



Heather Millar enjoys a coffee with the owners of Blessed Cheese, the café the locals love in the heart of McLaren Vale. Photographs by **Grant Beed**.

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Every morning I head to my favourite café for coffee. Every morning I see familiar faces. As a freelancer who works from home, it’s a great start to the day – sharing coffee in what feels like an extension of my home, before heading back home to the quiet; just me and my computer.

So it is that instead of gathering around the water cooler at the office, we McLaren Vale locals gather around Rob and Jo Kolencik’s coffee machine at Blessed Cheese, right in the heart of our township. It’s definitely the ‘it’ place of the moment in the area. Though owner/proprietor Kolencik is humble enough to admit that this could change, every café has its day. But ‘Blessed’ as we locals like to call it has been the favourite for a few years now. Kolencik puts it down to the fact that he and Jo work hard at it – and choose the best ingredients and produce.

But the truth is, it’s more than just hard work – it’s the years of experience they bring to the party. ‘I was born and bred into hospitality,’ says Rob whose father was a chef, and with whom Rob started his apprenticeship.

Rob later spent seven years as proprietor of the restaurant and kiosk at the Botanic Gardens, then seven years catering up at Carrick Hill, Springfield. He met Jo through the industry and they worked and dreamed together.

In 2000 the idea for their own café was born. The Kolenciks were travelling through Europe, and in France they stumbled upon the inspiration for Blessed Cheese.

‘We fell in love with this little café in Paris,’ says Rob. ‘It had gourmet food for sale – duck confit and truffles on the shelves, and a little

cheese cabinet – and one long table with virtually a set menu featuring beautiful, seasonal, fresh bistro food. We thought, wow, wouldn’t it be great to do something along these lines?’

When they returned they began looking around Adelaide, and further afield in regional South Australia for a place, and that’s when Blessed Cheese came up for sale.

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Jo was born and bred at Second Valley on the Peninsula and Rob in the southern suburbs of Adelaide – and this was already their weekend fishing and camping stomping ground.

The Kolenciks bought Blessed Cheese in 2008 when it was more of a cheese shop than a café, with just a few tables to sit at. They ran it just as it was for the first few months, then shut down for a few days for renovations – knocking out a wall and opening the place up. The decision began to pay off immediately, as customers began pouring through the doors.


‘We use really good produce,’ says Rob. ‘It’s more expensive, but we use Fleurieu milk and our bread is from Small World Bakery in Langhorne Creek. It costs more than supermarket milk and bread, but it’s so much nicer; we buy Hamlet’s bacon for the same reason ... it comes down to sacrificing a little profit to make sure the quality is extremely high; but it pays dividends in the end because we are always busy!’

‘The other reason I think it works is because people want to come along and say g’day and be recognised, and know that we know what they like’.



‘We also bend over backwards to do something different, changing the lunch menu every few weeks, and the breakfast specials. We have a passion for getting it right – from the tables being clean, to the high quality food, and friendly staff,’ says Rob.

The Kolenciks currently live in Maslin Beach, but are looking to buy a bit of land so they can grow produce to use in the café kitchen: herbs, salad greens, tomatoes.

‘Our food is fresh and healthy, with lots of locally sourced produce. In the end, it’s about putting yummy food on the plate!’ ‘Blessed be,’ say the locals. 



Top far left: Cheese.
Top: Facade from the street.
Above left: Bread.
Above: The Kolenciks.