



# CONFERRING IN PARADISE

VICTORIA'S PREMIER CONFERENCE, EVENT &  
ACCOMMODATION VENUE IN THE DANDENONG RANGES

**(03) 9728 7000**

[countryplace.com.au](http://countryplace.com.au)



# CountryPlace

## Conferencing in Paradise

When it comes to running a conference or business event, it would be hard to find a more appealing location than the wonderful Dandenong Ranges just outside of Melbourne. High in the mountains, surrounded by forest, overlooking Silvan Dam and right down

the Yarra Valley, the CountryPlace location is truly idyllic.

Choosing the right venue, in the right location, can sometimes be a daunting task. The right conference facilities, services, accommodation, and



food and drink offerings, have to be carefully considered in order to make the meeting or retreat a success.

In Victoria, there are few places that can fit all of the above requirements better than CountryPlace. The

## AT A GLANCE

**WHO:** CountryPlace

**WHAT:** An award-winning conference, event, and accommodation venue

**WHERE:** 180 Olinda Creek Road, Kalorama, Victoria 3766

**WEBSITE:** [countryplace.com.au](http://countryplace.com.au)

award-winning conference, event, and accommodation venue offers a premier service in one of the most beautiful locations in the Dandenong Ranges. The centre has been operating for almost 25 years in its current location, just 40 minutes from Melbourne.

Jeffrey and Carol Farman, the co-founders and a directors of the company, talked to us about managing the venue, their values, and the guidelines that direct CountryPlace. With a strong background in advertising and marketing, Jeffrey handles the promotion, branding, and marketing of CountryPlace. He is also actively involved in developing and maintaining the magnificent CountryPlace gardens.

### **Very special gardens**

The venue's gardens are a huge attraction with both the people who book the events and the guests themselves. These gardens are situated in the Olinda State Forest, one of the ven-

ue's main features. Anyone who visits the location can attest to its beauty.

The gardens, which spread across eight acres, feature both native flowering trees and exotic specimens. Because guests frequently enquire about them, the organisation recently completed a project to identify and label all of the important species. The pristine gardens offer a sense of tranquility that makes CountryPlace ideal for both business and leisure.

## Special events, popular with guests

One example of a popular event is the Faulty Towers Dining Experience.

“We have been running the Faulty Towers Dinner Show for the past three years and it's now enormously popular. We sell out well ahead of time for each of the events and we will be running six of them this year. Faulty Towers tends to attract people who are familiar with the show. Often corporate groups will include a show to provide a highlight for their event,” says Jeffry Farman.

## Moving Australia's venues forward

When the Farmans acquired the venue in 1992, they quickly focused on turning it into a prestigious yet approachable organisation that could accommodate a range of different clients. Soon after the purchase, they



**Jeffry Farman**

went on a tour of venues in the United States. Here they became familiar with the International Association of Conference Centers (IACC). Membership of the association required strict standards with regard to meeting facilities and conference rooms. For example, meeting rooms must have very good natural light with lots of windows. Fully adjustable ergonomic chairs were required to provide all-day comfort for conference delegates.

With all that in mind, the company developed a purpose-built conference facility, connected to the main complex, that met all of these standards. Having met the criteria, CountryPlace became the first Australian conference centre



to be accepted for membership of the international association.

After gaining membership, in 1993, Jeffrey worked hard to establish a local chapter of the association in Australia. He became the first chairman of the Australian Chapter. He also served for two years as president of the global board, based in St Louis.

Domestically, CountryPlace has won the National Tourism Award twice and the Victorian Award for Tourism five times. It is also the only conference centre to be inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame in Victoria, a fact that showcases the exemplary services of the venue.

## **Establishing the Quality Management System**

Offering a reliable, customer focused service is important for CountryPlace to achieve strong repeat business levels. The organization is committed to an ongoing Quality Management System for their operations. “Quality management is based on establishing clear standards, training and staff communication. You firstly have to know what the customer wants you to achieve,” says Jeffrey. Everything from making beds, pouring beers, cleaning the venue is documented. The system that CountryPlace has in place defines absolutely everything. Nothing is left to chance.

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Yering Farm is steeped in history, for its location and for the vines this site was originally known for. It is located on the original site of the Yeringa Vineyard once owned by the Deschamps family back in the 1800's.

As fifth generation Orchardists, the Johns family resurrected the property in 1980. The old hay shed was transformed into the charming rustic Cellar Door that you can visit today, complete with the original "Yeringa Vineyard" sign adorning the entrance.

The whole property exudes charm, with commanding views of the Yarra Valley: perfect to linger with a bottle of wine and the Yering Farm "Pruner's Platter" by the fire or out on the large verandah.



The replanting of grapevines began in 1989 and to this day, all Yering Farm wines are still produced on site from estate grown fruit with the sole focus being to produce high quality, low yielding, hand picked grapes.

Like Alan and Vicki Johns, the wines have passion and personality, as do the fabulous wine labels, especially in the Farmyard series, which includes Run Rabbit Run Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, Duck Down Under Pinot Noir and The Foxtrot Cabernet and Shiraz.

As an Orchardist, a tasting experience would not be the same without trying Alan's Pink Lady apple cider. It's delicious!

## YERING FARM WINES

The most recent addition to Yering Farm is the luxurious self-contained heritage farmhouse. Known as *The George at Yering*, it is set idyllically amongst the 70 acre orchard and the 30 acre vineyard, all within a short walk to the Cellar Door.

*The George at Yering* exudes luxury from the moment you enter the front door: a double story home awaits beyond the vaulted ceiling foyer. In the main lounge area with its open fire place, you get to enjoy a complimentary glass of Yering Farm Cabernet Sauvignon aptly named "The George".

Over the two floors are six large bedrooms, three bathrooms, central dining, library room and a gorgeous timber country kitchen looking out on to the in-ground solar heated saltwater pool and spa with beautifully manicured gardens.

Contact Yering Farm

Yering Farm Wines, 19-21 St Huberts Rd Yering, Victoria 3770 Australia



This method, it seems, has been working well for the company. Their level of repeat business stands at around 65 percent. They are clearly doing what their clients want. Regular clients have particular requirements, right down to the way they need the conference tables placed.

The quality management system is imbedded across every aspect of the business, including the supply chain. Anything that goes into the kitchen is carefully inspected too. If a chicken arrives at the wrong temperature, for instance, the kitchen staff will send it right back because it does not meet

the standards set by the management system.

Being the largest residential property on the mountain has made CountryPlace very important for local suppliers so there is a symbiotic relationship that works very well. Keeping the supply chain moving and simultaneously investing back into the facilities can be a challenge but it is certainly something that Jeffry and his team have consistently handled well. After all, a venue such as CountryPlace needs to be at the forefront at all times. There are continuous investments in computer software and hardware, screens, data



projectors, electronic whiteboards, and everything else that might be useful to meetings and conferences.

## Running at the top of the market

According to Jeffry, CountryPlace's most successful marketing tool is keeping direct contact with their customers. The venue has a database of about 5,000 people to whom they regularly email marketing campaigns and associated promotions. Some of their clients only have a conference once each year but the company still keeps in touch with them and maintains con-

tinuous contact. Web-based marketing is also a vital and the company is continually improving its website strategy.

Jeffry also talked to us about staying ahead of the competition: "The market is quite competitive. First of all, 90 percent of our business comes from Victoria. Corporate, government, universities, and leisure groups." What they tend to do first is choose a location. An area or region that has a particular appeal. The Dandenong Ranges is a tourist destination because of its natural beauty with the forests, gardens, hills, and lakes, all of which make it very





attractive. It also means we are well-known for our location to most clients”

CountryPlace maintains a team of about 35. Jeffry and his wife regard CountryPlace as a family business with staff who have been with them for a considerable number of years. The managing director John and his wife Janine, an award-winning chef, have been with CountryPlace for more than 25 years. Their sons have also worked in the business. Generally, Jeffry wants to offer his employees a chance to balance work and family life even though the work is challenging. CountryPlace operates 7 days a week with very busy weekends so a lot of employees are needed to cover the various bases.

## Continuous growth via ongoing investment

To date, the venue has provided meeting and hospitality facilities for over 10,200 residential meetings covering learning and professional development as well as programs relat-

ed to culture change, leadership, and team-building. It has hosted a range of clients including universities, schools, corporations, churches, government, and special interest groups such as health and fitness clubs as well as hobby and sports groups. Over the past 12 months alone, the venue has grown revenue by over 22 percent. According to Jeffry, their 25 years of experience and their absolute dedication to meeting their clients’ specific needs are the two main things that have established CountryPlace’s leadership in the market.

Jeffry hopes to continue building upon the stellar track record of CountryPlace. He wants to retain positive customer feedback to raise the level of repeat business. Whatever area Jeffry will focus on in the future, it is certain that CountryPlace will benefit.

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