



# Value added

Hamilton Island's wealth of natural beauty has been augmented by a breathtaking array of architectural splendour, writes **Kylie Lang**

If I were a golfer (six weeks of lessons, years ago, taught me that my talents lie elsewhere than on the green), I'd be hooked on Hamilton Island's stunning new 18-hole course. Actually, I'm hooked on it regardless, thanks to its welcoming clubhouse with breathtaking views over the shimmering Coral Sea and sprinkling of Whitsunday islands.

The golf course, a quick boat transfer to Dent Island from the larger Hamilton, was designed by five-time British Open winner Peter Thomson to sit snugly within the rugged landscape. It's basically a series of holes strung along ridges and played across valleys, challenging players of all levels. Natural soils and vegetation, including plants that command exorbitant prices in Brisbane nurseries, have been retained and a sustainable irrigation system means the ecosystem isn't compromised.

Hamilton Island Golf Club, with its Chris Beckingham-designed clubhouse, is indicative of the thoughtful development surging ahead on the island at the hands of the entrepreneurial Oatley family. Patriarch Bob Oatley, of Rosemount Estate wine fame, bought the popular holiday destination in 2003 for a rumoured \$180m and has already poured another \$300m into it, most notably via a spectacular new yacht club and a series of villas.

The villas – most of the 35 sold off the plan – were in the finishing stages at the time of our visit in December 2009. Now they have been completed and the gardens, designed by celebrity landscaper Jamie Durie, are already nicely established.

Architect Walter Barda's stamp on the villas is clear – an abundance of natural timbers, a sweeping curved ceiling and muted neutral tones. Walter says the "combination of rough-sawn timbers and dressed joinery was central to the overall feel".

Each villa has commanding water views, a good degree of privacy and, with external walls and columns dressed in dark-hued local basalt, a calming, earthy feel.

Villa residents also have access to the facilities of Qualia, the island's adult-only luxury resort, which means massages on call in the day spa (try Li'tya Kodo, a rhythmic massage inspired by Aboriginal techniques).

Each owner paid upwards of \$2.8m for a slice of

paradise, but if these villas are anything like the \$43m Grant Kenny-Jim Goldberg Pavilions development of 2004, resale will be lucrative (Pavilions' residences bought for \$1.5m have resold for more than \$6m, according to Sydney-based Caroline Selka, who markets Hamilton Island property).

The sleepy Hamilton Island I first holidayed on in 1997, and have been to half a dozen times since, has made way for a far more sophisticated offering, and nothing exemplifies this better than the new yacht club.

Although it has its detractors – change is never easy – it is a striking architectural piece, again from Walter Barda but with input from yachtsman Iain Murray AM.

Resembling a manta ray, its soaring roof is finished in copper which will, in time, oxidise and turn that lovely muted green. Cantilevered terraces offer boundless views of the marina and Dent Passage, and the new Bommie restaurant is a refreshing step up in island dining.

Bommie (short for the Aboriginal word "bombora") takes its name from the shallow, colourful reef patches in the waters around Hamilton Island that are a haven for tropical fish but a challenge to yachtsmen.

My Coffin Bay oysters (\$4 each) were fresh and plump, and the dry-aged rib eye, a glorious piece of beef with beetroot, parsnip and horseradish butter (\$55), defeated me with its generosity.

Amid all the development, both commercial and residential, that is a constant presence on the island these days, some things remain unchanged. The beautifully maintained pools in the older part of the island are inviting, snorkelling is awe-inspiring in the waters off nearby Chalkies Beach, and a visit to Whitehaven Beach is a must (Hamilton Island Water Sports will get you there and back).

This 6km stretch of beach boasts immaculate white sand that dazzles your eyes and, being 99 per cent pure silica, cleans your jewellery beautifully. With its pale aqua water and swaying palms, Whitehaven Beach is every bit paradise found.

**THE WRITER** and her son were guests of Hamilton Island. [www.hamiltonislandyachtclubvillas.com.au](http://www.hamiltonislandyachtclubvillas.com.au)



**ISLAND DREAMING ...** chilling out on pristine Whitehaven Beach, *clockwise from left*; living easy in a Hamilton Island villa (*image supplied*); the yacht club with its striking copper roof; and the new, panoramic golf course. **Photographs //** Kylie Lang