



HAVE FOOD, WILL TRAVEL

THE WEST SIDE STORY

From Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin, Western Australia's Margaret River region is home to plenty of good eating and drinking. **MAX VEENHUYZEN** meets local producers attracting plaudits in such diverse enterprises as beer, pork and potatoes.

PHOTOGRAPHY **ROBERT FRITH**

GRAPE PHOTOGRAPHY: JEREMY SIMONS/BAUERSYNDICATION.COM.AU



World-class wine, astonishing scenery, some of Australia's best surf and, just in case the region didn't have enough going for it, Margaret River can now add a thriving food scene to its resumé. West Australian holidaymakers are no longer heading "down south" just to drink wine, but to dine, as well. And despite having a population a fraction the size of Perth's, the region's food is right on trend. There's Spice Odyssey, a food truck delivering uncensored Indian flavours to the Cape Leeuwin and Cape Naturaliste areas. Small, cosy bars, meanwhile, serve bold food and drink in equal measure, while adventurous winemakers supply equally exciting vinous thrills. Then there's the regional network of farmers' markets, important platforms for helping eaters connect with local growers and producers. The following are some of the people making the south-west such an engaging, flavour-packed corner of Australia. >

Dave Carter grows heirloom potatoes on his Marybrook property





David Hohnen with his pigs; Injidup Beach (right)



Hog heaven: part of the Big Red herd (and right)



Bahen & Co cacao beans and chocolatier Josh Bahen (below left); Colonial Brewery's Justin Fox (left)



BEACH PHOTOGRAPHY: SHARYN CAIRNS/BAUERSYNDCATION.COM.AU



DAVID HOHNEN

The Farmhouse Big Red pork. thefarmhousemr.com.au

He might have been founding winemaker at Cape Mentelle, but David Hohnen is now concentrating on a different kind of red. More often than not, you'll find him at his Forest Grove property feeding his growing herd of primarily Tamworth pigs, one of several arms of his business, The Farmhouse. According to the forthright farmer, the property's combination of space and multiple creek lines adds up to the perfect environment for raising happier, fatter and tastier hogs.

"Where you find fine wine, you find fine food, and where you find fine food, you find fine wine - there's no separating them," Hohnen says. "By carefully selecting genetics and the right place to grow something, you can deliver a better product."

While the Big Red range consists largely of cuts of pork, Hohnen hopes to extend his range of fresh meat sausages and small goods ("the original fast food"). "I'm just discovering so much pleasure in having the best and healthiest convenience food in the world. Why would you go and have a greasy burger when you can enjoy a slice of wonderful artisan sausage?"

❖ **Where to taste:** Big Red pork is served at local restaurants including the Muster Bar & Grill (107 Bussell Highway, 08 9758 8877) and Leeuwin Restaurant (Stevens Road, 08 9759 0000) in Margaret River; Goanna Café (278 Hayes Road, 08 9759 1477) in Dunsborough; Bunker Beach Cafe (Farm Break Lane, 08 9756 8284) in Bunker Bay; and Knee Deep winery restaurant (160 Johnson Road, 08 9755 6776) in Wilyabrup. It is also available at Blue Ginger Fine Foods (31 Station Road), The Larder (2/99 Bussell Highway) and Margaret River Farmers' Market (weekly, Tunbridge and Farrelly Streets), all in Margaret River.

❖ **Local knowledge:** "On the main drag, Russell Blaikie's Muster Bar & Grill is the place to get corralled. It's local-local, friendly and professional, plus chef Sean Carter does great things."

DAVE CARTER *Carter's' Fresh Dug Potatoes.*

401 Marybrook Road, Marybrook. 0437 203 330.

The humble spud? Not on Dave Carter's watch. Whether it's a velvety Dutch cream or a visually striking Purple Congo, Carter's heirloom taters are a hit with the Margaret River chefs and eaters who look for the spuds at local farmers' markets. ➤



Si Vintners wines produced by Iwo Jakimowicz and Sarah Morris (above), often in giant concrete "eggs" (left)

THE GROWING INTEREST IN FOOD CULTURE IS IMPORTANT FOR KEEPING FARMS LIKE OURS GOING



Dave Carter tending his taters (and right)

“The world of potatoes has, by and large, been homogenised by big-yield varieties that present well and can be stored for a long time,” says Carter. “But that’s starting to change and more people from different cultures are after specific-purpose spuds. The stability that comes from knowing there’s a growing interest in food culture is important for keeping farms like ours going.”

While the farming roots of Carter’s family stretch back to the 1860s, he began his dedicated, fresh-dug, heirloom potato operation on his Marybrook property only about two years ago. In addition to persevering with flavour-first varieties such as Delaware, Nicola and Maris Piper (“heartbreaking to grow”), Carter believes a hands-off harvesting approach helps deliver a fresher, tastier tuber.

“When you wash a potato, it’s the beginning of the end,” he says. “Immersing a potato in water triggers all sorts of anaerobic reactions. Dry-brushing is a minimal intervention way of handling a potato. It helps them retain their nutrition and fibre.”

❖ **Where to taste:** Carters’ Potatoes are served by Margaret River restaurants including Vasse Felix (Caves Road, 08 9756 5000) in



Margaret River and Hay Shed Hill Deli Café (511 Harmans Mill Road, 08 9755 6046) in Wilyabrup. Carters’ spuds spend alternative Saturdays at the Margaret River Farmers’ Market and the fortnightly Vasse Markets at the Vasse Community Hall in Koorup Road.

❖ **Local knowledge:** “Breakfast at Hay Shed Hill is a million miles away from your local greasy spoon. My wife, Felicity, looks forward to having the *nasi goreng* whenever we go. It’s also a great place to take the family.”

JOSH & JACQUI BAHEN

Bahen & Co. bahenchocolate.com

Using vintage equipment to make artisan chocolate might sound romantic, but like any

relationship, it requires a certain commitment. “It’s almost like being married,” jokes winemaker-turned-chocolatier Josh Bahen. “Put in a lot of time and things will go well. Start neglecting things, however, and you might end up on the rocks.”

Fortunately, it’s so far so good for Bahen, wife Jacqui and their collection of antiquated machinery. Since its launch in 2009, Bahen & Co has fast made a name for its single-origin chocolates.

The company’s modus operandi is simple: work closely with cacao growers from around the world to source the best beans, then add nothing to them except for a tiny amount of unrefined Brazilian cane sugar to retain the cacao’s distinctive flavours. The result is regionally expressive “bean-to-bar” chocolate.

“One of our best domestic markets is Melbourne,” says Bahen. “The specialty coffee market understands the concept of single-origin flavour, as do wine aficionados.”

While the Bahens work closely with locals (Eagle Bay Brewery uses spent cacao husks to brew single-batch cacao stout in winter), they’re also daring to think big. They recently expanded the range >



Si Vintners' vines produce "natural" wines

from four flavours to eight, and now export to the UK, USA, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Netherlands.

❖ **Where to taste:** Bahen & Co chocolates are available at cellar doors and gourmet providores throughout Margaret River and at the Margaret River Farmers' Market.

❖ **Local knowledge:** "On a Sunday, Eagle Bay Brewing Co (236 Eagle Bay Road, 08 9755 3554) in Naturaliste is one of the most beautiful places on the planet. Its small-batch craft beers are super-tidy and the food is a winner every time."

JUSTIN FOX

Colonial Brewery, Osmington Road, Margaret River.
(08) 9758 8177. colonialbrewingco.com.au

Margaret River might enjoy an international reputation for fine wine, but its craft beer movement is fast gaining on its grape-based assets. One of the local brewers driving this revolution is Colonial Brewing and its Germanic Kölsch beer.

"WA's Mediterranean climate is a win-win for the kölsch," says head brewer Justin Fox. "There are so many people who are yet to access craft beer. The Kölsch is a great way to get them on board and realise craft beer doesn't have to taste like scary home-brew. Here's this beautiful, clean-tasting beer with perfume and a hint of hop that people don't have to be scared of. It's a great beer to drink in the sun and really suits our lifestyle."

Working at Colonial Brewing really suits Fox, too, not least because Colonial's size and rural setting are polar opposites to the large-scale brewing conducted at Fox's previous employer, Swan Brewery. But even with challenges such as unreliable power supplies and distance to contend with (Fox brews and lives in Margaret River during the week before driving back home to Perth for weekends), the pros of brewing in the south-west far outweigh the cons. "In Perth, I used to have to pay someone to take away spent grain and put it on the land,"

ONLINE

WANDER THE WEST

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says Fox. "Here, we've got farmers lining up to take it. They use it to feed their stock, so there's that really nice connection to the land. I've said to a lot of people since I've been here, Margaret River is the best office in the world."

❖ **Where to taste:** Colonial beers are available at the brewery, 11am-6pm daily.

❖ **Local knowledge:** "The region's best beer list is at The Pour House (26 Dunn Bay Road, 08 9759 1720) in Dunsborough. Great bottled beers and its takeaway prices are very good, too."

IWO JAKIMOWICZ & SARAH MORRIS

Si Vintners. sivintners.com

Deeply textured pinot noir rosé. A white blend bringing together the unlikely bedfellows of semillon and chardonnay. Wines aged in giant concrete "eggs" for up to two years. Si Vintners doesn't exactly embrace conventional winemaking.

"It wasn't our intention to go against the grain," pronounces Iwo Jakimowicz, one half of Si Vintners' husband-and-wife winemaking team. "Our philosophy is to allow the expressions of our vineyard to show in our wines. We like taking a minimal-interference approach to allow the wine to show the place where it's grown."

The place in question is a dry-grown vineyard that was primarily planted in 1978. After being purchased by Jakimowicz and Morris in 2010, the land was converted into a biodynamic property, with the couple implementing viticultural techniques inspired by time spent in Spain (as well as being an acronym for Sarah and Iwo's names, *si* is Spanish for "yes").

While the couple's wines have little in common with traditional Margaret River styles, a growing reputation on the international "natural" wine circuit (Si Vintners was the sole WA exhibitor at last year's Real Wine Fair in London) suggests there's room for both styles to coexist in the south-west. Best of all, it's still early days for the rogue vigneron. "We still have a lot to learn from our vineyard," says Jakimowicz. "From a viticultural perspective, fine tuning and evolution are very important. I doubt we'll ever stop experimenting."

❖ **Where to taste:** Si Vintners wines are available at Morries Anytime (2/149 Bussell Highway, 08 9758 8280) and Settlers Tavern (114 Bussell Highway, 08 9757 2398), both in Margaret River, and the restaurant at Cape Lodge in Yallingup (3341 Caves Road, 08 9755 6311).

❖ **Local knowledge:** "When we can, we get in a sneaky counter lunch at Settlers Tavern – great food and an amazing wine list that's at odds with the pub's modest appearance." 🐦

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