

# KEEPING IT LOCAL

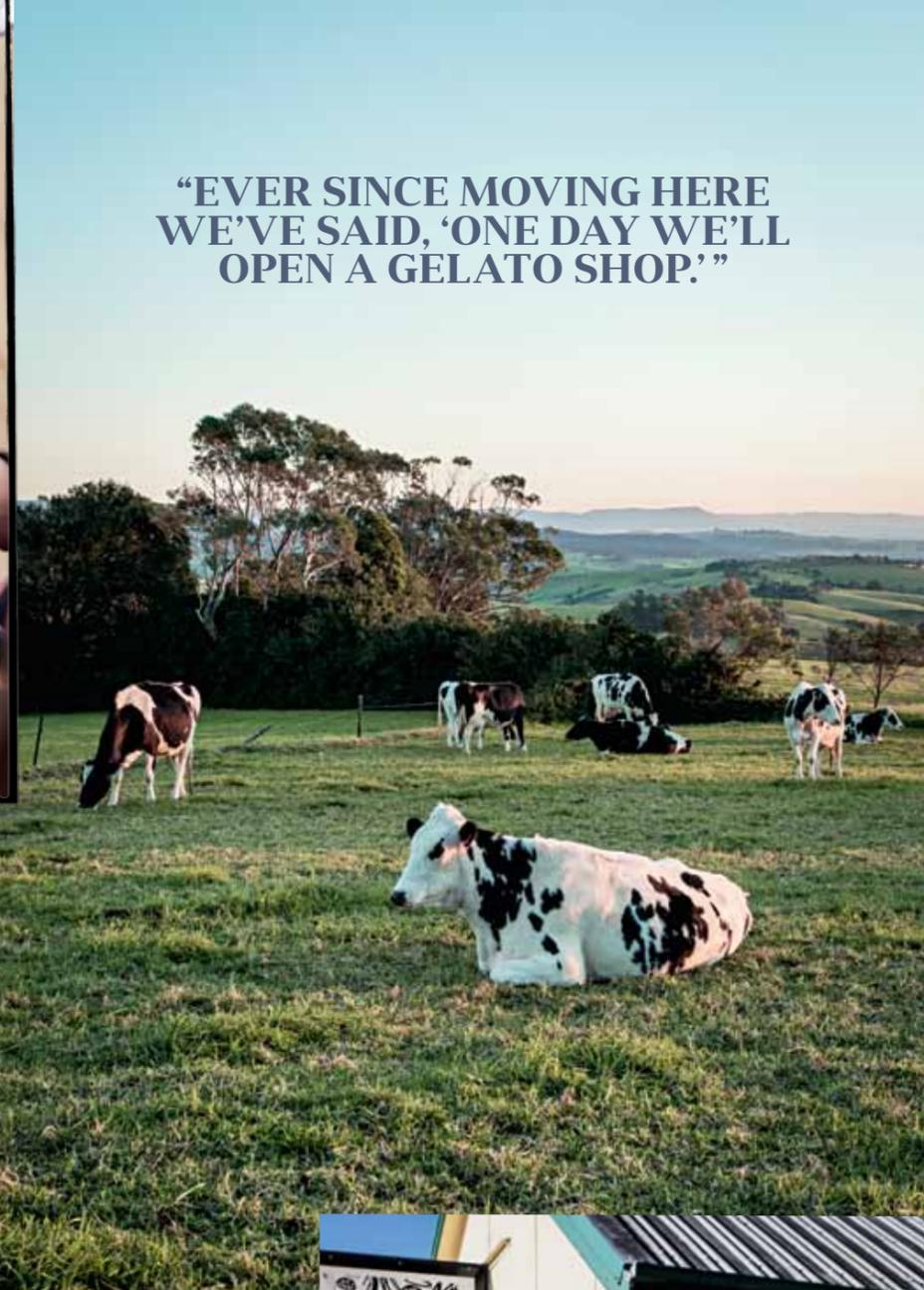
WHEN A FAMILY WHO WANTED A GELATO SHOP MET ANOTHER WITH A DAIRY HERD, TWO DREAMS WERE FULFILLED.

WORDS BARBARA SWEENEY PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL WEE



From left, the Jennings brothers, Max, 12, and Noah, eight, with family friends the Reid sisters, Ruby, nine, and six-year-old Tallulah, outside the Jennings's gelato shop in Berry. FACING PAGE The view from Saddleback Mountain, where the Grey family have been farmers since 1854.





“EVER SINCE MOVING HERE WE’VE SAID, ‘ONE DAY WE’LL OPEN A GELATO SHOP.’”

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Mint choc chip, panna cotta with blackberries, passionfruit, and rich chocolate are some of the flavours Kel and Damian have dreamed up; the Greys have farmed Holstein cows at The Pines since the 1950s; Il Locale Gelato with a mural by Kiama artist Becky Guggisberg; looking to the north-west from The Pines’ front door. FACING PAGE, FROM LEFT Kel and Mahlah Grey with baby Tabitha, and (right) Damian Jennings; The Pines homestead dates back to 1874.

When Damian Jennings moved to Kiama, on the NSW south coast, eight years ago he couldn’t understand why there was no gelato. He, wife Josie and their children — Max, now 12, and eight-year-old Noah — came from Leichhardt, known as Sydney’s Little Italy; serious gelato territory. At first, it was merely a slight annoyance, a craving that could be fulfilled on Sydney visits. But over time, it became an obsession. For Damian, a seaside town without gelato just didn’t make sense. “Ever since moving here we’ve said, ‘One day we’ll open a gelato shop.’”

At the top of Saddleback Mountain, on the south-west outskirts of town, Kel Grey was wrestling with a different problem. How was he, the sixth generation of the Grey family to farm The Pines, going to keep it going? The Pines is one of the few small dairy properties left in the area. “There were more than 100 when I was growing up,” Kel says. “Now there are just 16.”

Quite apart from the heritage and making a living, no-one would want to give up a view like this. Looking out from the homestead, the emerald green paddocks are edged by low stone walls built by Kel’s Irish forebears. The undulating farm country stretches back into the hinterland. And far below is the town and beyond, the sea — and the coastline stretching into the distance.

Among Kel’s earliest memories is his father, Garry, bringing home a billy full of milk, and identifying which of ‘the girls’ it had come from. However, Kel didn’t see himself becoming a dairy expert: “I wanted to travel the world,” he says. Life as a ski instructor meant Kel did just

that, but he always kept a hand in at The Pines. “Dad was working the dairy on his own,” he says. “I’d come down from Thredbo to help him for a day a week — then that turned into two days and then three days.”

That was 10 years ago. Marriage to Mahlah and the arrival of Tabitha, now two, signalled a more permanent move. Kel and Mahlah now run the property with Garry full-time and have branched out into offering farm-stay accommodation. However, with just 70 hectares, the Greys cannot run a large enough herd to remain viable solely as a milk producer.

“You have to go big and milk at least 300 cows or stay small,” Kel says. “I knew straight away that I wanted to stay small, remain independent and diversify.”

Kel and Garry milk 15 cows twice a day. The milk travels mere metres from the shed to the new processing room, where they make the gelato that Damian Jennings now sells.

Gelato became the focus after Kel visited the Cow And The Moon gelato shop in Sydney’s Enmore. This soon proved to be a useful meeting. Owner John Crowl would be voted the world’s best gelato maker in 2014 during the Gelato World Tour in Italy; intrigued by the idea of making gelato using raw milk, he offered advice and guidance in the early days.

Gelato making requires the base mixture to be heated, but health regulations forbid the selling of unpasteurised milk, so almost all gelato has effectively been pasteurised twice. But because he makes the gelato on the farm, Kel is able to start with raw milk and pasteurise only the base mixture. “The real gelato fans say they can taste the difference immediately,” Mahlah says. >



A chance conversation at a weeknight football game bought Damian into the picture. “A mate asked me if I knew Kel,” Damian says. “He mentioned gelato and thought we should talk.”

Damian and Josie’s Il Locale Gelato, on the main street of Berry, 26 kilometres south of Kiama, opened in November 2013. “We really wanted to do the local thing, but just couldn’t find the right site in Kiama,” Damian says. The Jennings have also moved to Gerroa, halfway

between Kiama and Berry. You’ll know the shop by the queue that trails out the door to the street.

Inside, the whitewashed shop is a gelato shop and coffee bar — a past life as a Sydney café owner and barista guarantees Damian’s coffee hits the mark. A small lunch menu, and timber tables and stools invite lingering, while out the back is a store selling Josie’s selection of clothing, homewares and accessories.

Thursday is Kel’s delivery day, and he always stays on for a coffee and a chat. “We talk flavours,” Damian says.

## “YOU’RE NOT AN OWNER, YOU’RE A CARETAKER.”

“We recently came up with white chocolate, raspberry and rose.” Kel’s delivery includes The Pines’ bottled milk that, curiously enough, was an afterthought. “Once we worked out the recipe for the gelato and the volume of milk that 15 cows produced, we realised we had more than we needed,” Kel says. “So we put the rest in bottles.”

The Kiama and Berry communities have got right behind The Pines and Il Locale Gelato. “People like local,” says Mahlah. “And they like to buy from people they know.” Both couples agree that it’s a partnership that works. As Damian says, “You can’t farm and do a shop.”

The Greys are happy to do the farming and to keep the land — and the view — in the family. But then again, “As Dad says, ‘You’re not an owner, you’re a caretaker,’” says Kel. “You just take care of it until someone else comes along.” \*

*Il Locale Gelato is at 114 Queen Street, Berry, NSW. 0414 407 907. The Pines’ original 19th-century homestead is now available for holiday rentals. For information, telephone 0449 914 063 or visit [thepineskiama.com.au](http://thepineskiama.com.au)*



Kel, Mahlah and Tabitha out in the paddock with the cows.