

LISA ALLEN

Riding the wave

This undulating retreat keeps drawing people back

It can be difficult to spot the legendary Saffire Freycinet lodge, particularly if you are attempting to view it from the Hazards mountain range on the opposite side of Tasmania's Coles Bay. But that was the deliberate intention of the Hobart-based architects Robert Morris-Nunn when they designed the 20-suite remote wilderness lodge on a former caravan park site.

"The idea was to make it as architecturally unobtrusive as possible...to make it look like a sea creature," says Saffire Freycinet's general manager Russ Boobyer, a specialist in running remote luxury retreats.

Fashioned out of materials that include Tasmania's famous huon pine, celery top timber, as well as old blue gum timber sourced from a decommissioned bridge in Sydney, Saffire is as up to date architecturally today as it was 12 years ago when its owners, Tasmania's Federal Group, opened it.

According to Morris-Nunn, the resort's form evokes coastal landforms, dunes, waves or sea creatures.

"The suites are small waves or boats, arranged on the site as if marking the tidal shoreline. The passage between the units is a metaphor for a beach, the suites moored like small craft run up onto the sand. Each suite is enclosing and private, yet opens to an individually personalised view of the Hazards. The project has become an international symbol of Tasmania."

Indeed it has. Boobyer reports that these days the multi-award winning resort is swamped with domestic visitors - many of them repeat guests. Some stay as long as eight nights while others have returned 15 times, according to Boobyer's colleague Matt Casey, general manager of tourism for the privately owned Federal Group.

Saffire is a favourite getaway for Sydney doctors, for instance, but Boobyer says international guests, specifically New Yorkers, are slowly returning. The multi-award winning lodge prides itself on the personal service of its well-trained staff as well as the exceptional quality of its food and beverage offerings.

For Boobyer, the only problem is having enough room vacancies to accommodate the increasing demand.

Casey also reports that Saffire is phenomenally busy, boasting a year-round occupancy rate of more than 90 per cent. Of the domestic guests, around 35 per cent hail from Sydney, 35 per cent are from Melbourne and the remainder from various parts of Queensland. Most are professional people or investors, with the average stay nudging three nights.

They all want "emotional, meaningful experiences as well as high-quality food", he says. Favourite complimentary activities include viewing Tasmanian devils, oyster shucking and heekkeeping, as well as a connection to country experience led by Saffire's Indigenous guide.

Fully inclusive prices start from \$2300 a night for a luxury suite, of which there are six; from \$2600 a night for one of the 10 signature suites; and from \$2800 a night for one of the four private pavilions.

The writer stayed at Saffire with the assistance of the Federal Group



The view across Coles Bay to the Hazards, top. The resort's curved design evokes coastal landforms, waves and sea creatures, with the lavish use of glass maximising the impact of the setting.

