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Winter of content

Hunker down in a holiday house at Lorne on Victoria's Great Ocean Road

SARAH NICHOLSON

My family only squabbles about one thing and that's the proper way to make a fire. My brother David, an alpha male with a booming voice to match his imposing frame, maintains a good blaze must be built on a clean base and he's inevitably the one who takes to the fireplace with brush and pan to remove old ashes before blending "starter wood" and "heat logs" to shape the flames.

So, with pleasantly chilly weather during our family weekend at Ocean House in Victoria's coastal Lorne, I know David will be in fine form as self-appointed master of the fireplace. And it's a big responsibility in this architecturally designed holiday house, with a roaring fire necessary to keep things cosy when outside all is cold and moody.

As I watch clouds shuffle across the horizon, turning the deep blue of Bass Strait a menacing shade of grey and pushing long lines of breakers onto the sand below the home, I smirk to myself as David makes return runs to the woodpile and assembles the perfect assortment to stoke the burn. In no time the smooth stucco wall above the slow-combustion unit is radiating with heat that washes across the couches in the sitting area of this modern glass box of a house; we lounge about with magazines that only manage to take our attention from the view outside for minutes at a time.

I imagine Ocean House would be glorious in summer, sliding back the glass walls to open the living space to the insect hum of the parched Australian bush on one side and the metronomic pulse of the surf on the other. But winter is divine, too, in this five-bedroom seaside retreat.

Ocean House was designed by Melbourne architect Rob Mills; an industry website describes his firm as subscribing "to the belief that landscape, architecture and interiors are one and must be considered as one".

The project was an opportunity for Mills to abandon the demands of a client brief to create a holiday home for his family. When the Mills clan isn't using the North Lorne abode (which, by the way, comes complete with a rooftop deck called The Sky featuring open-air bathtub and daybeds), it becomes a holiday rental that's ideal for a gang of friends or a multi-generational Great Ocean Road getaway.



ROB MILLS



The three-storey dwelling, which can accommodate 10 guests with peaceful zones providing the space needed for a group to avoid getting under one another's feet, is not fussy in style. The interior features a blend of concrete and timber and vast windows. Rounded walls disrupt the exterior's straight lines; the main bedroom, on the middle level, is a circular chamber and the surface above the fireplace reflects the same elegant curve. While guests can't see the waves when in bed, the sound of the surf echoes through Ocean House.

There is a swag of activities on offer in Lorne to keep us busy — surf lessons, bushland hiking and biking trails, fishing from the pier, popping into an art gallery, browsing the Mountjoy Parade shops — but we find it hard to pull ourselves away from Ocean House during daylight hours. We watch kangaroos feed on the long grass in the vacant block nearby at dawn, a family of kookaburras vis-

Ocean House Lorne, perched by the beach, top; living space with a leafy outlook, above

its us at lunchtimes, and David returns from a nocturnal excursion to the backyard woodpile to tell us he's had an encounter with a wallaby.

There are daily jaunts into town to buy newspapers in the morning and gourmet baguettes from Louttit Bay Bakery at lunchtime, long walks on the beach at the bottom of the street, and outings to enjoy dinner at restaurants run by locals keen to keep the settlement humming during the quiet season.

Our Sunday dinner is at The Ovenhouse Restaurant, a venue that complements the weather with a roaring fire and comfort food such as lamb slow roasted in the kitchen's wood-fire oven.

Owner James Fuller shares his views about why Lorne is a welcoming year-round destination. "Winter [here] is about solitude, open fires, walking on empty beaches, sitting with a glass of shiraz to watch the weather, talking to the locals who are too busy to do anything but work during summer..."

And, perched in front of brother David's carefully prepared fire at Ocean House, I can appreciate that wintry beauty and peace and feel as if I'm a contented local in this sleepy Great Ocean Road settlement. Even if it's only for one lovely, lazy, long weekend.

Sarah Nicholson was a guest of Ocean House.

Checklist

Lorne is 140km from Melbourne; the journey takes about two hours via Geelong on the Princes Freeway and Great Ocean Road. More: visitvictoria.com; lovelorne.com.au. Ocean House Lorne is available for rent, as apartment-style for eight guests or the whole three-storey property accommodating 10. More: oceanhouse.com.au.

Fare go on Mountjoy

Dining in style around and about Lorne

SARAH NICHOLSON

• **Pizza Pizza:** A project set up by local mates Brett Graham and Robert Lowther to serve the food they have loved eating during their world travels. 2 Mountjoy Parade; pizzapizzalorne.com.

• **River Tea House:** A haven for lovers of good cups with a great selection of blends to be savoured in a serene riverside location. 6B Mountjoy Parade; riverteahouse.com.au.

• **The Ovenhouse Restaurant:** James Fuller has spent every summer in Lorne since he was a baby holidaying with his family and now offers an easy lunch menu, elegant dining at dinner time, French crepes cooked on the porch, and a variety of wood-fire dishes. 46A Mountjoy Parade; ovenhouse.com.au.

• **Louttit Bay Bakery:** Not only does this bakery produce the best baguettes in Lorne but the young baker who creates all those delicious cakes and pastries is one of the town's star footballers. 46B Mountjoy Parade; lovelorne.com.au.

• **Cuda Bar:** There's a veranda offering water views by day while, after dark, the restaurant serves modern Australian cuisine before tables and chairs are moved to make way for a live music venue. 82 Mountjoy Parade; cudabar.com.au.

• **The Bottle of Milk:** The good things in life — milkshakes, burgers made with 100 per cent Aussie beef (or



Regional ingredients, fine fare and boutique wines at Marks Restaurant

vegetarian options), good coffee — are on the menu at this cafe, also operated by Brett Graham and Robert Lowther. 52 Mountjoy Parade; thebottleofmilk.com.

• **Moons Espresso Bar:** This is the spot where locals go for coffee (Moons is often packed with tradies on their morning breaks) and it's a favourite for breakfast and brunch. 108 Mountjoy Parade; lovelorne.com.au.

• **Marks Restaurant:** Talented chef Mark Purdie blends regional ingredients into fine fare partnered with bou-

tique wines. Reopens September 2 after a winter break. 124 Mountjoy Parade; marksrestaurant.com.au.

• **Swing Bridge Cafe & Boathouse:** Head beyond the delights of town to the Great Ocean Road where Argentinian-born owner and chef Jorge Guerrero's breakfast menu at the beach shack-style Swing Bridge Cafe, at the mouth of the Erskine River, is the talk of Lorne; on Fridays he sets up a barbecue to grill a lunch for carnivores. 30 Great Ocean Road; visitgreatoceanroad.org.au.