

# WISH

DECEMBER 2021

**HOLIDAY SPECIAL**  
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# ARE WE HERE YET?



DECEMBER 2021

# WHO

STORY BY Susan Kurosawa PORTRAIT BY Nick Cubbin

## Rise of the anti-hotel

*James & Hayley Baillie*



# WHO

**W**hen James met Hayley in 1998, something magical happened, and not just in a romantic sense. For James Baillie, then managing director of P&O Resorts, operators of Queensland's Lizard, Bedarra and Wilson Islands, and expedition cruise leader Hayley Smith (daughter of famed Aussie businessman and explorer, Dick), it was a meeting of minds and the discovery of a shared passion for conservation, the marine environment, design and luxury travel on a small and meaningful scale. Marriage and four adventure-loving sons were to follow. For the rest of us, it meant the birth of Baillie Lodges in 2003 and Australia's newfound recognition as a leading destination for an exciting style of accommodation.

The word "lodge" speaks of hunting parties on country estates, baronial decor and antlered deer heads above the mantelpiece, but in tourism terms it is more defined. A lodge is not a hotel, nor even a resort. Today, the best examples of the concept are small "eco-luxury" estates in areas of natural beauty, cultural importance and environmental excellence. The accommodation is relatively small, and each guestroom, suite or glamping tent is designed as a sanctuary. Guests can mingle for drinks, or mix during activities, but the emphasis is on privacy and reconnection.

Looking at the luxury lodge landscape, the average size is about 40 guest rooms. "The sweet spot for Baillie Lodges is 20," says James. "It needs to feel intimate and exclusive but also value for money." Typical extras are plentiful, from the inclusion of drinks and meals to excursions and bespoke experiences. James says he likes the description of a lodge as being "an anti-hotel". It's more personalised, he says, and the luxury elements are "relaxed". The Baillies have been inspired by the vision of Aman Resorts [now branded as Aman] founder Adrian Zecha, particularly his pioneering projects in Bali in the early 1990s with private pool villas in walled compounds that looked and felt intrinsically of the destination. James says that when talking about Baillie Lodges to US-based travel operators, he often describes the experience as "a combination of a stay at an Aman and a Lindblad expedition cruise". He adds that "they totally get it".

The Baillies launched their portfolio by taking over the established Capella Lodge on NSW's World Heritage-listed Lord Howe Island in 2004, and updating its suites and facilities with destination-specific design touches in what James calls a "barefoot luxury glamour". Its serene position, with front-on views of Gower and Lidgbird mountains, is considered the island's finest, and the lodge is the brand's enduring flagship property. James and Hayley were among the first Australian hoteliers to recognise that guests were not just interested in the thread count of sheets and the size of televisions. They want to know the provenance of food and drinks, whether a piece of artwork was locally sourced, and if community artisans were involved in on-site projects. Was the lodge interested in giving back?

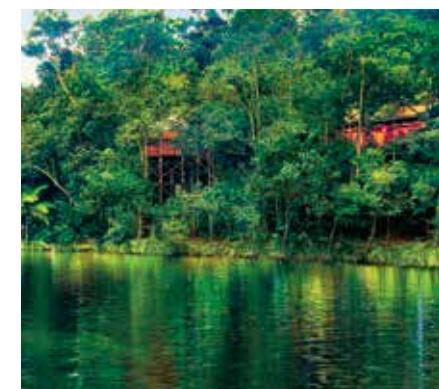
Added to the mix in Australia have been Southern Ocean Lodge on South Australia's Kangaroo Island, opened in 2008, the acquisition of Longitude 131 at Uluru-Kata Tjuta in 2013, and the 2019 addition of Silky Oaks Lodge in north Queensland's Daintree Rainforest, reopening December 15 after Covid setbacks. There's been a \$20 million makeover that includes six suite categories, a lighter palette and tropical design flourishes. Hayley is ensuring treatments at the lodge's Healing Waters Spa focus on time-honoured practices that harness the bounty of the rainforest and Mossman River, and that where feasible spa products are sourced from Indigenous companies.

All the Baillie Lodges local properties are members of Luxury Lodges of Australia, of which James is director and chair. The Louise, a 15-suite retreat in South Australia's Barossa Valley, was acquired earlier this year and will be given a light interiors refresh. "It's never been about vast growth but acquiring properties with the right DNA," says James.

Hayley is busy continuing to form fruitful connections with Indigenous communities, primarily in art associations at Longitude 131. As an advocate of "cultural enrichment", she organises artists-in-residence programs four times a year at the Northern Territory property. About 180 artists from Indigenous owned and operated Ernabella Arts in outback South Australia have travelled to the desert lodge so guests can watch the creative process.



Clockwise from top:  
Capella; Huka  
Lodge; Silky Oaks  
Lodge; Longitude  
131; Clayoquot  
Wilderness Lodge



Ernabella's hand-crafted wares feature at Longitude 131, and Baillie says more than \$750,000 in income has been generated for Ernabella Arts by the partnership, including paintings purchased by leading museums and galleries. For the Silky Oaks project, Hayley has commissioned artwork from the region's Kuku Yalanji people, and purchased works from the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and ceramics from Yalanji Arts Centre. Fine arts photographer Catherine Nelson has produced large-scale images of elements of the Daintree.

She is pursuing similar collaborations with Canada's First Nations people on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, the site of Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge, which joined Baillie Lodges in 2020. Similarly, she is engaging with Maori communities in proximity to the legendary Huka Lodge at Lake Taupo on New Zealand's North Island, which joined the portfolio in early 2021, to source art, books, homewares, textiles and bespoke craft pieces. Working around original interior decor elements by top New Zealand designer Virginia Fisher, the Baillies plan to open up the lodge's public areas for more of a lodge-style "great hall" atmosphere.

Such international expansion was a logical step after an affiliate of global private equity firm KSL Capital Partners made a substantial investment in Baillie Lodges in late 2018. The Baillies retained their stake as co-founders, creative directors and "the faces of the business", intent on "guiding the vision [of] wild, experiential luxury", and they continue to operate Capella Lodge independently. Just over a year later, Southern Ocean Lodge, along with vast tracts of bushland on Kangaroo Island, was destroyed by bushfires but the Baillies have grasped the opportunity to expand on the vision of the coastal lodge and plans are well under way for "SOL 2.0". Major work is expected to start in February, 2022 with the launch slated for the first half of 2023. Clearing, replanting and regeneration of the site continues to advance as part of the volunteer Camp SOL environmental initiative. James says there's now a "silver lining" to improve on the original by considering new ideas and advances in building materials. The reborn property will have a four-bedroom clifftop Ocean Pavilion, ideal for couples or families travelling together. Similarly, a spacious Daintree Pavilion is part of the Silky Oaks Lodge revamp, while Longitude 131's two-bedroom Dune Pavilion, with dual views of Uluru and Kata Tjuta, opened in 2017, already stars as the property's top digs.

The Baillies also hope to strengthen the focus on employing local staff. Ultimately, it's about a sense of place and connection, of sustainability, celebrating the location, of first-name terms and genuine friendliness. *Susan Kurosawa is The Australian's associate editor [travel]*

# WARES

Milanda Rout



A comfy couch is usually the place for good stories to be shared between friends with a glass of wine, or to witness other stories being told on the screen as you relax with takeaway and a movie.

But this particular sofa is a story in itself. The tale of Great Dane's Ilse sofa starts with a jet-lagged Australian in pyjamas in the middle of the night in Stockholm, goes via London and a famous interior designer, heads to an organic sheep farm in Victoria and ends in a Melbourne showroom.

"I am terrible with jet-lag and at 1am or 2am, when my partner Megan was fast asleep, I would walk downstairs at the hotel and sit on this wonderful sofa," Great Dane founder Anton Assaad tells WISH. "I spent many hours over many years sitting on that sofa, thinking god, this is such a beautiful sofa to sit on, and there was always someone there to make you a sandwich and a cup of tea."

That sofa was the work of British interior designer Ilse Crawford, as was the hotel, Ett Hem, a tiny boutique establishment in Stockholm. Assaad had always been a fan of Crawford's work and her hotel was his favourite place to stay when visiting the city for trade shows.

"We just love her work as it has a really beautiful feel to it, and it is very understanding of humans and how we live and what we need for our interiors," he says. "So when I finally saw her I went up and said, hey, you don't know who I am but I love the hotel and I really love your work."

They became friends and over the years met in various cities in Europe, until Assaad got up the courage to ask her if he could stock his favourite sofa at Great Dane, his retailer in Australia that specialises in Scandinavian furniture. She agreed, but only if he could make it here.

That's when the next chapter of the story begins, in which Assaad has to find all the parts that go into the sofa to produce it in Melbourne. First, the material used for the upholstery; it was not your normal foam.

"The sofa was made by an old-school furniture-maker in the UK called George Smith and they don't use foam, which is petrol-based. They use a much more traditional material called hair lock that is actually a combination of horse hair and latex," Assaad explains.

He had to find a company to source the hair lock (he found one in the Netherlands that had been making it for 100 years), and the next step was finding local organic materials as Crawford wanted the piece of furniture to have "an Australian voice". This was not easy, but Assaad found an "out-of-the-box" organic sheep farmer past Tullamarine and managed to get an organic wool.

"The only thing that is not organic in this sofa is the metal springs and some brackets," he says. "It is quite old fashioned but very contemporary because it is rejecting the notion of how a sofa is made today. It is saying the old style is not only more sustainable and good for the environment, but it is actually a better quality product with a better feel."

After four years' work, Assaad was finally able to sit on said sofa in the middle of lockdown this year in Melbourne. "It was like being transported back to Ett Hem and that is how I immediately knew we had everything right," he says. "It was great to have that direct connection with the sofa in terms of my own experience and using it for exactly what it was designed for."



Crawford wanted the piece of furniture to have 'an Australian voice'. Assaad found an organic sheep farmer past Tullamarine and managed to get an organic wool

Anton Assaad and Ilse Crawford, left  
The Ilse sofa, above

# WHEN

Luke Benedictus



## VACHERON CONSTANTIN MÉTIERS D'ART THE LEGEND OF THE CHINESE ZODIAC – YEAR OF THE TIGER

Easy, tiger. Well, actually not easy. Wildly difficult in fact. The Métiers d'Art is the realm of Vacheron's master craftsmen who hand-engraved the aforementioned tiger in pink gold. He prowls through plant motifs that are hand etched into the metal of the dial and semi-embedded to give the impression of depth. Next up, enamel is applied in successive layers to enhance the intensity of the bronze-toned dial. There are no hands on this watch, only paws. Instead, the unique movement uses four openings at the 2, 4, 8, and 10 o'clock positions to convey hours, minutes, day and date. Suffice to say none of this comes particularly cheaply from the world's oldest watch manufacturer. Then again, as Vacheron kindly reminds us, the tiger is "an auspicious animal that exorcises evil spirits and brings good luck" and you can't really put a price on that. **\$167,000**



## GRAND SEIKO SBGY008

A classic dress watch is all about simplicity and at first glance this seems like a quietly formidable example. The rose gold case is unobtrusively sized at 38.5mm to make it ideal for a wrist of any gender, the pinky blush of the metal complemented by the brown crocodile-leather strap. Admittedly the dial is rather special, with its subtle texture designed to evoke the snow-covered ice that covers Japan's Lake Suwa every winter. Visible through the open caseback, the movement is equally impressive and provides a 72-hour power reserve on a single wind, as well as guaranteed accuracy of +/-1 second per day. But it's from the side angle that this watch literally shines, with the case runners bedecked with 53 hand-set diamonds. The result is a dress watch that maintains its formal decorum while buzzing with palpable joie de vivre. **\$53,000**



## RADO HYPERCHROME ASH BARTY LIMITED EDITION

If you're an ambitious tennis player, you could do a lot worse than start wearing a Rado. Consider the evidence: former ambassador Andy Murray partnered with the Swiss brand in 2012 and the next year he became the first Brit to conquer Wimbledon since 1936. Adding credence to Rado's lucky-charm powers, Ashleigh Barty has already scooped two Grand Slams and become world No.1 since joining the brand in 2017. Celebrating her achievements, this quartz-powered watch offers a high-tech ceramic case that encloses a mother-of-pearl dial in delicious blue. Three diamonds are stacked at 12 to balance a rhodium-coloured moving tennis ball symbol at 6. It's the second collaboration Rado has done with Barty, but if her remarkable momentum continues, one suspects it won't be the last. **\$3675**

# WHEELS

Stephen Corby



## LAMBORGHINI HURACAN EVO FLUO CAPSULE

Engine  
**5.2-litre V10**

Power  
**470kW**

Torque  
**600Nm**

Transmission  
**7-speed dual-clutch automatic, all-wheel drive**

Fuel Economy  
**16.4 litres per 100km**

Price  
**\$571,475**

## GREEN WITH ENVY

### *How to bewitch grown men*

The male brain is one of the most impenetrable, ingenious and deeply stupid cognisant entities in the universe, and being closely attached to one, I find it fascinating.

Logically, any man who sees the eyeball-damaging Lamborghini Huracan EVO Fluo Capsule Verde Shock (a long name that translates as "Supercar Brighter Than the Sun") coming up behind him should know that attempting to race it would be foolhardy.

If that man was riding a motorcycle at the time, he would also know – at some rational level – that no matter how god-like he considered his skills, very fast cars are just faster around corners, partly because their drivers don't have to contort their bodies and grind their knees into the tarmac to make them so.

And yet you can bet that nine out of 10 motorcyclists are going to try to race you anyway, because if they think riding road bikes at high speed is a good idea, they're not closely associated with rationality.

I should not be pointing fingers, of course, because my brain is equally stupid and just as filled with the irrational reactivity inspired by that damn fool drug testosterone. I feel the need, basically, not just for speed, but to prove to these motorcycle men just how wrong they are.

And fortunately, on this day I was in a machine that could teach the Space Shuttle, or more appropriately a comet, a thing or two about speed.

The most instantly notable thing about the Huracan EVO

Fluo Capsule is obviously the extreme green of its paintwork, but from the inside, once your eyes have recovered and you can see shapes again, it's the 5.2-litre V10 engine with its 470kW and 600Nm that really commands your attention.

Sitting as it does just behind your shoulders, under a pane of glass so you can admire it when you get out, this violent V10 will throw you at our legal limit in just 2.9 seconds, which leaves you very little time to react to the fact that you're speeding.

If you're focused on some uppity motorcyclist next to you, you might be going very fast indeed by the time you glance at the speedo, with its comically video-game-like fonts, again.

What is more indelible than the fact that it can challenge a motorbike for straight-line acceleration is the razor-like way it can cut through bends. In its racier modes, there's something very pure indeed about its ability to turn tiny steering inputs into large lateral g-forces.

This made the Lambo more than capable of embarrassing our biking friend, but rather than slinking away he followed me to my next stop and ran up to the door like a small child who's just had a ride on a fire engine.

"Oh man! That car is THE LOUDEST thing I've ever heard. That's dope, man. That. Is. DOPE!" he shouted. So loudly that I feared the car, which pours noise into the driver's seat at enough decibels to loosen your bowels and is no doubt even louder if you're riding right next to it, had deafened him.

I had to fight the urge to put on a British accent and

respond: "I'm sorry, young man, I'm not sure what language you're speaking, but I can assure you that this car is no 'dope'. Nay, it is you who is a fool, sir, for thinking something worth less than a 20th of its \$571,475 price tag could keep up. Now good day to you." But honestly, he was just so thrilled I couldn't be mean to him.

Perhaps it's the colour, which seemed to enervate small children while at the same time bewitching grown men, but this Lamborghini in particular seemed to create mini fan clubs wherever it went.

My neighbours, even the ones who've never spoken to me before, lined up for rides, then screamed and cried and swore never to visit my house again.

But I must admit I found it kind of a guilty thrill to drive myself. The EVO in the title means that this is the most extreme and almost unnecessarily hardcore version of the Huracan, so it makes even more crazy explosions when you step off the throttle and the seats are so brutal that I no longer have any lumbar region to speak of.

Yet you'll put up with all kinds of discomfort on the highway just to get to a nice, hidden and winding piece of road where you can properly unleash a car like this. Truly, few things can make you feel as alive, nor as competitive, as such a supercar.

Personally, I found the colour of the Fluo Capsule a little difficult to swallow, but then I don't think there's a Lamborghini customer on the planet who would agree with me on that. ☺