

REVIEW | WINERY HOTEL

Balgownie Estate

By Danielle Norton

CHECK-IN

One of the two luxurious Balgownie winery estates, the other in Bendigo, this resort in the Yarra Valley, Victoria's cool climate wine region, hosts weddings and events year-round. It also features the Endota Spa for sublime face and body treatments. On the Melba Highway, it's a one-hour drive from Melbourne's CBD. The resort has expansive lawns, an indoor pool and gym, a tennis court and award-winning wine at the cellar door.

THE LOOK

Balgownie has risen from the ashes of its previous incarnation after a 2020 kitchen fire destroyed the restaurant. The contemporary design, by ZWEI Interiors and Architecture, is a combination of polished concrete, noise-absorbing hardwood timber, American oak slats and warm lighting. The foyer is next to the cellar door with a modern aesthetic; the floating fireplace and curved velvet lounges provide a vibrant space to pause. The restaurant beyond beckons with views of the winery and the nearby Yarra ranges. Endota has moved in and refurbished the spa premises with a soothing colour scheme and eight treatment rooms for facials, massage, and a range of packages. It's a relaxing space open to day visitors and overnight guests.

THE ROOM

Accommodation is apartment style with most of the 4.5-star rooms due for an upgrade this year. My one-bedroom spa suite has a balcony facing the rolling vistas of the wineries and hills of the Yarra Valley. The bathroom contains a circular spa bath with a window into the suite's living room. It seems odd at first glance but once I'm immersed in it and absorbing the view, the orientation makes sense. The beds are king-sized, the kitchenette has space for cheese and wine, and the lounge is roomy enough for you to invite guests for an afternoon tittle.



Clockwise from top: The vines and the venue – Balgownie Estate; executive chef Aiden Gallagher; dishes from the estate's Restaurant 1309; and one of the Endota treatment rooms.

FOOD + DRINK

Restaurant 1309 has a new chef at the helm. Irishman Aiden Gallagher's previous stints include the Merrion Hotel in Dublin and award-winning Irish pub McGettigan's in Dubai. My favourites are the Buxton trout served with an avocado lime mousse and a chicken ravioli with local asparagus. The dry-aged Gippsland rib eye with a chilli tomato relish makes the tastebuds zing but the dessert, a Coldstream sorbet presented in a floral ice bowl containing tiny violas, has us gasping with surprise. Matched Balgownie wines put us in fine spirits for the walk back to our suites.

OUT + ABOUT

The Yarra Valley is predominantly wine country, but it's also home to the popular Yarra Valley Chocolaterie, where chocolate is on tap and there are chocolate education classes. Nearby are art galleries within wineries at Tarrawarra and St Huberts, and the Yarra Valley Dairy has tasting platters of handcrafted goat and cow cheeses.

THE VERDICT

For an easy-to-access wellness retreat with a splash of wine, Balgownie Estate is hard to beat.

THE ESSENTIALS

From \$345 for a one-bedroom spa suite and \$795 for a two-bedroom spa suite. Book spa treatments once accommodation is confirmed. 1309 Melba Hwy, Yarra Glen, phone (03) 9730 0700. See balgownie.com

Danielle Norton was a guest of Balgownie Estate and Endota Spa.

THE SCORE

HIGHLIGHT Complimentary wine tasting at the Cellar Door is the icing on the cake.
LOWLIGHT Commercial station radio in the infra-red sauna. More soothing tunes would improve the experience.

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