



WORDS ELISABETH KING

## HOT BUT NOT BOTHERED ON THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA

WHEN Caudalie, the French beauty brand that bases its skincare on grapes and grapevine extracts, announced it was opening a 'wine spa' at Chateau Smith Haute Lafite in Bordeaux in the early noughties, journalists worldwide - including me - were intrigued. Not least by the name. Caudalie comes from the French vigneron's term which means the unit measure for the time a wine's flavour lingers in the mouth. The more caudalies, the better the wine. An omen of sorts, as it turned out.

Five years later, Caudalie took its wine-inspired treatments to Rioja and set up shop at the Marques di Riscal hotel, designed by American star architect Frank Gehry. I've been to both establishments and can tell you that nothing freshens the complexion better than a 'scrub' of crushed cabernet grapes. Unless it's the barrel bath treatment, in which bubbling-hot spring water is enriched with super-fine pieces of grape skin.

Last December the 20ha Peninsula Hot Springs property unveiled the second stage of a development designed in the style of such toney Japanese onsen hot spring resorts as Arima and Miyajima, which charge \$US2500 a person for a weekend visit. You can't stay at Peninsula Hot Springs yet - 126 chic spa lodges to be 'hidden' in the surrounding dunes for ultimate privacy are slated to open in 2012 - but the day spa featuring mineral-rich water that bubbles up from 637m underground at 50C has been a huge success with Melburnians, interstate visitors and golfers from nearby Peppers Moonah Links resort - only a seven-minute golf buggy ride away.

The architecture and garden layout are inspired. In addition to the public baths scattered around the main area and the tiny, only-for-two private baths tucked into forest glades, the very chic expansion has added 39 more bathing experiences,

your skin to feel as fresh as a newborn's, there's also a smart range of mud, stone, salt and steam therapies available in the very private Spa Dreaming Centre that are as sophisticated as their counterparts in Asia and Europe. Feeling peckish? The expanded relaxation centre also houses the Bath House cafe, which serves spa cuisine created by leading Melbourne celebrity chef Andrew Blake.

Eating is as much a part of a visit to Peninsula Hot Springs as detoxing. You can front up for the ultimate healthy cooked breakfast washed down with one of Emma & Tom's Vitamin and Mineral Waters. The raspberry and cranberry juice is particularly refreshing. The lunch menu follows a 'Mediterrasian' bent and veers from chorizo sausage, roasted pepper, olive and mushroom pizza to a big bowl of Asian-style soup - barbecue pork, noodles, bean sprouts, chicken, prawns and bok choy.

*If you want your skin to feel as fresh as a newborn's, there's also a smart range of mud, stone, salt and steam therapies.*

Caudalie isn't alone in teaming luxury spa and grape-based treatments. In Italy, Terme di Salvarola in Emilia-Romagna, once an ancient thermal centre frequented by the Romans, serves up exfoliation and massage treatments using Lambrusco di Grasparossa grapes.

But you don't have to go halfway around the world to enjoy a luxury spa in wine country that feels a little bit French and a little bit Italian. A couple of years ago, Peninsula Hot Springs on the Mornington Peninsula opened its doors as Australia's first up-market hot spring spa. Note the word luxury. The Northern Territory has long relieved the aches and pains of locals and visitors at Mataranka and Bitter Springs, about 100km south of Katherine, while an estimated 300,000 visitors a year take a dip in Moree's Hot Artesian Pool Complex in NSW, first opened in 1895. But posh they are not.

including a Turkish hammam, authentic Finnish sauna and a private hilltop spa with a 360-degree view of the surrounding countryside. Imagine a plate of fruit and a chilled glass of local sparkling wine here at sunset for a master/mistress of the universe feeling. The uplifting trek to the top of the hill makes sliding into the bubbling hot water seem even more of a reward.

The luscious products slapped onto the willing bodies at any spa are a major drawcard. And to further bolster its position of offering up-scale natural healing and relaxation, Peninsula Hot Springs offers a huge array of body and face treatments using Li'Tya, Australia's premier luxury home-grown spa brand, which features native ingredients such as lilly pilly and Tasmanian peat mud, and Phyt's Certified Organic products from France. If you want

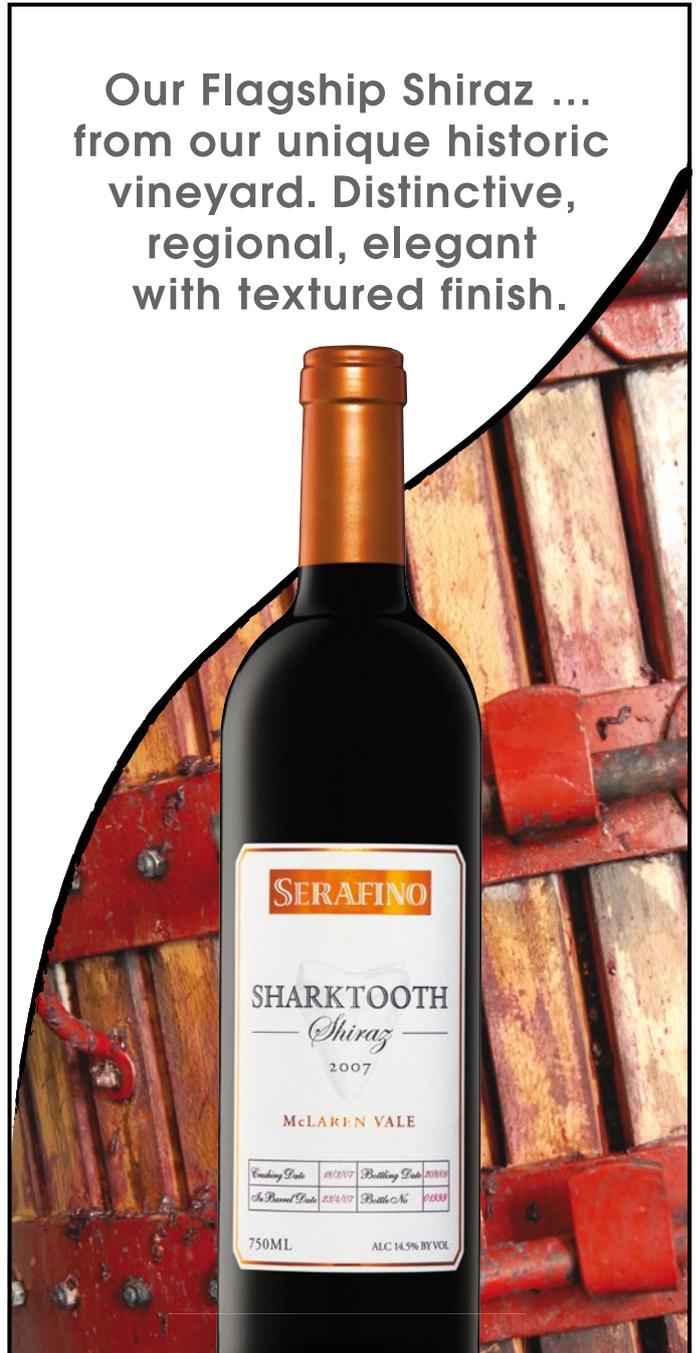
As you would expect, local wines feature strongly in the popular Dine & Bathe menus - two-course meals with options such as five spice roast duck salad, figs and hazelnuts to Syrian chicken with giant couscous. More of a pasta lover? Then select from the Pasta and Bathe line-up for a gnocchi with duck and thyme ragu or veal and caramelised onion tortellini with tomato and basil sauce to go with your complimentary glass of Mornington red or white matched by the sommelier - all for just \$70 a person, including a three-hour bathing session. The evening Dine & Bathe packages are very popular because they include the whisper-quiet twilight time and lazing in the moon-viewing pools. You don't even need to drink to feel the magic, but a glass of pinot noir only deepens the feeling of fantasy.

Our Flagship Shiraz ...  
from our unique historic  
vineyard. Distinctive,  
regional, elegant  
with textured finish.

The Bath House cafe may be one of the peninsula's best but the antique shops, seaside walks and 50 cellar doors beckon strongly. Before lunch, a good trio of wineries to park the car at include Paringa Estate (for great reserves unavailable elsewhere), Red Hill Estate and Tuck's Ridge. You can lunch splendidly at all three venues or head for the atmospheric amphitheatre setting and 'chef's hat' cuisine at Montalto Vineyard and Olive Grove. Fancy more of a snack? The Roman-style pizza at T'Gallant winery can be sniffed from metres away. After a leisurely chow-down, finish off the day with inspections of Morning Star Estate, Hickinbotham of Dromana or Willow Creek.

Beauty junkies-cum-winelovers also have the option of the Endota Wellness Spa at Red Hill or the Spa Retreat at Woodman Estate. Two of my favourite places to stay are Glynt Manor Luxury Retreat and George's B&B. The Mornington Peninsula may liken itself to Tuscany or Provence but it also provides services that the Italians and French wouldn't think of, now that their drink/driving laws are stricter. If you don't want to restrict your tasting or drinking pleasure because life and your visit is too short, book a 'designated driver' through Luxury Personalised Tours or Mornington Peninsula Shuttle Services.

*Fact file: Peninsula Hot Springs is only a 75 to 90-minute drive from central Melbourne. Prices begin at \$30 per adult for a day pass to the public areas, with treatment packages beginning at \$135. If you want to stay overnight, Peppers Moonah Links Yin Yang Packages are available for \$525 per couple, which includes overnight accommodation in a one-bedroom suite, full buffet breakfast, an access bathing pass for two, one Kudo body massage, one round of golf, lunch for one and a complimentary visit access pass for the second day. Two night packages with the same inclusions are available for \$725 per couple. For more information and bookings, see [www.peninsulahotsprings.com.au](http://www.peninsulahotsprings.com.au).*



*Serafino's*  
McLaren Vale

Restaurant • Boutique Hotel • Conference Centre • Winery

stay • relax • indulge

Kangarilla Road, McLarenVale SA 5171  
P 08 8323 0157 F 08 8323 0158  
admin@serafinowines.com.au  
[www.serafinowines.com.au](http://www.serafinowines.com.au)