



the Brokenback range, west of the more publicised realms of central Pokolbin. While the latter is home to long-established wineries and big-name resorts, there's something enticing about this less-visited alternative. Broke Road leads from Pokolbin to the blink-and-you-miss-it village of Broke. Then right, then a quick left onto Millbrodale Road and unfurling paths of discovery to wineries at the end of country lanes, to olive producers, farm gates with honesty boxes, and city dropouts turned artisans and vigneron.

But if all this should sound too bucolic and straw-hatted, a visit to Running Horse Wines disabuses any such notions. Owner and winemaker David Fromberg runs his operation from a series of smartly converted shipping containers, elevated and angled to catch views of the Yellow Rock escarpment. The tasting experience is light and bright, as Fromberg peppers conversations with spirited tales of riding; from the equine bottle labels to the horses grazing in the distance, this is a place of particular passion. Visitors often arrive for the novelty of the architecture but leave with newfound knowledge and a stash of wines.

Nearby Whispering Brook feels like a tucked-away treasure but it's certainly on the connoisseurs' radar, having been awarded the maximum five red stars in the *Halliday Wine Companion*. The winery and cellar door are housed in a long, low farmhouse-style building; convivial tastings take place on the covered veranda. Winemaker Susan Frazier and her husband Adam Bell also have an 18-bed holiday rental on site and offer Beyond the Cellar Door walking tours of its olives groves bordered with lavender and daisies and rows of vines.

Unwind Hunter Valley is a property agency that handles a raft of options, including the Talits Estate manor, cottages, cabins, villas and the one-bedroom Mews Studio at Lavender Ridge Vineyard. *Au revoir*, Provence.

Perfect for: Wine aficionados; groups looking for a weekend away.

Must do: Pre-book tastings and meals; wineries and restaurants in the Hunter still have limited opening hours and restricted numbers.

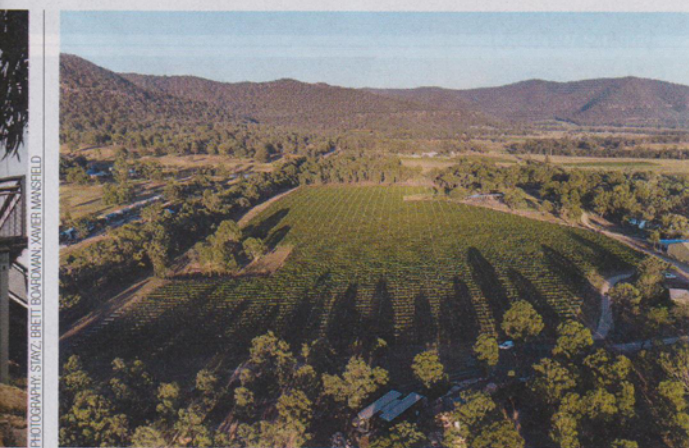
Dining: Melissa O'Toole of Mottys Farm Cuisine bases her catering on home-grown and local ingredients for guests at Talits Estate; she'll drop off excellent pre-ordered meals, ready to be served. Drive to Pokolbin for lunch at the pizzeria on Bimbadgen Estate's broad terrace, or excellent Italian-inspired fare at eRemo in Spicers Retreat resort.

Getting there: The Hunter Valley is about two hours' drive from Sydney.

Bottom line: Talits Estate from \$915 a night; seasonal variations and weekend premiums apply.

talitsestate.com.au; visitnsw.com

## NOT FOR THE SWOOPING GALAHS



Charm: clockwise, Talits Estate manor; Susan Frazier; vineyards; Running Horse Wines; Talits manor entry hall

