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One of my earliest recollections of childhood holidays is of a languid summer in the remote power town of Mount Beauty, plunging from a swinging rope into the cool waters of the Kiewa River downstream of the hydro-electric scheme that gave birth to this workers' Shangri-la.

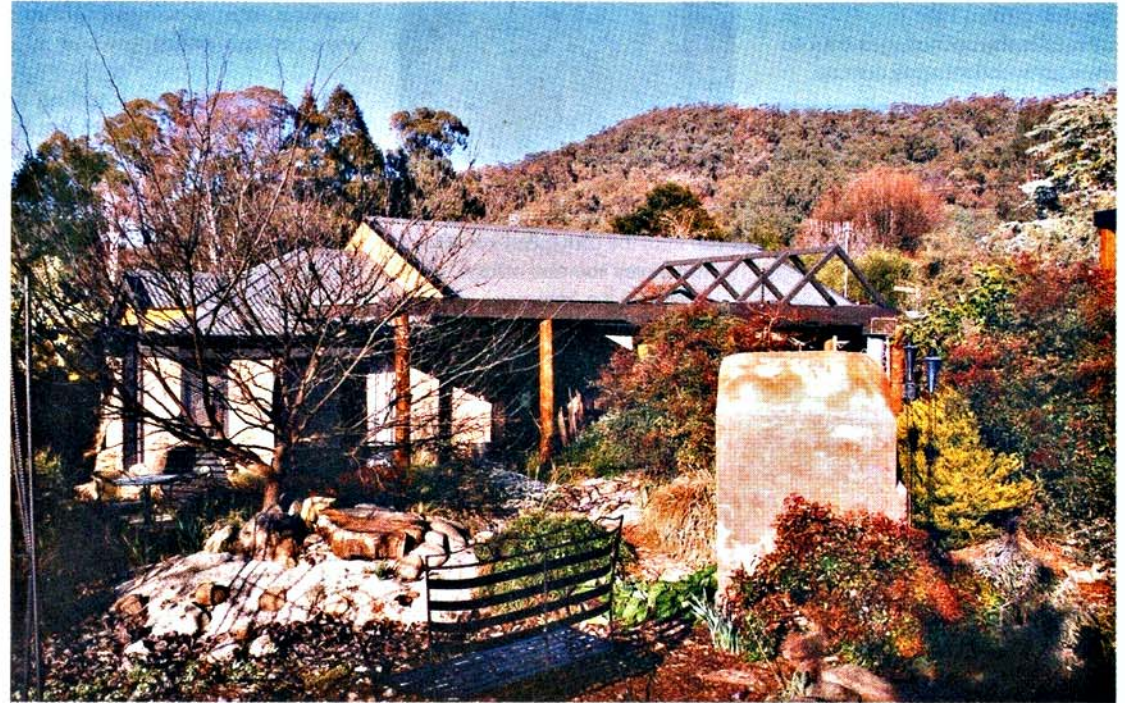
They were uncomplicated days, filled with abandon, and in my boyish imaginings I could identify with Mark Twain's characters Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn as they messed around on the Mississippi. A wily old bushman whom I worshipped as "Uncle" Bill settled there with his muse, "Aunty" Audrey, who could easily have played Tom's Aunt Polly to my Huck Finn.

Audrey and Bill are long gone but my return to Mount Beauty was coloured by the hope that it had not lost its unpretentious charm. I was reminded of Audrey on meeting Isla Macleod, proprietor of Braeview and, like my adopted aunt, a redoubtable figure.

Isla's sanctuary styles itself as a romantic escape. There's a choice of traditional B&B, separate studio or the more expensive option, Reflections Cottage, which sits virtually secluded in its own garden. Its calming influence is best appreciated while sitting in the breakfast atrium looking onto the spectacular native plantings.

Cottage couples are well catered for: there is a double spa, a deck with mountain views, a barbecue and even an outdoor pizza oven, and while Isla can provide catering, a meal at the exceptional Recline restaurant in town is recommended.

Dear Aunty Auds would have found it all very appealing. **Steve Foley**



1-2 4hrs **\$\$**

Cost: Reflections Cottage \$270 a double a night; two-night minimum. Includes breakfast basket, port, chocolates and food platter. Local wine may be purchased by the bottle and meals are available at additional cost.

Distance: 350 kilometres (almost four hours' drive) north-east of Melbourne; 30 minutes' drive from the Great Alpine Road.

Accommodation: in addition to

Reflections, Braeview offers a self-contained studio apartment and two B&B spa rooms in the main residence.

Features: spa, TV, air-conditioning/heating, gazebo overlooking garden, outdoor pizza oven, seating areas for quiet relaxation.

Nearby: Recline restaurant, walks, bike trails, olive farms and wineries, skiing at Falls Creek.

Bookings: four weeks ahead.

Children: not suitable.

Wheelchair access: no.