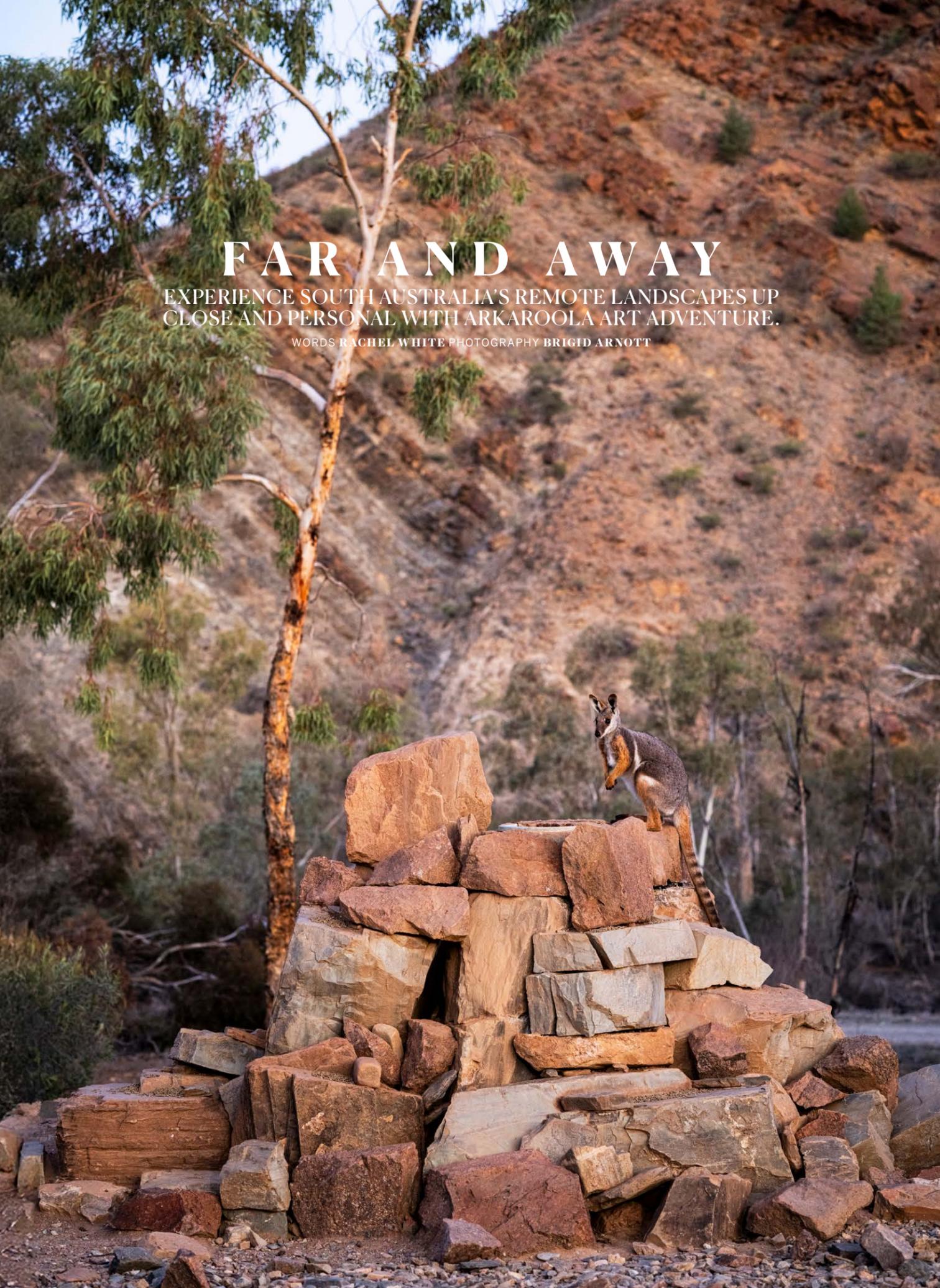


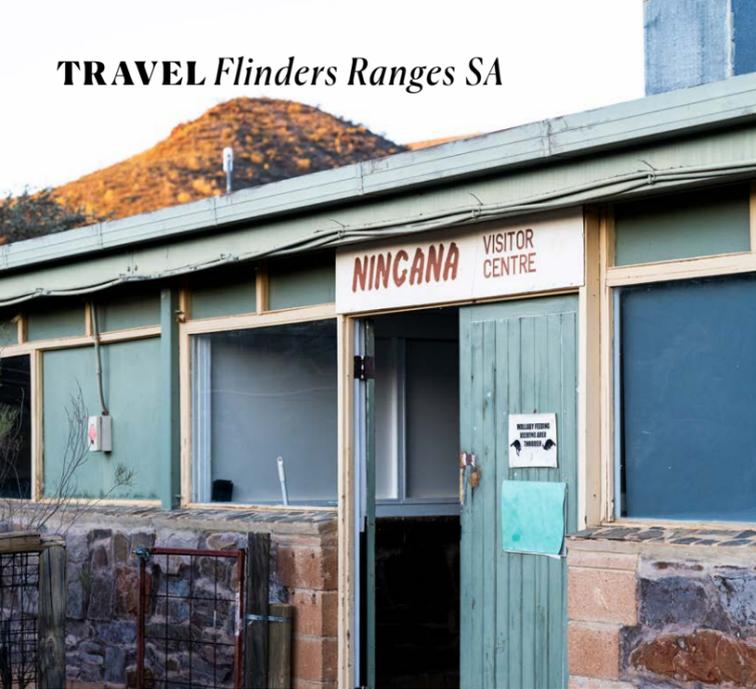
FAR AND AWAY

EXPERIENCE SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S REMOTE LANDSCAPES UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH ARKAROOLA ART ADVENTURE.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT



The landscape at Arkaroola provides endless creative imagery. **FACING PAGE** The yellow-footed rock-wallaby is endemic to the Flinders Ranges. "They're gorgeous animals," says co-founder of Arkaroola Art Adventure Paul Macklin (pictured centre, alongside Peter Griffen and an art workshop participant)



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT
 "This is where the astronomy talks are held at night, and there are geological displays, too," Paul says of the old visitor centre. "The main resort sits opposite this and the mountain behind, Griselda, is spectacular and home to the family of yellow-footed rock-wallabies that come down for a snack each evening at sunset."; tools of the trade await the eager participants; the artists can explore walking tracks beyond the resort and soak in the stunning surrounds; happy painters Paul (left) and Peter with the fruits of their *en plein air* session; creativity in progress: sketch-booking and mark-making; there is ample time for artists to explore the wild textures of the landscape; Denise Lithgow with her unique felted vessels; Denise takes inspiration from Arkaroola's ancient, layered geology.



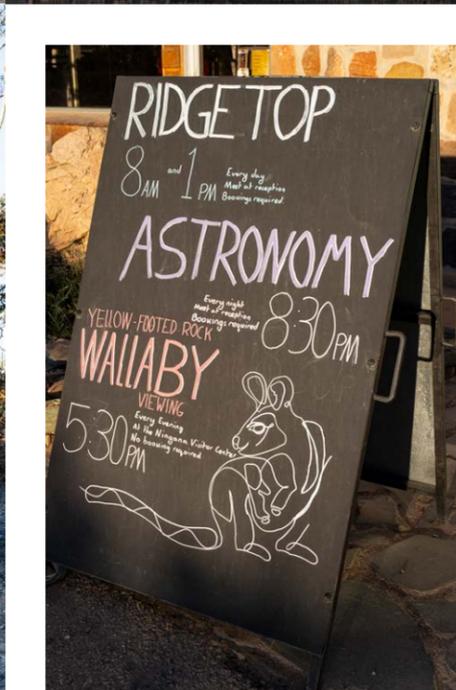
THE FLINDERS RANGES ARE A WORLD unto themselves. Located about 450 kilometres north of Adelaide in South Australia, on the traditional lands of the Adnyamathanha people, the rugged mountain terrain is characterised by vibrant colour and jagged topography. By day, the region's deep red earth, wide blue skies and unique geology captivates intrepid travellers, artists and geologists alike. By night, astrologers and stargazers flock to the remote region, where the starry expanse shines in this Dark Sky Sanctuary. "It's one of Australia's best-kept secrets," says Paul Macklin, 70, co-founder of Arkaroola Art Adventure. "It's red, mountainous and wild; it's architectural and very painterly."

Arkaroola Art Adventure was born from a flash of inspiration in this majestic region. A qualified art teacher, Paul and his wife, Sallie-Ann Macklin, 58, worked in the corporate world for 25 years, before he was struck by a sudden realisation on a family holiday. "My wife and I ran a company in organisational change, but after the GFC hit, I'd had enough," Paul explains. "We were travelling around Australia with the kids and in the middle of the Flinders Ranges, I had a kind of spiritual epiphany. I thought, 'I have to get back to my roots, I have to make art.'"

When they returned home to MacMasters Beach in New South Wales, Paul and Sallie-Ann recruited Paul's cousin Peter Griffen, 77, a long-time painter, and his partner Denise Lithgow, 70, a fibre artist, to their cause. Together, the four co-founders devised a plan to take art students into the outback for a week of artistic inspiration and exploration. But to bring their dream to life, they would have to find a base camp that was remote enough and large enough to make their idea viable. So, Paul and Peter returned to the Flinders Ranges to seek out such a place.

"Peter's mother had told him about a place in the north of the Flinders that was red, and if you're a painter, red desert is a really attractive thing," explains Paul. "So, we travelled into the far north of the region and at sunset, we drove into Arkaroola. We were just overwhelmed; it's such a stunning environment." They found the perfect set-up for group accommodation at the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary and the following spring took their first group of students into the mountainous desert. They have repeated the adventure every year for over a decade, except during COVID.

Offering students a well-rounded and immersive seven-day retreat, Paul, Sallie-Ann, Peter and Denise all draw on their artistic strengths to help students draw stimulus from their surrounds. "It can be quite overwhelming for people who have never worked *en plein air* before," says Paul. "But we create a very positive and encouraging environment for students." Bookbinder Sallie-Ann helps students make >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Peter creates a sketch; Arkaroola's geological diversity attracts lovers of history and geography, with timeworn waterholes and desert vistas to explore; visitors to Arkaroola can join astronomy talks in this designated Dark Sky Sanctuary; Arkaroola is a 'rock hound's' mecca. Samples of the region's geology line the approach to Greenwood Lodge at Arkaroola Wilderness Resort; the lodge is nestled into a picturesque spot in the nature reserve. **FACING PAGE** Paul and Peter venture out in the early morning, searching for an ideal painting site. They offer participants day and evening workshops, tutorials and presentations throughout the week.

personalised sketchbooks to use during their stay. Fibre artist Denise teaches felting, guiding each participant to create vessels inspired by their experiences in the bush. "Peter and I both teach drawing and painting," adds Paul. "Peter is a painter who draws, and I'm a drawer who paints. So, we come at it from different perspectives."

Landing on a winning formula that their students can't get enough of, Paul, Sallie-Ann, Peter and Denise have gained many repeat attendees who appreciate both their teachers' enthusiasm and the overpowering beauty of Arkaroola.

One such student is Poss Keech, a committed amateur painter from Burrawang, NSW, who has participated in the retreat four times. "All four of the teachers are really, really great and the scenery is gobsmackingly awesome," says Poss. "A week at Arkaroola provides so much inspiration; it really fires you up. I always come back with enough to work on for six months or a year."

Filling the cup of both student and teacher, increased demand means that this spring, Arkaroola Art Adventure will run two retreats, instead of their usual one. "We're going to be there for a week teaching, then we'll have a week just for ourselves painting, and then another week teaching," says Paul, who is looking forward to the opportunity to "recharge, recuperate and reconnect" with nature.

"The nice thing about being there for three weeks is that the four of us get a week in between to do our own thing," he says. Extending what is a magical time for everyone involved, he adds, "We're all teaching, painting, studying or showing when we're not at Arkaroola, but when we're there, it's the highlight of the year." *CS*

Arkaroola Art Adventure runs from Aug 30-Sept 7 and Sept 13-21, 2025. To book, email sam@amazingpeople.com.au Visit paulmacklin.com.au Follow @paulmacklinartist and @posskeech on Instagram.

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