

# hidden valley

City slickers find splendour in the grass deep in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

Words **Cathy Osmond**

It was love at first sight. As the ribbon of road spilled down out of the ghost gums and on to a clearing at the northern edge of the Blackall Range, the car's occupants whispered a collective "Wow". The house sat before us on her grassy, terraced perch. All around, as far as the eye could see, were thickly forested hills and valleys. We were so alone it took our breath away. In the silence, a small voice piped up from the back seat: "Is this the Countryside?"

We'd come to this secluded spot in the Sunshine Coast hinterland in a car packed with good intentions. The city mice, clearly suffering from Environment Deficit Disorder, would forget TV and plastic toys and wander off – not too far – to inspect insects and flowers and things. Their parents, who love fresh air but also great houses, fresh produce but also proper wine, would enjoy the hills but also get to have a hot bath. Boorman Eco, a new solar-powered, tank-watered house on 50 hectares near Mapleton village, looked just the ticket for our light-green escape.

This is the first foray into holiday accommodation for Mapleton locals Denise and Philip Boorman. A former builder who now designs award-winning houses, Philip had acquired pockets of the hinterland over the years

with a view to conserving local flora and fauna; his environmental trust fund now continues this buyback, with 50 per cent of proceeds from every stay at Boorman Eco going to the fund.

And so the house gives back but also takes remarkably little out. It's spacious, comfortable, immaculately finished with Philip's signature, beautiful timbers – and self-sufficient. With bifold glass doors that open wide to deck and terraces, it catches the breeze; with a log-burning stove and lashings of insulation, it warms quickly; solar panels deliver enough energy to sustain sensible consumption, while gas and filtered rainwater do their bit for cooking and piping hot showers.

The well-stocked kitchen adjoins a dining area dominated by one of Philip's magnificent modern tables. The lounge has stylish furniture, a TV with DVD/CD player and a large DVD library (there's no TV reception). Along a hall are a bathroom, washing machine, toilet and a bedroom where three single beds are given privacy with smart, individually colour-themed storage areas. Upstairs there's an airy master bedroom with balcony and ensuite. And throughout, tasteful soft furnishings and thoughtful touches that never veer into twee. Clearly there's no roughing it here. However, I found myself rather appreciating a two-day crash course in energy consumption. Boorman Eco has her own likes and dislikes: she'll keep giving

## MUSTDO.

**VISIT** Mapleton Falls Lookout. Join the 58km Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk or try a shorter circuit in the Mapleton Falls or Kondalilla national parks.

**STROLL** around Mapleton village, stopping in at Gallery 9 to admire Philip Boorman's unique timber dining tables. Then drive the scenic routes to Flaxton, Montville and Maleny, picking up some organic produce at roadside stalls on the way.

until you make a mistake, such as turning on two demanding appliances at once. Then she'll black out till the offender is unplugged. After three strikes, says Philip, she'll call it quits: time to take a short trip down the hill to start up the generator. We found she does not like the oven's electric grill option, or iPod speakers, and certainly not hairdryers. I'd thought the lack of a toaster was an oversight till I learned how much energy one would cost the house. We happily had oven-warmed rolls for breakfast instead. And after using the washing machine, we paid the house back by running the generator for a while.

Of course the city mice did need supervision, and the DVDs got a workout. But so did the piano, and the preschooler was thrilled with our forays into the forest, where we trawled for natural treasures. At night, with exhausted children tucked up, we roasted an organic chicken and poured wine and watched the stars. And wished we could always live like this.

**THE PLACE** Boorman Eco holiday house, near Mapleton, Sunshine Coast hinterland.

**TEL** (07) 5445 7020

**WEBLINK** [www.philipboorman.com.au](http://www.philipboorman.com.au)

**THE DEAL** \$490 per night for the house, which sleeps five comfortably, or \$2500 for six nights. Minimum of two nights.

