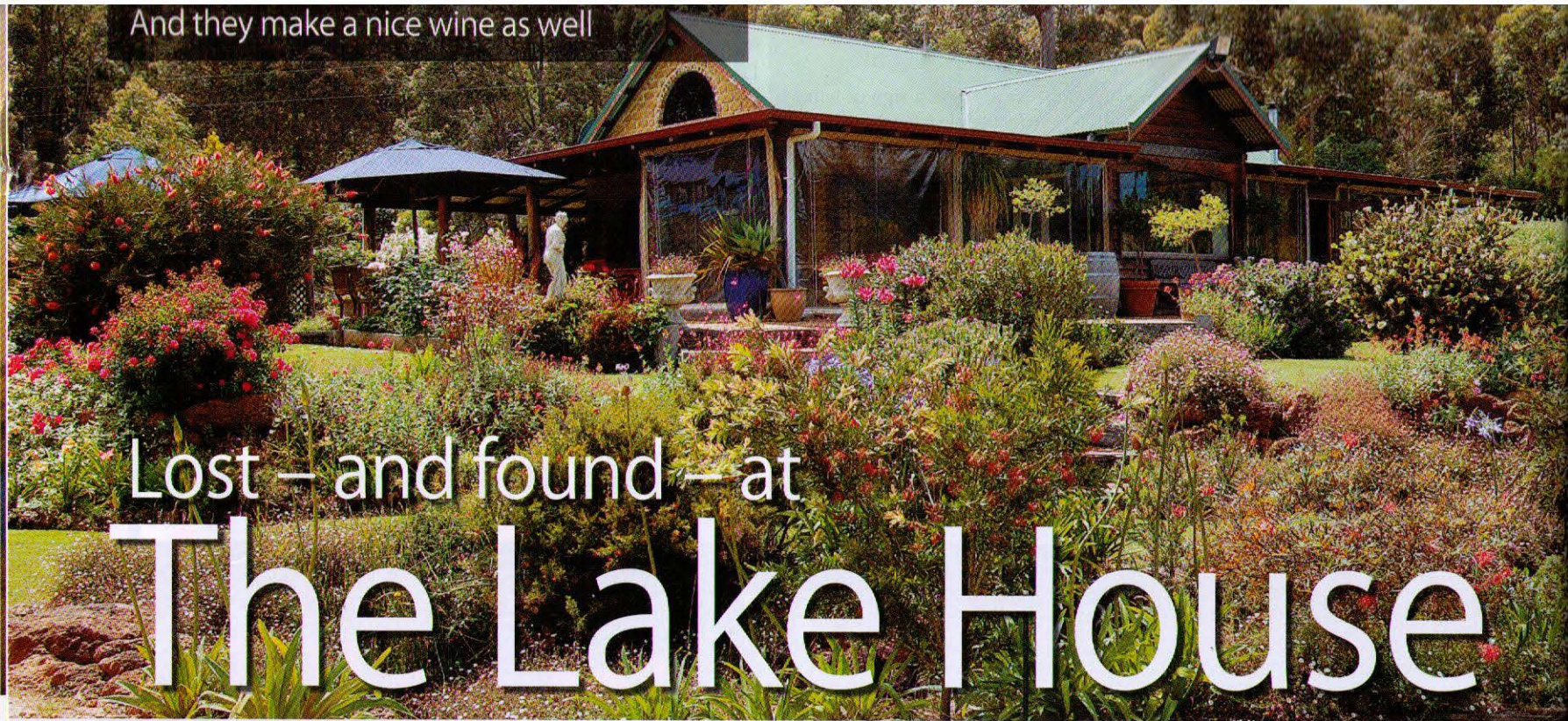


And they make a nice wine as well



# Lost – and found – at The Lake House

I'VE BEEN LIVING in regional WA nearly a year and I still haven't learnt my lesson.

When visiting a property outside the confines of Albany, don't wear heels, especially patent black ones.

And definitely don't wear a skirt. But there I was again, heels sinking into soft ground, grass seeds attaching themselves to my legs as, without the slightest pretence of fashion or decorum, I clambered on and off a four-wheeled motorbike and in between hurtled around the 15-hectare property Garry Capelli and Leanne Rodgers call both The Lake House winery and home. My camera was flailing in the slip-

stream, my white knuckles were gripping the rails either side of me, and I was trying desperately not to fall off – with style.

You might be able to take the girl out of the city, but you can't take the city out of the girl.

But it will be four years this Easter since Leanne and Garry much more successfully swapped the Perth rat race for the quiet of Turner Road, off Denmark's Mt Shadforth tourist drive, to establish their winery.

But don't box them into the ordinary "tree-changer" category.

Though they are both newcomers as far as vigneron go, this is a passion-

ate, driven pair who have brought their city energy and chutzpah with them. They are using their years of combined experience as a finance broker (Leanne) and management and corporate consultant (Garry) to build The Lake House into one of the must-see destinations on the already-crowded itineraries of Denmark holiday makers. Their Pinot Noir, Semillon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot vines at Denmark, as well as the plot of Shiraz at Frankland River, produce wines for their three labels.

"The climate at Frankland is hotter and drier," Garry explains. "It produces a better quality and more consistent wine."

Capelli's enthusiasm for the property, the business and the lifestyle are palpable.

He seems to take every task – whether it's his Pilates sessions on the deck, his in-depth explanation of the benefits of the antioxidants in grapeseeds or choosing a winemaker for his fruit (it's James Kellie) – seriously, genuinely and with an "only the best will do" philosophy.

Apart from the wines, the pair also make a VinoFood range of chutneys, mustards and condiments and bath and body products under the WineSpa label. "We have created The Lake House from everything we've learnt so

**BEST VALUE HOTELS** *Over 1000 Specials Australia Wide* 1316.AF.7

far in our lives," Garry says. "It's what I've always wanted to do – move back to the country, and even though running a property represents a multitude of challenges, things you never think of, we have slowed down the real speed of life. We like people to feel that when they come here and take a bit of it away with them."

The lake after which the property is named is natural, but was extended by the previous owner. Leanne and Garry say the first time they saw the property they had driven the back way in, stumbling across the misty lake on an overcast day. Then they found out the property was for sale.

"Turner Road actually used to be a railway, and the lake was a watering hole," Garry says. "Loggers used to work at the top of the hill and float the logs down into the lake – now it's full of trout and marron instead." And from the first day Leanne and Garry have adhered to biodynamic principles, using rye grass and clover in the vineyard and growing

their own vegetables for the kitchen. "We really look after the vines," Garry says. "I've never understood why winemakers think it's a good idea to stress the vines – where in life if something is stressed is it better?"

As well as wine, The Lake House also has a kitchen and restaurant where wine is available at cellar door prices. Leanne describes the restaurant as "an extension of the living room."

The food is relaxed, casual, and designed for sharing.

"We want people to feel like they are at home here, like they can sit and have a good conversation and feel at ease," Leanne said.

And they do.

"We'd always wanted a hundred acres and a lake," Garry says. "Now we've got it."

And everything that comes with it.

It might not be a rat race, and they might love it, but it is also a hard slog to ensure visitors feel "at home".

