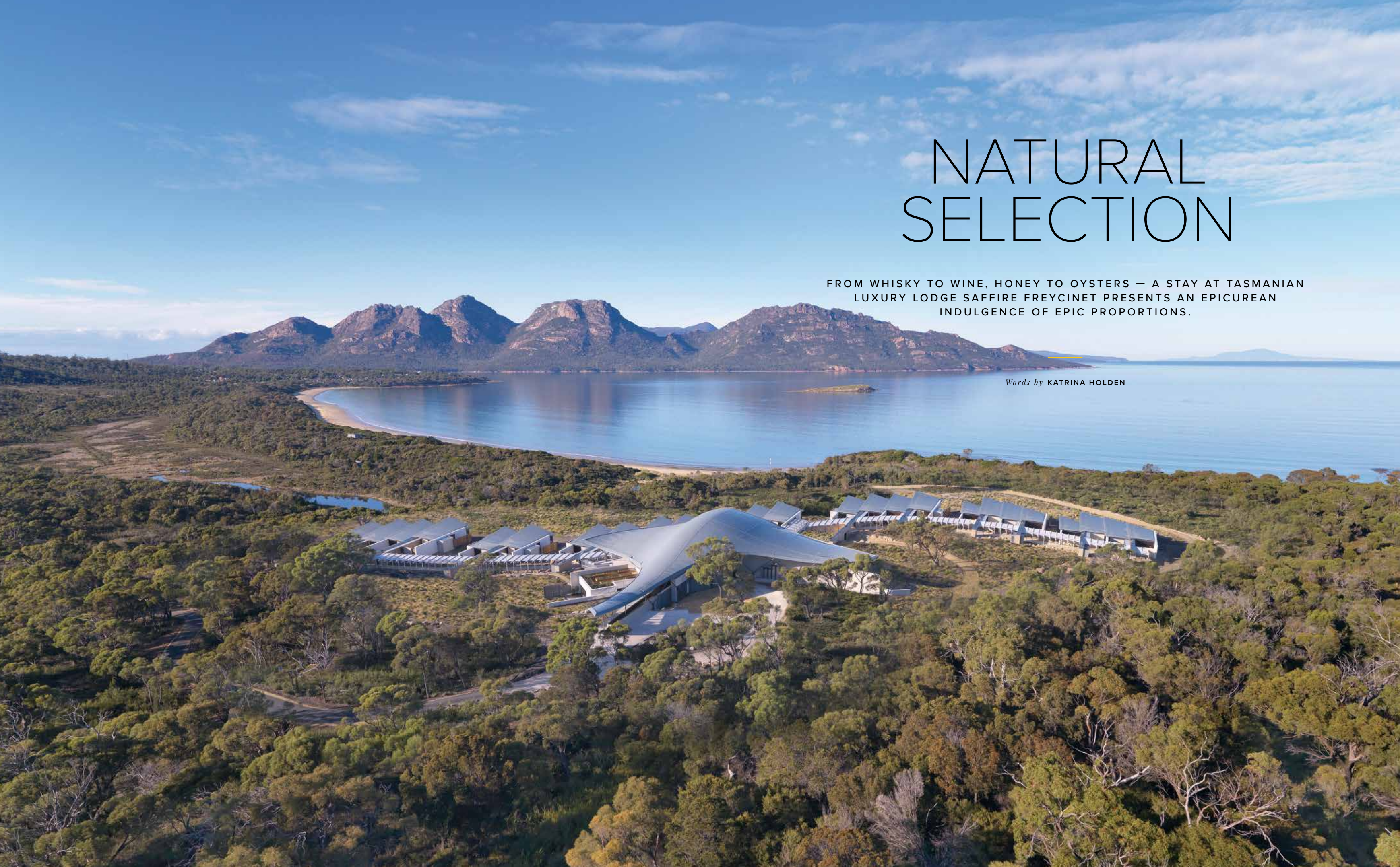


NATURAL SELECTION

FROM WHISKY TO WINE, HONEY TO OYSTERS — A STAY AT TASMANIAN
LUXURY LODGE SAFFIRE FREYCINET PRESENTS AN EPICUREAN
INDULGENCE OF EPIC PROPORTIONS.

Words by KATRINA HOLDEN



A symphony of squawking seagulls rings out loudly in the pure air. The gulls are gathered en masse on ivory-coloured rocks here at Waubs Harbour in Bicheno, a small coastal fishing and former whaling village in northeast Tasmania. I’m visiting Waubs Harbour Distillery, producers of artisanal, single malt whisky, all created on the site of a former oyster hatchery. At the entrance to its new tasting room, perched on the shore’s edge, sits an old timber boat and white-painted oak barrels that contrast vividly against the cobalt blue water. The rustic exterior gives way to contemporary interiors, with polished concrete floors, a Chesterfield leather couch, louvre windows that allow the flow of Tassie coastal breezes, and industrial pendant lights. I’m sampling the Waubs Harbour Distillery Tour as part of a new culinary experience for guests staying at nearby luxury lodge, Saffire Freycinet. We peruse the processing facility, tasting barley grain sourced from a local supplier (and distilling 600kg of grain per day); sip whisky in various guises during its production process; learn how this sustainably minded distiller uses sea water to naturally cool its pipes; and have our first tastings with the Co-Founder of this family-run business, Rob Polmear. Our guide is Thomas Etges, Cellar Door Manager, who invites us to sample even more specialities from the range as our Saffire hosts prepare platters of gourmet cheese, charcuterie and fruit for us to graze on.

AUTHENTIC, GOURMET EXPERIENCES

Saffire Freycinet first opened in 2010 and has since gained a reputation as one of Australia’s most celebrated properties. A member of Luxury Lodges of Australia, the bold, architectural building, designed by Tasmania’s Morris-Nunn Architects to resemble a stingray from above, has an enviable position — not only due to its location in the pristine wilderness of Freycinet National Park, but for being nestled in a gourmand’s paradise, with an abundance of natural produce, aquaculture and agriculture on its doorstep. The oysters found here at Coles Bay are considered some of Australia’s finest.

As a guest during an all-inclusive stay at Saffire, you can join a guided experience at the Freycinet Marine Oyster Farm in what has provided, arguably, one of the country’s most iconic culinary images: people standing, thigh-deep in the waters of a working oyster farm, framed by background views of the granite Hazard Mountains. During this experience, you’ll learn about marine ecology, before tasting freshly shucked oysters straight from the lease and eating from a tablecloth-covered bench in the water — while sipping on Tasmanian sparkling wine, of course.

If your taste persuasions lean more towards the sweet side, the Beekeeping Experience might be the one for you. Fully

kitted out in an apiarist suit, join Rob ‘The Bee Man’ Barker to extract honeycomb from the onsite Saffire apiary and its hives, and learn about the natural process of honey making and the importance of bees in our overall ecosystem.

One morning, I head out with a member of the Saffire team for a ‘Perfectly Paired Wine Adventure’. I am driven to Craigie Knowe Vineyard, the oldest vineyard on Tasmania’s East Coast, where I meet with Alex Travers, the affable and down-to-earth Operations Manager who, together with his father Glenn Travers, runs the wine business.

The family’s five dogs lurk about taking shade beneath the cover of vines, and trotting along with us when the energy strikes, as we tour the vineyards and admire the original settlers stone house, built in the 1840s and now the Travers family home. I don’t know how he does it, but Alex is talking and cracking jokes with deadpan Australian humour, all while walking backwards so he can face me — and juggling in his hand a glass of White Label sparkling rosé.

Back at the cellar door, a sit-down tasting of their range — from zesty, crisp, dry riesling through to their best-selling wine, the Estate Label pinot noir — is paired with delicate pastry morsels prepared by Alex’s pâtissier and Le Cordon Bleu-trained partner, Xinruo Wang, who has set up Freycinet Coast Patisserie at the winery. Seriously, if you’re only mildly enthused about wine, come for Xinruo’s incredible pastries.

On the return to Saffire, I ask my driver to stop in at Freycinet Vineyards, which we pass on the road, surrounded by idyllic green hills. I’m in luck as Co-Winemaker, Claudio Radenti, is in attendance and guides me through a tasting of their exceptional wines. The soft-spoken and humble Claudio, who runs the business with his wife and fellow Winemaker, Lindy Bull, is making self-deprecating remarks along the way — but the bling on the bottles and trophies in the rustic cellar door hint at the quality and reputation of this well-respected wine estate. I leave purchasing a bottle of the outstanding Radenti Sparkling R3, aged for seven years on yeast lees and winner of the Best Tasmanian Sparkling (multi-vintage) in the 2023 Tasmanian Wine Show — and a bottle of their estate-made, extra virgin olive oil.

OPENING PAGE Saffire Freycinet overlooking the Hazards Mountains.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP Guests arrive to a viewing platform where they can immediately connect with their surrounds.

BOTTOM, L-R: Cuisine at Palate Restaurant; the oyster experience at Freycinet Marine Farm.





“It’s a luxury resort, we have incredible produce, but I do like to keep the kitchen as sustainable and waste-free as I possibly can,” says Executive Chef, Paddy Prenter.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF SAFFIRE FREYCINET.

In the late afternoon at Saffire, I join fellow guests in The Lounge at the Cocktail Mixology Class led by Bartender, Gui. Sharing his passion for the history and craft behind cocktails, we watch as Gui prepares three concoctions — a Pisco Sour, a Bramble and an Adriatic — all made with local Tasmanian base spirits. It’s here in The Lounge where pre-dinner drinks and canapés are served. It’s one of those tried and tested luxury lodge experiences that works — bringing together guests from all over the world to mingle over drinks. I chat with people from Texas, Perth and Melbourne, while nibbling on a pork croquette with shaved truffle and truffle mayo, and a scallop crudité on an edible wasabi leaf with caviar.

ON THE PLATE AND IN THE GLASS

Saffire Executive Chef, Paddy Prenter, has been working at the lodge since 2018, stepping into the head culinary role in 2022. The Hobart-born chef leads a team of about 15 in the kitchen at Palate Restaurant.

Paddy oversees about 17 different menus — “so there’s a lot of food that leaves the kitchen,” he says, modestly.

“I try and keep my à la carte menu as seasonal as possible; we might make a few modifications and the dishes are always evolving, but I tend to change things around with the seasons. On any given night, we might have 11–14 different degustation menus leaving the kitchen in one service, and that’s just with all the changes due to dietary requirements and preferences. Our ethos in the kitchen: is we don’t want the guests eating the same thing twice during their stay,” he says.

“It’s a luxury resort, we have incredible produce, but I do like to keep the kitchen as sustainable and waste-free as I possibly can,” says Paddy.

Honey is sourced onsite from the apiary; the team will also forage down at the beach for sea herbs. Paddy sources his pork from Long Name Farm at Little Swanport, and lamb from Wild Clover near Launceston. The seafood comes from vendor, Ashmores, who source sustainable and ethically caught seafood from all over Australia.

“I’ve requested that all my fish come from Tasmanian waters. We’re really lucky with our oysters, which we source from the Freycinet Marine Farm, and there’s incredible oysters too from Melshell, just over the river. I can order that day-by-day, as we’re so close, which is fantastic. Where possible, I try and keep it as Tasmanian as I can. The foundation of my menus is Tasmanian-sourced,” says Paddy.

The impressive wine list is naturally skewed heavily towards Tasmanian wines. There are some 50 premium wines available by the glass, all-inclusive to guests, while a further detailed wine list features 2000 additional-cost options from the cellar collection.

IN THE ROOM

I’m staying in Signature Suite number 10, named ‘Alpha Centauri’, which has an outdoor deck and lounge area overlooking Great Oyster Bay. Scrawled in the pebbles of the Zen-style garden in the entry courtyard is a welcome greeting. From either the enlarged living room or the oversized bathtub, I am in full seclusion, with the feeling of being embedded in the vegetation — and yet, still able to gaze out at the mountains and jaw-dropping views. Although there are 20 other suites onsite, I cannot see them when I’m within my own lodgings — creating the illusion I have this sanctuary all to myself.

In the mini bar, there are more local, Tasmanian goodies to tempt, including Coal River Farm handcrafted chocolates, Nutsnmore Cajun cashews from the Huon Valley, and McHenry Distillery gin and vodka from Port Arthur.

Raising the blinds with the flick of a button, I sit and munch on house-made biscuits and an organic loose leaf tea blend, reclining on designer furniture when I notice, through the window, a wallaby and her joey moving calmly through the shrub. Fine cuisine, design, wine, wilderness and now, wildlife ... it doesn’t get much better than this.



JOURNEY NOTES

Saffire Freycinet is a 2.5-hour drive from Hobart airport. Saffire offers a luxury chauffeured limousine service for guests for additional fees. Private helicopter charters can also be arranged from Hobart airport, taking 45-minutes. Rates at the all-inclusive luxury lodge start from AUD\$2500 per night and includes all meals, beverages from a generous inclusive list, an in-suite mini-bar replenished daily, a \$100-\$200 property credit, complimentary Saffire experiences and activities, and use of Saffire’s Hobart airport lounge.

saffire-freycinet.com.au

OPPOSITE PAGE
TOP LEFT Waubs Harbour Distillery Tour. Credit: Katrina Holden.
OPPOSITE PAGE
BOTTOM RIGHT Gui leads a cocktail masterclass. Credit: Katrina Holden.

TOP RIGHT Rob, ‘The Bee Man’ Barker at the Saffire apiary.
BOTTOM LEFT A signature suite at Saffire Freycinet.