

TRAVEL WINERIES

Unique stays at cellar doors

Winemakers are catching on to the idea of inducing visitors to spend the night, writes **Paul Best**.



Knocking back a flute of museum-release 1992 Clover Hill sparkling wine in a tent before turning in is hardly roughing it. But it is just the extravagant nightcap to make one a very happy camper.

Only this isn't exactly camping. There is a queen bed with linen, cushions and an electric blanket, a bedside table with scented candles and reading lamp, jute floor mats, slippers and Aesop toiletries for the piping-hot portable shower. Not to mention enough headroom under canvas to execute an aerial backflip.

Nor are we fluffing it just anywhere. I'm in one of half a dozen luxury tents pitched alongside the cellar door at Clover Hill Wines, at Lebrina, 40 kilometres north of Launceston in Tasmania.

The winery is trialling the grapevine glamp-out in a move to inject a little extra cheer into a trip to the cellar door, opened about a year-and-a-half ago.

"It's about the experience," says Adam Torpy, head of Goelet Wine Estates, owner of Clover Hill. "We have this optimum

experience of being in the vineyards, seeing them the way they are."

That we do. The tents are set next to a hillside block of pinot noir, one of three varietals used in Clover Hill's sparkling wines. I wake to early morning sunshine setting the autumnal vines aflame, and uninterrupted views across wine country and state forest to Bass Strait.

It's not just a matter of the setting. Glamping at Clover Hill may also, if you choose, incorporate a masterclass with chief winemaker Rob Heywood, a paired wine dinner prepared by chef Tanya White (with dishes such as wallaby suet pudding and confit duck with pickled blackberry) and a tour of the vineyard.

Torpy says Clover Hill plans to host a series of events with glamping options: Effervesence Tasmania's weekend celebration of sparkling in November, its cellar door's second anniversary on the Australia Day weekend next January and a club dinner in March.

"It's a reasonably large logistical exercise to bring everything in and pull it out, so we're tying it to events that make it a really unique experience," says Torpy, who hopes to double the number of tents.

Glamping is an idea catching on with wineries. Along with enticements such as art, music, food and events, you can stay in luxury tents at places including Balgownie Estate and Cofield Wines in Victoria and Nashdale Lane near Orange in NSW.

At Dal Zotto Wines in Victoria's King Valley, an eco-friendly pop-up hotel fashioned from shipping containers sits at the juncture of two blocks of prosecco grape vines.

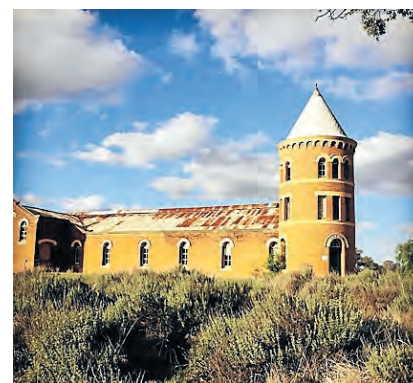
It's a step-up in luxury on the tents. Inside is a lounge area and kitchenette, which effectively doubles in size when floor-to-ceiling bi-folds are opened to an awning-covered porch. At one end is



The portable Wine Down Pop Up, top and above, has been travelling between Victorian wineries. Left: glamping at Clover Hill Wines in Tasmania offers fine food and luxurious enticements. Right: the Tower at Mount Ophir Estate in Victoria's Rutherglen wine region. PHOTOS, NICHOLAS BROWN, GEORGE JAMES

a bathroom with tiled shower, Hunter Lab toiletries and a plumbed toilet. At the other is a queen bed with Australian-designed Cultiver linen.

The portable hotel, dubbed Wine Down Pop Up, has dark, soft-textured walls, chevron-patterned floors and a benchtop in timber, with designer fittings and furniture chosen for a contemporary, boutique feel. There's also a wood-fired hot tub and fire pit, both put to good use with a glass of Dal Zotto Prosecco to hand. "We've tried to break down the stereotype of a shipping



container as hotbox," says Anatoly Mezhov, who set up the company Contained with his wife, Irene Polo, a couple of years ago. "We wanted to repurpose the container but also make it bespoke and beautiful."

Set up as an initiative of the state tourism body Visit Victoria to spotlight key wine regions, the makeshift hotel has been hopping from winery to winery in recent months. It kicked off in April at Waratah Hills Vineyard in South Gippsland, a two-hour drive from Melbourne, before being transported on the back of a semi-trailer to Dal Zotto. Its latest location, until July 7, is Mount Towrong Vineyard in the Macedon Ranges, an hour north of Melbourne.

My night in the pop-up, at its second location, included a private wine tasting with proprietor Michael Dal Zotto, who took me through the winery's growing range of proseccos, an Italian sparkling his father Otto pioneered in Australia two decades ago.

Also on offer, should I have had time, were winery tours, yoga sessions in the vines, and regional food-and-drink options including picnic and barbecue hampers.

At Mount Ophir Estate, in Victoria's Rutherglen wine region, guests can stay in more permanent but no less romantic lodgings: a three-storey French Provincial-style tower, built in 1903.

The tower has been transformed into a luxury getaway with a whitewashed, chandelier-lit dining room on the ground floor, a wrought-iron spiral staircase climbing to a lounge on the second floor (where bookshelves trace the curved walls); and a bedroom and bathroom up a set of steep timber treads on the third.

On this top level, there's an urge to spin around the room like a whirling dervish. Or at least flit from window to window to drink in the 360-degree views of the estate and surrounding plains.

The property itself has a colourful past. Established as a farm and vineyard in 1891, the 300-hectare estate was bought – and the winery and tower added – by leading London wine merchants, the Burgoyne. At one point, they were the biggest wine supplier in the southern hemisphere, with ambitions to become the wine capital of Australia – but it wasn't to be.

Under new owners, in 1955, the estate was reduced to 57 hectares, the winery closed and vineyard razed. In the 1990s, it was sold again and the vineyard restored, with shiraz, durif and muscat planted.

In 2016, it changed hands once more. Eliza, Angela and Nicholas Brown, owners of the nearby All Saints and St Leonards wineries, bought and restored the property in fulfilment of the wishes of their late father Peter Brown, of the renowned Brown Brothers wine family. Along with the tower, two homes and three cottages have been converted to guest lodgings, sleeping from two to 20 people. There are also plans to convert the barrel halls into event spaces.

"The region needed a unique selling point," says chief executive Eliza Brown. "We see the tower as a bucket-list thing." The family is also reinstating the Mount Ophir wine label, with three hectares under vine. "We picked shiraz for the first time this year," says winemaker Nicholas Brown.

While the estate doesn't have a cellar door, guests are surrounded by wineries. Boutique Scion Wine, for instance, is only eight kilometres away, while All Saints and St Leonards are less than 20 kilometres. **L&L**

The writer stayed at Clover Hill, Mount Ophir and Dal Zotto as a guest of Visit Victoria.



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Need to know

Clover Hill Wines
Glamping packages start from \$600 a night twin share.

Wine Down Pop Up
\$275 a night Sundays to Thursdays
\$375 a night Fridays and Saturdays
Until July 7 at Mount Towrong Vineyard, Macedon. See contained.com.au/hotel.

Mount Ophir Estate
Tower from \$550 a night