

**JOURNEY BROKE NSW**

Rows of vines roll across the landscape at  
Tinonee Vineyard Estate in Broke, NSW.

# THE SECRET VALLEY

THINK YOU KNOW THE HUNTER VALLEY? DISCOVER BROKE, BRIMMING  
WITH WINERIES AND RESTAURANTS – MINUS THE CROWDS.

WORDS HANNAH JAMES



PHOTOGRAPHY IMAGE SUPPLIED



DOWN WHERE THE WOLLOMBI Brook runs quiet and strong, where the peaks of the Broken Back Range slice the sky, there's a valley. It's a valley thick with history: the Wanaruah people have lived here for 30,000 years; and it's been known by its current name since 1830, when the town of Broke was founded.

Vineyards have flourished here ever since, thanks to the alluvial soils and sandy loams perfect for white grapes, and a seam of volcanic red clay loved by red varietals. The valley's most recent chapter has seen it evolve into a thriving food and wine destination. "The change I've seen in the seven years I've been here has been extraordinary," says Karin Adcock, who bought Winmark Wines in 2016.

Never heard of Broke? That's the point. This part of the Hunter Valley, just 15 minutes' drive west of Pokolbin, is the trail less travelled – and it's all the better for it. Stop in for a tasting at one of the wineries that stud the valley, their vines spreading up the hillsides and covering the river flats in leafy green rows, and chances are the person filling your glass is the owner – or winemaker – herself. These are almost all family-owned operations producing small-batch, carefully crafted drops.

The most familiar to oenophiles and gastronomes alike, perhaps, is Margan Wines, where Andrew and Lisa Margan have been filling their trophy cabinet with awards for their sustainably produced, locally grown wines since they opened their doors in 1996. A decade later, they opened a restaurant serving up dishes focused on hyperlocal produce, much of it grown on-site.

Margan Restaurant soon won a chef's hat to add to the family's accolades. The next addition was offering tours of the property to diners. "People want to connect to the provenance of their food and wine, and know about the backstory," says Lisa. "Our experiences connect the dots."

They do indeed. Exploring the winery, rich with the heady scent of fermenting grapes, then strolling around the one-hectare kitchen garden and orchard in gathering twilight is the perfect introduction to a five-course tasting menu in the sophisticated restaurant.

As the Margan family business has blossomed, so has Broke. Its "rural charm" is what initially drew Lisa here, and still, she says, "I enjoy the bucolic bliss of this beautiful valley, surrounded by national parks." Now there's a choice of places to stay, eat and drink, too. >

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PHOTOGRAPHY BROOKE TUNBRIDGE, DOM CHERRY, SPIRO ROKOS



**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT**

Sip crisp, delicious chardonnay at Winmark Wines; lounge by the inviting pool at Talits Estate; cosy outdoor seating at Talits Estate's new cellar door; visit Krinklewood for award-winning, biodynamic wines; get up close to cute farm animals at Starline Alpacas; cultivated gardens and olive trees surround the French-inspired, luxury homestead at Talits Estate; treat your face and body to beautiful handmade skincare products by Bare Nature'sKin; Lisa Margan, co-owner and director of Margan Wines. **FACING PAGE** The dramatic sandstone formation Yellow Rock rises beyond the trees at Margan Wines's Ceres Hill vineyard.





FROM BELOW Panoramic valley views from The Residence at Tinonee Vineyard Estate; the picturesque verandah at Winmark Residence. FACING PAGE Michelle Waite creates her all-natural skincare products for Bare Nature'skin at River Flats Estate.



“As I started spending time at Winmark, I had a strong feeling of needing to share this beautiful place.”

Karin Adcock is a more recent convert to the beauty of Broke, but she's just as passionate. The corporate high-flyer took a left turn into winemaking after selling her stake in Pandora jewellery, which she launched into Australia. “I unexpectedly fell in love with the property,” says Danish-born Karin of the vineyard. “It was initially for family and friends, but as I started spending time at Winmark, I had a strong feeling of needing to share this beautiful place with many more beyond my circle.”

She did just that, expanding and upgrading the accommodation, which now consists of four guesthouses, which sleep two, eight, 10 and 14 people respectively.

As if sleeping among the vines weren't enough incentive for visitors, Karin added a whole new element to the experience. “I've always had a love of art and the property presented itself as a wonderful place for sculptures,” she explains. The resulting sculpture walk winds around the hillside, with dramatic pieces standing out against the sky. There's an art gallery, too, cool and white and stocked with Australian artists. On a recent visit, Julianne Ross Allcorn's delicate botanicals in pencil and acrylics graced

one wall; Alison Mitchell's lit-from-within still-lifes spanned a second; and the juicy, tactile impasto of Felicia Aroney's hydrangea paintings literally stood out from a third. And the main event – the wine – has undergone its own transformation. Winmark Wines now specialises in chardonnay, dedicating 11 hectares to it – and the results show the gamble was worth it, with a gold medal in the recent NSW Small Winemakers Wine Show.

All this has made Karin evangelical about Broke. “We have a wonderful community of passionate operators striving to give our guests the best possible experiences,” she says. “The Broke Fordwich Wine Trail has been a great platform to bring us all together and we're going from strength to strength.”

Lisa Margan agrees: “Visitors love the less commercialised aspect of this historic but ‘softly spoken’ region. They love the premium food, wine and accommodation, and connecting with nature. I guess, like all special places, that will make Broke a little busier – but we can all enjoy it now, while it's still a little undiscovered.” *CS*  
Visit [brokefordwich.com.au](http://brokefordwich.com.au)

## THE FACTS

### GETTING THERE

**CAR** Broke is about a two-hour drive from Sydney, or a one-hour drive from Newcastle.

### WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

**MARGAN WINES & RESTAURANT** Pouring drops from its own award-winning winery, Margan also serves up superb hatted food. 1238 Milbrodale Rd, Broke; (02) 6579 1372; [margan.com.au](http://margan.com.au)

**MOUNT BROKE WINES** A tightly edited menu (try the local Angus rib-eye for two), their own wines, and views of vines and mountains is a lunchtime treat. 130 Adams Peak Rd, Broke; (02) 6579 1314; [mountbrokewines.com.au](http://mountbrokewines.com.au)

**WHISPERING BROOK** Step through Whispering Brook's tall timber doors and you're in Portugal, with varietals including singing Arinto and full-bodied Touriga Nacional on offer. Access via Rodd St, Broke; (02) 9818 4126; [whispering-brook.com](http://whispering-brook.com)

**GREENWAY WINES** Settle in under a greenery-hung loggia beside a red barn to taste handcrafted, small-batch wines, including crisp fiano and luscious shiraz. Don't miss the verjuice. 350 Wollombi Rd, Broke; (02) 6579 1175; [greenwaywines.com.au](http://greenwaywines.com.au)

**RUNNING HORSE WINES** Jockey turned winemaker David Fromberg makes beautiful drops

that age well. Visit his modern cellar door, made from converted shipping containers. 1133 Milbrodale Rd, Broke; 0474 156 786; [runninghorsewines.com](http://runninghorsewines.com)

### WHAT TO SEE AND DO

#### A LITTLE BIT OF BROKE FESTIVAL, MAY 5-7

Experience the best of the valley over this festival weekend. You can book in for decadent degustations, picture-perfect picnics in the vines and special wine tastings. Visit [brokefordwich.com.au](http://brokefordwich.com.au)

**THE WELLNESS FARM** Relax in the magnesium float pod, barrel sauna and hot tub, while working off the wine and food on a Pilates reformer or in the gym. 130 Hill St, Broke; 0402 764 116; [thewellnessfarm.com.au](http://thewellnessfarm.com.au)

**HUNTER LAVENDER FARM** Visit in December or January and you can stroll the lavender fields, then visit the shop for oils, mists and pillows made on-farm. 125 Adams Peak Rd, Broke; [hunterlavenderfarm.com.au](http://hunterlavenderfarm.com.au)

**WINMARK ART GALLERY** Winmark Wines serves up chardonnays with art on the side. 229 Wollombi Rd, Broke; (02) 9997 5373; [winmarkwines.com.au](http://winmarkwines.com.au)

**BARE NATURE'SKIN** Michelle Waite crafts natural skincare under the label Bare Nature'skin. Visit her shop to buy them, plus olive oils, vinegars and

chutneys from her mum Marian's River Flats Estate next door. 500 Wollombi Rd, Broke; 0404 512 116; [barenatureskin.com.au](http://barenatureskin.com.au)

**MAGOONY'S COFFEE HOUSE @ THE GARAGE** An old servo is now a family-owned cafe, with Melissa O'Toole dispensing bagels, paninis, pastries and spectacular cakes made by her pastry chef son Ryan, while husband Paul sells antiques and his handmade recycled timber tables out the back. 19 Singleton St, Broke; (02) 6579 1282; [instagram.com/magoonyscoffeehouse](http://instagram.com/magoonyscoffeehouse)

**KAWAL ROCK DISTILLERY** The rustic, barn-like cellar door houses a gigantic copper still from Tasmania – and plenty of gin, brandy and moscato. 260 Milbrodale Rd, Fordwich; 0401 378 874; [kawalrockdistillery.com](http://kawalrockdistillery.com)

### WHERE TO STAY

**TINONEE VINEYARD ESTATE** Sample the estate's 1813 range of wines at the cellar door, where a spectacular wall of glass lets you gaze out onto the vines and hills beyond. Then stroll into the spacious, gracious Residence, which sleeps 12, or The Cottage, a former dairy sleeping four. 1273 Milbrodale Rd, Broke; 0488 127 321; [tinoneevineyardestate.com.au](http://tinoneevineyardestate.com.au)

**WINMARK WINES** Choose from Villa Vino, a tiny home in the vines; Winmark Residence,

owner Karin Adcock's own home, which sleeps eight; Rock View, a comfortable country house for 10; or the contemporary Mio Monte, sleeping 14. 229 Wollombi Rd, Broke; (02) 9997 5373; [winmarkwines.com.au](http://winmarkwines.com.au)

**BINBILLA VINEYARD ESTATE** Set on a 40-hectare vineyard, this grand yet homely estate sleeps 10. 1297C Broke Rd, Broke; 0477 010 010; [binbillavineyardestate.com.au](http://binbillavineyardestate.com.au)

**TALITS ESTATE** In a breezy cellar door with a wide verandah and a lawn running down to a dam, you can tuck into an overflowing cheeseboard and the estate's multi-award-winning wines. Just as special is the accommodation: a Provencal-style farmhouse with parterre garden and picture-perfect pool. 722 Milbrodale Rd, Fordwich; 0472 500 662; [talitsestate.com.au](http://talitsestate.com.au)

**KRINKLEWOOD** This glorious vineyard has a distinct French accent. The cellar door is hung with ivy, the shady courtyard is set with stone urns, and there's an elegant homestead. Book a stay there or in the award-winning eco cabin (opening later this year) and you can enjoy the lovely gardens, with avenues of trees, rippling fountains and shady loggias where you can tuck into cheese platters and wine. 712 Wollombi Rd, Broke; (02) 6579 1322; [krinklewood.com](http://krinklewood.com)

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