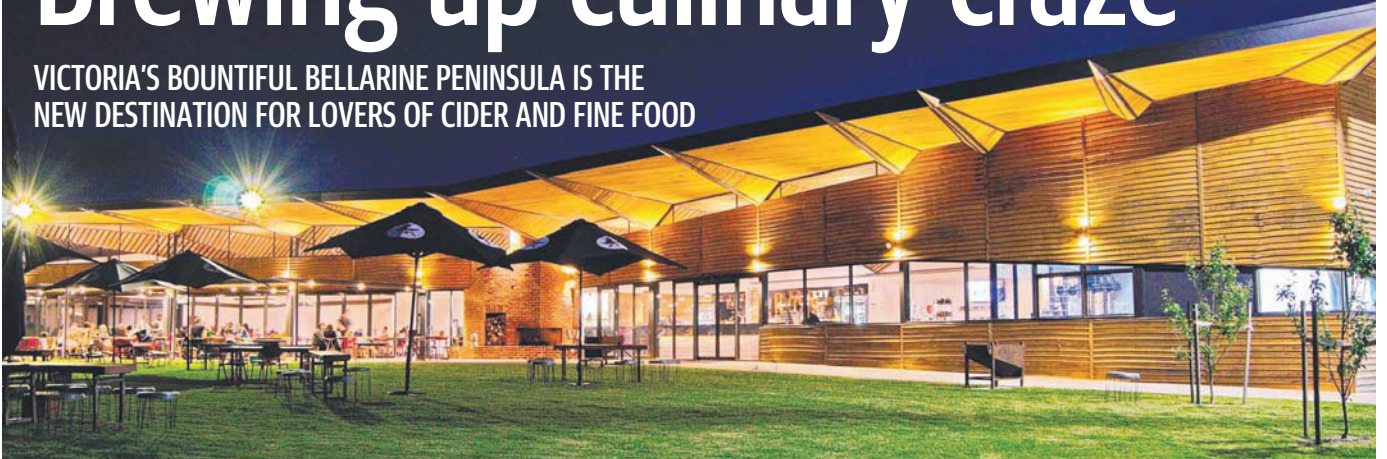




Brewing up culinary craze

VICTORIA'S BOUNTIFUL BELLARINE PENINSULA IS THE NEW DESTINATION FOR LOVERS OF CIDER AND FINE FOOD



BLANCHE CLARKE

The tasting paddle slides on to the bar in front of us. Four ciders in a row, with an extra one on the side for good measure. The first, the Flying Brick Original Cider, is refreshing, the type you could drink all summer long.

But wait, this second one, the pear cider, I prefer this one. It's drier, more quenching. The draught is next. Definitely bolder, more sophisticated.

I'm torn now, especially when I try the "PAV" pear and apple varieties. It's earthy, and my palate is developing as I sip it (I'm trying not to gulp it down). But No.5, this surely is the piece de resistance, the limited edition "PACHINGA" pear, chilli, ginger and lime. There's a subtle chilli and ginger hit, an unexpected zing that offsets the lime.

Who are the alchemists who have created this tingly take on the hipster brew? Wine maker Nyal Condon, from nearby Jack Rabbit Vineyard, and executive chef Dwayne Bourke, of Flying Brick Cider House, take the credit.

Condon says cider can be as diverse as wine.

"It has such an incredibly long history; there are over 4500 known varieties," he says.

"There are new ones popping up every day. It's exciting to think what we could and will end up doing with that. It might become more like wine in the sense of becoming single varietal."

The PAV is made from a harvest of local wild apples in the English "scrumpy" tradition and all profits go to the Movember Foundation.

The choices continue when you sit down to dinner at Flying Brick. There are numerous plates to share: the fried cauliflower, the moist duck empanadas shaped like wafers rather than pies, and the slow-cooked lamb shoulder are among my recommendations.

Many travellers drive down the Princes Hwy west from Melbourne to Geelong and veer to the right, following the famous Great Ocean Rd, unaware of the Bellarine Peninsula's bounty. That's the reason

the panoramic view of Geelong, the You Yangs and Melbourne from Jack Rabbit Vineyard seems all the more astounding. But the secret is

out now. Late last year, Lonely Planet named the peninsula as one of the best value destinations, alongside more exotic locations such as Nepal, Venice, Morocco and Russia.

Its attractions include a rail trail, beaches and charming townships such as Queenscliff. But Flying Brick and Jack Rabbit are adding a fresh flavour to the region. Sitting down to lunch at Jack Rabbit restaurant, it's hard to go past the smoked local mussels. Mains range from eye fillet to a rack of wild clover lamb, potato gnocchi and poussin. There is wine tasting and more casual meals in the adjacent House of Jack Rabbit cafe.

After a drive around Portarlington, and a walk along the foreshore, we check in at Starhaven Retreat, featured on television's Grand Designs, in Indented Head. Robert and Ian's seven-bedroom home with 15-seat cinema, bar, games room, large spa and rooftop garden has become a B&B, offering deluxe accommodation with a difference. It's also wheelchair-accessible.

Ian serves up a great cooked breakfasts, made with local



ingredients, to the guests gathered at the communal table. Conversation is free flowing and the view of the water helps maintain holiday mode.

We head to Leura Park Estate where we meet Tim, of Segway Geelong, for a 20-minute Segway lesson before we wend our way across paddocks and around the vineyards. After 15 minutes, Tim cranks up the power, and we race past

the vines. It takes a few minutes to readjust to terra firma before enjoying a wine tasting ahead of lunch.

The Grand Vintage sparkling blanc de blanc and Ms Flamingo & Associates certainly qualify as Spring Carnival cache, while the sauvignon blanc, 25 d'Gris pinot gris and single vineyard viognier fight for a seat at the lunch table.

However, it is the Block 1 hand-picked reserve chardonnay that asserts itself.

Leura Estate dining is a laid-back affair of local gourmet produce and stone-cooked pizzas, though there's nothing casual about The Vault dining hall with its sculpted concrete roof. It's the perfect place for groups to enjoy the grazing menu for \$30 a head.

The writer was a guest of Leura Park Estate and Starhaven Retreat

G02 BELLARINE PENINSULA

GETTING THERE

The Bellarine Peninsula is a 90-minute drive west of Melbourne.

WHAT TO DO

Jack Rabbit Vineyard, 85 McAdams Lane, Bellarine. jackrabbitvineyard.com.au
Flying Brick Cider House, 1251-1269 Bellarine Hwy, Wallington. flyingbrickciderco.com.au
Leura Park Estate, 1400 Portarlington Rd, Curlewis. leuraparkestate.com.au
Segway Geelong, segwaygeelong.com

WHAT'S ON

The Cadel Evans Great Ocean Ride Race is on January 27-29. cadelevansgreatoceanroadrace.com.au

MORE

visitgeelongbellarine.com.au





Daily Telegraph, Sydney
05 Jan 2017, by Blanche Clarke

Escape, page 48 - 786.00 cm²
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BRIEF #BUS-BELL INDEX 1

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Stop in at Flying Brick Cider House (top) for delectable cider varieties (above left) and (right) The Vault at Leura Estate.