

WORD OF MOUTH

UPDATES ON EVERYTHING GROUND-BREAKING IN TRAVEL. EDITED BY FIONA KERR

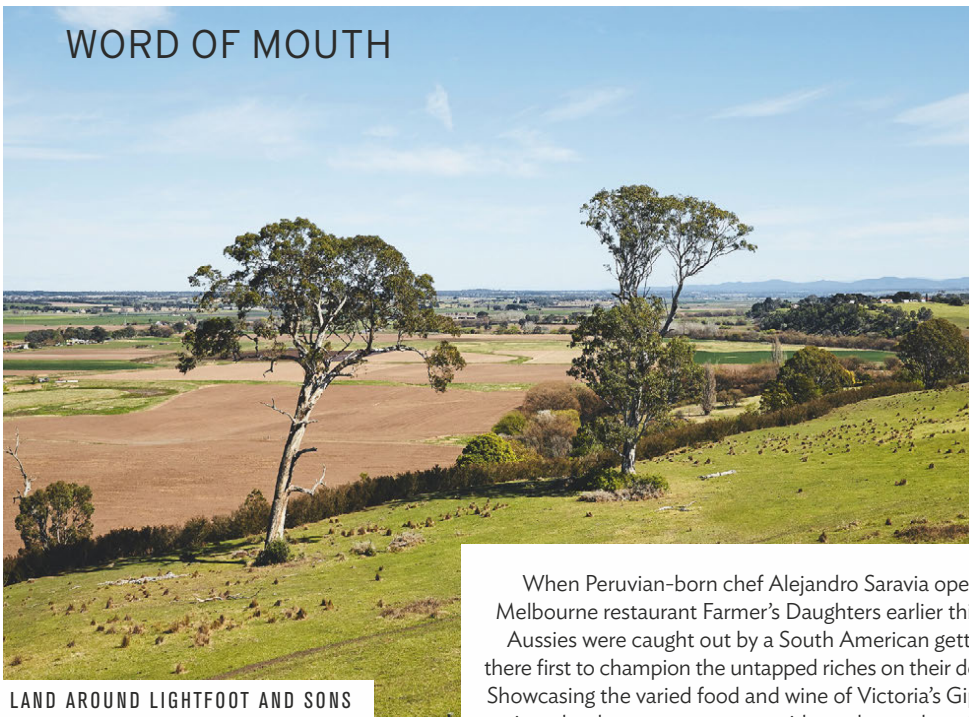
PIIONEER SPIRIT

THE LESSER-KNOWN EXPANSES OF GIPPSLAND IN SOUTH-EAST AUSTRALIA ARE EMERGING WITH AN EXCITING NEW FOOD SCENE AND ROOTED STAYS

PHOTOGRAPH: LACHLAN MOORE

LIVING AREA IN THE CABIN AT ROSS FARM

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LAND AROUND LIGHTFOOT AND SONS

LIGHTFOOT AND SONS



When Peruvian-born chef Alejandro Saravia opened Melbourne restaurant Farmer's Daughters earlier this year, Aussies were caught out by a South American getting in there first to champion the untapped riches on their doorstep. Showcasing the varied food and wine of Victoria's Gippsland region, the three-storey space, with a colour palette inspired by gumtrees, has become the unofficial embassy of the state's most underrated area. Saravia's passion for the vast land – spread across some 16,000 square miles and starting just over an hour east of Melbourne – was fuelled on excursions to meet producers and immerse his two sons in the local culture. While it has long been known for rugged nature walks and time-stood-still fishing towns, Gippsland has more recently become a country escape for inner-city Melbourneans who are snapping up weekend houses much more affordably than on the popular Mornington and Bellarine peninsulas. Now it's emerging as a serious culinary destination with an innovative wave of restaurateurs, cooks and makers tapping into its natural abundance. In his wood-fired kitchen, Saravia coaxes magic from raw-milk cheeses, grass-fed beef and exceptional fish, while the deli offers small plates and quick bites – Bass Strait beef-cheek pastrami, Baw Baw alpine-trout *rillettes* – along with wines to take away. At aperitivo hour, the rooftop terrace is the place to be for an aromatic vermouth or G&T with pepperberry while plotting a foodie road trip to some of Gippsland's coolest spots.



SODAFISH

ROSS FARM



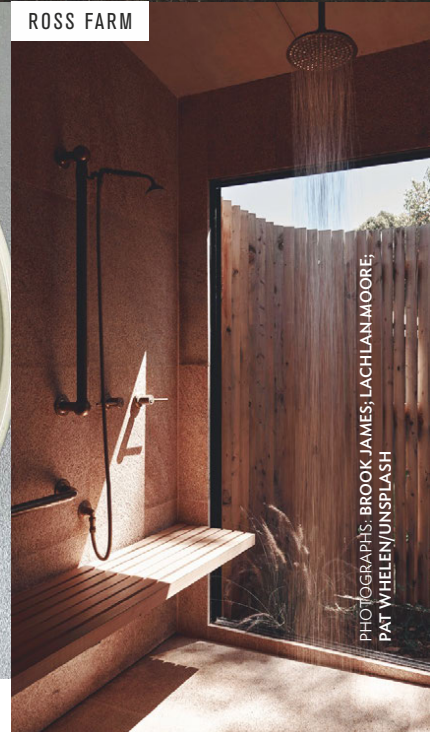
ROSS FARM



FARMER'S DAUGHTERS



NORTHERN GROUND



PHOTOGRAPHS: BROOK JAMES; LACHLAN MOORE; PAT WHELEN/JUNSPASH

SARDINE



INDIGENOUS WILDLIFE



ROSS FARM



LOCAL BARN

ROSS FARM



EAT

At West Gippsland's **Hogget Kitchen**, chef Trevor Perkins and his team butcher, brine, pickle and smoke local ingredients to critical acclaim. Super-fresh seafood takes centre stage at Paynesville's **Sardine** and at Lakes Entrance newcomer **Sodafish**, which gets Saravia's vote for the best fish and chips. Other essential lunch pit stops include Bairnsdale's **Northern Ground**, **The Long Paddock** in Lindenow and Korumburra's stripped-back **The Borough Dept Store**, a food hall with a cheese-stuffed fridge and counters laden with sourdough and spiced wild-apple muffins.

DRINK

The region has countless boutique cellar doors, craft breweries and distilleries. Get a taste of the famed cool-climate terroir at **Dirty Three Wines**, **Lightfoot and Sons** and **Waratah Hills**, all known for their excellent Pinot Noirs. **Loch Brewery & Distillery** makes quality gin, whisky and malty ales. Hipster go-to **Sailors Grave Brewing** has a cracking IPA and gets experimental with native ingredients such as coastal seaweed and *burru ngalluk* grass seed. Settle in for 'a pot' at the bay-front **Metung Hotel**, Saravia's favourite Gippsland watering hole.

STAY

Surrounded by rolling pastures on the site of an old dairy farm near Meeniyan, eco-minded **Ross Farm** is made up of a trio of meticulously designed hideouts, while on Phillip Island, micro-farm **Five Acres** has added three ocean-facing huts, each with an outdoor bathtub. And at **Vivere Retreat** in Neerim South, guests can light the wood fire and crack open a bottle of red while soaking up the views across the nearby Baw Baw ranges. LEANNE CLANCEY



SODAFISH



VIVERE RETREAT



HOGGET KITCHEN



GIPPSLAND BEACH