



# FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

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WORDS BY EMMA WESTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMIE DURRANT

When turning onto McCormacks Lane leading up to The Buckland Studio Retreat, the line of four little studios sitting on the hill is not immediately apparent; such is their seamless blending into the valley's environs. But then you spy them... and your heart skips a beat.

'How utterly adorable,' you're sure to find yourself thinking. And distinctively unique as well. Rusted metal, corrugated iron and timber make up the materials from which these winged-roofed studios designed by local architect, Andrew McCoubrie, have been constructed. Step inside, though, and they're anything but rustic. Smooth wooden floors with deep pile, softest of soft floor rugs greet you - leather reclining chairs, combustion wood-fires, corduroy couches, a neutral colour scheme and modern amenities, including Smeg cooking appliances, a dishwasher disguised as just another kitchen drawer and an espresso machine filled with fresh coffee beans.

What else could someone possibly need? That was the question owners Sabine Helsper and Eddie Dufrenne asked themselves when establishing The Buckland. The idea was to create an all-in-one holiday retreat, where every single detail has been taken care of, even some you may not have considered yourself - like aromatic candles, for instance. If you didn't guess it already, The Buckland is unashamedly romantic. Each studio is outfitted with one luxuriously downy king-size bed. No place for children. Due to environmental concerns, there is no spa bath either. But the double-headed shower that spreads over half the bathroom space and looks out into the neighbouring bushland through a floor-to-ceiling glass window, more than makes up for that omission. There are shower loafers for two, L'Occitane body products for two, chocolates for two... Ah, bliss.

'You come here and you have fun – that's the whole idea,' says Sabine. 'We had an elderly gentleman staying here and he called me because he had arthritis in his hands and

he was having a hard time getting the blinds down in the bathroom. I said I'd come out and do it for him but he said not to worry about it. I thought it was about privacy and he said, "No, I'm only concerned that I'll splash on your windows." I said, "Just go for it! Splash away! Have fun!" He said, "If I was to do that at home, my wife would have my head for it."

The lack of baths in the studios has proven a point of contention, however. 'We demand to be classed as "luxurious" because that's what we're aiming at, and I think that is what we're doing, explains a determined Sabine. 'We've been told we don't have the spas, therefore, we can never go five-star. But we did that consciously for water conservation. It's the number one issue in Australia – water conservation - not just here but across the whole of Australia. And this is a small contribution we make and, because of it, we might lose a few customers - but so be it.'

When pressed about her passionate stance regarding environmental concerns, Sabine says, 'I think we just can't take the world for granted, can we? Look at it (she gestures across the Buckland Valley of chestnut groves, gum trees and grape vines), it's just beautiful.' That's why Sabine and Eddie have taken the hard, and more expensive, road in making their exclusive holiday retreat as eco-friendly as possible... within practical limitations (for example, Sabine screws up her nose at the thought of composting toilets).

'The buildings are designed to take advantage of the summer breezes and the winter sun to come in and warm it up,' says Sabine when running through the property's eco-friendly appointments. 'They're designed for cross-ventilation, wrapped in insulation all around – even underneath the studios - and we also have double-glazing. We use environmental heat pumps for hot water and we only use green energy. All the building materials are as sustainable as they can be, given the circumstances, of course, there are some limits. We also didn't want the architecture to take over the environment so we chose



the masonry walls and the colour scheme as it is because it doesn't matter what time of the year, it tends to blend.'

The exclusivity of The Buckland Studio Retreat is guaranteed by Sabine's reticence to expand the accommodation further. She admits to possessing a building permit for six studios but strongly doubts The Buckland will grow to more than four. Any additions will enhance the property as it stands – like a little café, which is opening in August. Sabine is quick to emphasise that The Buckland Café will operate on a small scale; no need to open for dinner because award-winning restaurants in the area, like the extremely popular Simone's of Bright, Villa Gusto and The Poplars, are amply filling that niche. Similarly, Eddie and Sabine plan on producing fresh cheese from 24 goats that already roam the property – but not too much, just a little.

'We will only make fromage frais, which is the curd,' Sabine continues. 'We won't do any of the aged stuff because, again, there are other people, bigger operations, that are set-up for that – like the Milawa Cheese Factory and Indigo Cheese Company. We just want to make a small amount of what we love. We will probably make preserves and things but that's only for in-house. We're also going to sell some local wine but it's only going to be very small.'

**Previous Page:** Sabine Helsper's beloved goats and one of The Buckland's four luxurious studios. **Above:** Mountain views from your private studio, king-sized bed. **Below:** Autumn views and afternoon light, Patrizia Simone's stunning marinated octopus - The Buckland is only a short drive to some of North East Victoria's best dining.

In keeping with the feel of the studios, the café is being made from corrugated iron and coloured in browns and wreens. And, in keeping with Sabine's leaning towards 'something different', the toilets are going to be housed within a tank inside the actual café. A rainwater tank? 'It's hard to describe,' says Sabine. 'But you'll see in the end.' As the old saying goes, it's the little things that count, and Sabine and Eddie have demonstrated that you don't have to go grand in order to make a grand impression. Discovering something like pancake mix in the kitchen drawer or heated towel racks in the bathroom is enough to put a smile on even the most discerning of travellers' faces.

**Info:** The Buckland is situated in the Buckland Valley near Bright, Victoria. Tel: 03 5755 2280  
 Web: [www.thebuckland.com.au](http://www.thebuckland.com.au)

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