



Indulgence past and present

Carolyn Beasley unwinds at Sequoia Lodge in the Adelaide Hills.



Picture this: It's January 1859 and a horse-drawn carriage approaches a grand summer house. The couple inside are relieved to arrive, having navigated the steep, rough Summit Road from Adelaide. The cooler temperature at this elevation is welcome, especially for the lady. She's dressed in her finest bonnet and an unwieldy, ballooning skirt with a wire petticoat, her waist cinched by a whalebone corset.

Ushered inside, the couple mingle with others of Adelaide's elite. The gentlemen join the host to tour the grapevines and walnut plantation, while the ladies take a turn in the garden, admiring the exotic trees. Servants pour South Australia's best wines, while in the kitchen, a whole side of mutton and leg of beef rotate on spits.

At the end of the party and feeling decidedly merry, the couple wait for their allotted departure time. (The host has staggered the carriages at 10-minute intervals to avoid problems on the treacherous and dark descent.)

Despite his best efforts, rounding a corner on the track the couple's carriage gets into some difficulty. Bizarrely, they've stumbled upon a small menagerie of escaped animals from Burton's National Circus, and must now contend with two monkeys, a performing dog, and a miniature pony.

The host of these grand parties, Arthur Hardy, has been described as the Great Gatsby of South Australia, and perhaps his party lifestyle did somewhat resemble that of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1920s character Jay Gatsby.

A British-born colonial settler, Arthur and his wife, Martha (yes, really), began building their opulent summer residence, Mount Lofty House, high above the city in the Adelaide Hills, in 1852.

Their granddaughter Mabel would later describe their lifestyle as "a sort of feudal splendour". Sadly, the excesses proved unsustainable and in 1865 they were obliged to sell the property to the bank.

Today, Mount Lofty House is a boutique hotel and an Adelaide icon. It also now shares its grounds with a new property fast gaining its own reputation for fine hospitality - Sequoia Lodge.

The new lodge, built by Mount Lofty's current owner, David Horbelt, is named after three mighty Californian redwoods, or sequoias, planted by Hardy on Mount Lofty Estate. Aside from his rollicking social life, he was a politician, barrister, pastoralist and a collector of trees.

It could be argued that Horbelt, who

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Jesse Kornhoff, estate manager

bought Mount Lofty in 2009, shares his flair for hospitality, but has a better head for business. He owns the Reef House in Queensland's Palm Cove and the Rydges in Adelaide, and will soon develop a new hotel inside Cleland Wildlife Park, just down the road.

He also designed Sequoia himself, in collaboration with a local draftsman, and workshopped the details with project manager Anthony Kain and the estate general manager, Jesse Kornhoff.

After 11 months of COVID-19 delays, it

was officially declared opened in August.

I check in at Sequoia in time for the welcome. Beside a fireplace overlooking vineyards, apple orchards and forest, I'm handed a glass of Sequoia sparkling, grown onsite. With a handful of other newly arrived guests, I'm entertained with tales of Hardy, the hotel's history and the landscape.

The lodge's 14 generously proportioned, split-level suites are arranged in an arc along the ridge line of the estate. Stepping into mine, I note there are panoramic views of the Piccadilly Valley, right from my pillow. A gas fireplace made from local stone has pre-warmed the space and, as the blinds automatically retract, a verandah with an enticing, nap-worthy day bed is revealed.

Hardy, I suspect, would have approved. Kornhoff explains that much of the suites' materials and furnishing were sourced from the Adelaide Hills. He points out the local spotted gum flooring, the bespoke furniture, the original works by local artists, and even the bedside lamps, made just down the road.

Given its location, it's no surprise the lodge offers in-depth wine experiences. "There's nowhere else in the world with four world-class wine regions within 50 kilometres," Kornhoff says, ticking off McLaren Vale, Langhorne Creek, Eden Valley and the Adelaide Hills.

"And those regions are so diverse in terms of terroir and climate."

To learn more, I join estate sommelier Linna Berry for her Maker and Somm experience, in which a rotating roster of boutique winemakers join her and guests for an informal chat and guided tasting of their best drops.

Kicking off our tasting, winemaker Michael Hall insists there are no stupid questions, and soon we're peppering him

Top left: Sequoia Lodge has stunning views, including from the hot tubs. The area has a massive population of koalas. Hardy's Verandah Restaurant, top right.

with plenty of non-stupid questions about the wine he produces in the Barossa and throughout the Adelaide Hills, including right here in the Piccadilly Valley.

Later I join a guided nature hike through misty eucalypt forest. Through the swirling fog, a round shape morphs into a wild koala, and I learn the Adelaide Hills has the largest concentration of wild koalas anywhere.

Extending my koala joy, I've been booked on a private tour at Cleland Wildlife Park. There I meet keeper Ash Hunter, who explains the conservation work being done here, including the rehabilitation of koalas injured in the Kangaroo Island fires of 2020.

Other off-site experiences offered capitalise on the Hills location. Guests may book a private tour to Penfolds Magill Estate for a taste of Grange Hermitage, and if Arthur "Gatsby" Hardy was here, I bet he'd take the Prancing Horse tour in a gleaming Ferrari.

But for me, I'm ready for some relaxation in the estate's chic and historic Gatekeeper's Spa. Here, my face is pampered with products made by Jurlique on its organic farm, a property so local I can see it from the veranda of my suite.

The indulgence continues at Sequoia's outdoor hot tubs, which have been reserved for my private use. Like all the water on the estate, the water for the tubs comes from mineral-rich springs flowing deep inside the mountain. As I soak, a green tea and mint-infused mocktail magically materialises, together with relaxing smelling salts comprising local lavender.

Keen to experience Hardy's splendour for myself, I stroll through Sequoia's gate and into the yard of Mount Lofty House. Sequoia offers a sleek, contemporary foil to its heritage big-sister hotel, but both are elegant, and worthy of their place on this mountain top.

I take a seat in the much-lauded Hardy's Verandah Restaurant, which sprawls through various rooms, and I accept the recommended seven-course degustation menu with premium wine matching.

Between courses, I'm offered a tour of the original cellar, claimed as one of the best wine collections in the country. It brims with historical significance, and I poke my head into a hidden dining space and a mysterious tunnel, possibly Hardy's escape route.

Filtering through the joyous laughter from upstairs, if only I can hear his ghost. He's raising a toast to his beloved mansion and its swanky new addition. And in true Gatsby style, he's sabring the top off a bottle of that special Sequoia sparkling. **153**

The writer was a guest of Sequoia Lodge.



Clockwise from above left: The restaurant at Sequoia Lodge; aerial view of the property; Arthur's Cellar at Mount Lofty House, named after the original owner, Arthur Hardy. PHOTOS: JULIAN CEBO

Need to know

Sequoia Lodge
Rates: \$1000 a night for two, including breakfast. The Lodge Experience package includes breakfast, lunch and dinner at Hardy's Verandah Restaurant, drinks in Sequoia Lounge and signature experiences. From \$2200 for two per night. Tel: (08) 8130 9230.