

Elemental

Community, Connection & Culture



Surfing legend Rusty Miller on his continuing love for the sea; NORPA artistic director Julian Louis on building regional theatre; local philanthropists on their passion for giving back; the Rail Trail is truly a natural wonderland; we showcase Melissa Lucashenko's brilliant new novel, *Edenglassie*; glass artists Asaf Zakay and Noel Hart, and circus directors Alice Cadwell and Belinda Hultgren on living their passions; the wonder of the Brunswick Heads Wallum wetlands and Mandy Nolan on just about everything; plus our *Elemental* guides to everything good, and more...

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ELEMENTS
OF BYRON



Publisher's Letter

Welcome to the latest issue of *Elemental*, truly a magazine to see you through the seasons. It often seems to me that themes seem to naturally emerge as an issue comes together, and in issue five it's all about connection, community and the environment.

Our 'bookends' are two stellar creatives, NORPA artistic director Julian Louis, who has transformed NORPA into the leading regional theatre company in the country, and the irrepressible Mandy Nolan, whose multifaceted life includes her deep commitment to politics, the environment and the need for public housing. Nolan's concerns are shared by our local philanthropists - people who have a passion for giving back to their communities and offering support to those in need so they too can fulfil their potential.

The environment also takes centre stage, through our story on the region's latest nature wonderland, the Rail Trail, the stunning photo essay on the Brunswick Heads Wallum wetlands, and our spotlight on the ecosystem of natural pools. And while we're on the environment, we also have a feature story on surfing legend Rusty Miller, and his wife Tricia Shantz. Kim Carey talks to Miller about his extraordinary career as one of the world's top surfers, but also to the couple about their long-term love for the Shire, and their commitment to its ecology.

At Elements of Byron, we take pride in the fact that sustainability is key in the way we manage the mixed ecology around us - from coastal dunes to wetlands and rainforest. Editor Candida Baker takes a turn around the Elements block with our executive chef, Ebony Baker, experiences manager, Alastair Oakman and cocktail whizz Veronika Eliasova, to discover the fascinating world of foraged food.

Then, of course, there's our guides, our columnists, and our town notes. Happy reading.

Michael Skinner

Welcome To Country

Jingi walla blagganmee Arakwal jugan. A 'Welcome to Country' is like a mother's embrace - it makes you feel safe and acknowledged. By welcoming you here, to Arakwal lands, as part of the Bundjalung Nation, we invite you to immerse yourselves in our beautiful environment. We acknowledge and pay respect to our ancestors. We look after Country here, and we ask that you do the same.

Delta Kay
Arakwal Custodian, Byron Bay

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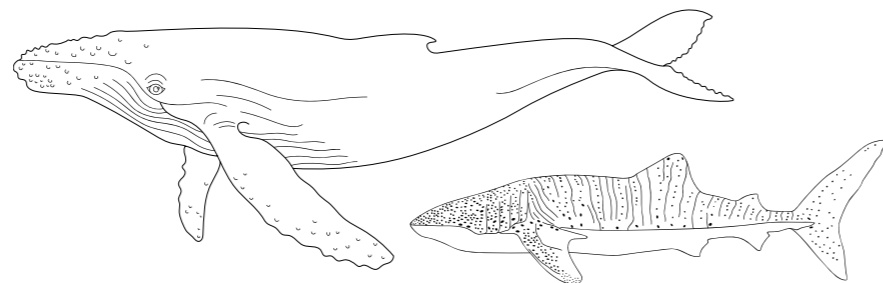
Home and Away

From whales in Byron Bay to whale sharks in Western Australia – Candida Baker ponders the similarities, and the differences, between the most easterly point of Australia and the far reaches of Western Australia.

I'm standing on a hill in Western Australia, next to Vlamingh Head Lighthouse on the northwest tip of the North West Cape. The scorched sandy earth of a year-long drought surrounds me, but not far below is the azure and turquoise Indian Ocean. This apparently tranquil coastline hides the brutal wrecker of many ships – the unique Ningaloo Reef that in this part of the country, hugs the shoreline.

From the deep greens of the Northern Rivers, to the red and browns of Western Australia, I feel as if I've been catapulted into another world, particularly when I contemplate that the next morning, bright and early, we are about to be picked up for an eight-hour adventure on a boat, in order to snorkel on the Ningaloo Reef and swim with the whale sharks. I've snorkelled at Nguthungulli Nature Reserve, Julian Rocks, and several times on the Great Barrier Reef, but it would have to be said that the ocean is not my natural habitat. On the whole, I'm more your terra firma kind of woman.

When my husband decided many months ago to head off on a Boy's Own adventure with the camper trailer, we decided I would meet him in



Geraldton, north of Perth, where we would spend a few weeks exploring the Coral Coast, and the World Heritage area of Ningaloo Reef. And that meant two things to me – swimming with the whale sharks, and a dolphin experience at Monkey Mia.

We kicked off our adventure with three nights camping in another World Heritage area, the Francois Peron National Park. The park produced everything an adventure holiday should, swims in the lagoon, a visit to the old historic homestead, and easy access to the Monkey Mia resort, where the wild dolphins come in for a miniature feed in the mornings. In its heyday, before it was taken over by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the dolphins, particularly the babies, were not doing well on the indiscriminate feeding, forgetting their natural instincts to hunt for their food. Now, two tiny pieces of fish given to two of the older females in the pod is enough to keep them interested, and over the decades the dynasty, as they're called, have become accustomed to a human presence, staying after the feeding to swim in the shallow waters near the resort beach. The morning we visited, about a dozen dolphins came in to play and fish along the water's edge. After we left Francois Peron, we travelled from campground to campground finally reaching Exmouth where we had a few days recovery before our ocean adventure.

The lead-up to the main event on our Ningaloo Discovery boat was a snorkel on the reef, to get us used to the drill of how to get in and out of the water. The system worked like clockwork. The first snorkel in the beautiful coral-filled water, with brightly coloured fish darting about was relaxing and easy. On the second swim, once we were past the reef and in the deep water, with no visible bottom beneath us, the first whale shark was sighted, and almost immediately there we were, lined up and leaping, but it was shy, and dove down deep. Our guides told us that one reason whale sharks are not often seen anywhere else along the coast is their ability to dive to at least two kilometres, and to stay down there for as long as they like, because unlike whales they don't need to come to the surface. The warm waters of Ningaloo are a favourite spot for juveniles, although nobody knows why the visiting whale sharks are 80% males and 20% females. A fully-grown whale shark can reach 12 metres, but little is known about them, in part because no tagging device can withstand the pressure of the water at the depth they can dive to, so they remain elusive and mysterious. Fortunately for those of us swimming with them, whilst whale sharks, are, in fact, a shark, they have a large mouth but a very small throat, and their similarity to whales

“
From the deep greens of the Northern Rivers, to the red and browns of Western Australia, I feel as if I've been catapulted into another world...”

is in their diet of plankton and krill.

Our subsequent swims were out of this world. At one point I found myself swimming along between two whale sharks, suspended for a moment in the middle of two giants. We'd been told to keep at least three metres away from them at all times, so I stopped swimming, and just trod water, as the two lazily made their way forwards. Gazing at the whale sharks under the water, it was easy to see the different coloration and markings, easy to see their gills moving, suddenly easy to feel completely at home in the water with these gentle giants.

By the end of the day, we'd seen a minke whale, four whale sharks, a leopard shark, reef sharks, a vast array of reef fishes, an electric blue starfish, turtles and rays, and dolphins who'd indulged in one of their favourite games, riding the bow waves in front of the boat.

Travelling home a few weeks later, I felt I'd found another piece of the massive jigsaw puzzle that makes up Australia, a piece that links us via the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which merge on the South East Cape of Tasmania. More than 25,000 of Byron Bay's favourite denizens of the deep, the humpback whales, spend much of the year travelling up and down the east coast, on their annual migratory path from Antarctica, often lingering in our warm waters, close to the shore. All of us, residents and visitors alike, love to see the whales, and snorkelling at Nguthungulli Nature Reserve, Julian Rocks, is also a wonderful highlight for our area. And now, I know, somewhere way out beyond, the whale sharks are out there off our coastline as well, living their mysterious lives in the deep, only the unique features of the Ningaloo Reef coaxing them in to rest, play and feed. ■

Comfortable in his (wild) skin

Over the past 17 years artistic director Julian Louis has built the Northern Rivers Performing Arts into one of the premier regional theatre companies in the country, with works that emphasise the importance of physicality, story and place.

“I came to the Northern Rivers as artistic director of NORPA 17 years ago for a two-year contract, and never left. Regionally based arts jobs are rare and to do my job properly and well, it’s important to understand a place to build genuine relationships. You’re working with local creatives and performers, First Nations communities, with different aspects of the community who become really invested in what you’re doing.

Creating new theatre in a regional context has a unique set of challenges and opportunities. From the role, I’ve learned an enormous amount about community engagement, creative process, programming and audience development, advocacy, the role of arts in a healthy community; and of course, creating site-specific theatre. I’ve gained this experience alongside a small team, and managed to build a nationally recognised performing arts organisation and a body of work of which I’m really proud. These experiences might not have been possible if I’d stayed in a city.

I grew up on the North Shore in Sydney, my mother was a teacher and librarian and is now a writer; and my dad was a very physical man, a hard worker in factories, who passed away recently. My mother is Dutch and has always been a big influence on me because she is a passionate storyteller and reader. We weren’t a theatre-going family, but our house was lively, with lots of parties, and it was a very social home. I wasn’t directly drawn to theatre as a young child, but when I was 13 I discovered – with some encouragement from my sister – that I could dance quite well. This skill had the added bonus that I got

the attention of girls, so of course my ego got a kick from that. Like so many kids I was into sport, but I got a different thrill from performing, which is also a very physical activity. I started to do a few musicals, and joined a dance group at school, and when I was searching for a university to go to, my mum pointed out that Charles Sturt University in Bathurst had a degree in Theatre Media, which included units that taught physical approaches to theatre making. I remember reading the word ‘juggling’ in the course description, and I was keen to audition. Theatre for me was first and foremost an attraction to be in my body. I auditioned and was one of 25 people to get into the course.

This BA degree has been a major influence on my approach as a theatre director. Within the course itself was an ethos around ‘community’ and ‘collaboration’. In our first year, we were put into small groups of four and taken out to western New South Wales, to the old gold mining town of Hill End, and out onto the Bridle Track. We had to walk the 30 kilometres, and then when we arrived at our destination, we found the third-year students had set up a camp, created a piece of theatre and were cooking for us. The theatre they made was incredible. Afterwards we moved on to find the second-year students had developed a cabaret at the Hill End pub, and as first-years we had to make a piece of theatre or make up a song along our walk. It was an imaginative degree – and has amazing arts leaders working nationally and internationally as alumni. I feel so grateful that I was at university at a time when courses were live, with a deep sense of community



Julian Louis, artistic director of Northern Rivers Performing Arts. Image by Tajette O'Halloran

and teamwork, and with practical skill development that seems to be missing now. The course didn’t just teach acting and theatre, we were taught to think about the role theatre plays in society, and its impact.

I became very involved in making theatre and spent my holidays in Bathurst working on extra shows, outside the demands of the degree. We made shows for the streets, in the bush, in cabaret venues, in small theatre and schools. It’s as Peter Brook, the great director, used to say, theatre happens as soon as you create an audience.

My first job was a secondment from Charles Sturt with the ATYP (Australian Theatre for Young People) as an assistant director for *Henry IV Part 1*, with a cast of 60, 30 tonnes of dirt and four live horses – all at the Eveleigh Street railyards. Later I went to Europe and studied with Philippe Gaulier, and performed with members of Theatre de Complicité. After two years working and studying as an actor overseas I returned to Australia with a desire to focus on directing to bring the style of work I’d learned in the UK and Europe to Australia. In my late 20’s I went on to study directing at NIDA (the National Institute of Dramatic Art) and I’ve always directed and taught actors in the same way I would want to be directed.

In June 2006, during the week I was told I’d got the job at NORPA, *The Sydney Morning Herald* was full of the news of the terrible car crash at Broken Head, in which four teenage boys died. I remember my wife Megan and I were packing up our lives in Bondi to move up here and somewhere in me I think I already knew that I had to make a piece of theatre about the families impacted by this tragedy. The playwright Janis Balodis and I created a

work set in time a month after the crash, about a grandfather who loses his grandson and a sister who loses her brother. It had an interactive chorus with young people, and whenever we played in a town or city, local students would slot into the chorus. Janis wrote *Engine*, a beautiful play, which was published by Currency Press, and from that first collaboration we've formed an ongoing partnership. We were both very influenced by the Australian playwright Nick Enright, and we have an endless fascination with creating original work. What I love about Janis as a writer is that he lets me play - he gives me space. He writes something, then we go into another phase of creative development, and we discover it in the theatre-making. He's not precious about his work. As the dramaturg and director, I have to think of the audience's imagination and how it is being held across a production. Janis and I do that together, and he gives me space for a physical interpretation of his words.

My theatre making practice is influenced by the European style, which is highly collaborative. I work with ensembles, and we don't start with a fully formed text. We take inspiration from the place around us; we gather stories and stimulus before we even get into the rehearsal room, and a lot of it is about the process of observation. Our projects take up to two years to make. I don't pull plays off the shelf - they're original works inspired by contemporary and universal themes. I've always made original theatre, and I'm extremely proud of the fact that we are one of only 16 theatre companies in Australia,

“
The production features an all-female cast, so the women get to play the threatening men, all done in a very physical theatre style.”

outside of the Major Performing Arts tier, to receive four-year funding from the Federal Government. We achieved that five years ago, then COVID happened, the floods happened, and still we continued, somehow, to make impactful and successful theatre works.

NORPA is the only professional theatre company in the region, placing a high expectation on the organisation. In such a creative area, where support and resources are scarce, we do all we can to be relevant and supportive of artists while also creating nationally significant work that attracts funding. There are many different pressures on our small team, and it takes dedication and time to build a body of work, but that is what has kept me super engaged.

My early experiences and also my time in Europe led me to an inner belief that theatre can be made



Railway Wonderland was created on the disused railway in Lismore. Image by Evan Malcolm



A woman grieves a life not lived in *Wildskin*, 2018. Image supplied by NORPA

anywhere. This was really put to the test two years ago when Lismore City Hall, which was NORPA's permanent home, flooded in the 2022 floods. We were already out in the community with productions like *Railway Wonderland*, which we created on the disused railway in Lismore, and *Dreamland*, but now we had to really back our large outdoor works, and so we created *Love for One Night* at the Eltham pub, which played three weeks of sell-out shows and won some national recognition.

Currently I'm working with a brilliant creative team to reimagine *Wildskin* - which we first presented in in the Lismore City Hall in 2018 - for the Lismore Showground. It's about a woman who is grieving a life not lived, and is deeply disillusioned. She finally leaves her relationship and domestication to go on a journey where she encounters danger, wild animals, and even wilder people. The production questions how we can subvert expectations and undermine societal expectations while we discover a wilder sense of life. The production features an all-female cast, so the women get to play the threatening men, all done in a very physical theatre style.

Earlier in the year we presented *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* by the Iranian playwright Nassim Soleimanpour in Byron Bay. It's a one-hander, and not an easy play for the actor because until the moment he or she opens the envelope on stage, they



Love for One Night at the Eltham Hotel. Image by Kate Holmes

have no idea what the script is. Darren Gilshenan came to Byron to perform it for us at the Byron Theatre, and it was a wonderful night of theatre - an absurdist adventure, but with a potent message about the dangers of totalitarian regimes, and with some clever audience participation. It reminded me again how hungry people are for live performance in this region.

Of course, the floods, and the stories around the floods, are deeply embedded in peoples' psyches in this region, and these events are becoming more frequent and more widespread due to climate change, and so we are developing a future work, slated for June 2026, that has the working title *In The Face of It*, which will explore 'acts of kindness', during and post a disaster. My partner, Megan, is currently working at the Living Lab in Lismore as a design and delivery leader and is at the centre of the research and consultation process to help redesign Lismore post flood, which is an important and fascinating challenge. Lismore has always been a cultural centre and therefore plays a significant role in the region. Our children, Tobhiyah, who is 16, and Reuben, who is 14, have both spent all their lives in the area, and so we are deeply embedded here. I continue, every day, to take inspiration from the stories that are in this place, and for me the locations continue to become more and more evocative the longer I live here." ■

The Call of the Sea

Surfing legend Rusty Miller and his partner Tricia Shantz have dedicated their lives to the natural world around them from their Byron Bay home.

Words by Kim Carey

Author Clarissa Pinkola Estés once suggested in *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, that the definition of innocence is having seen it all and still being moved toward the good.

Moving towards the good appears to be the embodiment of the spirit with which Rusty Miller and his partner of 42 years, Tricia Shantz, live their lives, both of them committed to what they give to each other – and to the wider community.

When I walk up the wooden steps of their home, I am greeted by their cat Cairo, who is perched like a sphinx surveying his domain. Soft jazz and birdsong drift in the air, and Miller greets me with a welcoming smile as he sits on the verandah eating a late breakfast, having just returned home from Wategos Beach.

Miller's eyes sparkle as he mentions how he saw a woman surfer grace the waves. "She rode all the way to the beach with such style and stepped off on the shore in the Hawaiian tradition of respect for the wave – it was magic," he says. For Miller, it's obvious there is a soul connection to the ocean that has never wavered.

There is a thread of nostalgia in their family home. The numerous images of surfers from the 60s and 70s weave their way throughout the house, capturing a surfing era that was not simply about catching waves, but was a way of life. Originally from Southern California, Miller was born in La Jolla. When Miller was five the family moved to the surf town of Encinitas, north of San Diego. When he was only 10, his mother passed away, the same year that Miller learnt to ride a surfboard, and the ocean first became his refuge. "It was at Encinitas that I learnt to be a 'waterman' and surfer under the guidance of the local surfing and lifesaver elders," he says. "I learned skin diving, bodysurfing, paddling, swimming, lifeguarding, telling stories, playing music, making a fire on the beach (when you could) for warmth. Survival skills."

Miller's surfing credentials speak for themselves. He competed in state, local and county contests and by 1965, at the age of 22, he was the United States Surfing Champion. That same year, he went on to surf in the inaugural Duke Kahanamoku Invitational Championship at Sunset Beach in Hawaii, competing for the following three years. Back in the 1960s few,



Rusty Miller and Tricia Shantz happy at The Pass, Byron Bay. Image by Daniella Smith



Rusty Miller big wave surfing, Sunset Beach, Hawaii 1962. Image by Dr. Don James

if any, surfing contests carried as much honour and prestige as the 'Duke', and Miller gained even more respect for being one of the first big wave riders in Hawaii from mainland USA.

Miller can still remember the biggest wave he has ever ridden. "It was 20 feet plus at Waimea, Hawaii, in the early 60's," he says. "The Hawaiians always say it could be 20 feet or 30 feet plus, and once it's over 20 feet there's no point in measuring or guessing the wave size. In those days it was paddling in, no leg ropes, no jet skis or tow-ins, no leg ropes to salvage your board after a manoeuvre gone wrong or a pounding wipe out." Not unnaturally, it was in Hawaii that Rusty's waterman skills became finely honed. Miller later confirmed his legendary status as possibly the first surfer to ride Uluwatu in Bali, as captured in the classic surf movie *Morning of the Earth* by Albert Falzon. Falzon needed a surfing elder (Miller was only 28 at the time) to accompany the 15-year-old surfer Stephen Cooney in the uncharted and gnarly point break, and Miller was happy to pass on his waterman and surfing skills.

In the early 1960s Miller and two of his surfing friends Mike Doyle and Garth Murphy became business partners. "It was pretty simple," says Miller. "We didn't like the hard surf wax we all bought from the gas station, and so we established our own business, Surf Research, and created Waxmate, which had a secret wax softening formula. The wax had a scent to it, and we included a Chinese cookie style saying in each wrapper."

The trio decided to sell their successful business, which went on to become the current legendary wax and surf accessory company Sticky Bumps. The three friends went their separate ways in 1967 with Doyle heading to Mexico, Murphy to Australia's north coast and Miller to Kauai, Hawaii, where he lived for the next three years.

"Kauai is one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen," says Miller. "I lived a life of surfing simplicity, eating natural food and fish and spending my days in nature, living in a small shack on the beach at the end of the road." He became good friends with Howard Taylor – the older brother of the famous Elizabeth Taylor – and his family, and spent a lot of time surfing Hanalei Bay.

Miller's taste for international travel was sparked when he completed two around the world voyages studying for a BA in history on a ship for university students that educated them about different countries and cultures, as part of a programme called University of the Seven Seas. Miller visited, and saw through the eyes of a surfer, the coast of Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Portugal, and many

other countries.

"We sailed into Woolloomooloo in Sydney in 1966, which was my first trip to Australia, and so I visited Bondi," Miller tells me. "It turned out that Bondi was the sister surfing club for my Californian WindanSea Surf Club, and I felt quite at home there."

As the 1970s rolled in Kauai was changing, and Miller could feel development impinging on his island paradise. He decided to visit Australia, and his friend Garth Murphy who had moved to the New South Wales north coast.

Between 1970 and 1973 Rusty travelled back and forth between Kauai and Australia until he permanently settled in Byron Bay in 1975. "I fell in love with Australia," he says, "particularly this area of the north coast with its incredible waves and ocean, and I became an Australian citizen in 1975. I knew Australia was the place for me when Gough Whitlam became Prime Minister in 1972, and pulled Australia out of the Vietnam War."

These days Miller divides his time between surf coaching, publishing *Rusty's Byron Guide* together with Shantz, playing music – harmonica and drums – and protesting over inappropriate development in the Byron Shire. The guide is a magazine about people, politics and culture, and can be found in cafes, venues, and homes all around town, becoming as well-known as its founder who states: "We want people to read, think, and act. We don't call people who come to the area tourists, we call them visitors, and trust they will love and respect the area as much as we do."

As we're speaking, Cairo moves across the table and greets Shantz who has sat down to join us. Canadian born Shantz is an accomplished writer and social geographer. She studied journalism and human geography, and holds a Graduate Diploma in Urban and Regional Town Planning, teaching social planning at Southern Cross University for over 20 years. Shantz is also the author of the recently published book *Neverland*, a social and cultural history of the shift in Byron Bay told through the stories of the core group of American and Australian surfers who fell in love with the north coast and this region. The book is a must read for anyone interested in an era of Byron's history that was the catalyst for its cultural change.

"There were a handful of surfers, Rusty being one, who formed the nucleus of this way of life in Byron," says Shantz. "I was tired of the mainstream media calling Byron Bay a hippy town. It wasn't. It was a surfers' town. *Neverland* tells the story of how Byron Bay went from a tough slaughterhouse town to become the beating heart of Australian



WindanSea Paddle Team (Rusty Miller centre) Huntington Beach 1962. Image by Ron Church

counterculture, a crossroads creative mecca, a world-class surf destination and one of the planet's most desirable addresses. If it wasn't for the American and Australian surfers Byron Bay might still be an industrial town rather than the culture destination it's become."

There sometimes seems to be a magnetic pull that causes people to migrate to Byron Bay. Shantz was travelling after finishing studies in Ottawa when a friend suggested she drop by and meet Miller if she was in the Byron Bay area. "It was 1982, and I decided to go to Byron. I visited Rusty at his home in the hinterland at Coorabell," says Shantz. "We've been together ever since and have two incredible daughters."

Over decades the couple have seen the winds of change and have held true to their love of surfing, nature, community, and Byron Bay itself. Miller and Shantz are tireless campaigners for the protection of Byron Bay – and the Shire – from inappropriate development. "We attempt to educate visitors and locals alike about the delicate balance within this amazing place. If you love a place, it's important to not just enjoy it but also do something about protecting it," says Shantz. Her dedication extends to all, with her involvement as one of the project co-ordinators and writers for *No Fixed Abode*, a book that sheds light on the stories of the people living on the streets around Byron Bay.

Over the years Miller has become known as *the one-*

to-one personal surf coach in Byron Bay, and on any given morning you are likely to find him coaching a beginner surfer at The Pass. He guides his students through the basics and passes on his wisdom, knowledge and experience of the ocean, and the joy of nature experienced through surfing. The ocean is mysterious and unpredictable, no matter how much you understand it, and learning from the best is a profound experience. I've often witnessed his students' look of elation when they catch and stand up on their first wave. What, I wonder, do surfing and the ocean mean to him? "They're my life force," he says simply. "The common denominator in my life. My surfing tribe is my family."

Finally, it's time to leave, and Miller offers me a bunch of fresh herbs from their garden. Both he and Shantz ready themselves for their afternoon to meet their regular local Landcare group, which they co-started after they moved to Byron Bay. Cairo is nestled happily in Shantz's arms as the couple wave goodbye.

An intimate connection to the sea, is, to my mind, what gives meaning to the life of most who embrace her, and of all those who have heeded the call of the ocean and the natural world in Byron Bay, both Miller and Shantz stand out as beacons of inspiration. ■



Above: Rusty Miller and Bailey at The Pass, Byron Bay. Image by Ross Parkinson. Below: Rusty and Tricia at home with their cat Cairo. Image by Kim Carey



Foraging, Flavours and Feasting

Romantic heritage locales, front-row river seats and hushed dining rooms. Menus created with premium, local produce and inventive culinary flare – here are our favourite eateries.

Harvest

Wild, native ingredients

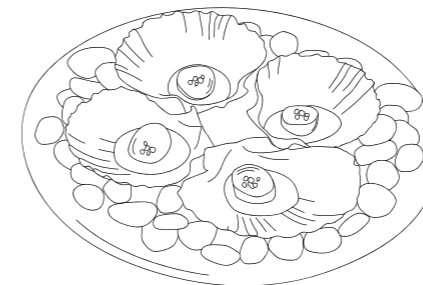
For a long lunch or dinner in one of Byron's most idyllic hinterland villages, head to Newrybar and discover Harvest restaurant, situated in a lovingly restored old Queenslander. With seasonal produce sourced locally, this award-winning restaurant creates dishes that showcase native, wild and foraged ingredients. Only a 20-minute drive from the resort, Harvest's talented chefs create dining experiences designed to inspire, augmented by an outstanding drinks list cleverly devised by their expert sommelier and mixologist.



Above left: A seasonal feast worth celebrating. Above right: Azure Bar and Grill dining room



Above left and right: Harvest creates dishes that showcase native, wild and foraged ingredients



Azure Bar and Grill

Foraged flavours and fine-dining finesse

Celebrating the rich culinary produce of this region, Azure Bar and Grill's meticulously crafted menus, designed by executive chef Ebony Baker, cater for a wide variety of dietary preferences and needs, including an extensive array of nutritious, inventive vegan and vegetarian offerings.

Made from the freshest local, premium ingredients, including foraged natives from the resort's grounds, Azure Bar and Grill's array of dishes have been lovingly transformed into a seasonal feast worth celebrating. Classical French and fine-dining techniques leave a quality signature in every dish.

One of the best restaurants in Byron Bay, found right here at the Elements, Azure offers an elegant, hushed dining space as well as a welcoming family-friendly poolside terrace.

The Hut

A weekly produce-first menu

More than 100 years ago, this building was lined with school desks. Today, the windows of The Hut in Possum Creek open onto a sprawling verandah and green hinterland views, while inside intimate tables of diners create lively conversation, and passionate chefs live out the Mediterranean way of life through their cuisine. An easy 20-minute drive from Elements through undulating ridge-lined pastures, The Hut is open for lunch only, Thursday to Sunday. The weekly menu is created each Thursday, based on the finest produce and seafood available, with share-plate menu choices ranging from à la carte dining to a 13-course feast. If you've a soft spot for Nonna's finest, this is for you.



The weekly menu at The Hut is created each Thursday based on the finest produce and seafood available



Tweed River House

A heritage culinary stage

With a grand sweeping verandah and endless mountain views, this is a dramatic, highly romantic culinary stage in a magnificently restored, century-old, grand river house. Inspired by Raffles in Singapore and New Orleans' finest, Tweed River House is award-winning, hatted and well worth the 50-minute journey from Elements. Created from local ingredients, its dining options start from a two course à la carte to a seven-course tasting menu. Have a pre-dinner cocktail at the lawn bar then start with Australian scallops, followed by the wild caught fish, and don't forget a little something sweet.



Above left: Award-winning food created from local ingredients.
Above right: The Tweed River House's dramatic dining room



Trouble San

Front-row riverside seats

This is the place to sip cocktails and dine on pretty plates of Japanese cuisine overlooking Simpsons Creek in the village of Brunswick Heads. Only a 20-minute drive from Elements, Trouble San makes a perfect finale to a vintage-inspired day trip. A contemporary izakaya dining experience, Trouble San's the place for slurping oysters with toshu and finger lime, nibbling eggplant sticks with miso, and washing it down with a Spicy Yuzu Margy. You'll know you've had a successful long lunch if you're still there for dinner and dancing - it is called Trouble San after all.



Trouble San offers a contemporary izakaya dining experience

Yoga and Pilates

There's more invigorating and nourishing than a daily yoga or Pilates class, and Byron Bay has some of the best yoga studios in Australia.



Elements of Byron's daily beachside yoga caters for all ages and levels of fitness

First Light Club

Yoga as the sun rises over the ocean

Do you salute the sun, or does the sun salute you? Byron Bay is the easternmost point of Australia, the first place to see the sun rise – and what a spectacular show it is. Guests are invited to join the Elements of Byron yoga instructor to greet the morning at the Heart of the Bay, the elevated grassy knoll offering unbroken views of Belongil Beach, the ocean and beyond. Daily yoga sessions are held against the soundtrack of waves hitting the sand, early morning birdsong – and perhaps even the sight of a humpback whale breaching out at sea. The resort's team of qualified yoga instructors cater for all ages and levels of fitness.



Above: Bende focuses on precise and conscious movements. Below: Taking time out with mindfulness



Bende

Mindful yoga, Pilates and barre

Located in the Habitat precinct, just five minutes walk from Elements of Byron, Bende is a boutique Pilates, barre, yoga and flow studio. Focused on precise and conscious movements that build strength from the inside-out, classes at Bende offer conditioning that sculpts and tones your body with mindfulness. There's a full reformer studio as well as regular group mat-based classes. So you'll get a little of everything here, from slow movement to toning exercises and cardio intervals.



Authentic yoga in Creature Yoga's beautiful, light-filled space



Creature Yoga

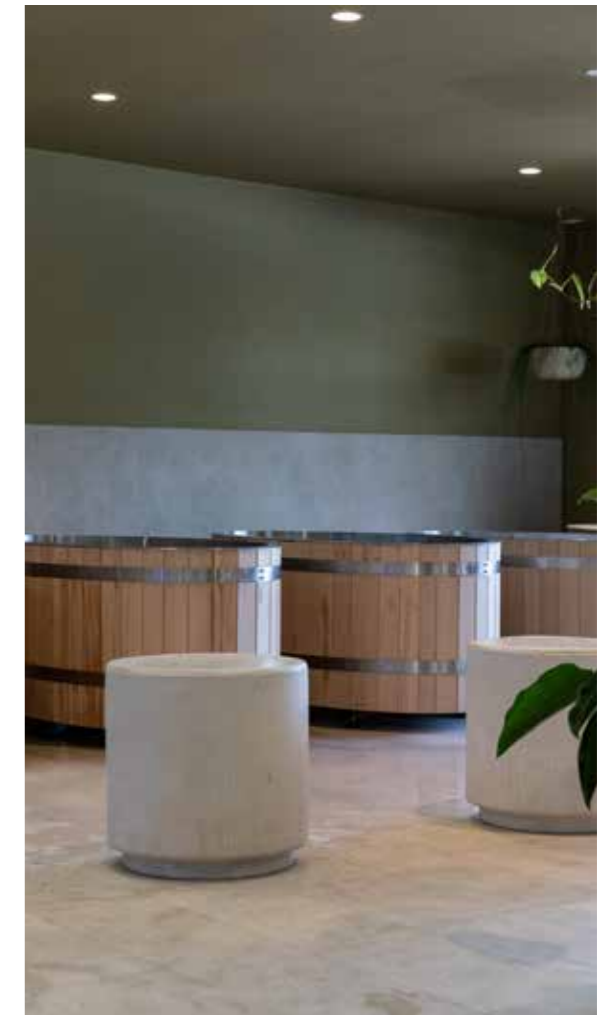
Vigorous vinyasa and quietening yin

Elevate your practice at a school of yoga that is grounded in thousands of years of tradition and housed in a beautiful, light-filled inspiring space, just 10-minutes walk from the resort. Founded by Bess Prescott and Tahl Rinsky, Creature Yoga is home to diverse, luminous, wise and kind teachers, who ensure that no two classes are ever the same. Link your breath to movement through steady vinyasa. Restore physical and mental balance and restore through yin. Focus on breath and perfecting prana through hatha. Creature Yoga also offers an extensive teacher training program, honouring traditional teachings whilst making the vastness of yoga relevant for modern practitioners.

Social Remedy

Workouts with recovery options

Social Remedy's industrially designed gym space, just 15 minutes walk from the resort, has everything you need for a high or low intensity workout – professional trainers, high-tech equipment, and an extensive program of yoga and Pilates classes. Social Remedy also specialises in post-workout and stress recovery. Accelerate your rejuvenation process, ease aching muscles and combat stress in their luxurious recovery spaces. With massages available, five ice baths, a steam room and traditional Finnish hot sauna, as well as compression therapy, IV drip therapy, oxygen therapy and more, there's plenty of options to choose from. Even more luxurious – have sessions tailored to meet your specific needs.



Above: Workout in Social Remedy's industrially designed gym space. Right: Indulge in one of their many recovery options

Kayak, Canoe and Stand Up

From meandering estuaries to hinterland waterways, nearby coastlines and rich marine life, there's plenty of ways to immerse yourself in aquatic serenity.



Above: The Brunswick River is a perfect place to play. Right: Torakina is a safe haven for families

Brunswick River

A family river adventure

Flanked by rainforest, sandy beaches and wetlands, the Brunswick River is one of the most scenic river systems in this region. Only 20 minutes drive from Elements, the river offers the perfect opportunity to discover Byron Bay's hinterland by water. You can either book a guided kayak tour or enjoy a self-directed adventure by hiring a kayak, canoe or stand up paddle board. As you glide along the river's clear azure waters, expect to be interrupted only by local sea birds and wildlife. Best to go at high tide, with Go Sea Kayaks, Brunswick Heads Canoe Hire, and Brunswick Buccaneers Boat Hire available for your choice of watercraft.



Above: Learn to kayak with Go Sea Kayaks. Below: Take a guided daily excursion near Australia's most easterly point



Byron Bay

Get up close to marine life

What better way to experience Byron Bay than kayaking amongst the marine life in the clear blue waters of the bay? The highly regarded team at Go Sea Kayaks offer guided daily excursions that travel near Australia's most easterly point and the iconic landmark of Nguthungulli Nature Reserve, Julian Rocks. Experienced guides will point out all there is to see, whilst regaling you with stories of this landscape. There's a good chance of spotting rays, tropical fish and turtles – and sometimes even whales – on these tours. But the heroes of any sea kayaking trip are the bay's bottlenose dolphins, frequently found fishing or playing in the waters up and down the coast near Byron Bay, with the guides always ensuring interactions are non-intrusive.

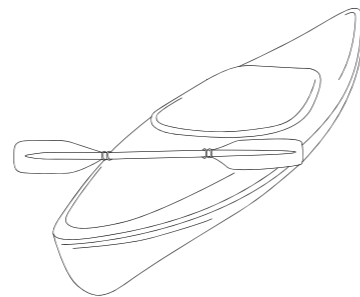


North Creek offers the chance to paddle for several hours in the company of numerous varieties of bird life

North Creek

Perfect for a quick or longer paddle

Paddling up North Creek, Ballina's well-known tidal waterway, is a great way to spend a few hours and it's only a short 30-minute drive south of Elements of Byron. One of the best places to get into the water is at The Serpentine, a gorgeous public reserve and gentle family-friendly beach on the opposite side of the road to Shaws Bay. Once you're in, paddle up near the Missingham bridge then head upstream into the mangrove edged creek. There's plenty of birdlife – pelicans, kingfishers, cormorants and spoonbills – to keep you company and you'll also have a good chance of spotting some local dolphins.



Above: Taking a quiet paddle in the still waters of Lake Ainsworth.
Below: The lake lies only metres from the ocean waves of Seven Mile Beach

Lake Ainsworth

Between bracing waves and serene stillness

On the northern end of Lennox Head is Lake Ainsworth, a large lake with waters that are cola-coloured from the surrounding tea trees. The distinctive brown colouring comes from a staining caused by the oils from the tea trees that surround the water. Only a 20-minute drive south of Elements, this freshwater coastal dune lake is the perfect place to kayak, canoe and stand-up paddleboard. A great picnic spot, it's also a safe swimming place for small children. Here you'll be only metres between the salty ocean waves of Seven Mile Beach and tranquillity of the freshwater lake – bliss!



Creativity and craftsmanship

With timeless beauty, ancient symbolism and contemporary design, Byron jewellery designers create items to treasure and enjoy.

Lisa Black

Marrying old and new

A New-Yorker by birth, Byron local by choice, jeweller Lisa Black has extensively travelled the globe to unearth exotic relics and rare artefacts which she then incorporates into her magnificently handcrafted luxury jewellery. Using ancient beads, precious stones, South Sea pearls and 22 carat gold, she produces exotic, one of a kind jewellery. With a passion for adornment, Lisa Black interweaves old and new, tribal and contemporary, roughly hewed and finely detailed work, to create collections acclaimed for their luxurious, innovative craftsmanship.



Above and right: Lisa Black creates magnificently handcrafted luxury jewellery



Above: Handcrafting is a Temple of the Sun speciality
Below: Yonna Derofo's designs are rooted in archetypal symbolism

Temple of the Sun

Archetypes for a modern world

Designed in their Byron Bay headquarters by founder Yonna Derofo, Temple of the Sun's design ethos is rooted in deep appreciation of archetypal symbolism, contemporary design and the ethical sourcing of materials. All pieces are designed by Derofo and imbued with the rich cultural experience of her upbringing in the cosmopolitan mecca of 1970's Istanbul. A masterful silversmith and ceramicist, her designs are at once desirable, timeless and steeped in meaning. Just 10 minutes walk from Elements, Temple's boutique is an irresistible treasure trove of modern ancient heirlooms. Temple of the Sun's jewellery transcends trends and seasons, embodying the timeless beauty of ancient craft and symbology.



The Fossick

Locally sourced Australian stones

Each jewellery piece in gemstone enthusiast Ashleigh Kennedy's The Fossick collection has been handcrafted in a long journey that starts with the actual fossicking for a gemstone which is then crafted into a pendant, earrings or ring. A local jeweller, Kennedy is also a gem cutter and gemstone fossicker who creates unique pieces from the precious stones she finds. These include lapis lazuli, opal, quartz, carnelian, amazonite, agate and sterling silver. You can find her unique collections on display in the Elements foyer, just beside the library.



Above and below: Ashleigh Kennedy is a gem cutter and gem stone fossicker, creating unique pieces from the precious stones she finds



Above and below: Isabelle Sidd offers her solid gold and sterling silver pieces for sale in her central Byron village boutique

Love Isabelle

Timelessly romantic

Designed and handcrafted in Sydney, and available in a central Byron village boutique, Love Isabelle Jewellery is a jewellery label offering a range of solid gold, 14 karat gold filled and sterling silver pieces. Born from the imagination of self-taught jeweller Sidd at her high school desk in 2017, Love Isabelle embraces the beauty of the everyday in a curation of quality, timeless and classic pieces, notable for their minimalism and romanticism. Since graduating high school in 2019, Isabelle quickly established a strong presence within the Australian market.



The Giving Cup

With success comes the responsibility for giving back, believe a group of locals with a passion for philanthropy.

Words by Candida Baker and Timothy Hobart

As a child Peggy Flannery lived next door to a woman who was a victim of domestic violence. "I can still vividly recall it," she says. "In those days nobody would interfere because it was 'family business', and in the end, young as I was, I said to her: 'You don't have to stay - why don't you leave?' I've never forgotten her reply. She told me: 'I've got five children, no money and nowhere to go. I can't leave.'"

The moment had such a strong impact on Flannery that she knew when she grew up she wanted to create a place where women who felt they had no alternative could go. Fast forward some decades, and last year her dream came true when she opened Peggy's Place, a Brisbane holistic shelter that takes women and children for up to a year.

In the intervening years since her childhood experience, Flannery has lived a full life as an active volunteer in her community while she was bringing up her children. More recently, in 2010, she and her husband bought the site on which they built Elements of Byron. Flannery became the driving force behind designing a resort with the intention of enhancing the environment and the community around it. With business success, Flannery believes, comes a duty to support community. "I've always believed that philanthropy is important," she says. "If you're lucky enough to be in a position

to give, then you should. For some of us, opportunities have occurred, and we've taken chances that have worked out, but for so many others life is much more complex, and domestic violence causes another level of trauma and difficulty entirely."

Peggy's Place is not, Flannery stresses, emergency shelter. "The issue with emergency shelters is that they only take people for three months," she says. "We take them at the end of their three months in emergency shelter, and while they are with us, they have counselling, the children have counselling as well, we teach women how to handle their finances and how to negotiate daily life. It's about healing the women and re-empowering them so they can live a life free of violence. We know that if they can get a job, their self-esteem rises, and they won't be attracted back towards the same kind of violent relationship."

One of the most important aspects of the work the staff do is the breaking of the intergenerational aspect of domestic violence, Flannery believes. "The children have huge trauma, and for many of them subconsciously what they have witnessed can cause them to act out the same scenario

when they grow up, that it's okay to treat their wives or girlfriends like that, so we put a lot of effort into helping the children understand how to change their view of families."

Peggy's Place opened in October 2023, and recently had its first success story. "We had a family who recently moved out into their own government social house and are doing really well. We'll continue outreach consultation for them to make sure everything continues to go well in their transition," she says.

It took a while for Flannery to find the right place. "I finally found somewhere I knew would work, and we renovated the property," she says. "Now we can take up to 34 women and up to 45 children. It will cost us around \$3.5 million a year to run when full, in part because we don't rely on people donating their time. We want women to have the continuity of the same counsellor, or the same lawyer. I believe that this scale of venture is the first of its kind in Queensland and most probably Australia - I'd definitely consider doing it again, because in the big scheme of things we're not even scratching the surface."

As well as the families, Peggy's Place provides shelter for the 'forgotten' women. "We have a wing dedicated to those women who are over 55 and have suffered domestic violence. Because they don't have children there's no emergency shelter provision for them, there's no government facility to take care of them, they either couch surf or live in their cars, or become homeless. We can take about 13 women at any one time, and that's something I feel passionate about."

Over the years Peggy and her husband Brian have supported numerous charities. "We give to



about 30 charities each year,” says Flannery, “and we have done for a number of years. If you look at the charities we support, the majority are for the underprivileged, for women and children, for sick or abused children. We give to Foodbank because it provides food for the homeless, and we’ve also donated to a special section at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane to help young mums suffering with depression. It’s not that men aren’t vulnerable as well, but there are many more beds for men than women, and although domestic violence occurs in same sex relationships, or can be inflicted by women on men, the fact is that women are the most vulnerable.” Sometimes, when surrounded by the unique beauty of the Northern Rivers, one can forget that hidden amongst its mountains, forests and turquoise seas are people who are truly struggling. In recent years the region has been hit by bushfires, floods, COVID, and the rising cost of living, all of which have had a lasting effect on many businesses, families and individuals. In fact, the Northern Rivers sits well above the state average in almost all areas of disadvantage. As well as individual philanthropists and philanthropic families, the region is also home to one of Australia’s largest foundations, the Northern Rivers Community Foundation (NRCF). It covers a staggering area of over 20,000 square kilometres and 300,000 inhabitants. Since handing out its first round of small grants in 2005, the NRCF has given away more than \$9.5 million to the hundreds of local community organisations that work at the coal face of need and disadvantage.

Former NRCF director and now patron, John Callanan, puts it succinctly. “Our motto is: ‘We help you help others’, and that is exactly what we do,” he says. “We are the bridge between the most vulnerable in our community and the people who care, help and give. In other words, we enable local people to help local people.”

What makes the NRCF different from many other charities is that it’s sustainable. With extremely small administration costs of around three percent, the majority of the donations it receives are invested in a perpetual fund. Only the profits are given away every year, which leaves the original donation intact to keep on giving in perpetuity.

‘Sustainable philanthropy’ is the fastest growing type of philanthropy in the world today, and it comes in various forms, such as the recently founded Byron Shire Community Land Trust. They’ve set out to use a philanthropic housing model that has been successfully tried and tested in Europe.

The idea is as genius as it is simple – land is donated from generous locals and eco-housing is then built

Below: The warm and welcoming interior of the rooms at Peggy’s Place



Peggy Flannery, founder of Peggy’s Place in Brisbane



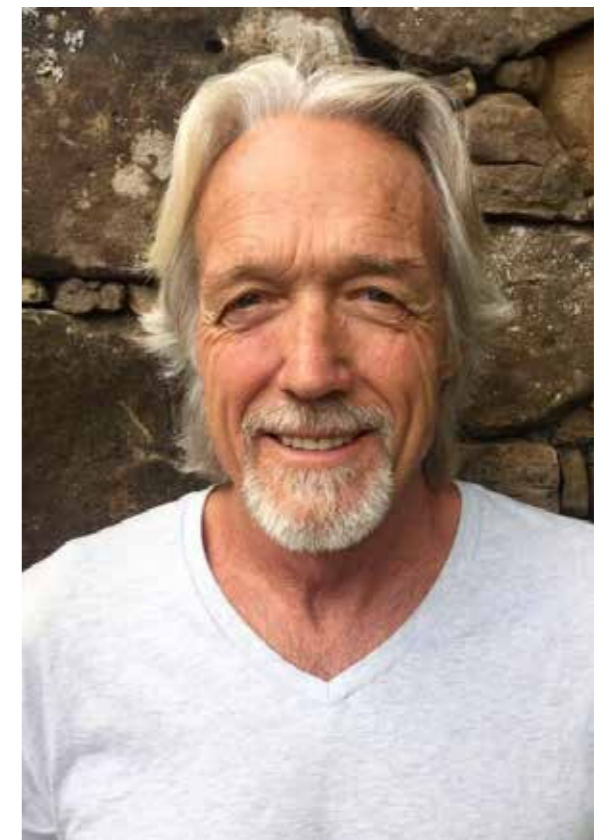
Above: Byron Shire Community Land Trust. Below: Former NRCF director and now patron, John Callanan. Both images supplied by NRCF

on it as not-for-profit, rental accommodation for the disadvantaged. The subsidised rent generated is then pooled and used for the building of more homes on donated land, thereby creating a sustainable community trust. The property owned by the land trust can never be sold, ensuring affordable housing for future generations.

The land trust was started as a community effort by the NRCF, Brandon Saul from Creative Capital, Dr Tracey Mackie from Momentum Collective and Louise O’Connell from the Byron Community Centre, and a few local philanthropists. Says Callanan: “We wanted to create the same kind of long-term stability for it as we’d created with the NRCF.”

Another frontline charity working towards becoming fully sustainable, is the Coolamon Community, founded by Evie and Jennifer Wood, with the focus on First Nation mothers in need of help. What started as a way to get some bundles of clothing to disadvantaged mothers, soon morphed into the ‘Coolamon Crib’.

“We asked doctors, midwives and support workers in the region what they felt would be most beneficial,” says Pam Brook, of Brookfarm, who sits on the board of the Coolamon Community. “From their responses, and working closely with the Aboriginal health





Above left: 500 Coolamon Cribs have been given out to local Indigenous new mothers. Image by Nelly le Comte. Above right: Evie Wood, creator of the Coolamon Crib. Image supplied by Coolamon Crib

services, we created the Coolamon Crib, a natural fibre baby crib filled with clothing, blankets, creams and other baby essentials, along with items for the mums. The gift of the Coolamon Crib is life-changing for the mothers; to know early on in their pregnancy that they have everything they need makes such a difference."

For Evie Wood, the idea for Coolamon Community evolved when she had her first baby. "There is a history of removed children in my family, and once I had my own baby, the stories I'd been told hit so much deeper," Wood explains. Wood spoke to an Aboriginal health professional out at Casino just by chance when she was giving away the first set of clothes her son had grown out of. "The social worker mentioned that complete bundles were very useful for her to support new mothers," she says, "so my mum and I put together baby bags of everything a new mum would need, using our COVID supplement money to fund the bags, which of course wasn't sustainable, but then when I met Pam, suddenly the idea had legs!"

It gradually became clear that the gift was much more than just a material item, it was a tool for connection, with culturally safe healthcare via the Aboriginal Health Services, and celebration and empowerment of Aboriginal mothering. For Wood, Coolamon Community has become her purpose.



"This is how we can keep mothers and babies together," she says, "and have better wellbeing outcomes during pregnancy, birthing and beyond. Many programs often end before any real impact can be made. It's ironic that when it comes to programs designed to keep babies with their mums, less than 20% of funding is reserved for that purpose, and over 80% goes to supporting out of home care - care of the child once it's removed. We want to help change that woeful division."

Finally, says Wood, impact is not always about a bigger footprint. "Impact is about treading lightly, slowly and purposefully. It's about making sure that each new community and each new mob you work with can rely on you for the long term. The mother and baby pair are the centre of everything. When we can support all mothers and babies to have the best start together, we are supporting the core of Aboriginal wellbeing. In the past two years, over 500 Coolamon Cribs have been given out, creating trust between the Aboriginal community and the health services." There's no doubt that the genesis of the drive to volunteer seems to lie in wanting to help others, and John Callanan concurs. "From my own perspective, philanthropy is a way of acknowledging my gratitude for the life I have," he says. "In my opinion, to be wealthy at any level brings with it an obligation to support and help others. This may

“
*Impact is about treading lightly,
 slowly and purposefully...*”

be a moral choice, or something coded into our DNA. I suspect it's the latter, because our ancestors would not have survived on their own, it was being in a community or tribe with shared resources and obligations that enabled their survival." Lucy Ashley would tend to agree. Having previously been chair at the NRCF, she is now the executive officer at Northern Rivers Food, a not-for-profit organisation that focuses on supporting food and beverage producers and contributing to the food security of the region. When asked what drives her, Lucy says: "In such a small region, it's an enriching experience to see the money flowing back into the community where it makes such a difference. In many ways, the need has never been greater, so it brings so much joy to see how the grant money helps people."

Another unforeseen benefit for many involved in charity work is the connections they build - whether to those in need or those who want to help others in their community. "I have come to realise that a shared vision or challenge builds strong personal relationships, and, at the end of the day, I think our relationships are the most important aspects of our life," says Callanan. Perhaps what is truly at the heart of the Northern Rivers philanthropy is a strong sense of community. So many people have moved here from other parts of Australia or the world because they fell in love with the region and all it has to offer. They feel a sense of pride in where they live, and with that comes a desire to help look after the land, the animals and people with which they share this magical space.

It's this sentiment that might be the clue to how philanthropy truly works: that through giving, we receive so much. "Donors deserve huge thanks and great respect," says Pam Brook. "We appreciate it if they give one dollar or \$5000. They are the reason we can all do what we do and are able to help so many in need." ■



Brookies Rainforest Tour. Image by Tashi + Co

Opening a Window into Nature's Wonderland

Winding through breathtaking countryside, across heritage listed bridges and disused train tunnels lit with glow worms, the award-winning Northern Rivers Rail Trail has become a tourist sensation for cyclists and walkers alike.

Words by Timothy Hobart

Images by Jeffrey Kieffer

When the rural train service in northern New South Wales was closed down in 2004, it wasn't long before the railway line fell into disrepair. It might have remained that way, forgotten and slowly consumed by vegetation, if not for the creative vision and passionate advocacy of a handful of locals. They saw these corridors of public land for what they were – a potential golden opportunity for walkers and cyclists.

The Northern Rivers Rail Trail Association Inc. was soon formed with the sole vision of transforming the 130-kilometre land corridor from Murwillumbah to Casino into a vast trail for cyclists, walkers and even, in places, horse riders.

Joined by local government councillors and members of the tourist industry, the association ceaselessly petitioned the state and federal governments for the trail's construction. While the journey was as long and winding as the trail itself, in March 2023, the first stage was finally opened, and the public response was immediately overwhelming. "We've been blown away by its success," says Nicole Manderson, from the Tweed Shire Council. "Rail trails around the world are proven tourist attractions that bring economic benefits to rural towns, but we weren't expecting this. It's not only brought in more tourism; it's also been beneficial to the health and wellbeing of the local communities."

When the first section, which runs for 24 kilometres between Murwillumbah and Crabbes Creek, was completed, it was expected that approximately 30,000 visitors annually would visit, but one year on, over 140,000 have already taken to the trail. Likewise, a second section, opened in March 2024 and spanning 13 kilometres from Casino to Bentley, was quickly fully embraced by visitors and the local community.

The reasons for the Rail Trail's astounding success are many and varied, but first and foremost is the magnificent country that it passes through. Running across the hinterland of the Tweed and Richmond Valleys, the natural beauty is as diverse as it is astonishing.

"It's amazing, you see all these places you can't see from the road, or even knew existed," enthuses local cyclist Tim Parsonage. "Like the tunnel filled with glow worms, or the forgotten bridges. I've lived here for 30 years and have never seen some of the things I've seen on the trail."

And users of the trail can also expect to be right amongst the region's incredible wildlife. "Because you're pedalling along quietly, you can hear and see all the birds and animals and get close to them," says long-time local, Bob Black. "There's no car fumes or noise, and as you go, the birds and animals are always changing. I've seen wedge tail eagles,



Above and below: Meander beside the old railway line, and a whole new world opens up



kookaburras, parrots, rosellas and lots of wallabies – plus the microbats in the tunnels."

To protect the species of microbats that now call the Burringbar Range Tunnel home – along with a vast colony of glow worms – the tunnel has no lighting. Instead, visitors must use their own lights and riders are encouraged to dismount and walk the 500 metres, so as not to disturb this unique ecosystem. Along with the many picnic stops and amenities dotted along the trail, it also cuts through welcoming, historic villages and old train stations that offer a chance to stop and refresh at cafes, restaurants, bed and breakfasts and camping sites.

All of these local businesses have felt the immediate benefit of the trail, and the Moo Moo Roadhouse in Mooball is just one example. "Business has really picked up," says owner Debbie Butterini. "It's been so good. The whole town has come alive. We expected a lot of tourists, but we're also getting more locals out on the trail as well. The Rail Trail has brought us so much."

Rachel Dorig, co-owner of the Northern Rivers Cycles



The Rail Trail offers numerous delights, including local flora and the tunnel filled with glow worms



and Bike Hire, couldn't agree more. "Business is booming like crazy. It's fantastic and we couldn't be happier. Everybody can ride the trail and we're hiring out bikes to professionals and beginners alike." And perhaps that is another key facet in the Rail Trail's success; not only is the entire trail fully accessible to all users, including wheelchair and mobility scooters, it's also a gentle ride.

Trains are lazy beasts at heart, designed to follow the flat plains, even going so far as to bore through mountains rather than climb them, so the trail is perfect for beginners and amateurs alike. The Tweed and Richmond Valley Trails pass over more than 30 bridges and through three tunnels, and are a mix of both paved and compacted gravel sections that make cycling a breeze. There will even be free trishaw rides for the elderly and disabled when the Cycling Without Age charity begins operating.

Also on the horizon are an array of guided tours for the more curious visitor. These will include tours and lectures on the native flora and fauna, the disused railway itself, and the history and culture of the Bundjalung people, who were the traditional, Indigenous owners of the land. For families, the Tweed trail passes through the Hosanna Farmstay near Stokers Siding, which offers children a chance to stop and feed exotic animals like llamas and alpacas, along with cows, pigs, sheep, ducks and geese. "We offer a great stopping point for coffee and food, while the kids can look at the animals," says Jeannie Opitz, business manager of the Hosanna Farmstay. "It's just something a little different to do along the trail."

The Rail Trail traverses a variety of landscapes, including rainforest



Another point of interest is that just a short walk from the Murwillumbah Railway Station is the Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre, where you can see local and international exhibitions. For the avid horse rider the options are gradually expanding. While the Tweed Valley has a two-kilometre area where riders can meander along the side the trail, the newly opened Richmond section has a bridle path that runs adjacent to the entire trip. Here, horse riders with permits are actively encouraged to join cyclists and walkers in the adventure. Following such stellar success, the Rail Trail will continue to expand, and construction has already commenced between Bentley and Eltham. In August 2023 the Byron Bay Council also voted to extend the Rail Trail right into Byron itself.

"It feels so good to see how the trail has been embraced by locals and visitors alike," says Marie Lawton, who championed the Rail Trail from the very beginning, going so far as to quit her day job to work as a volunteer on the project. "Visitors and locals love it. Kids love it. Dogs love it and horse riders love it. We're just so thrilled and can't wait for the remaining sections to be completed." Once the final sections are complete, the Rail Trail will offer visitors and locals the unique ability to traverse a vast, unbroken stretch of the Northern Rivers and be privy to all the secrets and wonders it has to offer. ■



Executive chef Ebony Baker and landscapes and experiences manager Alastair Oakman searching for sea succulents

Feature Story

The Fashion for Foraging

There is nothing more satisfying, for a customer or a chef, to know that each and every dish contains seasonal, local and even 'gathered' food.

Words by Candida Baker

Images by Jeffrey Kieffer

Being invited to tag along on a food foraging trip with Element's landscape and experiences manager, Alastair Oakman, executive chef Ebony Baker, and bars manager Veronika Eliasova is truly an eye-opening experience.

The grounds of Elements span a gracious 20 hectares, and the resort also has its own native chef's garden, so there is plenty of bush tucker to choose from, each with its own distinctive flavour.

Take the popular warrigal greens for instance, growing liberally wherever there's a good combination of sunshine and shade. Oakman and Baker disappear into a large coastal patch under one of the pandanus trees that grace the boundary of the resort, filling a large basket with the soft, native leaves, also known as New Zealand spinach, native spinach, or Botany Bay greens.

"I love using warrigal greens in my dishes," says Baker. "It has a slightly tangy, salty quality which is different to spinach." (On a side note, Baker notes that the leaves need to be blanched before eating, due to the fact they contain oxalates which might possibly be harmful in large quantities.)

For cocktail creator Eliasova, the greens are not quite as interesting as the Davidson plum tree nearby, with its piquant taste and bright purple colour. "I make a sugar syrup from the plum because they are quite bitter," she explains, "but the colour they give a

cocktail is amazing."

According to Baker foraging is 'on trend' in the world of food. "It's definitely a big movement towards using native ingredients from a mixed ecology of planted and native gardens," she says, "and it means that you're always using food that's in season. It also gives me a great chance to play with flavours that are right here on our doorstep."

For Oakman, whose background is in environmental management and bush regeneration, the rainforest tours and the foraging tours he conducts for guests at the resort are definitely a highlight of his job. "I love showing people how to 'see' what's around them," he says. "We have a lot of edible native ginger here, also tiny native Illawarra plums, coastal lemon aspen, pigface, Davidson plums, cordyline - so much around us can be used in cooking. The native ginger has a blue fruit with seeds in it - I call it a native rainforest gobstopper because its flavour changes a couple of times in your mouth - and we also have midgen berries, which local First Nations people call bush lollies. When guests come on a tour they learn about the complex ecology that surrounds the resort."

As we meander our way through the rainforest path, up towards the beach, and back down through the more open heath path back into the rainforest, the trio stop to pick, taste and discuss. Baker is planning a seafood consommé with a shellfish broth and

Below left: left to right: Cocktail maker Veronika Eliasova, Baker and Oakman check out the quality of the ripe native ginger, with its slight floral taste. Below right: Oakman cuts warrigal greens for use in the Elements kitchen



“
The tiny blue midgen berries pop with flavour, and after my tour, my senses are filled with the intense flavours of the food we've foraged...
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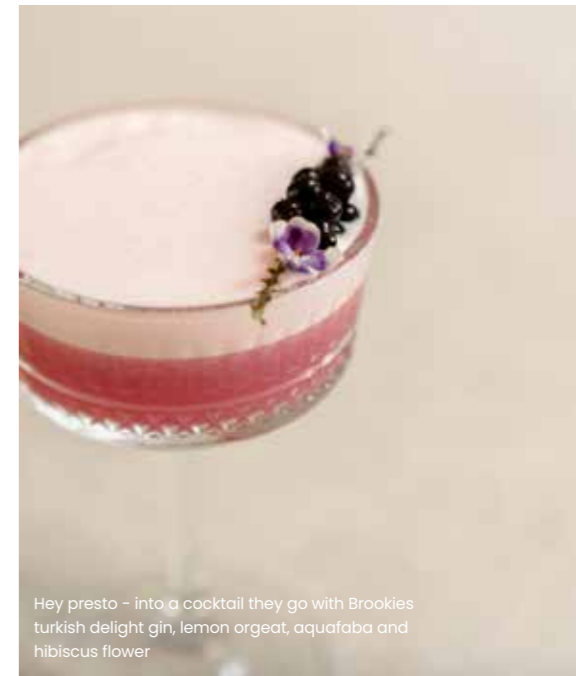
dumplings and is thinking of adding a little native ginger; Eliasova is thinking of making a non-alcoholic native blue ginger syrup as an addition to the cocktail list. The tiny blue midgen berries pop with flavour, and after my tour, my senses are filled with the intense flavours of the food we've foraged - the tastes of pepper and lemon salt are often present, and there's also an indefinable zesty quality to the plants, which leave a clean, crisp after taste. Oakman is instructed to dig up a large quantity of native ginger, which he obligingly does, hoisting it over his shoulder for its journey to the kitchen, where it will begin its transformation into an Ebony Baker creation. Native foods can be capricious however, says Oakman. "You can't really rely on them to produce the same amount every year," he says. "We might get truckloads of Illawarra plums one year, and the next year hardly any, but that's part of the organic fun of it. You're creating with what's in season, and what is plentiful."

There's no doubt that for someone whose gardening skills are close to zero, (I awarded myself one brown thumb years ago) it's the tasting of the food and the cocktail created from our foraging experience that is the highlight of the visit. In next to no time there is a piquant - and very pink - cocktail waiting to be sipped, and a tasting menu of dishes using some of the bush tucker we've found on our travels, which is mouth-wateringly delicious.

My foraging tour reminds me of a treasure hunt. Walking with three people so committed to their work is inspiring, and discovering the sheer volume of local native food dotted around the grounds is a fascinating experience. At Elements creating the connection for the guests between nature's bounty, and the dishes that are created from that bounty, helps us to truly understand, not just what bush tucker, or foraged food can offer us, but also how important a balanced ecology (and the sustainability that comes from that) truly is. ■



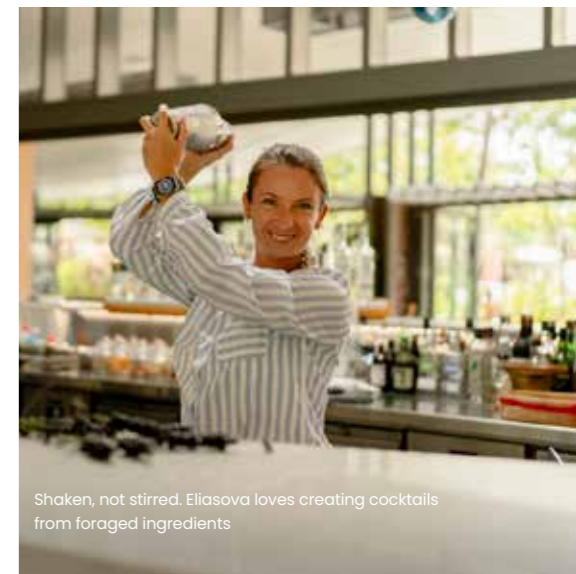
Checking to see if the midgen berries are ripe



Hey presto - into a cocktail they go with Brookies turkish delight gin, lemon orgeat, aquafaba and hibiscus flower



Above: Baker created a crudo kingfish with sunrise lime and truffle vinaigrette with truffle mayonnaise, tempura crunch and wasabi cress. The sunrise lime is a cross between a cumquat and a finger lime. Right: Goldband snapper with warrigal green lemon butter sauce, native blackened spice mix and Ballina pipis



Shaken, not stirred. Eliasova loves creating cocktails from foraged ingredients



Author Melissa Lucashenko. Image supplied by UQP

Edenglassie

An edited extract from *Goorie* author Melissa Lucashenko's epic prize-winning novel, with two parallel Indigenous love stories set five generations apart.

In her long life, Granny Eddie reflected from her hospital bed that afternoon, she had seen a great deal of time. A lot of time, and more than one variety of it, but this sort of time – or life (which amounted to the same thing) – was altogether new. The blurred colours of the hospital ward were far too bright, everything shining and glowing with colours a person had never imagined before. All colour and no detail, and a pain in her temple that had taken a fair whack of morphine to knock over. At first Eddie thought it was the hospital lighting making everything glow and shimmer, but when the nurse drew the curtains apart, revealing the brown Warrar snaking around the City Botanic Gardens with the Story Bridge in the distance – a silver brooch joining the two banks of the river – she realised it was the same outside. Brighter. Newer. Blurry. The world was like it always was, and yet different. Hard to put your finger on it. Most things a lot less clear, and yet some things as clear as day.

Take Old Grandad Charlie. She'd never in all her born days been able to recall his face. Grandad had ploughed Mr Bolitho's Phantom Continental smack bang into the shopfront at McDonnell & East just

before the war. Finally pushed it too far that day, bless. Just turned eleven, young Edwina had kept the memory of Charlie's voice and smell, nothing more. But strange, lying here in crisp sheets in what was doubtless a whiteman hospital overlooking the river – and as to why she could hear so many little babies crying so loud on the floor below was yet another mystery – strange that she could all of a sudden picture Old Man Charlie, his thick dark eyebrows and Fred Astaire hat, the cheeky old darlin as clear as anything in her mind. The fall must have shaken some of the dust out of the crannies in her head and made room up top for the old bloke to come visiting her.

As the nurses rabbitied on about blood pressure and bedpans and suchlike, Eddie focused her mind on the serious matter of dirt. She had been concerned with dirt all her life, and with being dispossessed of same, not to mention treated like dirt, which is to say, trampled over and disregarded as a general rule. And what with being a *dirty black*, so-called, it was only common sense that dirt – meaning earth, meaning also Country – was something of a constant and compelling interest to her, unlike the

whitefellas who so very rarely looked at the ground beneath their feet, for fear of remembering where it had come from and what it had cost, and where they themselves would undoubtedly end up.

She was dirty on them mob, truth be told. Yes, yes, there were plenty of exceptions, like Rob's dear wife, Cathy, an actual human being for all them squatters she come down from, and wotsername Judy. But the Judys and the Cathys of the world were hard put to cancel out the likes of Bridget in Grade One, her with the short little stick at school just long enough to keep your black hand from touching hers in the line-up outside the classroom, and Margaret too, the sour-faced bitch, running your family down when she thought you couldn't hear her. So, all your Murri life, your Goorie life, it was a matter of learning the hard way to be just like the earth, unchanging and unchanging, in the face of white people and their never-ending provocations.

Despite the ache in her head and neck, Granny Eddie smiled. That was the funny thing, the really hilarious thing – white people thinking she was stupid, when

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Somebody ran a cultural awareness seminar somewhere and she magically acquired a million white nephews.”

they were the ones walking around with blinkers on, hah! Stupid as sheep for the most part, never noticing a damn thing. Looking at their phones for the last two hundred years. What was it Grandad Charlie had said? *Never say no to a white person. Say yes, yes, yes and always smile.* Watch them relax, watch them believe they have it over you, that you are malleable, stupid, not a troublemaker, nothing to lose sleep over. Nothing to see here.

The door began to open. With a burst of fright, Granny Eddie remembered the dirt beneath her fingernails. She curled her hands into quick fists to protect the precious dark grains from strangers. Never know who's in there, see. Never know whose ancestors you might be carrying around in the palm of yer hand. She fell at the maritime museum they said earlier, well, well. You might as well say Mary time museum. May as well say Murri time museum,

meaning back in the day, back before Grandad Charlie even, so long ago the land didn't recognise the sound of an English word. How many Marys Murrdis would you need to go back to ... for it was well known, of course, that part of every blackfella who ever lived went back to the good jagun, the good earth. Who was she holding on to, below her nails? Who was holding on to her, as the door to her room in Ward B swung wide for all the world to see?

Eddie uncurled her fingers then and peered at her shimmering nails, wishing for Grandad Charlie to come, or her big sister, or her poor old dead ma. But it was a man with a stethoscope who entered the room. Not very tall, and not particularly dark, but handsome enough, yes, in a blurry sort of fashion. 'Who're you?' Granny Eddie demanded. 'State yer damn business! Where's Winona?'

Doctor Johnny Newman startled. He was used to being sworn at, spat on and even punched by the unfortunates in Emergency, but Eddie's centenarian aggression was a novelty. He pointed to his ID badge. 'As if I can read that!' Granny Eddie huffed. The silly brat! Even with her glasses on, she could barely make him out, let alone his badge. And who was to say it was the truth written there? They could make anything up. What if he was one of them serial killers? Look at Daniel Morcombe. What chance did a hundred-year-old black woman stand, alone in the world, her husband and their three daughters finished up, and her blind as a damn bat it seemed. Someone needed to fix that and fix it fast.

'I'm Doctor Johnny,' the handsome blur said gently. 'My damn business is to see what's up with your eyesight, Aunty. Did you know you had a fall? Hit your noggin on the footpath?'

'Noggin – is that a medical term then? I reckon you got your doctor's licence out of a cornflakes box, mate. It's my neck that hurts,' Eddie grumbled. 'Where's Winona got to?'

'Winona? Is that your daughter?' Johnny looked around in vain for a flower-shaped family chart pinned to the wall.

'Not my dort, my grannie – my daughters've all passed. Watcha doing now? Are you a student, ay? Don't I warrant a real doctor?' Johnny assessed her: hip – bruised but by some miracle not broken; limbs – sound; head and neck – very sore for no obvious reason, likely soft tissue damage, but also needing an X-ray pronto, especially given the sudden change in vision; diabetes no doubt a complicating factor, and quite possibly the reason for the fall in the first place. 'Nice to meet you, Aunty,' he said several minutes later, handing her over to the X-ray orderly. 'I don't remember saying you can call me Aunty,'

Eddie snapped. Somebody ran a cultural awareness seminar somewhere and she magically acquired a million white nephews. 'Call me Mrs Blanket. And find my Winona!'

1. Kurilpa Village, Moreton Bay 1840

The Ancestors sent no warning. The first inkling of the arrival was the thing itself – a great white curve headed upriver. Dawalbin had seen this sight in her youth, but never here on her husband's bend of the Warrar. She scrambled to her feet. 'Yerrin! Look!'

A handful of boats rested on the sandy beach below the village and so it took some manoeuvring for the newcomers to find space to land. The visitors – two bearded men – remained seated, waiting for an invitation. When Yerrin signalled welcome, they came up the riverbank, leaving their great white curve behind them. As the men reached the first row of huts, their shadows stretched behind them, almost touching the children who had clustered near the canoes and were examining the strange white object. 'Hello, Uncle.' Yerrin embraced the older man. 'It's been a while.'

'Good to see you, Nephew! Dalapai wanted to catch up,' the Old Man said, gesturing to his companion. Like him, Dalapai bore the scarrings of seniority on his chest and arms. His hair was streaked white and his face was grooved with the lines of habitual worry. 'Of course, of course,' Yerrin said, easing himself down onto the sand and preparing to hear what had been happening north of the Warrar. He refrained from asking about, or even looking at, the gift these men had brought.

'Welcome, Dalapai. Will you eat?' Dawalbin asked, opening the neck of her dillybag. The visitors laughed with pleasure and Dawalbin passed her toddler, Murree, over to his big sister, Ada, so she could prepare the crayfish.

'Your hospitality feeds more than just our bellies, Nephew,' the Old Man announced some time later. He threw his last cray shell in the fire and wiped the juice from his beard and whiskers. 'To sit with our relatives, eating the gifts of Biame, it reminds us to enjoy life. Especially now our Countries are returning to us.'

Yerrin nodded. The end of the Catastrophe was in sight. Soon their Federation would be at peace again. The havoc the English brought would never be forgotten, of course. But the clanking of iron chains on Sufferer's legs was now rarely heard. The screams from the flogging triangle in Queen Street had ceased last Oyster Season, and less than three

hundred foreigners remained in Magandjin. Soon this tiny band of invaders would return across the ocean, and the Kurilpa, along with their neighbours, would have a normal existence again. Yerrin wondered if the peace he had known as a child would feel the same as a middle-aged man. He had seen so much destruction.

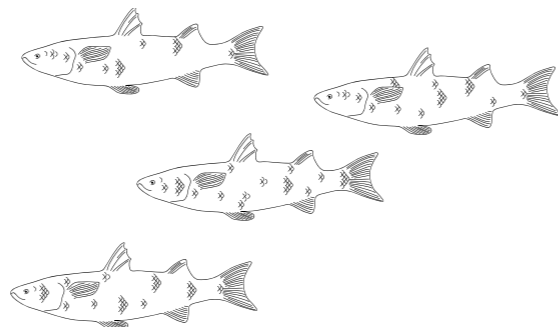
'When these last dagai have returned to Muttakundrei,' the Old Man predicted, 'we will have sanity. A life where lunatics don't go around pretending to own other people's land and calling themselves masters.'

Yerrin and Dalapai grunted in disgust at the word. 'I doubt this one's children will even believe the nightmare was real,' Dawalbin commented, kissing her son's curls and throwing a fish wrapper onto the coals. The paperbark briefly flared before crumbling to powdery white ash.

'I hope they leave by the Time of the Whales,' she dreamed aloud. To travel to the ocean without fear; to journey home to her grandfather's people and see the whales spouting off the Island Countries knowing that her safe return home was assured; how wonderful that would be!

'They will be gone by the Mullet Run,' predicted the Old Man. 'And there we can discuss our Federation's recovery. What say you, cousin?' He was addressing Dalapai, who had remained silent and was gazing down at the children splashing in the river. 'It will be a blessing from the Ancestors to see them gone,' Dalapai agreed. 'But, cousin, don't speak too soon. Our neighbours beyond the mountains report that dagai continue to arrive uninvited. They still come from the south with their Sufferers and their hole makers, driving great flocks of munkies before them, and there they camp and wait for word from their Queen.' 'Word?' asked Yerrin, looking up sharply. 'What word?' 'Word that free white men are now welcome in our lands.'

The group fell silent, pondering this grim revelation. On the opposite side of the Warrar, a cutter left the Commissariat Store dock and slid into the outgoing



tide, heading for Dunwich.

'Come to our village on the full moon,' said the Old Man to Yerrin. 'There's more to discuss before we hear from Dundalli. And my sisters ask that Dawalbin comes to visit, your daughter also.' The visitors' canoes, now minus their strange cargo, were edged out into the current. The Old Man climbed in beside Young Tom and dipped his paddle to steady the craft.

'You know you are always welcome in my Country,' Dalapai turned to add, floating alongside, 'and please, Nephew, hark my words. The dagai's numbers may seem to grow less. But he is a mothar – and like a mothar his web spreads and spreads.'

'Yoway,' Yerrin nodded. 'We must use all our wits to avoid being tangled in it.'

With that, the visitors were away. They left behind them the gift – a set of whale ribs which would never again plumb the depths of the ocean. The giant bones, bleached white in the sun since being harvested by Dawalbin's people near Dunwich, would become the girders of Yerrin's new home. This gift symbolised a new phase in the alliance between saltwater and freshwater Goories. Later that afternoon, Dawalbin took Murree onto her hip and sat beside the fire with him, deep in thought. She suckled the little boy, imagining as her milk passed into the child what his life would be like when the dagai had gone, and also what it would mean if Dalapai was right. If life never returned to normal. If the rule of Law was never restored. What would her son see as a man? Would he be free to travel their Federation, or would he, too, have to live in fear of displeasing the invaders? Would her daughters be subject

to the terror the dagai brought? Grim imaginings filled Dawalbin's mind. She took Murree's hands in hers and held them closer to the glowing coals of her fire. The boy yawned in her lap as she resumed the day's lesson. It was the same lesson all infants learnt. *Be generous. But never steal. Taking what isn't yours will burn your hands.*

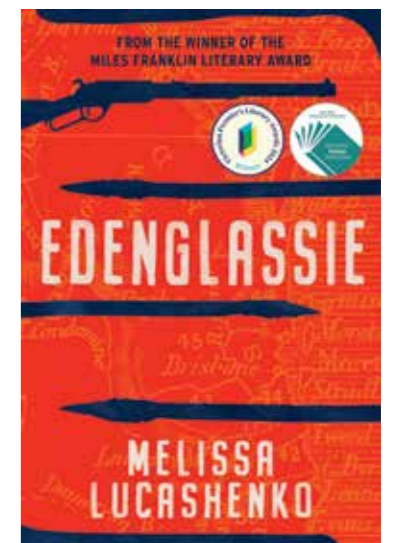
She next held ten chubby toes towards the fire. *Walk strong. Don't step where you aren't invited. Stepping where you aren't invited will burn your feet.*

Dawalbin took Murree's curls in her hands and turned his head sideways to the glowing coals. Warming first one ear, then the other.

Listen well. Don't listen to bad talk or lies, son. Listening to bad words or lies will burn your ears. As his wife instructed their son, Yerrin stepped away and stood facing west. The sun had just slipped below the mountains. Early stars were beginning to show in the Sky Camps. He looked up, wondering what advice the Ancestors, wheeling above the earth in their great ellipses, might give him in times like these. Times when things could go either way – a return to peace, or the ongoing turmoil of undeclared war. Civilisation or unending chaos. What should we do, my Old People? he asked. Which road will lead us back to freedom? Where is the honourable path in seasons as strange as these? After long minutes, Yerrin finally lowered his gaze to the village. What he saw there made him laugh aloud in astonishment. There, in the fast-fading light, stood what looked like an entire forest. But the trees he saw in front of him were not bloodwoods, nor palms, nor the distant grove of sacred figs

downstream. He was looking, rather, at a trick of the twilight. A vast field of smoke plumes rose from the fires of his people. Two hundred white pillars stretched from where he stood opposite the Queen's Wharf all the way down to the ridge above the Woolloongabba Swamp. It seemed to Yerrin, standing there, that for every star that had just emerged in the night sky, a twin fire blazed among his people. The rising pillars of smoke joined the Sky Camps to the earth, knitting the past and the present together in one tremendous tableau. It was answer enough. He was not alone; he was never alone. The Kurilpa were still so many, and their Ancestors were always watching. ■

Melissa Lucashenko is a Goorie (Aboriginal) author of *Bundjalung and European heritage*, whose sixth novel, *Too Much Lip*, won the 2019 Miles Franklin Literary Award and the Queensland Premier's Award for a work of State Significance. This edited extract is from Lucashenko's seventh book, *Edenglassie*, set in Brisbane at a time when First Nations people still outnumbered the colonists. *Fierce, powerful and funny*, *Edenglassie* won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for 2024.





A natural pool offers numerous benefits for the environment and for the users. Image supplied by Adam Grabowski, Flo Gardens

The Healing Power of Natural Pools

More and more people are replacing their swimming pools with a natural pool, creating an ecosystem in their own backyards.

Words by Timothy Hobart

There's no question that when you decide to visit one of the Northern Rivers numerous stunning natural water holes, you can feel transported to a timeless land. Swimming in the pristine streams that run through undisturbed rainforests and meander into inviting billabongs, you feel not only refreshed, but recharged.

And that is the starting point of natural pools. These incredible, engineered water features seek to emulate their natural environment by using a simple mix of plants, fish, rocks and gravel to filter the water and avoid the chemical or salt filtration found in regular pools.

The trend towards natural swimming pools is considered to have started with Gottfried Kern, in Austria in 1954. Kern partitioned water to form a regeneration zone, where the ecosystem would be

undisturbed. Four decades later, a fellow-Austrian, Arnold Klement devised a filtration system that would enable him to build pools with a 20% filter zone, and an 80% swimming area. Fast forward to today and 3,500 pools have been built in Europe, with growth increasing every year.

In 2009, Klement's system became available in Australia, but it's really only in the past decade that their popularity has increased exponentially as there has been a steady rise of interest in this alternative choice to traditional chlorine or salt filtration systems. Adam Grabowski, the co-founder and co-director of Flo Gardens – the Northern Rivers only local installer of natural pools – has been there from the start of the surge in popularity.

"We've installed about 60 natural pools so far and our business is still expanding," Grabowski says.



"I think what's caught people's imagination is not just the absence of the more toxic chemicals, but how a natural pool is literally about creating your own ecosystem. By utilising the delicate balance of geography, flora and fauna we can build and recreate the ecosystems that cleanse our natural waterways here in the Byron Shire."

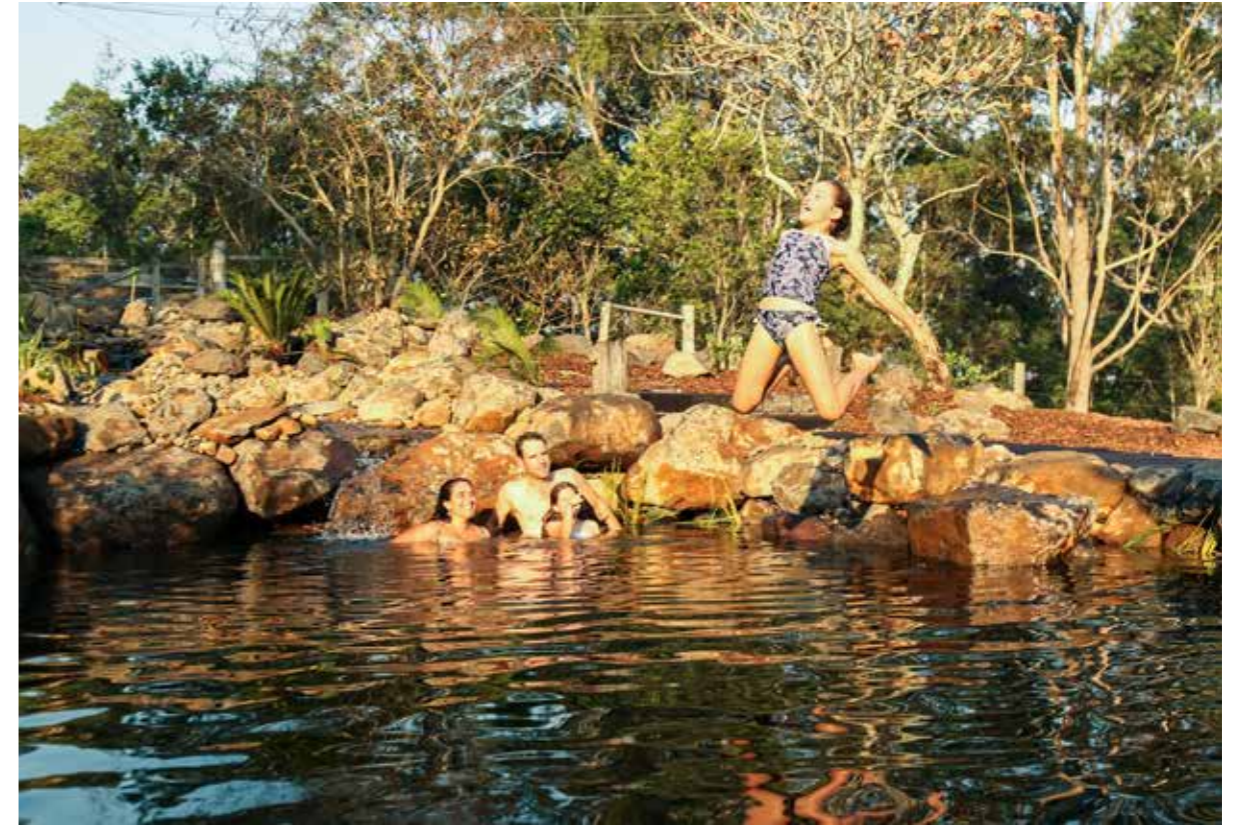
The first step in the process is carried out by the small fish and crustaceans within the pool itself. These feed on the waste and dirt, breaking them down. The water is then designed to gently flow into a 'filter zone', which is not dissimilar to a small marsh or wetland. Here, plants and biofilms living on the rocks, purify the water, just as they do in the natural environment, removing any nasties and creating nutrients. What's left is pure, fresh water, which is then pumped back into the pool for the whole process to start over again.

Minyon Falls local, Celine Debellis, is a great admirer of natural pools. When she decided to install a natural pool several years ago, she did extensive research into what would give her the most environmentally-friendly and cost-effective option. "We live in the middle of the rainforest, and I wanted something that would be the best fit for the land. I also wanted to swim without chemicals and have

Above and below: Mandy Nolan's natural pool. Images by Jeffrey Kieffer



Image supplied by Adam Grabowski, Flo Gardens



something that was low maintenance. It's absolutely the best thing I have done on our property. The water is so pure and the plants have grown up in less than six months. I also love the idea of swimming with the little fish!"

The 'little fish' used in natural pools are not just any old species, they are dependent on the exact location where the pool is to be installed. This is why before Flo Gardens begin construction their first step is to thoroughly survey the local area and identify the endemic fish and plants found there.

"This native wildlife is paramount," says Grabowski. "We take samples away and then through our fish nursery, breed and use them for the pools we make. We do the same thing with the native plants. This helps the natural pool find a symbiosis with its surroundings."

This symbiosis not only ensures that the plants and fish introduced to the pool will be more likely to thrive - it also creates a welcoming environment to the native wildlife.

"Chlorine just kills everything," says Paul Dalby, another Byron Shire local. "I wanted something that was going to fit in with the native animals on my property. The pool is good for biodiversity, for my family's health and the health of the environment.

There is also practically no maintenance - which is good because I'm pretty lazy at heart."

The low maintenance is another huge plus for natural pools. Once the balanced ecosystem is reached and the pool begins to self-filter, there is no need for chlorine, chemical filtration, pH balancing and the regular servicing that normal pools require. Not to mention the huge drain of electricity. And then there are the proven health benefits.

"When you get in the pure water it creates negative ions, which are extremely healthy and have been proven to neutralise free radicals in the body and help boost metabolism and the immune system," Grabowski explains. "The healthy bacteria of a freshwater ecosystem also have positive benefits for your microbiome."

As the design and science of these natural pools continues to develop, there are plans to further harness the nutrient by-products and pure water, to irrigate and fertilise gardens and fruits trees planted in the surrounding area. This will allow people to not only enjoy the healthy benefits of their own natural swimming hole, but to know they are truly a part of their own biodiverse ecosystem. Natural pools are a win-win situation for the environment and everyone who enjoys them. ■

Glass Art with Heart

Asaf Zakay and Noel Hart both produce unique glass work, inspired by their natural environments.

Words by Candida Baker

Images by Jeffrey Kieffer

For as long as glass artist Asaf Zakay can remember, animals and art have always been his passion. “I grew up in a village in Israel and even as a child I had this silent communication with the animals around me,” he says. “But of all the animals, horses have always been my favourite.” We’re sitting at a long wooden table on the verandah of his Coorabell home, with its view of rolling hills in front of us, and living proof of Zakay’s connection to the interests in his life is all around us. Sculpted geodesic glass shapes catch the afternoon light, his ragdoll cats are lying near the back door, behind us is the enclosure with his two beautiful Maremma dogs and his goats, while in the paddock his small herd of horses are quietly grazing. In a separate paddock is a mother donkey with her new baby, and when we take a walk down to his workshop to explore more of his glass art, we pass a massive aviary with doves and chickens, and one very talkative white cockatoo, while his beloved Pomeranians keep us company on our tour.

Zakay’s interest in creating glass sculptures also goes back to his childhood in Israel. “I first started working with wood,” he says. “I was always fascinated by geometric forms, particularly the tetrahedron that makes up the Star of David. I completed a stained glass course in Israel, and later when I was working installing Belgian-style stained glass sculptures that would light up a room when they were illuminated, I began to wonder how that might transfer to my work.” In 2005 Zakay moved to Australia and was introduced to the concept of sacred geometry, which was to shape his life’s work. He discovered that his continuing passion for the shape of the tetrahedron meant that he could build this three-dimensional marvels from different styles of glass, all with different reflective and light-catching properties. On the first day of February in 2023, he was on his own when he decided to light a burn pile, which exploded, engulfing his entire body in flames. “My reaction was completely instinctual,” he says.



Glass artist Asaf Zakay holds one of his sculpted geodesic glass shapes in his hands

For Zakay animals and art have always been his passion



"I just ran as fast as I could and jumped in my pool, and immersed myself in there. My neighbour saw the flames and came rushing over, and I moved to a cold shower and just sat in there, with water pouring all over me. When I got to hospital they told me that there was no way I was going to be able to leave hospital without numerous surgeries, and they moved me to the burn unit at Brisbane Hospital. The surgeon kept me on the surgery list, and I kept praying that I wouldn't need surgery, and finally after three weeks, he told me I could go home." The sheer heat and humidity of the day literally turned the air surrounding the petrol into a bomb. "It was a bus size flame," Zakay recalls. "I'll never forget it. You don't feel the pain immediately, and the oddest thing was the sheer level of silence in the middle of it. Just for a few seconds, there was nothing."

“*Art is necessary in life, art inspires people. If I can create pieces that people love – that is an amazing gift.*”

On the day of the interview, over a year later, Zakay is still wearing pressure stockings, but there are no visible scars to be seen. For a man whose belief in the sacredness of life is absolute, Zakay saw redemption where others might only have seen a horrific experience. "I recognised it as 'my flame'," he says. "It was – and is – part of my life. I had to meet it head-on to discover the depths within me that would allow me to carry on growing as a man, and as an artist." For Zakay, the language of his art is love, pure and simple. His work, which is in constant demand worldwide, is based on the Fibonacci sequence, the famous pattern that shows up everywhere in nature including in flowers, pinecones, hurricanes; and even in huge spiral galaxies in space. But the Fibonacci sequence doesn't just stop at nature – in art, architecture or design it's known as the Golden Ratio, the proportions that are expressed in every living being on earth. Says Zakay: "Art is necessary in life, art inspires people. If I can create pieces that people love – that is an amazing gift."



Zakay at work in his home studio in Coorabell

Glass artist Noel Hart at home with two of his blown glass forms



Gazing into Noel Hart's glass works, it's almost as if you're drawn into an abstract version of the natural world. Swirling colours mix and mingle – the crimson, blue and greens of a rainbow lorikeet, the deep black of a cockatoo's wing, the suggestion of a powerful owl. Hart's glass art takes the viewer on a journey of discovery, from the pure beauty of his creations, through layers of artistic knowledge, hinting always at the importance of preserving the environment. "My work is really all about the recognition of the impending extinction of species," Hart says. "I grew up in the city, and went to art school in the city, but I was always drawn to the bush. My wife Helene and I arrived in the Northern Rivers in the late 1980s with our son Gabe, and came to live in the forest, which introduced me to hundreds of species of flora and fauna, and it wasn't long before the energy of the forest and its geology became my source of inspiration." Decades later, Hart has remained true to that inspiration, as a photographer, painter and a glass artist. "I've always loved to experiment," he says, "and I think that's what allowed me to accept that challenge for the glass work I've created at Elements of Byron. I was commissioned to make a series

of blown glass forms, but in order for them to be suspended where they were designed to go, they needed to have wooden poles through the middle of them, and wrought iron around the top to tie the mediums together." Even though Hart was aware that it wasn't going to be easy, it was harder than he thought to realise his vision, which was to create an installation exploring the colours of five of the black cockatoo species in Australia. "I think if I'd had any idea how complex it was going to be, I might have thought twice," Hart recalls. "They had to be large pieces, because of the size of the space they were to fill, they had to have a clarity to them that would allow any available light to show them off, they had to be strong enough to withstand the wooden rod and the metal work. I remember beating the living daylight out of the wrought iron!" But for Hart, the challenge was just one more question in a lifetime of questioning the world around him. "The natural world is so inspiring," he says, "but also still such a mystery. Why does the satin bowerbird create sculptures? Why are there bioluminescent mushrooms that glow in the dark? Why are there such bright colours in birds, particularly parrot species?" Talking to Hart it's not



Above: From left to right (from the front) the endangered carnaby's white tailed black cockatoo, the endangered palm cockatoo, the critically endangered red tailed black cockatoo, the yellow tailed black cockatoo, and the endangered glossy black cockatoo. Apart from the yellow tailed black cockatoo, all of these black cockatoo species are in danger of extinction. Below: A detail from the endangered palm cockatoo



“
Four of the five black cockatoos I reference are in danger of extinction and the truth is that exploring this factor is always the basis of my work.”

difficult to see him as a small boy - the ever present 'why?' demanding answers to the questions. One of the many challenges with Hart's abstract style of blown glass work is that it is literally, a coat of many colours and patches - it is not one piece of glass, but many. "It's similar to a jigsaw of coloured parts," explains Hart. "It requires a large team of assistant glassblowers, and can take 15 man-hours to create a piece."



Above left and right: Zakay and Hart's Glass work enhances the senses, through the use of colour and light. Above right: Image supplied by Asaf Zakay

Hart's glass works have been exhibited around the world, and he is careful not to over-produce the unique pieces for which he is famous. "Helene and I now live at Koala Beach, near Pottsville, in a development that includes 270 hectares of protected bushland. I spend most of my year either painting, or working on environmental issues, and then once a year a few of us get together at Jon Westacott's glass studio on the Sunshine Coast, and create our glass works. Over the years I've discovered it's just not possible to do it in the summer, but when we do get together, it's a joyous and collaborative process. We generally only work in front of the furnaces for a couple of weeks a year in the middle of winter." At Elements, the magnificent five-piece installation doesn't even hint at the level of work involved in its construction. Instead, it sits in harmonious peace



with its environment, hinting at the natural beauty of the surrounding land. But there is also, for Hart, the deeper message of his art. "Four of the five black cockatoos I reference are in danger of extinction," he says, "and the truth is that exploring this factor is always the basis of my work." Zakay and Hart's work enhance the senses, through the use of colour and light, both artists using an energetic imprint that reminds us always of the importance of the land on which we live, and the species we share it with. ■

Bangalow

A hill town with a rich and varied history, Bangalow is full of culinary, clothing and cultural delights.

In the mid 1950s, the quaint hinterland town of Bangalow had a population of only 650 people, and was part of the main Pacific Highway between Brisbane and Sydney, with trucks thundering through it day and night.

Nowadays, of course, Bangalow is a thriving country centre with a population of 2,750 people, catering to a broad demographic with its varied collection of independent boutiques, cafes and restaurants.

Like most towns in the Northern Rivers, Bangalow was born from the timber boom in the 1840's, its name possibly derived from a Bundjalung word - 'Bangalla' - meaning a low hill, or a kind of palm tree, native to Australia. Bangalow as we know it today, really owes its continued existence to one man, Robert Campbell, whose parents were Irish immigrants. As a young man Campbell worked in the Newcastle mines, but

with a desire to own land he decided to push north, arriving in the Big Scrub in 1881, selecting 600 acres for himself on the banks of what was later named the Byron Creek.

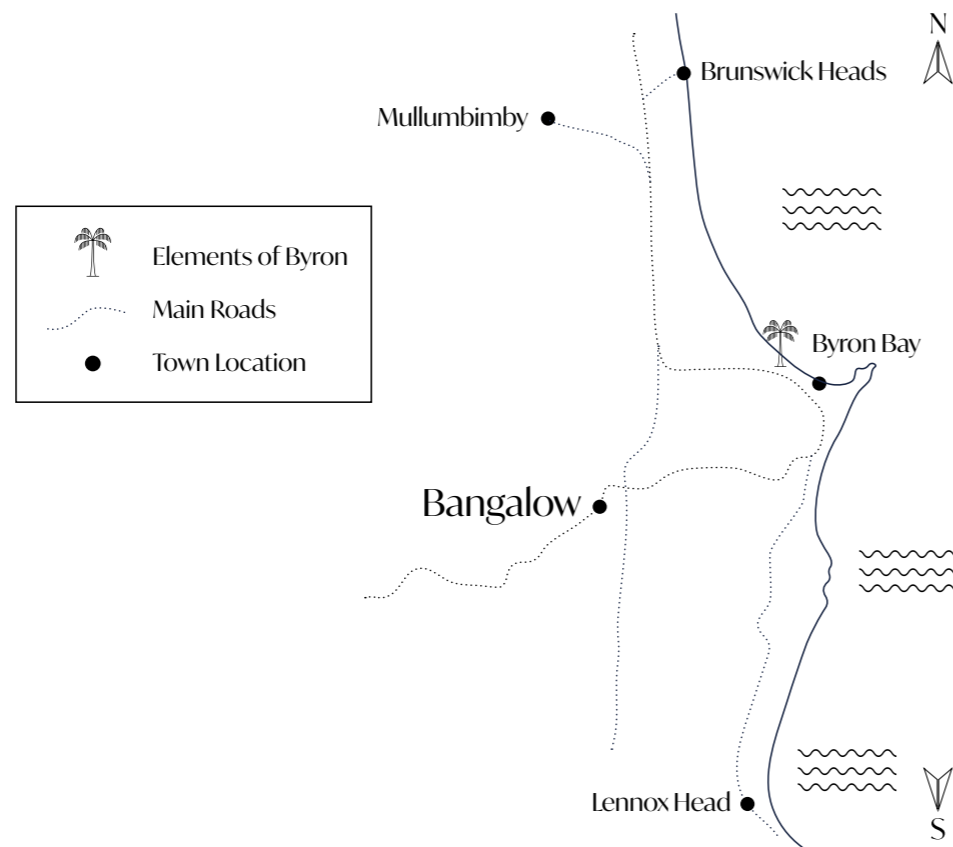
Campbell cleared the land, built a bark hut so his family could join him, and decided to go into the dairy industry, which was then booming. He was one of the first farmers to diversify in the area, growing sugar cane and maize on his land, which he separated into three individual farms. As Campbell built his fortune, he was generous to the area, supporting the local co-operative movement, and donating land for shops, churches, the cemetery - and perhaps most importantly for the future of the town, the Bangalow Showground.

All these years later, the beautiful showground, situated at the top of Station Street, with the



Above: The inside of the Ninbella art gallery. Above right: Bangalow's bustling main street. Below: The ever-popular Red Ginger. Images by Jeffrey Kieffer





Below: The facade of the A&I (Agricultural and Industry) Hall. Image by Candida Baker



Above: Get in early to WOODS if you want to grab a table in this popular cafe. Image supplied by WOODS

Bangalow A&I Hall at its entrance, is still the hidden beating heart of Bangalow. On the fourth Sunday of every month, the showground hosts the Bangalow Market, with its cheerful collection of funky stalls, street food and fashion. On any given day you're likely to see a 'gathering' of some kind, including numerous horse club events. Once a year, the Bangalow Show is still one of the most popular agricultural shows around, while the A&I Hall hosts numerous cultural events, including the many festivals that call the hall home throughout the year, from February's Flickerfest tour to August's Byron Writers Festival. Another hidden gem is the Bangalow Heritage House Museum's beautiful old Queenslander nestled next to Piccabeen Park (formerly the Bangalow Weir Parklands). The museum serves morning tea on its covered verandah, with scones the size of saucers, pots of real tea and giant milkshakes. You can learn all about Bangalow's history while you eat off

a wonderfully eclectic collection of crockery, and then take a stroll through the park, past the rotunda, across the bridge and back up into the main street. As you come up Station Street, if you glance upwards to your left, you'll catch a glance of one of Bangalow's most popular shops, the fabulous Red Ginger (also in Byron Bay), where light and fluffy dumplings and gyozas are sold along with a varied collection of spices, frozen and fresh foods, colourful tableware and furnishings. Of all the highly individual shops in Bangalow, one of the most iconic has to be the Country Women's Association (CWA) store, with its wonderful collection of old-fashioned knitted tea cosies, hotwater bottle covers – and even boiled egg cosies. Campbell's generosity meant that numerous businesses built up on the land with the money he donated. Part of Bangalow's charm is in its substantial buildings, such as the old Post Office, which is surrounded by artworks in the form of a



Above and below: There's a shop to suit every taste and budget. Images by Jeffrey Kieffer



rainforest mural created by Italian artist Vanni Mangoni near the post office boxes. Plus, of course, the stunning tree mosaic by artist Chloe Rowland and ceramicist Kerry Stanton, and the hinterland mural opposite by renowned mural artist Samantha Wortelhock, whose work graces many a Bangalow wall.

A wander down the main street is an absolute must for any visitor and the town is full of culinary, clothing and cultural delights. The Ninbella art gallery beckons, with its emphasis on First Nations art, and Wax Jambu Emporium entices with its furnishings, jewellery, perfumes, toys and selection of world music. There's a butcher, a baker and quite possibly a candlestick maker – in fact come to think of it, there's actually a cafe called Butcher Baker. More recent arrivals include the refurbished precinct just off Station Street where WOODS Bangalow is the place to eat. Then of course, there's always the Bangalow Hotel; a small independent supermarket which is open almost every day of the year, the uniquely artistic florist shop, an oriental rug store; the much-loved Bangalow Hairdressing salon and the news agency/bookshop – all part of Bangalow's charm.

Without a doubt the best two public events are the Christmas Eve Carnival, and the Billy Cart Derby. On Christmas Eve the showground becomes a playground for people of all ages, with street performances, rides, food and a truly carnival feel. The Billy Cart Derby is held in late May every year, where hay bales line the hill for any runaway carts to crash into, and there's more regulations than a Formula One car race. It's the one day of the year when Bangalow sheds its quiet, let's face it – slightly

Whatever time of year you're visiting the Northern Rivers, take time to check out Bangalow. Image by Jeffrey Kieffer



middle-aged – feel and lives life on the edge. Carts of all shapes and sizes zoom scarily fast down the hill towards the fire station, and no Derby Day is complete without a few mishaps. Whatever time of the year you're visiting the Northern Rivers, make a point of checking out the region's most attractive, and active, hinterland town. ■

Candida Baker

The Wonder of Wetlands

Local photographers have created a visual feast of images from 'Wallum' – a unique and endangered flora and fauna ecosystem in the Byron Shire.

Words by Candida Baker

The great American writer and nature lover, Annie Proulx, once wrote that 'Wetlands are actually unsung heroes'. Proulx might have been talking about wetlands a world away from Byron Shire's local wallum country, but the sentiment stands.

Wallum, or wallum country, is the name given to the Australian ecosystem of coastal south-east Queensland that extends into north-eastern New South Wales, characterised by flora-rich shrub and heathland. Wetlands are among the most important parts of the planet, rich in biodiversity and teeming with life.

The wallum country that lies close to Byron Bay, just at the edge of Brunswick Heads, represents a significant part of the one percent of remaining wallum heathland in Byron Shire. It is a place of deep cultural and ecological significance, housing numerous vulnerable or endangered species, including the koala, wallum sedge frog, wallum froglet, glossy black cockatoo, eastern grass owl, white-throated needletail, common planigale, pale-vented bush-hen, little bent-wing bat, large bent-wing bat, greater broad-nosed bat and southern myotis, and the endangered ecological community of swamp sclerophyll forest (on coastal floodplain). Of all the extraordinary flora and fauna that exists within the Byron Shire's wallum, the unique wallum sedge frog and wallum froglet are perhaps the most extraordinary. Over time these tiny frogs have evolved to be able to live and breed in the wetlands where coastal freshwater and riverine systems create acidic and sandy substrates with

limited nutrients.

Taking a walk through the Brunswick Heads Wallum with environmental scientist Svea Ess, is like taking a magical mystery tour into a hidden land. Just a few metres from the end of a quiet, suburban street lies the forest of scribbly gums and swamp mahogany that abound in this 30-hectare paradise. As we walk along the banks of the Simpson's Creek, part of the Cape Byron Marine Park sanctuary, a world of rich beauty opens up.

We see a few members of the small flock of glossy black cockatoos, one of the rarest, and smallest, cockatoos in Australia. "There's a flock of only nine left in Byron Shire," Ess says. "This is where they live with a diet of mature she-oaks. Once the mature she-oaks and the scribbly gums go, then inevitably the ecosystem is damaged, and once the acidic frog habitat is destroyed, then from the tiniest inhabitant to the ancient trees, some of which are three to four hundred years old, something is gone that can never be replaced."

A picture, they say, paints a thousand words, and local photographers have risen to the challenge of documenting Brunswick Head's Wallum for posterity, and to show the world the unique wetland habitat hidden in this small, rare and precious package. An unsung hero indeed.

In these pages we give you photographs by Nola Mancy, Mark Seiffert, Spencer Hitchen and Mac Maderski, with the opening shot from the Belongil coastal wetland by *Elemental* photographer Jeffrey Kieffer. Enjoy the visual wander through this unique landscape. ■

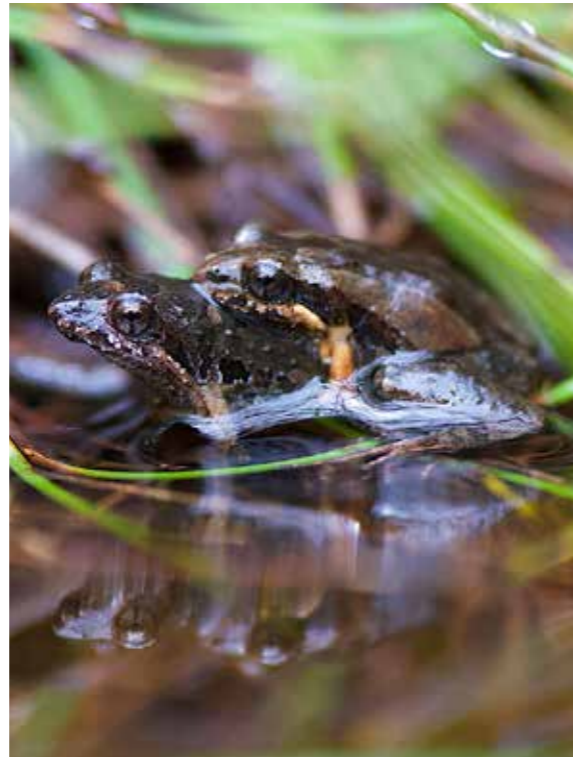


The white heron surveys its domain. Image by Jeffrey Kieffer

"An old growth banksia tree bathed in golden light, overlooking the wildflower wallum heathland. The heathland blooms predominantly from autumn to spring, adorned in shades of pink, yellow, and white." Nola Mancy



"The flying duck orchid (*Caleana major*) which grows in the Brunswick Heads Wallum, is a remarkable and delicate native orchid known for its flower that strikingly resembles a small duck in flight. The flying duck orchid is rare in some areas due to habitat loss and degradation." Nola Mancy



"I was thrilled to capture this pair of wallum froglets mating. This small frog is listed as vulnerable in NSW and Qld and is strongly associated with wallum swampland." Spencer Hitchen



"During the rainbow bee-eater's nesting season, Wallum at Brunswick Heads becomes a massive nursery for these beautiful birds. It is impossible to walk through without noticing their nest burrows in sandy soils, hearing their calls and witnessing their impressive agility as they catch insects in flight." Mac Maderski



"This majestic scribbly gum, estimated at over 200 years old, stands tall in the morning sun. These trees are a life force at Wallum, providing shelter, nesting, food and protection for the abundant wildlife that live here. At sunrise they take on a golden personality when the sun highlights them, and at night they are ghostly and enigmatic. Sand mining decimated a number of scribbly gums, and we believe these beautiful trees should be protected."
Mark Seiffert



"During the day the swamp wallabies remain well hidden and secretive around wallum, becoming more active from dusk till dawn. I've often seen them on the banks of Simpson Creek in the morning grazing on mangrove shoots." Mac Maderski



"Sometimes it's the little things that count. These gorgeous tiny red mushrooms thrive in the sandy soil at Brunswick Heads Wallum. They are a small part of the incredible and biodiverse ecosystem that can be found here. Those who walk this place gently and with inquisitive eyes can find these little beauties popping up after rain." Mark Seiffert



"A small group of endangered glossy red tailed black cockatoos call Brunswick Heads Wallum home. They nest and roost in the trees found here and have a critical water and food source only found in the river and the heathland. They eat almost exclusively the seeds of the allocasuarina tree, which are also found in Wallum." Mark Seiffert

Enjoying the Ride of Their Lives

Alice Cadwell from Spaghetti Circus and Belinda Hultgren from Circus Arts reflect on their continuing commitment and love for circus.

Words by Candida Baker

Images by Jeffrey Kieffer

Putting up a Big Top wouldn't be everyone's idea of the perfect way to spend a day, but then Spaghetti Circus general manager and festival director Alice Cadwell, isn't 'everyone'. "I love the Big Top," Cadwell tells me, as we wander through the permanent Spaghetti Circus site at the Mullumbimby Showgrounds. "I also love driving Gertie, our big red truck when we go on the road. There's just something about circus that gets in your blood."

Cadwell, who grew up in the Byron Shire, went straight from university to working with Circus Monoxide, and later with Circus Oz as their stage manager and production manager of their Big Top tent. "I kind of ran away to join the circus," she laughs, "and then when I was pregnant with my second child, I ran away from the circus and moved back here."

But in 2011 circus called her back,

when she applied to be general manager of Spaghetti Circus, and to her delight, got the job. "It was, and is, a perfect fit for me," she says. "It marries my love for the Northern Rivers and my love for circus."

On the plus side for Cadwell was also the fact that Spaghetti Circus is a not-for-profit, with its roots firmly planted in community. "The difference between Spaghetti and most other businesses is that it's a matriarchy," Cadwell says. "Leonie Mills, who founded Spaghetti, was a Gymnastics Australia trainer and coach for 30 years, and she's still connected as a board member and mentor. Leonie instilled in the company a matriarchal ethos, which is a very inclusive kind of leadership. Everything we do is with the idea of continuation and legacy in mind."

As an example of the importance

of ongoing traditions, Cadwell points to their new costume shed, designed to hold every costume ever created for the company. "We never throw away here," she says. "We alter, or refit, but we don't discard."

The idea of empowering everyone connected with Spaghetti is also embedded in their culture. "It doesn't matter whether it's a child coming for lessons, or a parent who's giving time to help with productions, we have a saying that once a Spaghetti, always a Spaghetti," Cadwell says. "My own two boys, Alex who is 16 and Tombo, who is 13 have grown up around the circus. We hold the biannual circus festival here in September, and we have a free pre-school, we're given free food by the Mullumbimby Farmers' Market and by Baker & Daughters. The support for us is amazing, and much needed because we have

Left: Alice Cadwell general manager of Spaghetti Circus with Gertie the big red truck. Right: Belinda Hultgren owner of Circus Arts on the flying trapeze



240 students at any given time." Spaghetti, like so many other places, suffered during COVID, and were only just recovering when the 2022 floods hit, destroying much of their equipment. "It was tough to pick ourselves up again," says Cadwell, "but we had to, and we had to do it quickly. Even though I'm seriously dyslexic - which is not an advantage for a general manager - I'm also very good at grant applications, as long as someone else reads through them for me when I've finished. We managed to bring in enough grant money to not just repair but also rebuild a replacement shed so I can say that right now we're in a very strong position." The inclusive nature of Spaghetti means that there

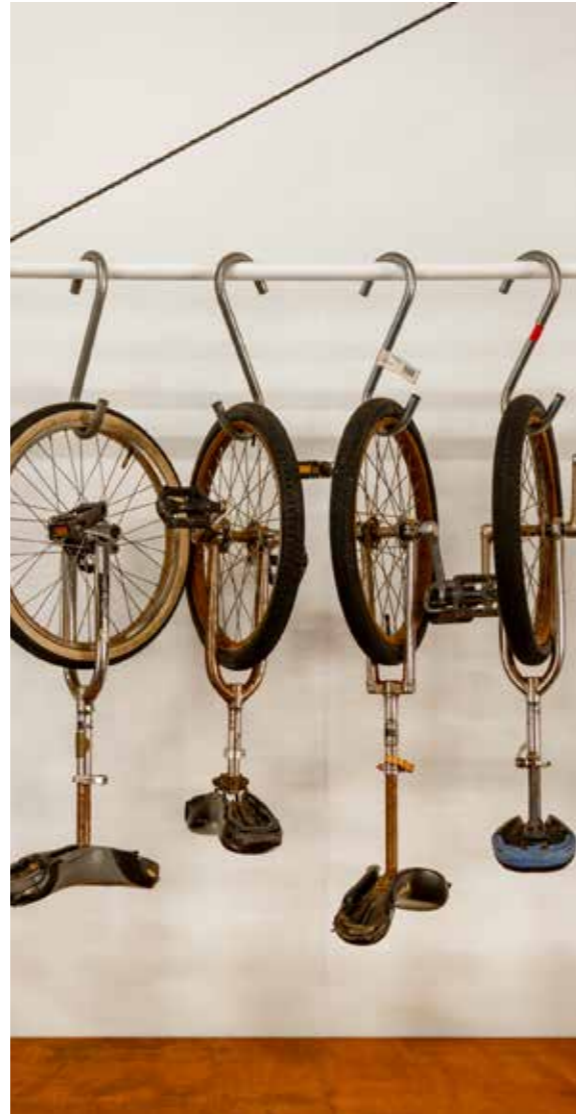
are classes for all age ranges and abilities, including for Macaronis (children under five) and parent and child classes, as well as classes for adults. For Cadwell, managing Spaghetti means, in part, witnessing on a daily basis people of all ages taking risks that allow them to discover inner strengths. "Belonging to a community that encourages and supports us to become more than we ever thought was possible, is something that circus offers," she says. "Our teenagers love it because they're able to take risks and actually be applauded for it. But also, over the years, everyone learns that you have to work hard to succeed at a skill, and personally I think that sets people up for life."

In fact, for Cadwell, it's hard to imagine any other kind of life. "Circus is like that," she says. "It gets in your blood, and you're hooked." As she says, once a Spaghetti, always a Spaghetti.

“
I kind of ran away to join the circus,” she laughs, “and then when I was pregnant with my second child, I ran away from the circus and moved back here.”
”

There's something magical about walking into Belinda Hultgren's Circus Arts space in Byron Bay's industrial area. The combination of the steam-punk makeover of a children's playground, the myriad white umbrellas suspended from the ceiling and, of course, the massive centrepiece of Australia's only indoor full-size flying trapeze all offer echoes of carnival, sideshow alley, and the mystery and allure of the travelling circus. There's even a miniature play space for toddlers, complete with tiny tents, where little kids can exercise their imaginations, while their older siblings are learning gymnastic and circus skills.

"One of the aspects of circus I value is that it offers activities and a home for those who don't necessarily fit in 'normal' boxes. It welcomes you into a family where you can feel at ease expressing the unique



The Circus Arts building is a magical, mystery tour into a world of daredevil and make believe

Above: Alice Cadwell in the new costume shed at the Spaghetti Circus site. Right: Unicycles lined up at Spaghetti, ready to go

parts of yourself,” says Hultgren, who grew up in Byron Bay. “The great thing about circus is that you learn certain techniques and progression for skill development, but then you can get creative about how you present it. Everyone can present the same activity in an entirely different way, and in a way that reflects their personality.”

Although Hultgren’s parents weren’t involved in circus, they were both sporty, owning a scuba diving centre and a wholesale business. “We were always encouraged to be physical, to try new things and to follow our dreams,” Hultgren says. “My dad bought a unicycle for my sister, and taught us all some basic juggling skills, and I did a lot of gymnastics growing up.” Although there must have been something lurking in the DNA because both Hultgren and her sister became aerial artists, touring with traditional circuses, while their brother, The Space Cowboy, holds an astounding 56 Guinness World Records. Among his many other extreme skills, he is considered one of the most innovative sword swallowers alive today.

But for Hultgren it was always the call of the trapeze and after acquiring the technique and mastering the art at the old Byron Bay Beach Resort, she ventured off to coach at a Summer Camp in the USA, then to

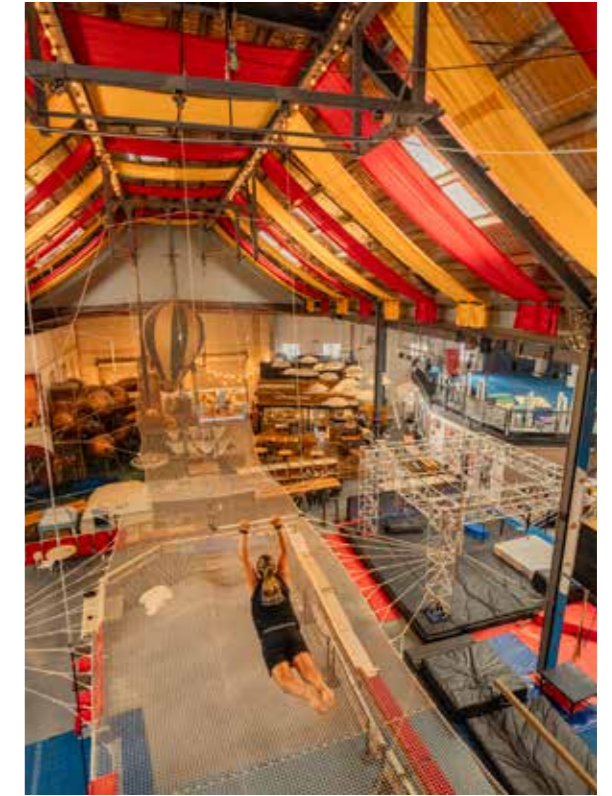
New Caledonia to teach and perform circus skills in the Club Med resort for a year. “When I got back I visited Stardust Circus in Sydney where I was offered a job with their other family touring show, Burtons Circus. They gave me a caravan and a car, and sent me off to Mackay to begin the tour immediately,” Hultgren recalls. “I’d never towed a caravan, or lived in one, or driven that far, so it was an all-round wild, thrilling learning experience. It was perfect timing because their flying trapeze troupe were about to embark on a tour to the States, and we had the opportunity to train with Bob Yerkes, a Hollywood stunt coordinator and trainer for the show ‘Circus of the Stars’. The troupe and I lived in his backyard where he kept all types of stunt and circus equipment – including a 25-metre stunt tower, airbags, Russian swings and a full size flying trapeze. We got to train with him which led to us becoming part of the development of a brand-new circus in Oklahoma, followed by a tour with the Moscow circus. It was absolutely surreal.”

In 1999, Hultgren decided she’d had enough of touring, and moved to Sydney, where she built a flying trapeze, scoring her first gig in Darling Harbour for the circus and street theatre festival. “It was such great exposure performing and teaching

Children’s playground with a steam-punk makeover



Belinda Hultgren swinging on the only indoor full size trapeze in Australia



Putting up the Big Top is one of Spaghetti Circus general manager Alice Cadwell’s favourite jobs

“*One of the aspects of circus I value is that it offers activities and a home for those who don’t necessarily fit in ‘normal’ boxes.*”

every day,” she says, “and it led to me being offered a permanent spot for our flying trapeze at the Narrabeen Academy of Sport. I then moved the rig to Olympic Park after the Olympics were over and Circus Arts has now been training enthusiastic flyers and curious daredevils in Sydney for almost 25 years.”

Much as she loved being on the move, Hultgren had the dream of creating a circus hub with flying trapeze back home in Byron, and with the support of her parents she was able to customise the family warehouse to fit a huge variety of circus equipment, including aerial apparatus, trampolines, the full-size indoor flying trapeze rig and more.

Hultgren’s partner, Scot ‘Ted’ Tornaros, is also a well-known trapeze coach, and has been a big part of the growth of Circus Arts. “We’ve been friends since we were 18,” Hultgren says. “He’s also from the Byron Shire, he fell in love with circus and flying trapeze as much as I did, and when he’d finished his tour overseas he wanted to settle back in Byron as well. We’ve got three children, two boys – Jax, 13, Ty, 11, and a daughter, Halo who is nine. They’ve all adapted well with the circus lifestyle – our daughter Halo particularly loves her acrobatics and dance. We love seeing them grow into the next generation of Byron-based circus performers.”

It’s the importance of the ‘one place’, that draws the community together, Hultgren believes. “The majority of our business is local, however, there’s plenty on our program for visitors,” she says. “I feel we’ve become known for giving people unforgettable experiences. Flying trapeze is an adrenalin activity – it pushes your boundaries, but it also gives you an amazing sense of achievement.”

Just out of curiosity, I wonder how old the oldest person has been to venture onto the flying trapeze. “We had a 76-year-old make a catch,” Hultgren says. Hmmm. Hope for me yet. Or perhaps I’ll stick to the playground and make up circus stories for the littles. ■

A Sanctuary for Wildlife

The Byron Bay Wildlife Sanctuary offers visitors meaningful, up close and personal experiences with the local wildlife.

Images supplied by Byron Bay Wildlife Sanctuary



Lucy, the tawny frogmouth, waits eagerly for her food

Educational and Fun

A family fun day out

The Byron Bay Wildlife Sanctuary in Knockrow has been a family favourite for generations and it's only a 20-minute drive from Elements of Byron. Formerly known as the Macadamia Castle, the sanctuary offers a daily program of educational and fun activities, all based on getting close to, learning about and protecting different Australian native animals. In addition to a wide range of keeper talks, immersive presentations and animal feeding, there's a treehouse playground, a small waterpark, 18-hole mini golf course, café, bar and gift shop, with plenty of activities for all the family to enjoy.

Wildlife Conservation

Learning about wildlife helps to protect it

As well as providing an enjoyable day out, the Byron Bay Wildlife Sanctuary's immersive programs are designed to support its core mission – to educate the community about the importance of protecting Australian wildlife, and to show what we can each do to conserve our native fauna. Home to more than 100 animals: kangaroos, koalas, snakes, reptiles, birds, farmyard animals and more, the sanctuary has an extensive program of keeper talks, educational school and holiday programs, and animal encounters. These range from the owl experience, in which Socrates the barn owl will land on your gloved hand, to kangaroo and farmyard feeding, and rabbit petting. During the school holidays, kids can even become a keeper for a day.



Socrates the barn owl in mid-flight



Meet a joey at feeding time

Making Friends

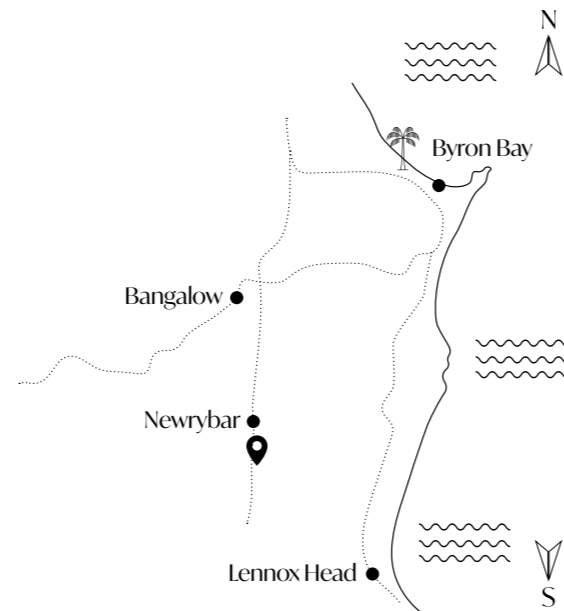
A wide range of animal experiences

Opening the daily program of animal encounters is the mid-morning rabbit petting, suitable for the littlest of children. Then there's farmyard animal feeding. Supervised by the keeper, visitors can offer chaff to the farmyard animals and learn about their habitats; and afterwards, visitors are invited to a koala presentation and educational talk. Next, by the duck pond, there is a free flight bird show where the birds fly out in the open, over the audience and then back to their keeper. Some birds, such as cockatoos (who can have the brain capacity of a seven-year-old) love to be close to people and perform. All birds are given the option to be a part of the show. After lunch, there's kangaroo and emu-feeding where visitors are welcomed in the large kangaroo enclosure. Later, the reptile show features blue tongue lizards, blue tongue skinks, and a variety of snakes, including black-headed pythons, woma pythons, coastal carpet pythons and a large olive python. Unlike a large metropolitan zoo, the Sanctuary is a not-for-profit charity. As a small park, it is able to offer more intimate programs and talks for visitors, all with a personal touch. This holistic approach helps visitors understand the importance of respecting and caring for wildlife.



One of the two sugar glider brothers – six-year old Sebastian and Samson, long term residents

-  Elements of Byron
-  Wildlife Sanctuary
-  Main Roads
-  Town Location



Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital

Treating injured, sick and orphaned wildlife

Partnering with the sanctuary is the Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital, which is housed in a large purpose-built hospital truck called 'Matilda', and permanently located onsite at the sanctuary. The Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital provides full-time expert veterinary care for injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife. Since it opened in October 2020, this privately funded, not-for-profit charity has treated more than 7,000 animals free of charge. It is the region's only all-species wildlife hospital and Australia's largest mobile wildlife hospital, which means it can travel anywhere to assist a critical mass of wildlife in need. While the hospital is not open to the public due to operational reasons, there are a number of monitor screens positioned on its front for visitors to watch what's happening inside. The Byron Bay Wildlife Sanctuary provides a meaningful, educational experience for the whole family, and contributes to the long-term protection and conservation of Australian native wildlife.



Poem

Byron Bay: Winter

Poem by Robert Gray

Barely contained by the eyesight,
the beach makes one great arc –
blue ranges overlapped behind it;
each of them a tide-mark.

About me, swamp-oaks' foliage
streams, hatching by Cézanne.
Off in the heath, a guard's carriage
follows the vats of a train.

A creek spoils the hem of the sea;
spread on the beach in flutes
it has the redness of black tea,
from the swamp's sodden roots.

Behind, cloudy afternoon swells,
the colour of claret stain.
The sunlit town is strewn like shells.
Its lighthouse, a tiny pawn.

I'm walking on the beach alone;
the sea's grey feathers flurry,
showing emerald. Sandpipers blown
seem mice, in their scurry.

And the sun on my shoulders brings,
because it's perfect warmth,
the feeling that I wear great wings
while stepping along the earth.

Robert Gray was born in 1945 and grew up on the north coast of New South Wales, which has provided the setting for many of his poems. He has published seven collections of poetry, and his Selected Poems have been published internationally. He has won every major poetry prize in the country and is taught widely in schools and universities. Gray's poetry is characterised by the striking and often unexpected nature of his imagery and his flexible use of the free-verse line. (Byron Bay: Winter, was published in 2018 by Black Inc Books, in Coast Road.)

Funny Business

There's nobody quite like the Byron Shire's very own comedian, politician, activist, feminist, writer and artist, Mandy Nolan.

Q: You have a very multifaceted career Mandy, in everything from politics to stand-up comedy. Is it ever hard balancing all the Mandys?

A: It's true that there are many Mandys. Sometimes people have told me they were going to ask me to host an event, but they were worried I was going to swear. But there's also a considered, reflective, respectful Mandy. I love performing, but I would find a career just doing that boring, and although with stand-up it's great to make people laugh, at the same time, it has to have meaning and purpose. I have strong values around protecting the environment and advocating for my community, and I have skills in the public space, and I realised a long time ago that I'm happiest doing a lot of different things. I've probably got ADHD, but I've overcome it by being hyperfocused and being able to change channels at a moment's notice. I don't procrastinate, I write lists, I'm super-organised and I triage what needs to be done. When you start something, anything, you don't know the answer, you start and then you have to trust the process. I do have great support around me, and I ask for help when I need it. Being a creative person who self-manages, I've spent 40 years hustling. If I don't hustle I don't get paid, nothing's going to turn up unless you make it happen. I'm prepared for the fact that sometimes projects work, and sometimes they don't.

Q: You've been addressing the housing crisis in the Northern Rivers, and you recently spoke of the importance of public housing for you personally when you were growing up...

A: I think having lived experience gives you an inside view into how meaningful housing is for people in crisis. It's a determinant for mental health and social justice. We were a family with zero generational wealth. My mother was 19 when she had me, and 26 when my dad was killed in a car crash. Not long before he'd died, we'd obtained public housing. His death was her release from a domestically violent situation, and she was left with next to nothing. But we had a secure home. My mother was a hairdresser and she worked hard, she did a lot of volunteer work in the community, worked in community development and as a manager; she went to university and got a degree, and through all of it she showed me how a person's life can change when they leave violence and have a secure home. And I loved that house, it was my security. Later on, as an adult, when I experienced violence in my own life, and I was a single mum, a local real estate agent helped me out by putting me forward for a lease on a house, and it meant we had a home. Lived experience isn't just about the experience of the trauma, it's the experience of what we learn about recovery, and what it takes.



The serious side of a funny woman: Mandy Nolan at home. Image by Jeffrey Kieffer



Q: What would you ideally like to see in the housing sector?

A: Ideally I'd like to see good, high-quality public housing with long tenancy that stays as public housing, where, if wraparound care is needed, it's also provided. Reading the last *Quarterly Essay*, 'The Great Divide', by Alan Kohler, it states clearly that Australia is 1.2 million dwellings in deficit, and the fact is that children who come out of domestic violence or homelessness can fall through the cracks. My passion for housing is that every person deserves a home. I'm not suggesting money should be taken away from anywhere else, but new money needs to be allocated for housing and support services in regional areas. It's much cheaper in the long-term to do this, and yet governments are not listening to the people working at the coal face. This is something I'm passionate about. I have five children, and I know how important a secure home has been to us all.

Q: Housing is part of your passion for politics, isn't it? When did you realise that you wanted to stand

for the Greens in the Richmond electorate?

A: I've always been political. When I went to university I started in feminist theatre at the same time – which was terrible by the way. I grew up in Joh Bjelke Petersen's Queensland, and I was very much a leftie. Now I'm in the Greens, I'm actually more moderate, believe it or not. I've always been engaged in advocacy and telling stories, and what politics brings me is that all the bits of me are brought together. The compassion, the comedian, the capacity to deal with the adversarial, the ability to cope with criticism and to take a risk. When the Greens first approached me I said no. I suffered from a lack of legitimacy. Politics is basically men in suits or high-powered women, and I thought I'm meant to be on the outside yelling at those people, but then I realised that it was fear of the unknown that was holding me back. And I do think representation is changing in Australian politics to be more inclusive. Richmond is one of the most marginal seats in Australia, and all I needed was 1800 votes to be the first federal seat to go Green. What I enjoy about the Greens is that we all work really hard

in our community, and Labor needs the Greens to push them. Australia has so many resources – our First Nations people are the oldest living culture in the world, we're creative, and clever, and the whole country has so much potential. If governments could come to terms with the fact that improving the quality of life with education, health and housing would vastly improve the country's wealth, it would be a huge step forward.

Q: What do you think about the HECS debt that young people have to carry?

A: I think it's a tragedy. My son, who is super-bright and was captain of the school, and could easily have got in to anywhere, didn't want that debt. Of my five, one has gone to university, and one is there now, but what worries me is that they are moving forward into their young adult lives with a massive debt already. It's the same old story – for families with wealth, paying for education doesn't matter, for families with little or no wealth it means that many of our brightest minds are now choosing not to go to university. Ironically most of the people making those decisions went to university. For free.

Q: Part of your political activism has always been for protecting the environment, and you've been very involved with the saving Wallum.

A: Despite our need for housing, and after we've lived through the flooding that we've experienced, we should never build on environmentally significant wetlands. Wallum is clearly a wetland. There's less than one percent of that ecology left in the Byron Shire, and how you can have only one percent, and 14 critically endangered species in that one percent, and not call that area endangered is incomprehensible. Government has said that it's too small to protect – that right there is a broken metric.

Q: In your own home you and John have built a natural pool...

A: Yes. We've had it for six years, and I have no idea why anyone would have anything else. We've never had to test the water or chemically treat it. You 'garden' your pool. We're going into winter now, so we'll cut the plants back, and everything will go to sleep, and then in spring it will all wake up again. You need to keep the water moving so we have a pump which is run by solar, and means there's a small permanent waterfall. There are little fish in the pool, and birds visit. It's a complete ecosystem in itself, and we all love it.



Mandy Nolan and Ellen Briggs make up the dynamic two women comedy sensation *Women Like Us*. Image by Lyn McCarthy

Little Mandy Nolan with a crooked fringe. Says Nolan: "I'm the daughter of a single mum who learnt to cut her own fringe."



Q: To ask you something personal, I know you recently gave up alcohol – what was the reason behind that?

A: I stopped drinking on July 13th, 2022. I realised that it had become too easy to use alcohol as a way to manage the stresses in my life. I'd always had alcoholic friends that made me think I was okay, because I was never someone who, for instance, drank in the morning, but I began to realise that I couldn't go out to something and not have a drink. And sometimes the drink would turn into so many that I would just black out, and wake up at 3:00 am feeling very ashamed. Then I had an unrelated vertigo event, and had a few weeks without drinking, and it allowed me some space to look at what I'd been doing without making excuses. I realised I'd become more compulsive – I was doing and saying things I wasn't proud of. If alcoholic was midnight, I was five minutes to midnight. I have a lot of friends in the 12-Step Program, and I thought about it, but I wasn't sure I had time to do it, and so I just made the decision to stop – although if I ever did need to go for support, I would. It was a huge relief for me to stop, it meant that I didn't have to think about, or worry about when I was going to have my next drink. I was missing out on having authentic experiences with my family and friends, I'd got to the stage where I'd just get drunk and talk over the top of everyone and that's abrasive. Then I realised that alcohol was creating and amplifying the anxiety that I had been using alcohol to manage! After I'd given up for long enough, I found that's what allowed me to do all the different things in my life that I love to do.

Q: Was going into politics part of that decision?

A: In part, yes. The person you are when you're drinking is not who you really are. You became a weird, abrasive, obnoxious version of yourself. I mean, let's face it, you never think what a great person someone is when they're drunk. When you stop drinking you realise how much harm it does, and in a public role, accountability and integrity are important. I've done my bit supporting the wine industry. I'm surprised I didn't get a plaque. John has been very supportive of my decision. He's the perfect partner for me. We have shared values and he's the kind of man who is on his own mission of change. He does incredible work in health – currently focused on diabetes reversal programs working with Indigenous health leaders in Arnhem Land.

Q: You've had a lot of success with your partner in comedy crime, Ellen Briggs, with 'Women Like Us'.

How did that come about?

A: I've taught comedy for a long time, and Ellen was in a class about 15 years ago. She just wanted to write, but I told her she had to perform, and within her first year she was a huge success. On the few occasions she did an average gig she'd say, 'That's it, I'm throwing it in', and I'd talk her off the ledge. She was way too good to lose. We'd do fundraisers together where the audience was 90 percent women, and we were like rockstars, as opposed to performing in a comedy club where it's a mainly male audience, so we decided to go and make a show and find our own audiences. It's been 10 years now, and we've probably performed to over 70,000 people. We love doing our shows, but part of what makes us successful is in the promotion and marketing we do. We're both very competent operators, you have to make your own opportunities, book the shows, plan them and manage them.

Q: Your son Charlie has followed you into comedy – how did you feel about that?

A: You always worry for your kids, but I could hardly tell mine not to have creative careers. I've always

supported them in what they want to do, but I've told them that they have to back themselves, that it takes a lot of discipline, and they probably won't earn a lot of money. Your friends might be going off on overseas trips, and you can't afford it, but that's okay, because to be a creative you have to work for it, and if you're lucky you get a break in the traffic – or not, there's no guarantee of success. But it was a natural progression for Charlie. He's a great performer, an incredible critical thinker, into quantum physics and philosophy. All my kids are funny. Like me, comedy is how they see the world. I can find the weird bit in anything, and that's what Charlie does, and I'm very proud of him. I was down there visiting him a while before his Melbourne Comedy Festival show, and he told me this really shit name he was thinking of calling it, and I told him: "You should call it *Prodigy*, because it's like you were the super achiever, the one who was going to be amazing, and now you're working for a removalist company. So much hope. So little achievement." He said: "That's a bit harsh mum, but it's really funny." And *Prodigy* is what he called it.

His show became about this fake thing young people are brought up on with social media that means you only achieve something if it's in the world of social media.

Q: What about your other children?

A: Well, my stepdaughter is a design engineer, who is off to Madrid soon for two years with her fiancée. Zoe lives locally and is a dental care assistant. She was contemplating childcare, but she said she doesn't like the polyester shirts. Zoe is wickedly funny. My other daughter is at Melbourne doing furniture design at RMIT, and Ivy is in Year 9 at Shearwater, so we are a big and varied tribe. My kids are awesome people. They are bold, and kind, and insightful and brilliant to be with. I helped make good people. That's something. ■



"I have so many couches – but I rarely sit down!" A rare moment when Nolan is actually still. Image by Jeffrey Kieffer



Park at your Peril

Christian Morrow's attempts to manoeuvre his truckasaurus into a too-tight spot in his local town have, he admits, occasionally caused him to cut and run.

I've always liked to think I was living my life in the fast lane. That the most important thing was simply to put my foot down and meet my destiny. Not for me the winding country lanes and backroads where I might meet rusticated locals and spend time smelling the roses. You can't smell roadside roses from the fast lane unless they're crushed and turned into a rose shaped air freshener. And where even would I hang that air freshener? I have no rear-view mirror, so there was no looking back for me. Whatever was back 'there' has deservedly been left in my dust. But there's a toll to be paid for a life lived in the fast lane because no matter how far or fast we drive, we all reach a destination. Whether it's a shopping mall, a music festival or in my case, the cafe where I get my coffee, we must all park eventually. In my town parking is a high stakes game. Reputations, both within the family unit and the wider community, can stand or fall on our ability to parallel park...

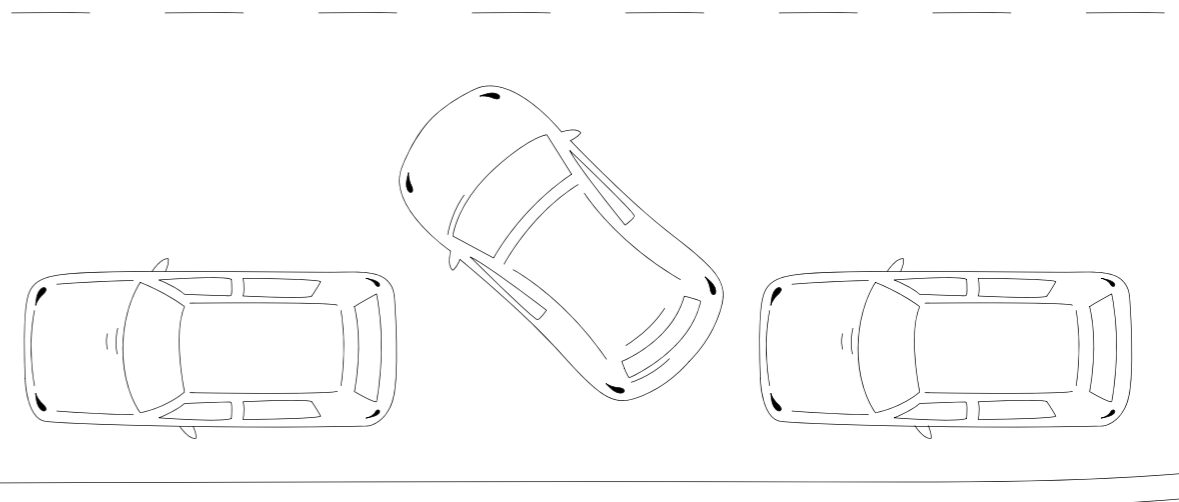
in public – that's right – with people watching. By rights, at this stage of the climate game, we should all be zooming around on roller skates holding up a sail to catch the occasional breeze that might take us to our destinations. But counter-intuitively, our cars keep getting bigger and our parking spaces fewer (and, I believe, smaller). No matter where any of us stand in the debate over vehicle size, fuel types and the optimal number of beverage holders needed to avoid a climate catastrophe, the one thing that unites us all, at the end of our journey, is the need to park that gas guzzler somewhere. So there I was, crawling along in my truckasaurus, searching relentlessly on a Saturday morning for that optimal parking space. Meanwhile on the pavement, hordes of uncaffeinated pedestrians, having somehow fluked a place to park, were queueing up for their morning latte fix in front of my favourite cafe, or perching on

sunny steps and kerbside tables nearby to sip the nectar of the gods. And so it was that just in front of my cafe of choice a parking spot became available. From 50 metres away I spotted the tell-tale flash of blinkers as a punter made their way back toward their vehicle deactivating their door lock from halfway down the block.

“
...the one thing that unites us all, at the end of our journey, is the need to park that gas guzzler somewhere.”

I decided to roll the dice and risk the wrath of the drivers behind me. I pulled over to the left and waited. But were they really leaving? Had they just come back to get their sunglasses? Or worse still, did they intend to sit in their car with the air-con roaring while conducting a lengthy conversation with a long lost relative as I waited in vain for them to hit the blinker and ease out into traffic. We've all been there. We've all suffered that loss. But the space cleared and the prevailing mood on the street shifted imperceptibly. Newspapers were lowered and gazes shifted from phone screens toward me, as those sitting outside

the cafe watched and prepared to pass judgement on my parking prowess. Flustered, I prayed for a unicorn parking event. The moment when two consecutive car spaces would become simultaneously available outside a shop with a large glass window. This rare occurrence would allow me the space to park nose forward like a rock star, using the reflection from the shop window to gauge distances perfectly. A Jim Morrison of a park. Instead, I had to contort my body, awkwardly looking back over the rear seat, risking strangulation courtesy of my inertia reel seat belt, to make the complex trigonometric calculations required to park successfully. Tragically, it quickly became apparent I was not going to get my car into that space on my current trajectory short of mounting the kerb and pushing the people sitting at the kerbside cafe out of the way with my rear bumper. I was left staring into the shameful abyss of the 'second bite' parking attempt. Because, with any second attempt comes an uptick of crowd interest. Judgemental side-eye becomes the order of the day as word goes out that someone is making a second attempt. People I'd once thought of as friends may even have appeared, phone cameras activated, to unhelpfully record my second attempt for posterity. Most humiliating of all, some do-gooder stepped in and began offering gratuitous parking advice, accompanied by indecipherable hand-signals. That is when I cut and ran. I'm ashamed to admit I drove three kilometres out of town to find a nose-to-kerb parking space and hitch-hiked back to get my latte... and snigger at other people trying to park outside my cafe. ■



Market Magic

Market days are an exploration of farm fresh produce, handcrafted fashion inspired by local lifestyles, an expedition through a trove of vintage treasures, and a chance to indulge in delicious local street eats.

Weekly Markets

Every Tuesday

New Brighton Farmers Market
Lismore Organic Market

Every Wednesday

Newrybar Hall
Nimbin Farmers Market
Murwillumbah Farmers Market

Every Thursday

Byron Farmers Market
Lismore Produce Market

Every Friday

Mullumbimby Farmers Market

Every Saturday

Bangalow Farmers Market
Lismore Farmers Market
Uki Market
Byron Twilight Market (October to April)

Every Sunday

Ballina Farmers Market

Monthly Markets

1st Saturday

Brunswick Heads Market

1st Sunday

Byron Bay Community Market
Pottsville Beach Market

2nd Saturday

Kingscliff Lions Beachside Market
Maclean Community Market

2nd Sunday

Lennox Community Market
The Channon Craft Market

3rd Saturday

Mullumbimby Community Market
Murwillumbah Makers & Finders Market
Kingscliff Salt Village Market

3rd Sunday

Pottsville Beach Market
Uki Buttery Bazaar

4th Saturday

Kingscliff Lions Beachside Market
Rotary Kyogle Bazaar
Evans Head Riverside Market

4th Sunday

Bangalow Market
Yamba River Market
Nimbin Market

5th Saturday of the Month

Bangalow Flea Market

5th Sunday

Lennox Community Market
Nimbin Market

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