

■ New & Noteworthy

Further Down Under

Once considered a beautiful Australian backwater, Tasmania is turning heads with an extravagant new eco-lodge and provocative museum. **BY BECCA HENSLEY**

To residents of bustling Sydney and artsy Melbourne, the southern island state of Tasmania is Australia's provincial cousin. Its residents, so-called Taswegians, are often characterized as country bumpkins who live 150 miles off the coast. It's easy to see why the natural landscape has defined the area: Tasmania is a striking mix of Tahitian-like beaches, verdant rain forests, and pointy peaks, much of it protected within 19 national parks. In the bushland, furry wallabies hop, fat wombats waddle, and Tasmanian devils howl.

Recently, however, a touch of worldly elegance has landed on these shores. High-end lodges set in isolated areas have long been considered a specialty of the Kiwis to the north. But over the past few years, choice areas of Australia and now Tasmania have started to get into the game. The 20-suite **Saffire Freycinet** (from \$1,250/night; saffire-freycinet.com), a deluxe resort that opened in June on Tasmania's sunny east coast, has brought clean-lined modernity, but not so much so as to interfere with nature. The main building—housing

a full-service spa and a 40-seat restaurant emphasizing fresh degustation menus—sports a swooping manta ray-like roof, visually connecting it to the pristine waters of Great Oyster Bay just below. Wading for shellfish is one possible activity for guests. The rooms are decorated to emphasize the view of the Hazard Range in the distance.

Further boosting Tasmania's cachet will be the **Museum of Old and New Art**, or MONA (free admission; mona.net.au), opening in January just outside the Georgian-style capital city of Hobart. The museum

will contain what is being touted as one of the largest private art collections in the Southern Hemisphere. The new attraction is a project of eccentric millionaire David Walsh, a professional gambler and art collector who has poured much of his fortune into its construction. MONA is garnering a lot of buzz, not least because of its location and layout: Set on 8 acres of riverfront on Walsh's Moorilla estate, the museum is entirely subterranean and the galleries are arranged like a labyrinth. To encourage further disorientation, a bar stands in lieu



Tasmania's Saffire Freycinet grants views of Great Oyster Bay and the Hazard Range.