

Fans of Monica McInerney in for a treat

The Station Master's Residence in the heart of Clare was home to the McInerney family from 1959 to 2003. Monica McInerney was one of seven children who grew up in the stone property; she is now a best-selling author, whose novels such as *The Alphabet Sisters*, *Family Baggage* and *A Taste for It* are published in Australia, Europe and North America. In April, the Station Master's Residence is to be opened



as a bed and breakfast by Christine and Chris Jones. "I've got all Monica's books in the hallway," says Christine, "along with historic pictures of the house and the railway. I've also got a lovely picture of Steve McInerney, Monica's father, who was the station master for 26 years. He was actually the last station master to operate here – the station was closed after the Ash Wednesday fires." After a subsequent owner, the Joneses acquired the house and embarked on a lengthy refurbishment. "We've kept the era of the house – which was built in 1901 – but have added modern touches throughout. It needed a bit of TLC, but there are some lovely original features, like the leadlights, the ornate pressed tin ceilings and a walk-in pantry." There are also mod-cons in the self-catering property (which can accommodate three couples), including a St George stainless steel oven, a dishwasher and entertainment system. One of the biggest challenges for the Joneses was to reintroduce a garden, since much of the elevated property is sitting on rock. "I've had to plant flowers using a pick," says Christine. "Actually, when we first got stuck into the garden we found it was full of golf balls." It transpires the youngest McInerney, Rob, built a 9-hole golf course, painted 'Railway Country Club' on the fence and hosted a championship golf tournament attended by most members of the local golf club. On Monica McInerney's website, (www.moniamcinerney.com/) the author has posted a charming piece called 'The Real Life Railway Children', describing the old house as an 'adventure playground':

"All seven of us spent much of our childhood on the roof... We played chasey up there, tearing round and round the four sides of the veranda roof, thrilling to the groans and creaks of the sheets of iron under our flying feet, oblivious to the dangers or our mother white faced and muttering Hail Marys down below..."

That same veranda will soon offer a wonderful place for guests to sit and drink, watching over the townscape of Clare as the evening draws in. "Monica now lives in Ireland with her husband, but she came to the house last year when we invited her to see what we'd done to the place. And she loved it. It was probably very hard for her with all the memories it would hold, but she said she just loved the feel of it, and kept saying 'Can I have one more look?' "And that's the best accreditation I could have. I don't care about stars and ratings – I'm delighted just to have that." The Station Master's Residence will be opened by Monica's mother, Mary McInerney, on April 2. If you would like to attend the opening or arrange a stay in the property, Clare Valley Tourism will be happy to host your visit.