

PHILANTHROPY

IN A WORLD INCREASINGLY FULL OF CONCRETE MONSTROSITIES, AN ENLIGHTENED COUPLE IS GIVING A STRESSED-OUT WORLD THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL – A PRISTINE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND A GREEN-FRIENDLY LIFESTYLE. BY ANN-MAREE MOODIE

BACK

The sign on the house reads 'Seldom Inn' and the play on words isn't hard to understand, for this is a place that is rare for its exclusivity and natural beauty.

The place is Turtle Beach, a 650-hectare tract of coastal bushland overlooking the southern-most tip of the Great Barrier Reef. It is a place where the reef meets the beach, and the beach meets the bush.

Once slated for sand mining by BHP, the land has been 'rescued' by entrepreneurs and philanthropists Michael and Dellarose Baevski of Midell Developments, who have gifted most of it back to the public.

The remainder, less than 5 per cent, is being sold as a unique opportunity to obtain an allotment in what is believed to be Australia's only truly sustainable eco-village.

FUTURE VISION

"We wanted to create an urban village that would allow families to take a step back and breathe again," says Dellarose. "The purpose of Turtle Beach is to create a soulful place; a place where families can reconnect with each other and with nature. It's the sort of place where you can collect driftwood on the beach and fossick in rock pools."

With the exception of national parks, there are few, if any, areas remaining on the Eastern Seaboard that haven't fallen prey to developers and their shopping centres and high-rise apartment blocks.

Few of us can remember the Gold Coast in its heyday, with its wonky beach shacks and family-friendly pubs. Today the Gold Coast is unrecognisable, with its high-



TO NATURE

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Images courtesy of Ann-Maree Moppid



rise skyline reminiscent of a small capital city, and its highway flanked by malls, video stores and two-dollar shops. The natural landscape is long gone.

This could easily have been the future of Turtle Beach, which lies near Agnes Water and the town of 1770, about 80 minutes' drive north of Bundaberg. Instead, most of the land – with its natural bush, wetlands and pristine beaches – is now protected in perpetuity, having been gifted by the Baevskis to the Australian Bush Heritage Fund and the original Aboriginal owners. It is the largest single donation of private land to a conservation group in Queensland.

SCARCITY VALUE

"Our fear was that if someone else got the land, it would be tortured and distressed by development," says Dellarose. "We wanted to protect it because it's one of the most beautiful pieces of coastline in Australia. It's as rare as a pearl or a pink diamond."

It's true. The air is clean; local flora grows today like it did before Australia was discovered; green and loggerhead turtles return to nest as their species has done for thousands of years. On the day *Private Word* toured the site, a lone surfer out catching waves off Springs Beach had the beach to himself.

On the minuscule percentage of land that the Baevskis retained to create their sustainable eco-village, three ventures are underway.

Sunrise at 1770 is a \$100 million development comprising a sustainable village of 172 lots, an eco-tourism site, a cultural heritage site and a large nature refuge.

Residences must comply with a strict building code that cannot be changed by the local government or the body corporate. The height of the house, the building materials – even the exterior paint colours – must comply with established design covenants so that the properties blend with the bush. The only trees that can be removed are those which are in the footprint of the property.

And it works. Standing on the beaches and looking back into the bush, it's hard to determine where the houses are located.

Attracting prominent business names, as well as overseas and local buyers, Sunrise at 1770 is already collecting significant awards for sustainable design.

The development recently received the coveted Environmental Excellence Award in the 2008 Urban Development Institute of Australia National Awards for Excellence. The awards recognise land revitalisation,



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community consultation, sustainability, energy efficiency, environmental management, affordability, use of infrastructure and quality design. And one house received the 2007 Queensland Master Builders Association's House of the Year award.

The pools, change rooms and barbecue areas, which can be used by the residents as common areas, are likewise in tune with the building code in their use of a particular formula of materials and palette of colours.

CREATING HARMONY

The lights embedded in the decking are LEDs, in order to minimise light pollution, especially when the turtles are nesting. The effect is stunning – it's impossible to determine where the star-studded night sky ends and the deck begins. The street lighting follows the same philosophy.

"We saw how the built form could harmonise with the environment and still be commercially successful," says Michael. "We're showing that you can have an extraordinary outcome while still improving the quality of the environment."

The two other sites at Turtle Beach, Red Rock and The Cove, are still in progress. A six-star hotel, spa and an artist-in-residence program are part of the plans for these sites.

All the houses are self-sustaining, using solar power, rainwater tanks and a patented water and sewerage treatment process that uses sonic energy to return grey- and blackwater to a drinkable standard. Seeds from plants endemic to the area, such as bloodwoods, Morton Bay ash and grevillea, are collected and grown in pots before being planted out.

It's no wonder that Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Fritled-neck Lizards, echidnas and goannas feel welcome here.

"There isn't anywhere else in Australia – if not the world – which offers what Turtle Beach can," says Michael. "In this place there are pristine beaches, surf, a seductive climate, an untouched biodiversity featuring local flora and fauna, and a degree of isolation so residents won't be invaded by 'weekend tourists'."

"It will never be overdeveloped, because the coastline and the bush will always be protected." ✱

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