

LAKE HOUSE

Business with purpose

Championing destination dining and regional, seasonal food

In 1981, when Alla and Allan Wolf-Tasker set out to create a destination restaurant near the country town of Daylesford, Victoria, the Lake House property was a run-down farm - overgrown with weeds, the lake was more of a swamp than a lake - and Daylesford was an economically depressed regional town with an unemployment rate of 20 per cent.

Alla's vision was to create a destination dining experience in the style of French country restaurants, where the menu was sourced from the garden or local suppliers who worked in tandem with the hospitality industry. At the time, this idea was - literally and figuratively - completely foreign in Australia.

Over the ensuing three decades, this formidable team built and established Lake House as one of Australia's finest restaurants, regional hotels and leaders in hospitality. The resulting business manifested Alla's belief that a regional destination restaurant cannot operate in isolation from its region.



Creating a culinary culture

Alla Wolf-Tasker AM has worked tirelessly to foster a local food culture focused on holistic organic, sustainable and regenerative farming practices, mentoring numerous chefs, supporting local producers and fellow restaurateurs and building a veritable army of hospitality now working and sharing this ethos all over the world.

In the process, she has been instrumental in putting the Daylesford region on the map as one of Australia's most exciting and innovative food destinations, and inspired its development as a thriving regional food bowl.

The result: economic nutrition for a region

"Our community has grown around us and is now deeply engaged with the local food culture and production. We continue to develop this - we're minimising food miles, and the money stays in the community. This success means local growers are able to produce seasonal food for optimal nutrition, interest and diversity - not just because it can be cold-stored for long periods or can be transported great distances," explained Alla Wolf-Tasker AM, who continues to campaign for optimal nutrition in food paired with regenerative farming methods (the antithesis of much of today's industrial food production).

There are now regular farmers' markets and farm gate stalls throughout the region, featuring organic and biodynamic produce. Local growers are experimenting with rare animal breeds and heirloom varieties of vegetables, creating award-winning products - such as the organic chickens from Milking Yard Farm, Holy Goat Cheeses, and produce from Angelica Organic Farm - that grace fine dining tables across the nation. Local products such as oils and preserves now have loyal followings across the country.



Introducing regenerative farming and building capacity

In 2017 the Wolf-Taskers purchased nearby Dairy Flat Farm, a 38-acre degraded farm that they have transformed into a regenerative growing facility following organic practices. Today, the farm has flourishing flower and vegetable gardens; 300 fruit trees; 200 olive trees; a glasshouse, a bakehouse dedicated to slow fermented sourdough; and a vineyard. In addition, the farm is a 'laboratory' for experimenting with unusual varieties.

"The Dairy Flat regenerative farm has enabled us to 'close the sustainability loop'; the fresh produce supplies and defines the Lake House seasonal menu. Farm-grown botanicals and native plants are incorporated into our spa treatments, our olives are pressed to make our house olive oil and we have our own bee hives for honey and pollination" said Alla Wolf-Tasker AM

Improving soil quality is a mission on the farm; food scraps are composted and layers of cardboard are recycled over the garden beds to increase the soil level and support its microbiome.

Alla has championed seasonal, local, sustainable food production at all levels of the community, from school programs (such as the Daylesford Primary School Kitchen Garden project) to the halls of government, where she has campaigned vigorously for legislation around food and its production. Her Good Food Matters Regional Producers Scholarship provides \$5000 for a small producer to boost their skills through travel or training.

She has also spearheaded the development of the not-for-profit Institute of Gastronomy, an ambitious and vital project that encourages people to consider deeply what exactly constitutes good food and why it matters. The project combines collaboration between several industries including agriculture, hospitality, tourism, education and wellness and when it launches will be a gamechanger for culinary tourism in Australia.

"Since day one, we've committed to education, training the next generation of food, wine and hotel experts. The outcome I'm hoping for is an innovative approach to culinary education. The Institute would be an opportunity for students to learn artisanal skills like charcuterie, sourdough baking and butchery, with a broader remit that includes agriculture and tourism," said Alla Wolf-Tasker AM.

She has sat on numerous restaurant and tourism industry boards and government think-tanks and has long been a spokesperson for the region and the restaurant industry. She was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2007 in recognition that, more than almost anyone, she has played a pivotal and driving role in the transformation of the Australian food scene, contributing to a national cultural shift towards more sustainable food production and management.

Other sustainability initiatives (our mandates):

- Alongside its support for the local food industry, the family have been a staunch supporter of the local and extended art scene, with much of Allan Wolf-Tasker's art adorning the walls and gardens of Lake House.
- The majority of single-use plastics including hotel amenity bottles have been discontinued.
- In rehabilitating both the Lake House and Dairy Flat Farm properties, there was careful use of native species and the active removal of invasive species is ongoing. Over 200 native and drought-resilient trees and shrub seedlings were planted at the Lake House in the 1980s and now form a towering canopy over its outdoor pavilions
- At Dairy Flat Farm, there is a focus on cultivating rare and heirloom species, ensuring their conservation. No pesticides are used on either property.
- Since the beginning, rain water has been collected and recycled to water gardens and to be held in reserve during drought times.