

what to wear

Happily ever after

A room with a view and a lifetime of memories makes Kilcunda the perfect spot for Harris family celebrations.

On their first morning of married life, Phillip and Dawn Harris sat in bed sharing a box of Minties and reading a Phantom comic, enjoying the stunning views of the ocean right outside their window.

The year was 1965 and after marrying in Melbourne, the young couple had spent their first night as Mr and Mrs at the Kilcunda Hotel – or as they fondly call it – the Killy Pub.

The trainee and private secretary had met when they shared an office while working for IBM in St Kilda. Phillip had recently arrived from the United Kingdom in the era of comedians such as Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan and Harry Secombe.

"I brought the comedy with me," he says. "Then this little lady came in (motions to his wife of 50 years), and between the joy of sitting opposite me and hearing these ridiculous attempts at humour, that was it!"

Phillip says "one thing led to another" and the couple quickly became an item. Upon Dawn's return from a family holiday on Heron Island, Phillip got "down on bended knee in a swamp at Koo Wee Rup", where Dawn's family lived, and proposed. It was

only their third date. "I was away for a month. When I came back, I think he'd missed me!" Dawn laughs.

Their pending marriage, however, had to be kept a secret. The founders of IBM, the Watson family, were strict Methodists, tolerating neither alcohol consumption by employees nor relationships between staff. "Because of company policy I had to wear my ring around my neck," Dawn says. "My boss actually picked up on it and I had to tell him, but for six months he didn't let on to anybody!"

The bride (carrying a frangipani bouquet sent all the way from Papua New Guinea) and groom were married on the 6th of March in the All Saints Church of England in East St Kilda. Dawn's organ teacher played while the church's boys' choir sang – a special memory for the couple.

The reception was held in Hawthorn, the newlyweds arriving in a black Chevrolet with red leather lining – an ex-State Government car Dawn's father had purchased for the family. Phillip remembers going to pay the bill at the end of the event only to find they'd been charged for six dozen bottles of beer.

words simone short photos warren reed and supplied



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"I had some of my mates there, but they weren't heavily into drinking, and Dawn's family didn't drink beer at all," Phillip recalls. "We toasted with champagne, but I'd say there's no way in the world 72 bottles were drunk by this lot. They were just trying to charge us extra, so that cut the bill back!"

Having spent countless holidays camping with her family in Newhaven, Dawn knew she wanted to spend their wedding night by the ocean. The couple had fond memories of travelling to Cape Woolamai by boat for a New Year's Day picnic with Dawn's family earlier that year, and Phillip says there was an affinity with the area. They knew the Killy Pub had to be it.

"When you look at the Kilcunda Hotel now, you see a big bay window on the right-hand side of the building – that was our bedroom," Phillip says. "When we sat up in bed the next morning, we looked right over to Cape Woolamai."

They celebrated with a roast beef dinner, and a couple at a nearby table gifted the newlyweds a bottle of Lindeman's Caraway Claret and a souvenir from the hotel. The spotted shell with 'Kilcunda' etched into it and a small black baby sitting on top still sits above the bed in their Frankston South home.

That celebratory dinner has been recreated several times since: a secret visit to the hotel to celebrate their 25th anniversary – just the two of them – and again for their surprise 50th anniversary dinner organised by their daughter Fiona. This

time they were joined by their four children, as well as 50 of their family and closest friends. In 10 years' time, there's no doubt they'll return for their 60th. In the meantime, Dawn's family tradition of holidaying on Phillip Island continues, with plenty of visits to their holiday house in Cape Woolamai.

And their secret to a happy marriage spanning half a decade? "Laughter," Phillip and Dawn agree. "If you can laugh, even in adversity, then you're always happy." ☑

