

people | EDEN VALLEY SA

Down by the dam... "We call it our lake," says Roz. "In summer we put a barbecue on the pontoon."

FACING PAGE Peter and Roz

Seppelt met in 2005: "It was love at first sight," she says.

## LABOUR OF LOVE

HORSES BROUGHT THIS COUPLE TOGETHER — AND BUILDING A VINEYARD AND HANDCRAFTED STONE BUILDINGS HAS MADE THEM EVEN CLOSER.

WORDS **BARBARA SWEENEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **MARK ROPER**





**MADE FROM LOCAL STONE**, Peter and Roz Seppelt's cellar door carries an air of permanence and prominence as it sits squarely on its patch of South Australia's Eden Valley. The gums tower overhead, their leaves dancing in the slight breeze. All around is quiet until the front door opens and a tumble of black and white dogs race down the steps and away.

The building is typical of the region. Built by hand, using mud and straw for mortar, these stone structures tell a story of settlers with big ideas and a purpose. Even in disrepair, their roofs half gone and walls crumbling, they're picturesque.

This one is far from crumbling — and particularly attractive. The geometry is harmonious and the colour of the stone in the late afternoon light is a warm palette of pink, cream and grey. At one end, there's a circular tower with pretty proportions and a cupola roof. As tradition dictates, the stonemason has left his mark, carving the year the building was finished on a large, stone embedded in the wall. It reads... 1991.

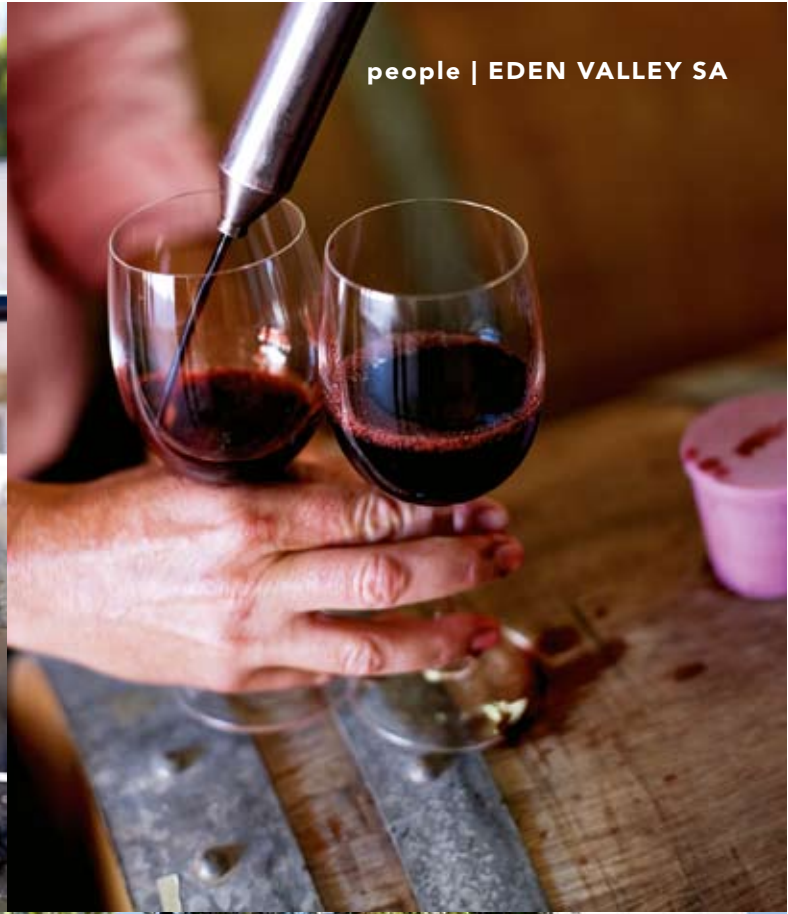
Rather than some 19th-century settler, it is Peter who is responsible for this feat. Almost alone he built the cellar door and the tower — in fact, six buildings in all. Roz has recently graduated to chief cement mixer. "It's hard work," she says. "But I don't need to go to the gym."

The building spree started 30 years ago when Peter and his father Kurt — the managing director of the Seppelt family wine business until its takeover in 1983 — planted grapes on the Springton property. Digging the vineyard yielded lots of fine bluestone, which Peter thought he might put to good use. He built the wine barrel room, an elegant structure with a steep corrugated iron roof and a deep verandah that houses the Grand Cru Estate's wine.

"When I was growing up in Adelaide, we had an Italian stonemason come in to build some big retaining walls and I helped," Peter recalls. "I learned more than I realised."

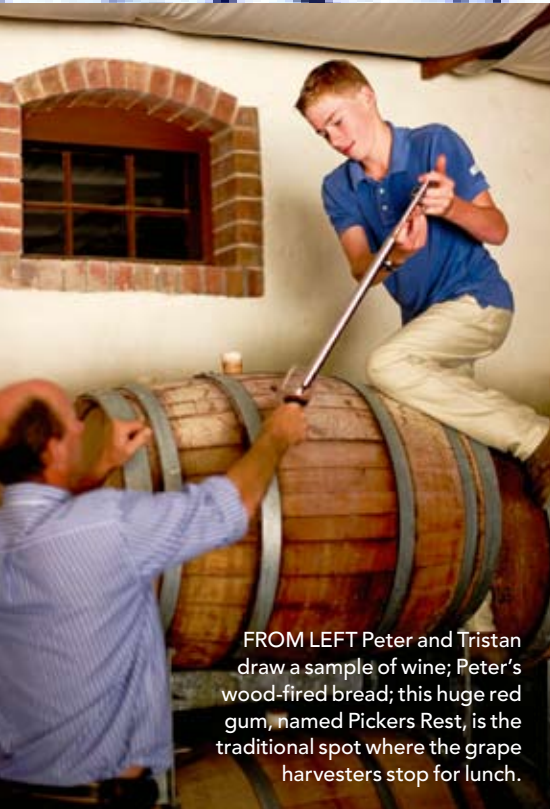
Like their building partnership, Peter Seppelt Wines is a joint effort. Roz, who studied agriculture and also works off-farm as a consultant agronomist, is the viticulturalist who manages the vines while Peter is >





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Golden retrievers Malt and Maddie (left and right), labrador Toby and border collie Bella; a taste of merlot; the rustic cellar door looks like one of the region's 19th-century buildings, but was actually built by Peter; some of the beloved Land Rovers. FACING PAGE Melinda and Roz ride Irish Sport horses Flea and Wikkie.





FROM LEFT Peter and Tristan draw a sample of wine; Peter's wood-fired bread; this huge red gum, named Pickers Rest, is the traditional spot where the grape harvesters stop for lunch.



the winemaker. Although he's a graduate of Adelaide's Roseworthy Agricultural College, Peter credits his wine education in part to the many hours spent sitting in the back of the Seppelt company car, driving around vineyards all over Australia with his father. "At the time you don't think you're learning anything, but again I realised later I'd absorbed a lot."

Peter makes a range of wines, from chardonnay to merlot, but is proudest of his riesling. "I love my riesling," he says. "And the Eden Valley makes some of the best in the world."

The family, including Peter's children — Melinda, 16, and Tristan, 15 — are devoted to animals. A pair of golden retrievers, Malt and Maddie, labrador brothers Toby and Wyatt, and Bella the border collie now sit patiently by the back door, silky bantams peck about under the trees, and the guinea fowls that Roz breeds are busy at work in the vineyard, seeking out bugs — "the good as well as the bad, unfortunately," she says.

Roz also keeps a flock of sheep and Peter a herd of Pol Hereford cattle. And then there are the Irish Sport horses, Flea and Wikkie.

Not only do Melinda and Roz travel to compete, but the Seppelts also host the annual cross-country and show jumping Grand Cru Horse Trials, which attract elite riders from all over the country.

The trail weaves its way around the 120-hectare property, through rough pasture, the vineyards and along Roz and Peter's wonderful wedding tree avenue. They met in 2005, when Roz was competing in the horse trials. At 33, she says, she had just about given up on men and the idea of happy ever after. But the pair's shared passion for wine, animals and Land Rovers — Peter is an avid collector — led to love at first sight.

As a wedding gift, they asked friends to buy deciduous saplings and then set about planting the claret ashes, maples and oaks in an avenue. The trees reach around four metres high now — "and are beautiful in the autumn," Roz says. The couple like to walk around the vineyard, glass in hand, at the end of each day.

"That's what we do, mooch around and chat," Roz says. "One day Peter said, 'I want to build a pizza oven' — and he did. All he did was read a book. He's very clever."

The single oven became two and before they knew it, Peter and Roz were open for business, making pizza for their cellar-door customers.

"One minute we're mixing concrete, the next we're mixing dough," Roz says. "It's certainly never dull."

It's a family affair with Melinda and Tristan also helping out. Peter is the main cook and justifiably proud of his garlic prawn pizza — "I think he's so good with the dough because he understands yeast as a winemaker," Roz says. But Melinda has made her mark too with sweet specialities like fig with brown sugar and chocolate brownie pizzas.

Some of the ingredients are close at hand. Roz's vegetable garden supplies rocket and the fig tree fruits prolifically. So much so, the dogs put on weight after gorging on this year's windfall. Peter now plans to fence it off — after all, "figs are \$25 a kilo!"

You would think Peter and Roz have their hands full, but as we eat some freshly baked pizza Peter talks about wanting to breed golden retrievers. Is there any one interest that edges out the others? "No," he says. "They're all top of the heap."

"All our hobbies are married together," Roz says. \*  
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