

THIS PAGE View into the Long Pavilion, across the upper swimming pool

LUXURY IN THE TROPICS

WORDS LUCY BULLIVANT
PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD GLOVER

BUILDING DESIGN
CHRIS BECKINGHAM
INTERIOR DESIGN FREEDMAN
REMBEL, PIKE WITHERS
LOCATION
HAMILTON ISLAND | AUS
PROJECT QUALIA

DESIGN FOR SERENITY AT QUEENSLAND'S GREAT BARRIER REEF







If you own your own island in the Great Barrier Reef – and run it as a ‘something for everyone’ tourist location – it makes sense to create an extra special oasis on an auspicious area of its land. That’s what Bob Oatley, the billionaire businessman, and his family, who have owned Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays since 2004, realised. So, last autumn they opened qualia, a five-star gated resort on the northern tip of the island. The sensual vernacular design of qualia is part of the family’s aim to re-position the island as an international luxury destination, explains Jason Friedman, the General Manager.

The bush vegetation of qualia’s secluded 15 hectare site is pungent with native eucalyptus trees. The resort is hidden behind a tall Japanese style gate and is just a 4km chauffeured ride from Hamilton Island’s tiny airport. Laid out with a generous density of half-an-acre per site are 27 north-facing windward pavilions, 33 on the western, leeward side, a large beach house, and two superbly situated restaurants. Upon entering the elevated and open Long Pavilion on the north-west corner of the Island, the eye is drawn to the long vistas and framed views of the Coral Sea. The resort claims to be ‘a unique Australian expression of world-class luxury’, and to live up to that claim the architecture takes its cue from nature and the island’s rugged beauty – but without resorting to organic forms.

qualia (kwah-lee-ah) is a word denoting a ‘collection of sensory experiences’. Its cuisine and Rosemount wines certainly fit the bill. But the other ace card is that its architecture and landscaping avoid generic luxury or copying tropical Thai or Balinese spa resort architecture. Building Designer Chris Beckingham, an Australian based at Airlie Beach, was born in London and emigrated to the bush aged nine. For the past 18 years he has lived in the Whitsundays, and is well known for his use of local materials. He had designed 16 residences on Hamilton Island, including Oatley’s, and qualia was

the first resort he has designed. A big fan of Danish architecture, he also shares Oatley’s love of tropical New Guinean architecture, and set out to make something which, like the best of Queensland’s residential architecture, draws the outside in. “The thing here is boating, so I wanted to reflect a relationship with the water,” says Beckingham.

Although the Long Pavilion possesses great formal strength, rather than trying to make an architectural statement, Beckingham aimed to simply make “a tranquil place” with lots of natural light and cross-ventilation – the recipe for all the facilities at qualia. In Bali and Thailand, resort buildings can be more open, but on Hamilton Island some days are cool so the design is “on the fringe of open and closed”. Accessed via its own bamboo-screened *porte cochère*, the Long Pavilion’s long sweeping axis, free of aesthetic references to temples, nonetheless evokes their serenity. It mixes permeability and a touch of the sacred with comfort very successfully, and Beckingham’s treatment of levels stepping down towards the sea is skilful. In front, a well-furnished open-plan living

“I wanted to reflect a relationship with the water”

CHRIS BECKINGHAM

ABOVE LEFT The Long Pavilion offers expansive views of the Coral Sea
FAR LEFT The north facing Pebble Beach dining terrace
LEFT The south west-facing Leeward Pavilions

THIS PAGE Each Windward Pavilion has a private plunge pool





room; to the left, the restaurant on two levels occupies the sea-facing corner of the building, enjoying the same relative 'transparency' as the lounge. An airy, refreshing place for breakfast or to allow one's senses to explode, sampling the seven-course degustation menu, its assets include a glass-fronted wine tasting cellar by the restaurant (Oatley founded the Rosemount Estate and Oatley Wines), and a smart, air-conditioned library after the Whitsundays' spectacular sunset.

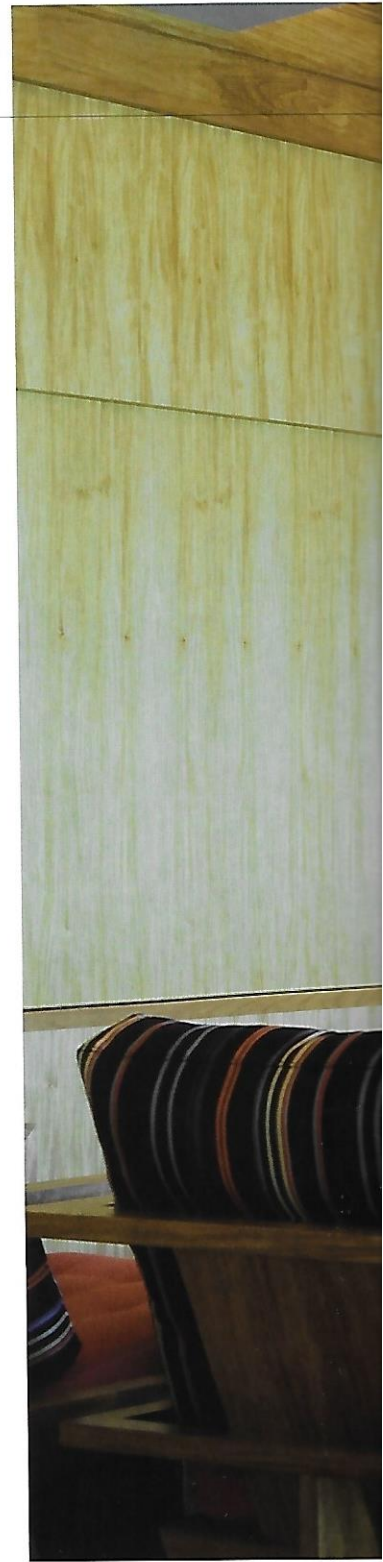
The design is meticulous, with a wide use of locally sourced timbers – Hoop Pine, Kwila hardwood – and stone such as Bowen Blue does not produce uniformity, but rather a unified family of structures, each with a harmonious feel and colours stealing from nature. All the Long Pavilion's joinery is New Guinea Rosewood, its roof beams lined with Hoop Pine and Queensland Spotted Gum. The floor and catering screen is Kwila, as Bush Teak would have been too red and oppressive, feels Beckingham, who takes credit for spotting Torres Strait artist, Dennis Nona, and buying 207 of his prints for the walls of public and private spaces. The elegance of the architecture throughout is well complemented by interiors and custom-designed furniture by New York-born George Freedman (Freedman Rembel). Fabrics and patterns inspired by nature in chocolate brown and loungers in black and white are a relaxing blend.

Down the hill on the beach lies the more casual, north-facing Pebble Beach pavilion. Here from an open air dining area (and adjoining cocktail bar), gazing out at a serene sea is easy. Occasionally, it's ploughed by sleek craft, such as qualia's 36-foot Adrenalin Rush catamaran or 45-foot Atomic Marine speedboat. But little disturbs the neat terrace and infinity pool (with nearby gym). Its ambience would benefit from the changing rooms being sited right by the pool, not at the end of the entrance walkway, and a single entrance, not two. But otherwise it is a first rate, well-landscaped ensemble. Transport on the short distances between buildings is by two-seater electric golf buggy along quiet roads largely free of petrol driven vehicles bordered by Eucalyptus, Lilly Pilly and Gardenia in tiers.

Ten thousand cuttings were propagated, with bamboo (good for screening), Hibiscus, Cardamon bushes and Frangipani trees amongst other species now populating the cultivated, aromatic bushland of gum trees.

The pavilions are sited in the sub-tropical landscape to ensure privacy and unimpeded views of the sea. Each of the north-facing Windward pavilions (up the hill behind the Beach House) are four times the size of an average hotel bedroom, with sleek living rooms, separate bedroom, well-planned bathrooms, retractable screens on all windows and a veranda with lounge chairs and a plunge pool. Upholstery patterns are easy on the eye, and small Aboriginal motifs decorate the bedcovers. A larger south-east facing Beach House has its own swimming pool. The Leeward pavilions overlooking the Whitsundays to the south-west are of the same quality with wide Kwila sun decks.

The tranquil spa is at the high point of the resort, with a nearby freestanding boutique, also in wood and stone. Instead of a claustrophobic cluster of 'cells' off a circulation corridor like too many urban spas, it's an Asian-influenced cruciform space, simple, legible and balanced. Soft sea breezes waft through the cross-shaped foyer as you pass its four water pools to the visible yoga and meditation pavilion. Views of the blue-green sea lend perspective to the six capacious treatment rooms (four single, two for couples) and relaxation areas. Beckingham's non-denominational design does not need Buddha statues. His main gate



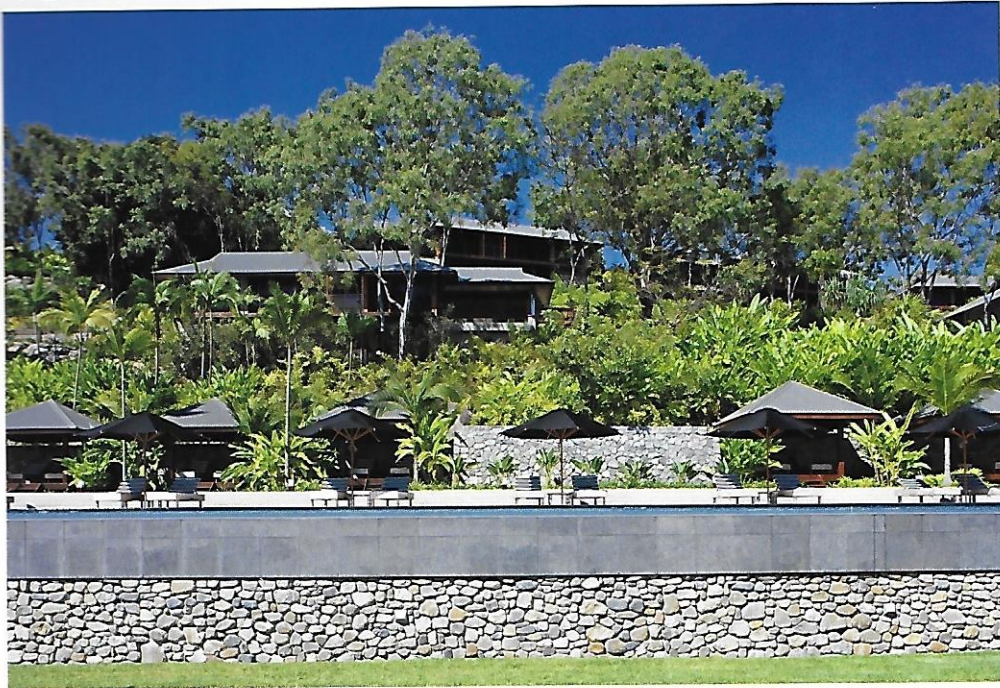
ABOVE RIGHT The library
RIGHT All the furniture in
the pavilions is designed by
George Freedman of
Freedman Rembel
FAR RIGHT The bathrooms
look out over the island





Its architecture and landscaping avoid generic luxury or copying tropical Thai or Balinese spa resort architecture

LUCY BULLIVANT



LEFT The view toward the Pebble Beach pool

structure in Spotted Gum battens and stainless steel follows the loose style of those of a Japanese temple because they have “spiritual significance”.

The quality of design induces a sense of reverie that you can find refuge in (only those over 18 can stay at qualia). However, visitors also venture out to kick up a storm, enjoying Whitehaven Beach nearby with its pure white silica sand and crystal clear water, or water-skiing, parasailing, target sports, swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving, diving lessons, guided kayaking, catamaran sailing or yacht charter (a new Island Yacht Club is due by the end of this year). Beckingham’s design input re-appears on the long list of recreational activities. Take a scenic flight, a bushwalk, a game fishing excursion, or play golf in a brand new par 71 championship club on adjacent Dent Island designed by the champion golfer, Peter Thomson – with clubhouse by Beckingham, the only island golf course in Australia.

It is said that Oatley wanted to create a landmark for Australia at qualia, and he has. There is the understated luxury he intended for which the “peacefulness” and “integrity” Beckingham feels are critical ingredients in resorts today. qualia takes the Australian reef resort – and the opulent marble rife in resorts of the 1980s – into more cohesive design territory. The architect’s simple framing of views – “making the buildings as invisible as possible”, as Beckingham modestly describes it, and permeable to the sub-tropical landscape, is at the essence of this mind-strokingly healthy place.

Lucy Bullivant is Indesign’s London correspondent.

QUALIA

BUILDING DESIGN AND PROJECT

DIRECTOR Chris Beckingham

INTERIOR DESIGN Freedman Rembel, Pike Withers

LANDSCAPE DESIGN Pawsey & Prowse

LIGHTING CONSULTANTS Point of View

ELECTRICAL/MECHANICAL

CONSULTANTS Lincolne Scott

HYDRAULIC CONSULTANTS Brian Burnett & Associates

BUILDERS Colin Hounsell Constructions and Whitsunday Pole Homes

FLOOR AREA Ridge building approx 1,350m²; Library approx 95m²; Beach Building (not incl pool etc) approx 450m²; Tranquility Spa approx 1,150m²

CHRIS BECKINGHAM AND ASSOCIATES

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FREEDMAN REMBEL (61 2) 9360 2600 freedmanrembel.com

PIKE WITHERS (61 7) 9699 2255 pikewithers.com.au

PAWSEY & PROWSE (61 7) 4031 3310 pawseyprose.com

FURNITURE All furniture, unless otherwise stated, custom designed by Freedman Rembel. Dining and library tables throughout glass inserts made by Astor Safety Glass, tops made by Bindi Furniture, bases supplied by Thonet. Sun chairs, armchairs, dining chairs, sofas and ottomans throughout manufactured by FMCA. Other tables, sun lounges and outdoor beds throughout manufactured by Bindi Furniture. Stone table tops by Artedomus. Driade outdoor dining chairs in

all villas and Maxalto ‘Simplice’ armchairs in library and reception area from Space

LIGHTING Antonangeli ‘Stars’ table lamp from Gineico. Graphite bedside table lamps throughout designed by Arne Jacobsen for Louis Poulsen, supplied by Lightmakers

FINISHES Rugs in long pavilion from Whitecliffe Imports, other rugs throughout manufactured by Woodnotes, supplied by Anibou. Fabrics throughout by Kvadrat Maharam, Order Imports and South Pacific Fabrics. Leather for dining chairs supplied by Contemporary Leathers. Loose cushions by Contemporary Leathers. Loose cushions in the spa, ‘Catalan’ honed stone tiles and ‘Arbor Green’ stone mosaic tiles from Bisanna Tiles and sand blasted Isernia from Artedomus. Paint and polyurethane throughout by Dulux.

FIXED & FITTED In public areas, Vitra ‘June’ washbasin from Inovita, ‘Newport’ toilet suite from Fowler and Manflush cistern from Reece. In spa, ‘Flaminia’ twin set basin from Parisi Bathware, ‘Relaxa’ plus shower set by Grohe, and custom bath. Other bathroom fittings throughout from Rogerseller.

ARTWORK All art supplied by The Australian Art Print Network, framing by RP Art.

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