



THE FARM SHED

EAST COAST WINE CENTRE

Is The Farm Shed Australia's best post office?

It is a fact of life in Australian country towns that people and businesses sometimes need to serve multiple functions to ensure that services, safety and quality of life are all maintained for the community and for visitors.

Subi Mead and Helen Bain, residents of Bicheno on Tasmania's sunny east coast, have taken this approach to rare heights of sophistication with their latest venture, The Farm Shed East Coast Wine Centre.

A single building, architect-designed to reflect the agricultural buildings and heritage of the region, contains a wine bar, café, wine centre, craft and design outlet as well as the local post office.

The pair, who had been running the local post office for some years with some local craft displayed as a sideline, had previously established a number of successful hospitality enterprises on the East Coast, including the fondly-remembered Left Bank café at Swansea in the early 2000s.

“Our aim with The Farm Shed wasn't to cram as much as we could under one roof,” explains Mead. “It was about bringing together the things that we love and creating a space to share those passions with like-minded people, who appreciate the finer (although not necessarily costly) things in life.”

One of those passions is the wines of Tasmania's east coast. Some of the region's vineyards are among the oldest in Tasmania, while many don't have their own cellar door. The Farm Shed stocks (at last count) 48 different wines from the region's 18 vineyards, which stretch around 200km from Orford in the south to St Helens in the north.

On any given day, five wines are available for tastings, which cost \$5.00 per person (the cost is discounted against any purchases that result). While the pair doesn't consider themselves to be wine experts, they do share the stories of those who make the wines and the properties, several of which are operated by the same families that settled them nearly two centuries ago. The pattern is backed up by informative displays giving the story of each vineyard and tasting notes provided by the winemakers.

Larsen and Thompson teas, Zimmah coffee, Willie Smiths organic cider, Iron House pale ale and Vestal sparkling water are also available to accompany the menu, which includes plenty of vegetarian and gluten-free options.

“We are not the sort of place that does eggs and bacon for breakfast,” says Bain, who supervises the kitchen. “We offer a selection of tasting plates, panini, bagels and a range of “small bites” that go well with a glass of wine, or with a coffee.”

The careful curation of the comestibles at the Farm Shed is reflected in the range of original art and craft from local artisans.

“It is another of our passions and keeps us in touch with the wonderful artists in the area,” explains Mead, who was general manager of the Salamanca Arts Centre in Hobart for many years.

Right down the back of The Farm Shed (and accessible via a separate side entrance for those wishing to avoid the temptations on the way from the front door) is a shutter door which opens from 10-4 on weekdays to provide the postal service.

“Interstate visitors can make up mixed cases of their new favourite wines and we can post them home for a price that means it’s just not worth trying to struggle home with it in their hand luggage,” says Mead. “We will soon be opening an online shop so those visitors can send for more supplies.”

A customer was recently overheard to exclaim that The Farm Shed was “the most amazing post office I’ve ever been in.” Another opined on social media that if more post offices were like this, Australia Post would be a lot more popular.

Both may well be right.

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