

TRAVEL

Where to stay when you visit the best places on earth. Edited by Nigel Bowen.

THE APPLE ISLE'S NEW FIVE-STAR FACE

Tassie reveal

When I mentioned I was going on my first trip to Van Diemen's Land, people reacted in one of two ways. Those, like me, who hadn't yet crossed Bass Strait would shrug and express a vague desire to get down there "some day". But those who had would immediately light up and start gushing about its breathtaking natural beauty, incredible food and wine and old-world charm. After experiencing the latter reaction a few times, I began to wonder if my mental image of Tasmania as a quaint outpost full of apple orchards, timber workers, strange animals and boutique beer breweries was seriously deficient.

As it turns out, it was. The Tasmania of 2010 is a sort of mini-New Zealand — an unspoilt, relatively undeveloped island that's increasingly developing five-star facilities in the midst of spectacular scenery to attract discerning travellers.

MOORILLA ESTATE CLUB MED FOR AESTHETES

So you're a freakishly clever working-class boy from a hardscrabble suburb of Hobart. You work out a way to beat the odds gambling on horse races, resulting in your amassing more money than God. What do you do with all that loot?

Well, if you're David Walsh, you buy an old vineyard in Berriedale, about 10 minutes out of Hobart, then sink \$75 million into building a subterranean art gallery in a cliff-face and stuff it full of works by the likes of Damien Hirst, Sydney Nolan, Brett

Whiteley and Arthur Boyd from your private art collection (valued at \$100 million).

You figure that art lovers might like to devote a few days to checking out your art collection — which you name the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) — so you build eight pavilions nearby, overlooking the Derwent River. You also put in a heated infinity pool, sauna and gymnasium for

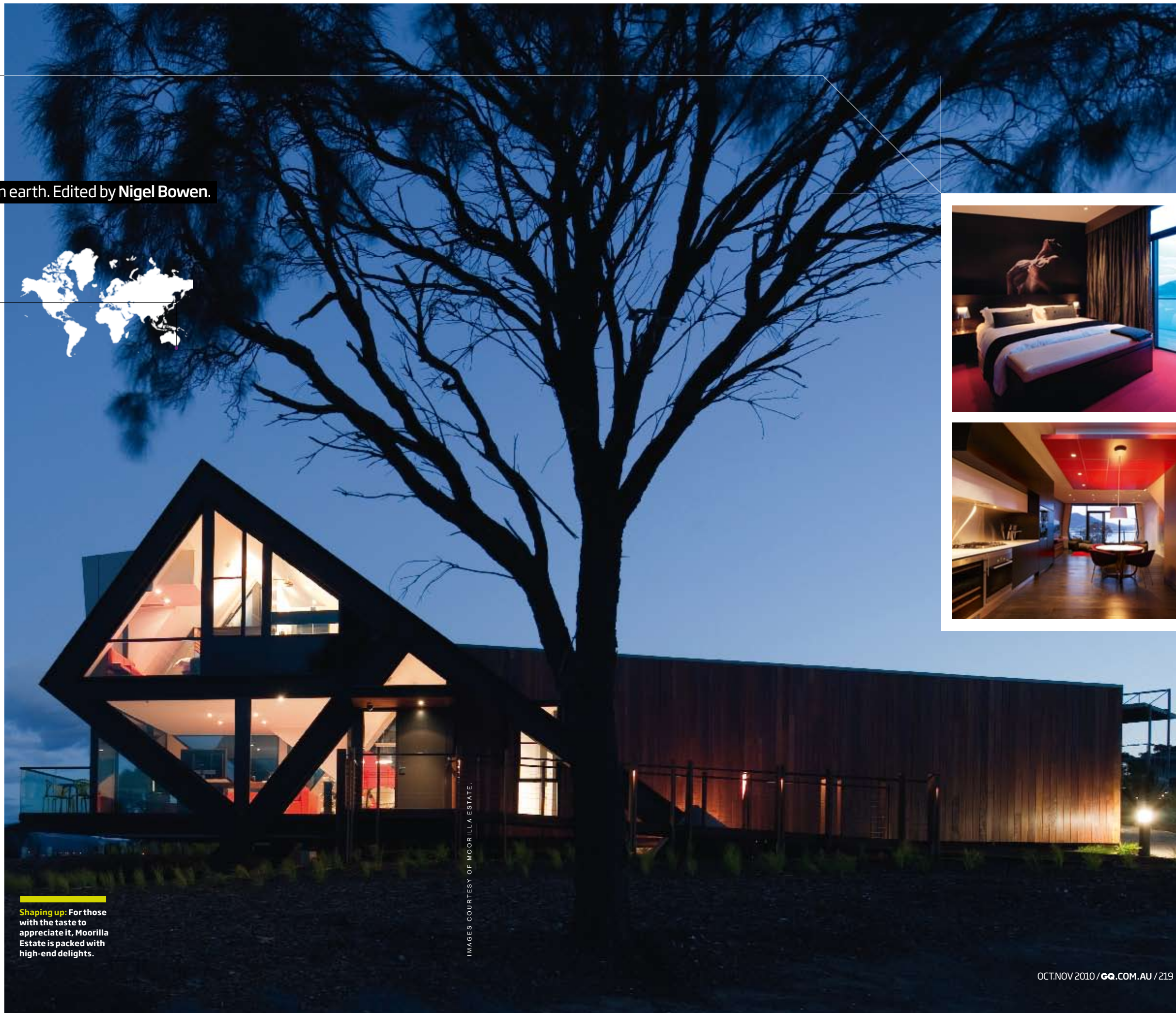
your guests to kick back in after a hard day's gazing. Those art-lovers are going to get hungry so you add in a fancy restaurant as well. And a micro-brewery to make your own beer. And, oh yeah, you've bought a property with a vineyard, so you may as well produce your own range of wines, too.

Sound pretty impressive? It certainly is — and that's before the aforementioned art gallery has even opened.

When we visit Moorilla Estate, MONA, Australia's largest privately funded museum, is still in the final stages of construction. In a way, it's like going to Disneyland on the day all the rides are ▶

Shaping up: For those with the taste to appreciate it, Moorilla Estate is packed with high-end delights.

IMAGES COURTESY OF MOORILLA ESTATE.



closed for maintenance, but we still find plenty to feast our eyes upon. After checking in, we're ushered to our pavilion — named Roy — by Delia Nicholls, Moorilla Estate's research curator. As we make our way there, she explains that all the pavilions are named after famous artists or architects (ours is named for Sir Roy Grounds, who designed the National Gallery of Victoria).

I've never been riven with intellectual insecurity by holiday lodgings before, but as soon as I walk inside Roy and clock a funkyly designed bookcase groaning under the weight of tomes such as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and a plethora of art books with titles such as *Blasphemy: Art That Offends*, I realise this isn't the kind of place I'm going to find a games room full of Monopoly sets and ping-pong tables.

Roy is spread across three levels, with the central kitchen/living/dining space in the middle, sandwiched by two floors featuring large bedrooms with roomy ensuites. On the lower level, the substantial bath is on the outside balcony, allowing guests to enjoy a hot soak in the crisp evening air while taking in the river views. The kitchen comes with a capacious bar fridge, well stocked with the estate's wines and Moo Brew beer. The wine labels are decorated with the same sort of imagery that adorns the walls above both beds — naked people in various states of ecstatic entwinement. Let's just say it's the kind of decor that could provide a welcome boost if you're visiting for a romantic weekend.

Each pavilion also has a work of art prominently displayed. Ours featured a large woollen tapestry, which I was unable to decipher the deeper meaning of, but found strangely calming to look at.

And the artistry isn't just on the walls at Moorilla — there's also plenty of it going on in the kitchen. Even more so than most five-star eateries, The Source restaurant (named for the John Olsen painting that decorates its ceiling), serves up food as art — beef cheeks in a blindingly bright orange sauce; starkly minimalist dessert triptychs composed of just chocolate, olive oil and salt. The dishes are so visually appealing you feel like a philistine actually eating them.

MONA will open on January 21, 2011, and it's tipped to quickly become one of Tasmania's biggest tourist drawcards. Given that Moorilla Estate can accommodate no more than 12 guests, you'd best make a booking now if you're keen to get the full immersion experience any time soon. *Moorilla Estate, 655 Main Road, Berriedale. 03 6277 9900; mona.net.au. Rates range from \$320 to \$950 per night, depending on the pavilion.*

THE LAIR VIEW FROM THE TOP

After a spectacular two-hour drive up Tasmania's stunning east coast we reach our next destination, The Lair. It's best described



The Lair: It's a toss up as to whether what's inside or outside provides the more amazing view.

A weekender on designer steroids, The Lair juts out of a steep hill like an enormous, glass-fronted shelf, offering magnificent views over Great Oyster Bay.

as a weekender on designer steroids, jutting out of a steep hill like an enormous, glass-fronted shelf. We get there a little earlier than expected and so run into the owner, Rick Bzowy, making the final preparations for our arrival. Bzowy looks like a rock band manager but is, in fact, a St Kilda architect who made a sea change a few years back. Ordinarily, Bzowy would be in advance touch with guests to discuss in detail exactly what fine food and wines they want waiting for them but we've booked in at short notice so he's stuck to the basics — a bottle of French Champagne, a loaf of crusty bread and some pots of soup on the stove ready as a warming snack after our drive.

If Moorilla Estate is what you get when an art lover with unlimited coin decides to create and build a resort, The Lair is what happens when an architect with somewhat more limited but still significant funds decides to design his dream holiday house.

Located halfway between Hobart and Launceston, The Lair offers views over Great Oyster Bay and is close to Wineglass Bay and the Freycinet Peninsula. But as Bzowy tells me, once visitors arrive at The Lair, they tend to hunker down, taking full advantage of the four-person spa, cable TV, internet-connected iMac, sound system, well stocked book and DVD library and even better stocked fridge and pantry.



There are two bedrooms at either end of the house and, just so there's no fighting over who gets the good one, they're identically fitted out. And the impeccable interiors are what really sets The Lair apart, with only the best of brands being used — B&B Italia, Cassina and Artemide, to name but a few. Bzowy opened The Lair in October last year and he says it's mostly been booked so far by those with a strong interest in design.

When designing the house, Bzowy's vision was to set a new standard in private, self-contained luxury, creating a "sweeping form drawing light and air into and through the building as the moods of Tasmania pour through every room". Mission accomplished.

Unfortunately, we've only got one night in the place but we do our best to sample its many delights, splashing around in the impressive spa in the backyard, lazing in the exquisitely elegant, half-eggshell baths and taking in the view. Then, as evening falls, we start up the log fire, make a gourmet dinner in the well-appointed kitchen and work our way through the arthouse section of Bzowy's DVD collection before drifting off to sleep betwixt sheets of finest linen.

The Lair, 11889 Tasman Highway, Swansea. 03 6257 8999; thelair.com.au. \$1100 per night, with a minimum two night stay.

THE HENRY JONES ART HOTEL JAM SESSION

It wasn't until the end of our trip that we actually made it into Hobart. Though it's only been around for six years, the Henry Jones Art Hotel can probably lay claim to being the first of the new wave of upmarket Tasmanian establishments constructed in the belief that if you build it, they (well-heeled tourists) will come. And come they have. The place has won a swag of awards for everything from architecture to cuisine and was named Oceania's Best Hotel in the *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers' Choice Awards in 2008, as well as being listed as one of the world's top 100 hotels in the same awards last year.

The hotel was assembled within the shell of an old IXL jam factory (IXL was started by one Henry Jones, hence the hotel's name) and, as the aforementioned architecture awards demonstrate, it's a stunning conversion.

Architect Robert Morris-Nunn retained the best of the colonial past (exposed sandstone walls and enormous timber beams) while introducing a sprinkling of the high-tech present (big screen TVs, shiny bathrooms, trapeze lighting), all with views out to Hobart's working harbour, a picturesque panorama of fishing boats stacked with lobster pots.

Keeping up with the Joneses: The Henry Jones Art Hotel, below, kickstarted Tasmania's push into luxe tourism in 2004.



Thanks to its cheap real estate, Tasmania is home to a disproportionately large number of Australia's visual artists, and the hotel markets itself as "Australia's first dedicated art hotel" — a working gallery showcasing local artists, both established and emerging. All the hotel's rooms and public spaces exhibit these original artworks, 98 per cent of which are available for purchase if you like what you see.

The hotel is located pretty much smack bang in the middle of Hobart, just a few minutes stroll from the best the city has to offer. Don't miss the famous Salamanca Market, held every Saturday, where you can purchase Tasmanian arts and crafts and local produce. The city's best restaurants (Smolt, Cargo, Marque IV) and bars (Observatory) are close by, as well as galleries (Salamanca Arts Centre, Handmark Gallery) and delis (try the well-stocked Wursthause Kitchen).

If you have a hire car, it's also a pleasant base from which to venture out on day trips to Port Arthur (make sure you stop in at the Tasmanian Devil Conservation Park on the way there), Bruny Island (famous for its wildlife cruises and cheeses) or Launceston (Tasmania's second largest city and gateway to the cool-climate wineries of the Tamar Valley).

The Henry Jones Art Hotel, 25 Hunter Street, Hobart. 03 6210 770; thehenryjones.com. Rates from \$190 to \$950, depending on the room.