

Estate of play

Enjoy a slice of landed gentry life amid the rolling hills of the Gold Coast hinterland.

By DENISE CULLEN

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It's mid-afternoon when I follow the long winding driveway down to Hazelwood Estate, a luxury new retreat complete with polo field and Wagyu farm in the Scenic Rim. The hillside ahead, lush and green from recent rains, is dotted with small white cabins. Fragrant magnolia trees frame the entrance to the main lodge, which resembles a (very fancy) farmhouse, with vaulted ceilings and oversized barn doors. Here, welcome drinks are poured, and custom lighting casts a gentle glow.

I'm taken by golf cart down to my digs for the night, a Luxury Pavilion overlooking a billabong. "I don't know if you'll need it, but your fireplace is all ready to go," says Gina Barrell, nodding to the wood-filled basket beside the front door. We're on the cusp of summer, so I scoff, but later learn that temperatures here on the Beechmont Plateau are 5C-8C cooler than those on the Gold Coast, 40 minutes' drive away. I'm grateful that all I have to do is light a match.

From the outside, my pavilion is unassuming and free of ostentation. But step inside and the generously proportioned space practically grins at the trick it's played. You're in the lap of luxury here, it whispers, but we don't need to shout about it. One long wall is of floor-to-ceiling glass, offering views out over rolling hills. Smoked oak floorboards anchor the open-plan living and sleeping space, with a lounge, kitchenette, study nook and cloud-soft king bed. Wicker chairs and a cowhide rug add rustic touches, and there's a furnished deck outside.

Set on 30ha, Hazelwood Estate opened in September. It's so new it doesn't show up on Google Earth, with the 2016 capture revealing only the fertile pastures of the former dairy farm, stands of trees and a couple of spring-fed dams. Brisbane-based owners Andrew and Claire Northcott bought the property seven years ago, first building a private residence, guest house, stables, staff accommodation, access roads and a polo field, so Andrew, founder and chief executive of software firm Roubler, could pursue the sport of kings.

Three years later, their vision expanded to incorporate guest accommodation and facilities for those who share the couple's love of polo, or who are simply seeking a slice of landed gentry life. Hazelwood Estate is now comprised of 17 cabins, three pavilions, the main lodge called The Club House, a day spa and the Tack Room, a function space filled with photographs and other polo memorabilia. Members of the Hazelwood Polo Club spell horses, train and play social "chukkas" and tournaments during the May to September polo season. The spa is cosy, with two treatment rooms opening into a larger space for couples.

I drop my bags and return to the Club House, which contains in-house restaurant The Paddock, for a scheduled market garden tour. Chef-in-residence Cameron Matthews leads us down to the raised garden beds set in a semi-circle. They are full of herbs, salad leaves and vegetables, plus edible flowers such as nasturtiums. Matthews pulls up the tangled roots of some "kama sutra carrots", which reliably cause mirth in the kitchen, instructs us on how to make orange blossom water, and points out the dill that accompanies the spanner crab on the entree menu, but which guests often scrape to the side. "If you don't eat the greens, you don't get dessert," he warns.

This is Matthews' last tour, because he's passing the ladle on to new executive chef Simon Furley, formerly of hatted Homage restaurant, Spicers Hidden Vale. Furley will continue to showcase Scenic Rim produce in the 40-seater restaurant, supporting local farmers and suppliers, and will strengthen its sustainability credentials by minimising food waste through smoking, curing and fermentation. A composting system is also planned.

After the tour, there's time for a hot soak before dinner, so I head back to my room and fill the freestanding tub. The bathroom is a calming space rendered in cream and white, with an Italian-imported stone-look porcelain floor, and Australian-made botanically derived Salus body products. I'm lolling amid bubbles, looking out on a muted sunset and sipping a herbal cuppa by The Tea Collective, when a face

appears at the glass. It's one of the resident wallabies. I raise my cup to him, and he beats a hasty retreat.

Up at the restaurant, I'm so relaxed that all decision-making abilities have deserted me so we opt for the Paddock Table selection. Out rolls a selection of entrees, pasta and main dishes, including wagyu bresaola and dill-dusted spanner crab. (Yes, I did eat my greens.) However, the most delicious surprise is a dish featuring watermelon, thrice frozen and defrosted, then pan-fried and roasted, lending a texture similar to beef tartare. The showstopper dessert is a Bombe Alaska, which resembles a quivering echidna. Sliced open, it yields raspberry sorbet and macadamia nut ice-cream.

There are ample ways to work it off the next day. Hazelwood Estate is hunkered on the edge of World Heritage-listed Lamington National Park, home to more than 320km of walking tracks, spectacular waterfalls and melodious songbirds, including Albert's lyrebird. Guided horse rides overlooking the gorge or ocean are available through nearby Scenic Rim Equine Group. More activities and facilities are coming up. Construction is due to start on a guest pool, for instance, while wagyu tasting experiences are in the works. From early next year, guests will be able to take a tour with the resident beekeeper, light a bee smoker, and sample honey tonic. For now, raw honey from Hazelwood Estate's beehives is on sale in the shop, for those who wish to take a little of this sweetness home.

In the know

Hazelwood Estate is at 422 Binna Burra Rd, Beechmont. King cabins are \$649 a night; Luxury Pavilions from \$749 a night. Both room rates include breakfast and a three-course a la carte dinner for two. In-house guests can upgrade to the Paddock Table chef's selection for a nominal additional charge. The Scenic Rim is the only Australian region listed in Lonely Planet's top 10 travel destinations for 2022.

hazelwoodestate.com.au

visitscenicrim.com.au

Denise Cullen was a guest of Hazelwood Estate and Tourism and Events Queensland.

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