

Sky high at happy hour

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As the old adage goes, when you're young and fond of parties, you stay up for sunrises but as you grow older, you set the alarm and get up. Sunsets are another matter, beautifully timed for all ages. In our age of effortless happy-snapping with devices that yield instant results, most of us chase a sunset on holiday. Cocktails are often named in their honour and boldly hued spirits such as Aperol and Campari provide an extra jolt of colour when held high to reflect an orange-red sky in a glass. Or the lowering sun might be mirrored in sunglasses or obliterated by a social media influencer posing and pouting and blocking the best view. But let's not go there.

On the southern end of Lord Howe Island recently, the sunset I saw over the peaks of Lidgbird and Gower was a cracker. From the pool terrace of Capella Lodge, superbly angled for panoramas of mountains, sea and sky, I joined a posse of fellow snappers and we clicked away in unison. We sighed and shrieked and debated the shape of clouds. I burst forth with my knowledge of a mackerel sky, rippled with cirrocumulus clouds to form fish-like scales. I know this only because I once researched nephology ("cloud contemplation", to be more poetic) for a novel but was glad no one angled for more information. The soft and bulbous mackerel sky looked like a pink-patterned bedspread, too, although I kept that theory to myself.

The whole sunset "event" couldn't have taken more than 40 minutes but the colours seemed to hang like a painted scrim as darkness took hold. The sun didn't so much set as just sigh and relinquish its place in the sky, fading away with dignity and grace. The well-named happy hour was over. We all clapped and clinked glasses. We had witnessed the denouement of another day amid fun and fellowship. In a world of chaos and uncertainty, it shone as a small miracle worth celebrating.

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