



South Australia

A writer's inspiration

A visit to the former home of author Monica McInerney reveals a reincarnation of history, writes *Elissa Doherty*

IT IS not difficult to see why a girl growing up in this charming Clare Valley residence was inspired to become an author.

Forget for a moment that the historic, picturesque home sits proudly in one of the prettiest regions in South Australia. Perfect fodder for a writer's ink.

The award-winning Stationmaster's Residence, the former home of international best-selling author Monica McInerney, is an experience in itself.

If the walls could talk, they would no doubt regale visitors with tales of the golden era of rail, and the antics of seven railway children whom Father Christmas would visit by train.

McInerney's father Steve was the stationmaster for 35 years, and the property was home to the family from 1959 to 2003.

Grand yet quaint, it has in recent years been reincarnated by couple Chris and Christine Jones into a decadent bed and breakfast, with throwbacks to its rail-time past. The term B&B, however, does not do justice to this gracious, 1913 stone home.

Strolling past the ivy-covered facade and sprawling garden into the elegant hallway is like stepping back in time, with the original pressed-tin ceilings dripping with chandeliers, the stained glass and the tasteful furniture.

It's easy to imagine a time when the stationmaster would entertain while the children would play hide and seek in the sprawling garden, and tea would be taken on the veranda.

But if this sounds like a weekend at grandma's, think again. Country charm is mixed with mod-cons, including a spa and a barbecue. And the real surprise is out the back.

Inside a corrugated iron shed is the "Country Club" — a modern games room with jukebox, pool table, plasma TV, comfy sofa beds, locally commissioned art works, a second bathroom and a bar fridge.

Every whim has been catered for from quality chocolates, a full wine rack, supply of port and scotch to magazines and novels, including McInerney's *Those Faraday Girls* and *The Alphabet Sisters*.

Links to the golden age of rail can be found throughout. The last train pulled out of Clare in 1983 after Ash Wednesday bushfires ripped along the track.

In a recent article about her old home, McInerney describes the happy memories she and her siblings shared. "Between the ages of five and 12, the seven of us used the tracks to commit hundreds of crimes against the Australian Government, deliberately mutilating as many 2¢, 5¢ and 10¢ coins as we could get our hands on," she writes.

"We would check the timetable,

line the coins up on the railway line and wait for the trains to pass, their heavy metal wheels squashing them into flat metal shapes.

"The excitement was in never knowing what the effect would be. Sometimes the pattern on the face of the coin would disappear completely. Other times it would be stretched, so the echidna on the 5¢ piece looked like it had a really long nose or the frill neck lizard on the 2¢ was very plump."

The B&B won the 2008 SA Tourism Awards Deluxe Accommodation category.

My friends and I managed to tear ourselves away to explore the surrounding area for a few hours, lingering over a delicious lunch at the rustic and renowned Skilogalee winery restaurant.

But then it was back to the residence, cooking up a barbecue and chatting and laughing into the wee hours. This was one station we hope to pull into again.

The writer was a guest of The Stationmaster's Residence.

Clare is an easy 90-minute drive north of Adelaide. The B&B is at 4 New Rd, Clare.

Rates start at \$275 for a couple, or "pay two nights and stay three" for \$460.

Ph (08) 8261 6270,
www.thestationmastersresidence.com.au.



Well-preserved: The elegant hallway of the Stationmaster's Residence