

IN RESIDENCE

A slice of Sicily

Rustic Italian flair permeates this holiday home near Byron Bay

DENISE CULLEN

Im wandering around almost a hectare of manicured grounds at Lo Scoglio, a new high-end holiday rental at Coopers Shoot in the Byron Bay hinterland. I am looking for a lime tree, and not just any old bush, but the citrus splitter that owner Angelica Arnott says produces “the most beautiful lemons and limes”.

When I arrived the previous afternoon, I gunned up the dappled, winding road flanked by lush rainforest that sustained the Arakwal people of the Bundjalung nation of Byron Bay for tens of thousands of years. Turning into the driveway, I cleared a set of security gates, and heard the crunch of my wheels on perfectly maintained pebbles. Then a two-storey Italian-style farmhouse slid into view and it felt like passing through a portal and landing in Sicily. With its stone walls, exposed wooden beams, arched doorways and windows, and exterior shutters, Lo Scoglio (The Rock) resembles the sort of agriturismo farm stay you would stumble upon in that island’s interior.

From its rustic good looks to the welcome hamper containing sugo and penne Birigate, the property pays homage to what Arnott calls her “Italianity”. It also functions as a love letter to her father, who was born on Stromboli and



died before the completion of Lo Scoglio, built on the bones of a “humble” 1980s-era home. Arnott lived here with her husband, biodynamic and regenerative farmer Charlie Arnott (of the biscuit empire), and their four children for more than two years. The original idea was to knock it down and build an architect-designed masterpiece. An “energy healer” was consulted to clear the space, and plans were drawn up, but the pandemic scuppered the lot. “Our values shifted, and we decided that we were going to go with what we had,” Arnott says.

The couple realised that working with the footprint of the original house, and repurposing and reusing materials found onsite and elsewhere, was more in keeping with their mindset. The result is locally sourced stone

laid by masons, and textured floors created from centuries-old European oak recovered from English farmhouses. Upcycled beams from old wooden bridges across Australia provide additional layers of visual and historic intrigue. The most dramatic of these comes from the more than century-old Sportsmans Bridge at Lawrence near Tyndale, southwest of Yamba; it seems to cradle the ceiling in the open-plan living area.

“I really wanted the house to feel grounded and (for) every material to have a resonance,” Arnott explains. “When I stand on those floors, I feel the energy from them.”

A similar “old with new” philosophy guided the choice of furnishings, with a contemporary modular sofa the colour of the sea hunkered alongside a pair of vintage Italian sheepskin armchairs, and geometric-printed jute rugs sharing space with vintage objets d’art. The overall effect is one of monastic (though moneyed) calm and reverence.

Although the family intended to live in Lo Scoglio, Charlie felt called to return to Hanaminno, their 2143ha cattle property in Boorowa, NSW, and so the decision to throw open the home to paying guests was made. Among its facilities are a pool, spa, yoga deck, gymnasium, infra-red sauna, and ice bath. Access to Arnott’s little black book of local wellness practitioners is also thrown in. On my first night, Aleshia Marie (of Bespoke Skin & Spa Therapy) arrives, lights incense, sets up a massage table layered with blankets and white linen, and determinedly eases out all my knots. Next morning, personal trainer Jaden Garft takes me through a gym, sauna and ice bath session, delivering an enthusiastic high-five when I last three minutes in the tub. I also venture out to nearby Newrybar to visit Dr Jemma Buultjens of Vae Medical Aesthetics for a consultation and hydra facial.

Restaurants are in easy driving distance, but on my second night, I have the urge to cocoon and cook “at home” in Lo Scoglio’s marbled kitchen. Using ingredients purchased locally, cherry tomatoes from the garden, and a luscious lime from what I suspect is the splitter tree, I make tom yum soup, but only because my Thai cooking game is stronger than my Italian. It seems a little sacrilegious, but when I tell Arnott later, she’s thrilled. “There’s a lot to be said for staying put, and really experiencing a holiday from a regenerative perspective,” she says. “I want people to feel that they can create nurture for themselves in that space.”

Denise Cullen was a guest of Lo Scoglio.



Lo Scoglio, above; exposed beams in one of the four bedrooms, left; open-plan living area below



TO-DO LIST

INDULGE

Mukti Beauty Rooms is in Mullumbimby, 20 minutes by road from Lo Scoglio, and its certified organic products are made onsite. Try one of the seasonal facials or a Mukti fusion massage.

muktiorganics.com

EAT

The Roadhouse Byron Bay does a delicious chia seed pudding with mango and coconut yoghurt. Bangalow, five minutes away by road, boasts twin treasures in Ciao Mate, lauded for wood-fired pizza, and the You Beauty bar and dining room, both helmed by sustainability-focused chef Matt Stone.

roadhousebyronbay.com

ciaomate.com.au

youbeauty2479.com

EXPLORE

The most popular walking trail is the 3.7km Cape Byron loop, or Lighthouse Walk, which cuts through rainforest and across clifftops with postcard views of the ocean and hinterland. Beach strolls, ocean swims, surfing, horse riding and kayaking are other diversions.

nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

SHOP

Many of Lo Scoglio’s fixtures have been sourced from Tigmi Trading in Byron Bay. Also proudly homegrown is the bohemian fashion label Spell. The Bangalow Pharmacy stocks fine brands such as Aesop bath and beauty products and Astier de Villatte, French makers of fine porcelain and fragrances.

tigmitrading.com

aus.spell.co

ESSENTIALS

Lo Scoglio is about 15 minutes by road from Byron Bay. The pet-friendly four-bedroom house plus separate studio sleeps a maximum of 12; \$2900 a night; three-night minimum. Wellness practitioners can be booked at additional cost.

loscoglio.com.au