

Today's Paper

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THE AUSTRALIAN Financial Review Magazine

Life & Luxury

Food & Wine

Australia's top chef is planning a new restaurant – in Hobart

After 24 years at the pinnacle of Sydney's dining scene, Peter Gilmore is trading harbour views for a piece of rich Tasmanian dirt.

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Peter Gilmore inspects a tromboncino flower. "If I want lettuce, I just get it from the garden." **Remi Chauvin**

Jill Dupleix [\[/by/jill-dupleix-hvc3a\]](#) *Food writer*

Jun 26, 2026 – 5.00am

This feature is part of the Culinary issue published on June 26, 2026.



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In the event of an apocalypse, flee to Tasmania. As a small island with clean air, a guaranteed water supply, 100 per cent renewable energy

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model of self-sufficiency. Besides, the dear market just landed. As of July 1, Tasmania now has Peter Gilmore.

Since the closure of Quay restaurant [<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/food-and-wine/quay-the-pinnacle-of-australian-fine-dining-to-close-in-february-20251214-p5nni8>] on Sydney's Circular Quay in February, Australia's top chef has been preparing a sea-and-tree change, moving to a small farm in southern Tasmania. To do what? Completely unfounded rumours (the best kind) flew through the hospitality industry. Would he join the arty crowd at Hobart's MONA, throwing whole beasts onto open coals and running naked into the sea at pagan festivals? Or would he shun the world, cease cooking at a professional level and just potter around the garden?

I'm sinking into the springy turf as the chef moves among his eight raised garden beds, looking as happy as a clam. But I still haven't been given an answer. "I don't plan to stop cooking," he says, as he gently pulls a giant, burgundy-skinned onion from the rich soil and gives it a shake. The pale root tendrils are strangely beautiful, and we both find ourselves staring at them in silent awe.

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Acclaimed chef Peter Gilmore on his farm in Flowerpot, Tasmania. "When something grows naturally in real soil, the nutrients are so dense." **Remi Chauvin**

The 2.8-hectare holding, which he and his wife, Kath, bought in 2023, has established trees for shade, a trim cottage and a veritable creche of 50 young fruit trees. Beyond are the wide blue waters of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and the misty rise-and-fall crags and long skinny neck of Bruny Island. For the past few years, the couple has flown down every six weeks or so, to plant, paint and plan the future. Architectural drawings lie on the kitchen table – they're hoping to extend the building footprint and incorporate large picture windows before they move in full-time.

The small coastal locality of Flowerpot, wedged between Woodbridge and Middleton, is littered with weatherboard Anglican churches and

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matron birds for sale. It's an quietly magnificent, but it's also a 10-minute drive south-west from Hobart, and the average winter temperature drops to 4 degrees.

For his next trick, the 58-year-old Gilmore doesn't need anything that will win awards. He has a cupboard full of those. Since his first three-chef-hat award in the 2003 *Good Food Guide*, he has gone on to earn three chef hats every year for a remarkable 23 years, a feat unmatched by any other chef. Quay also lived for five years on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list, and Gilmore has twice won the guide's Chef of the Year Award. He's been cooking since the age of 16.



Gilmore: "I want to open something really beautiful in Hobart that isn't too small to make money, and isn't too big to handle." **Remi Chauvin**

But if you look back at his career, you can see hints of what is to come. When the gastronomic world went mad in 2006 for the technology-based

molecular cooking style pursued by Ferran Adrià at El Bulli in Catalonia, Gilmore went in the other direction.

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backyard in Sydney's northern beaches and partnering with small-scale growers such as Dylan Abdoo of Newcastle Greens and Palisa Anderson of Boon Luck Farm in the Northern Rivers. The produce worked its way onto the menu at Quay; red orach, hatsuka radishes, native violets and Tennouji turnips. Other chefs scrambled to find such rare ingredients at the markets, to no avail.

The plan from here is to dive even deeper into fruits and vegetables. "I want to open something really beautiful in Hobart that isn't too small to make money, and isn't too big to handle," he finally reveals as we move inside the cottage, kicking off shoes at the door. "I think 30 guests would be the sweet spot, with two or three chefs in the kitchen and a couple of passionate people working front-of-house." It's a dream that is not without substantial risks, but Gilmore feels that closer access to the soil and the sea will only help him make stronger connections.

"My style has always been to push the boundaries with exceptional produce, in order to get real depth of flavour and texture," he says. "Now that I am down here, I can get to know the farmers and growers better and really target what I want to put on a menu at any given time of year." He gestures to the garden beds outside, the hilltops above and the sparkling waters below. "The other possibility is to do something right here. A real farm-to-table style of restaurant, with food from my garden. That's the bigger picture."

While the Hobart restaurant is tabled for late 2027, the farm-to-table dream will require more infrastructure; specifically, a financial partner or an existing Tasmanian property or winery with accommodation. "It's been a dream of mine forever, but it has a longer timeline," he says. Spoken like a true gardener. He knows that for seeds to germinate and flourish, conditions have to be just right.

Un the end of June but he already feels a degree of separation. “You work in the same restaurant for 24 years of your life and it becomes part of you,” he says as he brushes his hand across a fairytale bank of tall garlic chives, releasing their fragrance.

“Not having Quay in my life is a little weird, but I’m looking forward to what might be next.” When it was announced that Quay would close on February 14 – Valentine’s Day – the news was widely seen as another nail in the coffin of the fine-dining sector, struggling with higher costs and shifting habits. In a sign of the times, the space vacated by Quay has been turned into a four-level hospitality hub run by Australian Venue Co [<https://www.afr.com/property/commercial/private-equity-giant-snaps-up-sydney-venues-amid-roaring-pubs-trade-20260122-p5nw74>], owned by a Hong Kong investment firm and a global private equity fund.

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Peter Gilmore demonstrates making a cherry jam lamington in the kitchen of Bennelong in 2015.

Edwina Pickles

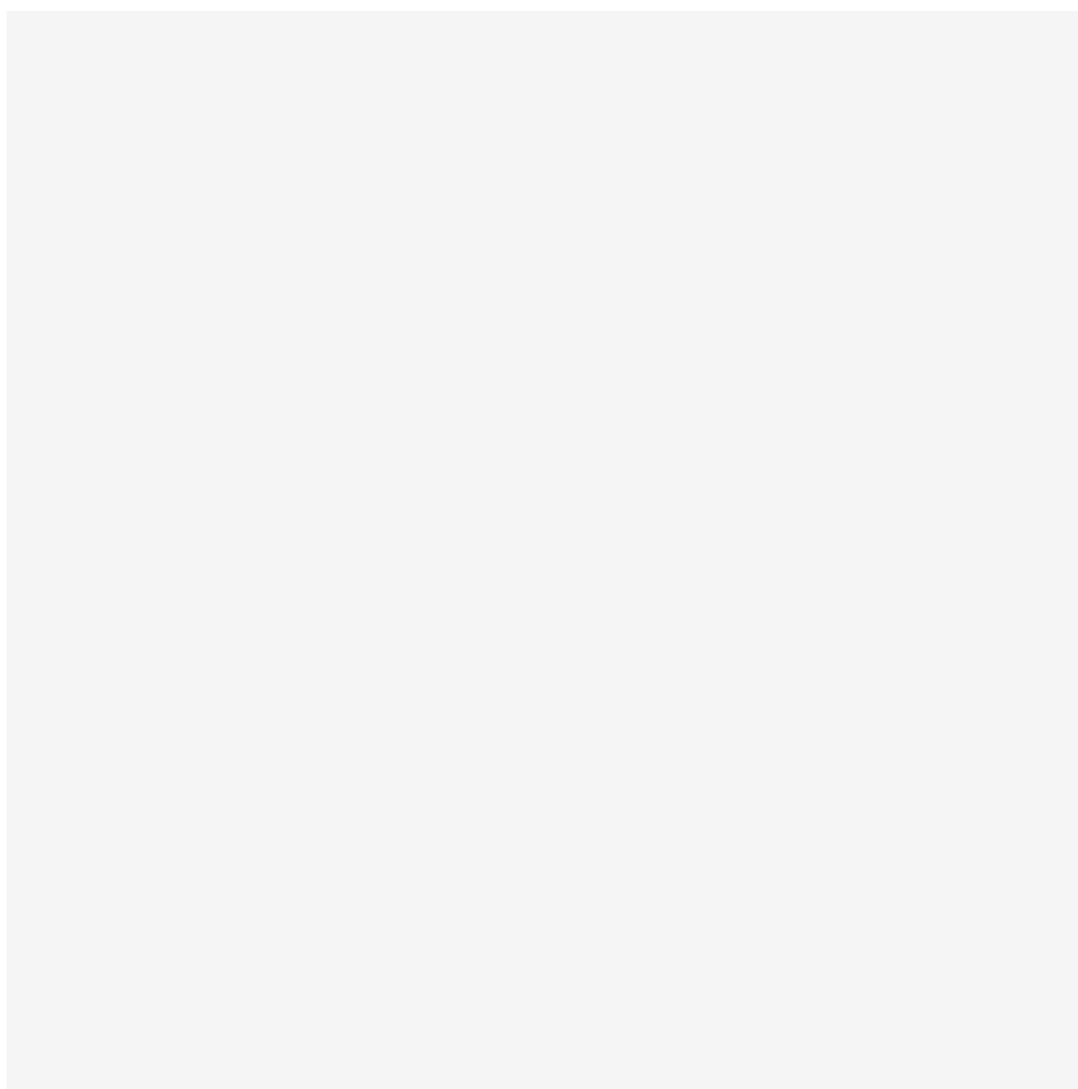
Data from national industry body Restaurant & Catering Australia shows that 10.4 per cent of food service businesses have closed in the 12 months up to early 2026. “Operating costs – wages, energy, insurance, rent and compliance – have risen faster than any business can absorb,” said Restaurant & Catering Australia president John Hart on the release of the report. “Australians are still dining out, but making a profit is becoming almost impossible.”

Quay, to use a term from finance circles, was “risk on”. Australia’s top restaurant, it sat harbourside like a luxury cruise ship as Gilmore’s ambitious degustation menu (eight courses for \$355 per person) set sail across a sea of widely spaced tables. The glossy-skinned Maremma duck with fermented honey and black garlic, marron and marigold tart with yuzu cream, and bone marrow noodles threaded with mud crab and crisp white walnuts were part of the honed and polished dining experience, with a deep cellar on hand to fuel the designated wine pairings. Once or twice

during service, Gilmore would emerge with a dish to deliver to a special table, like a kindly uncle dropping in with a present.

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one of the biggest gambles of his 90-odd years when he closed Quay in 2018 for a three-month, \$4 million top-to-toe renovation. It remained a profitable restaurant and event space until the COVID years, says Gilmore, after which it became incrementally harder to charge enough to cover the increase in food and wage costs, as well as the escalating rent charged by the port authority. “In Australia, you can only charge so much. For the equivalent dining experience in the United States or Europe, the bill would be the same, but it would be in euros or US dollars. Much higher.”



Gilmore's legendary Quay dessert, the Snow Egg. **Nikki To**

Quay's restaurant sibling, Bennelong, is now in the capable hands of chef Rob Cockerill, who has been working with Gilmore long enough to have absorbed the tenets of his natural, floral, artistic cuisine, and whose role

now is to put his own stamp on it. With their two sons now grown – Isaac is 25 and Joe is 22 – the Gilmores are free agents, albeit without the safety

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“It’s getting tougher to make money these days,” he admits. “There’s an economy of scale with big groups, to make it workable from a profit point of view. Then there are the small businesses, owner-operated with a lot of passion. It’s the ones in the middle who are going to fall through the gaps.” A stubborn gleam comes into his eye. “My place needs to be smaller, tighter and leaner than I am used to, but special enough to be able to charge for exceptional produce. I need to employ an extra person in the kitchen so I can still make the complicated stocks and foundation sauces and ferments that are the foundation of my cooking.”

Here in Tasmania, the outlook is peaceful, and only trees and islands break the horizon. It feels restorative, limitless – and a world away from his usual working day views – that dazzling, adrenalin-activating panorama across Sydney Harbour towards the Opera House. One view rests the eyes, the other fires the nervous system. One is still, apart from the flight of the odd bird. The other is filled with the energy and constant movement of people, ferries, cars. The southern Tasmanian peninsula is not exactly the edge of civilisation, but it says a lot for Gilmore’s self-belief that he reckons diners will drive down the long and sinuous Channel Highway to try his food once again.

The Quay dining room was nestled between the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House. **Jennifer Soo**

When Tasmanian-based chef Analiese Gregory [<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/travel/wild-child-chef-analiese-gregory-leads-the-tasmanian-rat-pack-20210422-p57lju>] heard the news of Gilmore's flight south, she thought "he finally did it". Having worked closely with him at Quay for five years at a definitive stage of her career, she knew he had a pull to the countryside. "I never knew if it was just a pipe dream or not," she says. "It turns out to have been a very real future plan."

Gregory herself moved south from Sydney to take over the old Scotch oven at Franklin restaurant in Hobart from David Moyle in 2017 and got hooked. "The people are still true to themselves here, and the farmers' market is full of actual farmers," she says. "Tasmania punches above its weight in the food, wine and art stakes, yet you can still breathe and unwind." She has since bought land, made a home and is soon to open her own 10-seater farm-to-plate restaurant, Lumachelle, in the Huon Valley.

Despite the dips and droughts restaurants have navigated since the pandemic, Gregory is convinced her old boss will get plenty of support.

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renovation," she says. "For Tasmania, elevated dining works best in a smaller establishment, so that in the off-season you're not trying to fill 100 seats when the tourists are not around. It's also about creating a community and a following of locals, because only they will support you through the winter."

Tasmania gets around 1.3 million visitors each year who spend about \$3.7 billion, according to Tourism Tasmania chief executive Sarah Kingston Clark. Australian travellers account for 85 per cent of them, and the international market is drawn mainly from Hong Kong, Singapore, the US and UK. "And now we are seeing more chefs move to Tassie, drawn to the strong food and produce culture that has been here for a very long time," she says. "Everyone loves the slower pace of life and cleaner air, but chefs particularly love being so close to the produce."

Is she hoping for some form of Gilmore Effect to increase food tourism? "From a tourism perspective, we know that people will travel for individual restaurants, but then add local experiences as well, so there is a flow-on effect," she says. "Having someone of the calibre of Peter move here with his incredible experience can only inspire local chefs and increase their opportunities as well."

Produce from Gilmore's Flowerpot farm. **Remi Chauvin**

Kingston Clark cites The Agrarian Kitchen [<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/travel/exactly-what-to-eat-in-tasmania-according-to-a-michelin-star-chef-20230531-p5dcq0>] as a role model, where Rodney Dunn and Séverine Demanet have built a garden, restaurant and cooking school and a kiosk for casual weekend lunches on the front lawn. “They do an incredible job for the New Norfolk community,” she says. “The locals see that their approach is honest and authentic, and so they support it. You can’t just come in and do a pop-up and not give back and contribute.”

This sense of creative freedom in Tasmania has lured food and wine-oriented entrepreneurs and dreamers for decades. Luke Burgess broke new ground in 2010 with Garagistes in Hobart, setting the tone for the state’s produce-first, sustainable dining ethos. Matthew Evans moved south from the mainland in 2016 to open Fat Pig Farm, the hero of a number of SBS *Gourmet Farmer* TV series that echoed the UK’s *River Cottage*. Chefs Federica Andrisani and Oskar Rossi once wanted to conquer Italy but opened the now-flourishing Fico in Hobart in 2016 when they realised they had more of a chance of doing things their own sweet way. Louise Radman and Nav Singh moved to Tasmania in 2000 for the weather – to build their cool-climate winery Domaine Simha, and Antarctic-inspired Institut Polaire diner [<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/travel/the-coolest-place-in-hobart-to-dine-literally-20250409-p5lqg5>].

Not everything takes root. For every 26-year-old Stillwater restaurant (still thriving in Launceston), there are short-lived fine diners such as Van Bone

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restaurant now has new Scottish-born operators at the helm and opens only on Saturday, Sunday and Monday for degustation lunches.

Fat Pig Farm's restaurant has been closed for two years (although it will reopen for weekend lunches in July). Burgess shuttered Garagistes in 2015 only to return in 2025 with the tighter, more personal, 10-seater Scholé. "If I were 30, I'd do something tiny, like Scholé," says Gilmore. "But being a bit older, I'm not willing to work 70 hours a week any more."

In mid-autumn, half the plants in Gilmore's garden look like weird underwater corals, having gone rampantly to seed. It's the sign of a good gardener, not a bad one. Gilmore has been saving the seeds of his rare and exotic plants for 15 years; gathering, drying, storing and eventually replanting. "You do it because it can be hard to import the things you want, and to safeguard the survival of the species."

American president Thomas Jefferson was another great seed-saver, writing in his *Garden Book* (1766-1824), "the greatest service which can be rendered to any country is to add a useful plant to its culture". Gilmore is trialling sea kale, and roveja dry peas ("good for soups," he says). Platters of various seeds and grasses colonise half of the long, rustic Huon pine dining table in the kitchen, warmed by the morning sun.

"Japanese carrots, rose mint and Tennessee hyssop, very floral and anise," he says, running his fingers through the seeds like worry beads. He was thrilled to discover that he can apply to the Tasmanian government for an import licence to continue his quest for the rare heirloom varieties on which he has built his career. "I've also discovered so many good people here in Tasmania with a great variety of seeds."

The 1920s cottage has good bones, and the front deck faces east for morning coffee sessions, but the kitchen isn't exactly three-chef-hat

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image that seems to hold more heritage seeds than it does food. Gilmore shows off airtight seed containers labelled “zucchini rampicante” and “violet de galmi onions” in the crisper. “Most people keep their lettuce in the crisper,” I comment. He points outside. “If I want lettuce, I just get it from the garden.”

Things grow slowly in Tasmania; football stadiums, ferry terminals, tomatoes. A bowl of eight heirloom varieties of the latter in fashionable shades of pink, crimson and purple sits on the table as silent proof. “They’re the last of the season,” says Gilmore. “Tomatoes take a long time to ripen here.” It’s this slow growth, he says, that imbues vegetables with so much flavour. “When something grows naturally in real soil, the nutrients are so dense. Food grown with chemical fertilisers, pumped full of water, is never going to taste as good.”

Getting away from the heat and humidity of Sydney is one of the leading reasons he chose Tasmania. “You get a true four seasons here, instead of just summer and winter merging into one another.” Over his visits, Australia’s southernmost state simply got under his skin. “I’ve lived in Sydney all my life and loved it,” he says. “But when I step off the plane in Tasmania and smell the air and see the light, I just immediately relax. It’s a deep, lovely feeling.”

As soon as he and Kath took possession of the land, they started planting the garden and orchard, courtesy of a bloke with a bobcat who dug more than 50 holes on the sloping pastures below the house. “I bought a heap of one-year-old bare-rooted heritage trees from Woodbridge, here in Tasmania,” says Gilmore. “They had 60 to 70 varieties of apple, which is incredible.”

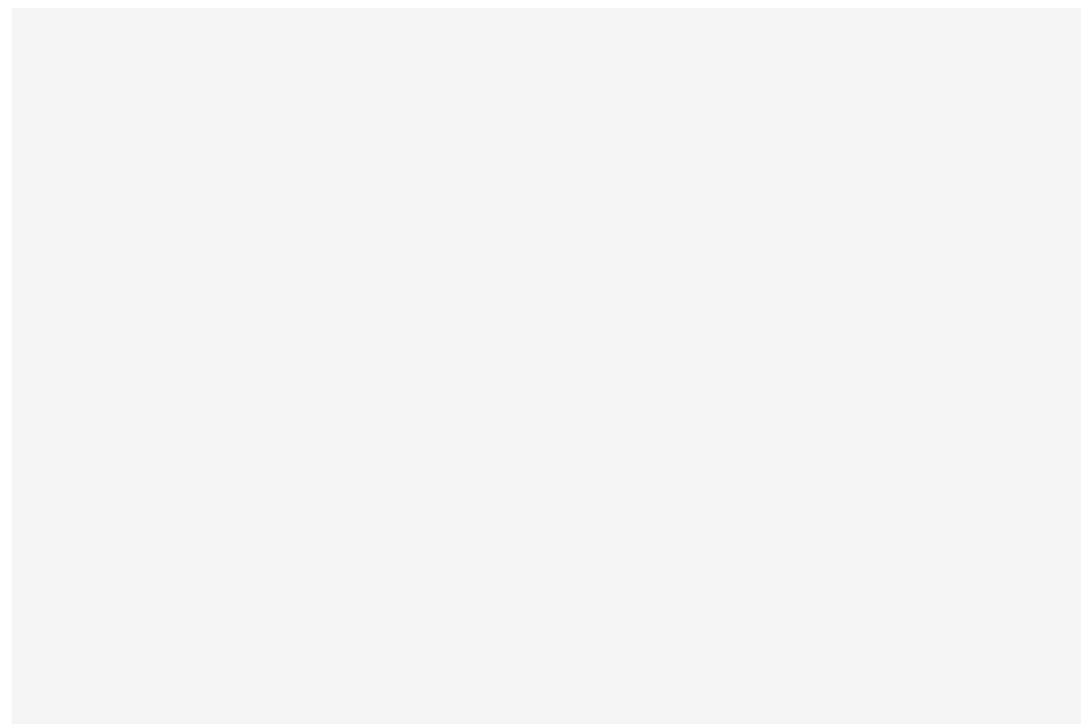
The fruit trees are now a metre high. Among them are scarlet apples named Cleopatra, Cox’s Orange Pippin dwarf apples, Spartan dwarf apples and a couple of cider apple varieties, with a view to making cider on site. There are Beurre D’Anjou and Durondeau pears, White Genoa figs,

Blenheim and Tardif de Bordanel apricots, and plums as varied as greengage, the Japanese blood plum and Mirabelle (“you don’t see them

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mulberries, and has a white mulberry tree as well as the Farkston long red mulberry, several different varieties of quince and six types of cherries.



Gilmore: “You have to charge for good food. But I think that is something that Hobart can support.” **Remi Chauvin**

Does such rare exotica make him rush back to the kitchen to devise one of his typical trompe l’oeil desserts, tweezering exotic mulberries beneath fragile shells of meringue in the style of the Opera House (a Bennelong signature dish)? He laughs. “We just eat from the garden when we’re here,” he says. “I love going out and digging up some potatoes or pulling some carrots and having them with a little meat or chicken.” No tweezers? “No tweezers.”

His new neighbours are welcoming. “Everyone here gives you produce,” he says. “The neighbour down the road brought a whole box of her home-grown apricots, which we’ve turned into jam. The neighbour up the top of the road gave us a huge punnet of blueberries.”

But even this mild-mannered, gentlemanly chef has mortal enemies determined to take advantage of his move to Tasmania. Possums top the

list, and the state's small marsupials known as pademelons. Rabbits, too.

Anything that eats roots and leaves, essentially. His first move was a

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So far, he's working for everything except the birds, which fly straight over the top of it. "They got all my cherries this year," he says. "Every single cherry had been reduced to just the stalk and the stone, left hanging on the tree."

Having a dream is one thing. People paying top dollar for it is another. "You have to charge for good food," says Gilmore, his mind on his new Tasmanian business venture. "But I think that is something that Hobart can support." He has been buoyed by seeing the local food and wine scene explode in the past six or seven years, citing The Trophy Room, Ogee, Fico, Scholé, Sonny and Omotenashi as top Hobart experiences, along with The Agrarian Kitchen and, down his way, the Mewstone Winery and Peppermint Bay Hotel. Like everyone else in the state, he credits MONA (the Museum of Old and New Art) for pulling the crowds that make it all happen.

"MONA kicked everything off," agrees Rodney Dunn of The Agrarian Kitchen. "It gave people the confidence to open restaurants in Tasmania, because it brings the type of visitors that will spend money and dine out." He's all for Gilmore setting up nearby. "That would be the cherry on top," he says. "If having his name attached to a place helps people decide to come, then everyone benefits."

It took 16 years to get The Agrarian Kitchen to this point. Does he have any advice for the relative newcomer? "Be prepared to go back to the trenches and do the hard yards," he says. "And give it time. It takes a while to find out where you fit, and to carve out your niche." If you looked at opening a restaurant from a financial point of view, says Dunn, you'd never do it. "It's not so much about chasing success here. It's about enjoying the process."

For him, the fact that Gilmore has jumped ship from the mainland is a signpost for the future of Tasmania. "Who knows? We might end up with a dining scene that becomes the next Copenhagen, bringing people here from all around the world."

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<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/food-and-wine/china-has-started-selling-its-wine-here-and-it-s-surprisingly-good-20260515-p5zxcr>

Jill Dupleix

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