

Top of the range

The high life in a haven for nature

It's always a privilege to step inside the houses featured in this column. While they may be brief visits, they nonetheless give me a sense of what it's like to inhabit the space and to get a feel for how the architecture fits with the owner's personality and lifestyle. A treat came recently then when I was able to spend more than an hour in one of these architectural gems.

I stayed overnight in a two-bedroom apartment on the edge of the world. To be exact, this apartment is about 800m above sea level on an escarpment in Lamington National Park. It has views over the Numinbah and Coomera valleys that are so spectacular it borders on the disconcerting. The owners weren't around and, being a place devoid of the sounds of civilisation, it felt as if no one else was either (although 10 other apartments were occupied).

The apartment is in one of the four new Sky Lodges at Binna Burra, the Gold Coast

hinterland eco-resort originally established in 1933. Back then, founders Arthur Groom and Romeo Lahey, who bought the last freehold title on the boundary of Lamington National Park, had the idea to set up a Christmas camp to see if people were interested in visiting the 35ha of hinterland paradise.

They were joined by 70 like-minded souls and so decided to build a lodge, which remains on the site as do some of the original cabins.

But things are changing at Binna Burra thanks to a master plan developed by shareholders in collaboration with resort staff and community members. Phase one is the Sky Lodges, opened in February this year and designed by Jono Medhurst of DM2 Architecture.

"After a few design iterations, we finally agreed on the four separate buildings, each with three levels, two of which are visible from the entry," Jono says. "They are located on the rim of the ridge to allow for a feeling



I couldn't ignore that niggling feeling you get when you're on top of the world: what exactly is holding me up?





of hanging off the edge and to get the units at treetop heights.”

And, of course, there’s the view. Top spots for appreciating the terrestrial sea of undulating hills have to be in the main bedroom, where you wake up to a picture window the size of a small cinema screen, and in the bathtub. It’s all very mesmerising ... and intriguing.

I was beyond relaxed as I sat in front of the gas fire in the living area, looking out to a valley stretching as far as the eye can see. Yet I couldn’t ignore that niggling feeling you get when you’re on top of the world: what exactly is holding me up?

Pardon me as I get engineering geeky, but some of the construction details are rather interesting. Each building has eight rock anchors and 25cm of concrete in the footings. The anchoring system includes steel rods fed into 9m-deep holes drilled into the basalt. Soil to a depth of three metres was excavated for each building’s footings and, being the rim of a volcano, there were hefty boulders to move.

“We decided during excavation that we would reuse the boulders in construction,” Jono says. “They form the landscaping features that separate the buildings from the car parking.”

Trees removed for construction were also used in the building. A variety of fire-retardant timbers was sent to nearby Canungra to be milled and reused as screening on the exterior.

It’s obvious at Binna Burra that nature has the final say at board meetings, but in order for us to enjoy this special spot, a little building intervention is required. I’m reminded of that when I look to the view and wonder how the



with
**FRANCENE
RIDLEY**



power poles and kilometres of cable stretching out over the valley were originally installed.

ARCHITECT • Jono Medhurst, DM2 Architecture, ph: 3012 9522

BUILDER • Rohrig, ph: 3868 3880

CONGRATULATIONS to Owen and Vokes who won Brisbane regional House of the Year at the Australian Institute of Architects awards last Friday night for Four-Room Cottage, which was featured in Brisbane News issue 876.

VIEW FINDERS ... nature surrounds Binna Burra’s Sky Lodges. **PHOTOGRAPHS** • Richard Waugh