

Short breaks Melawondi

Paradise waits at the end of the rainbow

A trip into the unspoilt Mary Valley is its own reward, writes **Alison Cotes**

TO TRAVEL hopefully is better than to arrive, is R.L. Stevenson's most famous travel statement; but in the case of Melawondi Spring Retreat he'd have been only half right.

The journey itself is spectacular, even if you need lots of hope, not to mention faith, in the rather confusing mud map.

The farther you go off the Bruce Highway through the Mary Valley the deeper and more mysterious the vegetation becomes, the narrower the roads and the more enticing the atmosphere. So allow yourself plenty of time to wander along the country roads and appreciate the lushness all the way along, and begin to realise why the local people have been so angry at the prospect of a dam – this country is as beautiful as anywhere in southeast Queensland.

It's unspoilt territory in the sense that the tiny towns and villages along the way have not been ruined by over-development. There are no billboards or petrol stations to spoil the view and even the cleared pasture seem to be just part of a natural landscape.

It's pure nostalgia for people who remember old-fashioned country holidays, and when we arrived and found that the rainbow that had been following us for half an hour ended right at the gate, we knew this was going to be pretty close to paradise.

That rainbow proved to be a good omen, because the single studio was not the bush shack that we were expecting so far out in the sticks but a glamorous getaway cottage so modern, and so exquisitely designed, that at first we thought it had come straight out of one of the many designer magazines that were scattered on the coffee table. When Tanya told us later that she'd designed the whole thing from scratch, my admiration increased three-fold, because she'd included little touches that even I might not have thought of.

The bathroom area takes up about a third of the floor space, separated into cunning little sections that offer a fully private loo area, a walk-in wardrobe area, and a huge open shower with three separate shower heads (make sure you get Tanya to point out the trick for the wall shower head that defeated us completely).

And, at one end of the open bed-and-living area, there's a gigantic free-form free-standing bath that suggested all kinds of imaginative possibilities once you'd exhausted the play potential of the triple shower.

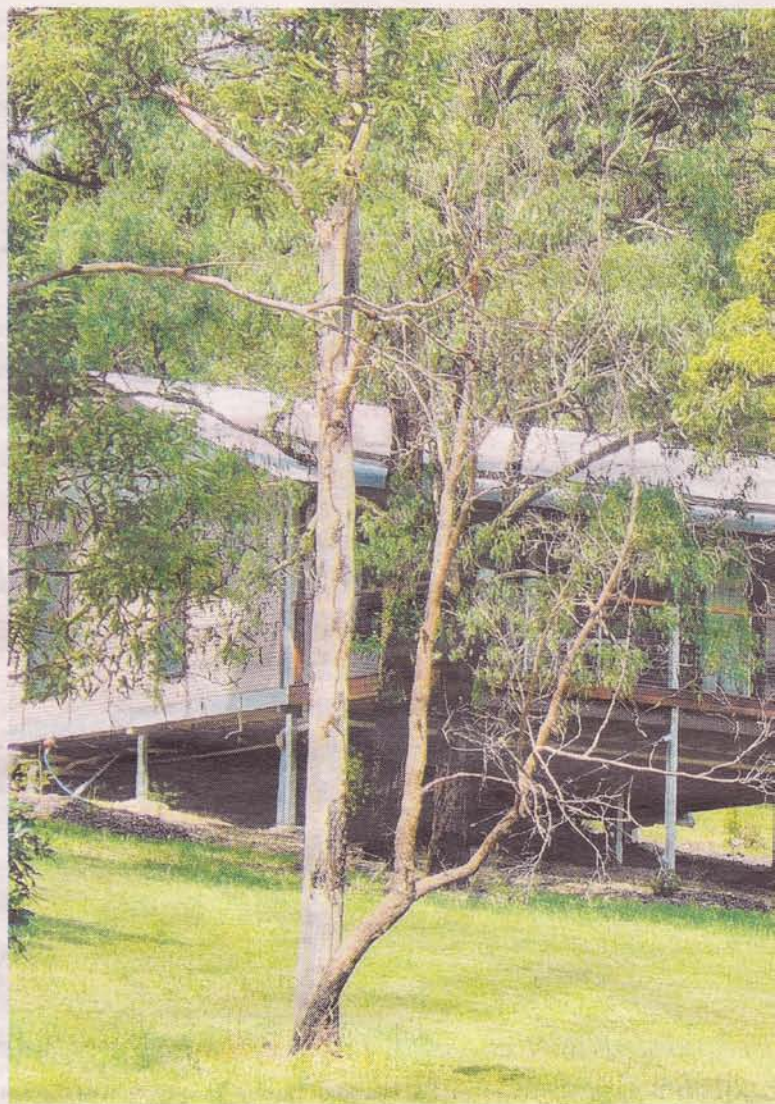
I've seen plenty of high-class getaway places in my time, but Melawondi has that wait-there's-more element. In the first place, it's the only studio on the old property, reached up a winding graded track out of sight of the main house, although there is radio communication if anything goes wrong. You never see your hosts, the polite and unobtrusive Fishers, unless you want to be taken to the cottage by Tanya and shown around. You need have no contact with them until you leave.

Because the studio has been open for only three months, the plantings around the building are still in the embryonic stage, but as you sit on the wide veranda and watch the rainforest tumble down the hill, it doesn't really matter, and the sunsets are beyond compare.

As for meals, you probably won't want to leave the absolute delight of hearing none of the sounds of what we laughingly call civilisation, so either take your own makings (there's a fully equipped kitchen and an electric barbecue on the veranda), or let Tanya supply you with a barbecue hamper containing one of the best pieces of steak I've eaten all year, from Imbil butcher Clinton Humphris.

Local produce, including very sweet vine-ripened tomatoes, made a gourmet meal indeed.

We were tricked at breakfast time,



ENTICING: The single studio at Melawondi Spring Retreat.

though, for we thought all the supplies were already there. What we hadn't realised was that the sound of a car, which briefly disturbed our slumber at the crack of dawn (8am) was Tanya delivering fresh bread, fruit and milk to the possum-free box just a few steps away from the back door, so that we'd already eaten by the time we noticed it. Oh well, that just meant we had to have another breakfast, with yet another cup of excellent coffee, made not in the ultra-modern Gaggia espresso machine but in a plunger that even the technologically challenged can manage.

As the old adage has it over the entrance to the Alhambra: Be there a heaven on Earth it is this, it is this, it is this, and I could happily have stayed there for a full week.

And when you get home don't forget to write to your state MP protesting about the still-possible Traveston Crossing Dam.

Wish you were

Go

Melawondi Retreat is about 170km north of Brisbane. Allow at least 2½ to 3 hours. Follow the Bruce Highway (A1) north, and after 142km turn left into the Kenilworth Skyring Creek Rd, turn left into Tuchekeoi Rd, right again into the Mary Valley Highway (not left to Imbil), left into the Kandanga-Imbil Rd, and right into Melawondi Rd. The house is No. 149 on the left, but not well-signed.

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