a life in community service, among other pursuits, but says her friendship with Chris is "forever lasting, that's for sure".

"We can look at the next generation and say we left a pretty good grounding for the future of Great Western wine."



KATRINA AND ANDREW TOOMEY

Miners Ridge Wines

Harley Davidson owners may have a certain reputation, but Andrew Toomey doesn't care about that. For this viticulturist, time on the bike is all smiles.

The 1998 Harley now rumbling at the vineyard is a longed-for recent acquisition. "I've always had motorbikes," Andrew says. "When I was a teenager, I had dirt bikes. Then I bought myself a Triumph in my early 20s, and foolishly sold it. Over the years I had a few more bikes, but I always wanted a Harley."

"When I ride, I actually have a smile on my face ... with the wind blowing in my face, just thinking about nothing except riding. It's a good way to wind down after a hard week of dealing with the stresses of a vineyard."

All the work has been worth it lately: the 2021 Miners Ridge Riesling having picked up a slew of awards, including Best White Wine of the Western Victorian Wine Challenge, and Best Riesling of the Ballarat Wine Show.

Thanks to a fantastic growing season and ripening period, Andrew says the winning wine is showcases all the best characteristics of a true cool climate Riesling.

Speaking of cool... "I'm excited for Andrew to have a hobby," Katrina says of the bike, "because he's worse at hobbies than me! We're just so busy all the time."

The other half of Miners Ridge quit her day job early 2021 to concentrate on the business. Her role now includes vineyard work, managing their repurposed train carriage B&B, marketing, social media, bookwork or meeting visitors at the cellar door.

"We're meant to have ten wines and at the moment we've got five," Katrina says on a measure of their success. "We're either not making enough, or people were drinking far too much during the pandemic!"

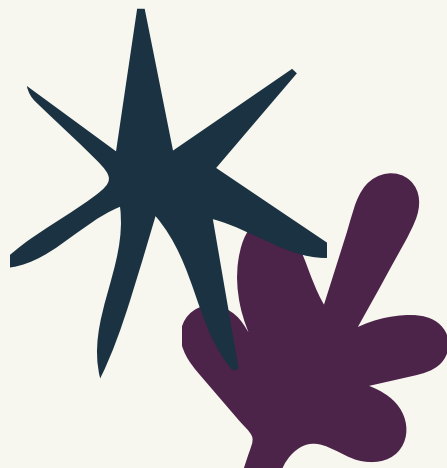
When she has some spare time, Katrina will forgo a Harley ride to head to the wicking beds, which keep both residents and guests in fresh veg and preserves.

"We get lots of tomatoes and different fruits ripening all at once," she says. "The Earth Mother in me says 'don't let anything drop to the ground and be wasted!' So, I love to make things out of the produce, whether it be passata or jam, and the guests to our cellar door get the benefit of that if they wish to purchase it, otherwise our bed and breakfast guests, friends, family and ourselves do."

"Spending time in the vegie garden is quiet relaxing, even the weeding, as you get that satisfaction of actually completing a job that day."

Katrina's waste-not ethos is always in play, even in the vineyard.

"When the harvester comes along, it doesn't pick the ends of the rows, it just leaves a bit on each vine. So, I go along with my bucket and pick the grapes to make shiraz jam." How sweet is that.



TOM AND SARAH GUTHRIE

Grampians Estate

For everything, there is a season, be it shearing sheep, picking grapes, resting and renewal.

"The seasons really dominate our yearly calendar and I like that," Sarah Guthrie says. "And you see the revolving of the seasons clearly when you live on a farm. There's a calmness about autumn. Thinking it won't be long before fires, woolly jumpers, lambing, pruning. Like just about everyone around here, we hand prune, because we're small."

Sarah has stopped for a rare moment to think about such things. Around her, leaves fall. Birds call. A chestnut quarter horse breathes a low, loose whinny, and Sarah responds with a handful of pellets passed over the fence.

This is someone in-tune with life on this land, where every tree, every rock, every contour of the Grampians beyond is intimately known to her. "I've come right back to where I grew up," she says. "I really came back to where I felt like I belonged."

Sarah grew up on the neighbouring farm. She became a teacher, travelled overseas and worked in Melbourne before returning to farm life with husband Tom. Twenty-five years ago, the couple established the vineyard and the Grampians Estate label.

"Right from the moment we planted grapes, I was just so excited to get into a game that value added," Tom says.

"I was always interested at the consumption level. That's where you get your initial passion. But when you sell wool or lamb, you put it

on a truck, it goes to market, and you have no feedback from the consumer, whereas when you produce a bottle of wine, they are judged in wine shows, and you can get an idea of whether you did a fantastic job or if it was a good season." 2019 was particularly good, with Grampians Estate receiving the Premier's Award for Best Victorian Wine.

After decades of outsourcing the winemaking, Tom is now in full control. Passing the sheep farm management onto family has coincided with a new career. Tom has just completed a Bachelor of Wine Science and is onto his second vintage.

He says the education led to improvements in technique and processes, plus the purchase of a gleaming new bag press, which is his pride and joy.

"It's more efficient, it gets better extraction, results in better quality juice and cuts out a heap of physical work," he says. "And it's an absolute joy to use. Now, we're able to process our 50 tonnes efficiently and quite easily. It's been the biggest improvement in our business."

Tom recognises he's an anomaly in starting fresh in his mid-60s. "Most of my contemporaries are working less, retiring, playing more golf, definitely entering a new stage of life," he says. "I want to keep being busy, and becoming a winemaker, and running this business for the next 10 years has given me a whole new lease on life."

"You're creating something people really enjoy and can relate back to a sense of place. This wine comes from the Grampians wine

region. It comes from our farm. There's a real sense of locally produced."

As Sarah says, "All roads lead back here in the end."

