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Mountain retreat oozes quiet elegance

Lauren Arena

The words 'old world charm' can conjure up images of stuffy cupboards and dusty sideboards, so as I walk into Varenna – a restored 20th century homestead in the Blue Mountains – I'm pleasantly surprised to see its ornate cornices, beautifully crafted antique cabinets, elaborate silverware, and billowing velvet curtains.



Luxurious... Varenna

The allure of four-poster beds and glowing fireplaces entices me further into the Victorian residence (circa 1906) where a long hallway passes three bedrooms before reaching a spacious kitchen, breakfast room and leafy courtyard.

Varenna is like a treasure trove of historic trinkets and fancy fixtures, restored to its former glory as a luxury guesthouse nestled in the rugged mountains and leafy village of Leura, just two hours from Sydney.

As I make my way to the formal lounge area, a complementary bottle of Sauvignon Blanc is waiting for me, next to a crystal decanter of port and an array of individually-wrapped chocolates on a silver tray. It's intricate details like these that bring Varenna to life – not to mention breakfast supplies in the kitchen – eggs and bacon in the fridge as well as cocoa and marshmallows in the pantry. The heated bathroom floor engenders the need to warmly frolic barefoot across the soothing checkered tiles in-between lingering sessions in the tub.

The glorious bathtub, with its 24-carat gold claw feet, is a Varenna original and is perhaps my new favourite place on earth – its healing powers dissolve the pressures of modern-day life in an instant and make 21st century stress disappear.

The glamour of yesteryear melds effortlessly with the comforts of today in this luxury homestead and, as I peer out the window, so does the majestic scenery.



Heaven... Varenna's original tub

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Around the corner, Bygone

Beauty is home to the

world's largest private teapot collection. There are over 3000 teapots on display in and around a tearoom that serves a very traditional Devonshire Tea. It's like a sacred cave of antique collectibles, fine china and silverware, albeit a little kitsch and claustrophobic.



Poetic... Everglades garden theatre

I wander over to the nearby Everglades Gardens – through 13 acres of European-style gardens and native bushland, terraced lawns and winding paths that lead to an historic 1930s house that oozes art deco flare. There is a tearoom, of course, with sweet treats baked by volunteers from the National Trust of Australia who help run Everglades house and maintain its poetic gardens.

If its 20th century glamour you're after, then Darley's is

the place to be. Now a famed restaurant Darley's was once the home of Sir Fredrick Darley, the sixth Chief Justice of New South Wales who commissioned the grand country house in Katoomba in 1890.

Like Varenna, Darley's was recently restored and refurbished with specially designed gilt and onyx scroll wallpaper, chandeliers and plush velvet dining chairs. The dining room has an elegant, sensual character – perfect for an intimate dinner.

Executive Chef Lee Kwiez serves an eclectic food and wine mix with a strong focus on local produce. I decide to be daring and try the confit of ocean trout with spanner crab, beetroot caviar and horseradish cream; followed by a main of streamed dory with Dashi custard and crisp lotus root – well worth the risk.

But be sure to save room for dessert, it's just as impressive as the rest of the menu and the spiced pear fool with macaroon crumble and pear granita brings a touch of sunshine to the wintry mountains.

A short train ride from Sydney will deliver you to Varenna's doorstep while the Blue Mountains Explorer tour bus will take you through Katoomba, to Echo Point and to the ever-popular Three Sisters.

Varenna is one of four properties offered by Mountain Whispers luxury accommodation.

Blue Mountains Tourism

www.visitbluemountains.com.au

Mountain Whispers

+61 (0)430 496 755

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Bygone Beautys

20-22 Grose Street, Leura NSW 2780

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Darley's

Lilianfels Ave, Katoomba NSW 2780

www.darleysrestaurant.com.au

Everglades Historic House and Gardens

37 Everglades Avenue, Leura NSW 2780

www.everglades.org.au

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About Us

A haven for the thinking luxury traveller

Lunch is a travel, food and wine magazine with an emphasis on current events. But mostly Lunch, like the meal for which it is named, is about the exchange of ideas.

Lunch is an independent magazine whose founders believe they have worked out what there is not enough of on the web – quality journalism. In addition to high quality original travel food and wine articles and destination reviews Lunch Magazine features interviews with internationally recognized leaders in business, politics, the arts and the media.

Lunch is also the ideal business travellers tool. Over the next 12 months, we will grow our network of local correspondents around the world ensuring when you arrive in a city, you will have up-to-date information on what's happening in local news as well as the latest hotel, restaurant and event news.

Importantly, Lunch Magazine is aimed at affluent, independent thinkers around the globe – a fast-growing community of international business and political leaders eager to embrace Lunch's unique take on global events and issues. A community of readers who are electronically direct mailed the online magazine every week.

Put simply: the best ideas are exchanged at Lunch.

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