

Good dirt, good life



TORI MORETON and her husband David Arbon combine their love of growing and making food and wine with the fun of sharing McLaren Vale with guests.



*All you could want.
A few chooks in the
yard and 60 acres of
really good grapes.*

WE FIRST met Tori (Victoria) Moreton when she worked for Fleurieu Food, promoting the produce of the Fleurieu Peninsula. She was inspired to take the job by Pip Forrester, then the proprietor of McLaren Vale's Salopian Inn. "Pip is still my mentor," insists Tori. "Her feel for food is addictive."

Tori still actively promotes the region. She started the Fleurieu Peninsula Slow Food Convivium and was invited onto the Board of McLaren Vale Grape Wine Tourism in 2007 to work on wine tourism in the region. But now she and David have their own venture, called Producers of McLaren Vale. Tori says it grew naturally from their interests and experience.

"David was getting more serious about wanting to make the best quality wine, he was getting a bit of a following with locals who wanted to learn how to make wine, and from there he had already decided to build a dedicated 'making' space," says Tori. "He's like a mad professor in his element when making; his joy at the presentation of a fresh batch of vinegar, olive oil, verjuice, cheese or apple cider needs to be seen."

The concept of Producers is partly based on the couple's European travel experiences, particularly in France and Spain. The French *Bienvenue a la ferme* (Welcome to the Farm) system, where on-farm accommodation includes an evening meal based around ingredients grown and preserved on the farm, was their favourite way to travel in Europe.

"We've been an 'open house' to travellers from around the world for many years and always enjoyed that stimulation" Tori continues. Melding this with David's plans for a 'hands-on' making space led to the business that allows them "innovation, creativity,

education and the fun of sharing this region with guests". Day tour and retreat packages let guests participate in winemaking, olive oil processing, pickling, preserving the fruits from the farm – whatever the season has to offer.

The building on their 32ha property was planned by David to be 'like the back shed', that is, exceptionally functional but with a few luxuries. "We had to have a cellar – needed to age wine," says Tori. "I could spend a lifetime with just cheese and wine so the cellar needed to be a cheese cave and also home to overflow produce, preserves, cool storage for our ever-growing olive oil harvest. I had outgrown my kitchen and pantry – we already had chutney, pickles and relish in the walk-in robe."

Architect Max Pritchard brought the dream to life in his design of a luxurious space set to inspire making and enjoying food and wine in a processing room, commercial kitchen, cellar and dining room wrapped around a Spanish style courtyard. Accommodation is provided in guest suites on the property.

If Producers at McLaren Vale sounds like your kind of experience, Tori and David's website at www.producers.net.au will whet your appetite, particularly the Producers' Calendar. We like the comments on the weather and wildlife: March – herons grazing amongst the vines; warm days and cool nights.

"We'd like to be known as a different kind of retreat for travellers, back to the earth and table pleasures," Tori says. "We don't know how the business will evolve. Let's see how it unfolds; not knowing is part of the fun." She laughs. "Doesn't sound like a bankable business plan does it? But as long as we enjoy the journey and tastes along the way, that is success." **RF**



Top. Tori and David in the courtyard of their architect (and David) designed building. Below. Winemaker Chester Osborn talks 'structure'; Nigel Rich preparing lunch of Roast Lamb with cherry tomatoes; Pip Forrester prompts a panel discussion with Fleurieu producers. See www.producers.net.au for accommodation and course schedules.