

It's one of the golden rules of a house-party holiday that the organiser scores the best bedroom. Those who follow get dibs according to order of arrival and latecomers must make do with whatever is left, even if it's a set of bunks with Barbie bed linen. Simply put, it can be fraught. There is no such roulette at The Residence at Winmark Wines in the Broke Fordwich sub-region of the NSW Hunter Valley. In a miracle of planning, there are four bedrooms down the hallway, three with queen beds and one with twins, and each has its own ensuite shower and toilet. As the usual planner of house parties for family and friends, entrusted with keeping everyone happy, this is a first for me. The bedroom I choose, with thick floral curtains and a bonus corner window, has a canvas behind the door of a patchwork cow by Tracey Keller. I find its goofy bovine stare oddly restful, with no hint of reproach.

Also noteworthy and comforting are the multiple number of living spaces, from a conservatory-style area with safari-style decor (tribal drums, masks, carvings) in earthy tones to an enormous main room with a banquet-worthy dining table and multiple groupings of sofas and easy chairs. There are piles of coffee-table books and art pieces galore. Karin Adcock, Danish-born owner and vigneron of Winmark Wines, formerly Pooles Rock Vineyard, is an avid traveller and passionate collector whose generosity is well evidenced by the personal treasures on display here. The unambiguous message is to spread out, relax and enjoy, everyone.

The most likely arguments among guests could be about which channel to choose on the one TV. But with expansive views beyond the house, it's much more equitable to watch clouds shifting over escarpments and old forests, the passage of the sun across district landmark Yellow Rock, and the arrival, seemingly on the dot of the cocktail and canapes hour, of inquisitive kangaroos. Big windows and French doors bring in sun and light, and there's outdoor seating on terraces under pergolas threaded with wisteria and along pathways edged with stalky lavender and pots of vivid geraniums.

The scope of all this is in keeping with this large parcel of wine country set amid rolling grasslands and hard, rocky hills cresting the horizon just off Wollombi Rd. Karin knows the true meaning of hospitality, and over the past seven years has diversified the estate's offerings to include a range of accommodation, from a tiny house suitable for a couple to the two-storey Residence, although she closes off the top level, where her personal effects are stored. The 52ha estate is understandably popular for weddings and events but such is the scale that it's hard to imagine any sense of overcrowding.

With map in hand of art-loving Karin's trail of "sculptures and landmarks", it's fun to wander up and down slopes to view myriad contemporary installations set amid landscapes of cultural and historic significance. Look out for Fight or Flight by Rode Vella, shaped as a gigantic slingshot poised for action, and David Ball's corten steel Celest, a former Sculpture by the Sea star turn that resembles a grounded UFO. Then check the neat garden of perennials and roses designed by Paul Bangay, the tree "park" of deciduous species, and skirt a few of the blocks of chardonnay vines, which cover just over 12ha. Some of the rather playful sculptures and installations are for sale and all embody a touch of whimsy, especially Scissor, Paper, Rock, formed from fragments of iron and round balls of oak, placed next to a sandstone boulder. It's the old intransitive hand game writ large and clever.

And then drop into the tasting room and cellar door, past Alain Vagh's glazed Ceramic Lollipops, acquired by Karin on a trip to Provence. There's indoor-outdoor seating for chardonnay samplings and cheese and charcuterie platters; allow time to visit the adjoining art gallery plus boutique showcasing



A VINE ROMANCE

House rules in the Hunter Valley

SUSAN KUROSAWA



Winmark Wines in the Hunter Valley, main; owner and vigneron Karin Adcock, inset; the sculpture walk, above; home comforts in The Residence, below



Australian artisans. If staying at The Residence, then wander up back "home", where Woman in Bronze by Sonia Payes keeps a double-faced watch amid the garden's dappled afternoon shadows.

For summertime guests, there's a pool and outdoor dining and seating at The Residence but this time of year invites a cook-up in the big, white kitchen, with its armoury of cooking equipment and every last gadget imaginable, from lemon squeezers to multiple styles of wine-bottle stoppers. Depending on provisioning needs, basic pantry and fridge essentials could include goods from parish



suppliers such as cheese from Binnorie Dairy at Lovedale plus olive oil or lavosh crackers. There'll likely be a jar of Winmark Citrus Delish, a jammy mix of grapefruit, lemon and orange that's delectable with cheese or straight from the spoon. I don't drink wine but find a fizzy glass or two of Buds and Beads ginger rose sparkling tea slips down in perfect colour harmony as the sun sets over ridgelines as old as time and a mob of roos fade away like ghosts in the gloaming.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Winmark Wines.

TO-DO LIST

CAFFEINE

It's less than 10 minutes from Winmark to the township of Broke where the O'Toole family of Motty's Farm Cuisine runs Magoony's Coffee House in a former service station on Singleton St. Here you'll find the 'hood's best espresso; tuck into house-baked cakes, bagels, pastries and tasty panini amid a rustic parlour-style atmosphere and adjoining retro retail space. Melissa O'Toole also provides catering, if required, for guests at Winmark's residences.

hunterhunter.com.au
mottys.com.au

WALK

There's a wide choice of escorted and self-guided walks in the Hunter region. But if you do just one excursion, make it to heritage-listed Baiame Cave, a sacred cultural site for the Wanaruah/Wonnarua people. The cave is in the foothills on the eastern side of the Great Dividing Range at Milbrodale, on private (but accessible) farmland, north of the boundary of Yengo National Park. The larger-than-life male figure with widespread arms depicted on the rear wall is believed to be Baiame, recognised as creator, protector and lawmaker by the cave's Aboriginal custodians.

singleton.nsw.gov.au

ESSENTIALS

Winmark was named Cellar Door of the Year at the 2023 Hunter Valley Wine Industry and Legends Awards and produces single-vineyard premium chardonnay; bottles from \$32 (Rusty's Run 2022). Tastings seven days: 10am-4pm, Mondays-Thursdays; 10am-5pm, Fridays and weekends. Same hours apply for the art gallery, boutique, sculpture garden walks and coffee cart. The Residence (sleeps eight) includes a pool and tennis court plus two-way sandstone fireplace for indoor-outdoor use. Also on the estate is Tuscan-inspired Mio Monte (sleeps 14); single-level Rock View with private pool (sleeps 10) and Villa Vino, with adjoining bathroom pod, outdoor kitchen with garden fire pit (sleeps two in "tiny house" style). Check website for seasonal rates.

winmarkwines.com.au