

MY TOWN

Dunsborough

This laid-back corner of the Margaret River region in Western Australia has waves, wildlife and wine in spades. And, as **Alexandra Carlton** discovers, a community that's big on pitching in.

Photography by Russell Ord.

**COMMUNITY
VOLUNTEER**

Jacquie Happ

"My family moved to Busselton, which is 25 minutes' drive from Dunsborough, when I was about eight. My parents ran a Chinese restaurant there. When I grew up, I left home to travel – until I visited my parents one long weekend

and they said, 'Why don't you open a Chinese takeaway in Dunsborough?' It was the last thing I thought I'd ever do but I did – for three years – and I'm glad because it led me to meet my husband, Myles.

After we married, we moved around and had two of our four children in Sydney. We returned to Dunsborough for a holiday and I was lured back once again. Myles had a conversation with my father and the next thing I knew, Dad said, 'Oh, I hear you're moving back.' I'm so happy we did – Dunsborough's our town now.

The arts are a huge part of Dunsborough and I've been part of the scene here for 20 years. Myles is a potter and there are painters, ceramicists and textile craftspeople. We organise street art projects to make sure our town keeps its character. The first art we put up was technically graffiti, because it was on a public building, but we just did it. There's a theatre group called Bare Naked Theatre, which meant my



kids got to see Shakespeare in a vineyard or a wine shed when they were growing up. There are choirs, plus the Dunsborough Arts Festival and Jazz by the Bay. We're lucky that so many people here appreciate art in its different forms and support it by buying pieces or attending concerts. Art is so undervalued but it's so important in our lives.

Dunsborough is full of community spirit. You can head to the supermarket with your kids and end up spending two hours catching up with people. There's also that lovely country town thing of banding together when someone needs help – food drops, garden makeovers or whatever needs doing. The town's still small enough for things like that to happen."



WETSUIT DESIGNER

Rio Clark

"I was bodyboarding professionally around Australia when I decided to settle in Dunsborough for the waves and the slower lifestyle. Surfing helps me in so many facets of my life; it keeps me physically and mentally healthy. Being in the water along this beautiful coastline is therapeutic. It is blue and

tranquil then these wild storm fronts roll in from the Indian Ocean, which is humbling and inspiring.

Dunsborough is a tourist town but for the locals it's a surfing town. We still have cafés that close during the surf peak and there's an understanding that if the surf's good, people won't come to work that day. Kids start surfing when they're as young as my son, Orion, who's three. Maybe their parents don't surf as much as they used to but they still get in the water with their kids.

When I first started surfing, it was mostly men in the water but there's a growing number of women. I'm the coordinator for the Dunsborough Surfing Mums group, which meets on a Thursday. Once we've chatted and everyone is comfortable, we leave some mums watching the kids while the others go for a surf and then we swap. We get mums turning up who



haven't surfed before but they want to learn so they can surf with their children. I'm always like, 'Yeah, good on you!' All the women support and encourage each other.

I think it's really healthy for kids to spend a lot of time outside, moving and playing. They sit down all day at school so afterwards it's important for them to go outside and ride bikes with their friends.

We're also lucky to have such a unique microclimate here, with different bugs and insects. Orion and I are always running around, finding new and interesting bugs to look at.

Dunsborough has such a cruisy lifestyle. Shops, schools and everything else are all near each other so there's not much travel involved. And everyone smiles and says hello; it's such a friendly town."



REAL-ESTATE BUSINESS OWNER

David Moyes

"I'm originally from Bridgetown, which is a farming community an hour and a half from here, but my connection to Dunsborough goes back to my parents' generation because we'd come here all the time for our school holidays. Back

then it was just a tiny coastal town that was only busy during the holiday periods but these days it's a bustling community all year round.

In 2004, my family – my wife, Jody, and two kids, Mimi and Hugo – moved here from Perth. It's a great place to raise children. You have nature on call so it gets kids out and about. Most of the children around here are really sporty – they play footy, netball, tennis or they swim, ride their bike or do triathlons. There's always something interesting to do and it's safe, secure, clean and natural.

That's also what attracts the tourists who love Dunsborough's laid-back vibe. Tourism is essential for our town because it enables people to live and work here. The influx of visitors means the town can support wonderful

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Even though we have visitors all year round, we're not bothered by a lot of things that affect the busier parts of the planet. You can even find pockets of peace over Christmas and New Year, which is the crazy period. People will congregate in certain areas like Yallingup Beach or Smiths Beach but you don't have to go too far – perhaps somewhere like Injidup or Windmills – and you might have the whole beach to yourself."



WINEMAKER AND RESTAURATEUR

Tony Davis

"I moved to Dunsborough on the Australia Day weekend in 2007. One of the great things about this town is that temperatures rarely get much higher than 30 or 35°C, because we're cooled by the ocean on both sides: Geographe Bay to the east and Yallingup to

the west. Of course, the day we moved here was one of those rare 40° days and our metal furniture was too hot to touch!

I'd been working in a winery in Jarrahdale, a lovely old mill town in the Perth Hills. But there's a lot more opportunity in the Margaret River region so moving here was logical. I launched Snake + Herring wines [in Wilyabrup, a 20-minute drive away] with my business partner, Redmond Sweeney, at the end of 2010 and then we opened Yarri restaurant and bar in 2018. We saw a need in the town for a wine-based venue using the best produce in the region.

The menu at Yarri follows the six seasons of the Noongar calendar. People around here tend to align with that calendar anyway, whether they realise it or not. For example, if I know that it's the time to pick mountainous chardonnay I'd also be heading out to see how the marri red-gum flowers are going to form this year to help me understand what the grapes will do. We also wait on the Leeuwin Current to change direction, which means the water temperature rises and we get great ripening in our cabernet grapes. We're all



dependent on the environment and the Noongar people have some of the best observations over the longest time period ever recorded. I think sometimes we've got to slow down, look around and listen.

The food and wine culture here is amazing; it's intrinsic to the fabric of the town. It seems like everyone has, at some stage, helped to build, worked in or supplied a wine or food business. This has always been a top dairying and cattle region, as well as wine, but now we also have all these smaller, diverse producers springing up, like brewers and distillers doing some interesting things with native botanicals and cross-pollinating with food producers – which is a win for the region. One of the strengths of this place is the open-mindedness and willingness to experiment. We're all learning from each other."

WILDLIFE RESCUER

Sasha Boundy

"I arrived in Dunsborough from the UK four years ago because my brother had lived here for years and he was keen for us to come over as well. Frankly, I didn't want to move at all. One of the conditions I gave my husband when I finally agreed was that I'd be able to open a wildlife sanctuary.

Within our first couple of weeks here, before we'd even found a house, we came across a baby possum that needed help. A rescue organisation provided care in that instance but the group didn't last. I soon realised there were no groups for injured wildlife in my area so I started looking after the local wildlife myself. Word spread and it wasn't long before I had five possums and then 10 – the number just kept growing.

Those 10 possums became Dunsborough & Busselton Wildlife Care. We mostly look after ringtail possums but at the moment I have kangaroo joeys, swans and other birds. Because we're surrounded by ocean, we have sea snakes, turtles and penguins washing in at different times of the year. We take everything.

A typical day for me starts at about half past six in the morning, unless a rescue call comes in before then; the phone is on 24/7. I feed the animals, which takes two hours, and in between I feed my two kids and get them to school. When I'm back from the school run, I catch up on paperwork. By 11am I'm feeding the animals again and heading out to rescues whenever the calls come in. I also have a team of great carers who help raise the animals until they're ready to be released in the wild.

Today, I love Dunsborough. I wouldn't go back to the UK for anything. The landscape is like a forgotten world; pristine beaches and incredible bushland and cape walks. And the community spirit is remarkable. If I ever need something for the animals or cash is running low, the community is quick to get involved and fundraise for whatever needs to be done.

I do what I do because if I'm going to live here and raise a family, I want to be able to tell my grandchildren that I did everything I could to save the western ringtail possum. I don't want to just sit back and let them become extinct; I want to make a difference." ●



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