

Crushing it in Orange

LIBBY MOFFET

It's a bluebird day in Orange and the autumn sun warms our skin as we gaze across the rich green rows of grapevines that form the backbone of ChaLou Wines. But while the outlook at this vineyard in NSW's central west is captivating, owners Nadja Wallington and Steve Mobbs are keen we also appreciate the beauty that lies beneath their vines, where cracked soil sits on ancient volcanic rock.

Wallington, who worked as a winemaker in France, says while European vigneron always talk about their soils, the cool climate Orange wine region tends to focus more on its elevation. "But Orange's soils are really unique and distinctive because they're volcanic basalts. That's why all our wines at ChaLou have a mineral-focused acidity – it's the soil," Wallington explains.

Winners of the prestigious 2024 Halliday Wine Companion Dark Horse Award, which recognises emerging producers who have achieved five-star winery status for the first time, Wallington and Mobbs bought their vineyard in 2020. Intent on creating a "bud-to-bottle" winery, the vigneron launched their label ChaLou (a portmanteau of their middle names Charlton and Louise) the following year, featuring wines made exclusively from the vineyard's 6ha of grapes, most of which are



IN THE KNOW

ChaLou Wines is at 569 Emu Swamp Road, Emu Swamp. The next Work with the Winemaker event will be held during Orange Food Week, March 20-29, 2026.

chalouwines.com.au
orangefoodweek.com.au

Nadja Wallington and Steve Mobbs at ChaLou Wines

focuses on the quality and flavour of the grapes. "Essentially the better the grapes are, the easier the wines are to make," Wallington says.

After a convivial cellar door lunch starring a tasty beef casserole cooked by Wallington and some excellent ChaLou drops, we stroll to the top block (elevation 900m) where the winery's sought-after chardonnay grapes grow on rocky soil. Mobbs and Wallington both grew up on NSW vineyards and met at university. But while they're skilled in the science of winemaking, Wallington says it's their connection to the vineyard that puts the art into their craft. "You need that connection, from pruning through to picking, so you understand the design of the wine more," she says. "It's intuitive." And although our group's pick may not warrant its own label, Wallington promises it won't go to waste. "We'll bottle it and just use for special events," she says.

Libby Moffet was a guest of ChaLou Wines and Orange Food Week.

hand-picked. Aged in their 30s, the husband-and-wife team are passionate about sharing their knowledge as well as their wines and regularly host events for enthusiasts, including a new "Work with the Winemaker" day.

An advance email advising me to wear work boots to the inaugural session is the first sign that the title is more than an exercise in marketing alliteration. The second clue is the sharp snippers Mobbs passes around our posse of 15 shortly after we arrive. Minutes later we're walking through the vineyard's "lower" section (elevation 881m) as Mobbs discusses how American rootstock reduces the risk of the devastating phylloxera bug, explains the process of grafting, and reveals ChaLou is poised to release Orange's first chenin blanc varietal.

Over the next hour we bend and snip our way along rows of syrah vines, gently placing

bunches of juicy grapes into cartons that assistant winemaker Alex Rashford loads onto a tractor-drawn trailer. A number of us are picking novices, but Rashford is full of praise, laughingly exclaiming "Well done – you guys are crushing it." And soon we are, literally. In the winery shed, some of the group throw off their boots and stomp our grapes before bucketing the mulch into a metal press. Others try "punching down" a large bin of fermenting syrah, using a metal plate fixed to the end of a pole to push down the rising grape skins.

It's hard work but we're soon rewarded with a swig of the fruits of our picking labour, transformed into a zesty rose-like red by the heavy press. As we embark on a fascinating taste journey sampling wines straight from the cask, Wallington and Mobbs discuss the importance of sugar levels, the role of oak, and their "vineyard-first" philosophy, which

NORFOLK ISLAND

SPRING ON NORFOLK ISLAND

Norfolk Island shines in the spring, it's an ideal time to visit this 'over-the-seas' destination. Travelling from October to November you can expect to find temperatures ranging from 15°C to 24°C, clear skies, blooming flowers, lush greenery and beautiful birdlife.

Emily Bay and Slaughter Bay are ideal spots for swimming, snorkelling and picnicking as the sun shines and the waters warm up. Breathe in the fresh Pacific ocean air, hit the bushwalking trails of the National Park for springtime explorations and visit the Botanic Gardens to see a huge range of native plants in full bloom. The island is home to more than 200 native plants, including endemic species such as the Norfolk Island Pine, Treefern and more.

Norfolk Island is also renowned for its magnificent birdwatching and no time is better than the spring mating season! Many birds you can spot year round, like the endemic Green Parrot, but spring is when migratory seabirds may be seen soaring along the coastal cliffs.

Norfolk's cultural calendar 'springs' to life this time of year as well. The Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Show in October has been running annually since 1860 and showcases amazing displays of fruits, vegetables, flowers, baking, art, photography, handicrafts, cattle and poultry, plus island drumming and dancing, equestrian events and even a canine agility show!

The islanders celebrate Thanksgiving in the last week of November, due to the influence of 1800s American Whalers in the South Pacific. All Saints Church is decorated with tall stalks of corn and produce, and following the service there is a traditional feast, featuring familiar fare, alongside delicious island dishes.

Travelling to Norfolk Island is easy! As an Australian territory, no passport is required, so why not say "Watawieh" (hello) to the Spacifica Travel team on **1800 999 100**, who can plan your unforgettable package deal including flights, car hire, tours and meals or book online at our website.

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