

MAKING WAVES IN
CONSERVATION

TAKING
CENTRE STAGE

EAT, PLAY, WORK AND STAY
- A QUICK GUIDE

THE ISLAND

PEOPLE AND PLACES OF PHILLIP ISLAND AND SAN REMO

IS THAT
A FURPHY?
IT SURE IS.

FEW FAMILY NAMES BECOME PART
OF THE COMMON VOCABULARY,
BUT CAPE WOOLAMAI'S ANDREW
FURPHY'S SURNAME HAS RICH LINKS
TO AUSTRALIAN HISTORY, LANGUAGE
AND BEER.

A lot to Say

*When Nick and Misha Say moved to San Remo in 2005,
they didn't plan to still be here twenty years later. But sometimes
the best decisions are the ones you make without realising.*

SPRING 2025

PHILLIP ISLAND & SAN REMO
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FREE
TAKE ME HOME

Water for the future

Preparing for a drier, more uncertain climate

In a region like the Bass Coast, where water views surround us, it can be easy to take it for granted. But as we face a drier, more uncertain climate future, water conservation is no longer just a good habit – it's a necessity.

A future of change and drier trends

Victoria's climate is shifting. Over the past 18 months, we have experienced some dry conditions with less intense rainfall to replenish water supply sources, and the slower catchment runoff is putting pressure on our water supply systems that are already working hard to meet community needs.

While we're not currently implementing water restrictions, we are closely monitoring the situation and will provide updates as conditions change. Which is why it's so important to make water conservation part of our daily lives, not just something we think about during dry periods.

Every drop matters

Rainfall patterns across regional Victoria are varied – while some areas have ample water, others are facing drier conditions. Although formal water restrictions (Stages 1-4) are not currently in place in the Westernport Water region, using water wisely now can help delay or even avoid stricter measures in the future. Every drop saved today gives households and businesses valuable time to plan, adapt, and invest in long-term solutions that safeguard our water supply without impacting our way of life.

That's where Permanent Water Saving Rules come in. These common-sense rules have been in place for over a decade and have been a quiet but powerful tool for conservation. Whether it's watering gardens with a hand-held hose fitted with a trigger nozzle or avoiding unnecessary hosing of hard surfaces, these everyday habits collectively save thousands of litres across the community each year.

Regional resilience – Our approach and planning for the future

Thanks to good planning and smart investment, Westernport Water is well-positioned to manage future challenges. Its integrated water network draws on multiple sources, including Tennent Creek via Candowie Reservoir, and a connection to Victoria's water grid which includes water from the Desalination Plant. Additional sources, such as the Bass River and the Corinella Aquifer, are also available to us when the environmental conditions permit. This diversity provides valuable resilience and flexibility, particularly during dry conditions or when critical maintenance is required.

Recycled water is another key part of the strategy. Delivered through a dedicated purple pipe system, recycled water helps irrigate sports fields, support agriculture, and water backyard gardens, which all help to reduce demand on drinking water supplies. Because recycled water is not reliant on rainfall, it offers a climate-

independent option that enhances the region's water security year-round.

Infrastructure upgrades over the past 15 years have also played a role, including doubling Candowie Reservoir's capacity and modernising treated water storages at San Remo, Grantville, and Wimbledon Heights. These investments aren't just about meeting current needs; they're about futureproofing the system against the growing impacts of climate change.

Together, we can tackle a drier future

At the individual level, adopting water-saving habits can have a surprisingly significant impact. Fixing leaks, choosing water efficient appliances, and using rainwater to flush toilets and water gardens, can dramatically reduce consumption. Holiday homeowners are encouraged to turn off the water at the stop tap when away to prevent silent leaks.

Public awareness around Permanent Water Saving Rules has waned in recent years,

partly due to a false sense of security during wetter seasons. However, as the climate becomes drier, it's time to reestablish these habits and refocus on the role we all play in safeguarding our most precious resource.

Water is essential – not just for drinking and hygiene, but for biodiversity, agriculture, industry, and recreation. As Westernport Water continues to invest in infrastructure, innovate with alternative water sources, and connect communities to a reliable supply, the responsibility doesn't stop at the mains.

Water update August 2025

As of late July, Candowie Reservoir is sitting at 45% full, reflecting the impact of ongoing dry conditions across our region. Rainfall is well below the five-year average for this time of year and we're only seeing minor inflows into Candowie. We continue to monitor the situation closely and will provide updates as conditions change.

While water restrictions are not currently in place, the combination of greater demand,

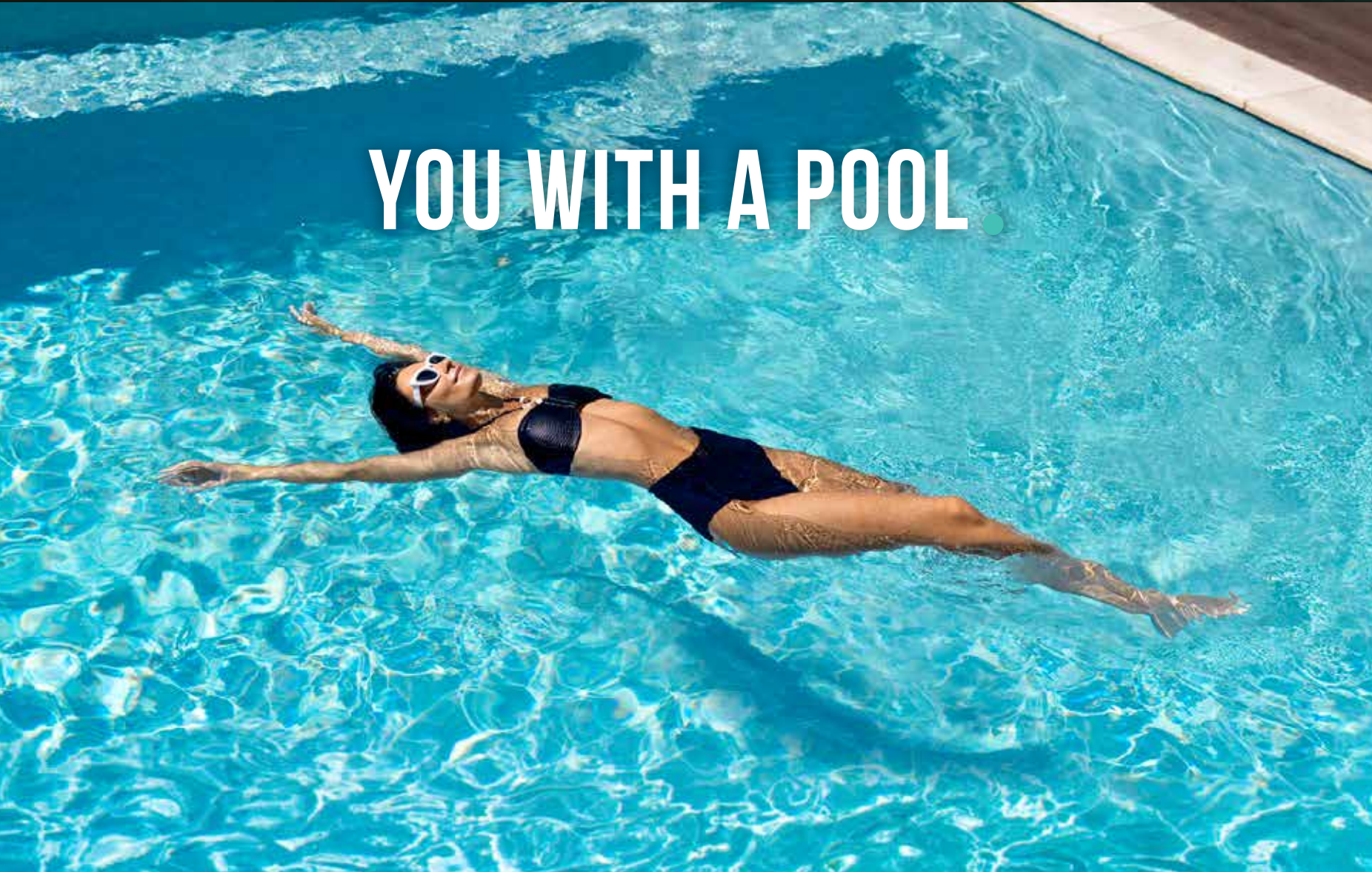
dry conditions and warmer outlooks means it's more important than ever to be water-wise. By using water wisely now, we can help delay or avoid the need for future restrictions and support the long-term sustainability of our water supply.

It rests with each of us to think ahead and act wisely, because the choices we make today shape the water future of tomorrow.

Evidence of change – consumption insights January to June 2025 compared to the past five years

Water usage was 1,592 ML, which is a 12% increase on the five-year average of 1,423 ML.

Average rainfall for the last 5 years has been 530mm, and this year, we have received 338mm, which is 35% below the five-year average.



That's me, rugged up and searching for whales, which is one of my favourite parts of island life during winter. This year was a bonanza for whale lovers. The whale watching app on my phone buzzed constantly: there were orcas sighted near the Nobbies, and humpbacks off the jetty at Cowes, cruising past Cape Woolamai or the Rhyll Inlet. Sometimes feeding, often breaching and regularly accompanied by pods of dolphins. There is no greater reminder of the wonder of nature than seeing these magnificent ancient creatures just off our shores, travelling the ocean as they have done for millions of years. Less than seventy years ago, humpbacks and southern right whales were hunted to the point of extinction. According to Dr Wally Franklin at this year's Island Whale Festival, the last formal estimate of humpback whale numbers along the east coast of Australia was twenty-five thousand, up from around one hundred and fifty back in the 1960s. That's living proof that when we act to educate people about preserving our wildlife, we can really make a difference.

Right now, with the world mired in conflict it's hard to feel optimistic about where we headed, both in terms of co-existing peacefully with each other, and with the planet. But hopefully, like the seasons, things can change.

If you feel you need some help to stay positive and find things you can do to make this world a better place, we've got some inspiration for you. Underneath the ocean, Newhaven's Chris Gilles is building a better world, working with sea sponges and kelp, while up on dry land, botanist Jess Moulynox teaches valuable lessons about the plants all around us. Part-time islander Andrew Furphy has put his money where his love of the ocean is, helping to finance an underwater documentary about Western Port and Nick and Misha Say reflect on how some of the biggest decisions in life (and business) are not the ones you expected to make. Others, such as newly drafted AFL player Zac Walker and actor Gil Tucker, show us how far you have to travel, and just what dedication is needed, to follow your dreams.

So welcome to spring ... a giant exhale after winter. We hope The Island can help you shake off the winter blues, as we all head towards the sunshine.

Eleanor

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*We acknowledge the people of the Bunurong
as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and water.*



Floating above us

The island's newest public artwork, the stunning Yawa (Long Journey) glass canoe was installed in Berninnet in June. Created by Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Mutti Mutti, and Boon Wurrung multi-disciplinary artist and curator Maree Clarke, the canoe is made up of thirty

shaped glass panels suspended from the ceiling of the great hall. At the start of the year, several hundred people took part in workshops run by Maree to help create the glass sections. Fabricated at Canberra Glassworks, Yawa spans an impressive five metres, crafted from glass, stainless

steel wire, and powder-coated steel. The canoe references the long connection to the waterways, and travel, while the play of light and colour on the glass reflects the sparkle of the local wetlands and ocean that surrounds Phillip Island. Make sure you look up next time you visit Berninnet.



The Good Years

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LOCAL LEGEND

When it comes to the history of Phillip Island, there's little historian and author Christine Grayden doesn't know. Combined with extensive historical knowledge, a love of the native animals and vegetation of the island and an innate gift for storytelling, she's the living embodiment of an island-wikipedia.

As well as a writer and illustrator, Christine's been a teacher and museum curator, and a dedicated volunteer to many local organisations. She was the curator at Churchill Island and secretary of the Friends of Churchill Island for three decades. A long-time member of both the Phillip Island and District Historical Society, and the Phillip Island Conservation Society, Christine's roles and contributions to local committees across more than four decades are extensive, and her impact immeasurable.

Over her career, Christine has written, revised or edited eighteen books, including the revised third edition (with David Maunders) of *Churchill Island: History and her story* written by Pat Baird in 2007. *An Island worth conserving* is a history of the Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS), covering the first forty years of PICS campaigns from the 1970s (and there were many) to protect the island from

inappropriate developments.

She also wrote *Women in Conservation on Phillip Island*, covering twenty women from the pioneering days to the modern era.

Her dedication to preserving our local history stretches beyond the page, showcased most notably with an award-winning oral history series – *Phillip Island and History Memoirs* – capturing island life from 1940 to 2022 and the *Home Front* video series with World War II veterans, produced for the Historical Society. She also produced a series of videos on YouTube, chronicling the life of her great aunt Olive Justice, who has a small parklet named in her honour in the centre of Cowes.

Not content with just capturing the stories from our past, Christine has also written many works of fiction, been published in several anthologies and taken out first place in an array of local writing competitions.

More recently, she's focused her love of the island and literature on children. Her two picture books aim to educate as well as entertain, with strong environmental messages. Both have raised money for causes close to Christine's heart. Profits from her most recent book *Minibeasts of*

Phillip Island Millowol. Land insects, spiders, molluscs and crustaceans, have been donated to the Penguin Foundation. Her first book *The Lost Blanket* (which she also illustrated) raised over a thousand dollars for UNICEF. Both books are still available from Turn the Page bookshop in Cowes.

Acknowledging her incredible contributions, Christine was made a Life Member of the Phillip Island and District Historical Society and the Phillip Island Conservation Society. In 2018 she was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by Museums Australia Victoria (now Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria). Without doubt, our local history is richer and better recorded thanks to Christine's dedication and skill.

www.christinegrayden.com.au

Do you know a local legend? Email your suggestions to theisland@pisra.com.au



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BY ELEANOR MCKAY
PHOTOS: STEPH THORNBORROW

A lot to Say

WHEN NICK AND MISHA SAY MOVED TO SAN REMO IN 2005, THEY DIDN'T PLAN TO STILL BE HERE TWENTY YEARS LATER. BUT SOMETIMES THE BEST DECISIONS ARE THE ONES YOU MAKE WITHOUT REALISING.

Arriving to take over the Westernport Hotel, the couple planned to stay a few years, get the venue up and running, then “flip it” and move on. They never imagined they’d stay for two decades, becoming a crucial part of the island’s community. “We had a two-to-five-year plan and were still thinking fairly corporately, I guess. Then we just fell in love with the place, and time sort of creeps on,” said Nick.

Nick, quietly spoken and considered, and Misha, vibrant and gregarious, have become a formidable team, creating a string of successful ventures on the island, alongside raising their family. Over the past two decades, the pair have launched

venues including Porter Republic coffee shop, The Store at Ventnor, St Jules cafe, The Yards and taken over the Phillip Island Winery, as well as running a handful of Airbnb properties. This year, they handed over the reins of the Westernport, but are showing no signs of slowing down, although their focus is now firmly on the winery.

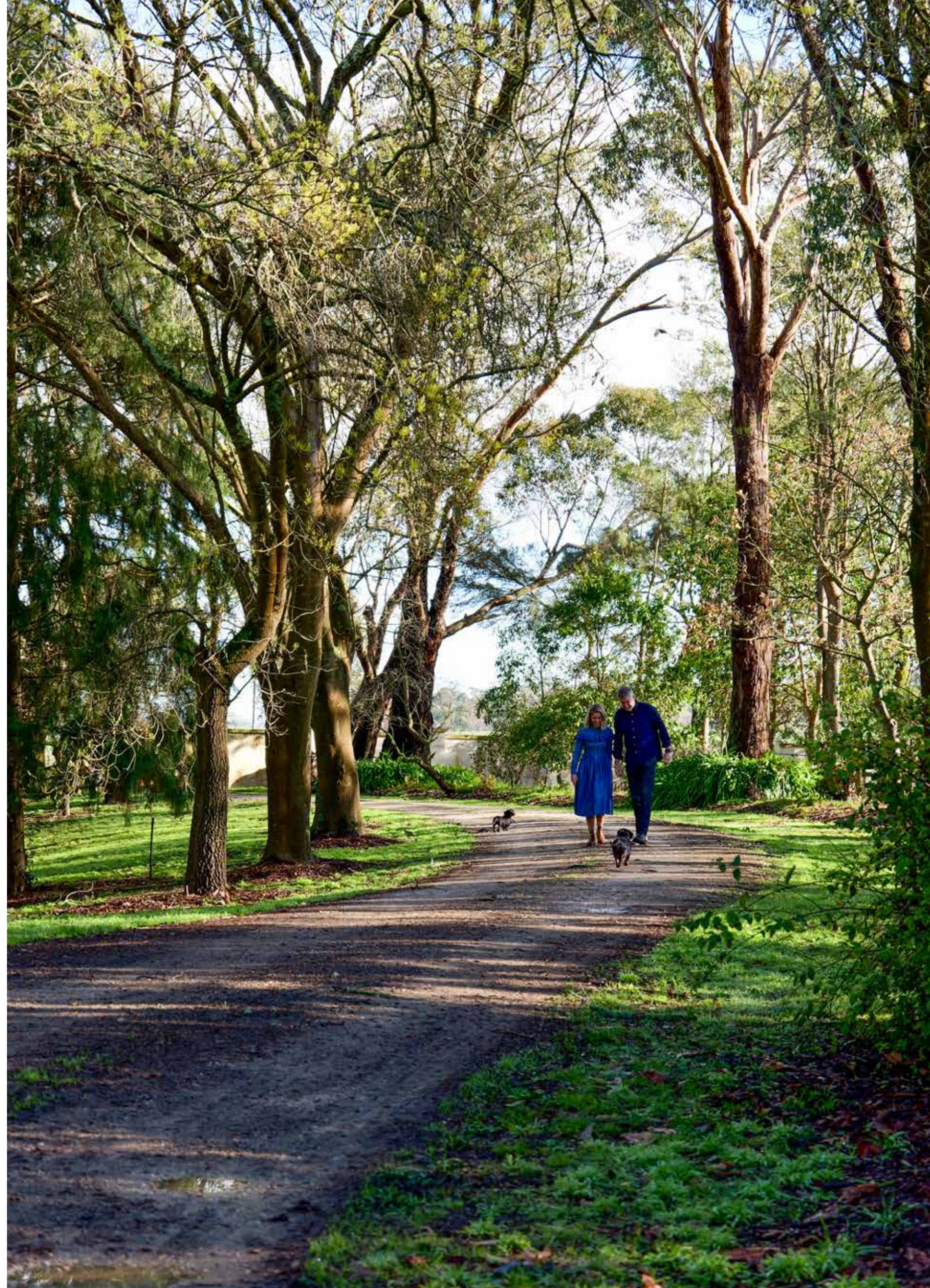
The couple met in their twenties, when Nick was managing the Geebung Polo Club (now known as the Auburn Hotel) in Hawthorn and Misha was working behind the bar as she studied at university. As the relationship blossomed, the young couple who were both originally from the country, decided to start their married

life together running a regional pub.

They were keen to be part of a smaller community, and when Nick discovered the Westernport Hotel, they packed up their city life and headed for the coast. “We arrived as a thirty-one-year-old and a twenty-five-year-old, with a bag full of Melbourne ideas and youthful energy,” Nick said.

“Nick had been working in pubs, and for me, hospitality was always a side venture. But when we bought the pub, we were living on site, and it was 24/7. I cried every night for the first month, asking ‘can we go back to the city,’” Misha laughed.

In Nick’s memory, the tears lasted a bit longer – “I think Misha cried for the first





three months” – as the couple set about trying to “transform what was a pretty rugged operation into something a little more family friendly”. “The majority of locals were amazing and welcoming, but there was certainly an element we could have done without.”

That rocky start provided plenty of great anecdotes, many of which were shared with the hundreds who came to bid farewell to the couple at the pub earlier this year. In his farewell speech, Nick recalled their first night: “one of the locals wrapped himself in toilet paper and was set on fire ... and things went downhill from there”, he joked to a round of applause and howls of laughter.

“We were very young,” Misha said. “You shouldn’t be a publican at twenty-five, plus we were taking over this beloved venue that nobody wanted changed. We did cop it.” Despite the initial shock, the couple gradually found their feet. “We started playing a bit of sport, we met beautiful friends and joined clubs, and cleaned the pub up,” said Misha. At the time local venues had a reputation for unruly behaviour and in hindsight, they perhaps went “too hard too early”, with Nick joking some nights there were two security guards out the front and two patrons inside. “But we had a really clear idea of what we wanted the place to

become, so we just stayed true to that.”

When Misha got pregnant (“sooner than we thought”), the couple bought a house in San Remo, and moved out from the pub, but that increased their focus on creating a family-friendly venue. Their own family focus grew too, not just with their own babies, but the arrival of Misha’s mother and her sister and husband to the area.

“We absolutely couldn’t have done what we’ve done without them,” said Nick. Misha agreed. “It takes a village to raise a child ... it took a village to keep a pub. Once we got the pub on its feet, the family support allowed us to branch out and do other things as well, but the pub was the backbone. It was the one.”

Hearing the couple discuss the other ventures they undertook while running the pub undersells the work and vision needed to create them. “The successes we’ve had has been just trying to fill a gap we identified,” Nick said. “There was a particular time we couldn’t find a good coffee in town ...” Misha jumps in. “It

was when the babies were little and I’d be walking at six-thirty in the morning, but nothing was open until eight. So I was like ‘we need a café in town that opens at six-thirty’. I’d see how many trucks would come over the bridge, and there’s all the tradies out. Then I’d pass other bleary-eyed mums. I thought, something could be done here and I think it could work.”

When a property came up on Marine Parade, Porter Republic was born and soon became a local favourite, with its clean aesthetic and focus on good quality produce. “It was fun, because it was the first business we did with my sister and her husband,” said Misha. “That started a partnership that continues to this day. That’s who we have the winery with.”

Those were hectic years. “We were doing everything ourselves on a shoestring budget,” said Nick. “I’d finish my day job, then renovate all night.” Misha said looking back, she thinks those years “were the tiredest we’ve ever been.

**“WE ARE A LITTLE
BIT ‘NEVER SAY DIE’.
WE’RE BOTH QUITE
STRONG WILLED
AND WANT
THINGS TO WORK.”**



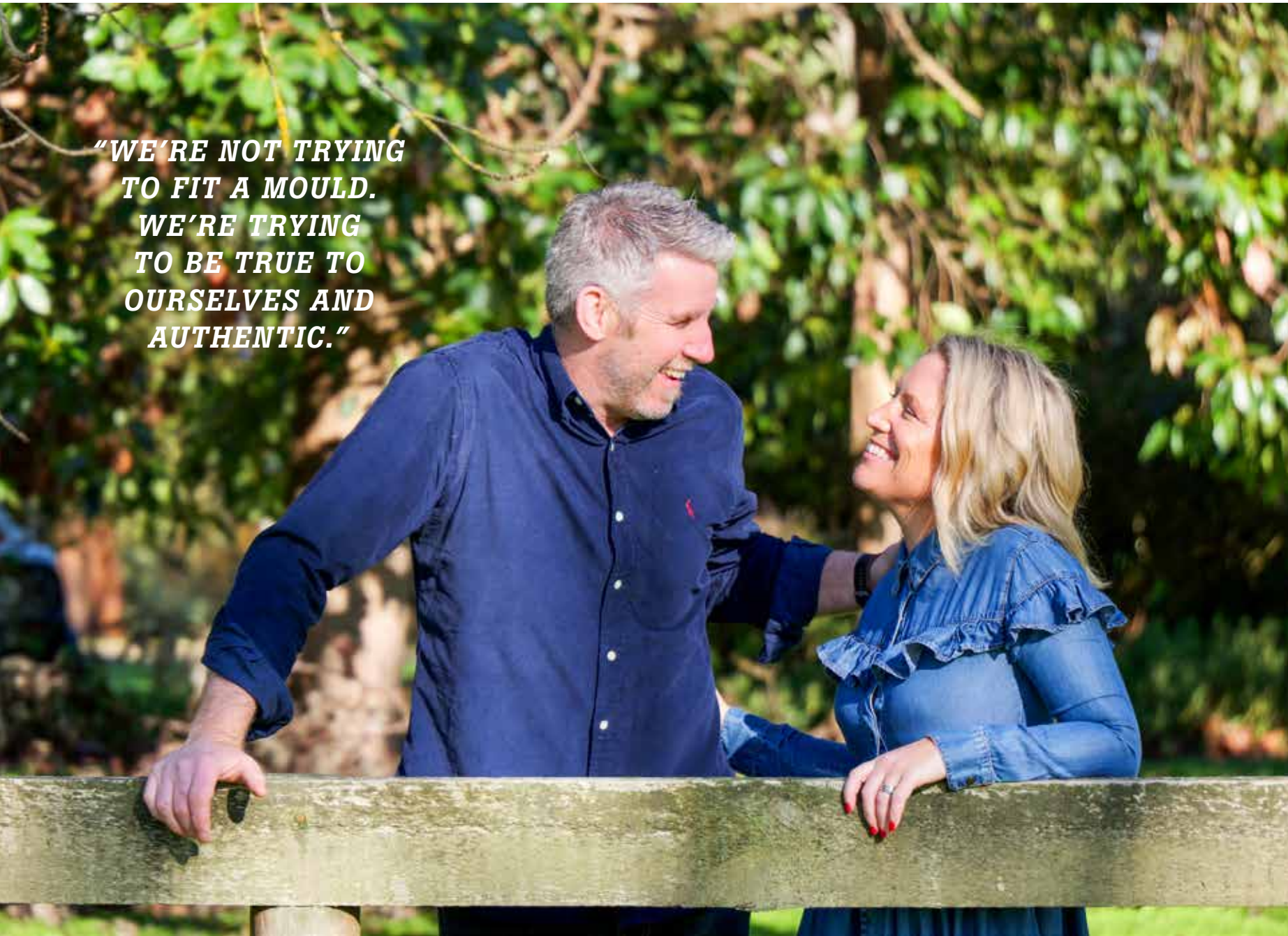
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TO FIT A MOULD.
WE’RE TRYING
TO BE TRUE TO
OURSELVES AND
AUTHENTIC.”*



It actually gives me a bit of PTSD thinking about it. But I think that’s the difference. We are a little bit ‘never say die’. We’re both quite strong willed and want things to work. I think we back ourselves.”

At the café, they did follow their original script – to establish it, then “flip it” – going on to set up The Store at Ventnor, then moving onto the Phillip Island Winery, and going full circle in San Remo now running St Jules in the building that once housed Porter Republic. “We started small and then things grew,” Misha said. “Everything we’ve done is linked to the other. You know we wouldn’t have the winery probably if we hadn’t done The Store. So there’s been a bit of an organic flow.”

She credits Nick with keeping the business side in good shape. “He’s very good at planning and crunching numbers before we launch, but it is very intuitive. If a venue feels right, if the energy is right

and we see a market for it, we just do it.” As Nick explains, “sometimes it’s good to not know what you don’t know.”

Anyone who has visited a business run by the couple knows that while they are all different, there’s a certain atmosphere in them all. A warmth, an eye for detail, a design aesthetic that is both welcoming and sophisticated, that sets them apart. It’s hard to define, but easy to identify as a customer, which is what keeps people coming back to a venue. “I think it’s what Nick calls the one percenters,” said Misha. “Doing those little extra things ... on service, on how the venue looks, that’s where the elevation comes from. That’s what we say to our staff in every venue we have. Welcome the people like you’re welcoming them into your own home. It’s got to be comfortable; it’s got to be warm. It’s got to be unpretentious but still nice. It’s also really thinking about your demographic. I hope none of our businesses look the same. They might

have a similar feel, but they won’t look the same.” Added Nick: “We’re not trying to fit a mould. We’re trying to be true to ourselves and authentic.”

What was originally instinctive is now more thought out, often involving business development days with the team. “We take the team away for a night or two, hire a house somewhere and literally put up big bits of paper, get post-it notes and pull the business apart, like you’re starting again, and revisit everything. It’s seeing the business through fresh eyes. We are not precious and we’re not egotistical,” Misha said. “I think we’re pretty good at knowing our weaknesses, and hiring the right team. We are much more strategic now, than when we started out.”

For Nick, there’s a longer-term vision as well. “I feel an obligation to make sure the next generations coming through are as well equipped as we are. Our young management team are so smart, and



Take The Plunge

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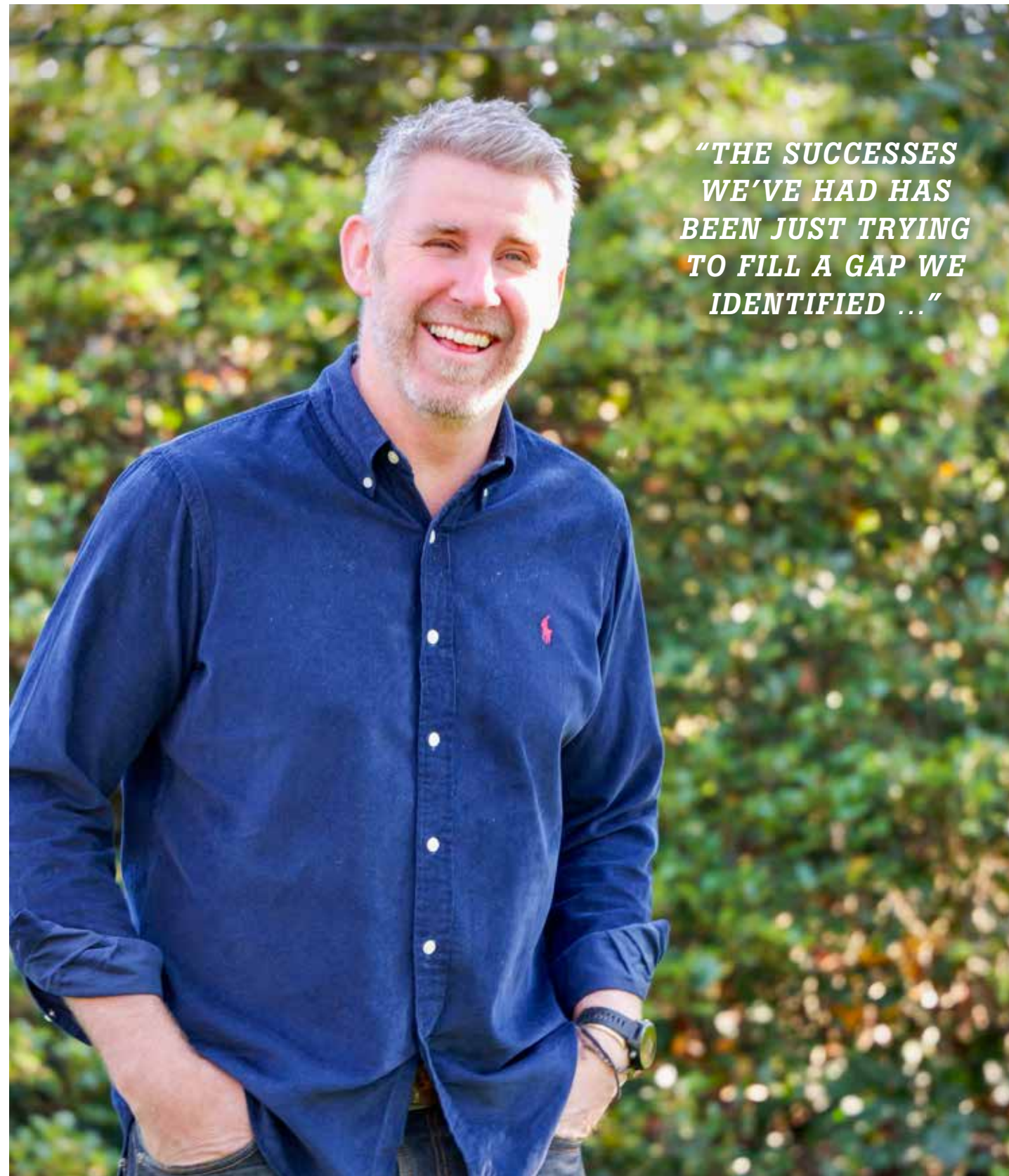
As a family business, Josh and his team are deeply committed to delivering exceptional service and creating beautiful outdoor spaces that families can enjoy for years to come. Whether you’re looking for a fibreglass pool or the

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*"THE SUCCESSES
WE'VE HAD HAS
BEEN JUST TRYING
TO FILL A GAP WE
IDENTIFIED ..."*

we've got a real obligation to make sure they leave better than they arrive. So it's nice to be able to put time into staff training." Having a venue like the winery that is reasonably busy all year around, and multiple venues has helped them retain staff. "I think that's been one of our strengths," said Nick. "It gives staff the opportunity to work across venues. We can give them enough hours to get through the winter, and opportunities to grow and develop and move into other roles, which probably doesn't happen a lot down here."

It's not just their staff who have grown and developed in the businesses. Their two girls Evie and Willow, now eighteen and sixteen, grew up in the hotel, sitting on the bar at the Westernport as toddlers and both eventually working in the venue. "I think our kids were probably pivotal in us keeping the hotel as long as we did, because then they started working in the business," explained Misha. "They've only known the pub and it was their home. We didn't want to take that away from them either."

That sense of community, which

had been part of the original impetus for moving to a regional area, was also a huge factor in their twenty-year tenure at the hotel. They wanted community to be at the heart of the Westernport, but even they were surprised at how big it became. "It was definitely a bigger part of the picture than we thought," admitted Nick. "I'm always pleasantly surprised by the community aspect of the pub. It's one of my favourite parts of the whole operation ... being a community hub, rather than just a pub."

Like all hospitality venues, the hotel



*"IT TAKES A
VILLAGE TO RAISE
A CHILD ... IT TOOK
A VILLAGE TO
KEEP A PUB."*

was hit hard by Covid, and for Misha, that prompted a reappraisal of what was important to her. "That was one time where we really were present, because it was all taken away. So the elements you missed were obvious," she said. "We missed seeing those regular faces on a Friday night. We missed the connection with the community. I think in a way the pub replaced church. It was how you found out how such and such was going with their children, or their work or whatever."

Over the years, the couple have

witnessed big changes on the island, although many came later than expected. When they arrived in 2005, "we thought what's going on in the Mornington Peninsula was probably five years away," said Nick. "But it was more like fifteen years. It was a slow burn for a long time."

The slow pace and a gentle resistance to change has been part of the charm of the area, with the couple saying they love that the island hasn't become urbanised like parts of the peninsula. "We have it pretty good," Misha said, adding more people doesn't necessarily mean it's better

for business. "I think it's the contrary ... it would lose its charm." The couple believe "progress well managed" is the key, so the energy, culture and feel of the island doesn't disappear.

Looking back over all they've achieved, Nick admits "it had its challenges. But I would do it over again in a heartbeat ... I would probably just try to find a better work-life balance."



Meet your new neighbours

In the past year, the island has welcomed some special new residents, with thirty-six bush stone curlews introduced into the wild. Back in August 2024, Phillip Island Nature Parks released twelve birds, with a further twenty-four released in April, with the aim of establishing a self-sustaining population. Looking a little like kids setting off for school, the birds have

been fitted with GPS monitoring devices in tiny backpacks, allowing researchers to monitor their survival, habitat use, movement and reproductive success. Residents and visitors around Sunderland Bay, Surf Beach, Sunset Strip, Silverleaves and Rhyll have been asked to look out for the birds as they establish their home ranges, and to slow down when driving,

particularly at dawn and dusk and at night when the birds are most active. Warning signage has been erected at key areas across the island. Report any sightings on the Victorian bush stone curlew project at www.inaturalist.org or by emailing community@penguins.org.au.

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BY SARAH HUDSON
PHOTO: STEPH THORNBORROW

STEPPING IT UP

Years of dance lessons growing up on Phillip Island paid off for Michaela Tancheff who now performs for Chunky Move, one of Australia's top contemporary dance companies, including in a recent global

tour taking in UK, Belgium, Portugal, Netherlands, Norway and Luxembourg.

Michaela first started dance lessons at the age of eight at the Bass Coast Ballet School. After immersing herself in jazz, ballet, tap and contemporary, all

while studying at Newhaven College, Michaela went on to complete a dance diploma. Before even graduating, she was snapped up by Chunky Move in 2019 and since then has worked with the company multiple times as

a freelance dancer.

Even now, she often reflects on those early years of dance. "I had three teachers, Miss Rowena, Miss Miranda and Miss Lizzie and I definitely have them to thank. They were more subtle,

genuine, supportive and I responded well to that, I wanted to come back for more. I steered away from ballet because I was less interested by it, and my hip joints aren't the particular type you need to be a prima ballerina. While

I have all respect to the commercial world of dance, for me contemporary was more enjoyable and engaging and I was more aligned with the people doing it. With contemporary you don't have to prove yourself. You can just be you."



BY ELEANOR MCKAY
PHOTOS: LUCY COOPER AND SUPPLIED

ZAC SWAPS KENNELS

It was a boyhood dream playing out in real time, as Phillip Island watched young footballer Zac Walker get drafted to the Western Bulldogs in the AFL's mid-season draft in June.

For the close-knit football community on the island, the announcement that Zac had been drafted saw cheers and plenty of tears, celebrating the success of a youngster who joined the Phillip Island Football Club at the age of five and admits

he "spent more hours at that club than I have at home".

It takes a village ... and the village came together to celebrate the young man the Western Bulldogs described as an "impressive intercept defender (who) reads the ball well in the air". When he was recruited, Zac was working as an AFL Sports Ready Trainee at Newhaven College, and eager students swarmed him on his last day, wanting his autograph,

offering paper, footballs, water bottles, shoes, lip balm containers and even some foreheads for him to sign. There was a similar reaction when the new local star came to a training session and watched a game with his former club on his last weekend before moving to Melbourne.

Chris Ross, president of the local football club described the draft result as "the greatest news I've heard all year", saying Zac showed perseverance and



*Happiness comes
one cup at a time.*

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HUMBLE, GENUINE,
WONDERFUL
YOUNG MAN..."*

resilience after he got cut last year from Gippsland Power. "It has brought the club so much joy to see him reach this goal in his football career," said Chris. "This is a community club; it's about families and supporting each other, and Zac's story illustrates that. Everyone has a stake in this. The club couldn't be any prouder of Zac. He's an extremely humble, genuine, wonderful young man, and all his hard work is paying off."

Zac is the first Phillip Island player to be drafted since Carlton great Sam Docherty (who recently announced his retirement and played his final game in July), and is inspiring a new wave of young footballers with his progress. Scott Huther, part of the senior coaching team said it was great to have one of the local kids drafted to the AFL. "He has inspired his mates, and the kids coming up through the club, even the twenty- to twenty-three-year-olds. He's shown there's always an opportunity if you work hard."

In a matter of days, after the mid-season draft announcement, Zac was whisked up the highway to Melbourne, starting training with his new club, that he has supported since he was a kid. The former Phillip Island Bulldog got to keep his mascot and colours in the new club move, but everything else felt "pretty surreal" for the nineteen-year-old in the weeks after being drafted, including meeting Western Bulldog legends Bontempelli and Liberatore.

Cam Pedersen, himself a former AFL player, and the head coach at the Phillip Island Football Club was full of praise for the youngster, describing him as talented and humble. "Zac is a hard-working, dedicated individual who seeks feedback and acts upon it to better himself," said Cam. "Phillip Island Football Club has long supported Zac and could not be prouder of the man he has become."

Pedersen also had some words of wisdom and practical advice for the new

recruit. "He said not to be nervous and to go in there and feel like part of the club," Zac said. "And to always be early ... if you're on time, you are late."

He said the support of his friends and the club had been pivotal in achieving his AFL dreams. "I am where I am today because of great friends. You are the person who you surround yourself with," Zac said. "You have to be patient and keep your head down. If you keep working and doing the right things, opportunities will come to you."

While he might have traded kennels and put on a different Bulldogs' jumper, a part of him will always be with Phillip Island. "Whatever happens, I'll always have a place in my heart for the club."



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BY SARAH HUDSON
PHOTOS: SARAH HUDSON AND SUPPLIED

MAKING WAVES IN CONSERVATION

IN AN UNASSUMING LITTLE BUILDING AT NEWHAVEN, JUST NEAR THE BRIDGE, SCIENTIST CHRIS GILLES IS TAKING BIG STEPS ON WORLD-FIRST PROJECTS TO HELP RESTORE DEGRADED MARINE ECOSYSTEMS.

In a world-first, a Newhaven company is cultivating sea sponges to help restore the seafloor for the oil and gas industry, and for future wind farm projects. Dr Chris Gillies, CEO of Offshore Biotechnologies, operates from the Newhaven hatchery, between the Phillip Island bridge and Saltwater restaurant, where he has successfully cultivated one hundred different species of sea sponges for a trial project.

Chris said the sea sponges were an

Australian first, with sponges cultivated in other parts of the world for medical purposes, as well as for bath sponges. But, he said, their project was the first to use sponges for underwater habitat rehabilitation. “In the North Sea they have tried oysters and kelp forests to restore the seafloor from industry, and in Mexico mangroves, but that is in shallow water,” Chris said. “No one has ever gone offshore in deep water to develop methods of restoration.”

After studying marine biology and completing his PhD in Antarctica, Chris had the idea for sea sponges to restore coastal ecosystems after seeing the upcoming offshore wind energy boom and decommissioning of old oil and gas platforms. “In the next ten years there will be sixty billion dollars worth of existing oil and gas infrastructure decommissioned and ninety-two billion worth of wind farms going into the water.” He described sponges as “the unsung heroes of the

ocean”, with at least thirty-thousand species around the world, found in all waters and able to breed at depth without light. The animals are more efficient at filtering water than oysters and mussels and come in a range of sizes and colours, creating vast gardens, which restore habitat for underwater life.

Last year Chris and his team collected species off Apollo Bay, transporting them to Newhaven where they fed and monitored them, before cultivating them,

“taking tiny bits of them and glueing them to reef pods (“miniature reefs specially developed for deepwater sponges”). Then these pods were taken back out to Apollo Bay with researchers from Deakin University, who dropped the pods twelve miles offshore in eighty metres of water.

Every year for the next five years the researchers will send remotely operated drones underwater to monitor the progress of the sponges, then monitoring them every three years for the next thirty years. Chris

said they were confident the sponges would survive and the trial would be a success, but monitoring was required to apply their work more broadly across the industry.

Currently, he explained, there was no accepted method for deep sea restoration, which made it difficult for the environmental regulator to enforce rehabilitation after seabed disturbances. Chris’ work will now hopefully add to that knowledge, including even the reef pods. “It’s hard to enforce if you don’t





have a method,” he said. “Ultimately we’d like to take this work globally too.” While they were continuing research, their methods were ready to be rolled out “now” he said.

So why do all this work on Phillip Island? Chris said there were only two hatcheries in Victoria: Newhaven and Queenscliff, which each have the necessary facilities including pumping water, food for species, tanks and heat pumps. At the Newhaven hatchery, Chris and his team of four also work on breeding oysters, mussels and seaweed, which is run under the umbrella of Chris’ other company, SeaGen Aquaculture. “People are always curious about what happens here at the hatchery, and I explain it’s cool stuff,” said the forty-three-year-old. “When we were first starting out with the sponge project, I’d wade out from the hatchery to get some sponges, which was very handy.”

And if Chris’ sponge project was not ambitious enough, more recently he and his team have also expanded to restoring undersea forests that have “suffered

severe decline” in recent years. SeaGen Aquaculture has produced two hundred and fifty thousand “kelplings”, or baby golden kelp, a native species of seaweed vital to Victoria’s underwater ecosystems.

The miniature kelp are being cultivated at Newhaven, in a newly designed aquaculture system, currently used to help restore kelp forests in Port Phillip Bay, where overabundant native sea urchins have devastated underwater habitats. Chris described the breakthrough as “a great moment for local conservation efforts”. “Until now, we haven’t had the capacity to produce kelp at this scale. It’s a real step forward in our ability to restore the health of our oceans,” Chris said.

Giant kelp in the sea are like trees on land, he said, but unlike forests on land, there was only one species and without kelp the entire ecosystem disappears. SeaGen developed a new system that allows the kelplings to be grown on cotton twine and small rocks. The twine and rocks are then planted out into urchin barrens by divers from the global

conservation organisation The Nature Conservancy, helping re-establish the kelp forests “that serve as underwater nurseries for marine life”.

Chris said the new kelp-growing system had the capacity to produce more than a million kelplings each year and could be used in other restoration efforts, including along the Bass Coast, where kelp forests had also “suffered severe decline”. “One future goal is the restoration of giant kelp forests, which once thrived along the Victorian coast but have all but disappeared – likely due to rising ocean temperatures. Giant Kelp are like the Mountain Ash forests of the ocean. They can grow more than twelve metres tall, and diving through a kelp forest is an otherworldly experience.”

He said Bass Coast had the right conditions and the community was motivated to help in conservation efforts. “Many of the ocean bays around Phillip Island and the Bass Coast area are ideal because they have the right physical conditions to restore giant kelp.” Chris said there had been similar projects in Tasmania showing giant kelp restoration was possible. “Combining aquaculture and conservation can not only restore degraded ecosystems but also create new marine habitats for penguins and other wildlife, as well as attract dive tourism to the region.”



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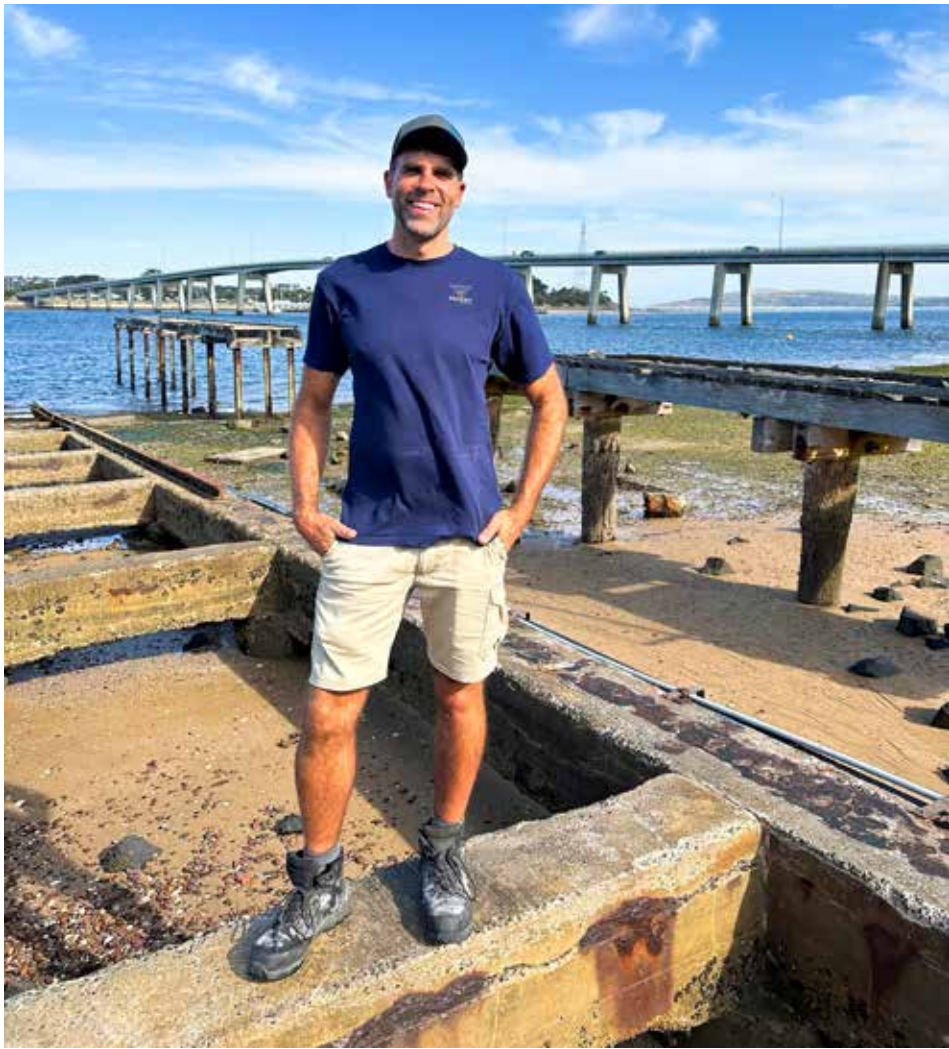


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Chris started his company in Newhaven in 2022 and fourteen months ago moved with his family to Cape Woolamai, with his daughter now attending Newhaven Primary. After completing his Antarctica stint – where he studied food chains by diving off the frozen continent for three seasons – he then worked for The Nature Conservancy for eight years rehabilitating seafloors using oysters and shellfish. He opted to start his own companies because “I decided we needed more private sector involvement in conservation”. “On land we have plant nurseries to restore forest, but so far there isn’t the equivalent for the marine environment.”



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Writer's Newhaven beach retreat



BY SARAH HUDSON PHOTO: SUPPLIED

When Lia Hills sets out to write one of her books, she heads to Newhaven beach. But when the award-winning poet and novelist says writing, she really means speaking.

"I use speech recognition technology to speak my books," Lia says. "So anyone seeing me on Newhaven beach would see me talking on the phone and it would sound like I have a very good listener on the phone. Then I go up to the little shed at Newhaven or the seat overlooking the water and edit it."

While Lia lives in Melbourne, she is lucky enough to have generous friends with houses on the island where she can stay to write. "It's my place to go when I'm doing a lot of writing."

However, it's a reflection of a much broader approach to writing, which is embedded in First Nations' culture of "deep listening", or "listening to country", with Lia explaining she is a "place-based writer". For her latest book, *The Desert Knows Her Name*, Lia headed to the Wimmera to speak-write the book, given the rural crime noir novel is set in the

desert region and frontier violence, that "Australia is a giant cold case".

"When you spend a lot of time in a place you build knowledge and connection to that place, especially on Phillip Island. You become very aware of the environment and it becomes a feeling of connection. The place finds its way into my writing. So when I'm walking on that tiny beach at Newhaven or the vast expanse of Cape Woolamai beach, I'm talking what I'm seeing."

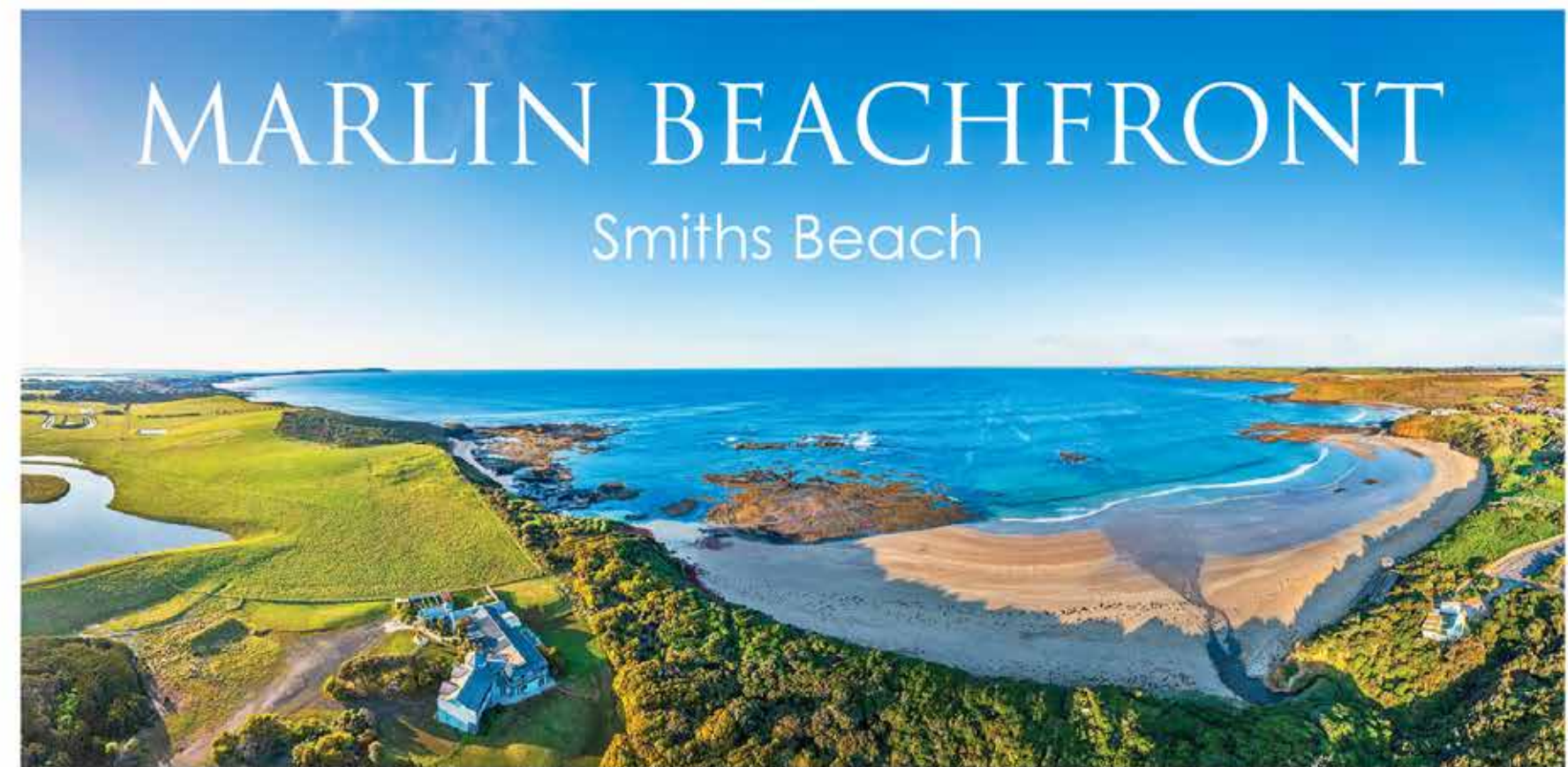
She says the process is a meditation on the environment, and adds this style also acknowledges the importance of oral stories as a way to pass knowledge in First Nations' culture. "We are so human focused. Having worked with First Nations communities and walked on country with elders I've learnt about what it means to listen to country. People think of listening with the ears, but it's listening with the whole body and not just the sounds but the relationship between things, the wind and the tree, the water against the rock."

Lia's debut novel, *The Beginner's*

Guide to Living, was critically acclaimed both in Australia and overseas, and was shortlisted for the Victorian, Queensland and Western Australian Premiers' Literary Awards, and the NZ Post Book Awards. Lia's second novel, *The Crying Place* was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award 2018 and named Book of the Month by Australian Independent Booksellers.

Lia says she started speaking her books travelling across Australia with her husband in the driver's seat. "It was too hard to write and too bumpy, so I started talking and I found I could get down 5000 words in a day."

In May, Lia was the special guest at a sold-out Literary Lunch at the Phillip Island Winery, talking about *The Desert Knows Her Name*. The lunch was presented by local bookshop Turn the Page, who Lia said have "sold the most copies of my book for an independent bookseller". "Turn the Page have been hugely supportive of my work. Independent booksellers are crucial to the success of literary fiction."



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"This image is an ode to the ritual morning 'surf check,'" photographer Tommy Williams explains.

"Not only does the surf check give you a great excuse to waste ten minutes of your morning, but it'll also shape how your day pans out. If the conditions look something like this image, well, chances are you're probably not going to roll up to work. Might just throw a sickie and paddle out with your mates instead."

The surf check may very well be the most important rite of passage in surfing, Tommy says. "Already late to work? Still time to check the surf. Just enough fuel to get to where you need to be? Check the surf. Your partner's dog got out of the yard for the fourth time this month? 'Yeah I can go grab them, I'll just have a look at the surf first'."

For the last four years, Tommy has lived at Surf Beach and admits there haven't been too many mornings when he's missed a surf check. "This photo is hands down the best conditions I have seen there. A beautifully sunny autumn morning, clean groundswell and perfect offshore wind. All the ingredients to create a lineup you simply cannot help but mind surf."

He says the island's rugged and raw coastline is a constant source of inspiration and opportunity. "No two days are the same. It really is a special thing when all of the elements align perfectly; but learning to appreciate the beauty in Phillip Island's imperfect conditions, its rawness and its moods, has given me a greater appreciation for this big southern rock."

TOMMY WILLIAMS

DETAILS:
Camera: Sony A7RV, Lens: Sony FE 24-70mm f2.8 @ 60mm, EXIF: 1/2000, f3.5, ISO 125

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THE ROAR OF THE ISLAND



Is that a Furphy? Sure is.

FEW FAMILY NAMES BECOME PART OF THE COMMON VOCABULARY OF A COUNTRY. BUT FOR CAPE WOOLAMAI'S ANDREW FURPHY, HIS SURNAME HAS RICH LINKS TO BOTH AUSTRALIAN HISTORY AND LANGUAGE. THERE'S LINKS TO BEER AND SPIRITS TOO. BUT RIGHT NOW, THE FURPHY NAME IS HELPING TO PROTECT WESTERN PORT BAY.

Depending on your age, the name Furphy will have a different meaning. "Anyone under the age of thirty will say Furphy is a beer," says Andrew Furphy. "Few at that age will connect it with history, World War I, or the meaning in the dictionary."

Yes, Furphy is certainly associated with the well-known beer, produced in Geelong. But Google the surname and you'll find a Wikipedia entry and dictionary definition, which states "telling

a Furphy" is to tell a tall story, a rumour. Wiki will explain it is the association with John Furphy and his eponymous water cart – first produced in the 1880s by J Furphy and Sons and how that came to be part of Australian vernacular – that is where the Furphy legend first began.

Yet if that's not enough, the Furphy name is about to have one more impressive connection. Andrew – a fourth generation Furphy (John is his great grandfather) – has for forty-five years

been connected to Phillip Island through his Cape Woolamai holiday house, shared with his wife and two children, Bianca and Adam, and grandchildren. It's thanks to that four-decade connection the Furphy name will now also be associated with a new documentary, set to be released next year, about Western Port Bay.

Andrew says he first approached documentary maker and marine biologist Sheree Marris about making a film about the bay a few years ago, after he viewed

*“THIS OLD MAN
WHO LIVES BY THE
SEA IS AWARE OF
THE PRESSURE ON
WESTERN PORT.”*

Sheree’s first documentary about Port Phillip Bay, called Melbourne Down Under. “Western Port is a magnificent bit of water, even more unique than Port Phillip,” says Andrew. “I’ve long enjoyed being on top of the water, seeing the birds, particularly the shearwaters, and of course the penguins, but what’s really amazing is what lies beneath: the coral reefs, sponge gardens, the mangroves that act as filters, the seagrass that is a breeding ground, and even the fact elephant sharks breed

in the bay.” Andrew says given the increasing development pressure on the bay – such as the proposed wind turbine hub at Hastings – he felt strongly it needed to be preserved for future generations. So, this year he has been working hard behind the scenes to get support for the documentary, including fundraising and organising meetings with groups and stakeholders. “I’m not against development. It has to happen. But the

idea with the documentary is that we give people, especially residents, the knowledge of what lies beneath, to give them the power, to make them more aware of the uniqueness, the magic, and maybe that will help slow down development. Knowledge is power. It’s about informing people to help Western Port in its hour of need. This old man who lives by the sea is aware of the pressure on Western Port.” Andrew, who lives in Shepparton, in the Goulburn Valley, is not a newcomer



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“WESTERN PORT IS
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to film making. In 2019 he started his own film making company, Bush Lit Productions, with his first production about great grandfather John’s brother Joseph, who wrote the well-known Australian book, *Such is Life*. Andrew – together with a volunteer production cast and crew – produced one chapter from the book, which he uploaded to his company’s website, in the hope of bringing more attention to *Such is Life*.

He then followed with further films borrowed from another great Australian author, Henry Lawson. “It was not a money-making venture. It started out as a duty to let people know about Joseph Furphy and his book but then it became a joy. After a hard day’s filming in the Riverina, with heat and flies, the beer would flow and we’d have some great conversations.”

Andrew’s more recent film features his granddaughter Harriet helping to explain the larger Furphy story. This film was produced after Andrew helped research a book on the family history, titled *Furphy: The Water Cart & the Word*. Andrew says John Furphy was twenty-two when he began his blacksmith and wheelwright business in 1864, soon after adding Furphy’s Foundry, inventing and producing various farm and agricultural implements in Shepparton, including

double furrow ploughs and spike rollers.

But it was the Furphy Farm Water Cart – a solution for efficiently transporting water – that is part of Australian history, not least because the cart was manufactured to feature the now well-known words: “Good Better Best, Never Let it Rest, Until your Good is Better, And your Better Best”. During World War I the cart was used in Broadmeadows where troops were trained and it was here it became the water cooler or social media platform of its day. Troops would gather at the back of the Furphy to share information or gossip, and soon after the word entered the broader Australian vernacular.

Andrew ran J Furphy and Sons after completing a metalwork apprenticeship at eighteen, when there were eight staff. After about fifty years in the company – during which galvanising was introduced – he retired fifteen years ago. His son Adam then took over J Furphy and Sons, which now has more than one hundred staff. The one-hundred and fiftieth anniversary of J Furphy and Sons was celebrated in 2014 at the Furphy Museum, part of the Shepparton Motor Museum.

The company still manufactures tanks, albeit stainless steel including tanks for the production of Furphy Beer in Geelong. And no, the family does not

make the beer. “The story goes – although it could be a Furphy – that the marketing manager of Lion Nathan wanted to create a parochial beer using Western district products and was looking for an iconic Australian name and came across Furphy. They asked Adam and Sam (his nephew) for the rights to the name and they agreed. I wasn’t privy to any of it.”

Meanwhile his daughter Bianca runs Shepparton Distilleries, which buys pears from Goulburn Valley growers, converts it to alcohol in Furphy steel tanks, after which it is shipped to France, where it is bottled and sold. Even the Furphy’s Cape Woolamai holiday house features steel galvanised by the family company. “For me Furphy is hard to define. My great grandfather wrote on his famous water tank ‘water is the gift of God’. I’d like to extend that to Western Port.”

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Permanent Availability

Following the success of last year's *Body Parts* exhibition, Phillip Island Tattoo studio is holding a new exhibition - *Permanent Availability* - at Grenache Wine Bar in Cowes.

The exhibition will open on September 6, with a special launch party starting at 5pm, with the artwork on display for the rest of the month.

Once again, Ian "Bugsy" Christensen is curating and the group show features a selection of twenty-one local and Australian tattooists and artists, working in an array of mediums.

Five of the pieces have been specifically created with the venue in mind. All pieces are for sale. Grenache Wine Bar, 55a Thompson Avenue, Cowes.





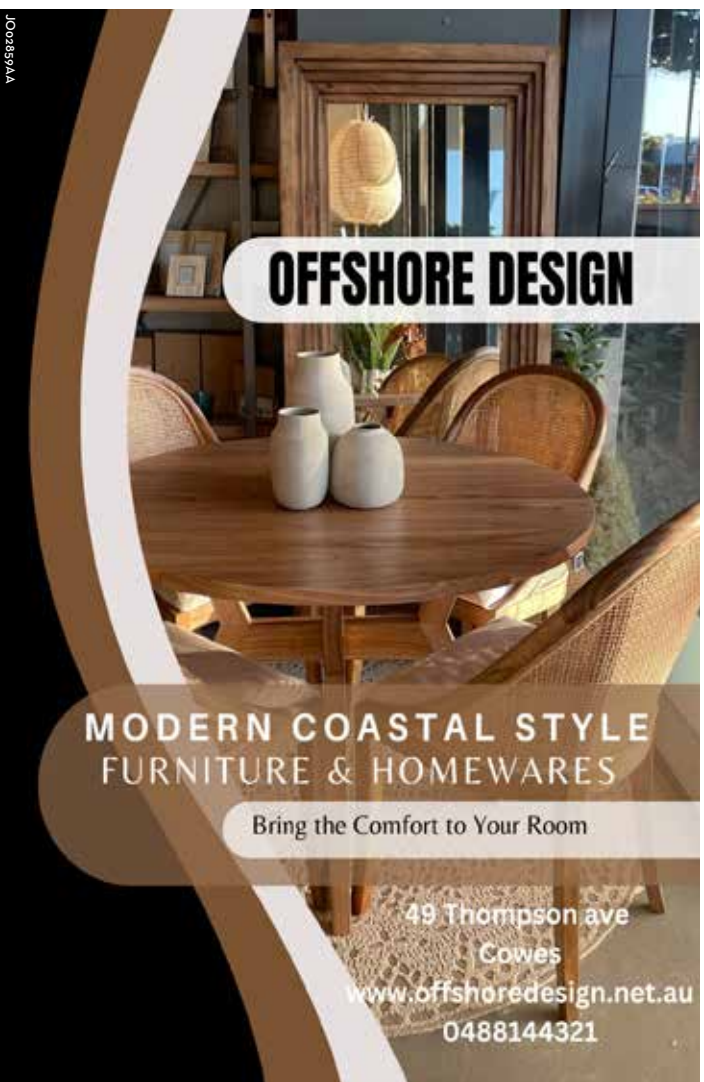
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BY SARAH HUDSON
PHOTOS: STEPH THORNBORROW

Taking centre stage

TO AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF AUSTRALIANS (OF A CERTAIN AGE), GIL TUCKER IS BETTER KNOWN BY HIS TV PERSONA CONSTABLE ROY BAKER FROM COP SHOP. YOUNGER FOLK MAY RECOGNISE HIM FROM AN ICONIC AUSTRALIAN MOVIE WITH MEL GIBSON. BUT ON PHILLIP ISLAND, HE IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS LOVE OF STORIES.

In the treasure trove of Australian showbiz memorabilia stored in Gil Tucker's Rhyll home, there's one piece of paper that stands out. "This is the cast list for the first *Mad Max* film," Gil says, pointing to the list. There, on the catalogue is his name, in his role as the People's Observer, recorded just above Mel Gibson. "I used to drive Mel home," Gil recalls. "He was a lovely bloke, very quiet. I knew him well before he became famous, in *Cop Shop*."

Gil, who has lived on Phillip Island for the past seven years, is one of the gems of

Australian small screen, with his career reading like a who's who of the formative year of show business. Chat with the seventy-eight-year-old father of two and grandfather of five about his five decades in the industry and it's hard not to feel a pang of nostalgia. From the outset, studying two years at NIDA, his fellow alumni included John Wood and after graduating he performed on the stage alongside the likes of Ruth Cracknell. In the late 1980s he co-starred in *House Rules*, where his TV wife was Jacki Weaver, his daughter Nadine Garner and son Matt Day.

But it was the TV shows Gil starred in that really highlight the glory days of Australian broadcasting, working for Crawford Productions in their stable including *Homicide*, *Division 4* and *Matlock Police*. The role that solidified Gil's career was playing Constable Roy Baker on Crawford Production's *Cop Shop*, alongside Terry Norris. "I missed the first thirty episodes, but the show ran for six years and had more than five hundred episodes. Roy was a young, fresh-faced officer, overly earnest but loveable. Police would tell me there was someone like Roy Baker

at most stations, trying too hard and putting their foot in it. For years I'd get called Roy and not Gil. People recognised me everywhere, mainly my voice. I was even at the footy once and all the Collingwood fans chanted 'Go Baker'." Such was the bond formed with his *Cop Shop* cast mates he continues to keep in touch with Lynda Stoner (Const Amanda King) and Paula Duncan (Det Const Danni Francis).

Gil admits his career resonates more strongly with the older generation, with those in their twenties or thirties

sometimes returning a blank stare at the list of TV shows. "But the younger ones recognise Mel Gibson and *Neighbours* of course," says Gil, who appeared in the soap in 1999. And, he continues to perform to this day, most recently in 2020 starring in *The Curtain* in Melbourne, while he still works doing voiceovers, including for the AFL and at one stage Tattsлото. Not surprisingly Gil plans to write an autobiography about his exploits and the industry.

Gil grew up on the outskirts of Sydney on a poultry farm, milking the cow every

morning from the age of seven. His earliest acting memory is being dressed by his mother as an Eskimo to appear in a Christmas nativity scene. It was in secondary school, about the age of fifteen, the love of acting sprouted, playing a policeman in a "horrible English play". "I was a show-off in my youth, I'd act the fool. It sometimes got me into trouble." It was that very same "preciousness" that would later solidify his career.

Gil took a detour, for a short time working in the Commonwealth Bank. It was only when he had a "sliding door

THE ROLE
THAT SOLIDIFIED
GIL'S CAREER WAS
PLAYING CONSTABLE
ROY BAKER
ON COP SHOP.





moment”, in a car accident that saw him dragged along the back of a car that he “realised I could have died and I wasn’t doing what I wanted”. At twenty-one he was one of eight hundred hopefuls who auditioned for forty places at NIDA, and – after being accepted – was then one of fourteen who were allowed to continue into the second year of the course. “I thought, this is it. I felt so at home.”

He speaks most fondly of his first job out of NIDA, working for the Perth Theatre Company in a play that travelled to remote regional Australia, with a small plane taking them to Aboriginal communities, and where one stage was made on forty-four-gallon drums and the lighting provided by car headlights. “Just that job will be a big part of my autobiography. It was an incredible experience.”

Returning to Sydney Gil auditioned for Crawford Productions, but “I was nervous and stuffed it up”. So at the suggestion of a mate, he moved to Melbourne – Crawford’s headquarters – and pestered them for three days until he got a small, one-day role. His wife of more than forty years Jo Rippon is a former casting director with Crawford Productions, who cast the first *Neighbours*’ stars.

Gil says Jo never cast him, at least knowingly. “We were together at the time and I was going for a role in *Kelly* (in the gos, about a “wonder dog”). I found out later she was behind the scenes watching my audition.” Following in her parents’ footsteps, one of Jo and Gil’s twin daughters is now a casting director, who lives on the Mornington Peninsula.

Like all actors, there were times when he had to supplement his income, driving taxis or waiting tables, even for a decade a partner in Australian Herb and Fruit Supplies, however Gil’s persistence and

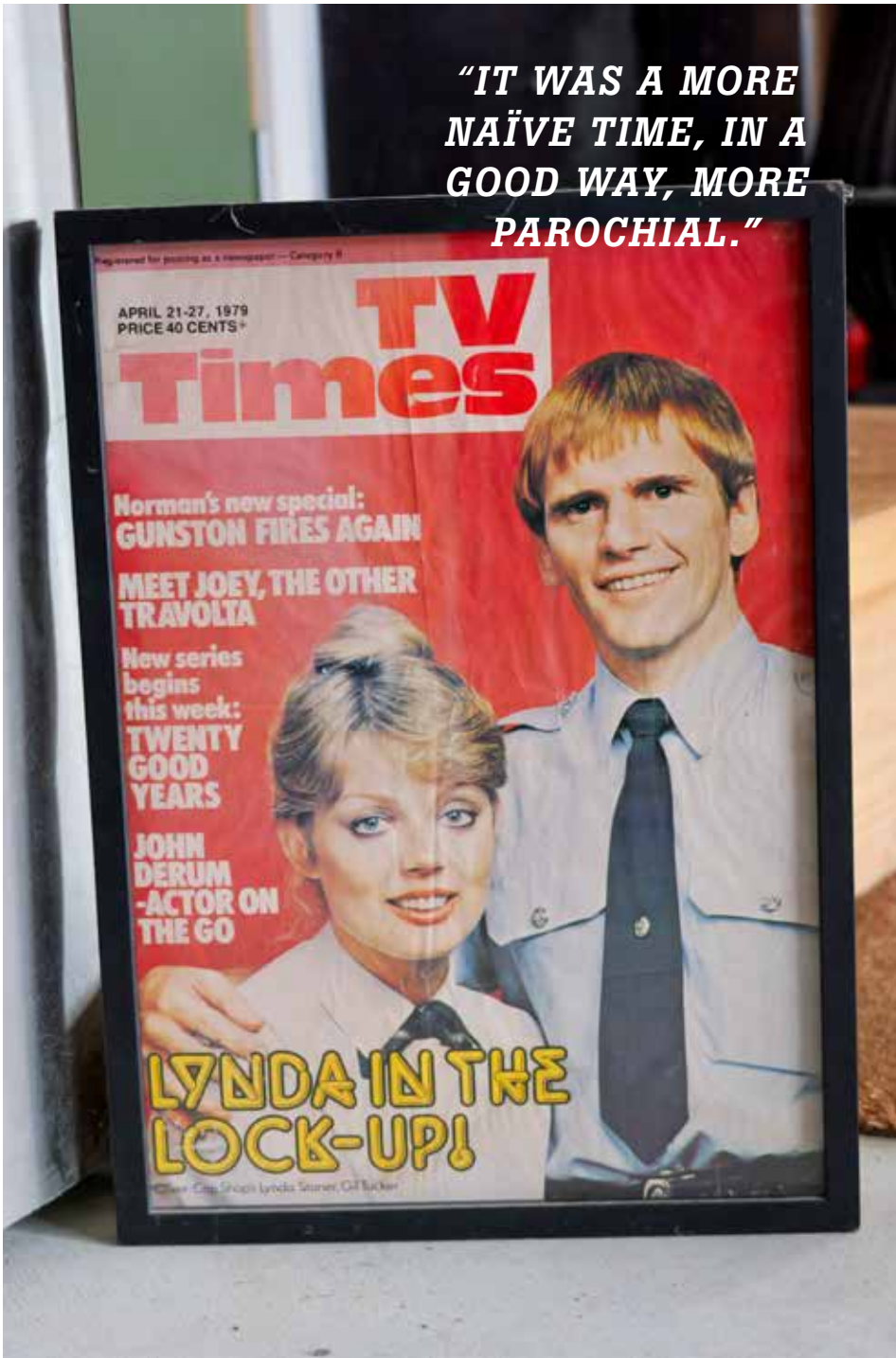
passion paid off. Over the decades he has landed key roles: in the TV miniseries *Power Without Glory*, performing as a boxer, trained by Gus Mercurio; through to *The Flying Doctors*, *Blue Heelers*, and so many more.

“It was luck really and it happened to be in the formative years of Australian TV. There was not much influence from the US at the time and local shows were big. It was a more naïve time, in a good way, more parochial. I was happy. I never felt jaded.”

While these days he watches Netflix and ABC dramas, Gil can’t help reflect that reality TV has replaced many quality scripts and TV shows: “It’s the only thing I lament, but not in a jaundiced way”.

Gil and Jo moved to the island seven years ago to a more “tranquil” life, running an Airbnb and growing a large edible and ornamental garden. He relishes being a member of the men-only book club Island Rebels. He is also part of the Movie Club and this year became a committee member for the Festival of Stories, including acting as MC at Berninneit at this year’s event. Through the festival he has rekindled contacts with former colleagues including Brian Nankervis and Bryan Dawe, (“it was great to catch up”).

Gil says he hopes to continue acting when and where he can, or even direct a play locally. “It wasn’t until Berninneit came along that I really felt at home here. It was like culture came to the island. I love the building, the cathedral ceilings and hardwood pillars from the original bridge. I’d love to do a show there one day, or direct something.”



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CHURCHILL ISLAND MARKETS
- first Saturday of every month, 8am - 1pm.
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CORINELLA COMMUNITY MARKET
- second Saturday of the month, 9am - 1pm, Harold Hughes Reserve, cnr Smythe and Balcombe streets, Corinella.

Bring the family and the dog (on a lead) and enjoy time out with fantastic goods including fresh produce, arts and crafts, garden stuff, coffee and a sausage sizzle. Indoor and outdoor stalls.

COWES ISLAND CRAFT MARKET
- second Saturday of each month. 9am - 2pm, St Philip's Parish Hall, 102 Thompson Avenue, Cowes.

The market's theme is Make, Bake and Grow. You will find a large range of products from local producers and crafts people. Profits from the market are returned for local community needs.



COWES MARKET ON CHURCH
- fourth Saturday of each month. 9am - 2pm, St Philip's Parish Hall, 102 Thompson Avenue, Cowes.

Plants, produce, clothing, crafts, "trash and treasure", as well as hot drinks and food.

GRANTVILLE COMMUNITY MARKET
- first Sunday of the month, 8am - 1pm, Grantville Rec Reserve.

Fresh produce and over a hundred stalls. including second hand collectables, antiques, food and clothing. Wet weather can make the reserve unusable, so if in doubt, check the market's Facebook page.

ON THE LAWN MARKET, NEWHAVEN
- third Sunday of each month, from November

to February. 9am - 2pm, Newhaven Primary School, 22 School Avenue.

Hosted by the local primary school, the Newhaven makers and growers market features a range of fresh produce, food, crafts and goods, with everything from honey, vegetables and fruit to candles or baked treats, as well as live entertainment.

There are regular markets at Archies Creek Hall, Inverloch, Kongwak, Jumbunna, Loch, Leongatha, Wonthaggi and Koonwarra. Check www.visitbasscoast.com.au/events/markets

For the latest on local news and events, read the Phillip Island & San Remo Advertiser, out Wednesdays, or online at pisra.com.au



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BY SARAH HUDSON
PHOTOS: SARAH HUDSON

A walk on the wild side

A COASTAL WALK ON PHILLIP ISLAND WITH ETHNOBOTANIST JESSICA MOULYNOX IS ABOUT MORE THAN THE SENSATIONAL VIEWS AND GETTING BACK TO NATURE. IT'S ALSO ABOUT OPENING OUR EYES (AND TASTE BUDS) TO THE FLAVOUR SENSATIONS AND HERBAL REMEDIES WE WALK PAST EVERY DAY.

On Cape Woolamai's public barbecues, on Cottlesloe Avenue, Jessica Moulynox has set up a smorgasbord of tasty treats, which you won't find at any restaurant. She pours a delicious tea made from lemon myrtle ("grown in my garden") and quandong ("sourced from a farm") that, she says, has numerous health benefits.

Then there's her homemade dukkah, which also includes ingredients from Jess' garden: native thyme, mountain pepper, as well as wild coastal saltbush foraged from Phillip Island. Muntries are little mauve pops of sweetness that have "four times more antioxidants than blueberries" and – while muntries are not found on Phillip Island – the plants can be bought at Bunnings. "Island Organics at Newhaven also has them in the fridge section," Jess adds.

While the offerings are all about new

flavour sensations, more importantly for Jess this is a teaser to a much more important subject: appreciating native foods, more specifically the endemic plants of Phillip Island. Jess serves these delicacies as part of her regular coastal foraging walks in Cape Woolamai and Rhyll.

Earlier this year the thirty-eight-year-old botanist started Backyard Botany, encouraging sustainable living practices through native edible garden design for schools and community groups, as well as for individuals. Jess then opened her Cape Woolamai garden to the public as part of the 2025 Bass Coast Edible Garden Tour, to showcase the twenty-two native edibles she's planted, as a forerunner to her coastal foraging walks and workshops.

She has since run several walks, with the aim to encourage not only a love and respect for nature, but also to inspire

people to plant native species in their own yards. This includes buying endemic varieties at Barb Martin Bushbank, on the Phillip Island Road, or buying native edible plants at Bunnings. "I want people to learn about the plants, plant them and use them at home."

On the walk, the mother-of-two introduces participants to about twenty edible or medicinal plants that are native to the island. Jess emphasises she has a Bass Coast Shire Council permit that allows her to forage at Cape Woolamai and Rhyll and so anyone keen to develop their foraging skills must also apply for a permit. "I am allowed to pick plants and give samples to people," she explains. And, she adds, she has permission from First Nations' elders to do this work. Importantly, she explains, plants should be washed thoroughly before eating, or



plucked from the top branches, so don't eat anything at dog pee level.


We don't walk far before Jess spots an edible native plant. She picks a frond of young coastal saltbush and nibbles it, explaining it is a handy salt substitute, or can be fried like burnt butter sage on top of pasta. "It is a fantastic antiviral and can also be eaten raw." Old man saltbush is generally considered the culinary version of saltbush, she adds, with that plant also to be found at Bunnings.

She walks a little further to a common-looking branch. Seaberry saltbush has berries that are "jam-packed" with antioxidants. "When modern medicine wasn't around a thousand years ago they had to rely on nature, eating small amounts regularly to sustain their health." Seaberry saltbush is so common anyone who has strolled anywhere on the island would be familiar with it, yet will have probably entirely ignored it. Jess calls this "plant blindness". So too, pigface is a common Phillip Island plant, whose flowers transform into fruit, which when opened contain "little salty strawberry kiwis". Who knew?

"This," she points to a stock standard green creeper kind of plant, "is native spinach". "I like to blanch it and add to a pie. It's not Warrigal greens. It's the sister plant." She points to lemon-scented tea tree, explaining she extracts the oils to make homemade deodorant for her family, even her husband Trev who is a consulting arborist.

And so it continues. A coastal wattle has water in its root that can help with survival. The acacia tree has sap that's sweet, while the coast beard heath has a white berry that "tastes like lemonade". The headache vine apparently lives up to its name, Jess says, putting a crown of entwined vine around her head. "The heat





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from your head releases the oils from the vine, which can help relieve a headache. And the fluffy flowerheads are great as tinder," she says, adding an anecdote about her son who has been learning how to start fires using soft wood timber. "He also made a bow and arrow out of tea tree the other day."

The walk isn't an arduous one, about one kilometre, and is more challenging for the mind than the body, with Jess giving Latin plant names throughout and peppering science knowledge.

Jess grew up in a family that loved camping and it was accepted practice to simply forage for wild food. One of her earliest memories is walking through paddocks with her grandfather when she got stung and he grabbed a bracken fern frond and opened the root, rubbing it on the bite. "The roots have an antihistamine that can be used on stings and bites and it brings immediate relief," she says.

Jess studied a Bachelor of Environmental Science, majoring in biology at Deakin University, also taking subjects at Melbourne University in the flora of Victoria. Because she studied a minor in indigenous studies Jess also calls herself an ethnobotanist, studying the relationship between humans and plants. Jess and Trev moved to Phillip Island in 2018 because she was a dedicated surfer



who wanted to be closer to the breaks.

Since Backyard Botany's launch, Jess has installed native edible gardens at the Ramada resort, as well as PICAL and Our Lady Star of the Sea. The foraging walks occur in the warmer months, while through the cold months Jess runs talks. The walks and talks are not just for foodies or gardeners. As she demonstrates, nature is also a medicinal pantry and offers lessons

in botany, with handy tips for doomsday preppers on survival skills. "People are sometimes nervous eating wild plants with me, coming from an expert. But I tell them, don't be afraid, be educated, there's a big difference between the two. The whole idea of Backyard Botany is to connect with nature, to look after the planet, to eliminate the fear of nature."



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For those who crave an authentic taste of Tuscany, Bistecca alla Fiorentina is a must-try. As we emerge from our winter cocoons, the arrival of spring beckons us to fire up the barbecue. The primal allure of fire and meat is undeniable.

Bistecca alla Fiorentina (Florentine steak) is the much-celebrated, classic and quintessential Florentine cut of beef with a long history that you will find in many traditional restaurants in Florence, Italy.

As a private chef in Tuscany, I would cook this religiously every Sunday during the summer months as it became a tradition to serve "Tuscan grigliata" for guests, sometimes in sweltering heat as I patiently tended to the wood fire.

Bistecca alla Fiorentina is obtained from the cut of the sirloin of the Chianina breed, one of the oldest in the world and renowned for its distinctive white coat and large size. In the middle it has the T-shaped bone, with the tenderloin fillet on one side and the sirloin on the other.

When living in Pietrasanta, Tuscany, my local butcher would have the carcass waiting for me, and I would always guess how much each steak weighed once cut, getting it precise almost every time to the

delight of my macellaio (butcher).

The general rule of thumb is that the steak has to be at least the same height as three fingers and will generally weigh between 1 - 1.3 kilos.

Traditionally, Bistecca alla Fiorentina is served with roast potatoes, wilted greens, and cannellini beans. The steak itself is cooked rare, taking only a few minutes on each side to cook, and a few minutes standing, then left to rest on a bed of Tuscan herbs and sea salt. The delicious outer salty charcoal crust is a beautiful contrast to the buttery centre, cut in thick slices, with the bone in tow and served on a wooden platter. It's theatrical.

When I moved down to the Bass Coast region in summer, it was the first thing I wanted to cook, taking advantage of the beautiful and local grass-fed Gippsland beef. It is a much anticipated occasion with my family, and I can already imagine that it will be requested many times this spring. The generous size of the steak makes it naturally conducive to share with others.

Happy spring,
Kara xo

INGREDIENTS:

1 - 1.3 kilo grassfed Gippsland beef or Chianina T-bone steak (3 fingers high)
A handful of sea salt and mixed herbs (rosemary, fennel, Sicilian oregano, thyme)
Handful of organic rocket
One lemon cut into wedges

METHOD:

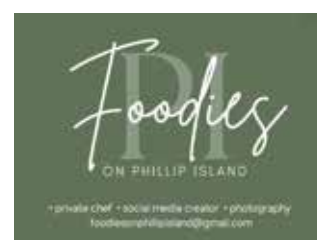
Prepare charcoal barbecue.

For a rare steak, cook the steak on each side for 3 - 5 minutes, and then stand up on the T-bone for another 3 - 5 minutes.

Rest the steak on a bed of herbs and salt on a wooden board (covered) for about 3 - 5 minutes.

Slice into thick pieces and immediately serve on a bed of rocket, with some lemon slices
NOTE: For authentic flavour, the steak needs to be cooked on a wood fire or charcoal barbeque. I would personally not recommend cooking on a gas barbeque, as the charcoal adds a crucial element to the flavour, and provides a crispy outer charcoal crust that you simply cannot achieve on a gas barbecue.

View the full cooking technique on Foodies On Phillip Island Instagram page.



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in for the Downtown Abbey finale, or "But Also John Clarke" a film about the beloved comedian and part-time island resident by his daughter Lorin. Live on stage, the offerings include comedian Dave Thornton, 90s indie-pop darlings Frente,

Bryan Dawe as Sir Murray Rivers QC and the Victorian State Concert Orchestra.
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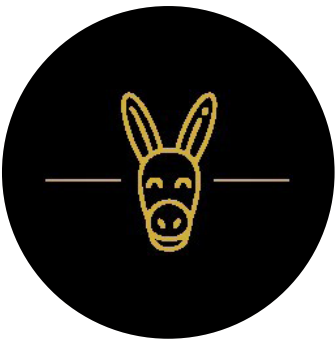
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The Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix roars back to the island from October 17 - 19 and you can expect plenty of action trackside. But the fun isn't confined to the circuit. Bike lovers, young and old, enjoy the spectacle of the Friday Homecoming Ride, with MotoGP fans joining some of the world's best riders riding across the bridge from San Remo to the track.

On Saturday October 18, the Community GP Run, which is becoming an annual favourite, will see hundreds riding from Caldermeade Farm to the island, with all fans invited to join in (check the Facebook event page for details).

Tickets are still available for the GP, with Aussie riders set to battle it out in MotoGP, Moto2 and Moto3. Or you

might prefer to join the fun at the Cowes Entertainment Precinct. Either way, there's plenty for everyone on the MotoGP weekend.

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Drawing the line

For tattoo artist Ian “Bugsy” Christensen, painting provides a soul-soothing outlet and a pathway to becoming a better artist.

In 2024 Bugsy organised an exhibition showcasing the artwork of his fellow tattooists. The success of *Body Parts*, which featured thirty artists, was the catalyst for an increased focus on art outside of the world of tattooing.

He described the show as a way for people to see what inspires tattoo artists, and highlight the influence tattooing has on their art. It also provided a connection and informal network for the artists.

The impact extended beyond the walls of the exhibition, creating a new artistic outlet for Bugsy, who has been tattooing for over two decades. “I began painting and that’s become a really significant part of my life.” The exhibition provided incentive for many of the artists involved to continue with their artistic pursuits. “It used to be you could sit there and tattoo, and make a pretty good living,” he said. “Now people have moved into other art fields. Not necessarily just to supplement their incomes, but to keep their momentum, and become better, rounded artists.”

Retreating to his studio to paint, especially during the quieter winter months, has become a regular part of his day, and a new exhibition this September has given him a goal to work towards. While this new love of painting

hasn’t diminished his love of tattooing, he says painting on canvas is “a lot more forgiving”.

“When you’re working with a client, tattooing them, you are under a lot of pressure. It’s their dream. It’s their idea and they’re paying for it. There’s a schedule you have to work with, and parameters. Tattooing is more like applied art. You are working to someone else’s brief. But when you paint, you don’t have to worry about any of that ... you are just doing your own thing.”

He believes the discipline needed for tattooing has helped with his painting, especially getting work prepared for the upcoming exhibition. “I come from a work ethic where no matter what is happening, when a client says draw this, you have to do it. You have to do art on the days you want to, and the days you don’t. It’s your job.”

He believes the exhibitions have opened people’s eyes to the artistic talent in the tattoo community. “With tattooing, you either like it or pretty much have no interest, but an art show is a lot more relatable.” He also hopes it inspires other artists to follow their creative dreams. “In the past, tattooists were complete outsiders, but now if you’re a young creative person and want to make a living through art, it’s an attainable pathway.”

Permanent Availability exhibition opens at Grenache Wine Bar in Cowes on September 6 and runs for the entire month. All works are for sale.

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