

AS ONE DAVE CLOSES,  
ANOTHER OPENS

A PICTURE  
OF HEALTH

EAT, PLAY, WORK AND STAY  
- A QUICK GUIDE

# THE ISLAND

PEOPLE AND PLACES OF PHILLIP ISLAND AND SAN REMO

## SOUL SURFER

*Surfing and skating run in the blood of Steve Ulula Parker – it's all about moving, floating through time and space.*



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# Ensuring the Region's Water Security

Our Water Network Connects to Melbourne's Supply

*At Westernport Water, we're committed to maintaining a secure, sustainable and reliable water supply for our community — both now and into the future. Our water network forms part of Victoria's extensive water grid, providing flexibility and resilience as we adapt to the impacts from climate change.*

We can access water from a range of sources. In addition to being able to access water from Tennent Creek (Candowie Reservoir), we also carry an annual entitlement that allows us to access

drinking water from Melbourne. In turn, this connection helps us to manage customer demand and our local water supply, especially when critical maintenance tasks are required at our water treatment plant.

Our region's water supply system is a complex, well-managed network. It includes a water treatment plant, multiple enclosed treated water storages, pump stations, and the connection to Melbourne's water grid via the desalination pipeline that connects Cardina Reservoir to the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant. Westernport Water can receive drinking water from this pipeline via a connection near Bass. Water accessed through this connection flows

directly into our water main and mixes in the network and the San Remo treated water storage before making its way to customers.

In recent years, Westernport Water has improved and upgraded the distribution system, including the renewal of the region's primary treated water storage at San Remo and backup treated water storages at Wimbleton Heights and Grantville; collectively holding a number of days of supply. More recently, water infrastructure connected to the underside of the San Remo Bridge has also been refurbished.

## **Permanent Water Saving Rules**

Our long-term investments and forward-thinking have built a secure water system capable of adapting to changing needs and climate conditions. Our storage level at Candowie Reservoir is closely monitored by our expert team. Water restrictions are unlikely in the foreseeable future, however Permanent Water Saving Rules remain in place across Victoria.

These every day rules help ensure water efficiency year-round while giving households and businesses flexibility, especially during warmer months. Restrictions, however, are only enacted when necessary, and we will continue to

monitor storage levels to make proactive, well-timed decisions.

For over a decade, Westernport Water has supplied recycled water for non-drinking purposes, increasing the community's available water supply. Unlike regular water sources, recycled water isn't dependent on rainfall, making it a reliable option. By using a separate purple pipe system, recycled water supports agriculture, sports fields, golf courses, and residential and commercial needs — helping to improve long-term water security.

We understand that many people don't think about what it takes to deliver water

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Westernport Water serves close to 24,000 customers across 27 townships, maintaining over 400km of water pipes and 2,173 hydrants.

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shed

# The Good Years



Build Yours with Shed House Australia



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*We acknowledge the people of the Bunurong  
 as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and water.*

Did you know the average Australian spends five and a half hours on their phone each day, which apparently is around thirty-three per cent of our waking life?

There's been a lot of studies about the impact of screen time on our mental health, with research showing a significant link between excessive screen time and increased anxiety.

It seems the internet, and the golden age of information, which was supposed to empower, connect and educate us all, is doing the opposite: isolating people, making them more stressed and anxious, and providing a platform for spreading conspiracy theories and misinformation.

Fortunately, we all have the solution to this digital-age problem at the tip of our fingers ... turn the phone off. Let's put our devices down and disconnect. Personally, my best stress release is to sit and watch the ocean, or quite literally, take time to smell the roses growing in my garden. But you might prefer to dive into the sea, walk along one of our amazing trails, cycle the bike paths, meet friends in a local cafe or pull on the Nikes and run for a kilometre or five.

Yet again, I'm struck by how lucky we are. We're in the perfect location to de-stress, to tune out from the angry buzz of daily life and world news. Stop doomscrolling on your phones, and instead read the stories in this edition of local people trying to make the world a better place in their own way ... whether it's designing prototypes for eco-friendly houses, raising money for water filters for third world communities, sponsoring a young person's education or using yoga and meditation, instead of alcohol, to help navigate the stresses of life.

Rather than depressing ourselves by reading about war, inflation, or the latest whims of petty dictators and tyrants, we can immerse ourselves in island life – both in the real world and in this tenth edition of The Island.

Sit back, relax and enjoy The Island. We hope you love it as much as we do.

*P.S: As usual, we're taking a short break over winter, so the next edition of The Island will be with you at the start of September.*

# Walk for the Kids



Every year the local community puts their best foot forward and raises money for the Royal Children's Hospital.

Organised by a team of volunteers and the San Remo Hotel, The George Bass Walk for the Kids is on Good Friday, April 18, and features a choice of two events.

The first is seven and a half kilometres

along the stunning George Bass Coastal Walk, starting in Kilcunda and ending at Punch Bowl Road. Shuttle buses run from the San Remo Hotel from 9am onwards.

The second event is the three-kilometre San Remo Town Walk, which is suitable for families and prams, and includes a chance to win an Easter hamper.

Throughout the day there is entertainment, kids' games and live music at the San Remo Hotel, as well as a silent auction.

You can register on the day from 8am at the San Remo Hotel, or via this QR code.

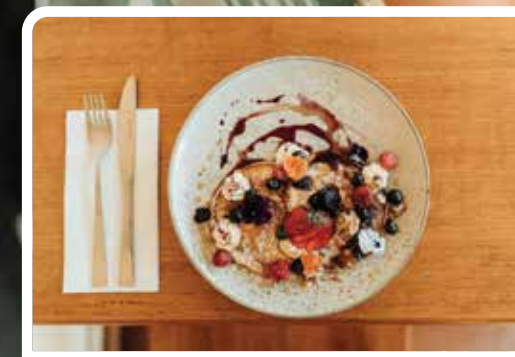
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# LOCAL LEGEND



Driven by her passion for books and reading, Lois Gaskin has spread her love of literature across Phillip Island.

The former owner of Turn the Page bookshop and a founding member of the local literary festival, Island Story Gatherers, Lois said books have always been part of her life.

A voracious reader from a young age, she turned her hobby into a job. Along with partner Paul, she ran Book City, in Swanston Street in Melbourne. When they decided to return to Phillip Island in 2009, opening a book shop seemed like an ideal plan, despite the publishing industry being under pressure from declining book sales.

They literally built up the business with their own hands. "When we came back to the island, the shop (on Thompson Avenue) had just been built," Lois recalls. "I built all the counters, the bookshelves, everything in the store."

She also remembers opening night, when a man walked into the store and told her "you won't be here for very long". She proved him wrong, running the store for over a decade, establishing a dedicated customer base, and influencing the reading choices of thousands of holiday makers and locals.

That was a part of the job she never

tired of. "If you can convince someone to read something different, you can put something into someone's hands ... because you know your customers, and know your books."

She gave a further boost to the island's literary credentials, establishing the Island Story Gatherers literary festival in 2017. "We don't make much money, and what we do make goes straight back into the next year's program," says Lois. "For me, it's about the intrinsic value of what we give. We want to present people with things that are challenging. We feel we have to be fearless."

The reward for the hundreds of hours that go into organising each event, comes from the audience reactions. "After the first festival, a guy came into the shop and told me, 'I went to the festival on the weekend, and it changed my life'. That's why you do things. I still get teary thinking about it."

Over the years, the festival has presented an impressive array of guest speakers, including Andrew Denton, Thomas Keneally, former politician and Olympic medallist Nova Peris, Kerry O'Brien, rapper/writer and actor Briggs, Brian Nankervis and Jacinta Parsons,

to name just a few. This year, the Story Gatherers are hosting their sixth festival from July 25 to 27, with Lois at the helm of the small but dedicated group of volunteers.

Although she sold the bookstore in 2021, it hasn't been a conventional retirement. Admitting that she "missed the customers", Lois now works part time in a local shoe store. "People still talk to me about books, or when I see them in the supermarket." And her own love of reading has not diminished. "I read every day and still read the weekend book reviews," she says. "Books are something that are inside me."

Pino's Trattoria a true Italian experience nestled off the main street in Cowes here you will find one of Phillip Island best known Italian restaurants. A place of celebration and homage to all things Italian. Authentic Italian food made from the heart, warm welcoming atmosphere to gather with family & friends embracing what the true essence of what a Trattoria is, making you feel a part of the famiglia



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BY SARAH HUDSON  
PHOTOS: STEPH THORNBORROW

# As one Dawe closes, another opens

*ONCE A LOCAL FIXTURE ON PHILLIP ISLAND, TV SATIRIST BRYAN DAWE NOW CALLS MOROCCO HOME. A NEAR-DEATH HEART ATTACK PROVED IT WAS THE RIGHT CHOICE, AND HE IS NOW DEDICATING HIS LIFE TO HELPING HIS NEW-FOUND COMMUNITY.*

**F**or thirty-five years Bryan Dawe was part of Phillip Island's community, buying a house here after his friend and fellow ABC TV satirist John Clarke had a property in Rhyll. But in the wake of John's death in 2017, Bryan last year sold his beach house to his daughter and so – thanks to her – the link

to the island remains. "I loved my house and on the threat of death my daughter made me sell it to her, so I'll still visit her and my friends on the island," Bryan says. "When John died it changed my life. Apart from our working relationship, I lost a confidante, someone with whom I shared music, books and the world. He

was unique and you can't replace someone like that. At the time of his death, I needed to grieve but I couldn't go to the San Remo supermarket without being pulled up by someone wanting to talk about it, which is understandable. The audience had supported us for thirty years and they had a right to grieve, but so did I."

*BRYAN ADMITS HE INCREASINGLY DESPAIRS AT THE STATE OF GLOBAL POLITICS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE ...*



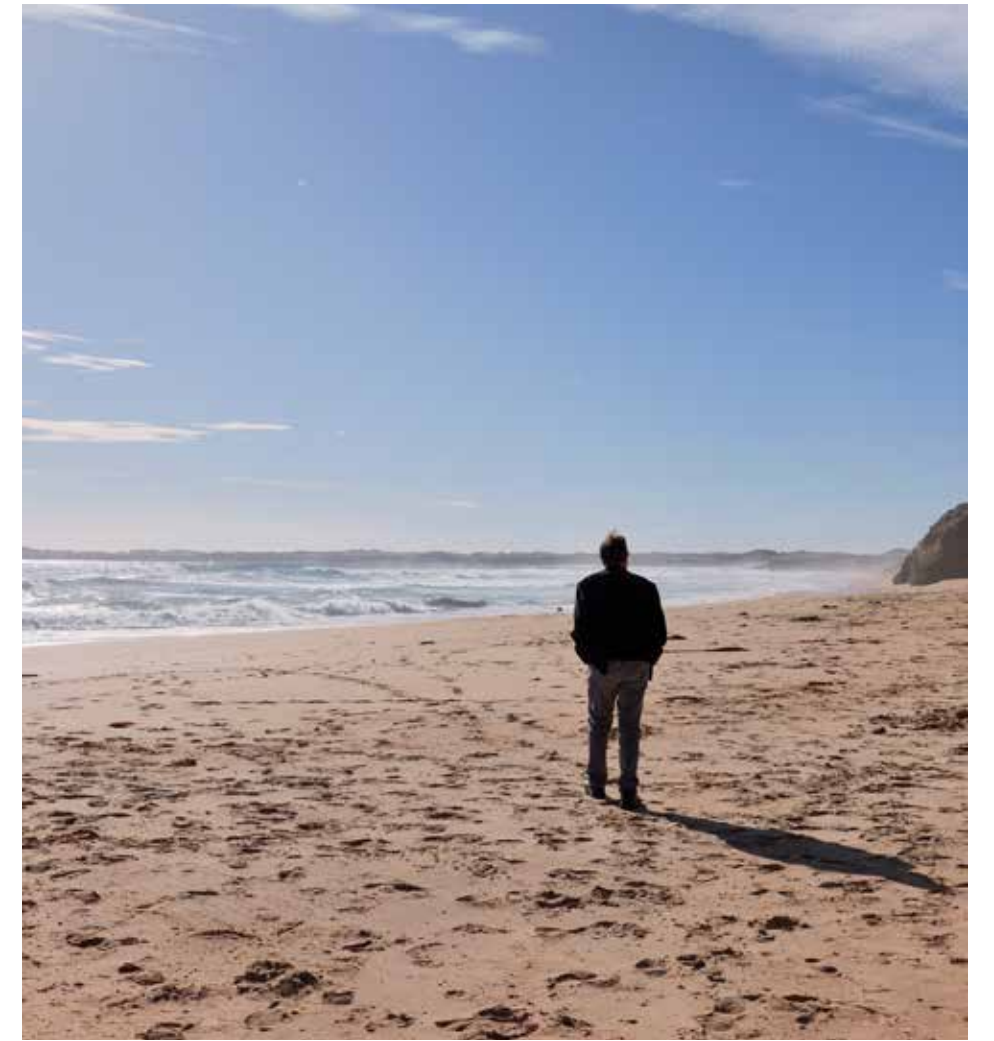
**"WHEN JOHN DIED IT CHANGED MY LIFE."**



Bryan envisages he'll spend half the year there and half here, most likely in Castlemaine where his daughter lives, explaining he can't ever imagine living in Australia full-time "because of the culture". "I'm shocked at the cost of living here. What I'm paying for a loaf of bread by comparison, I shake my head. I can live more cheaply in Morocco. You don't want to be one of those boring expats and dump on the country, but we do some dumb things here. It sounds like a whinge, but I'm questioning, how did we get here? It wasn't like this three years ago. There's an attitude here of 'oh well!'"

He says the cultural differences between Australia and Morocco are stark. "The whole Islamic culture is different," says Bryan, who speaks a little Arabic, but not the local language. "Tragically in this country we don't ever learn anything about the Arab world and if we did, we'd be wiser about events we get involved in. You have contact with people all the time there and here people are too busy. The people are very friendly and funny, a wonderful sense of humour. The longer you stay there the more you see their depth and fortitude."

Bryan says he is an atheist ("if I could figure how to turn water into wine Dan Murphy's would be in trouble") and yet no one in the Islamic country has asked



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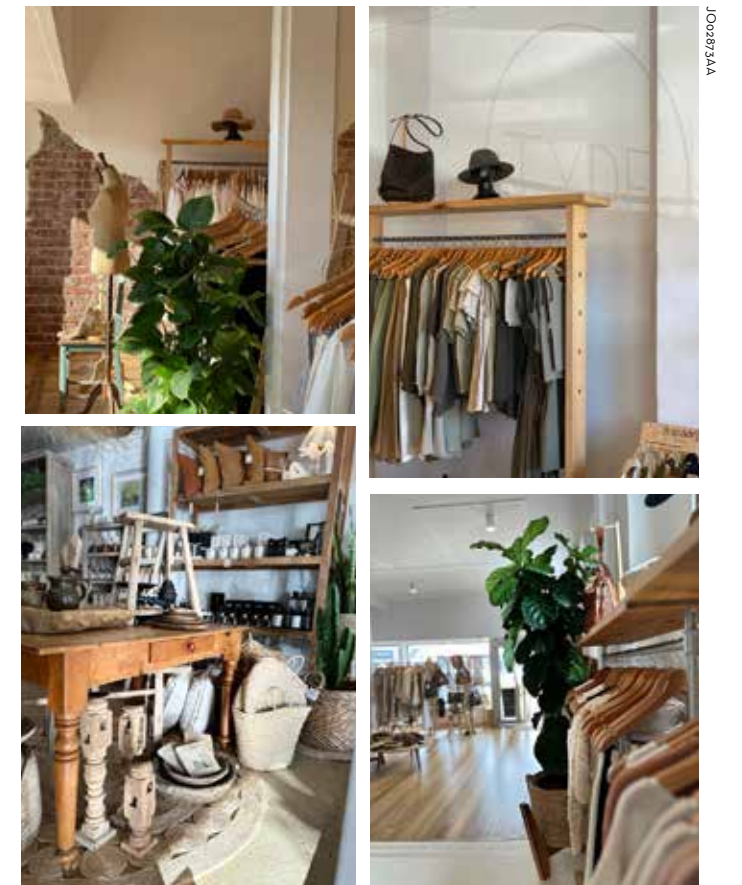
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So, following John's death, Bryan left Australia and moved to Morocco, Africa. Tangier to be precise. "I got off the plane at Casablanca airport and no one knew me," he recalls, explaining the self-imposed separation was "healing". The seventy-six-year-old has notched up roughly three years in the Islamic port city that overlooks Europe ("I can see Spain from the end of my street").

Tangier is now the closest thing to home for Bryan, who only returned to Australia last year for the wedding of his son, and to perform his show *Road to Tangier: A Satirist's Journey*, including performances at Berninnet.

*Road to Tangier* is a multi-media production for Bryan – who has appeared in films such as *The Castle* – which

includes a question-and-answer session. "Normally I get a question about John, and I can talk about him with the audience," says Bryan, reflecting on the relationship with his co-collaborator on ABC TV's *Clarke and Dawe* segment.

"I have now dealt with what I needed to deal with. I'm fine with it and I talk about it in the performance. Our relationship with the audience is not celebrity stuff at all. John and I ran away from that. The audience has travelled and they're smart."

Tangier may seem random, but for Bryan it was a natural extension to his travels through Türkiye and further east. He is a longtime supporter of the fight for a Palestine homeland, and he has led group tours to Eastern Europe, Jordan

and Syria, at one point travelling to the latter just before the civil war. "The more I went east the more I was fascinated," he says, adding that five of his uncles fought in Syria during the war.

As for Morocco, the introduction came four years ago through his friend, former ABC broadcaster Sandy McCutcheon, who offered Bryan his house in Fez. "Sandy lives in Fez with his wife and they offered me the use of their house when they came back to Australia for a month. Another friend suggested Tangier. She said to me we were made for each other. She was right. There's something in the air in Tangier. A bit of magic. Because I grew up in Port Adelaide, I'm attracted to the sea. I'm not very good inland. Water is in me."

about his religion. “I do have a faith but I’m not sure what it’s called. It’s about acts. If I was to go down a religious path it would be Islam because of the giving and sharing.”

It was precisely this faith and community spirit that shone when Bryan suffered a “massive” heart attack in early 2023 while in Tangier, requiring an emergency triple bypass. “I had no warning. It happened quickly. By luck – my Moroccan friends call it Allah – I was not at home alone but at an art opening when a woman there saved my life. If you’re going to have a heart attack, do it in Tangier because the cardiologist was brilliant and very funny, explaining the surgery was not done in a tent in the Sahara with camels out the back.”

Bryan recovered (“I’m fine now”) with considerable help and kindness from a local family, who he now describes as his “Moroccan family”. The family’s only income is from the twenty-eight-year-old eldest sister, who looks after her two younger sisters and brother, and mother, and who recently lost her job. Bryan has been working to see if he can sponsor the family to come to Australia, but in the meantime he is fundraising to support the two younger siblings through university.

Extraordinarily, he explains *Road to Tangier: A Satirist’s Journey* is being performed as the key fundraiser. Fittingly the performance explains how he ended up in Tangier, “via Syria and Jordan” and

**“I GOT OFF THE PLANE AT CASABLANCA AIRPORT AND NO ONE KNEW ME,” HE RECALLS, EXPLAINING THE SELF-IMPOSED SEPARATION WAS “HEALING”.**

his encounters with the culture and people of the country.

“Hopefully at the end people have a little bit of a different view of Syria, Jordan and Morocco. Because the cardiologist was right – people in the west think of the country as tents and camels. Australia sits

next door to the world’s largest Islamic country and there’s a sense of us versus them and we’re better than them. If you aren’t taught anything differently at school, that’s what you’ll think. But as the saying goes, I never let my schooling get in the way of my education.”

Bryan admits he increasingly despairs at the state of global politics and public discourse but is not tempted to return to TV satire because “you can’t satirise people better than they are doing themselves”.

Nor would he ever be a politician. “That is why people were so upset when John Clarke died because we were basically there on their behalf and saying what they thought. It was a special relationship. Until I come up with a better idea, all I can do is support people like the Tangier family. Money given to help the younger siblings is better than money to a charity because I know it will result in something.

“I can’t fix Gaza; I can’t change politics. What can you do? You can work your turf.”

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From fresh food to crafty treats, the island's markets will satisfy every craving.

### BASS MARKET

– third Saturday of the month, 8am – 1pm, 2 Bass School Road, Bass.

A community focused market with local produce and stalls, arts, crafts, handmade merchandise and delicious cakes, bread and preserves.

### CHURCHILL ISLAND MARKETS

– first Saturday of every month, 8am – 1pm.

Showcasing the some of the best local produce from Phillip Island and Gippsland, grab a coffee while you browse and after, take a stroll through the historic grounds.

### CORINELLA COMMUNITY MARKET

– second Saturday of the month, 9am – 1pm, Harold Hughes Reserve, cnr Smythe and Balcombe streets, Corinella.

Bring the family and the dog (on a lead) and enjoy time out with fantastic goods including fresh produce, arts and crafts, garden stuff, coffee and a sausage sizzle. Indoor and outdoor stalls.

### COWES ISLAND CRAFT MARKET

– second Saturday of each month, 9am – 2pm, St Philip's Parish Hall, 102 Thompson Avenue, Cowes.

The market's theme is Make, Bake and Grow. You will find a large range of products from local producers and crafts people. Profits from the market



are returned for local community needs.

### COWES MARKET ON CHURCH

– fourth Saturday of each month, 9am – 2pm, St Philip's Parish Hall, 102 Thompson Avenue, Cowes.

Plants, produce, clothing, crafts and the famous "trash and treasure" shed, as well as hot drinks and food.

### GRANTVILLE COMMUNITY MARKET

– first Sunday of the month, 8am – 1pm, Grantville Rec Reserve.

Fresh produce and over a hundred stalls, including second hand collectables, antiques, food and clothing. Wet weather can make the reserve unusable, so if in doubt, check the market's Facebook page.

### ON THE LAWN MARKET, NEWHAVEN

– third Sunday of each month, 9am – 2pm, Newhaven Primary School, 22 School Avenue.

Hosted by the local primary school, the Newhaven makers and growers market features a range of fresh produce, food, crafts and goods, with everything from honey, vegetables and fruit to candles or baked treats, as well as live entertainment.

There are regular markets at Archies Creek Hall, Inverloch, Kongwak, Jumbunna, Loch, Leongatha, Wonthaggi and Koonwarra. Check [www.visitbasscoast.com.au/events/markets](http://www.visitbasscoast.com.au/events/markets)

For the latest on local news and events, read the Phillip Island & San Remo Advertiser, out Wednesdays, or online at [pisra.com.au](http://pisra.com.au)

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BY SALLY O'NEILL  
PHOTOS: STEPH THORNBORROW

# Soul surrier



Surfing and skating run in the blood of Steve Ulula Parker – it’s all about moving, floating through time and space.

Each night, as the sun sets on Anzacs Beach at Cape Woolamai, the rust-red sculpture created by proud Boonwurrung, Yorta Yorta and Erub (Torres Strait Islander) man Steve Ulula Parker glows – creating a magical window out from Millowl (Phillip Island) into the eternity of Sea Country – the perfect expression of his spiritual connection to the waves.

Living on Millowl for almost twenty-five years, Steve feels a strong connection to the community he’s an integral part of. “I think the island surfing community is very in touch – they are more like our mob, who have always been the outcast,” said Steve. “I’ve got to know a lot of the older locals over the years and they have the same outlook and are in tune with Mother Nature. They can see the impact that everything has on our planet.”

Steve holds an important place in Victorian surfing and has seen the industry “at a very deep level”. He’s worked as a surf coach and at Island Surfboards, with Surfing Victoria for seventeen years establishing and running the Indigenous Surfing Program and was site manager at the renowned Bells

Beach contest – even securing a wild card to compete twice, which he describes as “pretty daunting”.

All this success is testament to his strength and spirit along the winding life journey that led him to surfing, and his rich life on Millowl. Born in Naarm (Melbourne), he was adopted by Alison and John Parker. “My birth mum had me when she was fifteen back in 1977, and as a black girl that young, I was taken away. We reunited when I was ten and have been in touch ever since. I feel honoured with my family ties – from my adoptive family to my real family, and the connection that extends through Victoria and up to Torres Strait Islands.”

His early memories are of old surfboards hanging in the shed, surfing photos around the house and days at the beach with family. His dad was one of the bayside suburbs’ pioneering surfers. “He was a chippy and surfed out of Point Leo – he and a mate were shaping boards even before the legendary Trigger Brothers began in 1970.”

The family lived in Buln Buln – place of the Lyrebird – putting them squarely between the snow of Mt Baw Baw and the coast – with lots of asphalt in between – and his life centered firmly around board culture. “Skating, snowboarding

and surfing go hand in hand,” said Steve from his sunny backyard complete with a full-size half pipe that has helped to shape local champion skaters like his own son Leon. “Skateboarding was the closest thing to surfing for us and has been a major part of my life and journey.”

As a teenager his first surf at Shoreham with his dad began a lifelong obsession. He and mates made the effort to get down to the beach as often as possible, asking for rides and then in their own cars. His neighbour, an outdoor education teacher, knew he loved surfing and skating and always invited him to surf camps with the older kids. “I was pretty honoured to be a part of that,” said Steve.

He left school at Year 11 to take up a building apprenticeship in Queensland where he spent most of his pay chasing waves and making it a mission to surf as much of the coast as possible. “I loved the challenge of getting to the beach and being with the ocean – it keeps you fit. Being Torres Strait Islander along with Yorta Yorta who are river people and Boonwurrung – I have lots of ties to water and the ocean.”

After he finished his apprenticeship, he went to Western Australia for twelve months, including a stint on Christmas Island, before heading back to Naarm



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and skating and surfing with mates. After seeing firsthand what being a chippy does to your body in the long run, he started to look for a lifestyle change and chose Millowl for the consistency of its waves. “There are forty-three breaks you can surf – so you can get the right conditions for every mood.”

He’d always been really excited to see other blackfellas in magazines and out in the surf. If he spotted a board with an Aboriginal flag, he’d paddle over to say hi and got to know deadly local surfers like Anthony Hume and Rangī Pito. Mate Rory

Thomas encouraged him to join a surf coaching course with some of the island’s and state’s best including Anthony, Rangī, Mick Lowe, Luke Hodge, Black Cat, Luke Archibald, Steve Noble and Sandy Ryan.

He then worked for Island Surfboards, as a coach, doing ding repairs and also shaping boards for himself and a few mates. Then, a new opportunity led him further into his own personal cultural journey. Max Wells from Surfing Victoria told the local boys about some funding

### **HIS EARLY MEMORIES ARE OF OLD SURFBOARDS HANGING IN THE SHED**

available to run a catchment program for Indigenous surfers. They decided they could help as coaches and mentors and then Steve found himself running the newly established Victorian Indigenous Surf Association. “I think our first budget was twelve hundred dollars, and with that we ran a catchment program in Warrnambool and Torquay and just got mob into surfing and then ran the first Victorian Indigenous Surfing Championships down at Warrnambool.”

He headed the landmark program for seventeen years, building it up to be the strongest Indigenous surf program in the country at the time. He worked with his mob to bridge the gap of learning to swim, getting into a wetsuit and out in the surf and brought together the first Australian Indigenous Surfing Titles. “We created a pathway for our mob and opened that door for them. I’m proud of that. The program is still going to this day because it’s about passing on surfing knowledge and coaching and making it self-sustainable.”

Steve also began integrating his culture into surfing through art, painting decals on surfboards and skateboards. The first surfboard he painted in 2001 took eight hours. “I remember Hoges telling me that I somehow had to speed it up because it wasn’t going to be sustainable!”

Along with running the Indigenous Surfing Program, being the site manager for Bells Beach contest each year was a lot of fun and hard work. From day one he knew he had to give his team a surf when the waves were pumping – or no work would get done. “It was best to just get the surf out of our system and then work hard. We ended up calling ourselves the Bells Beach Dogs because we worked like dogs,” he laughed. “Bells was a full community event back then, now the soul is getting ripped out of it.”

His Country kept calling, so he decided to leave Surfing Victoria and completed a cultural heritage and land management course. This, combined with living and working on his own Country of Millowl where he has strong traditional ties, made him more connected and stronger in his cultural journey.

Cape Woolamai produces some of his favourite waves, but Steve votes Surfies Point as home to his top island break – maybe because it’s just eight hundred metres down the road from his house.



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## STEVE BEGAN INTEGRATING HIS CULTURE INTO SURFING THROUGH ART...

“The island’s beaches give you options – there’s left hand beaches, barrelling beaches, and then you’ve got the little bay on the right-hand side of the Point, which produces fantastic little barrelling waves. On bigger swells, when the sand’s right, it can really produce some amazing waves.”

He says the island is a healing place and invites people to learn and experience more through his business Millowl Dreaming where he teaches culture, creates art and performs. “People need to tune into their own murrin marrup (body and spirit). The land has been walked on for thousands of years and the more you connect in a deeper way to Country, the more Country and the Ancestors will show you. I believe our songlines are still here, it’s about bringing them back in this part of Country where they have been lost. That’s something I want to make sure I’ve been a part of before I go to the Dreamtime.”

Steve is deeply concerned about the natural environment and changing tide of politics. He asks us to walk softly on and care for Country and learn more about the true history of the nation and not simply believe the media hype and undeserved negative press about his people. “Simple things like picking up the plastics and rubbish you see at the beach can help a lot.”

Luckily, living on the island, he can always escape and find inspiration from the ocean.

“When you’re out in the surf, you’re free, you don’t think about anything else but catching that wave. Sitting on that horizon, you’re in rest and looking for that next wave. One of the Elders of our surfing culture, Robbie Page, always said that you get to paint your picture on that wave, like an artist, and everybody has a different picture to paint.”



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# Gather round, let me tell you a story

The Island Story Gatherers literary festival from July 25 - 27, is shaping up to be one of their best events ever.

Following the format of the 2024 event, the Phillip Island Festival of Stories will open with a special film screening at Berninneit in Cowes.

On Saturday and Sunday, Berninneit will transform into a literary hub. Already locked in for the sixth incarnation of the festival is performer and former ABC radio presenter Sammy J, cartoonist and artist Judy Horacek, and award-winning indigenous authors and activists Tony Birch and Marcia Langton.

Making a welcome return to Phillip Island, is former resident (and Premiership football coach) Beau Vernon, talking about his wheelchair rugby Olympic medal and his Commonwealth Games campaign. Joining the lineup is CEO and Founder of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and cookbook author Kon Karapanagiotidis, with more guest speakers to be announced.

A new addition to the festival format is an artisan market place: The Art of Being Unique, at Berninneit. Open all weekend, this exhibition showcasing local artists



will include jewellery, metalwork, glass, ceramics, mosaics, paintings, photography, woodwork, textiles, floral arrangements, and more.

Tickets are on sale from late May, with individual sessions, day tickets and weekend passes available. Stay tuned for more updates. [www.pifestivalofstories.com](http://www.pifestivalofstories.com)

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BY ELEANOR MCKAY  
PHOTOS: STEPH THORNBORROW

# The island's design inspiration

DESIGNERS ANITA BELIA AND FIONA BLANDFORD  
HAVE TURNED THEIR LOVE OF PHILLIP ISLAND INTO  
A SERIES OF INSPIRATIONAL T-SHIRTS.

The brains behind the label “Everything is fine, Nothing is fine”, two years ago Anita and Fiona launched a new line, Souvie Tees, inspired by the beaches (and wildlife) of the island.

Launching a t-shirt line might not seem like the obvious choice for the two women, who met in Byron Bay twenty years ago, while studying at university.

Fiona had been travelling overseas for three years and was studying at Southern Cross University, when she met Anita. The pair immediately gelled but it took two decades before that connection created a business.

Together they bring a formidable set of skills and experience to “Everything is fine, Nothing is fine”. Aside from their photographic, artistic and graphic design skills, they’ve worked in media (Anita as Art Director at The Age) and the environment (Fiona as community organiser for Birdlife Australia) and the label reflects both their skills, their passion for the environment, with a dash of music and travel thrown in for good measure.

“Another influence in our design process comes from our love of music, album art and live gigs,” explained Fiona. “We love band tees and the feeling that the merch punctuates a point in time and place, like a great holiday tee.” The Souvie Tees label combines all this with a family connection to Phillip Island.

Anita’s parents owned a house on the island for decades, and she has endless memories of holidaying here as a child. Her parents, Odino and Vilma built an A-frame house in Sunderland Bay back in 1969, which became the family retreat and weekender.

In 1977, the family bought a house in Rhyll near the marina, where Odino could further indulge his love of fishing. “He was deeply involved in the local community, especially with the Italian network,” Anita recalled. “He formed friendship with Eddie from Isola and Rosa and Pino.” In fact, Vilma, a talented seamstress, sewed Rosa’s wedding dress.

Anita said her father built Rhyll’s first tennis courts and took part in many local activities. “He was always ready to

contribute, and stay involved,” she said.

Two years ago, Fiona’s parents moved to Phillip Island from Brisbane. “We used to holiday along the South Gippsland coast from Traralgon and the Latrobe Valley, where Dad worked on the power station Loy Yang,” Fiona said. “Mum and Dad have fond memories of camping at the penguins in the 1960s when they lived in Melbourne.” Now in their eighties, many say they migrated “in the wrong direction” but Fiona said the cooler weather has suited them.

In recent years, the women both found themselves spending more and more time here. “We’ve made Phillip Island our official second home,” Fiona said. “We now have a community on the island and all along to Inverloch, Fish Creek and Foster, where my brother and his family live. We are part of a migration from Melbourne’s inner north back to family roots and holiday memories.”

The idea to design a unique range for Phillip Island had been bubbling for several years. Spending extended periods on the island post-Covid, the women



decided to give something new a try. “In my previous community organising role, I was flying around the country, visiting a lot of small towns, and seeing the same designs with different names on them,” said Fiona.

She and Anita were keen to literally “keep it local” and create unique designs that really reflected a specific area. They also wanted designs reflecting their concerns for the environment and native wildlife. “We had this idea to do fresh designs and push the things we love, but in a different manner,” Anita explained.

The pair decided to test their concept on Phillip Island, basing their designs on popular beaches. The initial run of t-shirts was small, and sold quickly at local markets. The immediate response was great Fiona said. “People were blown away; they were buying multiple tees.” The designs include Cape Woolamai, Smiths Beach/YCW, Ventnor, Cat Bay and Surf Beach. Anita said the t-shirts tapped into the natural pride of island residents, and the beach rivalries as well.

“We do occasionally get people who say, ‘I couldn’t wear a Cape Woolamai t-shirt, I’m from Surf Beach’. Some people have asked me not to put certain places on the t-shirt, because they don’t want anyone to know about it,” said Anita. “We have to respect that, and keep the locals’ secrets as much as we can. We are trying to preserve things. We like to go to beaches where there’s not a lot of people. We’re totally conscious of not revealing all the island’s secrets.”

As well as the island’s beaches, native wildlife are stars of the Souvie Tees range. One of this year’s new designs “Feeling pretty good”, features a Cape Barron goose. “As a conservationist, I think we need to



celebrate the success stories. Because there’s not many,” said Fiona. “The Cape Barron Goose is a success story. It came back from the brink of extinction. I think there were six breeding pairs introduced onto Phillip Island in 1984.

“We also wanted to tap into surviving in general, because some of our tees have undertones of life post-Covid. We wanted a tee with a bird with open wings, letting out the biggest honk – being a survivor and feeling pretty great about it.”

Other wildlife designs include koalas, echidnas and wombats, which are popular online sellers. “We wear so many

American t-shirts of places we’ve never been to. I thought, wouldn’t it be great if we were proud of our animals, spaces and places,” said Anita.

“Many of these places are getting really destroyed. Maybe in a small way, this will make us think about it again. We need to start wearing our own places with pride.”



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BY EDMUND COLEMAN  
PHOTOS: STEPH THORNBORROW

# From shipwreck to shipwright

ROBERT MILLARD WAS CAPSIZED AND LOST AT SEA FOR THREE WEEKS NEARLY FIFTY YEARS AGO, AND HAS NOW BUILT THE REINCARNATION OF THE BOAT HE MANAGED TO SAIL HOME AGAINST ALL ODDS.

When Robert Millard began building a ClassGlobe 5.80 in his shed in Cape Woolamai nearly three years ago, less than fifty existed in the world. The hand-built yacht, capable of global circumnavigation, is now docked at the Newhaven Marina.

The boat, *Witchetty III*, is the namesake of the vessel Robert sailed in his first Trans-Tasman solo yacht race from New Plymouth to Mooloolaba in 1978. Although scheduled to begin after the cyclone season, disaster soon struck. As Tropical Cyclone Hal loomed above the north Queensland coast, and a low-pressure system pushed across the Tasman Sea, Robert found himself in sustained south-westerly winds of over fifty-knots, or ninety-two km/h, for several days. Long before the days of GPS systems or EPIRBs (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon), *Witchetty* was capsized. Her mast was snapped, her motor defunct,

and, what limited radio capabilities *Witchetty* had, were completely shot.

Lost at sea for three weeks, and presumed dead by those on shore, Robert constructed a small, makeshift jury rig and navigated his way three-hundred nautical miles back to the Australian coast using only sextant shots of the sun and moon.

“Look, when I saw the storm approaching, I was pretty sanguine about it,” Robert says. “I had read everything you could lay your hands on about sailing, about sailing disasters and how people in small boats had handled it. I wasn’t really frightened, because I thought the boat was seaworthy and that it would survive, and therefore I would survive.”

But soon the sea swept into a Turner-esque hellscape. “The waves were mountainous, and the wind was screaming. I had absolutely no sail up at this point. I could see from the way these big, mountainous seas were breaking it

was almost only a matter of time before the boat was capsized.”

When *Witchetty* was rolled over and dismasted, Robert was strapped in below deck. Knowing the mast was snapped, he clambered out onto the deck to cut the mast loose from its stainless-steel rigging. “One of the big risks when you lose your mast is that it is still attached to the rigging and might punch a hole in your boat. So cutting it loose was the first thing I did. Once I’d done that, I went into a sort of survival mode, just hiding away until everything settled down. I was frightened I was going to die, and I felt a bit angry about it really.”

Robert spent two days hunkered down in *Witchetty*, waiting for the storm to pass and the sea to calm. “It gradually became fairly calm, and at that point my spirit started to become a bit more positive, and I started setting about making what’s called a jury rig by making an A frame from two spinnaker poles.”

“THE WAVES WERE MOUNTAINOUS, AND THE WIND WAS SCREAMING.”





**LOST AT SEA FOR  
THREE WEEKS, AND  
PRESUMED DEAD BY  
THOSE ON SHORE...**

A jury rig is like something out of Robinson Crusoe; a third the size of a regular sail and much more difficult to manoeuvre. And while the storm had subsided, the boat was almost half full of water.

"I can attest to the correctness of the axiom that the best bilge pump is a frightened man with a bucket," laughs Robert. "All the fresh food was ruined, and all the labels had been washed off the cans. Because I didn't know how long it would take me to reach land, I was rationing myself to one can per day. Baked beans was a good day, beetroot was a bad one."

Two other sailors were caught in the storm of the infamous 1978 Single Handed Trans-Tasman Yacht Race. Bill Belcher became stranded on Middleton Reef, before launching himself into his lifeboat and being miraculously rescued near the equator some twenty-eight days later, a survival tale published in his book: *Shipwreck on Middleton Reef*. John Jury, the third sailor to be caught in the storm, was also rescued.

After three weeks at sea, Robert was able to navigate his way back to Mooloolaba. "By the time I made first contact with another boat, I'd known exactly where I was because of the

lighthouse markers on the coast of Australia. I was encountered by a fishing boat, and the fisherman came up to me and said: 'are you one of those mad bastards in that race from New Zealand?'

"I said 'yes,' and he just slung me over a bag of prawns and a bottle of beer. He reported my position to the Mooloolaba Yacht Club, who sent out a boat to escort me the last eighty miles or so."

While the 1978 Trans-Tasman Yacht Race was Robert's first and only solo ocean passage yacht race, he crewed as a highly-sought after navigator in several other boats – before the advent of GPS – throughout the seventies and eighties, including six Sydney to Hobart races, and a race from Sydney to Vanuatu.

Robert and his wife Claire moved to Cape Woolamai in 2007, quickly transitioning to full-time life on the island, six years after completing a two-year circumnavigation of the globe together. Robert, who is now in his eighties, said building the ClassGlobe 5.80 by hand was a "herculean" task. While no neophyte when it comes to woodworking, having taught classes at the Wonthaggi Woodcrafters, the doctor and psychiatrist by profession had never worked with epoxy or fibreglass.

"The building sequence involved

first constructing each of the frames, then standing them on the strong back, spaced exactly as they were to be placed in the hull, and then attaching them all by stringers, made from sustainable Australian hardwood.

"Although I had worked for several years building furniture as a hobby, I'd never worked with epoxy before and never with fibreglass. Because it was a steep learning curve, my first attempts were amateurish, but they improved as time went on."

Despite not working with the materials before, the boat has now taken several trips out in the Bass Strait. Although Robert muses that his days of long ocean passages may be behind him, *Witchetty III* will certainly circumnavigate the island and sail around Bass Strait.

The impetus to build the boat came during Covid, when Robert began missing the subtle, natural interaction with wind and wave which sailing offers. With help throughout much of the build from his friend Rohan Gaylard, *Witchetty III* was berthed late last year.

Robert said his wife Claire had also been a great support throughout the build, having lived close to the coast throughout much of her life and well accustomed to the ocean. On their circumnavigation of



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the world, Robert and Claire made port at a small island in the north of the Maldives, inaccessible to regular jet-setting tourists with allowances made for small yachts.

"Generally, the Maldives is a very sought after tourist destination, but they channel their tourists and often don't allow them to mingle with the local population. So it was a great privilege for myself, and Claire to be welcomed onto this small island, with a population of about two hundred. It is a very remote part of the world."

After spending a couple of days on the island, Robert, whose profession as a doctor was "let slip", was alerted to a man who was said to be dying. "I was hauled ashore to go and see this bloke who was dying. He was quite old, and moribund. Shallow breathing, with very poor circulation. I examined him and made the observation that he had poor entry into one of his lungs, and that the other was alright."

"It could have been cancer of the

lung, or tuberculosis, something that was pretty well beyond treatment for me. But it also could have been pneumonia." Robert started the man on a course of antibiotics, and by the fourth day it was "like he'd risen from the dead."

"They weren't exposed to western medicine or anything like that, so they were all very excited. His daughter who'd been looking after him was very grateful, and prepared dinner for us that night."

Upon spending five years in Melbourne after their return to Australian shores, Robert and Claire moved to the island for its natural beauty, and their shared mutual love of the ocean.

Now resting on calm waters in the Newhaven Marina, *Witchetty III* floats as a testament to survival, indomitable spirit, and a man who has never stopped seeking out the next adventure.



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Andrew Lidsey first discovered Phillip Island nearly fifty years ago and fell in love with the place back then. He says he still enjoys it as much today.

"I'm lucky to live at Cape Woolamai and have the beach breaks of Woolies in my backyard. Surfing and photography have been a lifelong passion and capturing ocean moments is still a thrill, whether it's a sunrise over Cleeland Bight or a storm brewing over Bass Strait."

A few years back Andrew purchased his first camera water housing. "From then on everything changed for me, with the thrill of being in the thick of the action. Swimming, negotiating rips and currents while getting in close enough to the surfers to get a good shot without getting run over is both challenging

and rewarding at the same time. I enjoy the interaction with the surfers and the hoots and laughs that are all part of it."

This shot of Phillip Island local Abbey Clarke was taken at Cape Woolamai surf beach a few years ago.

"Abbey had just caught a wave and was paddling back out to the line up for another," Andrew explains. "She paddled past me and I captured this shot. I like the water splash from her hands and the soft light from the summer sunset. I know Abbey's mum Lisa has said this is her favourite shot of her daughter. To me it feels so relaxed and calming ... where else would you rather be?"

ANDREW LIDSEY  
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# A picture of health

MEL BEYNON IS WELL KNOWN AROUND PHILLIP ISLAND, FROM OFFSHORE THEATRE TO PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARKS. BUT IT IS HER VULNERABILITY AND HONESTY — AND THE PRACTICES THAT NURTURE HER — THAT ARE TRANSFORMING HEARTS, MINDS AND BODIES.

It would be easy for Mel Beynon to curate an Instagrammable life. You know the ones. Beautiful person in yoga pants, living a beautiful life by the beach, surfboard tucked under the arm. A party girl, champagne glass aloft, surrounded by beautiful friends.

As true as this picture may be, Mel is the first to confess she has little interest in social media, beyond the occasional post and photo for her Mindful Connections yoga and meditation classes. The Ventnor local is far more interested in authenticity, to share unvarnished experiences from her forty-eight years on the planet, and maybe, possibly, along the way help someone.

“Why yoga? Why health? Why breath work? Meditation?” the mother-of-two wrote on her social media page last year. “Because before I started thinking about and doing any of these things my life was

pretty crazy and chaotic. I had chronic psoriasis, a ripping drinking and drug habit, couldn't hold down a relationship, couldn't make a freaking decision about anything. Just bounced from one shit show to another ... Could not handle, understand or even recognise my own emotions, let alone other people's.

“I lived in a dizzying, disassociated, disconnected, fight and flight state ... running, running, running from everything apart from anything that would numb me or distract me. Ultimately, I was running from my pain and my past, myself.” Anyone reading the post would have to conclude that kind of experience is probably a common one, but such honesty is less common.

Mel is well known around Phillip Island. She first moved here in 2001 to work as a waitress at Pino's. Then she was

manager at Mad Cowes, a crew member at Wildlife Coast Cruises for about five years, a ranger at Phillip Island Nature Parks for another five years and now works a few days a week at Pollyanna clothing in Cowes.

Her partner Beau Fahnle is also a former ranger and now works for Parks Victoria on French Island in cat eradication, while her two sons Gus and Manny are both at Bass Coast College.

If you haven't met her in any of the above, then you may recognise her from the stage, performing in three Offshore Theatre productions, while she is also on the committee of the island's amateur theatre group and runs their publicity. Mel is also part of a low-profile group, the Mid-Life Mermaids, who learnt to surf from Girls on Board and head out to the ocean a couple of times a month to catch a wave.

But Mel is best known for her Mindful Connections work. That includes running two yoga classes per week at Health on Course in Cowes, as well as seasonal events every four months with colleagues. She has also recently started online yoga classes for her school buddy (“fellow trash bag”) Danni Carr, who runs the highly successful How I Quit Alcohol retreats and podcast (Mel even recently featured on a podcast explaining her road to sobriety).

So significant has yoga practice been in her life that Mel divides her life into before yoga, and after yoga (“it sounds corny”, she admits). And yes, she can feel the eyeroll many people make in response to meditation and yoga, which some still consider to be the stuff of fringe hippies. “People think meditation and yoga is woo-woo, but it helps me live a better life. If you have stress or go through the day

clenching your jaw, then this is about balancing the nervous system, brain and overall health, to live more genuinely, compassionately and kindly.

“There's a lot of science around the benefits of supporting a healthy nervous system. Twenty years ago, the world was so different around mental health, trauma and healing. Now if you go to the GP, they'll ask if you're stressed and suggest yoga. What we do on the mat is about training for how you live life off the mat. When the kids are screaming, the bills are piling up and your partner is being a dill, instead of you acting out in ways you don't want to, it's about using the tools to come into the moment and diffuse the situation so there's less harm to yourself and those around you.”

Mel's experience could convince even the most sceptical. She grew up

in Castlemaine with a “semi-traumatic childhood”, living through her parents' “messy” divorce and the resulting trauma, and began drug and alcohol use at a young age. “I can see now I was addicted to a lot of things,” she adds.

At sixteen, a nervous breakdown led to a three-month stint in hospital to be treated for the painful skin condition psoriasis, as well as arthritis spreading in her joints. “We ignore the body until something goes wrong. It whispers before it screams.”

As a young adult Mel searched for answers, desperate for a “magic wand”. It was just after she arrived on Phillip Island that she found the solution. She started yoga classes in San Remo, attracted because on the “surface” Madonna practiced it. But it quickly went much deeper.





*"WE IGNORE  
THE BODY UNTIL  
SOMETHING  
GOES WRONG.  
IT WHISPERS  
BEFORE  
IT SCREAMS."*

"Early on I was doing pigeon pose and I left class crying," she recalls. "After a while I told the teacher every time I leave class I cry. She just said, 'that's awesome'. In yoga they say there's 'issues in your tissues'. In other words, what happens to you in life is stored in your body, which is explored in a well-known book on trauma effects in the body, The Body Keeps Score.

"Animals in the wild release and shake, but humans tend to store their emotions, turn them into thoughts and stories and then repeat them over in a

cycle. We love to hold on to things and create stories out of it, which becomes our life story. Yoga is one way to have a release of that energy. My teacher told me when the stories come to mind during yoga, let it come and let it go, and go back to the sensations in the body."

Mel says yoga is not a magic bullet, not a pill, but can act as a circuit breaker, "a pathway to self-awareness, allowing the answers to unfold". Those early yoga classes led her to a range of new experiences, including studying Buddhism

and taking part in a ten day Vipassana retreat where participants are entirely silent, rising early to meditate all day, with small breaks.

"Vipassana is all about bringing awareness to the breath and the body in the present moment. Most people say they can't meditate. I don't think it's for everyone, such as those with mental health issues. But for other people, it's not about clearing the mind, it's about observing it, allowing it to come, but not necessarily following every thought it produces".



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*"IT'S ONLY AS  
A SOBER PERSON  
YOU REALISE  
HOW INSIDIOUS  
ALCOHOL IS."*

While on the surface Mel was exploring new practices and developing her yoga skills, deeper issues were still bubbling to the surface. In 2016 Mel, Beau and the boys moved to New Zealand for five years, where Mel gained her yoga teacher training certificate and a diploma of health (life coaching). One of the big turning points came when, while there, she decided to become sober for three months.

"Things at that time reached a boiling point and something needed to change. I was relying a lot on alcohol and loved to party and when I partied I didn't stop. If it was Christmas, for instance,

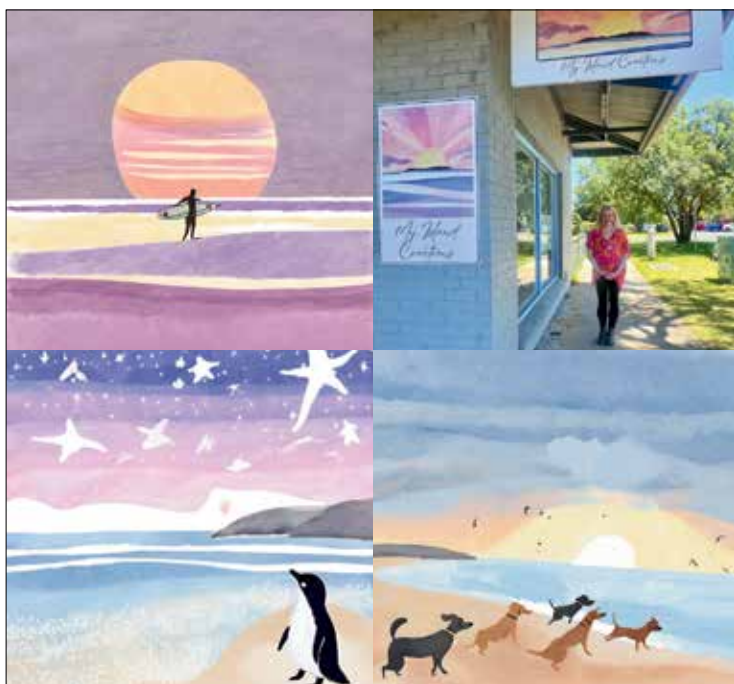
I wouldn't be thinking about the food but what champagne I would be drinking. It led to a lot of risk-taking behaviour and silly decisions. It's only as a sober person you realise how insidious alcohol is. It's a carcinogen in the same category as asbestos, yet we're so brainwashed into seeing it as the only way to celebrate and mark an occasion."

Mel says stopping drinking was easy "once I set my mind to it", especially helped by her dedicated yoga and meditation practices, explaining she has been sober for more than a year.

If the "before yoga" experience doesn't

convince sceptics, the "after yoga" surely does. It has helped to rewire her brain, bringing an acceptance and forgiveness of the past, but of course, it is part of a larger approach. "There's no magic wand to live a healthy, balanced, happy life. It's continuous, in the little choices you make every day."

For her those choices include prioritising her family. She could work harder, try to promote her yoga profile, but acknowledges "I'm more of a snail girl. I don't want stress, conflict and tension in life."



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# Watch out for wildlife

Since being released onto Phillip Island and Churchill Island, the Eastern Barred Bandicoots have really made themselves at home.

Declared extinct in the wild on mainland Australia in 2013, from the original 67 little critters released in 2017, the population is now estimated to be around 18,000

The bandicoots have established colonies on Churchill Island and the

Summerland Peninsula and have been spotted in Cape Woolamai, Sunderland Bay and Surf Beach and appear to be heading for Cowes and Rhyll, as they spread out across the island.

Unfortunately this means many are also encountering traffic, with the road toll for these endangered bandicoots also mounting

Phillip Island Nature Parks is asking everyone to slow down and be on the look

out for wildlife, "by looking for movement and eye-shine on the verges". Drivers need to be extra careful at dawn, dusk and at night, when animals are most active.

To report sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife, call Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service on 03 8400 7300 available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

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# Modelling a new career

RHYS UHLICH WAS HEADED FOR STARDOM, BUT TOOK A U-TURN BACK TO EARTH.

Rhys Ulich was perhaps a little vexed when he decided to go to Hollywood's clairvoyant-to-the-stars. The Phillip Island local's career had already been launched after being crowned winner of Channel 7's *Make Me a Supermodel* in 2008. The former teacher then moved swiftly to the small and big screens, even joining the cast of *Neighbours* and appearing in the film *Blow Back*.

Like so many, Rhys moved to Los Angeles to find his break into Hollywood but then, like so many, he was left humbled not to be instantly plucked from obscurity to stardom. "So, I went

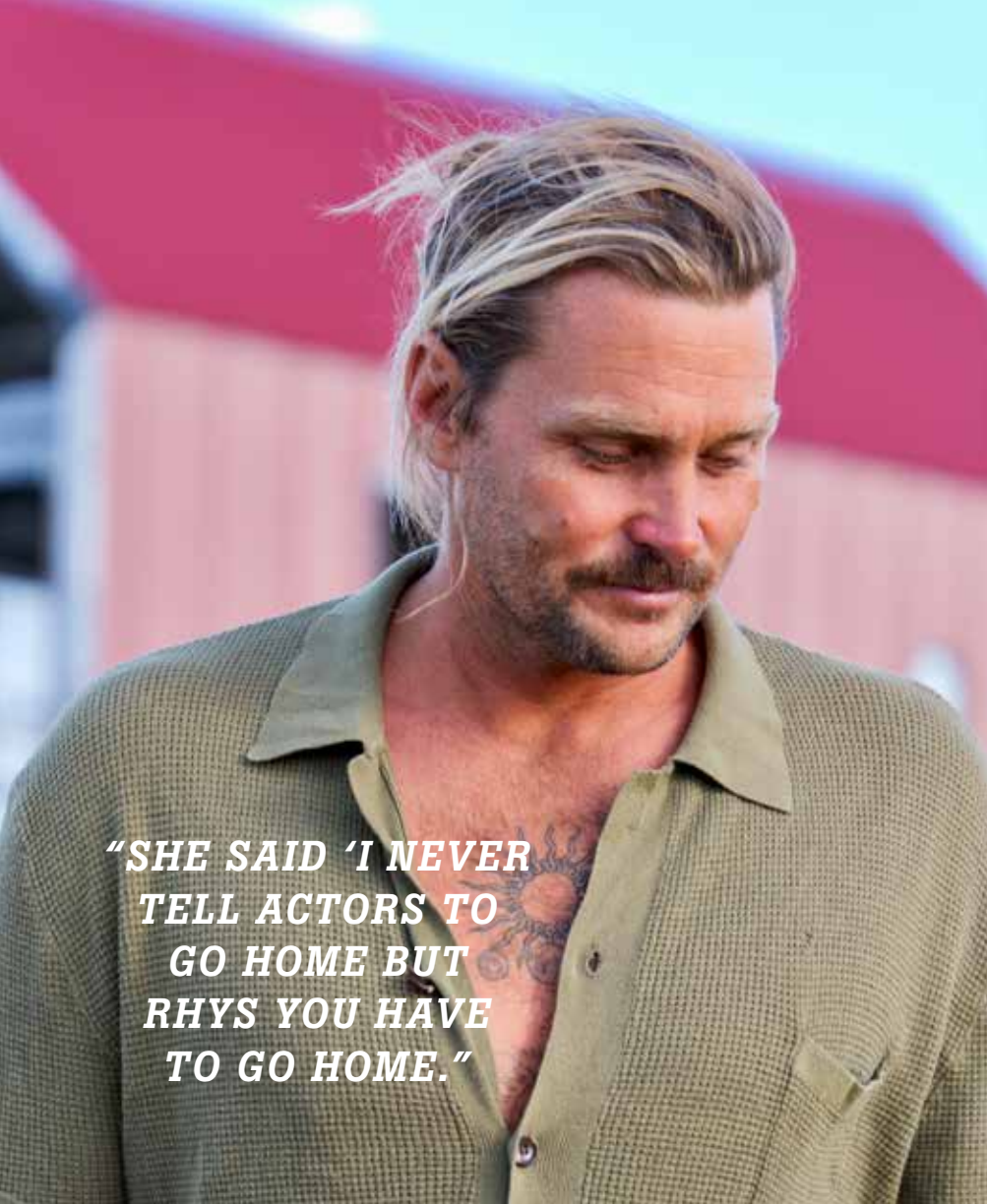
to this clairvoyant, and it turned out to be incredible," Rhys tells *The Island* magazine. "She said 'I never tell actors to go home but Rhys you have to go home. Your opportunity is not here and not acting, but to lead an organisation that could be generational'. She said 'I'd do other things so far removed from acting and it will open doors. It was the last thing my ego wanted to do. It hit me for six and I didn't want to believe it for a while.'"

In 2019, Rhys cut his losses and headed back to Australia. And it turns out the psychic was kind of right. Soon after arriving back on the island, Rhys built his first Shed House in Silverleaves, as his

family home, which he eventually sold in March last year. But the home was to launch a whole new career and open doors in the building industry.

In 2022 Rhys "spotted a gap in the market" and became the founder and director of Shed House Australia, which has nine full-time staff including five business partners. So far, the construction company – which designs homes based on the classic shed form and materials – has built twelve homes around Australia, currently building three on Phillip Island. And through 2025 there will be a massive scaling up with sixty clients in six months around Australia.





*"SHE SAID 'I NEVER TELL ACTORS TO GO HOME BUT RHYS YOU HAVE TO GO HOME.'"*

Because the buildings are delivered in kit form, they are cost efficient and easy to construct, with no wastage, which has caught the eye of the industry. Last year the Salvation Army approached Rhys and his company to develop a master plan for land holdings through Victoria to develop affordable homes, with discussions to potentially expand nationally.

"They approached us not only because we fit the price bracket but equally important, they believe the shed gable form uplifts people, with the height giving a sense of space and inspiration," the forty-one-year-old says. "It's something I do lose sleep over. I want to help people into affordable housing but know the shed system won't suit everyone and every parcel of land. I'm a worrier and a thinker. I've got a lot of responsibility now and I think twenty-four-seven on ways to improve things."

But for Rhys, who admits his mind races day and night thinking about potential projects, it is environmentally-focused construction that is currently opening doors. And in the remote rice fields of Bali, no less.

Rhys, his wife Claire and two daughters Indah and Mahli, are also in the process of building their own shed house on a half-acre block at Sunderland Bay, bought in April last year as their permanent home, currently renting next door to the property. The shed demonstrates the evolving nature of the company, with inline framing meaning there are no exposed beams, making it "more cost effective and easier to do internal fitouts".

It is the fourth house they're building in the past year or so. Houses one and two have been built on

a five-acre property at Agnes Water in Queensland, land the couple bought for a cheap price during Covid lockdown. Rhys first built a cosy, rustic tree house with an outdoor bathroom, which will be the family's escape when life gets too busy, and an Airbnb rental. More recently they also added a shipping container home, which Rhys designed. "We talk about retiring there and I have a dream of turning it into a commune, where residents pay through their trade."

House number three is his new passion project in Bali. Rhys says since he was four his family has travelled to the Indonesian province yearly and after forty-plus visits he has an "innate connection to the people and land". "I have never bought or built there because I've always seen the level of destruction happening, the western-style concrete construction."

But last year the family bought a lease on a small vacant block on a river surrounded by rice paddies in Canggu. Properties are leased in Bali for twenty-five or fifty years and Rhys says at the end of his lease his aim was to return to the land to the owner "disassembled, not an eyesore, with no environmental impact". So, he had the idea to build a demonstration home out of bamboo and Bamboo House Bali was born.

"Bamboo is the fastest growing and most sustainable building product in the world. It is fully harvestable after planting in three years, it grows in Bali and is stronger than steel and more flexible. I'm as intrigued by it as much as shed steel."

From start to finish the house took three months to build, with the bamboo weaved into a ply substrate, completed in January (2025). One month a year the



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**... LAST YEAR THE FAMILY BOUGHT A LEASE ON A SMALL VACANT BLOCK ON A RIVER SURROUNDED BY RICE PADDIES IN CANGGU.**

family will holiday in the house, and for the remainder of the year Rhys hopes it will become a model to others keen to build sustainably. "It's like the first shed house I built in Silverleaves in 2020; I don't know what will become of it, and I don't even know why I'm doing it, I just know I've got to do it. It could end up inspiring people. It's come about so quickly and easily. I'd like to show what can be done and inspire."

Rhys says he'll "probably have a nervous breakdown in six months", given all the projects he's working on. "But it's testing three different building methodologies that excites me." He acknowledges his work is also shouldered by Claire – who now works in administration for Shed House Australia – and his daughters.

"My poor wife, she just always trusts my crazy home ideas. The girls cringe a bit though and ask 'can't we just have a normal home?'. Their friends have Simonds and Metricon homes that are safe and easy, and dad is building out of bamboo. They are my harshest critics. I've been able to compromise with the Sunderland Bay shed. I want to do raw zincalume, but they say it looks like a

rocket ship, so we've now got a Hamptons style to the home and the girls are happy. Hopefully one day they'll look back and say, dad's cool."

Rhys receives the odd remark about being able to build four homes in just over a year. But he explains all four total the price of one average home, at under five hundred thousand dollars, "which is a cheap house these days". Given he is now a company man, Rhys surprisingly doesn't wear a shirt and collar, but still looks every bit the tanned, bleach blonde surfer. And yes, he still surfs daily, including at Berrys Beach, where the company is building two homes. "I need it, it's my mental escape. It clears the collateral noise."

Rhys does not build and is "not best served on the tools", but instead focuses on the big picture, such as finding efficiencies. Ultimately, he would like to merge his two careers and produce a construction and design TV show "like Grand Designs but at a budget". "There's something that drives me with this work. It feels like I have got a purpose. I like creating beauty with less. The sheds are much bigger than me now."

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*Un abbraccio (a hug)*

*Kara xoxo*

- INGREDIENTS:**
- 100g amaretti biscuits finely ground
  - 170g organic butter
  - 200g 70% dark chocolate
  - 200g plain flour
  - 350ml moscato wine (or marsala)
  - 100g sugar
  - 4 organic eggs
  - 3 pears

- METHOD:**
- Cut the pears in slices and place in a large saucepan with moscato. Simmer until the pears have absorbed the moscato and become tender (about 15 minutes).
  - Melt the chocolate in a small saucepan placed over a larger saucepan of boiling water (double boiler). When the chocolate has melted add the butter, melt, and stir until combined.
  - Whisk the eggs in a separate medium size bowl, add the sugar and whisk. Sift the flour in, add the crushed amaretti biscuits and stir to combine.
  - Add the melted chocolate mixture to the egg and flour mixture.
  - Place the mixture in a lined baking pan, and then place the pears on top.
  - Bake in a preheated oven at 180 degrees for about 35-40 minutes.



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BY SARAH HUDSON  
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# The wheel thing

*EMILY HULBERT HAS BEEN A PROFESSIONAL SOCCER PLAYER, DIVE INSTRUCTOR, WANNABE ASTRONAUT AND HIKED TO EVEREST BASE CAMP. BUT THOSE AREN'T HER BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENTS. RATHER EMILY WANTS TO HELP THOSE NOT SO PRIVILEGED, ONE WATER FILTER AT A TIME, AND THE PLANET, RIDING AROUND THE GLOBE.*

If you ever see Emily Hulbert waiting tables at Pino's Trattoria in Cowes, be sure to leave her a big tip. She certainly deserves one. Most summers for the past decade, the twenty-nine-year-old from Rhyll has waited tables not only to pay for her "bikepacking" trip around the world – yes, that's correct, riding a bike solo across the four compass points of the globe. But she has also been fundraising for her informal charity, buying water filters to distribute to impoverished families and villages she encounters on her travels, to ensure they can access clean

drinking water, with a GoFundMe page also raising funds for the cause.

"When I decided to bikepack I knew I wanted to find a way to give back. Travelling the world, you can start to feel guilty because the inequality is harsh," says Emily, who studied physics in New York after playing soccer for Melbourne Victory and winning a full sports scholarship. "I'm an incredibly privileged person with a beautiful life and so I wanted to do something, and I thought water filters would be the perfect answer."

After leaving Australian shores in





July 2024, Emily has travelled through Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, so far distributing about one hundred of the US-military approved filters, which anyone can use after a quick ten-minute lesson.

“I was at a Thai children’s home that had eighty children and each of them would drink eight three hundred millilitre plastic water bottles per day in the jungle, where there is no rubbish collection. The amount of plastic waste was huge, and I gave them two water filters and they now fill up big pans of water rather than using the bottles.”

On her travels through Lombok, Emily came across twenty families in a village who would burn plastic to boil water, so it was safe to drink. After giving each family a filter, they no longer use or burn the plastic.

Emily says one hundred per cent of donations goes to buying the water filters, which are about fifteen centimetres long

**“I’M AN INCREDIBLY PRIVILEGED PERSON WITH A BEAUTIFUL LIFE AND SO I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING.”**

and are gravity-fed to be used on tanks or buckets to remove bacteria, disease and microplastics. The Sawyer filters, which she carries in the panniers of her

bike, each cost sixty dollars. To track down the need, Emily contacts local non-government organisations or distributes as she sees the need along the way.

Emily left Australia again earlier this year, after working for the summer at Pino’s to save money for the next leg of her trip: Laos, China, across to India, Nepal and Pakistan before heading through central Asia and the Stans, including Azerbaijan, possibly Iran, through Türkiye to Europe and London by Christmas. Then it’s on to Africa, where the need for water filtration is particularly great, although she says not all countries have the same need.

Emily admits she has a fearless streak and doesn’t shy away from sleeping on beaches in her tent, loving the freedom and slow travel of bikepacking. “I’m trying to avoid flying because I think we need




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**“THE AMOUNT OF KINDNESS I HAVE RECEIVED OUTWEIGHS THE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES BY FAR.”**

to focus more on sustainable tourism. It's important to be aware and I hope to inspire others to travel sustainably and share the privilege we have in Australia. I don't judge anyone taking flights. I flew to Bali and back. But it's important to try to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as an individual, especially if there are other options to take."

Emily grew up in the Dandenongs and moved to Rhyll when her parents bought a house there ten years ago, working at Pino's and later the Smiths Beach store. Her dad is now a retired engineer who played soccer and during her childhood from the age of five he coached his daughter, leading her to play soccer for Melbourne Victory and later Melbourne City.

In 2014 the high-achieving Emily won a full scholarship to study physics at Hofstra University in New York City, focusing on astronomy and maths with an ambition to become an astronaut. Since graduating in 2018 she has recalibrated her ambitions. "There's a lot to be done on this planet before we leave it. I see my endeavours now as being more fulfilling on earth."

Instead, Emily has had her feet firmly planted on the earth, spending the large part of the past seven years travelling and "career avoiding". After university, she

rode a bike from the US state of Oregon seven hundred kilometres to Mexico, then played professional soccer for the Czech Republic for six months, backpacked around Europe, and hiked to Everest base camp (six thousand metres) in shorts and runners ("thanks to misplaced confidence and a bit of ignorance").

She topped that by becoming a dive instructor in the Canary Islands, then "starting the trajectory of humanitarian work" by volunteering for the Red Cross in Spain helping refugees integrate, learning Spanish along the way. During Covid Emily started teaching English to Asian kids online, a job she continues today (although 'job' is a loose term, given the tiny sum of money she asks).

At the end of 2023 Emily committed to her bikepacking trip after meeting a Spanish woman ("who was pure sunshine") travelling the world by bike. She worked at Pino's that summer, saving as much as possible, flew to Perth and rode to Darwin, where she took possession of a bulk shipment of water filters and started the GoFundMe page.

Emily still calls Phillip Island home and while she's only starting her multi-year travels, envisages a time she will settle down and start a career. "I know I want to work in the humanitarian landscape, to try to bring the world closer

together. I love kids and I'd like to give them as many opportunities as possible, maybe set up my own school. Part of the ride is to try to find a place. I love Indonesia and perhaps set up a youth centre there."

Emily says her bike travels have not always been sunshine, with headwinds making some days exhausting, a spider bite that knocked her for three days, skirting criminal activities and intimidating military checkpoints at border crossings. "One day was horrible. I was going over a mountain pass in Thailand with a headwind and a woman stopped and gave me a full bag of lychees. I thought 'I can't be in a bad mood now'. The amount of kindness I have received outweighs the negative experiences by far. There are so many things you hear about the world that are bad and it's easy to become sad and have a negative mindset.

"But the world is much safer than we realise, and people are much kinder than we realise. I'm incredibly privileged to have the time and money to ride around the world. I'm the luckiest person you will ever interview."

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# The whales return

This year's Island Whale Festival is on July 11-13, celebrating the annual whale migration along the Victorian coastline.

From May to September, you can spot humpbacks and southern rights as they migrate north, occasionally joined by a pod of orcas.

The Island Whale Festival includes whale watching cruises, citizen science

sessions, whale presentations, whale spotting walks, art installations and loads of art, craft and kids' activities. It's a fantastic, family-friendly way to get back to nature and find out more about these majestic giants passing through local waters.

Follow the Whale Discovery Trail, take to the seas with a whale watching cruise,

or visit the festival hub at Berninnet in Cowes. There are also sessions held at locations around the island, including the Woolamai Beach Surf Lifesaving Club and The Nobbies Centre.

A full program of events will be available at [islandwhales.com.au/](http://islandwhales.com.au/)



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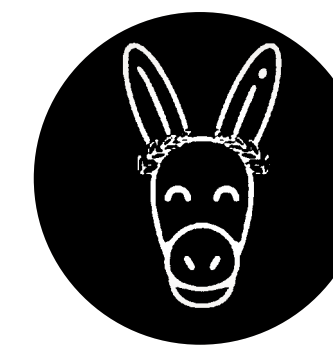
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129 Marine Parade, San Remo  
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Enjoy picturesque views across this tiny scenic island at the farmhouse kitchen café. The menu includes hearty traditional and classic favourites, made from locally sourced and seasonal ingredients.



55A Thompson Avenue Cowes  
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### GRENACHE

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92 Thompson Avenue, Cowes  
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The Island Marketplace  
151 Thompson Avenue, Cowes  
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Focusing on fresh and healthy food, locally-loved café on the Phillip Island block, Mon Dieu brings a taste of the country to locals and visitors seeking farm-to-plate fare. This eatery presents a family-friendly vibe.



Shop 4, 22 Thompson Avenue, Cowes  
0412 566 055

**PENNY LANE CAFÉ**

This small, modest cafe - tucked away in a short alley off the main street of Cowes - is a hidden gem. Serving up All Day Breakfast and lunch from 8.30am. No bookings, walk-ins only. Fully licenced.



2 Thompson Avenue, Cowes  
03 5952 2435  
Isoladicapri.com.au

**ISOLA DI CAPRI**

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25 Veterans Drive, Newhaven  
0419 502 903

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414 Berrys Beach Road, Ventnor  
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COWES

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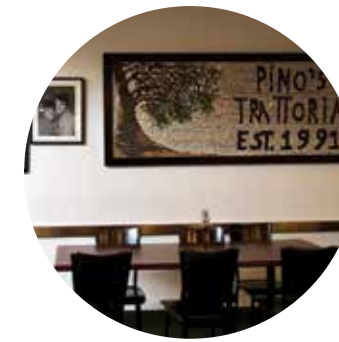
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Phillip Island Tourist Road,  
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41 Lock Road,  
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Looking for a crafty project as the weather gets cooler?

The Penguin Foundation is asking knitters to donate knitted jumpers to sell with plush toys at the Penguin Parade. All the funds raised support penguin and wildlife rehabilitation and research.

As these jumpers aren't used on live penguins (to save lives in the event of an oil spill), knitters can get creative with eye catching designs. Footy team colours, country flags and bright and stripey patterns are popular.

You can knit in pure wool, or acrylic,

and little hats and scarves for the penguin toys are welcome as well.

Crochet and knitting patterns for the penguin jumpers are available at [penguinfoundation.org.au/whats-new/](http://penguinfoundation.org.au/whats-new/)

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MY  
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# It's all in the water



Artist David Taylor has been working in watercolour for over six decades. His passion for the artform is unwavering, and his talent has been recognised across the globe.

Most recently he was given a lifetime achievement award at the world's largest watercolour festival, the Olympiart in India. He was also the guest of honour at the festival, attended by watercolour artists from more than one hundred countries.

David's passion for the artform runs deep. "A lot of people grew up thinking 'oh, watercolour is just a wishy-washy medium', but it's not," David said. "It's a very immediate medium, and it's much more difficult to do or learn than say oil painting or acrylic. Watercolour painting shows everything, very quickly. If you're scared, the painting's scared, if you're

angry, it's angry," David said.

David regularly paints en plain air, which means setting up an easel on the beach or paddock and painting in nature. For David, it is the perfect way to complete a watercolour painting. "Because when you paint the landscape, you're using water, which is based in atmosphere, to paint the actual subject," David said.

Having held regular solo exhibitions in Australia as well as internationally since 1975, David was the first winner (in 1979) of the Camberwell Rotary Overseas Travel Grant that enabled him to study in Europe and the US. He has since won more than two hundred awards in watercolour, is an international judge, and his work is regularly exhibited around Australia, China, the US and Scandinavia.

He and partner Diana Edwards (also

an accomplished watercolour artist) run the Iluka Studio Gallery in Silverleaves, where their stunning watercolour work is on display.

"We often get asked how long it takes to paint one of our works and the answer is sixty years," David said. "It takes a long time to learn the art of being spontaneous, which is a big part of what we do; how to say more with less.

"Our paintings are about light, colour and freshness of the landscape; uncomplicated."

[davidtaylorartist.com.au](http://davidtaylorartist.com.au)

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