

GOURMET ISLAND

Judith Elen uncovers unexpected treats tucked away in Tasmania's northwest

THE small city of Devonport is not at the crossroads of anywhere. Wash up here — as I have, arriving on the cruise ship Silver Whisper for a day in port — and you'll find a sleepy spot. But it is Tasmania's northern port, and many wash up here, including passing cruise ships and the Bass Strait ferry, Spirit of Tasmania, which makes the crossing from Melbourne and docks here.

Devonport is the setting-off point for passengers arriving at the shipping terminal or the city's airport, and venturing into northwestern Tasmania's wonderful wilderness areas of Cradle Mountain and the Franklin River beyond.

As Silver Whisper slips quietly down the Mersey River from the strait, heading for the terminal, it towers above the suburban streets of red-roofed houses clothing the banks, and the tin-roofed, weatherboard buildings at the dockside.

The terminal is about 3km from the centre of the city and there are some worthwhile sights close at hand, including the Tiagarra Aboriginal Centre, on the headland at Mersey Bluff, where the pristine lighthouse stands sentinel, and the maritime museum in town.

But Devonport has food and wine treats as well, and one is a secret the locals keep very quiet about. To find a kitchen creating good French provincial food in this relatively remote place is a surprise. But then, Tasmania offers some of the world's best and purest produce so, on closer consideration, it's a natural marriage.

Glencoe Rural Retreat is a boutique B & B (read small, elegant and easy to sink into) about 20km south of Devonport at Barrington. When we arrive for lunch and step inside, we discern the subtle warmth of country France in this Australian farmhouse. It's in the paintings (local), the flowers (homegrown) and the preserves (housemade) lined up on a dresser.

A heritage, cream-painted weatherboard house, Glencoe offers compact, comfortable accommodation in four guestrooms, and a true taste of the French south for anyone with the good sense to book a table. The cafe is licensed and is open for lunch Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 4pm (it's best to book). Non-resident guests can also dine here in the evenings, but only with a previous booking; a three-course table d'hote menu, excluding drinks, is \$50 a person.

Ginette and Remi Bancal imagined they'd settle in a busier spot when they planned their move from France in 1987, but once lured to this region by a friend, and finding this atmospheric house, they could see the possibilities for a real retreat with the feel of home.

Originally a sommelier at the Ritz in



Secret harvest: Clockwise from main picture, Remi Bancal serves his blueberry tart; Glencoe's gardens; cafe counter at

TO FIND A KITCHEN CREATING GOOD, RUSTIC FRENCH PROVINCIAL FOOD HERE IS A SURPRISE

Paris, Remi has worked with Miettas in Melbourne and as head sommelier at Sydney's Banc restaurant. Having grown up in France's Cotes du Rhone wine region, he carries with him a lifetime's knowledge of wine, a background of good French country cooking and a long commitment to slow food. What better spot for it?

The Bancals grow their own vegetables and herbs at Glencoe and source organic local products from dairy, farm and lake. Remi makes sourdough bread and brioche in a wood-fired stove, and deep, dense confitures (only the French word will do). Down among the trees and shrubbery, there's a wire pen housing a clutch of hens and a big black rooster.

We admire the interior of the house and then settle around a table on the veranda looking over the garden. Remi brings out platters of pork rillettes and two varieties of terrine, one larded with chunks of turkey meat, the other dark with prunes. (The rillettes are less saturated in delicious goose fat than they would be in a French country

kitchen, but Remi says that's how customers prefer them here.)

Then come large bowls of salad, a kind of nicoise but with smoked salmon instead of tuna and sumptuous with kipfler potatoes, green beans and herbs from the garden, and hard-boiled eggs with dark yellow yolks (no doubt from the Rhode Island Reds beyond the shrubbery).

We refill our plates, but still have space for a slice of Remi's blueberry tart, a big, square, homey affair served with freshly made vanilla ice-cream. If I lived nearby you wouldn't be able to keep me away; I begin to imagine a brief getaway here, and leave with a big pot of caramelised blood orange marmalade to keep me going.

Another northern hemisphere blow-in, albeit of long standing, having set up business here in 1989, is Igor Van Gerwen at the chocolate-making emporium, House of Anvers, at Latrobe, back in Devonport.

Rigorously trained as a pastry chef and chocolatier in Belgium, Gerwen is a committed man. He loves his craft and lives

and breathes its history. Chocolate was the food of "It has become a cheap, ity" on supermarket shelves on a mission to return healthy food to its proper

The Anvers chocolate back section of an elegant 1930s bungalow, with leadlight windows and wood pass through the front enter a sunny corridor museum of chocolate-making wide range of curiosities fascinating collection of chocolate on display, some from the 1920s to the revealing indication of the the past. A new building to month will provide dis Gerwen's far more extensive tells us.

We pass through a door chocolate-making going on a panelled wall. There are eight plus trainees; 40 staff here makes his chocolates with pure butter and natural flavouring, plus liqueurs and a imported chocolate (with 6