

[MENU](#)[VENUES](#)[RESERVATIONS](#)**SWILL**

Certain towns of Australia have always been a
draw to artists, enthralled by the natural
surroundings and attracted to the notion of
working alongside like-minded individuals.
To make, to share and occasionally despair
together

ARIELA BARD

Swillhouse Gift Vouchers



[MENU](#)[VENUES](#)[RESERVATIONS](#)

SWILL

13.05.2024 ART, CHEFS, CULTURE, ESSAY, FOOD

It's 8pm on a Tuesday night, and, aside from three men who've ridden their motorbikes down from Queensland and are sharing a room in the hotel upstairs, we are the only customers at the Royal Hotel, the last remaining pub in Hill End, population 125.

"Do you want the good news or the bad news?" asks Steve the bartender. He's a lanky man with a curious mien — think a modern-day Basil Fawlty played by Jarvis Cocker. I've politely finished the tequila and soda he served me — I ordered a gin and tonic — and have returned to the bar to buy another round for myself and my photographer.

"The bad news is the till is closed," he says. A wicked grin spreads across his face. "The good news? Now the drinks are free."

Apparently we've reached the PYO time of night at The Royal, when our barman decides it's time to sit down with a bottle of red and let his customers "pour their own." He is one of many curios in Hill End, a small town in Western NSW, where one fifth of the residents are artists.

Beyers Avenue, the main street in Hill End, is home to the aforementioned boozer, which has been serving the town since 1872, one general store, a gallery, heritage centre and museum. The people we meet will describe Hill End as a town frozen in time, and as we pass 19th century cottages and avenues of European trees planted 150 years ago, it is very much like being transported to another time and place. There is one policeman in the town, and the local school has between four and 15 students.

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There are no numbers on the houses, so I follow the directions the artists have texted — *Keep to the top road until you see one stone church.* Here I find landscape painter Luke Sciberras' studio, a towering deconsecrated Methodist church surrounded by wild rose bushes Sciberras planted and fed with blood. It must have worked — the lancet windows are fighting a losing battle with the roses, which have broken through a crack in the glass and are growing inside, too. As we approach we see a hand painted sign at the gate — *No visitors!* It says. *That means you.*



05.07.2022 ART

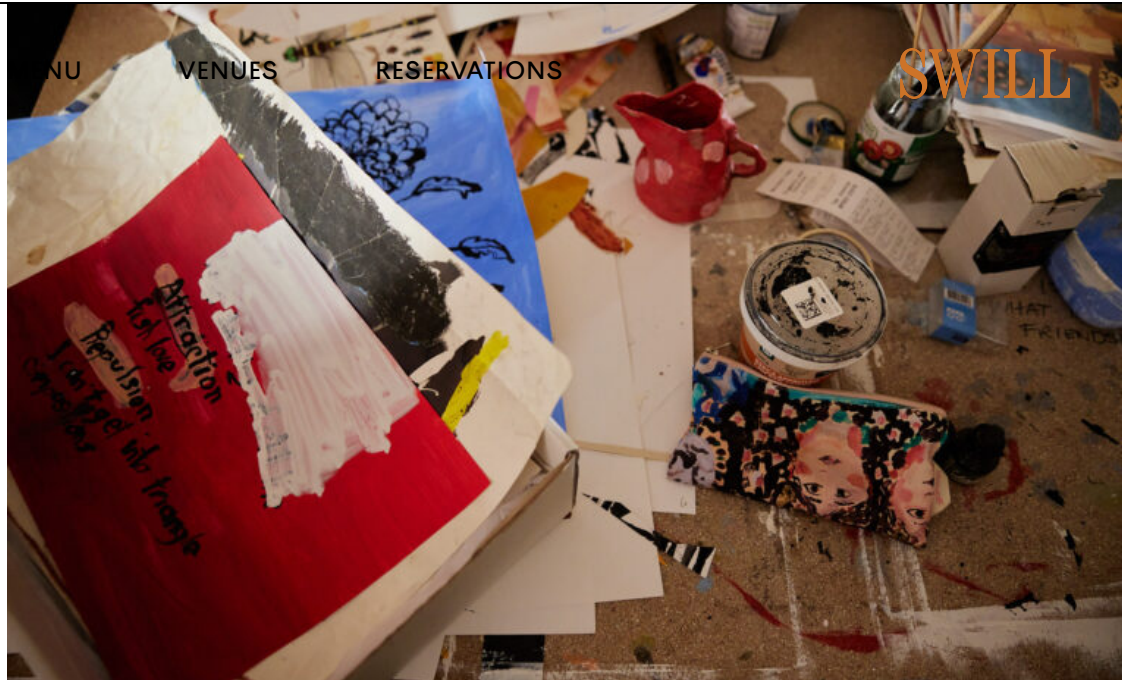
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07.11.2023

ART, CULTURE, DESIGN, FASHION, FOOD, JEWEL
In the studio with Lucy Folk

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Not so at his home, a rambling series of 1870s Georgian cottages located just behind his studio. When he bounds forth to greet us on his wraparound porch, he's wearing a loose striped shirt, a straw hat adorned with an erect feather, and a billowing floral skirt. He tells us that he's waiting for some sarongs to arrive in the mail, and, in the meantime, the skirt is perfect for the welcome warmth of the first bursts of spring. The winters in Hill End are brutal, and the harsh cold can last up to nine months. Today, on the last day of the October long weekend, Sciberras' garden is awash with early flower buds peeking through swathes of green grass, and he carries a bunch of pert asparagus, in his fist, freshly plucked from the ground. He has a glass of red wine in his other hand and a bon vivant's smile stretched across his face. The pizza oven is fired up and ready for the dough he prepared earlier in the day. A good portion of the town will arrive soon after us.

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“I just fell in love with it,” Sciberras says of the first time he visited Hill End in the mid nineties, with his former wife, the artist Gria Shead. “It was just a wild, mad, fabulous place.”

This is an excerpt from the latest issue of Swill. Want more? Order issue 5 today

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