



ESCAPE SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A writer's inspiration

ELISSA DOHERTY GETS UP A HEAD OF STEAM FOR VALLEY LIFE

IT'S not hard to see how a girl growing up in this charming Clare Valley home was inspired to become an author.

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

It has in recent years been reincarnated by 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 this gracious 1913 stone-built home justice. Strolling past the sprawling gardens and ivy-covered facade, and into the elegant hallway, is like stepping back in time.

The original pressed-tin ceilings drip with chandeliers and the sunlight shines through stained glass.

It's easy to imagine a time when the stationmaster would entertain, the children would play hide and seek in the sprawling garden, and tea would be taken under the ivy 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 the real surprise is out the back.

Inside a corrugated-iron shed is the Country Club, a

modern games room with jukebox, pool table, a plasma TV, locally commissioned art, a bathroom and a bar fridge.

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

Every whim has been catered for — quality chocolates, a full wine rack, a 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 well stocked, while the pantry is decked out with a season's supply of food.

Links to the golden age of rail can be found throughout, harking to the days when the old track would have hummed with locomotives

bustling into the station of Clare. The last train pulled out in 1983 after the Ash Wednesday bushfires destroyed the track.

After lunch at the nearby renowned Skilogalee winery restaurant, my friends and I headed back to the B&B to laugh and chat into the wee hours.

This was one station we hope to pull into again. *The writer was a guest of The Stationmaster's Residence.*

GO

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

STAY: Rates start at \$275 for a couple, or pay for two nights and stay three for \$460. Call (08) 8261 6270, www.thestationmastersresidence.com.au

