

MY WEEKEND WITH DAVID TAYLOR by MARIE WARNECKE



David Taylor, in his Smiths Gully studio, uses the Diamond Valley's natural beauty as the inspiration for his watercolours.

Picture: MARK FRECKER

It has been suggested that my weekend away with David Taylor was for nefarious reasons - however, let me assure you, nothing could be further from the truth.

After two days and two nights of intense socializing, eating, drinking and of course, painting and watching the master at work, I left physically and mentally exhausted, but stimulated, inspired and amazed at the magic of watercolour.



Six others and I arrived at David's remote and beautiful property on the outskirts of Melbourne on Friday night in the middle of a raging storm and torrential downpour. We found David out on the steep gravel road with his chainsaw clearing fallen trees and branches before anyone could negotiate the tortuous climb. The man's indefatigable energy never failed to amaze me the whole weekend.

David's property consists of a charming French Provincial farmhouse and three mud brick cottages set on thirty acres of beautiful rolling hills. The focal point is the large old shearing shed which is now a fabulous studio/gallery with room for eight artists to work and some of David's paintings studding the walls!

On Friday night, David's partner Diana had prepared a lovely dinner and we spent the evening getting to know each other. David was solicitous in finding out individually what each one of us was hoping to gain from our weekend with him. Four of us retired to bed up a narrow spiral staircase in one of the guest cottages and three ladies were dispatched to the other. First light nerves and excitement kept me awake much of the night and 5:00 am found me prowling for a cup of tea.

However, at 9:00 am we were in the studio and David had launched into his first demonstration - subject chosen by all us from his huge collection of photos and material. We then embarked upon our own interpretation of his example with plenty of help and support from David. "More shadow!" "More darks!" "Thicker paint!" he extolled. "Without the darks, the lights will not glow!"

Diana prepared another lovely meal, and after lunch we set up easels on the terrace for some plein air tuition, taking advantage of the wonderful light on the misty hills and the hazy panorama and undulating farmlands before us. Kangaroos paused to gaze inquisitively at the seven artists, working industriously on our later "masterpieces". David was kind, encouraging and gave each of us plenty of individual attention.

"More purple!" "More purple!" he kept telling me, and I must admit the deep purple distance and shadows made my sunlit hills come alive.

Dinner was another hilarious affair, but by 9.00 pm my eyes were drooping and my brain was reeling with everything I had taken in that day and I dragged myself back up the spiral staircase. The next morning I learned that David had taken everyone back to the studio and kept demonstrating until eleven o'clock!

Sunday, being very wet and stormy, was a big studio day, with intensive work on any subject of our own choice, and we each came out with more knowledge of washes, glazes, dry brush technique and lots of positive reinforcement.

I was privileged to be shown David's storeroom, stacked with his masterful works, framed and unframed, and a large watercolour which had just won the Kenneth Jack Memorial Prize.

Farewells took a long time on Sunday night with one lot of artists going out, and another lot coming in. Our group of five ladies and two men (some from as far afield as Western Australia and Newcastle) got on so well, we vowed to meet again for another of David's workshops - same time next year, to see how much we had progressed in that twelve months.

In the meantime, I must practice - loose washes, big brushes, contrast, contrast, contrast, suggest shapes and let the eye fill in what it does not see.

All in all, a fabulous experience!

