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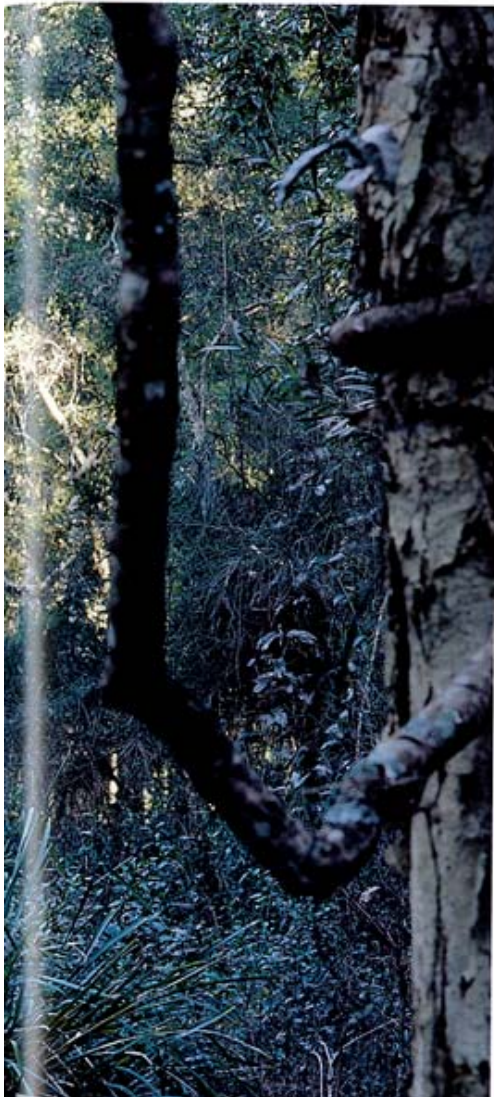
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IN PERSPECTIVE

*Paperbark Camp | Jervis Bay, NSW | Architect Nettleontribe*





# SOFT LEISURE: QUIETLY ECO- SOPHICAL

*Words by Heather Barton  
Images Paul Spillane*

The tissue-soft architecture of the Paperbark Camp provides a venue for a kind of soft leisure, one that leaves a gentle imprint on the earth and on the campers themselves. The Paperbark Camp in Huskisson, at Jervis Bay on the south coast of New South Wales, is founded on an ecosophical design principle. One that draws on what French post-structuralist Felix Guattari called ecosophy – the interrelation of the three ecologies: the socius, the psyche and nature, and is achieved via a certain ethico-aesthetic sensibility.

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Based on a model of the luxury African safari permanent tented camp and standing on thick forest and wetlands adjacent to Currumbene Creek, the Paperbark Lodge and Camp, is a Nettleontribe scheme, which is not simply about environmental sustainability – if such a thing is ever simple. It also takes the triunity of social, psychological and environmental ecologies as an aesthetic and design imperative.

Jeremy Bishop, design architect for the project at Nettleontribe, says, "The Paperbark Lodge and Camp is an eco-resort where the architectonic is based on the confluence of social, mental and environmental needs. The design attempts to sustain all these things and their interdependence on one another, as much as possible."

Bishop brought the project to fruition with colleagues Trevor Hamilton and Nick Hortis, after owners Irena and Jeremy Hutchings worked patiently for 10 years to achieve their vision.

"I had recently returned from Africa when the project arose," says Bishop, "I knew that for the design to work on that tripartite level it had to be open-ended, so that different tones could be set within the one context. The notion of leisure within the design had to be fluid and heterogeneous, so guests could actively define that experience and what it meant, for themselves."

There is an implicit intelligence at work in the design that leisure, as Guattari understands it,\* is part of the ecosystem of the three ecologies rather than a prefabricated inactivity, that exists as the remainder of, or retirement from, some sort of 'real' life elsewhere and otherwise.

Indeed, the Paperbark Camp is an activities-based camp. But these are gentle environmentally harmonious activities, pursued at will. Canoeing, picnicking and fishing along the creek or whale watching off Bowen Island can be alternated with wildlife and wildflower walks or bush tucker tours, when diving and snorkelling or simply walking along the white sandy beaches of Jervis Bay begin to pall.

The camp's design had to offer accommodation from which to pursue (or resist) these activities with as little obstruction as possible, while still providing comfort, luxury, privacy and interaction by working with the environment rather than against it. The aim for the Irena and Jeremy Hutchings was to promote the natural environment, sustain the local ecology, provide a low-key niche eco-facility benefiting the local and regional community.

To this end, the original landscape was carefully cleared by hand so that delicate ecosystems, natural flora

and birdlife were preserved. No major earthworks or clearing were undertaken. All toilet waste and waste water is pumped off the site to protect the pristine Currumbene Creek, which now forms part of the Jervis Bay Marine Park and is the only navigable waterway into Jervis Bay.

The camp is a discreet scattering of camouflage-coloured tents throughout the paperbark forest, which almost disappear into the landscape. High on rough hewn stilts and a platform of local turpentine hard wood with wraparound balconies, the custom-designed tents, imported from South Africa, act as a membrane between guests and the forest. The heavy canvas of the double roof tents seems to absorb noise, like the soft paperbark itself, allowing one to hear the quiet. All the natural materials used in the camp structures breathe to let the outside in while still providing a necessary protection from the elements. Each tent is placed far enough away from the next and strategically angled to provide privacy, yet is close enough to allow interaction if desired.

Familiar materials punctuate the camp's scheme: corrugated iron, clay, rust, rough hewn timbers, flyscreens, canvas and glass louvres.

The tents' outdoor, corrugated iron-wrapped en suites feature locally-built fixtures. Like most of the fittings at the camp, the recesses were custom-built for the project by local trades and craftspeople. In this case, Kanga Birtles, famous round-the-world solo yachtsman, turned his boat building expertise to the camp's shower recesses. Local potter, David Prescott, now based in Vietnam, hand threw and glazed the unique ceramic basins and soap dispensers. He also made soap dishes and ashtrays, which have all since been broken by delinquent possums. The 12-volt solar panels that power the tents were made by a local Ulladulla electrician. And furnishings are all locally handcrafted bush furniture.

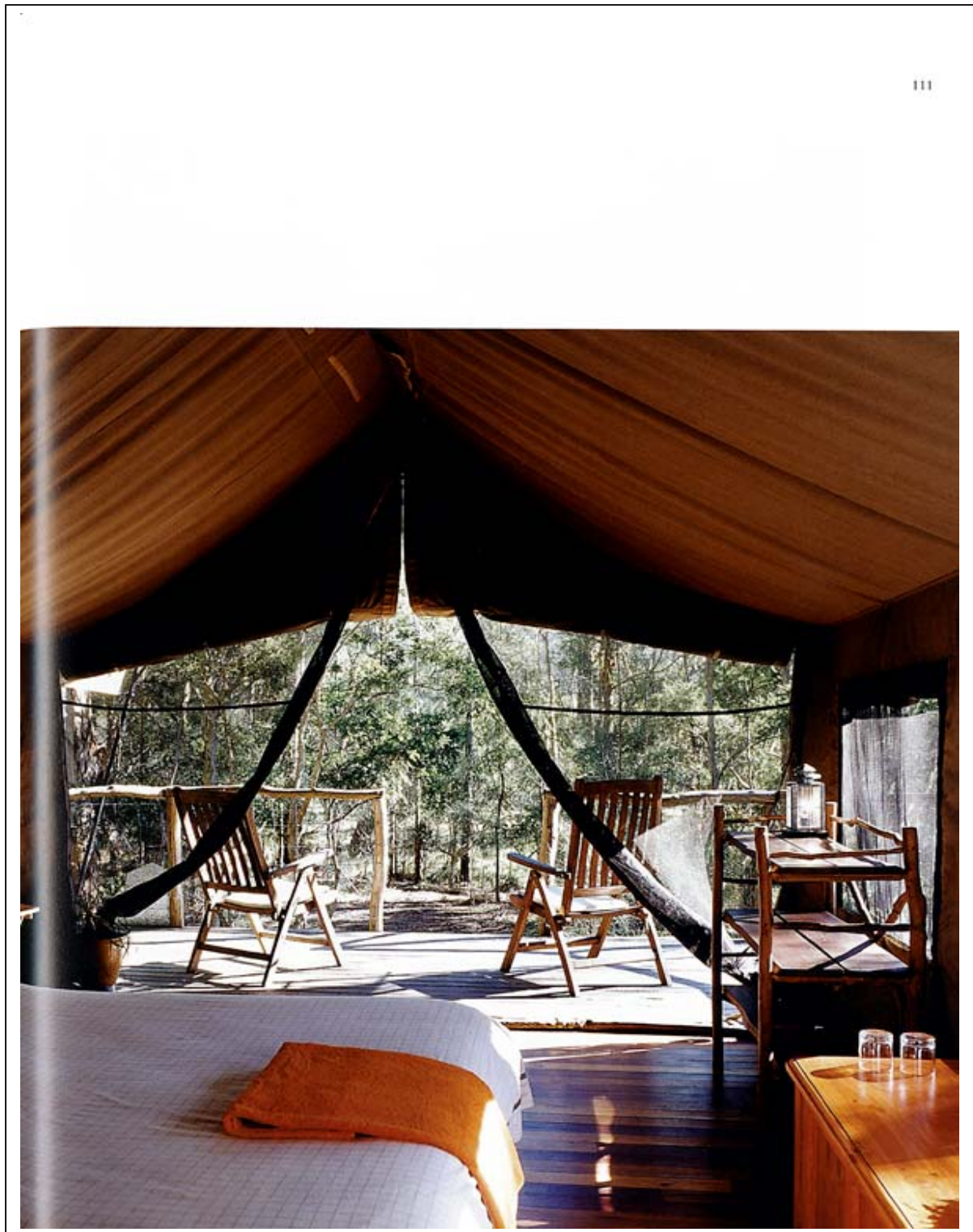
Guattari's ecosophical model follows (without referencing) the ecosophy of Norway's Arne Naess' deep ecology movement, but sees ecosophy as also having the potential to produce unpredictable or 'dissident' subjectivities. He calls for ecology to include ways to reclaim the potential to extend who we are, how we live and what we feel.

Guattari's aim for ecosophy is to imagine, if not effect, new subjectivities.

Nettleontribe's design seeks to create contexts for unexpected encounters, with ourselves as much as with others or the environment, which might allow us to imagine such subjectivities.



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The Gunya (a term used across a number of local Aboriginal language groups – meaning meeting place or place of shelter) is both the literal and philosophical heart of the Paperbark Camp and is such a context for these sorts of encounters.

Poised four metres off the forest floor, the Gunya stands tall in the treetops like a kind of lookout from which to gain perspective in more than one sense of the word. The tall, airy structure captures sea breezes and light dappled through the trees during the day. The sliding doors open up for outdoor dining on the verandah, creating a backdrop of the hinterland from which to enjoy relaxed meals and observe the antechinus (a small marsupial), sugar gliders and birds. An open fire and candlelight bring warmth to the room at night, playing off the amber of the stained, plywood clad walls. The lounges hugging the fireplace were again custom built for the scheme and add to the contemporary eco-design ethos. The Gunyah also serves as a conference venue for the exchange of ideas and creative collaborations and is home to a renowned five-star restaurant.

The architectural tenets embodied by the Paperbark Camp are not just a form of adherence to the technical standards of (ESDA) environmental regulations for the design. Architecture is not just technical it is processual. Its mark on the landscape bears witness to the interstice between architecture, milieu and ontology. Interior architecture perhaps even more so, because it is inside, because it is intimate, because it is an envelope for the quickening of intimacy within and between people.

For Guattari, a sense of interbeing [l'etre-en-groupe] is necessary, not only to strengthen our ability to communicate effectively as a society, but also to infect our very way of being in the world at the deepest level. The Paperbark Lodge and Camp attempts to offer a space for that.

*\*In an article that appeared under the title 'Pour une refondation des pratiques sociales' in Le Monde Diplomatique (October 1992): 26-7 (1), a few weeks before Guattari's sudden death on 29 August 1992.*

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In the middle of it all – the tents at Paperbark Camp are nestled into the surrounding bush, ensuring privacy and an undisturbed experience of nature.

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At the camp one can have the best of both worlds – the natural experience of camping and a comfy, stylish setting.

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The restaurant, in keeping with the philosophy of the camp, embraces local produce and flavours: Greenwell Point Oysters with soy, wasabi and lime dipping sauce, Jervis Bay mussels and king prawns in a mushroom curry with coconut cardamom and lemon, myrtle and isobark honey, puna costa with warble seed nile and lime strap adorn the menu.