

Produce to Platter

the food & wine lovers' guide to
Victoria's High Country



Freeman on Ford

The distinction between an exclusive boutique hotel and a 5 STAR Accredited Bed and Breakfast becomes a little blurred at Freeman on Ford, Beechworth's only 5 STAR Accredited accommodation – 5 STAR rated by AAA Tourism since 2005. Freeman on Ford is also Beechworth's only Eco Friendly accredited Bed and Breakfast, rated by AAA Tourism. In 2010, the business became one of only two finalists nationally in the 5 STAR Hosted Accommodation section of the HMMA for Excellence.

One of its recent claims to fame is being rated Number 1 Bed and Breakfast in Australia in the online, guest-rating site, Trip Advisor, in their 2013 People's Choice Awards.

This well respected business is located in the most enviable position, in the heart of town amongst exclusive shops and well-known restaurants. It has been showcased on numerous TV travel shows and it continues to win accolades for its service and attention to detail.

The building itself is a stately Victorian original that has been meticulously maintained and brought up-to-date without sacrificing its character. For most of the structure's existence, having been built in 1876, it has been a bank as gold mining brought fortune to the region. Heidi Freeman and husband Jim Didolis, recognised the beauty of the building and bought it in 2000, renovated for 2 years and recently added an extension that now provides a full complement of seven exquisite rooms, each having its own personality. This renovation also took two years to complete.

This preservation work has also been recognised through heritage awards for the building and the landscaped garden in 2010 and 2011. Heidi has also won the inaugural award for the "Heritage Mover and Shaker" by the Indigo Shire for her extensive renovations. Her qualification as a history teacher and her passion for heritage, is certainly useful when advising guests about the historically significant streetscape.

There are four Victorian rooms upstairs in the original part of the building which have been decorated to replicate Victorian grandeur. These rooms all have very high ceilings, double hung windows and swag curtains with fringe tassels.

All ensembles upstairs have tessellated tiles and ornate French or Baroque style beds with matching armoires. The quality of heritage, pure wool carpet and tapestries blend exquisitely together making one feel as if one truly has stepped back in time. The Victorian paint colours and gold stencilled walls upstairs add to the luxurious feel together with dazzling original crystal chandeliers which are graced throughout the building. Stained glass windows, and individually handcrafted floor to ceiling windows make the building very special.

On the ground floor, there is a new wing which replicates an Art Deco theme. The bedrooms downstairs have marble ensembles, fire hearths and unique hand carved beds and bedside tables. These grand and much larger rooms, lead onto a wide, granite verandah which overlooks the swimming pool and landscaped award winning backyard. The yard provides a private oasis. The building and yard go from one block to the other and guests appreciate that each car space has undercover parking and of course, even these are designed in keeping with the historical building; the car park is designed like an old stable.

Both Jim and Heidi have contributed to the quality of the streetscape by individually sponsoring the herculean renovations and turning this grand building into a sophisticated business. Heidi sums up the establishment as providing "all the services of a city hotel even though we are a bed and breakfast. We like to pamper guests, treat all customers with integrity and provide service which is second to none."

No doubt they have succeeded in doing this, and reviews from many sectors concur including the recent Trip Advisor Award. Freeman on Ford has certainly earned its motto after years of meticulous renovation: "Expect the exceptional."

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