

# PERFECT BLEND

JANE BAKER AND HER TWO DAUGHTERS RUN A MICRO DISTILLERY WITH A BIG HEART IN VICTORIA'S PYRENEES WINE REGION.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY GEORGINA MORRISON  
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Mrs Baker's Still House is a 100 per cent solar-powered distillery and cellar door in Elmhurst, Vic. Here, a negroni takes shape with Mrs Baker's Still House Mountain Pepper Pepperberry Gin mixed with Bitter Rose Amaro and Rosso No.5 Vermouth. **FACING PAGE** Kitten Percy enjoys the sunshine.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Australian barley was used to make the brand's first whisky; stock up on gins, whiskies and liqueurs at the cellar door; distiller Bess and mum Jane harvest wormwood for their absinthe; during a distillery tour, Jane explains to guests how this still (called Electra) works and the basics of distillation; Festive & Frivolous Christmas Gin is made into a gin and tonic; native mountain pepper bushes grow in the garden; Festive & Frivolous Christmas Gin; "I've always been interested in flavours and smells," says Bess, who uses a hydrometer to take a gravity reading on distilled spirits; "Our Rosemary Gimlet is one of my favourites," says Georgette. "It's made with our original gin and our Sensual & Intellectual Dry Gin, then mixed over ice with our homemade lime cordial and rosemary, strained and served."

IMAGE OF JANE AT STILL TOURISM AUSTRALIA

FROM ITS INCEPTION ALMOST A DECADE AGO, Mrs Baker's Still House has been a family enterprise dedicated to the creation of artisanal spirits with distinctive local flavours. Owner Jane Baker, 59, a former science teacher, moved from inner-city Melbourne to Elmhurst, in the Pyrenees region of Victoria, over 20 years ago in search of the quintessential country lifestyle for her young family. "Our place in Fitzroy had a backyard about the size of the kitchen in our house here," says Jane. "We thought having more space would be great for the kids – we wanted to let them go wild and enjoy the bush."

Jane and her husband, Benjamin, wanted to get their hands dirty too and were drawn to the Pyrenees region for its beautiful, craggy mountains, fertile soil and rich winegrowing traditions. "Before we moved, the extent of our winemaking experience was how to use a corkscrew," says Jane, laughing. "I was very much a city girl, so I was completely freaked out by it all."

Nonetheless, the adventurous pair delved straight into the business of winemaking, bringing their three children – Magnus, Elizabeth (known fondly as Bess) and Georgette – along for the ride. "I've got photos of the kids out in the paddock when we were planting the grapevine; our youngest Georgette must've been about two then," recalls Jane. "They were all out there, doing it with us."

Growing their wine business along with their brood meant work and family life was often blurred for the Bakers, whose 240-hectare property is mostly steep hill country, with extensive sheep grazing paddocks, the vineyard and plenty of native bushland. "Like all country-raised kids, we helped out on the farm," says Georgette, now 25. "In the vineyard, we would help prune, in the winery we would help make the wine, bottle it or label it... and the same when we started distilling."

After harvesting several successful vintages, the Bakers stumbled into distilling in 2016. "That was thanks to Benjamin," says Jane. "He wanted to make a fortified wine, but to do that we had to get a still. Once we got the still, I thought, 'Gosh, I like gin, why don't we try making gin?'" And the rest, as they say, is history.

Fast-forward nine years and the women of the family now run the award-winning distillery, dividing responsibilities intuitively. "We know each other's strengths, so it comes >

naturally,” says Georgette. “Bess is strong in the distillery and has a real knack for bringing flavours together beautifully. I have a background in landscape design, so that lends itself to design, marketing and a bit of business development.”

This leaves Jane, the powerhouse of the operation, doing front-of-house duties, office admin and everything in between. “I very proudly do the legwork,” she says.

United by a shared vision for Mrs Baker’s Still House as a sustainable and innovative brand, the women work well as a team, offering each other the support needed to keep their small business moving forward. “Working with family provides a level of flexibility that we need in the modern

day,” says Jane. “But it does mean production meetings can get off track quite quickly; we often end up online buying plants and quoting Jane Austen to each other endlessly!”

After almost a decade in the trade, the coming years promise even more exciting releases for the entrepreneurial trio. “I’m pretty excited because I’ve been working on an absinthe made from our own wormwood,” says Bess, 27. “The other thing that will be released a little further down the track is a brandy made from our own grapes; it’s maturing in an oak barrel at the moment, but early tests have shown it’ll be something to look forward to.” *CG*  
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LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY GEORGETTE GABB



**CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE** Mrs Baker’s Still House also creates beautiful wedding favours. “We offer custom labelled gin and/or liqueurs in bottles of varied sizes,” says Georgette. “This 30ml mini gin has a personalised label for a wedding and was given to the guests.”; Mrs Baker’s Still House hosted a Gin Garden Party to celebrate the release of their “gin-lovers’ gin” – the Stylish & Pragmatic Very Dry Gin. A delicious gin and tonic is garnished with a sprig of jasmine; from left: Bess, Jane and Georgette – holding her baby daughter, Sally – relax at their family home/distillery; goodies for purchase include: Mrs Baker’s Still House gins, liqueurs, whiskies, Christmas Gin, Long Rays Dark Soda, locally made Christmas cakes, gift packs, embroidered bags, vintage Italian linen cushion covers, shiraz wines from Wimmera Hills Winery, citrus cordials and seasonal preserves. **FACING PAGE** Georgette captured this lovely view looking toward the Pyrenees Ranges on a quiet, frosty morning as the fog lifted and the sun rose from behind the hill.

