

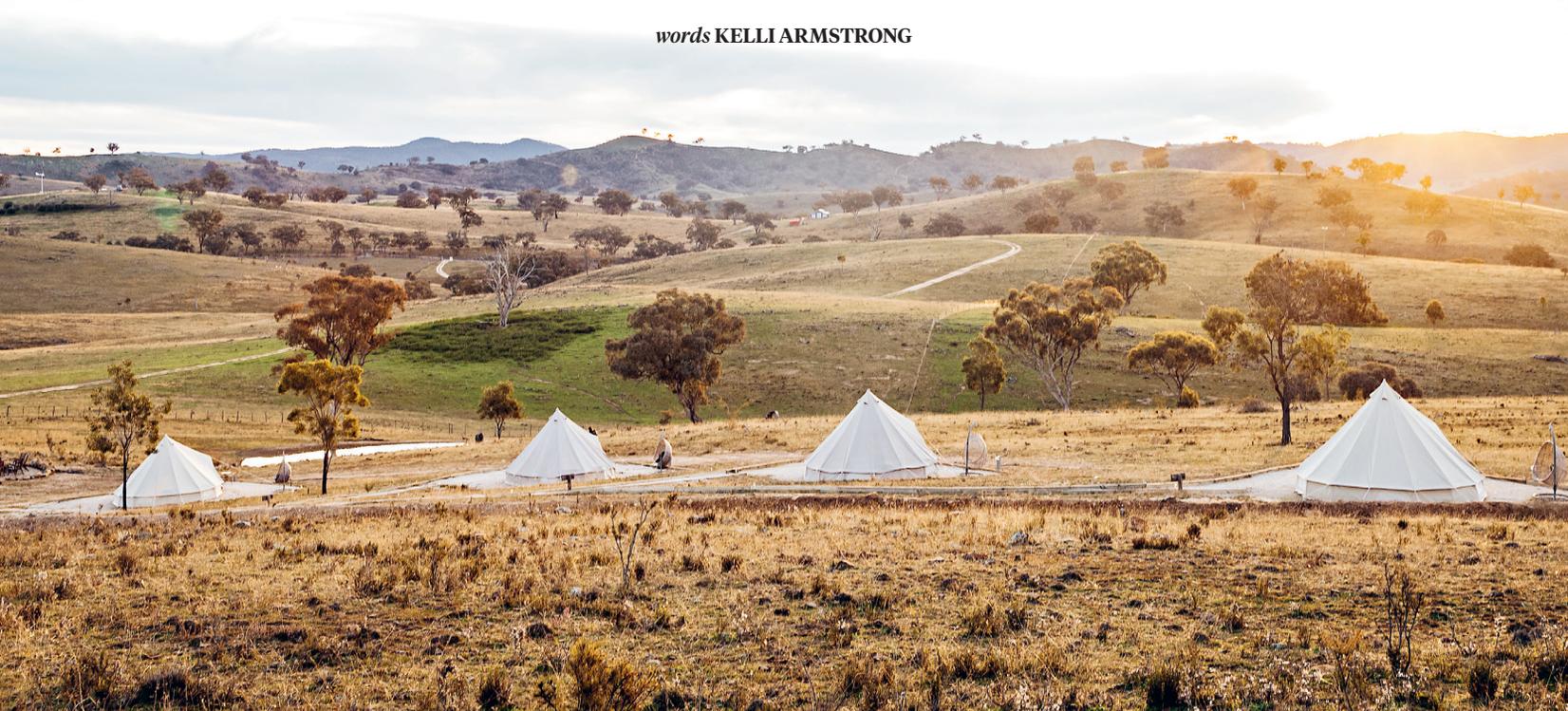


THE SOUNDS OF

SILENCE

*Glenayr Farm in central west NSW
proves a perfect escape from the city*

words KELLI ARMSTRONG



Bumping up and down on a dirt road, a newly washed car covered in dust, is what road trips are all about. So when my GPS sends us slightly off track, through a passageway shaded by gum trees and bordered by sheep and cattle, I'm happy to embrace the detour. Our destination is the off-grid glamping property, Glenayr Farm, in Windeyer. It's just south of the food and wine hub of Mudgee and can also be reached by weaving through vineyards and passing through the town. As the dirt track turns to bitumen I spy the entry to Glenayr Farm and memories of my grandparents' property not far from Tamworth flooded back as I jump out to release the gate, and then duly close it so the livestock couldn't escape. A winding dirt track stirs up more dust as we made our way to the villa where I'm spending the next three nights with my four-year-old daughter.

Villa Rosé and Villa Merlot (a nod to the fertile grape-growing ground surrounding us) sit on one area of the farm, though out of sight of each other, while four bell tents and a bunkhouse occupy another area next to a dam that doubles as a swimming hole and communal entertaining area.

The farm is the result of a family of five, the Whites, who felt city life was depriving them of any downtime. Looking for a way to disconnect to reconnect, they set out in search of a country escape.

"It was love at first sight," says Rachel White, who I never actually meet because as she tells me, the main joy of Glenayr is it isn't a hosted site, "So guests can feel like it is their own farm and enjoy the serenity and privacy without the owners hovering."

The working sheep property covers 130ha and with vistas to hilltops and endless evening sunsets, guests feel entirely remote, yet Mudgee is only a 20-minute drive away.

In a bid to reduce their own and guests' carbon footprint, the Whites built Glenayr Farm 100 per cent off the grid. "We provide accommodation with a point of difference," Rachel says. "It allows you to escape the stress of everyday life and soak up the wonderful Australian nature without sacrificing luxury or comfort. Many steps have been taken to ensure your mind, heart and body will be refreshed while minimising your impact on the environment."

The first thing we notice at our architecturally designed villa is the outdoor hot tub, which doubles as a mini plunge pool in summer and where we'd later soak away the five-hour drive from Sydney. Inside we are welcomed by a king-size bed, a sitting area by a fireplace, a marble kitchenette with gas stovetop and an open-plan bathroom. Glass doors and windows open to an oversized deck with fairy lights, a barbecue and a daybed to relax in after soaking in the hot tub. Footsteps away there is also a firepit to sit by and take in the kaleidoscopic sunset the country sky is famous for.

On our first evening, a private tasting with Mudgee's Gilbert Family Wines (gilbertfamilywines.com.au) includes a comforting shiraz and a chardonnay I plan to stock up on before heading home. But it's the 2016 Méthode Traditionelle with hints of wild strawberry and red apple that really marks the occasion.

At sunrise my daughter wakes me in delight after seeing two kangaroos nibbling on grass just outside our villa, and more are further across the paddock. This moment in nature inspires us to



From top: Rosby Wines; Glenayr's villas. Opposite: the firepit at sunset (top) and Glenayr glamping.





From top: Zin House at Lowe's; Gilbert Family Wines; Lowe winery.



take a morning walk down to the dam where we spot more kangaroos drinking and staring up at us inquisitively. We wander through wildflowers and over moss-covered rocks but unfortunately can't locate a dilapidated miner's shed, dating back to the 1800s, I've heard is somewhere on the property. All the searching makes us hungry though so after a shower with nature looking on, we head into Mudgee.

The Central West heritage town's wide streets are filled with quaint cottages city folk envy. It's long been renowned for its nearby wineries and local produce and also offers outdoor adventure and arts and culture. We head straight for Market Street Cafe and order pancakes, juice and coffee while sitting on the footpath that looks out to the town's heritage buildings. I grab another perfect flat white at the Butcher Shop Cafe which – you guessed it – is a former butcher shop with interior steel railings and tiled walls dating back to 1875.

We head to Rosby Wines, where Gerald and Kay Norton-Knight have been engaged in low-impact viticulture and boutique wine production since 1983. As well as making premium wines, Rosby hosts art workshops and Sculptures in the Garden (sculpturesinthegarden.com.au) which showcases regional and emerging outdoor artists each November. What could be better than seeing art through the eyes of a four-year-old and wandering through gardens with a glass of rosé at the end?

Dinner back at Glenayr is a barbecue on the deck with the sun setting in the west and the sounds of nature in the air. As the stars light up the sky – the area is one of the premier stargazing sites in Australia with Mudgee Observatory 10 minutes away – we decide to jump in the hot tub. But unable to light the gas cylinder to warm the water despite the in-room instructions, we settle for the plunge pool option which was literally just a dip as while the spring days are warm, the evenings still hold a chill.

While a stay at the farm is an ideal digital detox, there is plenty to do in and around Windeyer. The Gold and Fleece Hotel five minutes down the road proves the perfect place to meet the locals over a lamb roast. There are 60 wineries and 35 cellar doors in the region and many of them have child-friendly activities such as Lowe Wines (lowefamilywineco.com.au) where you can meet donkeys, emus and chickens, pick mulberries in season and take a kayak on the dam. Lowe's is also home to Zin House which offers the best in regional dining.

The Mudgee Honey Haven (mudgeehoneyhaven.com.au) offers honey tastings that will satisfy all ages and serves a delicious honey ice cream. The Mudgee Arts Precinct is just one place you can be immersed in local arts and culture, while the Mudgee public swimming pool offers a waterslide and aquatic play area for kids who are done with sightseeing for the day. For more details, go to visitmudgeeregion.com.au

