

Art and culture combine at Red Poles

If you're wondering how Red Poles—art gallery, licensed café and B&B—got its name, the similarly titled work of art at the National Gallery in Canberra will give you a clue.

Red Poles owner Ros Miller, artist and art lover, wanted strong visual branding for her McLaren Vale business, and struck on the idea using long, coloured poles along her McMurtrie Road entrance. "Then I thought about Blue Poles by Jackson Pollock and I quickly moved onto the colour red, which is visually very strong. Once I'd thought of using poles as a visual, it was all rather quick and easy! And the red poles make it easy to find from the road," said Ros.

Ros followed her passion for art while raising a young family.

"I started painting more seriously at home, then started exhibiting around Adelaide," Ros said. "I'd never done a visual arts degree—that sort of thing was frowned upon in my day—so I went back to uni and achieved my Degree in Visual Art and Applied Design.

"Then when I went back to painting at home I hated it! I missed the vibe of being around other artists, so I went out looking for a gallery and workshop where I could exhibit artists' work and also paint. In 2004 I found this place, which was a beautiful rammed earth building in need of some tender loving care and a complete re-invention of the space."

After serious renovations to set up a gallery, workshop, kitchen and B&Bs, Red Poles was opened in March 2005. Within six months Ros was offering exhibitions, art workshops, restaurant quality food and B&B accommodation for up to 10 people across three rooms.

"I started inviting artists I knew to exhibit and it's grown from there. Now I have the luxury of being able to determine who uses the space, but I've been a struggling artist—I've been through the process of showing work to gallery after gallery—so I like to show at least one work from each artist," Ros said.

"I'm proud that Red Poles is a way for emerging artists to exhibit and to see what sells to help them refine their work."

The gallery features all forms of art, from jewellery to textiles to paintings to graphic design. A new exhibition begins every six weeks and every wall is covered in an eclectic mix of art.

Art workshops are also popular at Red Poles for both



There is plenty of music and entertainment at Red Poles.



Inside a B&B room at Red Poles.

adults and children. "The classes are for the every day person and cover all different art topics," Ros said. "We have some professional artists come along to our life drawing classes because it can be hard to find a model, but most participants are just interested in art."

Kids classes are held every Wednesday and there is a school holiday art program for all ages, but particularly suitable for four to 12 year olds. "It's great for kids with working parents—it's good to get them doing something other than watching television," Ros said.

People who attend art workshops often stay at Red Poles for a meal. The licensed café has indoor tables as well as a lovely



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garden area where kids can safely play while adults soak up the sunshine.

"We have people come for a coffee or a glass of wine right through to our a la carte service," Ros said. "Combined with the B&B, the gallery and workshops, the restaurant makes Red Poles quite unique in South Australia. To my knowledge no one else offers such a range of services."

The natural bushland setting with tranquil lawns amongst the vineyards is the perfect setting for weddings and private functions. Red Poles has even been the venue for a CD launch and a book launch as well as many a birthday celebration.

That's not to forget the live music that fills Red Poles with atmosphere on Sundays. "We had live music at our 2005 opening and it was so lovely we put it on spasmodically from the first year," Ros said.

"Then I bit the bullet in 2006 and started offering live music every Sunday from 1-4 pm. Now most people come for the day—a meal, the music and then stay into the twilight. In fact it's hard to move them!"

The next step for Red Poles might be live theatre in 2009. "My daughter is an actor and we've talked about live theatre at Red Poles using all the different spaces, from the gallery to the garden," Ros said. "At the moment we offer live Cabaret which is very popular.

"And we're looking at offering outdoor movies on Friday



Artist Humna Mustafa running a henna workshop at Red Poles

nights during the twilight. Something a little different with a basket supper and a glass of wine on the lawns watching a great movie preceded by short films by emerging film makers."

Address: McMurtrie Road, McLaren Vale

Opening hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 9am - 5pm

Phone: (08) 8323 8994

Website: www.redpoles.com.au