

two paddocks

PICNIC



*time out in the heart of Central Otago with sublime wine,
award-winning cuisine, impeccable art & three famous friends*



Even in winter, the flavours of friendship are ripe and sweet in Central Otago. As three friends meet for an afternoon of sumptuous food, wine and repartée I ask why these astute and charming lads love the dramatic land they call home.

THERE IS EXCITEMENT and the scent of crab-apples in the air. Our streamlined Lexus, a.k.a. the Showstopper, slows to a respectable crawl as we pass through the quaint, bustling hub of Arrowtown. I cannot dislodge the indulgent grin from my lips. Today we are headed for Two Paddocks winery where I will meet no less than three illustrious icons of Central Otago and New Zealand – if not the world.

Sam Neill, peripatetic actor, Proprietor of Two Paddocks Vineyard, and adoring pal to porcine and poultry. Pete Gawron, founder, owner and head chef of Saffron, Arrowtown's most prestigious eatery, author of the visually and gastronomically divine cookbook of the same name. Grahame Sydney, artist, photographer, raconteur and, in my opinion, a true gentleman. I am honoured, enamoured and completely out of my element.

Being in a room with Sam Neill, Grahame Sydney and Pete Gawron is much like being aromatic vapour in an expertly swirled glass of Pinot. One is swept in a spin like a whirling dervish as the conversation reels from politics to art to wine to local gossip. But I have come here for more than stimulating causerie.

I have come here to dine. I have come to taste Sam's Two Paddocks Pinot. I have come to pore over Grahame's art and sneak a preview of his upcoming book, *Grahame Sydney's Central Otago*.

There is an air of festivity in the contemporary barn-like tasting room of Two Paddocks Vineyard. A table is divinely laid with crab-apples and olive leaves, true to

both season and meal. The red-green combo heightens the festive feel and comparisons to mistletoe are touted.

Pete has prepared the most delectable wild rabbit dish with a side of wild duck breast and local lamb, all on a juicy bed of crab-apple compote. A dash of straight-from-the-garden-herbs, and the result is divine. Every mouthful sets my taste buds dancing like fireflies in Autumn. It is a dazzling companion to Sam's 2008 *Two Paddocks Pinot Noir*. Ah, Pinot – enigmatic and fickle, this ruby lady has become my new friend.

Dare I admit to not being much of a wine buff? Dare I tell Sam Neill I have been raised on a hearty dose of single malt and wouldn't know a pétillant wine from a piquant one? Yes. I do.

And lo, I am given a lesson on wine appreciation by Mr Sam Neill himself. Sam's passion for wine, particularly Pinot Noir, runs deep. The dedication, the inimitable devotion to the process from conception to glass is much like the birth of a novel. Both require a deep and sincere love of the craft, both require undivided attention and both can be capricious pursuits. As with a good book, it takes time to tell the story of the wine. The right grape, the right season, the right soil; a sense of humour, determination, patience and passion. The discovery of two little paddocks, turning them into a world-class vineyard – yes, were I to pen a novel on the life and times of a certain Central Otago winemaker it would be called *A Passionate Patience*. Or perhaps *The*

Pinot Whisperer.

But how does one bestow a title to a man such as Sam Neill? I can almost hear the jovial aside from Sam's good friend, Grahame Sydney, "One would bestow the title 'Sir'."

All three men take great joy in relaxing with good friends. They are each down to earth and kind and they laugh with genuine vitality. Sam gets enormous pleasure from taking me to see one of his favourite artworks – a painting by none other than his dear mate, Grahame Sydney.

Grahame's art is affecting. It makes one think. It is a moment, a single second captured in poignant, raw tones. From a simple wooden lean-to against the golden tundra of Wedderburn to a hoar-frosted tree at dusk, his art and photography stirs my blood, makes me dream, makes me wonder, makes me want to stare at it for hours. It's no wonder Grahame is considered one of New Zealand's most prominent and talented artists. He is also an absolutely lovely person. Happy to chat about his experiences in Antarctica, his dabbling with the camera, his beloved pooch Milo, Grahame is thoroughly entertaining, incontrovertibly knowledgeable and an excellent person to be seated next to at dinner.

So why Central Otago? And Sam Neill's quick-fire response is precisely what I have come to expect after an evening with three such witty gentlemen – "Buy Pete's book, *Saffron*, and find out for yourself..." □





Otago cuisine Peter Gawron

OWNER AND CHEF of the iconic restaurant, Saffron, in the historic gold-mining village of Arrowtown, Pete Gawron and his charming wife, Melanie Hill, bestow upon both locals and visitors flavours to remember.

Pete's first cookbook, *Food from the Central Otago Heartland*, features the very best of local, seasonal fare. It is a stunning tribute to Pete's ability to coax zest, vibrancy and scrumptiousness from the most humble, natural and fresh ingredients. Capturing the essence of magical Arrowtown, the book also includes essays from illustrious artist Grahame Sydney and consummate international actor Sam Neill.

But wait, there's more! I am thrilled to announce a second Saffron Cookbook on the way! Due out in July 2012, Pete Gawron has produced another gastronomic classic and this one, he assures me, will outshine the first. I find that very difficult to believe, but with the incredible team Pete has surrounded himself with, and the dedication and perfectionism of the man, I have to believe in the impossible.

Born in Adelaide, Australia (we don't hold that against him), Pete Gawron is a chef of distinction, quality and personality.

A purist, Pete derives genuine pleasure from discovering and aligning himself with local producers of organic, fresh produce. Honey, wild ducks, rabbits, wild thyme, rosemary, vegetables, seafood, venison, crab apples... it's all about the story. The better, more natural and authentic the story, the better the quality of the food. And the quality of the food Pete prepares is out of this world!

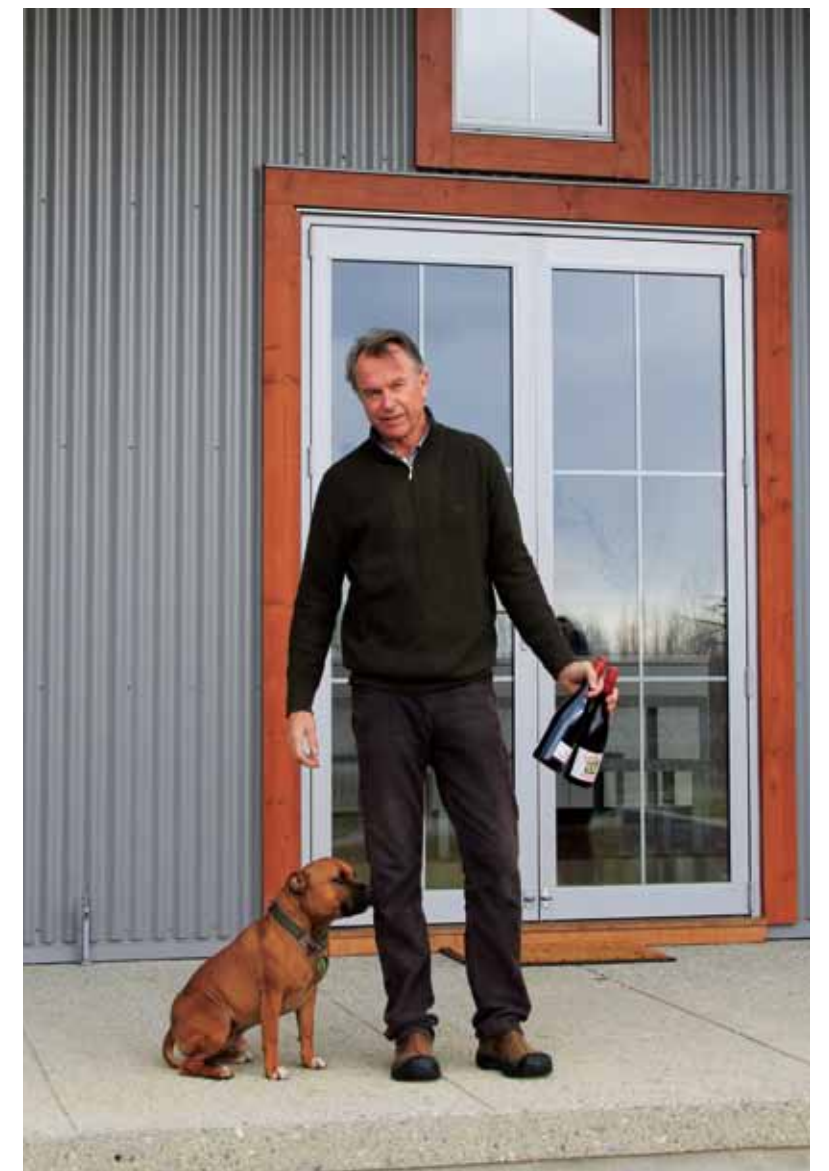
Pete is both unpretentious and gregarious. His ability to turn a phrase, make you laugh, and infuriate you with his pedantic platter presentations make him a true character. His enthusiasm for food, for wine, for life is infectious. Pete's contagious and eccentric delight in life seeps into his food, rendering it divine. □

A purist, Pete derives genuine pleasure from seeking out local producers of organic, fresh produce. Honey, ducks, rabbits, wild thyme, rosemary, vegetables, seafood, venison, stonefruit...

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an afternoon with sam neill



AN AFTERNOON WITH SAM NEILL at his Central Otago vineyard leaves me awe-struck, honoured and not a little in love with the man – not to mention his impeccable team and, his fabulous wee drinker, the 2009 *Picnic Pinot Noir*. An internationally established actor and imperturbable gentleman, Sam is distinguished, intelligent and effortlessly droll. One wonders where to begin writing a profile on this beloved New Zealander, but, as it is his passion, let's start with wine.

Sam knows good wine. A regular participant in tasting wine from all over the world but, in particular, Central Otago – for evaluation purposes, of course – Sam has a humble yet undeniably champion palate. He was moved to enlighten me on the intricacies of wine-tasting after a rather embarrassing blunder on my part – sometimes being a Southern farmer's daughter and hailing from a Scotch-drinking clan of Scottish Highlanders has its disadvantages. It may please Mr Neill to know that I can now swirl, sniff and sip with the best of them and am sharing the love with all who will bother listening.

Sam's specialist winery, Two Paddocks, is his pride and joy. The Two Paddocks premium Pinot Noir of 2008 is a beauty, combining the very best grapes from Sam's three vineyards to create a world-class Pinot. Bearing in mind I'm not a wine aficionado of any sort, my impression was of old-world Earnsclough cherries, a smooth, almost smoky – wild-thyme-burning-in-a-brush-fire smoky – aftertaste, and nearly ripe plums. But don't take my word for it! Available from the Two Paddocks cellar door by appointment, good wine stores and some surprising places around the world, such as the incomparable Datai resort on Langkawi Island, Malaysia, it is a must for your cellar.

His 'favourite corner of the world', Sam's Central Otago vineyards have become a blissful retreat for his family. Delving into the pleasures of growing things, Sam has planted such delights as lavender, saffron, echinacea, apricots, cherries, apples, pears, walnuts, and even truffles on his headquarter vineyard at Redbank. Here, Sam turns his hand to anything – and I mean anything – he can conceive of. Raising the

undeniably spoiled pig who has been known to enjoy the odd chocolate pastry, nurturing a rather unruly brood of chickens, all of excellent character and tenacity, getting in winemaker Dean Shaw's way during production, choosing excellent and appropriate names for guinea fowl and (speaking of guinea fowl names...) blogging.

Blogging, in my personal and reticent opinion, is where Mr Neill has found his calling. Yes, beyond his exceptional talent as an actor, even above the sedulousness of his ventures in wine – not limited to but including Two Paddocks, the Central Otago Wine Company, and regular tastings – Sam's blogging capacity is fast becoming legendary. It is on my list of favourites and should be on yours. Go to <http://twopaddocks.com/news-2011.shtml> for enlightenment, hilarity and consummate actor Timothy Spall's top ten DJ track list! I really only read it for updates on the chickens. □

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Grahame Sydney



Irrefutably my favourite New Zealander, Grahame Sydney is as poetic, gracious and subtle as his beautiful artworks. He is also one of the most interesting, witty and generous people I have ever met.

GROWING UP IN DUNEDIN, Grahame and his family enjoyed long, hot summer vacations in Central Otago. His passion for the area, born all those years ago, has anchored Grahame firmly in the heart of this ruggedly magnificent region. The stark majesty of the place, the vast open skies and dramatic undulating terrain all provide this accomplished and enduring artist an unending scope of flawless studies.

Spanning four decades, Grahame has presented perfection through the media of oils, watercolours, egg tempera, lithographs, etching, photography and film. Since his first solo exhibition at the Moray Gallery, Dunedin, in 1972, he has explored the realm of art to the extreme. Literally. His foray into the frozen climes of Antarctica's tremendous landscape produced a 'Listener Top 100' book. *White Silence: Grahame Sydney's Antarctica* is a miraculous glimpse into the extraordinary snowscapes of the world's most inhospitable environment and brings to light its astonishing beauty for the pleasure of us all. Thousands of Grahame's reproduction prints have been sold over the years, and his originals hang in prominent residences throughout the world. Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum in Wellington, houses the iconic egg tempera on board, *Rozzie at Pisa*, and the Christchurch Art Gallery boasts his *Self-Portrait at Fifty*.

Currently Grahame is awaiting the release of his next book, *Grahame Sydney's Central Otago*, due out in November 2011. The way Grahame has brought the Central Otago landscape to life is quite baffling. How can such a seemingly barren landscape be so inherently beautiful? Is it the emptiness, the austere yet vivid colours that create the incomparable splendour evident in every one of his Otago works? Whatever it is, Grahame captures the essence, the ambience of the golden hills, the umbrageous valleys, the hawk-haunts and rabbit- rendezvous, the skies of vibrant blues and spectacular nor'west arches, the sunsets that steal the breath and trigger tears and hoar frosts that drape everything in frothy, frozen lace, ethereal and severe, like no other and I for one await the book with eager anticipation.



