WINTER 2023

DEPARTURES



NOTE-PERFECT *Gifts*

PLAYFUL *Danish* DESIGN

BRAZIL'S *Culinary* BOUNTY

IN FULL SWING



Country Concept

What seemed like an unfortunate situation has become a positive for a former hospitality duo. Their Kyneton establishment is like no other, becoming a focal point for locals and visitors alike. *by Carrie Hutchinson*



Above: a cosy living room scene created with vintage finds at Kabinett; *top:* counterside at Botanik

THE PHONE CALL from her real-estate agent wasn't exactly music to Melissa Macfarlane's ears. The tenants who'd taken over the pub she and husband Frank Moyle owned had surrendered the lease. They needed to take it back, but the duo had already been there and done that. After buying the Royal George Hotel in Kyneton, about 90 kilometres northwest of Melbourne, in 2005, they tarted the old girl up and opened an upmarket gastropub (not their first, it should be noted).

But, as anyone who works in hospitality knows, running a successful establishment, especially in a country town where good help can be hard to find, is exhausting. Three years later, Melissa and Frank decided to pursue other interests – in her case, furniture and interior design; photography for him. They sold the business to another restaurateur, keeping ownership of the building. Then came that fateful call in 2019, and they had no other option but to return to the pub. But Covid had other ideas, and things changed again.

"It almost saved us," says Melissa. She had a furniture store not far away and decided to give that up and move her wares into the pub's many rooms.

"I guess you could ask why you'd put furniture in a pub, but when you see it, it makes perfect sense," she says. "The furniture store was one big room, but now people can understand the proportions."

Now renamed Kabinett, the pub's spaces showcase vintage furniture purchased on buying trips around the world and pieces Melissa designs herself – "they have a brutalist



Kabinett is filled with mixed-era antiques

element and are very much about materiality" – as well as jewellery, bed linen, cushions, lighting and all sorts of other covetable homewares.

Upstairs is a selection of the finest glassware and a boutique featuring one of Melissa's passions: avant-garde fragrances. Here, you can sample and buy perfumes by Australian-in-France Naomi Goodsir, renowned cognac distillery Frapin and others.

But you don't just get to browse and spritz at Kabinett.

"You know, I always wanted to go shopping and wander around and look at cool stuff then go, 'Oh my goodness, I can have a martini as well?'" says Melissa. So, as phase two, when Covid lockdowns finished, she opened Botanik upstairs.

It comprises a retail section selling vermouth, amaro and other herbal wines and liqueurs – "there are bottle shops and distilleries everywhere; I wanted to do something different" – and a cocktail bar that opens at 10am. "See, our hashtag is day drinking," she says, pointing at a chalkboard.

The cocktail list has a full page of herbal specialities followed by a page of negronis, another of classics and a decent selection of low- and no-booze mixes. Frank can be found slinging bottles here three days a week, and guests can prop themselves up at the bar for a chat, find a quiet corner on velvet armchairs or head onto the lush veranda that doubles as a nursery.

Melissa and I sit around a low table as she pours measures of amaro. The recipes for some are a complete secret. Amaro Montenegro, for instance, has been made outside the Italian city of Bologna since 1885, but not a single person knows the complete list of its 40 botanicals or their final blends. Each of the liqueurs is different; all are delicious.

The combination of Kabinett and Botanik has been a huge success with both locals and visitors attracted by the unique proposition. "I think when you do what you love and get enthusiastic about it, other people get it too," she says.

Of course, she's been asked to take the concept elsewhere. "I've been offered Vancouver and Hong Kong, but I think it has to be the right building, the right location, the right community. I dream about it, but I've always dreamed about having a department store. That whole model is so evocative, but it's very hard to make work. But it's really exciting to us." *kabinett.com.au; botanik.com.au*



Botanik's impressive range of botanical booze

Kyneton Quality

Five more reasons to visit this country town.

The setting is a riff on the classic country Chinese restaurant, but **Fook Shing** offers contemporary pan-Asian cuisine. Don't miss the sweet-salty wobble of the egg custard with blue swimmer crab. $ *fookshing.com.au*

Take a seat at the bar for a tasting of gins at **Animus Distillery**. If Botanik gave you a taste for herbaceous drinks, you'll love the Arboretum Gin, which eschews citrus for native flavours, like strawberry gum leaf and native bush tomato, as well as red capsicum and rosemary. *animusdistillery.com*

For an hour or two, put yourself in the skilful hands of Marye O'Brien, owner of **Maiaveda**, a cosy Ayurvedic day spa, and feel stress and tension melt away. $ *maiaveda.com.au*

The town's former butter factory has been transformed into **Stockroom**, a huge contemporary art space showing the work of local, national and international artists and makers. You could easily lose a couple of hours here. *stockroomspace.com*

Stay the night at the retro-cool **Kyneton Springs Motel** and live out all your Route 66 road-trip fantasies. Order breakfast the night before and have it delivered to your room through an old-school hatch in the morning. $ *kyneton springsmotel.com*

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