



Back on track in a rail cottage

Golden memories linger in this now up-to-date residence, says **Elissa Doherty**.

IT'S not hard to see why a girl growing up in this Clare Valley residence was inspired to become an author. Forget for a moment that the historic, picturesque home sits in one of the prettiest regions in South Australia — perfect fodder for a writer's ink.

For 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 1913 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 very special bed and breakfast, with throwbacks to its rail-time past.

Strolling past the ivy-covered façade and sprawling garden into the elegant hallway is like stepping back in time.

The original pressed-tin ceilings drip with chandeliers, the sunlight shines through stained glass, and the antique furniture all imbue a long-gone era.

It's easy to imagine a time when the stationmaster would entertain important company, when the children would play hide-and-seek in the sprawling garden bursting with gladioli, aga panthus and fruit trees, and tea would be taken under the ivy on the wraparound verandah.

If this sounds like a weekend at grandma's, think again — country charm is mixed with mod-cons, including a spa and a BBQ. And the real surprise is out the back.

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

Every whim has been catered for, including quality chocolates,

a full wine rack, supply of port and scotch, magazines and novels, including McInerney's *Those Faraday Girls* and *The Alphabet Sisters*, and tourist brochures.

For the budding chef, the kitchen is stocked with anything and everything you could require, while the large pantry is generously decked out with a season's supply of food.

Links to the golden age of rail can be found throughout, harking back to the days when the old track would have hummed with locomotives bustling into the station of Clare.

The last train pulled out of Clare in 1983 after the Ash Wednesday bushfires ripped through the track.

In a recent article about her old home, McInerney described the happy memories she and her siblings shared. "From the ages of five to 12, the seven of us used the tracks to commit hundreds of crimes against the Australian Government, deliberately mutilating as many two, five and 10 cent 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 five cent piece looked like it had a really long nose or the frill-neck lizard on the two cent was very plump.

"Amazing things would happen to the Queen's head on the flipside, too," Monica wrote.

On this visit, we manage to tear ourselves away to explore the surrounding area for a few hours. We linger over a delicious lunch at the rustic and renowned Skillogalee winery restaurant.

But then it's back to the residence, cooking up a barbecue and chatting and laughing into the wee hours.

This is one station we hope to pull into again.

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

DESTINATION >>



Clare Valley, South Australia

Getting there: Clare is an easy 90-minute drive north of Adelaide. The B&B is at 4 New Road Clare.

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

Details: (08) 8261 6270, www.thestationmastersresidence.com.au





Modern touch: Games room and well-stocked bar in the Stationmaster's Residence B&B



Quaint: Cosy verandah of the colonial-style Stationmaster's Residence B&B in the Clare Valley