

# HIDDEN GEM

Underpinned by a gigantic steel skeleton, Australia's newest 'super luxury' resort by Circa Architecture embodies the essence of its pristine natural surrounds.

Words **Rob Gillam** Photography **Paul Bradshaw; George Apostolidis; Chris Wilson**

**ARCHITECT** Circa Morris-Nunn Walker  
**PROJECT** Saffire Resort  
**LOCATION** Freycinet Peninsula, Tasmania





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Appearing like bare steel trees, hot-dipped galvanised CHS tubing forms vertical support columns and double as roof downpipes

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**P**erched on the northern verge of Great Oyster Bay on Tasmania's Freycinet Peninsula, Saffire Resort offers a degree of hospitality and accommodation that is rare even in the luxury hotel class.

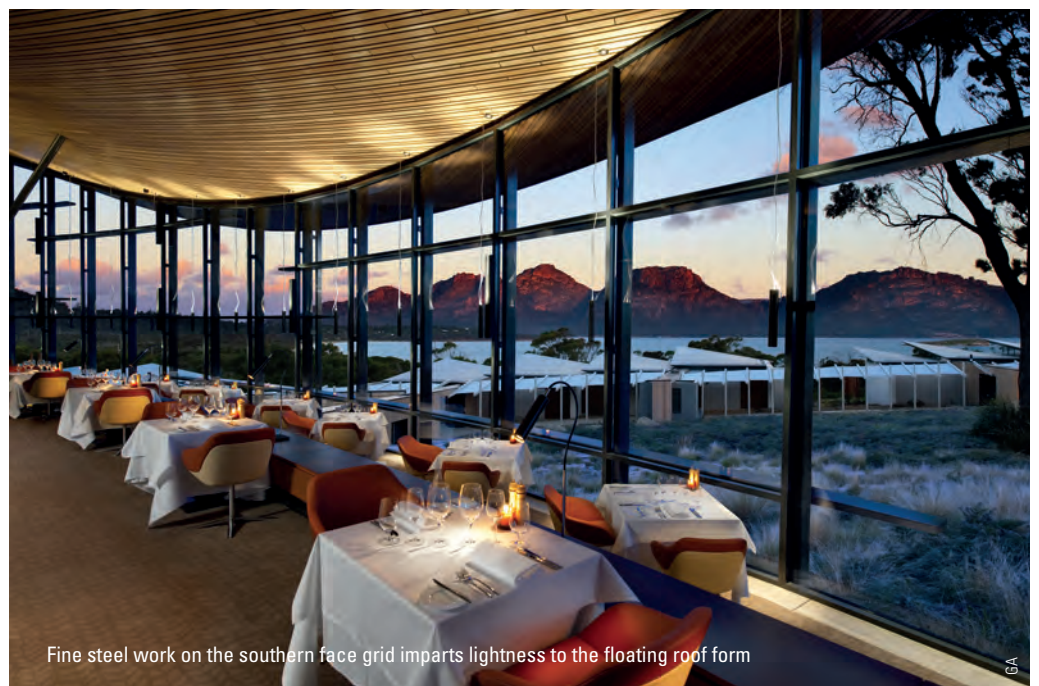
Saffire Resort owners The Federal Group sought an architectural statement for the resort that was striking, yet sympathetic with the site and reflective of its wider environment.

The brief posed a unique challenge for Circa Architecture, according to project architect and co-director Peter Walker. "The client wanted an iconic form, but one that was organic in that it was to be 'grounded' to the site."

The architects' interpretation of that key demand is apparent in the way that various natural themes are realised throughout the project. It imagined for example the guest suites, which are situated closer to the shoreline below the main reception building, as forms swept up on the tide or moored to the beach.

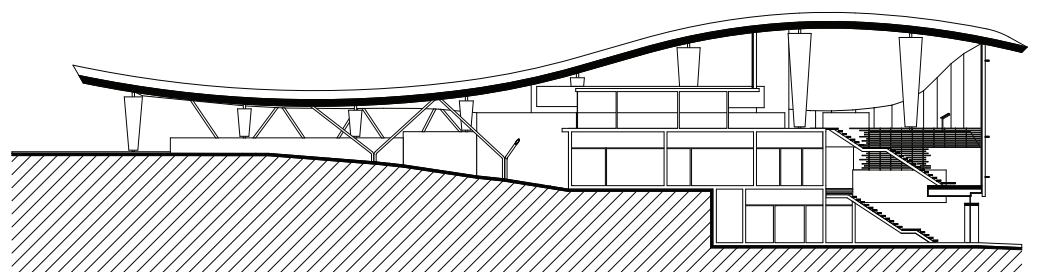
The reception building's design also harnesses environmental themes, reflecting the form of waves, dunes and sea creatures. A stingray? "Yes, it's not actually meant to be any particular object or creature per se," says Walker "but there are similarities to that creature's form."

"A lot of people compare Saffire's rooflines to a stingray and I'm pretty comfortable with that but it is not deliberate," he adds. "After the form was conceived we learned there are number of stingray varieties in the bay so it is a connection to the site but an unintentional one."



Fine steel work on the southern face grid imparts lightness to the floating roof form

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SECTION





Fabric-covered walkways are supported by RHS posts and frames

"I like to think the form is open to interpretation in the same way that the Sydney Opera House evokes many things such as sails or shells, yet specifically it is neither."

The wavy peak of the reception building's north-facing roof draws on another of the area's defining features – The Hazards mountain chain – its line mimicking that of the majestic granite outcrops meeting the sky.

The Hazards' magnificence is impossible to ignore. Approaching by road, little glimpses are caught as the terrain dips and weaves. This striptease continues on entry to Saffire's grounds – as it turns out, a quite deliberate architectural device.

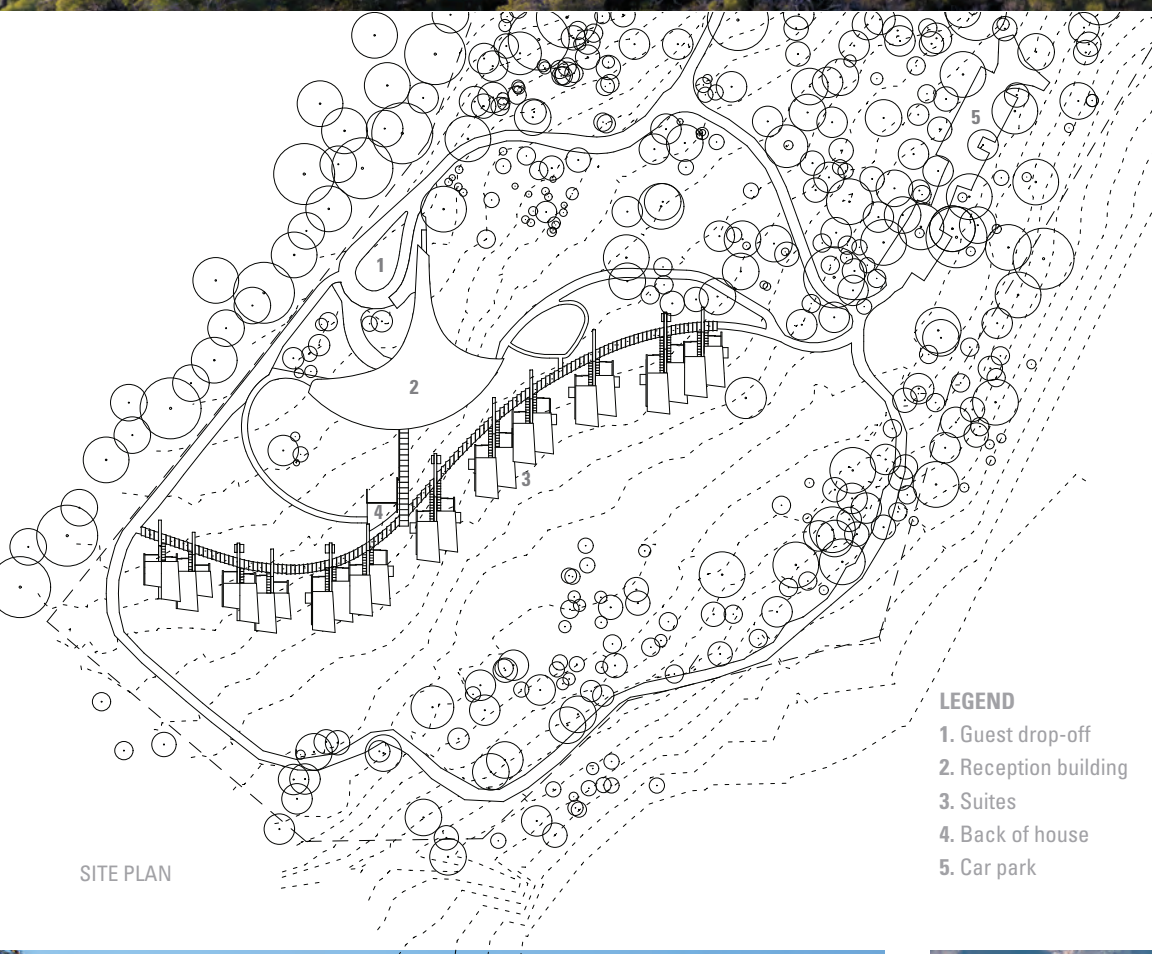
One of Circa Architecture's main ideas hinged on entry. On arrival, the reception building blocks a full view of The Hazards, creating anticipation. A long ramp leads to an internal walkway that further connects the building to the Bay by being literally surrounded in water. Here, gnarled knuckles of the 400 million year-old outcrops and expansive waters are fully revealed.

Saffire's remote location – roughly half way between Hobart and Launceston – required particularly considered material selection. "We faced cost issues in terms of having to transport materials to site and we also had a very tight construction timeframe," Walker explains. "These factors essentially dictated the use of materials that could be fashioned off-site and easily transported. Steel was an obvious solution because you can prefabricate it to exacting specifications and erect it speedily." ➔





The Resort embodies the essence of its pristine natural surrounds, evoking the form of waves, dunes and sea creatures



SITE PLAN

#### LEGEND

1. Guest drop-off
2. Reception building
3. Suites
4. Back of house
5. Car park

## PANEL SAYS

On the site of a former caravan park, an architectural wonder has emerged in Tasmania. Circa Morris-Nunn Walker Architects has taken what was a degraded site and transformed it into a very special place, where the building is striking yet still subservient to the natural beauty of the landscape. A careful layering of spaces and architectural features helps to draw the visitor into and through the building, towards the view. In the reception hall, a reflection pond helps blur the boundaries between inside and out, and fine steelwork imparts an incredible lightness to the floating roof form, conjuring up images of stingrays pulsing fluidly through the bay. Sitting alongside a pristine national park in one of Tasmania's best-loved tourist spots, this project is sure to attract many new admirers to the area.



LEFT: Entryway under construction

BELOW: Suites are framed using LYSAGHT® structural products



Steel was a great supporter of the project. “The steel framing we used, which was typically a bent circular hollow section, went up amazingly quickly,” says Walker. “Essentially, we just bolted it together. Our steel fabricators Crisp Bros used a shop-drawing process that meant we could model the entire roof shape. That meant we could get the roof on quickly and then fill in all the bits in between.

“The modelling also meant we could pre-order our glass based on the steel drawings and have it arrive simultaneously,” Walker continues. “We didn’t have to wait for the steel framing to go up before we could measure for the glass, and then wait for it to arrive. If we had chosen material other than steel, construction would have taken much longer, so that was a crucial advantage for us.”

The structure, as Walker explains, hangs on a row of vertical steel columns, which form the building’s central spine. Spanning horizontally over each of these are grid-forming curved steel beams, between which run laminated timber beams and battens. These consist of two standard shapes which when inversed and repeated create convex or concave planes. These curves enhance interior acoustics by diffusing acoustic reflections. Fabric and timber-battened interior roof cladding also help reduce pronounced echoes that might result from a multitude of hard surfaces such as glass.

Hot-dip galvanised CHS tubing forms additional vertical support columns, their multi-pronged ends appearing like the branches of bare steel trees. In many external instances – such as at the reception building entrance – these double as hollow roof downpipes.

A horizontal curved steel CHS ring beam encircles the north side of the building, forming a lip for the roof – the exterior of which is finished in synthetic membrane.

In contrast, the southern face is an engineered facade system in which fabricated horizontal fins tie in with RHS vertical columns to create a structural grid that works with the glazing system. The structural grid was specifically designed to accommodate the glass panels, the size of which was constrained by the necessary use of anti-reflectivity film.

“One of the problems we faced was glass’ high night-time reflectivity,” Walker says. “To achieve an unobtrusive reflection in this sensitive environment we had to apply non-reflective films to the glass which – along with transportation constraints – limited pane size.”

The guest journey continues via a series of fabric-covered walkways that are propped up by RHS posts and frames, moving from the monument of the reception building to the personal space of the its 20 luxury accommodation suites, which are framed using LYSAGHT® structural products.

A steel C section runs entirely around the edge, and a series of steel purlins run between. A top corner lifts to provide a kick for the roof.

In sympathy with the natural landscape, cladding and flashing made from flat sheet COLORBOND® steel in the colours Surfmist®, Dune®, Woodland Grey® and Windspray® are used liberally throughout the project.

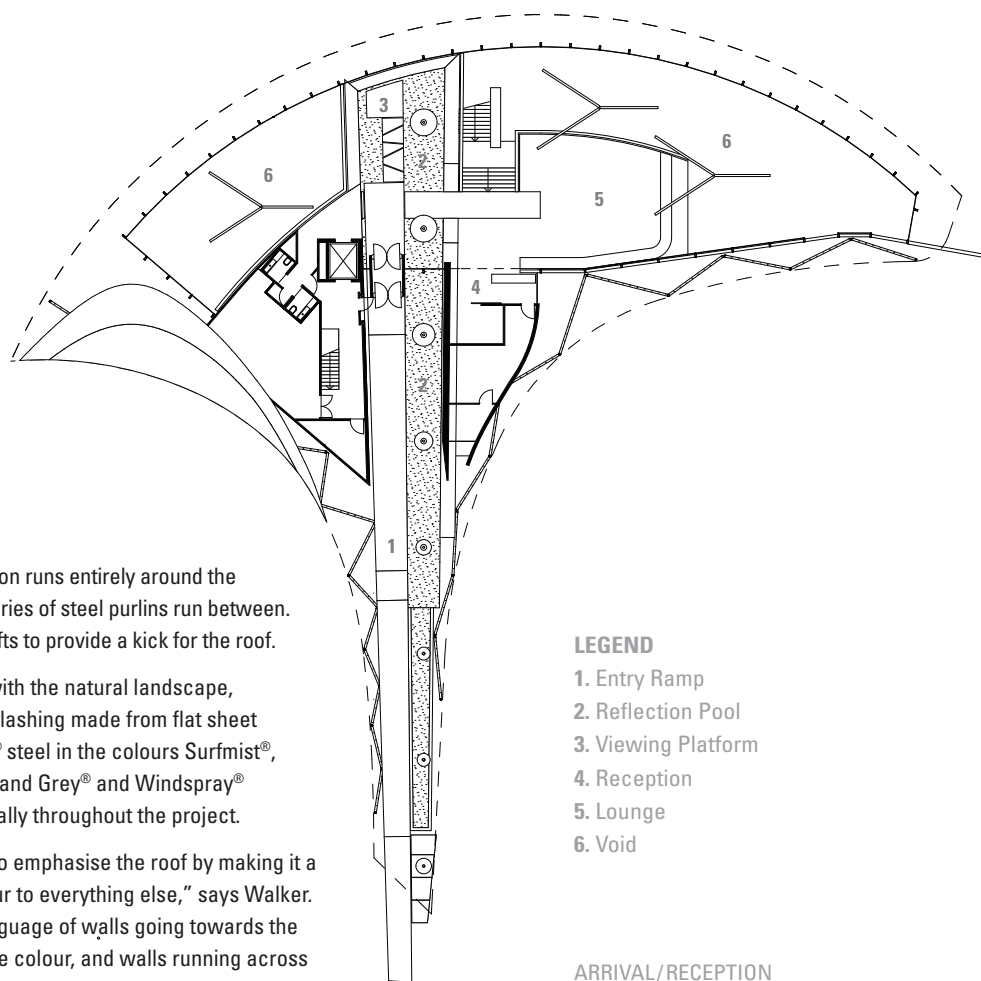
“We wanted to emphasise the roof by making it a different colour to everything else,” says Walker. “There’s a language of walls going towards the view being one colour, and walls running across the view being another. It’s uncanny how closely some of the colours match to the area. I’ve been up here on an overcast day when the water in the bay is identical to the blue-grey roof colour.”

Saffire’s uniquely luxurious experience comes with a rarified price tag which – while eye-watering for most mere mortals – is mitigated by including virtually everything imaginable. This is a deliberate strategy, says Saffire general manager, Matt Casey. “Most activities, our day spa, meals and beverages come at no extra charge. Guests pay up-front and that’s it.

“To us, relationship building is paramount,” Casey adds. “We don’t want our guests having any unwelcome surprises on their bill. Our success hinges on us knowing our guests and delivering a highly personalised experience. We learn their interests and passions and this helps us tailor an experience that we hope will be a lifelong memory.”

Interested guests are also informed about the area’s rich history. “When we talk about engaging our guests it is not only in reference to the resort but also with the history of this place,” says Casey. “Ten thousand years before European settlement, Tasmanian Aboriginals retreated here from the West Coast in winter, so in a sense it has always been a ‘holiday’ destination.

“Tasmania is steeped in history, much of which is dark, but we try to use it in a positive fashion,” he continues. “Many visitors are unaware of our convict past and the European/Aboriginal conflict. Also, sealing and whaling stations were established in this area very early on, and many visitors are



- LEGEND**
- 1. Entry Ramp
  - 2. Reflection Pool
  - 3. Viewing Platform
  - 4. Reception
  - 5. Lounge
  - 6. Void

ARRIVAL/RECEPTION

surprised to learn that Wineglass Bay was named as such not only for its shape but that it was often full of blood.” Indeed, with a replica colonial ship anchored in the Bay, it’s easy to imagine stepping back through the ages.

Saffire Resort is Circa Architecture’s most recent and most impressive addition to a list of hotel projects, including the award-winning Henry Jones Art Hotel on Hobart’s waterfront and Islington Hotel – both of which were created under its former name of Morris Nunn and Associates. In this latest offering, Circa has successfully designed a building that is bold and modern without being crass or misplaced. Its grace and natural form are a credit to the architects.

For his part, Walker says that this has been a satisfying project for him and his colleagues. “We try to look for unique solutions for our projects and I think we have achieved that,” he asserts. “I’m really happy with the way the building metamorphosises – depending on which way you approach it – and the way it takes natural cues from the area. It has some of the eclecticism of shack culture, but it’s not paying homage to that and it’s not trying to be an international-style resort. It fits somewhere in the middle.”

And his favourite feature? “It still has to be the entry sequence,” Walker says. “That is something we conceived on our very first site visit and was always held onto. You enter on a high and leave feeling the same way. I think it works really well.” SP

**PROJECT** Saffire Resort **CLIENT** The Federal Group **ARCHITECT** Circa Morris-Nunn Walker **PROJECT TEAM** Peter Walker, Poppy Taylor, Jarrod Hughes, Robert Morris-Nunn, Ganche Chua, Judi Davis, Chris Roberts, Gary Fleming, Tina Curtis, Kylee Scott **INTERIOR DESIGN** Chada **STRUCTURAL & CIVIL ENGINEER** Gandy & Roberts **BUILDER** Fairbrother Construction **STEEL FABRICATOR** Crisp Brothers **SHOP DRAWING CONTRACTOR** Crisp Brothers **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS** Inspiring Place **PRINCIPAL STEEL COMPONENTS** LYSAGHT® structural steel including CHS tubing, C section, RHS post and frame; roofing and flashing made from flat sheet COLORBOND® steel in the colours Surfmist®, Dune®, Woodland Grey® and Windspray® **PROJECT TIMEFRAME** September 2007-May 2010 **BUILDING SIZE** 3640m<sup>2</sup> **TOTAL PROJECT COST** \$32 million