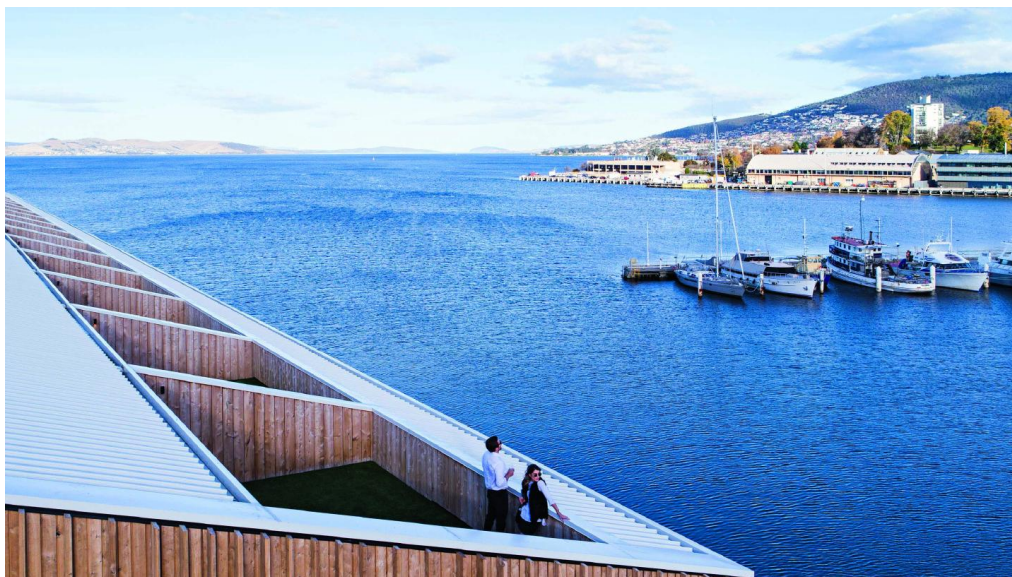


The 114-story hotel

This chic new hotel on the Hobart waterfront, designed to look like a shipping shed, is full of eccentric character.

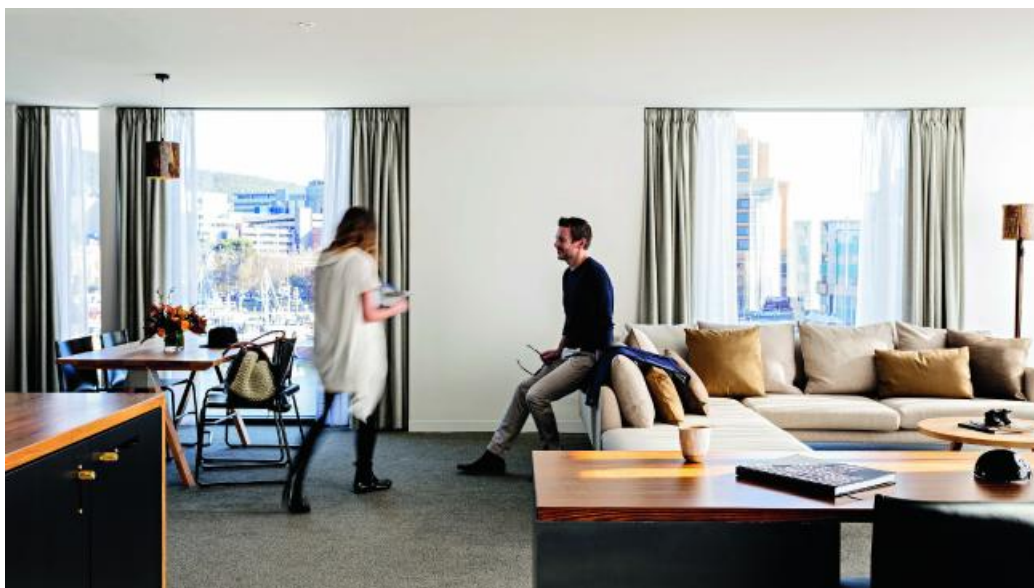
By MEGAN LEHMANN

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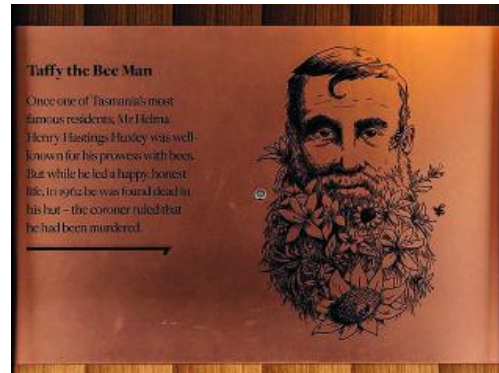
Let's try a twist on the Ultimate Dinner Party game. If you could invite a dozen famous Tasmanians, dead or alive, who would you choose? I confess that, until recently, I would have struggled to assemble 12 names, let alone the sparkliest raconteurs. Errol Flynn. Richard Flanagan. Princess Mary. Nobel prize-winning molecular biologist Elizabeth Blackburn (OK, I Googled that one). And isn't Ricky Ponting Tasmanian?

Truth is, prior to a weekend trip to Hobart for Mona's midwinter festival Dark Mofo, I was embarrassingly uninformed about the charms of the wild island state, including its rich history of incubating weird and wonderful, hardy and intrepid, frankly remarkable characters.

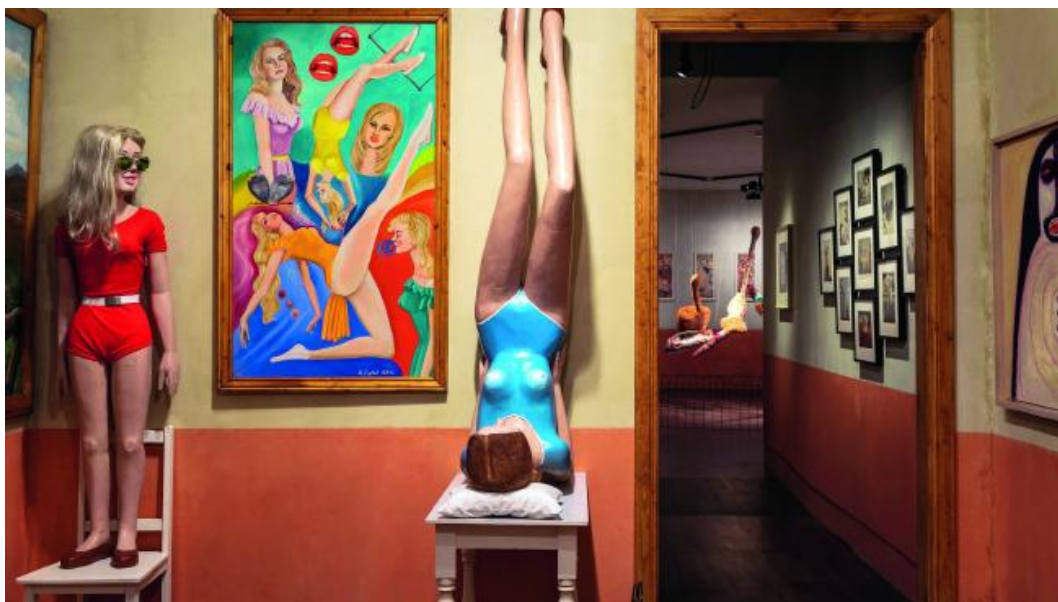


Enter MACq 01 to fill in the gaps. Calling itself a “storytelling hotel”, the high-end establishment threw open its doors last month, the first new accommodation on the capital’s waterfront in more than a decade. Designed to replicate the giant shipping shed it replaced on Macquarie Wharf, the \$45 million property is a modernist vision crafted from native Tasmanian oak, white cypress and glass. It’s the latest from Tasmania’s Federal Group, whose chic portfolio includes the nearby Henry Jones Art Hotel and Coles Bay luxury resort Saffire Freycinet. Each of the 114 generously proportioned rooms references a different local character, their potted biography affixed to the door, and “master storytellers” conduct tours connecting guests to the district’s history through the evergreen art of spinning a yarn.

The precinct, once home to the seagoing Mouheneenner people, has also served as a hanging ground for bushrangers and a deepwater port bustling with whaling, sealing and shipbuilding activity. During the 1830s it was a brothel-studded slum. The convict-built sandstone buildings on Hunter St, now home to hip galleries and restaurants, hum with salty tales of exile, isolation and survival.



As is so often the case, some of Tassie’s most interesting people inhabit the fringes. So big props to MACq 01 for venturing beyond Google to excavate some untold but worthy new stories. Saroo Brierley, inspiration for the recent film *Lion*, has a room dedicated to him, as does former PM Joseph Lyons and (yes!) Ricky Ponting, but the majority are not household names. They are convicts and absconders, indigenous warriors, trailblazers and eccentrics, and their narratives are unfurled by a storyteller named Anna, who greets me and two other guests in the lobby’s “yarning lounge” beside an open fire and an array of traditional Aboriginal artefacts.



A tour of the hotel’s three levels introduces us to author Nan Chauncy, TV fitness guru Sue Becker, Aboriginal resistance fighter Manalagena and Olympic wrestler and one-time Shirley Temple bodyguard Francois Fouche, whose Snidely Whiplash moustache hints at secret villainy. There’s also Taffy the Bee Man, profane publican Elizabeth “Ma” Dwyer and rabble-rousing convict Ellen Scott. My top floor suite, one of 15, is named for “Queen of the Isles” Lucy Beeton, who opened a school for Aboriginal children.

Here I disengage from the group, keen to take advantage of the room's informal luxury (low lighting, deep tub, well-stocked minibar, cosy throw rugs, board games). Contemplation of the past is eclipsed by an exhilarating present when I step out onto a huge private terrace and into the clarity of a cloudless winter's day. The dolerite brow of Mount Wellington looms over the Derwent River and the unbound spread of its estuary; crayfish trawlers, yachts, commercial vessels and kayakers ply the waters below.



The next day, I take a 20-minute ferry ride upriver to Mona for the launch of its latest exhibition. The Museum of Everything is a collection of 2000 artworks from 200 non-professional artists of the past three centuries. Like many of the characters championed by MACq 01, these untrained, unclassifiable creators have been rescued from obscurity. London-based founder James Brett dislikes the term “outsider” art; the psychiatric patients, factory workers, butchers, autistics and deaf-mutes featured offer “an alternative way of seeing”. Stories, stories everywhere.

- **Perfect for:** Romantics, aesthetes, history buffs.
- **Must do:** Neglecting to visit Mona is a crime against art.
- **Dining:** Enjoy unbeatable harbour views from MACq 01's restaurant The Old Wharf. Check out Peacock and Jones nearby or the buzzy, industrial-chic Franklin. Breakfast at Brooke Street Larder is a must.
- **Getting there:** MACq 01 is about 15km from Hobart airport.
- **Bottom line:** From \$305 to \$1200 (luxury waterfront suite). Entry to Mona (mona.net.au) is \$25-28; free for Tasmanians. The Museum of Everything runs until April 2, 2018.

MACq 01, HOBART: macq01.com.au