



THE BOLD AND THE BOUNTIFUL

The Barossa is truly a land of plenty, writes **Catherine Marshall**.

It's safari time in the Barossa and we're hunting down the Holy Grail. A Land Rover carries us through a landscape striped green with vineyards and gold with autumn grass. Turning off-road, we spy a mob of kangaroos bounding across a hillock as though to greet us. But they're alerted by the dust kicked up by our tyres; they screech to a halt, turn tail and hop away until they've dissolved on that immense, golden-blue horizon.

"They don't eat the grapes, which is surprising," says Pippa Merrett, my guide from Two Hands Wines. "They eat the wheat, though."

Full bellies, confirmed by the chunky flanks of the roos, are a theme for this fecund valley about an hour's drive north-east of Adelaide. Agriculture was the drawcard for the original British and Lutheran settlers in the Barossa; with its rich bedrock nourishing vineyards and farmlands, hunger and thirst are readily slaked here. Before us, Two Hands' mataro grapes adorn the squat bush vines so characteristic of this region.

"You see a lot of them throughout the Barossa simply because the original settlers didn't have infrastructure like trellises," Merrett says.

Behind us are the Holy Grail shiraz vines, held aloft on stakes and cropped of their voluptuous fruit. Merrett uncorks a bottle of this vineyard's 2019 vintage, and we discern its essence – treacly, aromatic, intense – while gazing across those cornrow vine plantings towards the avenue of date palms demarcating neighbouring Seppeltsfield Winery.

The Barossa's story of sustenance is told most poignantly, perhaps, in this avenue of palms planted after the Great Depression by winery workers grateful they'd been given free board and lodging. If those satiated



Sunset from the pool at The Louise; and a view framed at Appellation Restaurant.

workers and their families could see Seppeltsfield Winery today, their tummies would rumble anew. For lunch, we sit beneath a clutch of trees transplanted from that original plantation during Seppeltsfield's 2014 restoration at beloved South Australian institution Fino, relocated here, too, from its previous home in McLaren Vale's Wilunga.

Platters heave with smoked duck and figs, falafel, shishito peppers and preserved lime, giardiniera and olives and braised leeks with ricotta and capers; our glasses condense with a crisp sicilian vermintino – a relatively new varietal for this region, planted around six years ago. But the estate is custodian of far older harvests: secured in its Centennial Cellar are barrels of every vintage dating to 1878 – a 143-year collection believed to be the world's only unbroken lineage of single vintage wines.

"Benno Seppelt [son of Seppeltsfield's

founder, Joseph] had the vision to dedicate the first cask and mature it for 100 years," says Seppeltsfield spokesman Nigel Thiele.

"None of the barrels have run out. There are nine very rare vintages we don't taste or individually sell – they're offered as part of a collector's set."

Thankfully there's sufficient reserve tippie from my birth year, though it coincides with an auspicious event: the moon landing. Fruit sugars and nostalgia (and a touch of moonlight?) coalesce in the extract Thiele pours for me; as it glides down my throat I muse that we were babies at the same time, this port wine and me. Reading my mind, Thiele says, "it's a bit like walking around through time".

It's a journey of a different sort at Appellation, where the degustation transports us to unexpected destinations. Bite-sized hash browns droop beneath glistening mounds of black pearl caviar, blue

THE DETAILS

FLY

Qantas operates daily flights to Adelaide; the Barossa is about an hour's drive. See qantas.com.au

STAY

The Louise suites from \$645 a night, including breakfast and minibar. Two-night getaway package from \$1490 a suite, including a dinner at Appellation and a \$100 dining credit. See thelouise.com.au

VISIT

Two Hands' Search for the Holy Grail from \$150. See twohandswines.com Seppeltsfield's Taste your Birth Year from \$99. See seppeltsfield.com.au

Catherine Marshall was a guest of Luxury Lodges of Australia and The Louise.

swimmer crab bobs against delicate fronds of sea-grape, and blue lentils wreath bright persimmon cubes and a dollop of parmesan custard. Fruits of the vines flow with each dish, segueing from that vermintino to pinot gris, rose, shiraz with the Gumshire pork and gewurztraminer with the dessert of poached rhubarb and smoked sheep's milk.

The clue to executive chef Kyle Johns' heritage comes in the fire bread with peri parfait, served charred on a bed of hot pebbles – reminiscent of the braai sarmies you might eat in his homeland, South Africa; and the mini melktert (milk tarts), delivered in a box at the end of the meal. We are truly sated, and just like those rotund kangaroos, we must waddle off to bed. **T**