



WORDS **AMANDA WARD** PHOTOGRAPHS **KATE ELMES**

# WINE IN THE BLOOD

**L**IZ AND GUY ADAMS ARE A THOROUGHLY MODERN couple, but they are the first to admit that their lives are strongly influenced by the past. As the owners of *Metala*, a substantial farmhouse and property on the banks of the Bremer River at Langhorne Creek, they have met, head on, the challenges of integrating five generations of farming and viticultural tradition with a growing business and a young family.

Guy took over the management of *Metala* in 1982, exactly 100 years after his great grandfather, William Harper Formby, took possession of the property along with his wife and eight children. The generously proportioned stone farmhouse, however, was already there, constructed by the original owner of the property, Herman Daenke, in the 1850s. His plans to build a two storey residence fit for a gentleman never came to fruition, but left *Metala* with stone walls half a metre thick and a broad, square footprint that now provides ample accommodation for the young Adams family.

In fact, it was the generous proportions of the house that first brought Liz and Guy together. Liz had moved to Strathalbyn to work as a kindergarten director and had shared a house with one of Guy's friends when she worked in Kingston SE. He suggested Guy might have some accommodation, so she took up residence as a boarder at the homestead and they became close friends before romance eventually blossomed. "We could not do what we do now unless we were good friends," Liz observes, acknowledging that living and working together full time in an isolated environment with two young children would be challenging without this firm foundation.

Today, *Metala* is a welcoming country home, its solid limestone walls and shady verandahs restored to their original glory and surrounded by a beautiful garden combining century old trees with newly established beds of water wise plants. However, when Liz first arrived, the homestead was nothing like the liveable space it has now become. "We started renovating in 1995 and we finished the dining room last year. It's like the Sydney Harbour Bridge; it's almost time to start again," she laughs.

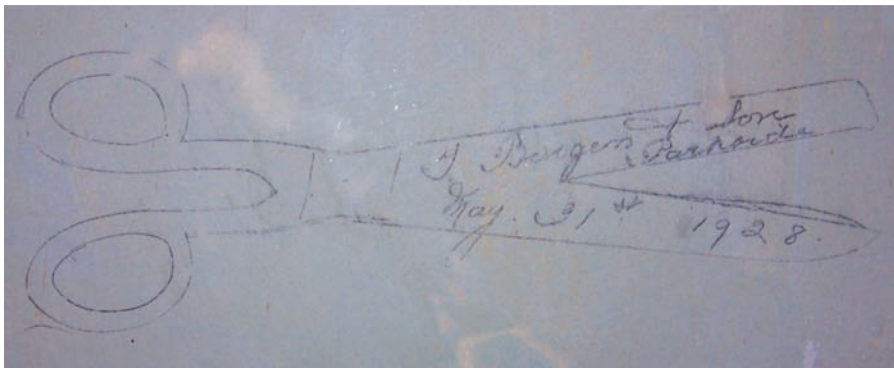
As with everything the couple do on the property, the renovation of the homestead aimed to preserve the historic architecture while bringing the features of the home up to date with

the needs of a modern family. An old lean-to was removed from the back and the large header tank and windmill that sat outside the kitchen over the underground water storage were dispensed with. Cement render had been plastered over the stonework in an attempt to hide the effects of salt damp and Liz recalls spending an entire Christmas break chipping off "the hardest concrete known to man", made from the local sand.

A lath and plaster ceiling was removed, along with a century of dust. Huge sheets of Willunga slate were sourced to match the existing scullery and maid's room floor and manhandled into place in the new family room. The house revealed some intriguing secrets during the work, including messages from Isabella, the daughter of the original owner, scrawled in pencil on the wall next to one of the fireplaces, and a trace of the wallpaperer's scissors with his name and the date pencilled inside. "There are some pieces of history we'll



Celebrating 125 years of family ownership this year, Liz and Guy Adams (**top right**, with daughter Emily) must embrace modern business practice, but have also managed to maintain the historic integrity of their home. Messages from Isabella, daughter of the original owner, on the wall (**following page**) and a trace of the wallpaperer's scissors (**right**) have been preserved. The property inspired the *Metala* label (**above**), but now produces the Adams brand, Brothers in Arms.

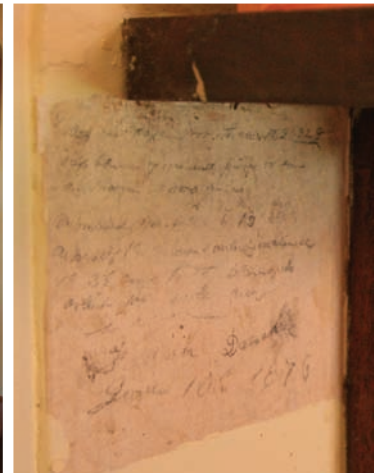


never get to the bottom of,” says Liz, including the origins of the name, which is thought to have something to do with the Prussian heritage of the original owner. What they have found, they’ve preserved. Even a lavender water bottle that tumbled out of a wall cavity when the kitchen window was being built has been retained. “I don’t know why it would have been there, but I kept it in the kitchen; it seems to belong there.”

All the major renovation work was done before the children arrived, and Liz says they made a conscious decision to keep the office separate from the house to make sure they could leave work behind at the end of the day. The engine room for the winery and farm business is set up in what used to be the single men’s cottage and the dairyman’s cottage, a stone’s throw from the main house, nestled under the last river red gums in a row planted at the same time as the first vines on the property in 1891.

But after just a few minutes spent with Liz and Guy, it becomes obvious that their work is their life. “We’re really bad,” says Liz ruefully. When Myles, now eight, and then Emily, now four, arrived, Liz found she couldn’t be in two places at once. The children were more comfortable in the house, but the work still had to be done, so the computers were networked to the house and the rest is history.

The property covers 1000 hectares, including the Bremer River flats, and is a mixed enterprise. In Liz’s words, “a bit of everything, which means no down time”. Their own vines, as well as a section of vineyard leased to a large producer, dominate a large proportion of the property. The oldest vines are the twisted and gnarled cabernet and shiraz, planted in 1891 opposite the farmhouse and in the adjacent cellar block, planted in 1894. Grapes from the property inspired the Metala wine label, which was introduced by the Stonyfell winery in 1959 and lives on today under the Saltram brand.



Several corridors of native vegetation, fondly referred to as Myles's Trees and Emily's Trees after the sixth generation now growing up at *Metala*, have been planted, and other areas are leased to a local revegetation group. Their maintenance is seen as an investment in the long term future of the property. "We are stewards of the land and the heritage," explains Liz. "There is nothing short term here."

This is a sentiment that is echoed by both Liz and Guy as they show off their farm, including the state of the art Brothers in Arms winery just a few hundred metres down the road, completed in 2002. Liz calls it the tin shed, an understated description of the modern facility housing 24 eight tonne stainless steel fermenters, a sizeable barrel room full of French and American oak working its magic on the 2007 vintage and a huge dry storage area full of pallets of wine awaiting distribution.

The office is buzzing with final preparations for the bottling of the 2006 fruit and a special 2005 cabernet. Although half of the wines produced are sold in Australia, the couple's wines are attracting a following overseas, so along with the farm duties, their schedule now also includes trips to the USA, Canada, Singapore and, more recently, China, to meet interested buyers. "We invited a Chinese group home to *Metala* for dinner once. They were surprised because in China they don't entertain at home like we do here. Halfway through the meal, the owner stood up and doubled his order," says Liz.

The garden was a 40th birthday present from Guy to Liz and the pleasure she takes in it is obvious as she walks from bed to bed checking the progress of each plant. A garden designer friend, Caroline Dawes, jumped at the chance to help with a plan for the expansive space. "The brief was to complement the house with natives and low maintenance plants," says Liz. The house sits on a red sandhill, so the soil is tricky and a pile of soil dragged over from the sheep shed turned out to be too difficult for many plants. However, the structure of the garden is strikingly dictated by the row of ancient river red gums and the huge and perfectly formed pyramid tree in the front lawn.

Liz decided to push the boundaries of the garden out from the house to keep farm traffic at arm's length and make room for a circular gravel drive. Low hedged lilly pilly *Australis select* sprout bright red leaf tips which tie in perfectly with the red brick details of the homestead. Another new addition to the garden is a long rose arbour with strong, geometric lines designed to extend the architecture of the house into the garden and give the children a more interesting journey from the house to the "bus gate", where they are collected for school and kindy each day.

A formal arrangement of lawns with a central urn is surrounded by deep beds where plants have been selected for texture, fragrance and hardiness. Crabapple trees and ornamental pears are establishing themselves amid a lower storey of flowering perennials and curry plant hedges. An expanse of lawn directly in front of the homestead is known as the croquet lawn and Liz and Guy confess to throwing the odd croquet party for friends when farm commitments allow for a little socialising.

Although they are one of the bigger growers in the tight knit Langhorne Creek region, Guy and Liz still consider themselves small producers, but they credit much of their success to the family history and their strong partnership. "It's nice to have something genuine," says Guy. "We don't have to make it up, it's real. When people drink our wine, they're also drinking in our lifestyle," adds Liz. When asked whether they would like to see their children carry on the family tradition, they are typically practical. "Farming has changed a lot; it's a serious business and we're not so naive to think that it won't change again over 15 or 20 years," says Guy. "If we have set the place up for them, then they'll have choice. We want to instill into our kids a sense of ownership of the land – respect and regeneration. We put an emphasis on that," concludes Guy.

*This year, Guy and Liz are celebrating Metala's 125 years of family ownership. To mark the anniversary, they will open the gardens of Metala as part of Australia's Open Gardens Scheme on November 24 and 25 from 10am to 4.30pm. Entry is \$5.*