

BAREFOOT LUXURY BY THE REEF

IN A BREATHTAKING LOCATION IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF,
THE ARCHITECTURAL THE HOUSE AT LIZARD ISLAND HAS BEEN
THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED AND INSPIRED BY ITS RUGGED
AUSTRALIAN COASTAL POSITION.

Compiled by **KATRINA HOLDEN**
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Some of the planet's most striking locations are a perfect muse and source of inspiration to entrepreneurial, design and architectural minds. The new The House at Lizard Island bears witness to this – perched on the shores of a marine park of the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef in Queensland and set subtly into the natural landscapes of the national park.

Known as Dyiigurra by its traditional owners, the Dingaal people, Lizard Island takes its European name from Captain Cook who noted the island's large population of monitor lizards when passing through in 1770.

The House opened in July 2022, after an approval process with local authorities that stretched over more than 25 years. It was designed by architects JDA Co. and represents a deep vision and long-held plan by Brisbane-based owners Steve and Jane Wilson to create the greatest 'reef house' in the world, on a site that Steve refers to as the "Bennelong Point of the Great Barrier Reef".

Lizard Island is a special place for Steve as it was his father, John Wilson, who developed the original Lizard Island Resort in the 1970s.

"The first time I visited Lizard Island when I was younger is an experience I still rank as the best holiday of my life," Steve says. "I grew up with a love of fishing and snorkelling and it was taken to a new level for me on the Great Barrier Reef. It's truly a wonderland."

DESIGN INSPIRATION

The site enjoys enviable natural surroundings of pristine, turquoise waters, native vegetation and three white sand beaches. It was the geology of the reef and its marine life that provided rich inspiration for the design.

JDA Co. Director Dr James Davidson says the design is entirely grounded in its connection to the reef and its place. To deeply understand the nuances of the site, James camped under the stars to become familiar with the terrain and the weather patterns.

"Every detail in The House ties back to its magical setting," James says. "The site itself is so incredibly beautiful and The House is there to act as a frame to its surroundings."

The design concept was centred not only on the premise of touching the earth lightly, but on receding into the landscape, hugging the slope of the hill so that the physical presence of the house blended in with its surrounds.

The architectural plan of The House is reminiscent of the reef sharks that swim just metres away. Narrow slit windows to the south and west act as 'gills' and were deliberately positioned to direct prevailing breezes and allow The House to breathe on hot days.

The site is comprised of The House, and an adjoining residence, The Cottage – which together make up the Estate.

On the ground floor of The House, stone flooring seamlessly unites the indoors and outdoors. A central, curved stairwell acts as the heart of The House. All three bedrooms include ensuites and have been individually designed to frame vistas of nearby places of interest. From the roof terrace and spa, guests can take in broad, 360-degree views.

Rosewood timber and copper materials used throughout bring warmth and don't detract from the vibrant colours outdoors. A large curving Emerald Quartzite kitchen bench is an ode to a conch shell, with subtle green tones that complement the hues of the landscape and reef.

"As a reflection of its remote, and sometimes harsh environment, the form of the house was a robust outer concrete and copper shell that was designed to blend with the surrounding rock formations and weather over time, balanced nicely by the interior which reflects a softer feeling through the use of timbers and natural stone," said James Davidson.

For the interior details, Sophie Hart was commissioned as the design consultant. The selected artworks include an impressive curation by female Indigenous artists; while some of the design pieces include Armadillo & Co rugs, Bemboka bedding, a Paul Morris built-in lounge, a custom-made rug by Tibet Sydney, and Mud Australia and Dinosaur Designs serving ware.

Steve Wilson says he wants to share the beauty of this place with people from across the world.

"Luxury to me is more about authenticity and experience than ostentation," says Steve.

"The luxury is witnessed in the position of the house, the thought behind the details and, of course, the views, but that's not to say we've denied it any luxuries in design and interiors. Every single piece chosen for The House has a sense of place.



ABOVE The living room and kitchen with its curved Emerald Quartzite bench, designed as an ode to a conch shell.

LEFT Interior designer Sophie Hart sought works from local, Queensland female Indigenous artists.

FAR LEFT A sunken bath and rain shower opens to the elements and views.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELISE HASSEY



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ABOVE Magical views of the marine park of the Great Barrier Reef from a rooftop terrace and spa.

LEFT Architects JDA Co used natural materials such as stone, in the interiors and exterior, to not detract from the vibrant colours of the aquatic surrounds.

Much of the furniture was hand built by a local craftsman, while other renowned international pieces stand as functioning works of art. An iconic table by B&B Italia sits alongside a piece of art by an Indigenous artist from Far North Queensland. I wanted guests to be captivated but also not feel uncomfortable walking inside with sand on their feet.”

SUSTAINABILITY

The remote location called for ingenuity when it came to construction. To protect the landscape and reef, materials were delivered to the island via an existing barge and onto an offshore pontoon. The pontoon was then pulled onto the beachfront below the site. From there, a flying fox contraption was built to shuttle materials from the beach up onto the site, leaving the landscape below untouched. All concrete used on The House was mixed onsite via a makeshift batching plant.

The House functions well off-grid and has been designed to encourage passive cross-ventilation, making the most of prevailing winds and foregoing heavy air-conditioning, despite the tropical climate. All building materials were sourced in north Queensland, selected for their longevity, and furnishings were also locally made.

STAYING HERE

The House at Lizard Island is located 240 kilometres north of Cairns and 27 kilometres off the coast of northern Queensland.

Guests can choose to occupy both The House and The Cottage. Up to eight guests can enjoy an all-inclusive stay on The Estate. Be treated to premium cuisine and beverages – a private chef and sommelier are on hand for all meals. A dedicated host will curate all experiences which may include a dinner on the beach or a cruise in the resort’s *Pisces* vessel (a luxury 56’ motor yacht for reef snorkelling, swimming, diving, and fishing).

The House and The Cottage are managed as part of Lizard Island Resort.

Guests will receive return scenic charter flights to Lizard Island from Cairns, transfers from Lizard Island Airport to The House (either by 4WD or boat, depending on guest preference).

Rates start from AUD \$16,000 per night, 3-night minimum for two; or from AUD \$28,000 per night for the entire House and Cottage, up to eight guests.



thehouseatlizard.com
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