



The rolling hills and rambling vineyards of the Granite Belt.

# drink wine

*while the sun shines*

Summer is indeed the perfect time to visit Queensland's surprisingly sophisticated wine region.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY SARAH OPPENHEIM

**W**hoever said winter was the best season for a weekend of wine tasting? Surely someone who has never spent a day in the soft summer sunshine of the Granite Belt, sipping a Chardy beneath the shade of an aromatic tangle of vines. Or someone who has never nursed a glass of Merlot through a crimson Stanthorpe sunset as the dry December air cools to crisp.

Only three hours south-west of Brisbane, but in a distinctly different climatic zone, the Granite Belt is heaven on earth for lovers of fine wine and good food – and the perfect place to escape the sticky heat of Brisbane during summer. With over 55 boutique wineries, an abundance of gourmet food producers and an impressive range of luxury B&B accommodation, the Granite Belt has all the right ingredients for a weekend of indulgent quaffing. Here's our guide to the region's best.

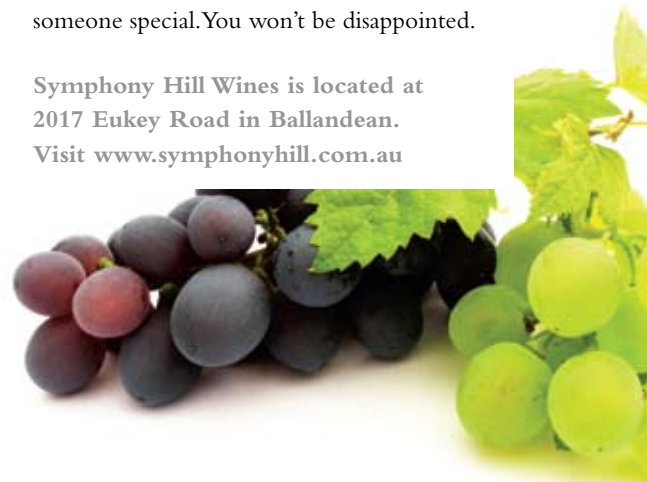
## *Our favourite wineries*

### Symphony Hill Wines

Undeniably the most contemporary cellar door in the region, Symphony Hill boasts wine production on a grand scale, with some of their finest reds available on the wine lists of Brisbane's premier restaurants. Symphony Hill's third generation winemaker Mike Hayes brings infectious passion and effervescent enthusiasm to his craft, and all wines can be shared during a candlelit wine tasting in the atmospheric barrel room, surrounded by the heady scent of oak.

Accolades for the vineyard extend well beyond the Sunshine State, with renowned wine critic James Halliday awarding Symphony Hill four-and-a-half stars in his 2006 edition of the Australian Wine Companion. This glowing verdict has made Symphony Hill the envy of many in the region. Our advice: buy a bottle of the 2003 Reserve Shiraz and uncork it with someone special. You won't be disappointed.

**Symphony Hill Wines is located at 2017 Eukey Road in Ballandean. Visit [www.symphonyhill.com.au](http://www.symphonyhill.com.au)**





## Robert Channon Wines

Like many vineyard owners in the Granite Belt region, Robert Channon enjoyed a successful career as a Sydney barrister before uprooting to the country and settling into the peaceful pursuit of winemaking. After 10 years of quietly tending the vines, it's clear that Channon has put as much zeal and finesse into winemaking as he did into corporate law – with equally lucrative rewards. His signature Verdelho has received not only national but international acclaim (James Halliday described it as: “by far the best Verdelho I have tasted”) and his Chardonnays have also won numerous prizes. For lovers of white wine, both fruity and dry, his vineyard is hard to surpass.

**Robert Channon Wines is located on Amiens Road in Stanthorpe.**

**Visit [www.robertchannonwines.com](http://www.robertchannonwines.com)**

## Heritage Estate Wines

Setting foot inside the dining hall of this winery-come-B&B is akin to entering a grand old English pub, complete with open fireplaces, wooden bar stools and heavily gilded portraits. While clearly built to keep people warm during the chilly winters of the Southern Downs, it also stays remarkably cool during summer, and is therefore the perfect place to enjoy a fine drop regardless of the season. Our favourite? The 2005 Unwooded Chardonnay. Take a glass in hand and wander outside to the adjoining vineyards, each row flanked by clusters of aromatic roses, and drink everything in. This is one place you'll want to stay at for a while.

**Heritage Estate Wines is located on Granite Belt Drive in Cottonvale.**

**Visit [www.heritagewines.com.au](http://www.heritagewines.com.au)**

## Ballandean Estate Wines

Not only is Ballandean Estate the largest winery in the Granite Belt region, it's also the oldest. Established by the Puglisi family in 1931, Ballandean Estate has played a pioneering role in the establishment of the Queensland wine industry. With oak barrels dating back to the early 1800s, fields of well established vines and towering trees, there's an overwhelming sense that this expansive winemaking estate is indeed a family dynasty.

**Ballandean Estate is located on Sundown Road in Ballandean.**

**Visit [www.ballandeanestate.com](http://www.ballandeanestate.com)**



The aromatic vineyard at Heritage Estate Wines.

## Where to stay Vineyard Cottages

This discreet collection of boutique cottages is set amidst a formal garden specifically designed to highlight the natural hues of the surrounding landscape. The result is heavenly. Hedges and arbours provide privacy for each cottage, and flowerbeds bursting with pastel foliage reflect the greys, pinks, lemons and blues of the region's underlying granite. Were it not for the warm hospitality and outstanding restaurant (see *Where to eat*, over page), the gardens alone may be reason enough to spend a weekend at Vineyard Cottages. Luckily, there's plush sofas, king size beds, spa baths and freshly baked cookies to give you that extra nudge.

**Vineyard Cottages is located on the New England Highway in Ballandean.**

**Visit [www.vineyard-cottages.com.au](http://www.vineyard-cottages.com.au)**

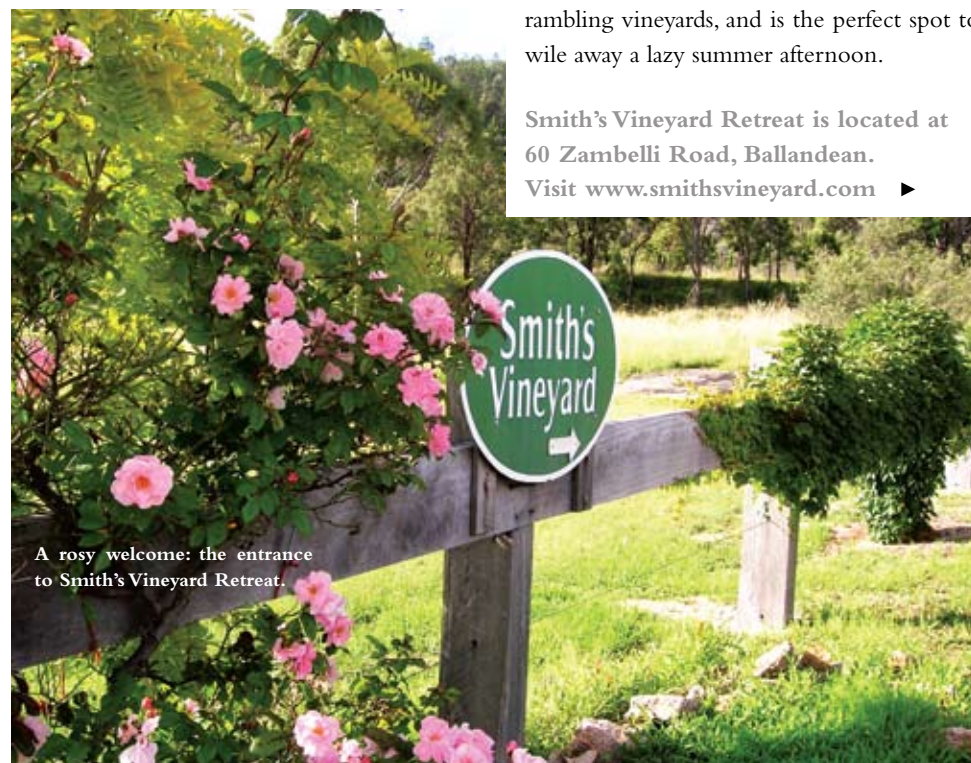


## Smith's Vineyard Retreat

Pardon the pun, but you'd be hard pressed to find a more relaxing vineyard retreat if you tried. Perched on the crest of a rolling hill covered in lush grape vines, Smith's Vineyard Retreat comprises two ambling Queenslanders, beautifully restored and bathed in dappled sunlight all year round. The verandah on the main house offers breathtaking views of patchwork fields and rambling vineyards, and is the perfect spot to wile away a lazy summer afternoon.

**Smith's Vineyard Retreat is located at 60 Zambelli Road, Ballandean.**

**Visit [www.smithsvineyard.com](http://www.smithsvineyard.com)** ▶



A rosy welcome: the entrance to Smith's Vineyard Retreat.

## AFFAIRdining

### Where to eat

#### Vineyard Café

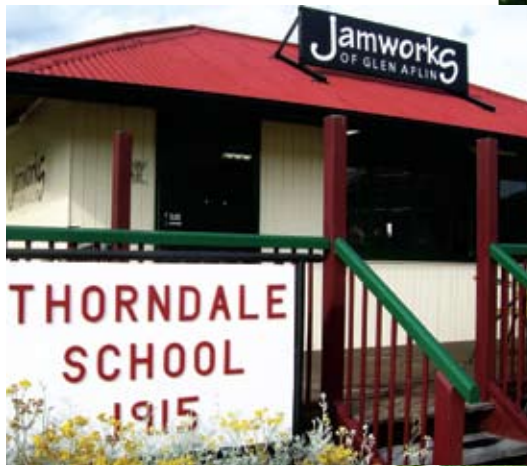
Luckily enough, the sublime offerings of the Vineyard Café are not limited to guests staying at the adjoining cottages. This award-winning restaurant is open to the public on Friday and Saturday evenings, but with only a handful of tables available inside the tiny converted church – featuring its original stained glass and gleaming timber – it's best to book well in advance.

Chef Janine Cummings is known for her innovative use of local produce, including trout, lamb, berries and stone fruit. A standout on her current menu is the Pink Grapefruit and Tea-smoked Salmon Salad – a divine combination of baked salmon, fried shallots, thin shavings of red chilli, succulent wedges of pink grapefruit and fresh mint, coriander and rocket. Another star is the whole egg ravioli, served with grilled asparagus, crisp prosciutto and fresh Parmesan. Not surprisingly, Cummings is routinely called from the kitchen by baffled diners to explain how she manages to envelope an uncooked egg inside a fresh ravioli. Needless to say, it requires considerable skill.

Vineyard Cafe is located on the New England Highway in Ballandean. Visit [www.vineyard-cottages.com.au](http://www.vineyard-cottages.com.au)



A converted church makes an intimate dining room at the Vineyard Café in Ballandean.



Robert Channon shows a visitor through his award-winning vineyard.




### Where to visit

#### Sutton's Juice and Cider Factory

The second best thing about this apple and berry orchard is the opportunity to see the entire juice-making process from branch to bottle, which is rather interesting in itself. The best thing, of course, is sampling the juice, which owners David and Ros Sutton are only too happy to dole out in endless little plastic cups. Apple and lemon, apple and raspberry, apple and orange, apple and ginger... the list is endless. Don't forget to try their genuine apple cider – a heady tippie for those after a little break from wine.

Sutton's Juice Factory is located at 10 Halloran Drive, Thulimbah. Visit [www.hivalue.com.au](http://www.hivalue.com.au)

#### Jamworks

A lovingly restored old school building is the unusual home for this fabulous boutique of jams and preserves in the tiny village of Glen Aplin. Using local fruits and berries and traditional boiling methods, jam maker Sue Ingall has fashioned an array of chutneys, conserves, jams and preserves impressive in its scope. Free samples are par for the course, so don't leave without trying the delightfully piquant Rosella Jam and the truly sublime Banana Butter. 

Jamworks is located on the corner of Townsend Road and the New England Highway, Glen Aplin. Phone (07) 4683 4171.

### How to describe wine

Ever feel lost for words at a wine tasting? Here are a few phrases to help you articulate that glorious flavour, feel and finish, the next time you're a-quaffing.

#### fruit influence

#### RED WINE

blackberry, plum, cherries, raspberries, mint, liquorice

#### consistency

velvety, sticky, mellowed, rich

#### barrel character

burnt, oaky, smoky, toast

#### finish

persistent, lingering, dry

#### WHITE WINE

banana, gooseberry, pear, lime, grass, melon, lychee

supple, viscous, silky, hard

straw, honey, butterscotch

clean, delicate, crisp

