

ABC Delicious

April, 2011

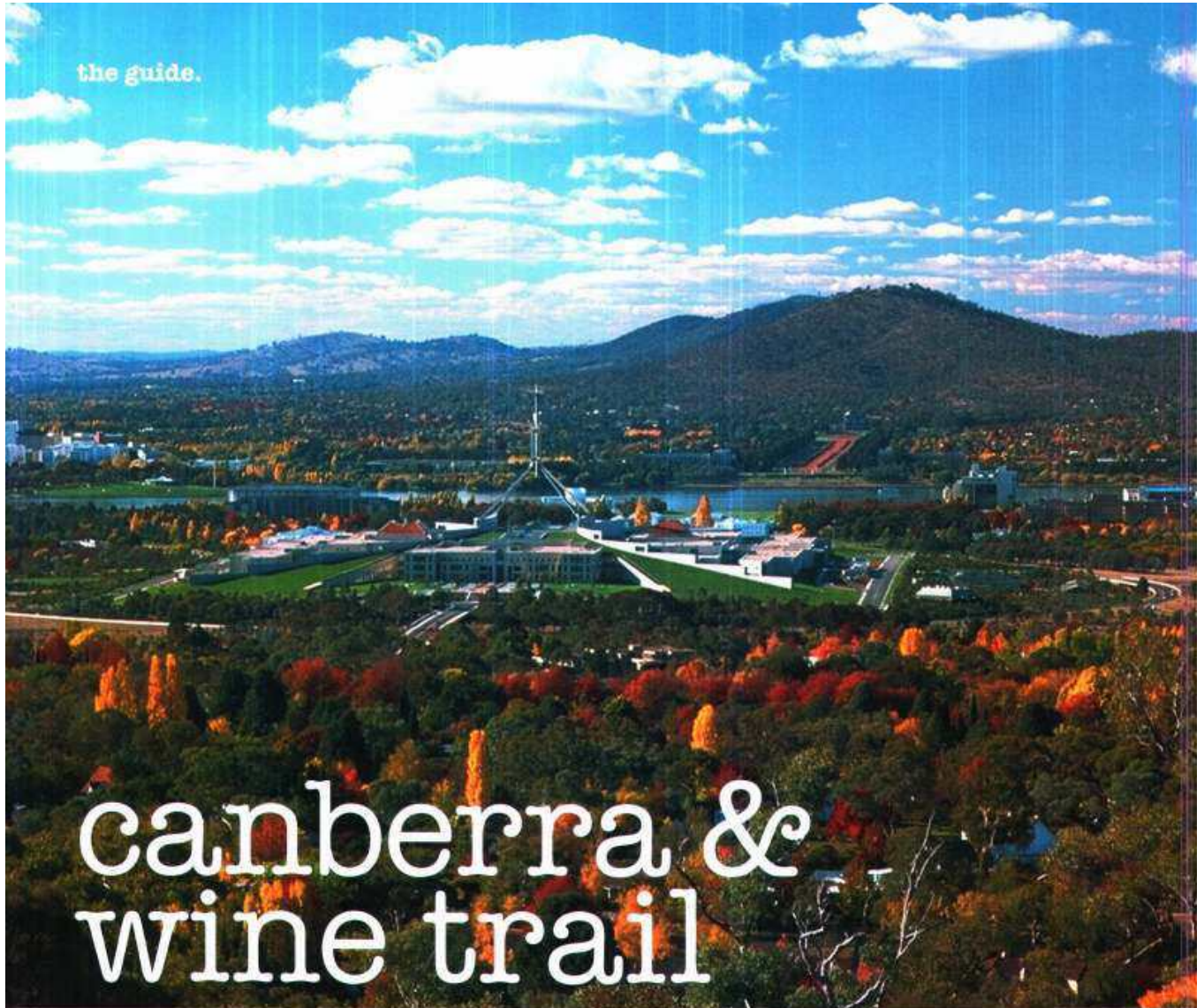
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Simon Thomsen discovers big things in Australia's smallest territory, from a burgeoning wine district and great country restaurants to a newly sophisticated dining scene worthy of the nation's capital city.

WORDS SIMON THOMSEN PHOTOGRAPHY CATHERINE SUTHERLAND

If only all political compromises turned out as well as Canberra. A city born of implacable differences between Sydney and Melbourne when it came to hosting a national capital, Canberra is a curious mix of high-octane decision-making, city slickness and country lifestyle.

For years, the city boasted one of the nation's finest bakeries in Silo, yet dining standards seemed less important than the deals being struck over the table. Now, a sophisticated food culture is emerging thanks to the likes of Lonsdale Street

Roasters. The NewActon redevelopment has created a new restaurant precinct to rival the trendier established suburbs including Manuka and Kingston.

The loop north of the city, dubbed the Poacher's Way, has given rise to an exciting wine region. There are about 40 wineries near Canberra and though they're mostly in NSW, the capital deserves the credit.

Meanwhile, people visiting from more haphazard capitals can only envy Walter Burley Griffin's leafy, spacious city as they sightsee without traffic jams.

where to eat

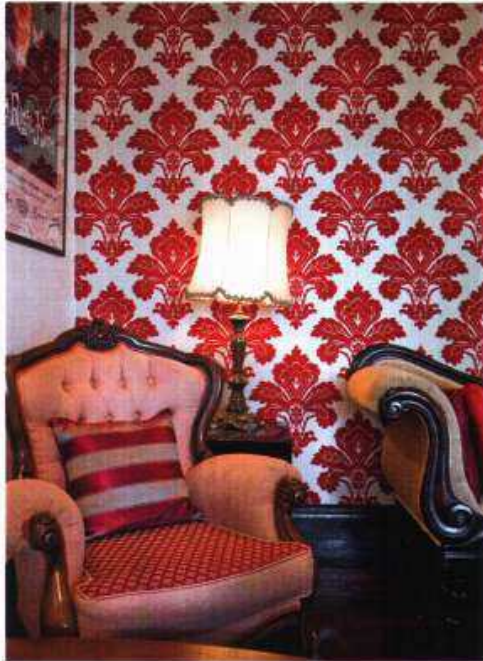
ITALIAN AND SONS

After introducing the capital to southern Italian food via Mezzalira, the Trimboli family opened up this lively trattoria. Effervescent service delivers great Italian wines and joyously sunny dishes to share, from antipasti such as salt cod fritters and vinegary sardines with pine nuts and currants, to woodfired pizzas and pasta. Come on Tuesday when the daily dish is meltingly tender slow-roasted porchetta. 7 Lonsdale St, Braddon, (02) 6162 4888.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHY: AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TOURISM



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DIECI E MEZZO

Former Otto chef James Kidman joined legendary ACT restaurateur Fiona Wright (ex-The Lobby) to start this modern Italian ristorante in the CBD. At night, the luminous Robert Foster sculpture opposite demands attention, as does James's equally entertaining menu, including a pickled red whiting salad with mojama, porcini-rubbed Cape Grim beef rib and panettone bread-and-butter pudding. Weekday breakfasts see a switch to cafe mode. Fiona and James also collaborate on the National Gallery's cafe menu, and on Friday nights in summer, the champagne flows at the outdoor Sculpture Bar. **ACTEWAGL House, cnr Bunda and Mort sts, City, (02) 6248 3142.**



Clockwise from far left: Capital Hill; Partour Wine Room; Lonsdale Street Roasters; Vince Trimboli of Italian and Sons; seared scallops at Pelagic Bar & Dining.



PELAGIC BAR & DINING

A shopping arcade seems an unlikely setting for this new, generously spaced seafood bistro, with its polished concrete floor and counter bar. However, there's certainly talent in the kitchen, if the Moreton Bay bug and oyster consomme, scallops with pickled cauliflower, and a blue swimmer crab omelette to rival Rockpool's are any benchmarks. The wine list is surprisingly red-laden, with plenty from the premium end - Grange with your kingfish, anyone? **Bailey's Arcade, 2/131 London Cct, City, (02) 6162 0752.**

BICICLETTA

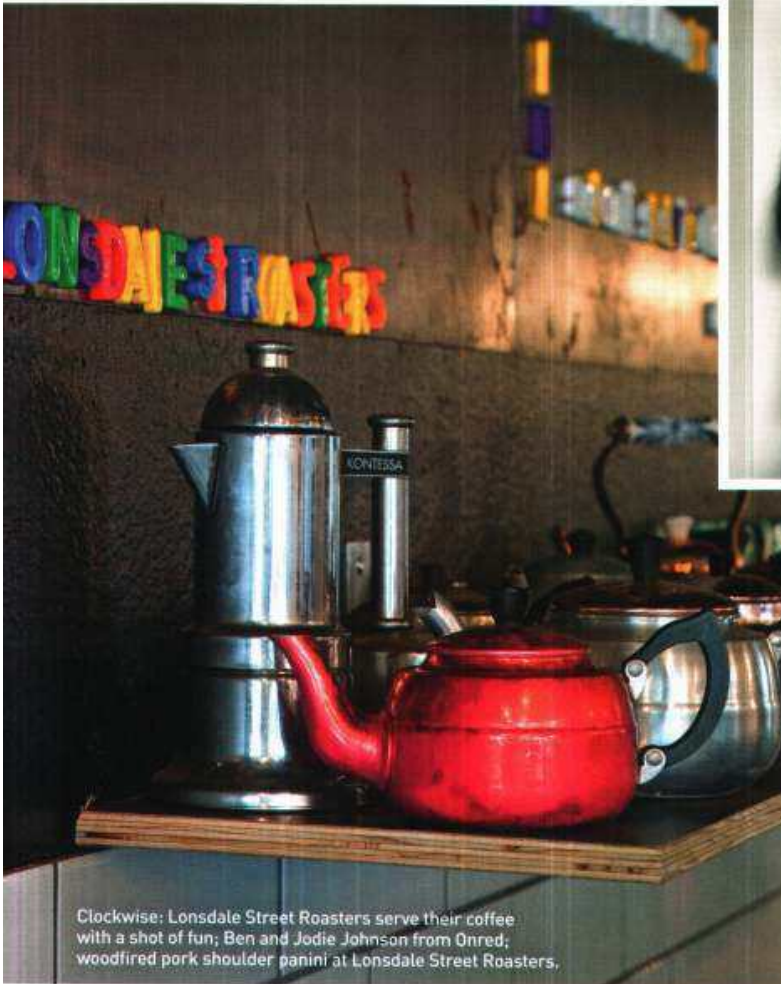
The team behind Sydney's Pizza e Birra delivers an encore performance in this casual Italian pizzeria, which doubles as the in-house restaurant at the Diamant Hotel (see 'Where to Stay'). The decor has an industrial appeal, with the scars from the former kitchen now part of the dining room. Pizza is really the star of the show here with 16 on offer, although the insalata caprese is as pretty as Sophia Loren, and the housemade tagliatelle with duck ragu just as sexy. Come morning, enjoy Bicicletta's breakfast buffet alfresco on the lawn. **1/15 Edinburgh Ave, NewActon Pavilion, (02) 6262 8683.**

THIRST WINE BAR & EATERY

In a 180-degree turn from its days as Anise, chef Jeff Piper has eschewed fancy dining for his own take on Thai in a space that juggles wine bar with Asian canteen. Barsnacky nibbles, such as Chang Mai sausage, chicken satays and corn fritters, are complemented by more substantial dishes including pad thai, crisp fish salad and green curry with trout dumplings. You can take away, too. **Melbourne Building, 20 West Row, City, (02) 6257 0700.**



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Clockwise: Lonsdale Street Roasters serve their coffee with a shot of fun; Ben and Jodie Johnson from Onred; woodfired pork shoulder panini at Lonsdale Street Roasters.

ONRED

Inside this 1960s glass eyrie, with its sweeping hilltop views over the capital's orderly design, former Grazing chef Jodie Johnson conjures imaginative, modern dishes that provide competition for the sightseeing. She's gone for a tasting-style menu, suggesting you order three or four of the 14 savoury dishes – perhaps ricotta gnocchi and prawns with fried artichoke and broad beans, or the pork belly with celeriac and apple puree. Sibling Ben tends the floor, while his wine list is sure to steal your attention from the view. **50 Red Hill Dr, Red Hill, (02) 6273 3517.**

3 SEEDS

After establishing their reputation at Podfood, a smart daytime cafe in a nursery, Andrew and Catherine Haskins have

moved on to their cooking school, deli and provedore in a new development next to the airport. 3 Seeds is filled with *pre-t-à-manger* meals such as five-spice pork belly and Thai chicken curry, while also operating as a cafe for breakfast and lunch. Andrew also makes picnic hampers if you're planning to go exploring. **7/15 Mustang Ave, Majura Park, (02) 6247 0555.**

SIL0 BAKERY

The dazzling array of pastries, tarts and croissants, lined up like ranks of soldiers, may lead to swooning. The bread is equally good, from sourdough to baguettes, Italian casalinga and German vollkornbrot, plus there's a walk-in cheese room. While a constant parade marches by to restock and grab coffees, the long narrow space also serves breakfasts of fresh juices, poached

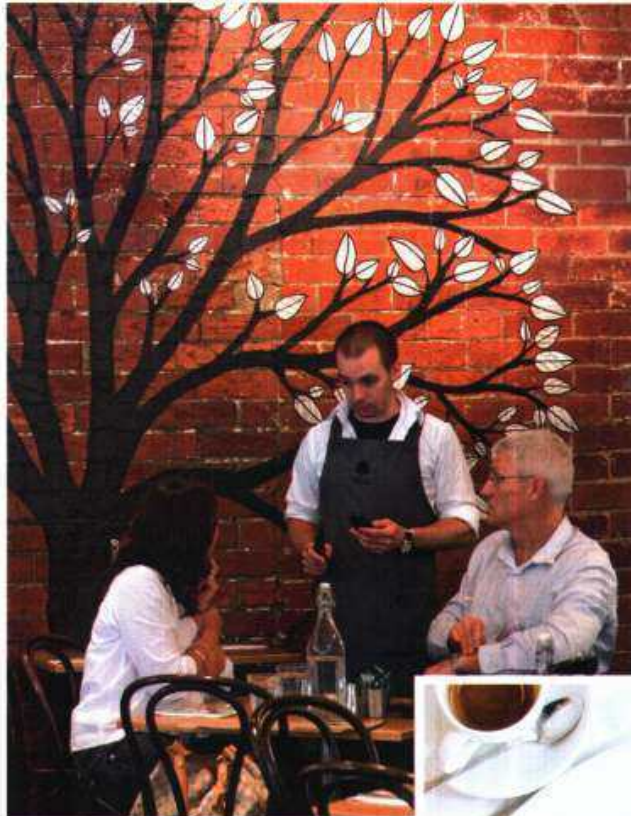
eggs with chilli jam or, in winter, brioche pudding. For lunch, you know anything involving pastry is a winner, although the vegetable pâtés are just as impressive. **36 Giles St, Kingston, (02) 6260 6060.**

LONSDALE STREET ROASTERS

Crowds suggest this is the cafe Canberra has been waiting for. Two AIs, Smith and Evans, and Paul Hutt opened this coffee roaster and retailer in December last year. With blends named Johnny Cash, Cartel and Mojo Rising, plus a dozen single origin coffees, you know they're sincere, but fun, while the wall-mounted bicycles hint at adventurous souls. The menu – presented in kids' magnetic letters – is just as playful, yet seriously good when the toasted panini is filled with slow-roasted pork shoulder. **3/7 Lonsdale St, Braddon, (02) 6156 0975.**



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Clockwise: Dieci e Mezzo looks onto this modern Robert Foster sculpture; Dieci e Mezzo's Amedei Toscano chocolate semifreddo; Urban Pantry in Manuka.

GUS' CAFE

This slice of history demonstrates how far the city has come. It was anything but swinging in the '60s when the late Augustin 'Gus' Petersilka battled a council that was terrified of the dangers of sidewalk cafes. He even petitioned the Queen for help! Luckily Canberra's first European-style cafe lives on for all-day breakfasts, salads and wraps to eat while watching the world go by. **Garema Centre, Shop 8, Bunda St, City, (02) 6248 8118.**

URBAN PANTRY

A seamless mix of outdoor cafe, breezy bistro and food store (selling Sonoma sourdough) that spills out onto Manuka Lawns, makes Urban Pantry the double shot the suburb needed. Yes the coffee's good, so too the freshly squeezed juices and spicy cannellini beans with free-range eggs for brekkie. The mod-Oz dinner menu may feature roasted duck salad with gorgonzola, pear and walnuts. The excellent city cafe Cream is related. **5 Bougainville St, Manuka, (02) 6162 3556.**



URBANFOOD STORE + CAFE

You can bet the prices at this organic supermarket, bottleshop and cafe are fair, especially when the offices for the ACCC are right next door. On weekends, cyclists drop in for Sacred Grounds coffee and live acoustic music, stopping to brunch on housemade baked beans with free-range poached eggs. Lunch includes several burgers and salads, with plenty of gluten-free and vegetarian options. **Cnr Marcus Clarke St and Edinburgh Ave, NewActon East, (02) 6162 3440.**

where to drink

KNIGHTSBRIDGE PENTHOUSE

This small bar, with its front window lit up like a Christmas tree, is where the young, beautiful and stylishly dressed crowd come to party. The DJs turn up the dance beats, while the barmen put on a show, shaking both classic and modern cocktails. Have a chuckle with concoctions, such as 'Zombie' or 'Aviation', or settle in with some decent wines and a few nibbles. **1/34 Mort St, Braddon, (02) 6262 6221.**

PARLOUR WINE ROOM

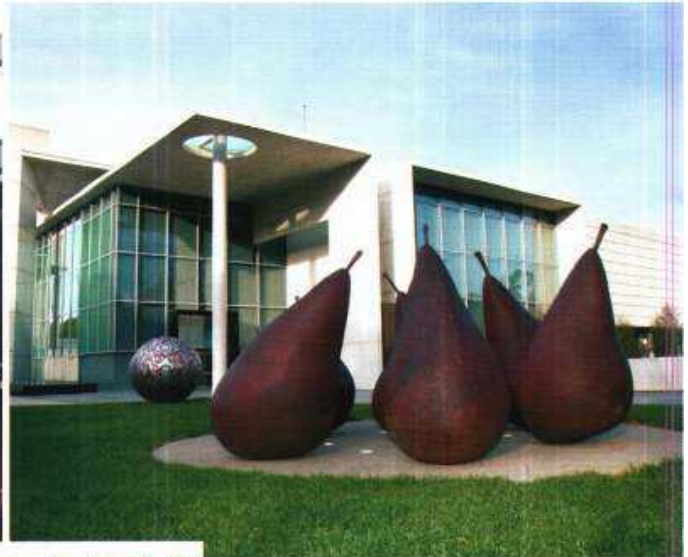
This lounge takes advantage of its mix of Victorian-era and Art Deco furnishings to offer a more gentrified setting than its Knightsbridge Penthouse cousin, however the occasional local hen's party might still enlist your help. The broad, interesting wine list has a focus on Spain to match the tapas on offer, right down to sangria jugs and sherry. They can mix a classy cocktail, too. **16 Kendall La, NewActon Pavilion, (02) 6257 7325.**



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Clockwise: Tongue & Groove; the National Gallery of Australia; Tom Moore of Grazing in Gundaroo.



BENCHMARK WINE BAR

Predominantly a restaurant, the joy of Benchmark is its 500-bin wine list, including 100 by-the-glass options in 175ml pours and three-glass wine flights. Explore the New and Old Worlds from the comfort of the leather banquettes with a cheese platter for company. 65 Northbourne Ave, City, (02) 6262 6522.

TONGUE & GROOVE

A mix of globally flavoured tapas bar, lounge, bistro and cavernous pub, with concrete beams like cathedral buttresses, Tongue & Groove is a generally sedate affair until it roars to life on weekend nights when the music cranks up until 11. Offering shared bites from sliders and pizzas to mini Vietnamese rolls, a big part of its appeal is the affordable range of by-the-glass wines to match. 1 Genge St, City, (02) 6230 4455.

where to shop

Plonk Beer and Wine Store (Fyshwick Fresh Food Markets, Cnr Nyrang and Mildura sts, Fyshwick, (02) 6260 6336) stocks hundreds of beers, from around



the globe, as well as ciders and locally made wines. The bad news? It's only open Thursday to Sunday, in line with the rest of the Fishwick Markets.

Bison Australia (8 Beltana Rd, Pialligo, (02) 6257 7255) makes beautiful, colourful stoneware, from milk jugs to sugar pots, mixing bowls and vases.

Craft ACT (1st Floor, North Building, 180 London Cct, City, (02) 6262 9333) celebrates 40 years in 2011. As well as exhibitions of works by leading Canberra artisans, the shop is a good place to nab a Fink water jug, by local designer Robert Foster – although its such an iconic design, you'll find it in most of the city's gallery and museum shops.

On Saturday morning, between 8am and 11am, the **Capital Region Farmers' Market** (Exhibition Park, Flemington Rd, Mitchell, 0400 852 227) is the best place to sample and buy homegrown produce, especially in winter, when the black truffles arrive.

out of town

GRAZING

This restaurant in an historic stone hotel, 35 minutes from Canberra, grows its own vegetables. Chef Tom Moore uses them to create hearty, generous and deeply satisfying fare, from smoked pork croquettes to marinated kangaroo on a caramelised onion and beetroot tart, and a sublime pav. There's a good list of local wines and beers to match, which is unsurprising really, since the building's owner is Jennie Mooney, the driving force behind Capital Wines. Try Capital's witty Ministry series, especially the Foreign Minister sangiovese, and the elegant Kyeema Vineyard reserve range. Jennie plans to open a cellar door at Grazing later this year. Cnr Cork and Harp sts, Gundaroo, (02) 6236 8777.

POACHERS PANTRY

This year marks 20 years of Poachers Pantry producing the hot and cold smoked meats that feature on the menu of the in-house **Smokehouse Cafe**. This old weatherboard cottage is a popular weekend destination, and also serves as the cellar door for Wily

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA PHOTOGRAPHY: AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TOURISM; GRAZING PHOTOGRAPHY: FOSTER; TOM MOORE WINES PHOTOGRAPHY: IRISHE DOWDY; DIAMANT HOTEL PHOTOGRAPHY: JASON LOUISAS PHOTOGRAPHY



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Trout and Fingerlings wines. Sit in the garden and share a pissaladiere tart with prosciutto, before tucking into smoked lamb cutlets and smoked quail saltimbocca. **431 Nanima Rd, Hall, (02) 6230 2487.**

CORK STREET GALLERY CAFE

The ramshackle 1870s police stables in Gundaroo are the rustic setting for this weekend pizzeria, where the food is tasty and honest – think pesto-stuffed mushrooms, garlic prawn salad, teacakes and good coffee. Across the road, **The Colonial Inn** dates from the same era and is worth visiting to try the region's wines while chatting with the locals. **24 Cork St, Gundaroo, (02) 6236 8217.**



Clockwise: The stylish Diamant hotel; father-and-daughter winemakers Ken and Stephanie Helm; Matilda the border collie mistakes Helm's barrels for sheep.

FLINT IN THE VINES

The old shearer's quarters covered in roses outside **Shaw Vineyard Estate** is a reminder of its former life as a sheep station. Builder Graeme Shaw runs one of Canberra's largest wineries and built his own cellar door, run by daughter Tanya, and restaurant Flint in the Vines, where chef Grant Kells (who's also responsible for Flint Dining in NewActon) and co-owner Jai Dawson let the good times flow. Tasmanian possum pie is a conversation piece, while Grant's globally flavoured menu ranges from beef bourguignon to woodfired pizza and duck breast on rice noodles. It's a popular weekend breakfast spot, too, and Shaw's Isabella riesling impresses any time of the day. **34 Isabel Dr, Murrumbateman, (02) 6227 5144.**

the wine trail

CLONAKILLA

Inspired by France's Rhône region, Tim Kirk created an iconic Australian wine when he bottled shiraz and viognier together. Clonakilla wine now ranks alongside Hill of Grace and Grange, with top critics naming his shiraz viognier 'Wine of the Year' several times. Not bad for a former teacher who took on the vineyards his father, John, first planted in 1971. Tim's no slouch with riesling either. **3 Crisps Lane, Murrumbateman, (02) 6227 5877.**

HELM WINES

With his extravagant moustache, Ken Helm looks a little like a flying ace, but the war stories he tells inside the small 19th-century schoolhouse-turned-tasting room

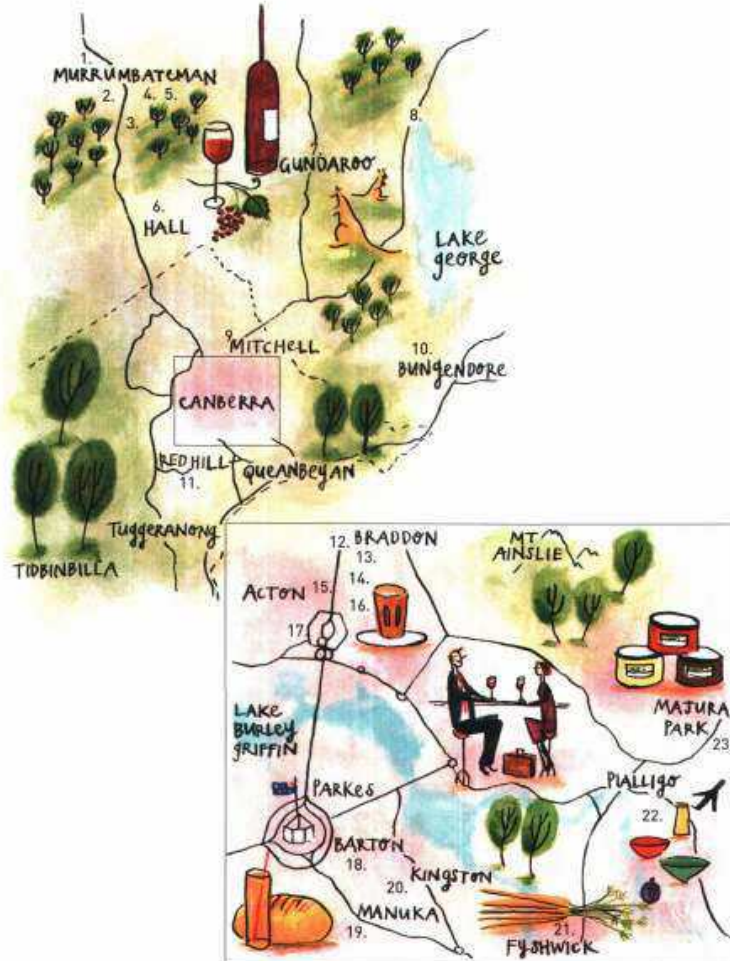
are all about riesling. With his assistant winemaker daughter Stephanie, Ken makes three styles of this varietal: dry, single vineyard and Germanic half-dry. Nearly four decades on it's still a great place for a chat, sniff and slurp. **19 Butts Rd, Murrumbateman, (02) 6227 5953.**

LARK HILL WINERY

There are two exciting developments at this biodynamic winery, which Sue and Dave Carpenter established high on the Lake George escarpment in 1978. The first is the 2010 gruner veltliner, a white Austrian grape rarely seen in Australia. The other development is son Chris' weekend restaurant that overlooks the vineyard. It serves simple seasonal fare matched to the wines, so venison carpaccio is an excuse to try the fragrant and light 2005 pinot noir. **Cnr Bungendore and Joe Rocks rds, Bungendore, (02) 6238 1393.**



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LONG RAIL GULLY

You may find barrister Garry Parker standing at the gingham-covered trestle table inside this large tin shed, proudly taking you through the excellent wines by his son, Richard. A testament to Richard's talent is that he is winemaker for several other vineyards. This picturesque spot, though hard to find, has a lovely picnic area beside the lake. **161 Long Rail Gully Rd, Murrumbateman, (02) 6226 8115.**

LERIDA ESTATE

It's worth the drive north to this Glenn Murcutt-designed winery, cellar door and cafe, as much for the excellent views, as the shiraz, pinot noir and shiraz-viognier. **The Vineyards, Old Federal Highway, Lake George, (02) 6295 6676.**

where to stay

Clifton Suites (100 Northbourne Ave, Canberra, (02) 6262 6266, cliftonsuites.com.au, from \$195 per double) on Northbourne is handy for the CBD with spacious self-contained one- and two-bedroom apartments and a good pool.

Surprisingly for a city hosting plenty of high-powered visitors, **Hotel Realm** (18 National Cct, Barton, (02) 6163 1888, hotelrealm.com.au, from \$290 per double) is one of only a few five-star hotels in town. Walking distance to Kingston and Manuka, and right on Parliament's doorstep, its retro-chic is paired with excellent service.

Canberra's newest pillows are at the art-themed **Diamant Hotel** (15 Edinburgh Ave, NewActon Pavilion, (02) 6262 8683, shotels.com, from \$190 per double),

an 80-room boutique hotel amid heritage-listed buildings that began life as accommodation for single public servants. It's a funky little precinct, with compact yet stylish rooms to match.

Richard Everson cooked in leading European hotels before returning here to open **Country Guesthouse Schonegg** (381 Hillview Dr, Murrumbateman, (02) 6227 0344, schonegg.com.au, from \$160 per double including breakfast) with his German wife, Evelyn. This modern, rural B&B makes a great launch pad for Murrumbateman's wineries, so start the day with their blackforest pancakes for breakfast - they're just plain naughty. **d.** Thanks to Australian Capital Tourism for their assistance with this story. For more info, tel: 1300 554 114 or go to: visitcanberra.com.au.

ILLUSTRATION: PRISCILLA NIELSEN