

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY SHARON HURST

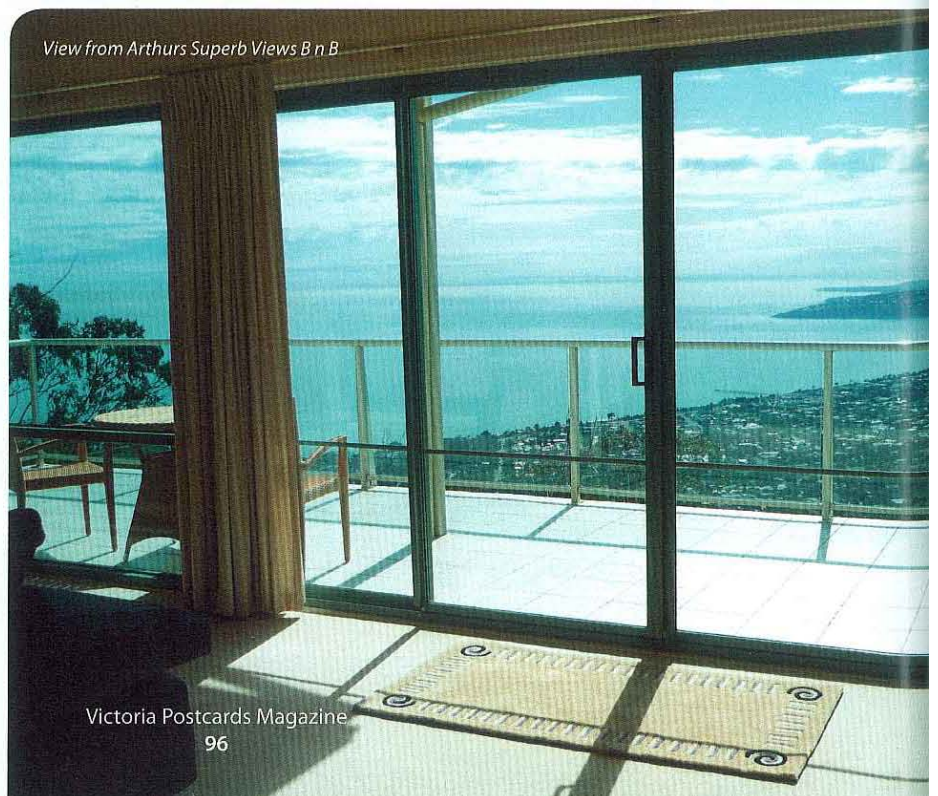


Visit vineyards

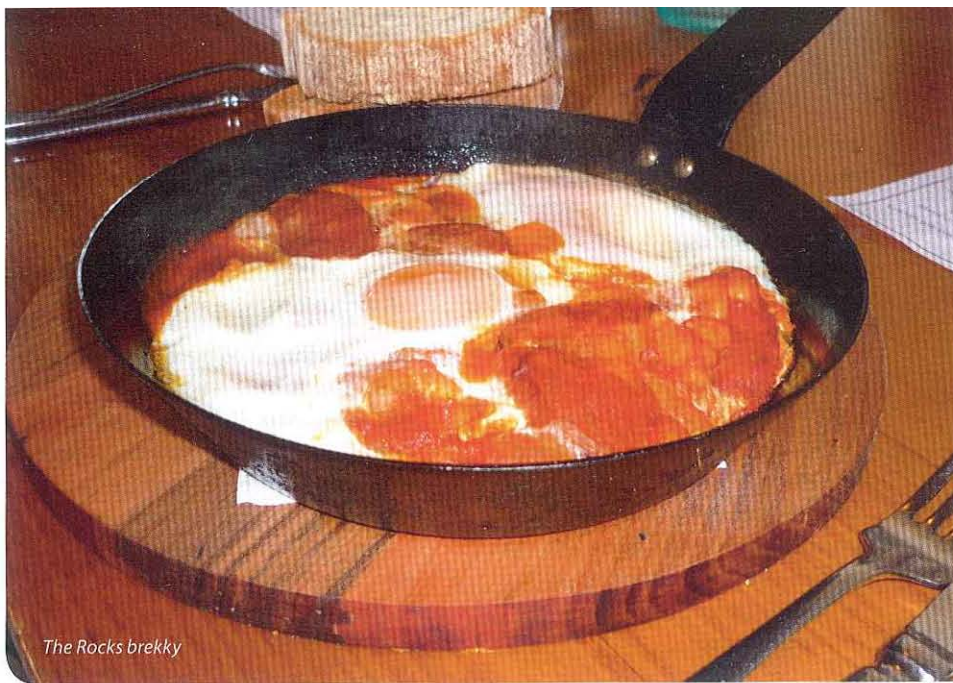
A new website brings together the best the Peninsula (and other great wine areas) have to offer!

Any self-respecting wine and food lover knows by now that the Mornington Peninsula is one of Victoria's prime destinations for top wine and food experiences. But it just got better with the launch of the VisitVineyards.com membership program. The site is Australia's most comprehensive guide to regional wine, food and travel and the exclusive membership program enables you to get the most out of your regional food and wine experiences. While launching in the Peninsula, the program will eventually cover all of Victoria and Australia.

Here's how it works. The site has brought together more than 30,000 wine, food and travel providers across every Australian region in the one location.



View from Arthurs Superb Views B n B



The Rocks brekky

From the biggest providers, down to the smaller boutique and artisanal enterprises, they're all there. Everyone can access the online guide which has all the information you need to research and plan, but once you sign up for the membership program (at a very reasonable \$49) the special deals are available. Members get a monthly newsletter offering them fabulous and exclusive experiences with the participating businesses.

Mornington Peninsula has already overwhelmingly supported this program with more than 70 operators signed up, from wineries, breweries, restaurants and food producers, to art galleries, spas and accommodations.

Some examples of the wine, food and accommodation experiences available

exclusively to VisitVineyards.com members include:

- Wine flights of chardonnay or pinot noir with lunch or dinner at **Montalto Vineyard and Olive Grove**
- Sampling of beer, bread and olives produced on site at **Hickinbotham of Dromana**
- a complimentary bottle of local sparkling wine and cheese platter upon arrival in your suite at **Arthurs Superb Views BnB** and for those who stay two nights mid week, an in-house massage.
- monthly winery tours and tastings at **Morning Sun Vineyards** including the opportunity to sample older vintage wines, taste wine straight from the barrel or participate in trial sampling



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*Specifically targeting Snapper - operates Nov-March only and includes steak & salad dinner

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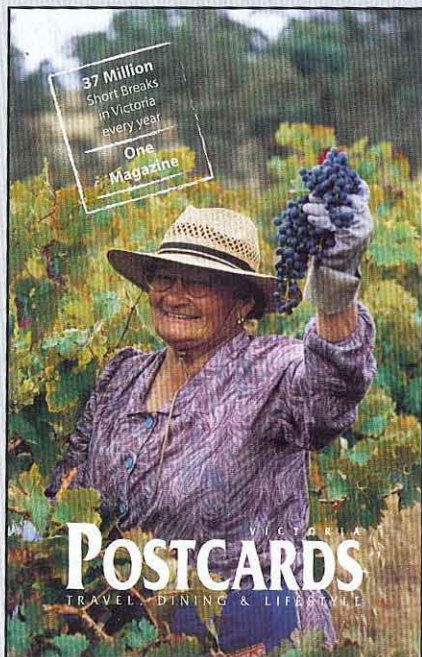
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Members will also receive the latest news from the 'inside' via exclusive access to product reviews, news and recommendations by industry experts, such as renowned restaurant and food reviewer John Lethlean and wine writers Jane Faulkner, Tyson Stelzer and winemaker Jim Chatto.

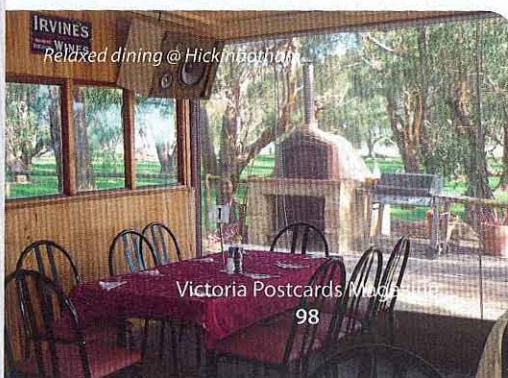
This program is the brainchild of creative lateral-thinking Robyn Lewis, who has combined her lifelong love of food and wine with her extensive planning and management experience. Finding herself swamped on her foodie travels with maps and brochures she had the brainwave to consolidate it all into the one site which is VisitVineyards.com.

I was lucky enough to get a first-hand experience of some of the deals that VisitVineyards.com members are entitled to and the places involved in the program.

Starting with the official launch of VisitVineyards.com membership program at [Montalto Vineyard](http://MontaltoVineyard.com) and [Olive Grove](http://OliveGrove.com), I was blown away by the quality of the catering coming out of Montalto's kitchen. As Robyn spoke about the exciting outcome of six years of hard work, guests enjoyed premium Montalto wines, along with gourmet canapés. I can't wait to follow it up with a meal at the vineyard some time soon.



Red Hill Cool Stores



Relaxed dining @ Hickinbotham

Victoria Postcards Magazine

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As if we hadn't indulged enough, another fine dining experience awaited us at the **Long Table**, in Red Hill. With a delightful seasonal menu, great wines, and a warm ambience, the restaurant reflects the owners' passion for food, wine and art.

Our overnight resting place had possibly the most dramatic view of Port Phillip Bay I've ever come across. Sitting on the balcony or in the expansive lounge of **Arthurs Superb Views BnB**, 300 metres above the sea, we reflected on what a glorious position Luke and Sally have chosen for their 4 1/2 star accommodation. Just refurbished, the BnB features top quality fittings, two of the three suites have a spa bath, all have a private balcony, and a generous continental breakfast hamper is included.

Next morning we popped into the **Red Hill Cool Stores**, where local artist Gillian Haig

has a resplendent collection of paintings, homewares, gifts, jewellery, ceramics, local produce, hampers and more. After sampling a couple of the excellent local olive oils, we cruised on to the **Red Hill Brewery**, where we indulged in a taste of the fine ales, and observed how inviting the in-house restaurant looked, with a fine menu to boot.

Brains behind the idea: Robyn Lewis



PHOTO: DIG MARKETING

Our lunch was at the **Morning Sun vineyard**, where winemaker Owen Goodwin and fiancé Rhiannon invited us to first sample some of their wines from the barrel, and enlightened us on how the various woods used in the barrels influence the wines. German born chef Jens Schroeder has worked up a stunning menu for the winter wine and food tasting, and Rhiannon recommended us to the *frutti di mare*, a scrumptious (and stunningly presented!) platter of seafood, followed by a gourmet duck and goat cheese pizza, and a melt-in-the mouth fruit tartlet. (Note: Morning Sun also offers a delightful self-contained apartment for overnight stays.)

By now the languid unseasonally warm afternoon was taking on an almost surreal and somewhat European air, and we drifted on to **Hickinbotham** of Dromana, where our knowledgeable host Andrew comes from a family with three generation of winemakers. He runs his winery in a very environmentally aware way, and, as well as some fine pinots and chardonnays, he also produces exotic sparkling wines and cider made from local fruit. The relaxed cellar door restaurant offers wining and dining experiences on weekend and public holidays all year round, along with other special seasonal events.

The evening feast saw us driving to Merricks North, where Bernard McCarthy heads up the kitchen of **Salix Restaurant** at Willow Creek vineyard. Our superb meal matched a variety of courses with complementary wines, and the final desserts of crême brulee and bavarois were to die for!

Our visit to the Peninsula ended, gastronomically, with a brunch at **The Rocks** in Mornington.

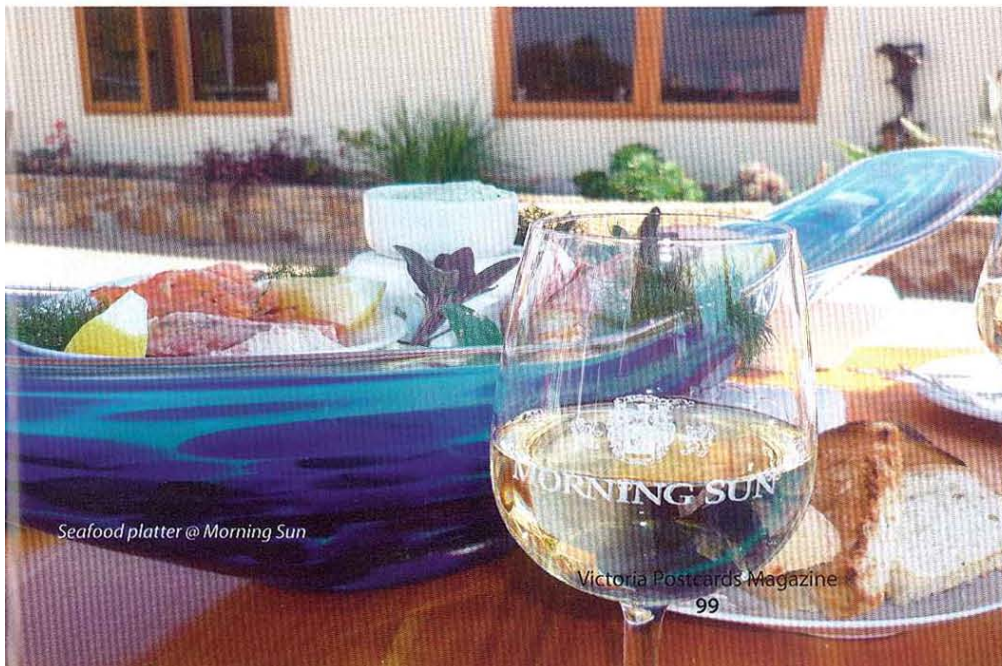
Overlooking the bay, and tucked adjacent to the yacht club, the breakfast treats ranged from a spicy chorizo and baked beans, to my favourite eggs benedict, with an excellent Hollandaise sauce and generous amounts of smoked salmon. For evening diners, the Rocks features a menu of seasonally-inspired dishes.

The VisitVineyards.com membership program also features art destinations, and so on our way homewards, we dropped into one of Victoria's top regional galleries, McClelland Gallery & Sculpture Park in Langwarrin, to walk off some of the food with a long stroll through the fascinating sculpture garden.

AT A GLANCE

www.VisitVineyards.com

Price of annual membership: \$49



Seafood platter @ Morning Sun

Victoria Postcards Magazine

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