



Clare necessities



Scintillating whites, ageworthy reds, history, hospitality and a strong arts culture. South Australia's Clare Valley makes for an enticing destination.

WORDS
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There's a

touch of The Shire from *Lord of the Rings* about the Clare Valley. It's the tranquility and other-worldliness created by its combination of hills and wheatfields, vineyards and early 19th century stone cottages – the latter not unlike the homes of hobbits. But the holy grail here is not in the form of a ring – it's riesling.

Just a two-hour drive from Adelaide, Clare Valley is close enough to the big smoke to be easily accessible, yet far enough removed to feel like an undiscovered gem. Home of the Riesling Trail for cyclists, a sign-posted track winds along the disbanded railway lines that used to bring trains from Adelaide. Regional producers such as Grosset, Jim Barry, Taylors, O'Leary Walker, Pikes, Clos Clare, Leasingham and Kilikanoon – the James Halliday 2013 Wine Companion Winery of the Year – have all cemented an outstanding reputation for riesling from the region.

But Clare is not only about this great wine style. The winemaking community, made up of mature and emerging characters, is upholding a classic approach while also breaking the mould. They are producing a mix of purist and contemporary wines across a range of styles – cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, chardonnay, merlot, malbec, sparkling, mataro, viognier, grenache, gewürztraminer and verdelho.

THE HOLY TOUCH

Sevenhill Cellars is the oldest winery in Clare and just one that is observing its history while moving into the future. This is a great place to start your Clare adventures.

Founded in 1851 by Jesuits (a religious order of the Catholic Church), Sevenhill is the only remaining Jesuit winery in the country, complete with a 160-year-old, hand-dug cellar. Originally established to produce sacrificial and altar wines, which still account for one-third of production, the range has grown to include table wines of high distinction. ➔

PICTURED

(left) The Clare Valley is an incredibly scenic region; (top) Sevenhill Cellars winemaker Liz Heidenreich.

Brother John May, aged 83, was the seventh winemaker and viticulturist at Sevenhill in 150 years and remained in the role until 2002. After moving to Clare in 1963, he was thrown in the deep end as a former carpenter and joiner, with no clue about winemaking. He credits the kindness and mentoring from other Clare winemakers, including Jim Barry, to show him the ropes. "I learned hands-on and I made copious notes in those years, which were very handy when I had to make the decisions. My philosophy is if you haven't made a decision, you haven't made anything. It was my vocation - I was called to serve the Lord and I had these hands," he says.

Today, Brother John (or BroJo as he's sometimes lovingly referred to) is still involved in the business and tastes wines with winemaker Liz Heidenreich. If you visit at 2pm on a Tuesday or Thursday, you can catch Brother John's free tours of the site. They begin and end at the cellar door, so be sure to take in a tasting - their Inigo Riesling, Cabernet and Shiraz; the St Aloysius Riesling and flagship Br John May Shiraz are all worth exploring.

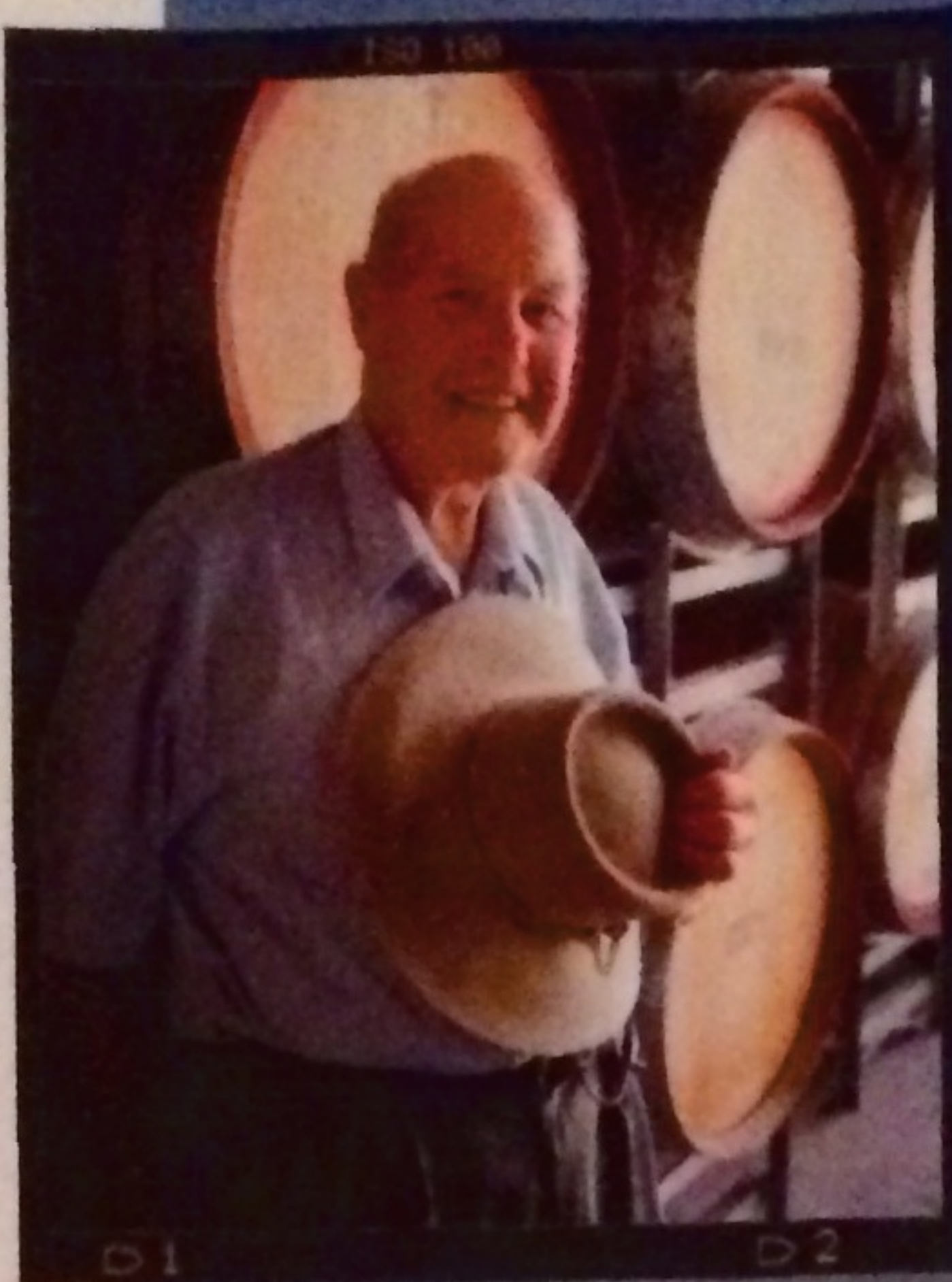
THE ART AND WINE MATCH

Many art galleries are in the region, with some attached to wineries, including at Mt Surmon, Claymore Wines and Pikes Wines on Polish Hill River Road. Brothers Neil and Andrew Pike established the winery in 1984; "Dad was dumb enough to give us some money," chief winemaker Neil says. Consistent winemaking and a focus on the Australian market have enabled the brothers to build a solid reputation, driven largely by its bestseller, the Pikes Traditionale Riesling.

History plays a role here too, with the Pike family's beer- and winemaking background dating back to 1886. Neil's great-, great-grandfather used the English Pike fish on his beer label and so the fish lives on in their own wine labels, and in a range of beer they also produce. An original Polish cottage remains on the property, as does a church that is now a museum. And after a wander in the art gallery, visitors can enjoy wine and grazing plates on the lawn.

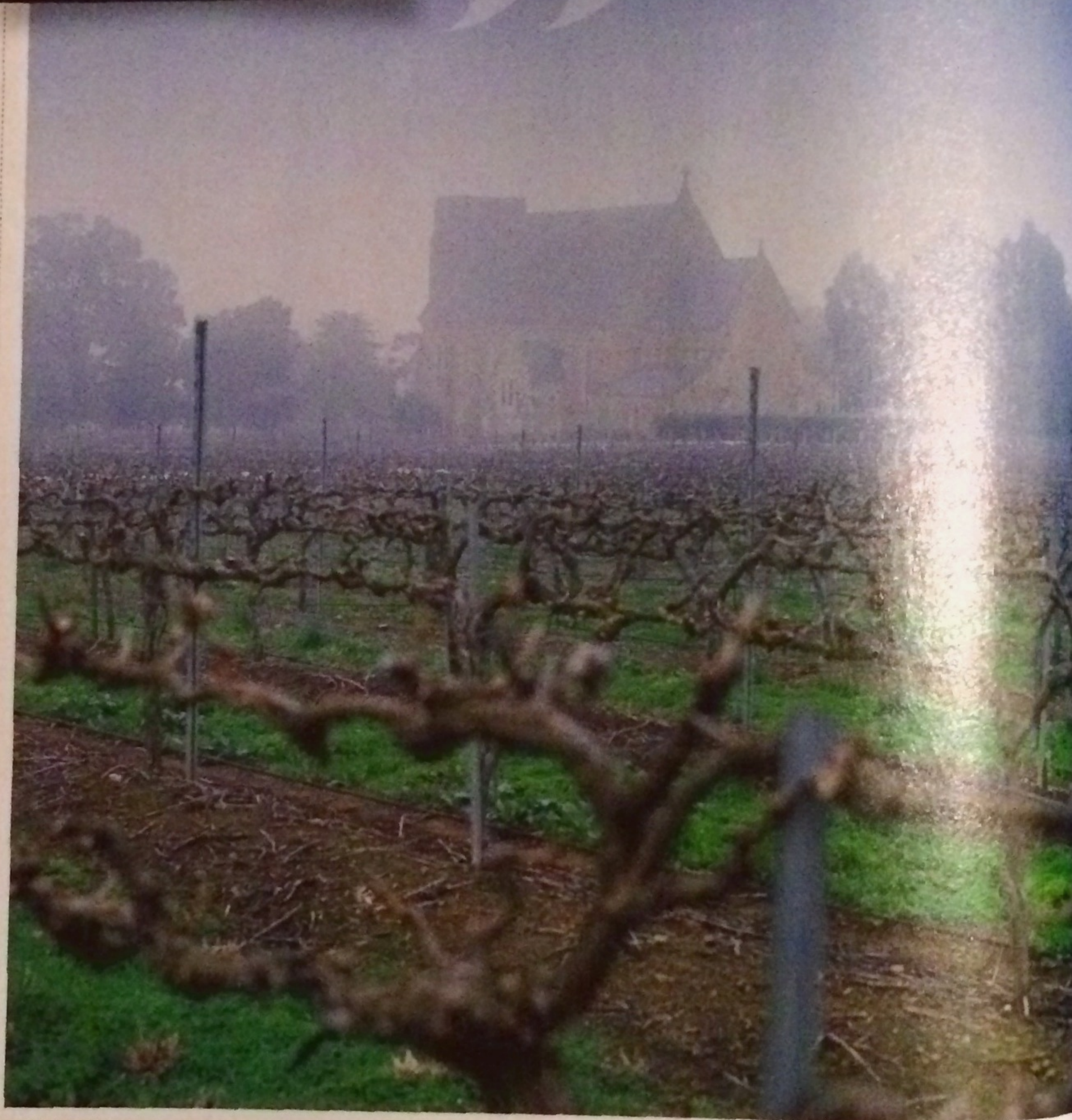
Around half of Pikes wines are riesling, but fruit is sourced from different vineyards and sub-regions, such as Watervale and Polish Hill River. Neil is pleasantly surprised with the quality of whites from 2013, but says it's unlikely to repeat the exceptional quality of last year. Try the Reserve JT Riesling and the Merle Riesling for something special, or for everyday drinking, the Luccio Sangiovese and the Impostores Savignan.

Working under Neil at Pike's since 2003 is winemaker Steve Baraglia. Along with two other mates, Steve has set up his own label, the cheekily named Naked Run Wines, with wines made from Clare and Barossa fruit. The Clare Valley range, including The First Riesling and Sweet Kiss Riesling, and Hill 5 Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon, are all winners of multiple wine show medals. Naked Run does not have a cellar door, but →



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BROTHER JOHN MAY
SEVENHILL CELLARS



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE WINE

For anyone looking to break up the wine and food experience, seek out these great ideas.

Delight in history

Visit, stay overnight or enjoy a Murder Mystery night at Martindale Hall in Mintaro - a grand Georgian mansion built in 1879, still with original furniture and fittings. Martindale was used as the Boarding School for Young Ladies in the classic Australian film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. And yes, there's said to be resident (friendly) ghosts.

G-rated action

The Mintaro Maze and Puzzle Shop is fun for the family. Little visitors may also appreciate the Clare Valley Model Engineers at Melrose Park, Clare and the model trains that chug across its 1km track. The 10-hectare park also includes a large lake, BMX bike track and walking paths.

Get cultured

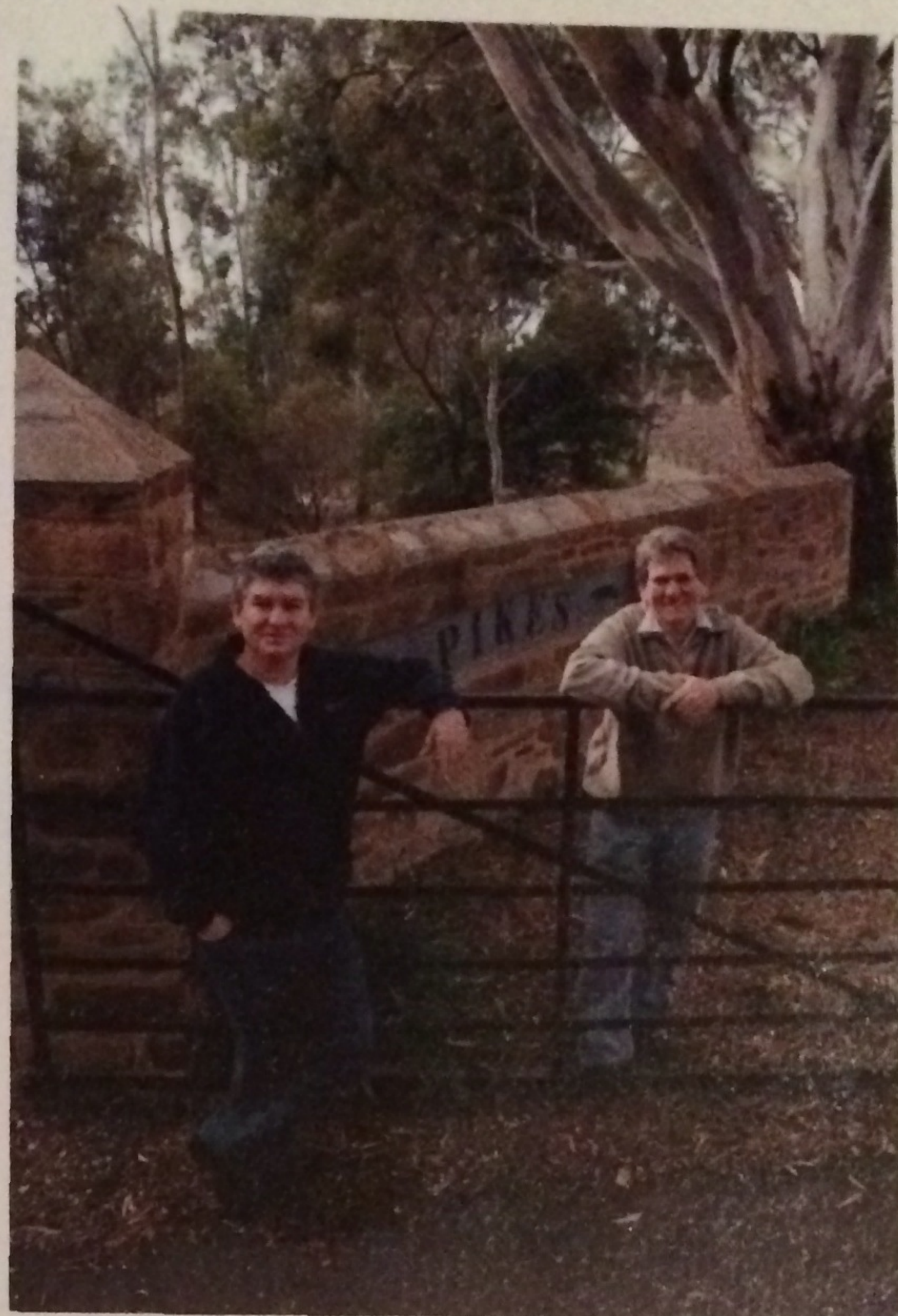
Several art galleries in the area showcase local works including Irongate Studio Gallery and Blackman Gallery.

Work off the treats

To enjoy the Riesling Trail, hire a bike from Riesling Trail Bike Hire or if you prefer someone else to take care of your transport, consider AM-PM Chauffeurs.

Meet some stars

If driving, fill up on a Saturday at Clare Caltex on Main North Road - you may be served at the fuel tank by a Marilyn Monroe or Superman lookalike. The staff pump petrol in fancy dress to promote the Clare Valley Costume Hire shop next door.



PICTURED

(clockwise from top left)

The new Mr Mick's offers a tapas-style dining experience; Pike brothers Neil and Andrew have winemaking and brewing in their blood; O'Leary Walker is one of many regional producers to fly the riesling flag; the pretty setting at Skillogalee, complete with a renowned restaurant; Hamish Seabrook, with Marnie Roberts, is making wine at Kirrihill Wines.

PICTURED

(right) Martindale Hall, used as the school in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, hosts murder mystery nights and offers overnight stays; (below) Knappstein winemaker Glenn Barry.

you can try the wines at The Little Red Grape in the Sevenhill area. It pours 14 smaller producers' wines, including Riesling Freak and Good Catholic Girl.

HISTORY REPEATS

The Knappstein Enterprise Winery and Brewery will appeal to the grain- and grape-lover alike. Originally a brewhouse, it was established in 1878 when Fanny Filgate, daughter of the founder of Clare, opened The Enterprise to quench the thirst of the increasing number of copper miners in the area. The brewery closed in 1915 and in 1969, Tim Knappstein opened the Enterprise Winery – the first wines sold in 1974.

In 2006, the brewhouse reopened and now, beers can be sampled alongside wines at cellar door.

Under the direction of winemaker Glenn Barry, Knappstein's wines include their bestselling and affordable Knappstein Handpicked Riesling, along with some divergent styles. "I'm an experimenter," Glenn says. "I'd get bored of making riesling only in the traditional style." For something different at cellar door, try the Knappstein Insider Riesling 2012 – the grapes are picked later and the juice held on its skins to produce a wine bursting with exotic tropical fruit. Or the Knappstein Three 2012, an aromatic white wine made from a blend of gewürztraminer for flavour, riesling for structure and pinot gris for texture. In the reds, the drink-now and perfumed The Insider Shiraz Malbec is made with a minimalist approach towards what Glenn says is a classic Clare blend. The Enterprise Cabernet is the flagship, with a richness that reflects its site.

Visit Knappstein on a Wednesday when the beerhouse is in full swing and watch brewer Damian Trounce preside over the 200,000 litres of beer made here each year. Apparently he loves a chat too, so you can ask him about the inspiration behind their special-release beers, including the Riesling Lager Vintage Ale, made from 25 per cent riesling juice and 75 per cent lager wort.

LOOKING AHEAD

Kirrihill Wines is embracing the new at their sizeable operation, making wine overseen by Hamish Seabrook and Marnie Roberts. Together, the duo are "playing around" with their riesling this year, giving it time on lees to create interest through texture and funkiness. "We want to treat riesling with a bit of excitement," Hamish says. At the Kirrihill cellar door (at Artisan's Table Restaurant) try their reasonably priced, trophy-awarded Kirrihill Tullymore Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 and their alternative varietals, including nebbiolo and sangiovese.



For the foodies, Skillogalee Winery and Restaurant is a must-stop and one of the few restaurants open seven days for lunch. In a stone cottage built in 1851, the cellar door and restaurant showcase the Skillogalee range, made by Nav Singh under contract, and include the impressive Trevarrick Riesling, The Cabernets (cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and malbec), Trevarrick cabernet shiraz, a lees-stirred chardonnay and a sparkling riesling they have been making since 1987. Nav also makes a small-batch artisan range of wines under his own label using Clare fruit – Matchbox Wine Co. They include a riesling, syrah and a malbec, bottled under retro labels inspired by vintage matchbox designs, launched last year to positive reviews.

Skillogalee Restaurant's head chef Nicola Palmer is the daughter of owners, Dave and Diana, and she also manages the venue. "Mum got me into the kitchen by telling me I was the fastest carrot-peeler and I had to show the others how to do it," recalls Nicola. A trained jeweller, today she is happily immersed in overseeing the kitchen, the estate-grown quince, figs, artichokes and herbs, and their homemade ice cream and sorbet, including the exotic lime and chilli. 🍷

WANT MORE?

If you want Clare Valley wine ideas, turn to page 105.

THE CLARE ESSENTIALS

WHEN TO VISIT

// Winter provides a blanket of green hills and, with much accommodation here being B&Bs and guesthouse-style, open fires and sleep-ins appeal.

SAVE THE DATE!

// On May 18 to 19, the annual *Clare Valley Gourmet Weekend* takes place. It's in its 29th year and celebrates the local wine, food, art and music.

WHERE TO STAY

// *Cygnets at Auburn* (under new management) has rustic stone cottages, as well as an on-site massage and aromatherapy service.

// *The Stanley Grammer Country House* provides luxury accommodation, and the team at *Brice Hill Country Lodge*. *Skillogalee House* is a spacious stone cottage dating back to the early 1900s, offers luxury, self-contained accommodation.

// Other good-value options include *The Clare Caravan Park*, *The Comfort Inn Clare Central*, *The Clare Valley Motel* and *The Clare Country Club*, adjacent to an 18-hole golf course.

WHERE TO EAT

// Check out the new *Mr Mick's Kitchen* for tapas-style food with wines by the glass for \$6 to \$7 from Mr Mick and Tim Adams. It's open seven days for lunch, with a wine bar on Friday nights until 8pm.

// *The Rising Sun Hotel* in Auburn, at the southern end of the valley, serves quality a la carte food in a heritage-style hotel founded in the 1850s.

// *Penna Lane Country Kitchen* (open for lunch weekends only) features seasonal local produce served in a vineyard setting, while *Artisan's Table Restaurant* is a popular lunch and dinner destination (Wednesday to Saturday).

// In addition to acting as a cellar door for smaller producers and an upmarket homewares store, *The Little Red Grape* has its own artisan bakery. It is also recommended as one of the best spots for espresso coffee, along with *Wild Saffron*.

// *Skillogalee Winery & Restaurant* is arguably the premier foodie destination in the region, open seven days for lunch year-round.