

# DEPARTURES

MARCH / APRIL 2008



INTERNATIONAL STYLE

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# blackBOOK

A GUIDE FOR THE SOPHISTICATED TRAVELER HERE & ABROAD | Edited by Andrew Sessa

*The Getaway*

## Great Barrier Relief

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Qualia's Leeward pavilions overlook the Whitsunday Passage and the uninhabited Whitsunday Island beyond.

**A**ustralian businessman and devoted yachtsman Robert Oatley remembers sailing by the Great Barrier Reef's Hamilton Island three decades ago. Back then there wasn't even an airstrip, but in the years since, Hamilton became a jet-setter's Eden and then an overcommercialized ex-paradise. Still, when he heard it was for sale, Oatley saw its potential. "I'm fond of the tropics," he says. "From Sydney this is as close as we can get to them in Australia without the problems farther north"—say, crocs and jellyfish.

Now Oatley has opened Qualia (pronounced *kwal-ee-ah*), a \$65 million resort spread out across 30 leafy acres on the island's secluded northern tip. It's big news, too: Until Qualia's debut Hayman, a private retreat for celebrity guests, stood alone as the go-to luxury spot in the Whitsundays, a group of 74 islands (only eight of them are developed) about two hours north of Sydney by plane. But Hayman now has a rival in Qualia, where Oatley and architect Chris Beckingham have created a serene, understated oasis.

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Scenes from Qualia, clockwise from left: The deck of a Windward Pavilion; Spa Qualia; a scallop speciality; the reception lounge.

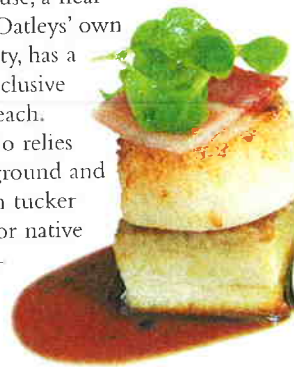


Oatley and Beckingham say they had the Aman resorts and the Aga Khan's Costa Smeralda in mind when planning the place, but they were also very much inspired by the landscape. Qualia's 60 pavilions are scattered over a gentle slope, with views of the Coral Sea and the occasional passing yacht. "Each one is like a lookout where you sit and appreciate nature," says Beckingham. Their corrugated-iron roofs are part of

the Australian vernacular, as are the generous eaves that keep out the tropical north Queensland sun. The ceilings, floors, and decks are made from local woods, and original artworks, playfully patterned textiles, and a retro-style lamp here and there prevent the interiors from being self-consciously meditative.

The best bungalows are the Windward pavilions, each with an infinity plunge pool. The Beach House, a near carbon copy of the Oatleys' own home on the property, has a guest cottage and exclusive access to a pebbly beach.

Chef Stephane Rio relies on his French background and locally available bush tucker (that's Aussie slang for native ingredients like kangaroo meat and lemon myrtle leaves) to create



his own interpretations of contemporary Australian cuisine. Some of the most successful dishes on the constantly evolving menu are banana hotcakes with Kaffir lime syrup and Hervey Bay scallops with poppy seed crêpes. Overall, it's the seafood that you want to order. (Note to those unfamiliar with wattleseeds, a seasoning now ubiquitous in Oz: Their distinctive, nutty flavor can be an acquired taste.)

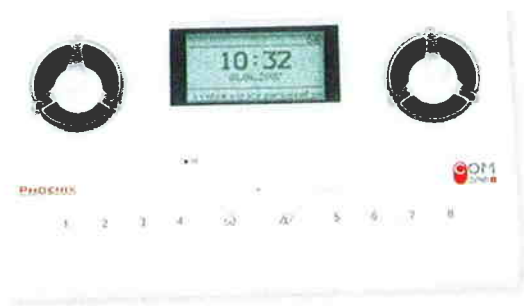
The Long Pavilion and Pebble Beach restaurants have the same tranquil feeling as the rest of the adults-only property. Qualia is so quiet, in fact, it's hard to believe that just a few miles beyond its gates is a marina with a noisy strip of bars, restaurants, and shops. The resort provides guests with electric buggies, so getting to town is easy enough if you want. But we see no real need to go any farther than Spa Qualia, perched on the property's highest point. Its lofty yoga and meditation pavilion affords 270-degree water views.

The area around the resort is changing, however, and once Oatley's Great Barrier Reef Yacht Club and Villas—now under construction—and 19-hole golf course (slated to open on neighboring Dent Island in 2009) are finished, guests might find more compelling reasons to venture outside Qualia. Just possibly. *From \$1,200 to \$2,700; 61-2/9433-3349; qualia.com.au.* —CAROLINE TIGER

Tech Update

Radio.com

While the satellite boom of a few years back gave the radio industry a much-needed boost, it's the Internet that is making waves today. With benefits just like those of the Web (instant access to all things, from anywhere, at anytime), Internet radio offers listening options of tremendous breadth and depth, surpassing by the thousands the station options currently available, even from satellite. Now new WiFi-enabled standalone devices allow you to listen without being shackled to your computer. We like Com One's **Phoenix WiFi Radio** (shown, \$210; comp.usa.com) and any of the three from C. Crane: the **Revo Pico**, **Sangean WFR-20**, and **Tangent Quattro** (\$350 each; ccrane.com). And look out for Tivoli Audio's forthcoming **NetWorksGo** (tivoliaudio.com). —FRANK VIZARD



FROM TOP: JASON LOUCAS/QUALIA (4); COURTESY COM ONE