

Library House

*How a house that wouldn't sell
became a Top 5 Australian getaway*



Rowan Smith

Library House - *How a house that wouldn't sell
became a Top 5 Australian getaway*

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A note to the Reader

This book is about creating something special.

And about survival.

I didn't plan on opening and becoming caretaker of a boutique luxury guesthouse.

Yet Library House turned out to be one of the most absorbing chapters of my working life.

I discovered a new kind of service. Surprising - after more than a decade running our creative agency.

In the daily work of preparing a beautiful house for guests and ensuring that every small detail was exactly right.

Part memoir, part manual, this book is that experience.

We look forward to your enjoyment of Library House.

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Introduction

The morning that changed everything

I woke early on New Year's Day 2014 and went straight to my laptop.

Virgin Australia's inflight magazine, *Voyeur*, had been preparing a feature on new places to stay around the country. Library House had opened only four months earlier, and the editor had hinted we might be included in a piece about new Hobart accommodation.

When I found the January edition online and opened the article, I realised something extraordinary had happened. The feature was headlined 'High Five' - five of Australia's top new getaways. And there, at number four, was Library House.

Alongside a \$30 million Sydney hotel conversion, a Sheraton resort and a Melbourne Docklands apartment hotel sat a five-bedroom guesthouse in Hobart that my then wife and I had created inside our family home.

Library House had opened in September 2013. Four months later it was being listed as one of the most exciting new places to stay in Australia.

For a moment I simply stared at the screen.

The listing turned out to be the single best piece of promotion we could have imagined. From that day on it gave Library House a credibility we could never have manufactured ourselves. It appeared in the footer of our enquiry emails for the remainder of our time running the property, reassuring potential guests.

It did that job beautifully.

But the real story begins well before that morning.

It begins with a house that wouldn't sell.

PART ONE

The Opportunity



Chapter 1

The house that wouldn't sell

We had lived in our family home in West Hobart for fifteen years.

It was a beautiful Federation house built in 1900 - one of the finest on Forest Road in West Hobart, originally designed and constructed by German brothers (one a cabinet maker) as a pair of cottages at numbers 82 and 84. In 2004 we undertook a large extension - a contemporary addition by award-winning local architect Andrew Williamson that effectively doubled the size of the house. The result was a fusion of old and new. Federation bones, contemporary light.

We had raised our children here. It was a very special home.

But in 2011 it was time for a change and we placed the property on the market.

The feedback following open homes was effusive. Record numbers came through the door over several campaigns - we even changed agents, moving from one of Hobart's most prominent and respected firms to one of its most boutique - hoping a different approach might unlock things. Viewers praised the quality of the house and the views. I recall a comment passed on by one agent, "Please congratulate the owners on a superb home." Yet despite everything, we received only one offer. And that one was absolutely unrealistic. The market was at the very bottom. The house was exceptional. Nobody was buying.

Meanwhile we had already committed to another house. This left us in a tricky situation. If we couldn't sell, we would need to create income from the property to support our commitments. Renting it in the traditional sense would not make the numbers work - the yield from an annual lease simply wasn't enough.

One afternoon we sat in a cafe with a new thought and some numbers scribbled on the napkin between us. If we couldn't sell the house - and traditional rental wouldn't work - could we transform it?

Chapter 2

A changing Hobart

When I moved to Hobart from Melbourne in 1996, the city felt very different from the place visitors know today.

I used to joke about it being difficult to find a decent loaf of sourdough bread.

But we'd wanted a different pace - and more grounding environment of living between the mountain and river - for our young children growing up.

I started a business, an advertising agency. With my wife and my experience in that industry already having worked at some great agencies in Melbourne and Sydney through our twenties, the new agency did well.

In Hobart things began to change again dramatically in 2011 with the opening of MONA - the Museum of Old and New Art - created by Tasmanian gambler and art collector David Walsh. Walsh did something remarkable: he made Hobart and Tasmania interesting to a whole new audience beyond the traditional dual tourism attractions of colonial history and natural wilderness. Not just to Australians either. The museum attracted international attention, and with it came a new kind of visitor - well travelled, interested in experiences that felt a little different, willing to spend.

You could notice it, living in the city. Things were changing.

Sitting in that cafe, we understood that something significant was underway. The question was whether our house could become part of that shift.

Chapter 3

Seeing the opportunity

At the time, most accommodation in Hobart fell into two categories. Hotels offered rooms. Short-stay options were typically two- or three-bedroom properties listed on the emerging platforms, and many were out of town or in the regional areas catering for tourists travelling around Tasmania.

Our house had five bedrooms and generous living spaces, with views across Hobart, the Derwent River and on a clear day all the way south to Cape Raoul on the Tasman Peninsula. In one of central Hobart's most sought-after suburbs.

We began to think about who was actually arriving in Hobart in the wake of MONA: middle to upper income travellers, lovers of food and art and unusual experiences, people who wanted more than a hotel room. Groups of friends travelling together. Families. Couples who wanted to share a house rather than have separate rooms.

We did our research - on TripAdvisor and the booking platforms at the time. To the best of our knowledge, we would be the only five-bedroom property in the centre of Hobart. We had position, amenity, and a clear gap in the market. Five bedrooms and three living spaces made Library House uniquely attractive to groups wanting a shared experience, while also commanding a premium nightly rate that the numbers actually required.

We also had two friends who were already running successful accommodation properties in and around Hobart who became extraordinary coaches and mentors. I cannot stress enough how much of our subsequent success was owed to their generosity in guiding us through what we didn't yet know. If you are seriously considering this path, find your equivalent. The investment of a mentor's time is worth more than almost any other resource.

Our conclusion on that napkin? The house was the opportunity.

PART TWO

Creating Library House



Chapter 4

Doing it right in a residential street

We knew this had to be done properly.

Operating a short-stay accommodation property at the level we needed to financially succeed - in a suburban street - would require a council permit for change of use. The rezoning of the property from residential to short-term accommodation. This process would involve our application being presented to every adjoining neighbour for comment, as well as being publicly advertised. We knew this going in, and we chose to get ahead of it.

Before lodging anything, we wrote personally to the surrounding neighbours explaining our intentions. The last thing we wanted was a disgruntled neighbour. Any objections had the potential to stop things before we started - but equally, we wanted to be good neighbours. A simple conversation, we felt, could open dialogue and understanding over any concerns.

The application itself was no small undertaking. If you have ever tendered for a government contract or submitted an arts grant application, our council document made a worthy comparison. Our mentors advised us on which sections of the City of Hobart Planning Scheme were relevant, how to frame our case, and what the council officer would focus on. The result was an application that was focused, compelling and left no stone unturned.

Following the council consultation process and a property inspection, we were required to address the following conditions

before a permit could be granted:

- An adjoining boundary screen off the back deck

The screen itself was an engineering feat - a high steel frame with large sheets of toughened translucent glass.

- Translucent window screening on the kitchen side
- A wired-in exit light on the staircase landing and another at the back corridor door
- Reinforced glass windows over the spa bathroom
- Wired smoke detectors throughout the house

These works represented a significant set-up cost. But I encourage you with what followed. This calculated risk, and our unwavering commitment to doing things properly, resulted in an awarded, loved property that brought joy to guests from around the world. And one that we sold profitably, having recouped all set-up costs and achieved the price we had always wanted for the house - within eighteen months.

The day the permit was finally approved was a special day.

Chapter 5

The brand – Why Library House was always going to be Library House

One question guided everything that followed the permit approval: if people were going to stay in this house, what would the experience feel like?

The answer was already there in the front room.

Since the renovation, that room had become the library. It was my wife's writing room and study - a beautiful bay-windowed room with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves running the full length of the far wall, built for her lifetime collection. Books had always been central to our home's life. Our children had grown up surrounded by them. The creative life of our family was woven into the walls.

When we began thinking about the identity of the property as a boutique luxury guesthouse, the strategy became almost self-fulfilling - leave the book collection for others to enjoy. Call it Library House.

What sounds so obvious in retrospect also underlines something important about branding. The best brand might be the one that already exists in your property and your story. Each of the five bedrooms was then named after a beloved book. The first three were named for authors she loved. *Norwegian Wood* - Haruki Murakami's haunting 1987 novel, itself named after the Beatles song - gave its name to the ground floor room opposite the library,

with its long desk, views to the Derwent Bridge and the city, and shelves stocked with Murakami titles including *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and *Kafka on the Shore*. *The Age of Innocence* honoured Edith Wharton, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of 1921 was the first to be awarded to a woman - a quiet room, the quietest in the house, with an ornamental original fireplace and high ceilings. *Light in August*, William Faulkner's Nobel Prize-winning work, lent its name to the first of two upstairs attic rooms - a skylit retreat with a reading chair, stocked with Faulkner novels and designed, quite deliberately, as a place to curl up and disappear.

The remaining upstairs rooms - the second attic room, the other with its own balcony - were named after two of her own books.

The original architect's drawings of the house - 'Cottage Forest Road', 1900 - was framed and hung in the Norwegian Wood room for guests to discover. Copies of all five namesake novels, and shelves of their authors' other works, were in each room. Guests could request signed copies of the (last two) novels posted home so they didn't have to add them to their luggage.

The rooms, along with the living areas, were stocked with titles from the relevant authors, plus cookbooks, lifestyle annuals and contemporary magazine subscriptions. There really was something for everyone.

On one occasion a guest from Perth turned out to be an actual librarian. Learning about Library House before booking her stay, she had gone about seeking out and reading four of the five bedroom-themed titles in preparation - some she had already known, others she actively tracked down. And she had deliberately saved the fifth for reading during her stay itself.

That a librarian had so carefully researched her arrival at Library House felt like the most wonderful confirmation that the brand had found exactly the right people.

And yet our very first guests couldn't have seemed more opposite.

Our first booking was a group of Sydney friends on a football reunion trip. Six men who loved their stay so much that three later returned with their respective families and other friends. Brand integrity attracts the right people - and the right people turn out to be more various than you'd imagine.

The Library House monogram and the Compendium cover

LC



Chapter 6

Furnishing the house

Transforming the family home into accommodation required more than furnishing five bedrooms. Every detail was reconsidered from the perspective of a guest.

We had lived in this house for fifteen years, so the first task was deciding what made the cut and what needed upgrading. A beautiful dark wood round table for eight - which had been purchased as a boardroom table for our communications agency - now found a new home in the Library House dining room, paired with new high-backed chairs. One queen bed from our home made the cut for its aesthetic. The art collection stayed. The books stayed.

Other things needed replacing. A pair of denim fabric couches we'd lived with for a decade were finally upgraded to a low leather pair we'd felt would suit the space better. Old coffee tables gave way to glass. The result was a house that felt elevated without feeling impersonal.

For beds, mattress toppers, linen, towels, bath mats, bath robes and luggage racks, we were fortunate to be directed to Oakley Textiles - a Hobart wholesaler to the accommodation industry. Their knowledge of what works in a hospitality setting saved us considerable time and missteps.

We purchased three complete sets of all linen from the outset: one set in use throughout the house, one in our supplies cupboard,

and one with the linen service. This system - in theory - kept the turnaround clean and reliable. In practice, our relationship with a linen service recommended to us led to some of the most stressful operational moments of the entire eighteen months - a story I'll return to in the Linen chapter.

For crockery, cutlery and essential cooking equipment and utensils - as we wanted the kitchen to be equipped for any guest party that did want to make their own meals - we worked with Medhurst Kitchen Equipment and everything was chosen commensurate to the standard and brand of a luxury boutique guesthouse.

For example, the British-made Steelite International tableware we used is specially formulated for the hospitality industry with properties that give it additional strength and durability. It carries a lifetime warranty against chipping, presents beautifully and feels fantastic (like the quality at your favourite restaurant with the good linen). And although a single dinner plate can cost more than a cheaper set of six, this was the quality and guest experience we wanted to provide at the table.

We also added a hall runner and rug in the library to protect the light-coloured wool carpet in that room, and purpose-appropriate lamps for several bedrooms.

The kitchen was equipped with the same attention to detail. A Chasseur enamelled cast iron frying pan in a beautiful Imperial Blue colour. A stainless steel pasta pot, matching colander, and a smaller companion saucepan for everything else. A four-slice toaster lived in a bottom drawer, out of sight but spotless and ready. Utensils were chosen for their quality, aesthetic and also being practical and lovely to use. Everything was then consistently well

laid out for every new arrival - down to making sure all the dinner knives were facing the same way - in the drawers and cupboards, to meet a holidaying cook's essential needs. Also beautiful glassware - champagne flutes, beer glasses, white and red wine glasses, all for six, whisky tumblers for four, the latter left in a discreet cupboard in the Norwegian Wood room - my former office - to be discovered rather than displayed.

We deliberately avoided pod coffee machines. The best home coffee, in our view - and more than one professional barista has said the same - comes from a traditional stovetop espresso maker. A high-quality Italian-design one sat ready on the gas stove, large enough for three lattes or four espressos in a single go. Alongside, a quality milk frother, and an Avanti eight-cup glass coffee plunger on a lower pantry shelf for when numbers called for it.

The overall effect was a kitchen that enabled whatever the stay called for. Nothing more was needed. Nothing less would have done.

The garden, too, was part of the offering: apricot and apple trees, abundant rose bushes, raspberry canes, cottage garden flowers and herbs. The compendium simply said 'pick whatever is in season' - and guests did, with evident delight.

The bathrooms deserve a special mention, too.

Some years earlier, I had attended a conference in Sydney and found myself staying at the recommended adjoining accommodation, Establishment Hotel.

The hotel was such a surprise that I soon booked a return visit - and during that stay, we found ourselves not just enjoying the room but photographing, measuring and sketching - the smaller

chocolate-coloured tiles set against larger cream ones, the green glass screens, the proportions. (All very new, then.) We went home with a clear vision for what we wanted from our own renovation, and a decade later, those bathroom details remained among the most consistently commented-on features of Library House.

Establishment wasn't the only influence. Through the years of the agency I had been fortunate to stay in some exceptional hotels, and each left its mark on the choices made at Library House. The Greenwich Hotel in New York - co-owned by Robert De Niro. Here, the array of snacks in the wire basket on the desk that were complimentary beyond the choices in the mini bar, the unforgettable fragrance of the Red Earth bathroom products - these were not amenities so much as a philosophy, and that philosophy informed our own. On another visit to our business partners in New York, staying at The Standard, High Line, in the Meatpacking District; and on a further occasion a very special family stay at The Hotel Chelsea. Hotel Lindrum in Melbourne had left a cute little 'Lindrum Bear' on my pillow after a number of overnight stays there when visiting our Melbourne office and clients in the city. Each of these recollections now added to our thinking about what a boutique, luxury guest experience could look like.

The details that I have loved as a guest were now the clues and experiences I enjoyed providing for our guests, when preparing Library House.

There were small touches that came from much closer to home. Some delectably moreish gluten-free bite-sized biscuits we'd been enjoying as a family - a bag of these left in the red glass ornamental bowl on the dining room table made the perfect welcoming gift. Beautifully labelled and packaged by the maker in

clear cellophane, over the time we included these they disappeared on all but a couple of occasions.

Another touch was a pair of quality Universal Travel Adaptors - on a low recessed shelf in the main living area, each in its own black cloth drawstring bag. Placed to be easily spotted and immediately useful for international guests, they were otherwise discreet enough to serve simply as a quiet nod to that level of consideration for everyone else.

Chapter 7

‘Don’t do food’ (or maybe this way)

A friend who had ventured into short-stay accommodation a few years ahead of us advised, “Don’t do food.”

Their experience was that guests generally didn’t eat the breakfast provisions left for them, creating running costs and logistical headaches including the sight of untouched food on departure day.

We took the spirit of the advice and adapted it. Rather than providing a full breakfast arrangement, we focused on two things: a pantry with core essentials that any guest would appreciate, and an optional pre-arrival grocery order through our preferred supplier.

The optional grocery order was where the pantry and fridge provisioning came fully alive.

We established a wonderful working relationship with Hill Street Grocer - one of Tasmania’s finest food store brands, with its original branch located nearby in West Hobart. In our pre-arrival correspondence, we invited guests to place an order online and share the order number with us. On the morning of the guest party’s arrival, I would collect the order and unpack everything neatly and visibly for easy and quick identification within the pantry and refrigerator.

An interesting aside. Over time I noticed something else revealing about these occasional orders. Regardless of where guests came from - Melbourne, Sydney, further interstate or internationally

- the contents were remarkably similar. Eggs and bacon almost invariably appeared. And some kind of bread. A coffee or tea. Either a bottle of juice, or no juice. Usually a sweet treat - a block of chocolate or packet of favourite biscuits. Perhaps a packet of chips or pretzels. Through the minor variations you could see a wonderful pattern: when people are on holiday, we are all not so different.

Chapter 8

The Library House wine list

A wine rack had been part of the renovated kitchen design - two rows of individual bottle slots running above the fridge and continuing in a separate block above the microwave, finished in a deep navy laminate. So for Library House, we offered some of our favourites - a small, considered selection, two bottles of each wine, plus a Tasmanian craft beer. Presented within the racks to mirror the wine list exactly, nothing more, nothing less.

Left to right: sparkling, whites, reds, cheapest to dearest within each category, two bottles of each varietal. The top Bay of Fires slot sat empty - its matching bottle already in the fridge below, cold and ready, along with the four-pack of Moo Brew. Everything else on offer in the rack above.

Under the Tasmanian General Liquor Exemption (No. 1) 2013 - operators of tourist accommodation and guest houses of less than twenty people were authorised to sell liquor to in-house guests without a separate liquor licence, subject to standard conditions. Library House qualified. We offered this small, considered selection at retail price.

We chose not to mark up. It felt more in keeping with the spirit of the offering - a service rather than a revenue stream.

Usually at least one bottle was ticked off the list during a stay. Sometimes more. Any selection made was charged to the credit card on file, with a note in the post-stay email letting guests know.

If you're considering offering alcohol to guests, check the current regulations where you are operating. They vary considerably.

The Library House wine list, left on the kitchen bench - aligned squarely, of course

Library House Wines

A small selection, featuring some of Tasmania's finest, is available for purchase.
(Your selection will be debited to the booking credit card.)

SPARKLING

Bay of Fires	\$36	<input type="checkbox"/>
2008 Joesph Chromy Pepik	\$54	<input type="checkbox"/>
2006 Vintage Jansz	\$60	<input type="checkbox"/>

WHITES

Storm Bay Sauvignon Blanc	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pipers Brook Pinot Gris	\$35	<input type="checkbox"/>
Freycinet Chardonnay	\$40	<input type="checkbox"/>

REDS

2010 Cotes Du Rhone	\$27	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drew Pinot Noir	\$40	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stefano Lubiana Pinot Noir	\$60	<input type="checkbox"/>

BEER

Moo Brew Belgo	\$9 (stubbie)	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Chapter 9

The Compendium

Our guest compendium was twenty-two pages, double-sided, and one of the most valuable investments we made in the Library House experience.

It contained everything a guest needed to know - how the house worked, recommended restaurants and activities around Hobart, distances from the city, what to do in each season, and the kind of insider knowledge that distinguishes a great compendium from a list of rules. Guests consistently commented that it helped them discover Hobart more easily. It had been conceived that way - as part of the brand experience, not as an administrative document.

Production-wise, it was a plastic ring-bound A4 document, printed on a home printer, but with a heavier semi-gloss paper colour cover, regular matt-finish recycled copy paper pages and a clear plastic cover over the top. However, the design, typesetting and overall look and feel were impeccable.

This meant I could reprint it and have a copy ready for every guest arrival if the previous one showed visible signs of wear. The compendium should feel as though it was prepared for this particular guest, not handed down from the last one.

The welcome page set the tone for everything that followed. It read simply:

Thank you for being our guests at Library House.

We hope your stay here is a highlight of visiting Hobart and Tasmania.

Please contact us should you require any further assistance during your stay. We will always do our very best to accommodate any request - and otherwise we greatly respect your privacy.

That last line - ‘We will always do our very best to accommodate any request, and otherwise we greatly respect your privacy’ - was the distillation of everything Library House stood for as a guest experience. It appeared on the first page guests turned to, before any practical information, before any house rules. It told them, before anything else, what kind of hosts we were.

The compendium’s alphabetical contents page covered everything from Appliances to Yoga. Key sections included a detailed Around Library House guide - curated personal recommendations for restaurants, cafes, galleries, walks, and attractions, written in our own voice rather than copied from a tourism brochure - Garagistes (‘all of Australia talks about Garagistes’), Pigeon Hole (‘takeaway breads are a must try’), Paesano Pizza (‘best pizza in Hobart, minutes from your door’), Me Wah (‘excellent Chinese and fabulous Sunday Yum Cha’), Fullers Bookshop (‘masterful recommenders, curious readers, eccentrically knowledgeable, community proud and 90-odd years young’). These were not listings - they were recommendations from someone who lived there and cared about the guest’s experience of the city.

The bedroom section described each room in full - the namesake author, the literary context, the specific books available to read. The catering section introduced Hill Street Grocer, West Hobart Gourmet Meats, and a dine-in chef if you desired. The fireplace section included both practical instructions for use and a clear

liability note. The heating section explained the quirks of the underfloor system and why small adjustments were all that was ever needed.

Every section was written with the same care as every other aspect of Library House. The compendium was not a housekeeping manual with a Library House logo on it. It was the brand in printed form - and guests loved it. They wrote in it. Left notes alongside restaurant recommendations, reminders to themselves, and occasionally a thank you on the welcome page.

I appreciate that reprinting used more paper and ink. Presenting a dog-eared document, however, was not an option.

Two pages from the Library House Compendium - the contents page and the first page of the 'Around Library House' section

Contents

Essential Phone Numbers

Appliances

Around Library House

Bedrooms

BBQ

Cafes

Car Parking

Catering

Check out time

Cinema

Fireplaces

Fitness (including Gym, Pools,
Tennis, Walking Tracks, Yoga)

Foxtel

Garden

Groceries

Heating

History (House)

Internet (Wi-Fi)

Kitchen and Living/Dining

Laundry

Library

Media Room

MONA (see 'Around Library House')

No Parties Policy

Petrol Stations

Restaurants

Security

Towel supply

Views

Walks

Wi-Fi (See Internet)

Wine

Yoga

Appliances

There is a Folder (same as this) containing all instruction booklets for Library House appliances. Please reference for support using any of the appliances. If this source information does not solve your need please contact Rowan or Tina (numbers opposite).

(See also Media Room, Fireplaces.)

Around Libray House

(Alphabetical)

Agrarian Kitchen	<p>www.theagrariankitchen.com</p> <p>The Agrarian Kitchen is a sustainable farm-based cooking school situated in a 19th century schoolhouse at Lachlan, 45 minutes from Hobart in Tasmania's Derwent Valley. To avoid disappointment, bookings are generally required months in advance.</p>
Arthur's Circle, Battery Point	<p>www.discovernaturalhobart.com/battery-point-heritage-walk</p> <p>Battery Point has a large number of historic houses dating from the first European settlement. Probably the most significant is Arthur Circus with its cottages, which is also the only circus in Australia.</p>
Backspace Theatre	<p>www.tastheatre.com/backspace</p> <p>The Theatre Royal Backspace is the performance home of the Tasmanian Theatre Company. The space is a focal point for the creative energy that enriches Hobart as a place to live.</p>
Bottega Rotolo	<p>www.bottegarotolo.com.au</p> <p>Bottega Rotolo Hobart are fine food & wine merchants specialising in European food. Complete with dedicated cheese room with 50+ cheeses from all over the world and weekly cooking classes.</p>
Bett Gallery, North Hobart	<p>www.bettgallery.com.au</p> <p>Dick Bett is a well known name in the Tasmania art scene. A contemporary art space in the North Hobart precinct.</p>
Bruny Island Cruises	<p>www.brunycruises.com.au</p> <p>Rob Pennicott's award winning wilderness and wildlife adventure cruise. Cruises depart from Hobart and also from Kettering 45mins from Hobart.</p>
Botanical Gardens	<p>www.rtbg.tas.gov.au</p> <p>Located 2mins from the centre of Hobart. The sheltered, landscaped grounds of the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens hold historic plant collections and a large number of significant trees, many dating from the nineteenth century.</p>

Chapter 10

Protecting your property – guests, breakages, and peace of mind

It is a fair concern. You are inviting strangers into a property you have invested in significantly – and in many cases, cared about personally. The honest answer, in our experience, was that the problem was far smaller than the fear – and that the best protection was not a bond or an insurance policy, but the decisions made long before a guest ever walked through the door.

You control who comes by how and what you present

The single most effective protection against poor guests is your marketing. When you present a property with a clear sense of identity and quality, you self-select the guests who respond to it. Library House attracted people who appreciated what it was – thoughtful travellers, families marking occasions, groups of friends wanting something special. Those guests treated the house with care because the house communicated that it deserved care.

A property that presents itself carelessly, prices itself at the bottom of the market, or makes itself available to any group regardless of fit, will attract a broader and less predictable range of guests. The work you put into brand, photography and presentation is simultaneously the work you put into attracting a quality guest.

Know your market and price to it

Our demographic was middle to upper income guests - people for whom Library House represented a considered choice, not a cheap bed. Many may have come from equally fine homes, or travelled regularly enough to know what genuine quality looked and felt like. At that price point, guests generally arrive with a corresponding expectation of their own behaviour - whether Library House met their usual standard or represented a special occasion, they understood the kind of place they were in, and treated it accordingly.

Your own removals

We made deliberate decisions about what stayed in the house and what did not. We had also collected a lot of art over the years, mostly from artists either of us had known personally, or from other special moments. In large part we decided to leave the art along with the books (save some key pieces for the new home). And certain other items of personal significance and anything whose loss or damage would have distressed us were removed before we opened. What remained was beautiful, considered and appropriate for a guest environment - but chosen with the understanding that it was now serving a hospitality function, not a personal one. Other than serving the spirit and story of the house.

This is both a practical and a psychological act of preparation. It removes the anxiety of 'what if' from objects you cannot afford to lose, and leaves you free to host generously rather than with concealed worry.

Policies that do the work

Library House operated with a clear set of policies that protected the property without feeling unwelcoming. In the accompanying terms that anyone would see when enquiring about a booking via any of the booking portals, they would read that Library House allowed for guests who were 12 years and over. My first email reply to a booking request reinforced this, inviting guests to ensure they had read and agreed to the Library House terms and conditions before confirming.

Those terms were plain and fair: guests were asked to return the house in the condition it was presented on arrival, with any excessive cleaning or garbage removal incurring additional charges. Breakages or damages beyond normal wear and tear would be charged to the credit card on file - though we made clear it was never our intention to charge for replacement of accidentally broken crockery.

We liaised with families who enquired about bringing infants and toddlers and made exceptions on a few case-by-case occasions. The mutual care and discussion and set up for these meant the agreement was always fully respected and ultimately enjoyable.

Whole-house bookings only. A maximum of eight guests - generous for a five-bedroom property, but a firm upper limit.

The Finding Serendipity room could also be configured as either two long singles or a king, depending on the guest party's needs - a flexibility that was requested more often than you might expect, and always well worth accommodating.

A minimum stay of two nights, which discouraged one-night

bookings whose primary purpose might have been a party rather than a genuine stay.

A security bond held against the booking and refundable on satisfactory departure.

The reality

Over eighteen months of operation, we had minimal issues. The occasional broken glass. Very occasional. A party forgetting to tick on the guest wine list what bottle or couple of beers they'd consumed from the rack or fridge. Once, some extra cleaning was required after a particularly well-enjoyed stay. Nothing that approached a genuine problem.

There was one party of young adults that had booked on Airbnb (my first concern as you'll read in the Chapter about booking portals). I recall there was also a question about allowing extra guests. Which I politely declined. When Charlotte and I attended afterwards, the house was particularly dishevelled and every spare towel in every room used. Of course this was our commitment and promise in providing them, but this was the only time that ever happened. Also one of the attic room windows was swinging open and we discovered its latch was broken off from the woodwork. This required an urgent fix before our next guest group arrived. In retrospect, our most disappointing booking.

But as a happier bookend, there was the family that left a very apologetic note that they had melted one of the Ikea storage containers - two white rectangular ones with finger-grip ends that we kept on the lower pantry shelf for guests who needed them - by putting it in the bottom rack of the dishwasher on a hot setting.

Such was ninety-nine per cent of people's genuine love of and respect for the house.

I attribute this almost entirely to the combination above: the quality of the guests our presentation attracted, the clarity of our policies, the personal welcome that established a relationship and a standard from the first moment, and the simple fact that people who are treated with respect and staying somewhere exceptional tend to reciprocate in kind.

PART THREE

Finding the Guests



Chapter 11

How to advertise – making sure the right people find you

‘How did you advertise the place?’ The answer is as layered as it is logical.

It always begins with the property’s key attractions, and the brand.

Brand and story first

Everything in the earlier chapter about identity and naming is your advertising foundation. A property with a clear, genuine story is a property that markets itself. When someone reads ‘Library House’ and understands immediately what kind of place it is, what kind of stay it promises, and why it exists - that is advertising working before a single dollar has been spent.

Know your audience before you know your channels. We knew we were aiming at middle to upper income travellers drawn by MONA and Hobart’s emerging cultural reputation. We knew five bedrooms meant groups, families and friends travelling together - people who wanted a shared experience, not adjacent hotel rooms. Understanding that shaped every decision about where and how we presented the property, and at what price point.

Your property’s unique selling proposition needs to be understood by you before it can be understood by anyone else. What do you have that no-one else nearby has? For us it was five bedrooms

in the centre of Hobart. For you it might be a particular view, a distinctive style, a location, a size, a story. Whatever it is - lead with it always, and let it guide every communication you create.

The Launch

We gave Library House a proper launch - an official opening on October 29, 2013, performed by the Minister for Tourism, the Hon. Scott Bacon. It announced our intention and generated early awareness amongst a key audience in Hobart, rather than simply listing the property.

We were intentional about who we invited. Alongside some friends and acquaintances within tourism and related businesses, and media contacts, we included some of Hobart's other quality accommodation operators - people who, if they found themselves overcommitted, would now have somewhere they trusted to recommend. From the beginning, Library House was positioned within the hospitality community.

Bookmark for beautiful new accommodation in Hobart.



You are invited to the launch of Library House, to be officially opened by The Honourable Scott Bacon, Minister for Tourism, Veterans' Affairs, Hospitality and Finance.

Date and Time: Tues October 29th, 2-3pm.
Location: Library House, 82 Forest Road, West Hobart.
RSVP by Thurs 24th Oct: Tina Stephens c/o stay@libraryhouse.com.au

libraryhouse.com.au



It's also funny how connections find you once you're underway with something like this. I'd recently bumped into an old friend, Tina, whom I hadn't seen for some time. Tina had been an accountant - and I learned was now a partner in the impressive Italian provedore a couple of doors up from our agency building.

We could chat occasionally around her other customers and work when I came in for a coffee or lunch. As we caught up over time, I heard about her plans to pursue her passion, a yoga teaching qualification and practice, and I got to tell her about where I was up to in the business and about a new problem of the house that wouldn't sell.

Fast forward a little from this reconnection, to a natural partnership when Library House was in its formative stage. Tina took on a significant role in the set-up of Library House - part-time but across everything: systems, product selection, stocking and replenishment. She set up the Library House Guest Timeline - the communication and operational sequence that managed every booking from first enquiry through to post-stay follow-up - and the marketing spreadsheet that tracked our media and PR outreach.

We'd also installed a lock on one of the laundry's floor-to-ceiling cupboards which provided an excellent inventory storage space that Tina stocked and managed with the various pantry, bathroom and other items we used regularly. Tina also worked with my wife on the accounts set-up across the business. And with me on the day-to-day. Her contribution to the property's success was profound.

Early on, Tina assisted as guest welcomer too, doing so for the first

few guest parties when I wasn't yet fully confident in that side of things.

Tina was a tireless advocate for the property externally - building relationships with journalists, editors and travel writers that generated a special kind of third-party endorsement and coverage.

Multiple channels that work for you

Once brand and story are in place, the booking channels do much of the advertising work. Be listed on the right ones, and make your listings as strong as your property deserves.

The full e-commerce and portal strategy is covered in the next chapter, but the advertising principle worth stating here is this: multiple well-maintained listings across the right channels create a compounding visibility that no single channel can provide. Guests might find you through Stayz, confirm your credibility on TripAdvisor, and book directly through your website. Each channel reinforces the others.

Your website

In this business, there are exactly two things you control completely: your property and your website. Every booking portal, every channel, every platform sits between you and your guest - presenting you within their own brand style and alongside your competitors, taking their cut, setting their terms. Only these two things are entirely yours.

Your website is where your brand lives without interference. The tone, the images, the story, the booking experience - all of it yours

to shape and protect. It is the one place a potential guest can encounter Library House - or whatever your property - exactly as you intend it. Invest in it accordingly, and keep it as current and considered as the property itself.

Images

Your images are the bridge between your property and the world - your website, your portal listings, your best promotion, all of it. No single investment in advertising repays itself more than quality photography.

Present your property honestly and beautifully across every channel. As you do, one image will quickly distinguish itself as your hero - the shot that stops people, that captures the essence of what you've created. Lead with it everywhere, always. Around it, build a consistent suite of supporting images - however many your property warrants, typically anywhere from three to six - that together tell the fuller story of each key room, each view, each detail worth showing.

Use this set consistently and without exception. Guests browsing their options will encounter your property multiple times across multiple channels before they book. That consistency builds recognition, trust and - ultimately - the confidence to commit.

For our property photography, I have been fortunate to work with George Apostolidis for over 25 years on many commercial projects. George and his wife and Producer, Cathy, travel together photographing some of the world's finest hotels and resorts. Being able to ask George would he photograph the house, I know is a very special privilege. I include this story, however, to emphasise the

importance of presenting your property - the rooms, the styling, the attention to every detail - in the very best light you can. Any investment at this level will come back to you many times over.

Suffice to say, the Library House images attracted a lot of comment and enquiry. A powerful foundation of our promotions.

How good strategy creates its own opportunities

One of the things that surprised me most about running Library House was the advertising opportunities that we had never planned for - direct consequences of having positioned the property clearly and maintained its standards consistently.

The Virgin Australia Voyeur listing that opens this book was one. The Stayz Holiday Rental Awards naming Library House Best Indulgence property in Tasmania for 2014 was another.

And although I had the experience of leading our communications agency for over a decade at this point, Tina's acumen for self-promotion, her understanding of where social media was heading, and her tireless work placing Library House in front of the right journalists and editors generated coverage we could not have bought. I am most grateful to her for it.

Virgin Australia Voyeur magazine, January 2014 - Library House featured at number four in the 'High Five' new getaways

BUDAPEST'S RUIN PUBS | A SINGAPORE FLING | MELBOURNE'S MUST-SEES

virgin australia

January 2014 issue 150

voyeur

Riding the Wave

KEEP THAT HOLIDAY FEELING GOING WITH
OUR GLOBAL GUIDE TO THE HOTTEST
EVENTS AND DESTINATIONS THIS YEAR

MADE IN OZ
THE PEOPLE
AND THE THINGS
THAT MAKE THIS
COUNTRY THE
BEST ON EARTH

IN THE FRAME

Art heists: an elegant
crime, or simply an
opportunistic one?

LIGHTING A FIRE

Experience the fantastical
exhilaration of Taiwan's
lantern festival

 **australia**

HIGH FIVE

From a boutique gem in Sydney to a Federation-style holiday home in Hobart, here are five of Australia's top new getaways.



1. 1888 HOTEL SYDNEY

A lazy \$30 million has transformed a wool storage warehouse into Sydney's hottest new boutique hotel in trendy Pyrmont. There's a strong photography focus here, making it the world's first 'Instagram Hotel'. So, budding snappers will love the walking maps known as the Pyrmont Insta-walk, a dedicated 'selfie' space in the lobby and in-room iPads. The guest rooms blend reclaimed iron bark beams, and concrete and exposed-brick walls with splashes of purple and mustard to create an industrial yet warm aesthetic. Don't forget to drop in at the on-site 1888 Breakfast Eatery & Bar for the sumptuous Big Breakfast, comprising Cumberland sausage, house-made potato hash, bacon, mushroom and slow-roasted tomatoes. And if you boast more than 10,000 Instagram followers, you'll score a free night. www.1888hotel.com.au.



2. SEBEL MELBOURNE DOCKLANDS MELBOURNE

Occupying pride of place in Melbourne's NewQuay Docklands waterfront restaurant-and-shopping precinct, this new-build apartment hotel presents spacious one- and two-bedroom self-contained apartments, with private balconies overlooking Victoria Harbour on a number of its 124 rooms. Architects McBride Charles Ryan pulled out all stops with floor-to-ceiling windows throughout; stark-white bathrooms with sleek-walk-hung vanities, frameless glass showers and deluxe amenities by Appelles Apothecary; mirrored bed heads and ceiling-mounted flat screens; and cubist high-gloss white kitchens with lavender-tone splashbacks. www.accorhotels.com.au/hotel/sebel-melbourne-docklands.



3. SHERATON NOOSA RESORT & SPA NOOSA

Sheraton has dropped \$10 million on an extensive makeover of this Hastings Street landmark, and the old girl has never looked better. Global design master Woods Bagot was called in to work its magic with a serene colour scheme of neutral cream and grey tones offset by stunning wooden furnishings and bright orange accents that reflect the resort's beach-side location. In the Noosa Lifestyle Studios, bathrooms feature an oversized spa bath and outside jacuzzi for two. www.sheratonnoosaresort.com.

4. LIBRARY HOUSE HOBART

The former residence of bestselling author Heather Rose and musician Rowan Smith has been converted into a superbly designed five-bedroom guesthouse that can accommodate up to eight people for a minimum two-night stay. River, mountain, bridge and city views abound from every vantage point in the West Hobart Federation property, and architect Andrew Williamson has created a thrilling blend of old and new with beautifully restored heritage fireplaces, timber floors and a library featuring floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, while the rear of the house features 270-degree views. www.libraryhouse.com.au.



5. QUEST MACKAY ON GORDON MACKAY

It's a strong signal that business is booming in North Queensland when a major hotel group feels comfortable splurging \$30 million on a new-build apartment hotel. Five-star services such as pantry shopping, valet dry cleaning and a suite of administration services have a firm focus on the business market, while floor-to-ceiling windows, wrap-around balconies, guest rooms in neutral grey tones, stylish monochrome bathrooms, and a rooftop lap pool and spa will appeal to leisure travellers. www.questmackayongordon.com.au.

Images: Shutterfly.com


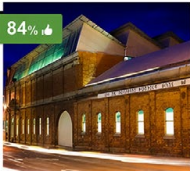



*The Stayz Holiday Rental Awards 2014 - Best Indulgence Tasmania, and
Library House at 100% on TripAdvisor*



HOLIDAY RENTAL AWARDS 2014

Best Indulgence TAS

Still looking for a great hotel in Hobart?

You recently viewed	Travellers also viewed these related hotels		
<p>Library House Hobart Tasmania ●●●●● 5 reviews</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">100% 16</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #FFC107; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Show Prices</p>	<p>The Old Woolstore Apartme... ●●●●○ 889 reviews P Free Parking</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">84% 16</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #FFC107; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Show Prices</p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid green; padding: 2px; margin-top: 5px;">Great Value!</p>	<p>RACV/RACT Hobart Apartm... ●●●●○ 247 reviews @ Free High Speed Internet...</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">86% 16</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #FFC107; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Show Prices</p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid green; padding: 2px; margin-top: 5px;">Great Value!</p>	<p>Grand Chancellor Hotel Ho... ●●●●○ 1,076 reviews ♾ Swimming Pool</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">83% 16</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #FFC107; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Show Prices</p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid green; padding: 2px; margin-top: 5px;">Great Value!</p>
<p style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">See all Hobart hotels</p>			

Another promotional aspect I wasn't anticipating was the travel blogger or social media 'famil' request - approaches from bloggers offering coverage in exchange for a complimentary stay. Standard practice in the travel industry. We trialled this twice.

On both occasions we received a lovely write-up and some engaging social media posts to link to. But it was genuinely difficult to measure what flowed back in bookings, and as Library House became more in demand, the second stay had felt almost stressfully disruptive - a paying group may well have been trying to book those same dates. Both famils were for a single night, but effectively blocking a minimum two-night booking on either side - three nights of potential revenue lost. And the preparation and cleaning costs were the same regardless.

If you do entertain famil requests, do your homework thoroughly on who is asking, what their actual following is, and precisely what they are committing to deliver. These were the early days of influencer culture - the landscape has changed considerably, and the due diligence required might be a little easier to see and understand now - views, likes, actual engagement - than it was for Library House.

The lesson: when you have built something authentically well and positioned it honestly, the world has a way of finding it. Your job is to make sure that when it does, what it finds is worth finding.

Photographs from our two visiting travel bloggers - each hosted for a complimentary one-night stay in exchange for coverage. Top: posted to Instagram. Bottom: published on a culture and travel website

 **luisekv**
 Library House 1 d



19 likes

luisekv This view! 🏡 #libraryhouse #tasmania #amazing #cool #house #dontwannaleave @tango__papa @libraryhouse

Home Star Instagram Heart Messages

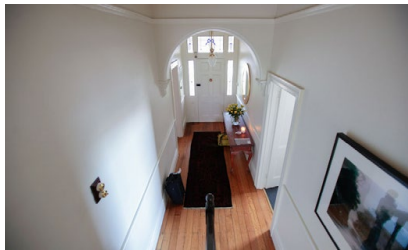
 **tango__papa**
 The Library House 1 d



14 likes

tango__papa In the library at Library House, our home for a day! #libraryhouse #hobart @luisekv tango__papa @libraryhouse

Home Star Instagram Heart Messages



The Famous Guest

Early in our first season, Tina called me one afternoon with an unusual enquiry. An agent in London had contacted us on behalf of a client who remained confidential at that point, and had a couple of questions. Did Library House have a security fence and good privacy?

Tina explained that the high timber fence provided solid protection from the street, but that the driveway was unfenced at the entry, and that the living areas had beautiful vertical timber-slatted blinds that could be adjusted to whatever level of privacy the guest preferred.

Tina's next call, "OK, guess who it is? The agent has told me - it's someone in the entertainment industry - and the Hill Street order includes chicken kebabs, Pringles, a carton of Pepsi and another of Budweisers." This was not quite the order we had imagined for Library House, it's fair to say.

I had a couple of guesses. "No," said Tina, "think a generation younger." For integrity reasons I won't say who it was, and when she said the name I was still none the wiser - but her suggestion was to go home and ask my daughter that night. I learned that our guest was a member of the biggest boy band in the world at the time.

Tina welcomed this party and reported that the star guest and his entourage were absolutely lovely.

And there was no way I wasn't accompanying Charlotte for the clean afterwards.

Charlotte had been part of the family for years - our cleaner since the children were young and entrusted across every corner of home and working life. As Library House took shape and ultimately opened, she was central to everything we were creating there.

The house, as it turned out, had been left beautifully. But there was one interesting item beside the kitchen bin: a paper bag from the local op shop containing a few costume items - cheap glasses, a curly wig. Reading between the lines - the cost of going out in public in Hobart as one of the most recognisable young men on the planet, solved for the price of an op shop visit. A follow-up call with the agent confirmed that the guest had very much enjoyed his time in Hobart and at Library House.

When you position a property well, you attract guests you might never have anticipated. And they are often, in the end, just people who want a good place to stay and some privacy to enjoy it.

Chapter 12

The e-commerce foundation

If you want to run your accommodation property as a business rather than a hobby, you need to invest in an e-commerce facility. This is the only way to have guest payments flow directly to you, rather than through a portal that holds your money and pays you later.

Payment terms varied significantly across the booking portal landscape when we were operating. Booking.com, for instance, paid us immediately on receiving a booking and then billed a commission later; Airbnb didn't pay until the guest had actually checked in. Platforms like Stayz and TripAdvisor's Holiday Lettings offered us the ability to collect payment in the first instance - but only if you paid the premium subscription tier and met their criteria.

Being business people, we wanted the money in our bank from day one. So we paid the premium subscriptions and established a Westpac merchant facility, feeding an American Express connection into the same account. We could accept Visa, Mastercard, Diners and Amex via direct credit card bookings.

The backbone of our channel management was SiteMinder - the best and industry-leading hotel integration system for managing bookings across multiple platforms. SiteMinder also contains The Booking Button, which I had embedded directly into the Library House WordPress website and which communicates in real time

with SiteMinder to manage availability across all connected portals simultaneously. This automatic synchronisation across the commercial channels - Booking.com, Agoda, Wotif, TripAdvisor and others - is what protects you from double bookings. I would update the domestic channels - Airbnb and Stayz - manually in SiteMinder as bookings arrived, and as promptly as possible to guard against double bookings, which added a step but kept everything in one place.

SiteMinder remains, at the time of writing, the industry standard channel manager - and I recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone serious about running a multi-channel accommodation business. It was our backbone throughout, and its standing at the top of the field has only strengthened since.

To manage bookings across multiple platforms simultaneously, a recognised channel manager is essential. Without one, the risk of double bookings is real - as I discovered early on. For a property like Library House, listed across several platforms, it wasn't optional. It was the foundation everything else relied on.

It is the primary safeguard against the one experience in short-stay accommodation you most want to avoid.

Which brings me to the one and only double-booking we ever had.

Early on, I had a habit of holding dates for enquirers - 48 hours as a standard, and longer if a caller asked while they consulted their group. I cannot recall a single held-date request ever converting to a booking - only the confirmed enquiries lost while holding dates for people who never booked.

Eventually, something had to give. The double-booking that resulted

was deeply uncomfortable - not because mistakes don't happen, but because it broke a promise to guests. The lengths I went to trying to make good on it were considerable. After that day, I never held a date for anyone again. The channels were set to automatic, the terms were clear, and - counterintuitively - this firmness helped convert enquiries rather than losing them. When people know a property books out, they book.

Chapter 13

Offer and pricing

Our introductory pricing was set to be marginally more competitive on overall comparison than the other premium establishments in Hobart, while reflecting the genuine uniqueness of what we offered - five bedrooms and three living areas over two levels with spectacular views, an extraordinary location, and a calibre of finish and service that sat comfortably above the standard short-stay market.

We launched at \$750 per night for up to four guests, plus \$50 per additional guest per night to a maximum of eight guests. For bookings of one week, we offered the seventh night complimentary. We never used the word 'discount'. The spirit of the brand was generosity, not reduction - and a \$750 bonus on a week's stay felt very different to '14% off'.

Our terms were a 25% deposit on booking, with the balance due thirty days before check-in. This structure worked brilliantly on multiple levels: the deposit was attractive enough to convert enquiries, and the 30-day balance requirement re-presented guests to their upcoming stay at exactly the right moment - creating a natural window for us to confirm details, answer questions and build the relationship ahead of arrival.

In the first winter, our low season, we experimented with offer incentives. The Blue Skies Loyalty Package was one - a five-night stay for up to eight guests for \$2,000, available only during the

winter months of May through September, and offered exclusively to past Library House guests and our mailing list. Twenty packages only, to be booked and paid in full by a set date. The spirit was generosity and belonging - and we named it after a feeling rather than a saving.

A Facebook campaign took the same philosophy to social media. 'Stay a little longer' led the creative - a complimentary extra night for the platform's community, valid across the winter months. No discount language. No desperation. Just an invitation, in the right words.

Both worked. But one caveat applies to any advance offer of this kind: a successful run of incentive bookings can create cash-flow gaps later when those stays are being honoured but full-rate revenue hasn't yet caught up. Watch this carefully.

In early 2015, when Library House had firmly established its reputation, we raised prices across the board by \$200. Bookings, if anything, increased. Price tells a story before a guest ever arrives. When your property has earned its reputation, pricing it accordingly only reinforces that reputation.

The Blue Skies Loyalty Package - our winter offer, for existing Library House guests only - and the Facebook campaign creative that followed the same philosophy. An invitation, not a discount



Blue Skies Loyalty Package

Dear Friend of Library House,

We are offering you a very special opportunity.

20 Blue Skies Loyalty Packages

Usually a 5 night stay at Library House costs \$3750 for four people. And \$4750 for eight.

We are offering a very special Blue Skies Loyalty Package to select Library House friends.

Book a five night stay at Library House during the beautiful blue sky months of May 1st to September 31st and pay just \$2000.

That's right, secure five nights at Library House between May 1st and September 31st for up to 8 guests for only \$2000.

There are only 20 Blue Skies Loyalty packages and they must be booked and paid in full by March 31st.

How to secure your 5 night Blue Skies stay:

1. Check our bookings calendar for availability. www.stay@libraryhouse.com.au
2. Then call us or email us right away to book your dates. (+61 407 246633 - stay@libraryhouse.com.au)
3. Pay with Visa, MasterCard, Diners or American Express (standard credit card fee applies) or EFT by March 31st.

Imagine the occasion spent with visiting family, friends or business colleagues enjoying Library House for 5 days... there may be snow on the mountain, it may be cool, but the sun is shining and Library House is very cosy...

We look forward to welcoming you, or welcoming you back, to Library House.

If we can assist you further please let me know.

Blue skies!

Rowan Smith
0407 246633

PS. This offer is only available to Library House Friends and family. If you have a friend or family member you'd like to send this opportunity on to, please make sure they mention Blue Skies when they call or email.

Offer ends March 31st or when 20 packages sold.



Chapter 14

Emails – the art form you’re probably underestimating

The best form of sales, marketing and guest relationship management available to a small accommodation operator is entirely free and already in your hands: the quality of your email writing.

I spent more time on emails than almost any other single activity in running Library House. I built a library of email templates in doing so too - not to make communication feel automated, but to ensure that the tone, information and care that went into every message remained consistent regardless of how busy things were.

Every email, without exception, closed with the same line:

We look forward to your enjoyment of Library House.

This worked for every type of communication - an enquiry response, a booking confirmation, a balance payment reminder, a pre-arrival note. If I had already used it in a previous message in the same thread, the next one would read:

We really look forward to your enjoyment of Library House.

A small variation, but one that acknowledged the real conversation building, and prevented the sign-off from becoming robotic. Within the same thread, if in doubt, I would rest it for a message and return to it.

Another presentation detail I was particular about: within a thread, I would always delete the Library House logo from any previous send, so our logotype appeared only once - at the base of the most recent message. The contact details and award details in the footer, however, I left intact throughout. Repetition of awards in a footer costs nothing and reinforces credibility every time it appears.

The templates I developed covered the full guest journey:

- Enquiry response (the conversion email)
- Booking confirmation
- Balance payment reminder (at 30 days)
- Towards your stay (pre-arrival details and Hill Street Grocer invitation)
- Post-stay follow-up

With every email: put yourself in the reader's position - can you be clearer, more helpful, more succinct? Check spelling (doubly critical when your brand is Library House). Re-read before sending. Make the subject line as clear and short as possible. And always re-read the incoming email carefully before responding - have you answered everything they actually asked?

One further detail worth noting: once a booking was confirmed to us via any of the portals, I would always copy and paste the key booking summary information from that portal's email notification directly into my confirmation email to the guest - dates, guest numbers, tariff, reference details. This took only a few moments and immediately signalled to the guest that they were dealing with a genuine, attentive operator.

The Virgin Australia listing and later the Stayz Holiday Rental Award for Best Indulgence in Tasmania both immediately became permanent fixtures of our email template footers.

Email writing is a high-level reflection of your brand. No recipient will trust that your property is clean, orderly and carefully run if the email they receive from you is rushed, uneven or careless. Spend the time. Read it back. Then send it.

Three example emails follow. The first is the Enquiry template - the conversion email, sent within the first 24 hours of an enquiry and often much sooner, in as close to real time as possible. It had the most work to do of any email in the sequence.

The second is the Confirmation template. It includes the automated receipt generated by the Booking Button system - identified by the 'BB' reference number - which I would copy and paste directly into the confirmation email to the guest. It served two purposes at once: confirmation to us of a secured booking with no risk of a double booking for those dates; and an unambiguous record for the guest of every detail of their stay.

The third is the Towards your stay template - the pre-arrival email that combined practical arrival information with the Hill Street Grocer invitation, included here because it illustrates something the other two don't: the template being bent to serve a particular guest's circumstances. The Easter timing, the Good Friday grocery order question, the personal sign-off. The framework was consistent. The guest's particular needs, always considered.

A final small detail worth noting between the Enquiry and Confirmation templates: in the enquiry response, my phone

number sits in the formal footer beneath the Library House logotype. In the Confirmation template it moves up - directly under my name in the sign-off. A deliberate decision. The guest had committed. From that point, I was on call - if needed.

The three emails that follow are reproduced as sent. First: the Enquiry template - one page. Second: the Confirmation template - shown across two pages, with the automated Booking Button receipt included. Third: the Towards your stay template - shown across two pages

Dear •••••• ,

Thank you for your booking enquiry for Library House starting on 28/5/2015 and finishing on 1/6/2015 - (4 nights).

These dates are currently available and to secure a booking we require a 25% deposit.

The total tariff for your group for four nights, would be \$4,600 (excluding standard credit card fee).

Deposits are payable by these methods: Visa, MasterCard, Amex or Diners Club via the Library House website - at www.libraryhouse.com.au (Bookings Page) - or by calling me on 0407 24 6633.

On receipt of a deposit a booking confirmation will be forwarded to you including arrival/departure times, access and other welcoming information.

Please ensure that you have read and agreed the Library House terms and conditions before confirming a booking. These can be read at the same web page as above.

Please contact me if you have any other questions or I can be of further assistance.

We look forward to your enjoyment of Library House.

Regards, Rowan Smith

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RS' with a flourish at the end.

Library House
One of Australia's top 5 new getaways - Virgin, 2014.
Winner, Best Indulgence Accommodation, Tasmania - Stayz Awards 2014

Email: stay@libraryhouse.com.au
Mobile: +61 407 24 6633

Dear ●●●●●,

Thank you for your booking and deposit payment for Library House, for your stay commencing 23/12/14 and finishing 27/12/14 - (four nights).

Your deposit has been processed, thank you.

The balance payment is required 30 days prior to check-in and we will send you an email notification a few days before processing - also an invoice once final payment has been received.

Library House is located at 82 Forest Road, West Hobart and is approximately 20 minutes from the Hobart Airport.

Check-in time is 3pm. Early check-in may be available if requested beforehand but cannot be guaranteed at this time.

Myself or Tina Stephens will greet you on arrival.

Please call or email us if you have any questions towards your stay at Library House or if we can assist in any other way for your time in Hobart.

If you would like any groceries to be ready at Library House, we recommend the nearby and wonderful Hill Street Grocer. We can assist in directing you to the Hill Street online store, where you can select from their fabulous produce and place an order. We can then collect your order, fresh and organised ready for your arrival.

We look forward to your enjoyment of Library House.

Regards,

Rowan Smith
0407 24 6633

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RS' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

libraryhouse.com.au

One of Australia's top 5 new getaways - Virgin 2104

Reference Number: BB1406083419562

Date Of Booking: 08 Jun 2014

Check In Date: 23 Dec 2014

Check Out Date: 27 Dec 2014

Guest Name: ●●●● ●●●●●●

Guest ETA: 03:00 PM

Booking Summary

House Total: \$3,000

Credit Card Surcharge: \$30

Service Charges and Tax Inclusive Total: \$3,030

GST Included: \$275.45

Payment Summary

Deposit: \$1,500

Credit Card Surcharge: \$30

Total: \$1,530

Outstanding Balance: \$1,500

Dear ●●●●●,

I hope this finds you well and looking forward to your family's trip to Hobart and stay at Library House over Easter.

If you would like any groceries to be ready in-house, we recommend the nearby and fabulous Hill Street Grocer. (Details for the Hill Street Grocer online store and our complimentary pick up and delivery service follow below.)

Library House is located at 82 Forest Road, West Hobart and is approximately 20 minutes from the Hobart Airport.

Check-in time is 3pm and you will be greeted on arrival by (*the new owner*).

Early check-in may be available if requested beforehand but cannot be guaranteed at this time.

If you wish to place a groceries order, these are the steps:

1. Visit the Hill Street Grocer online store at <https://hillstreet.myfoodlink.com/>
2. Open a new account and enjoy viewing the Hill Street Grocer fabulous produce. When you are ready to place your order please mark it as 'For pick up from New Town Store' (and we then collect it for you).
- 2a. As you will be arriving on Good Friday I suggest marking the order for collection on Thursday 2nd (as I am not sure if Hill Street will take orders for Good Friday?) If you find online that they are in fact filling orders for collection Friday 3rd, then mark it for collection this day.

3. It's important you send through your Order Number once completed, thank you. We'll then collect and take care of your order.
Please call or email us if you have any questions towards your stay at Library House or if we can assist in any other way for your time in Hobart.

I look forward to welcoming you on arrival.

Regards,

Rowan Smith
0407 24 6633

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RS' with a flourish at the end.

Library House
One of Australia's top 5 new getaways - Virgin, 2014.
Winner, Best Indulgence Accommodation, Tasmania - Stayz Awards 2014

Chapter 15

Systems – the master database, accounting, and portals

Running Library House as a business rather than a more casual rental required a considered operational architecture. What we built behind the scenes made everything in front of it possible.

Two spreadsheets sat at the centre of the Library House operation. Together they formed the operational core - from the first enquiry through to the final post-stay communication.

The Library House guest timeline

The first was our guest timeline, managed by Tina and me. This was the process map - the full communication and operational sequence that accompanied every booking, from initial enquiry through to post-stay follow-up, mapped against the countdown to check-in. Every booking, regardless of its source, moved through this same sequence - shown on the next page.

Pre Booking	Initial enquiry received 24 hour response	Email Enquiry template
Deposit	Credit card details received via Booking Button Process 25% via e-commerce	Update LH Guest Database
Days until check in – 35	Advise remaining payment	Email Courtesy template
Days until check in – 30	Process 75% via e-commerce	Email Xero invoice
Days until check in – 14	Advise additional stay details	Email ETA, Location, Hill Street Grocer template
Days until check in – 07	Call to confirm ETA if not advised	Update LH Calendar
Check in	Greet guests on arrival	Welcome, key, orientation of LH
Check out	Additional charges processed	Email thank you, additional charges, feedback template
Post Stay	Quarterly Bi-annual	Seasonal snapshot Special promotion

The Library House calendar

The second data spreadsheet we lived by was the calendar - a shared document between Charlotte, Tina and me. Where the guest timeline mapped the sequence, the calendar recorded the detail behind every booking. That Charlotte was across it was entirely in keeping with how we worked. She prepared the house knowing exactly who was coming. And when they were going.

The calendar had nine columns. The first seven - Name, Contact, Number of Nights, Number of Guests, Arriving, Confirm ETA and Departing - covered the operational facts of each stay. The last two columns - 'For their stay' and 'Other of interest' - were where Tina, Charlotte and I held a shared understanding of what we needed to prepare and who for. On the following page are some of our entries from both columns, exactly as recorded.

Scanning these entries in the days before an arrival, I could walk into every check-in already knowing something. Often quite a lot.

The Library House Calendar - selected entries from 'For their stay' and 'Other of interest'

For their stay	Other of interest
Five '60 ish' girlfriends – wanted a discount	“thank you, can spend the discount on some good wine”
6 women mid-forties – want food ideas for restaurants Fri/Sat (MONA Sat)	
Family of 5 coming, 17yo son loves theatre drama, W'ding Anniv, 12yo daughter b'day	
\$100K' guest :)	2nd Booking.com in 2 days
8 people 3 nights & 6 for the last night	
4 couples	
Kings to be long singles	
2 children aged 1 & 3 no charge - 6 adults	Mobile # & credit card # for \$1000 security
2 adults, 2 children	Paid in full for next Jan with 10% discount
Wedding group! – both originally from Aus, met in NYC	230 people coming to Pepp Bay
2nd 1st repeat customer stay at LH – 5 guests night 1, 4 guests nights 2 & 3	

Accounting

We used Xero for all day-to-day accounting. It provided excellent direct integration with our chart of accounts and end-of-period processing by our accountant. Whichever accounting platform you use, establish clean records from your very first transaction - far easier than reconstructing them later.

Portals

We used the following booking platforms for Library House:

Stayz - our strongest domestic performer and coincidentally the platform from which we built most of our email template infrastructure. Its owner dashboard and template tools were the best available to us.

TripAdvisor - via Holiday Lettings in the UK, which served Australian properties, an arrangement I found somewhat bizarre but which worked well for international visibility. TripAdvisor discontinued Holiday Lettings entirely as of late 2024 - worth checking current platform options before listing.

Booking.com - high volume and their payment model suited us well - funds received immediately on booking, with commission billed separately later.

Agoda - worth including for Asian market reach, which was meaningful for us given Hobart's popularity with Chinese and Japanese visitors.

Airbnb - in our case, the least preferred; their payment system held funds until 24 hours after check-in, and without direct access to

guest credit card details, any potential damage claims were more complex to pursue.

We were also listed on two platforms no longer active.

Beautiful Accommodation was a trusted guide during those years for finding premium boutique experiences across Australia. And HomeAway, which seemed at the time to be a US-based partnership with Stayz, had in fact recently acquired the leading Australian accommodation website, in December 2013.

Portal performance varies significantly by property and location. Our experience differed notably from our mentors' - a platform that was our strongest channel was weak for them, and vice versa. Experiment, track results, and don't assume any single platform will carry you. The automatic booking channels - those that confirm a booking enquiry immediately, without your manual approval - are the foundation of any serious multi-channel operation. The manually-managed channels supplement them, but require your active attention to avoid double-bookings.

PART FOUR

Running Library House



Chapter 16

Linen – what we learned the hard way

Linen deserves its own chapter, because our linen story is a cautionary tale worth telling.

We set up with three complete sets of everything: bed linen, towels, hand towels, face washers, bath mats and robes. One set in use, one in the supplies cupboard, one with the linen service. In theory, a clean, reliable rotation.

We had explored Hobart's commercial linen hire service at the outset, but at the time their top-grade products were not at the standard we wanted – and they didn't hire doona covers, which we preferred to the double-sheet method common in commercial accommodation. So we purchased our own premium linen and had the laundry service process it as customer-owned goods alongside their larger hotel orders.

This is where things became complicated. An industrial linen service is designed for the high-volume, regular orders of large hotel chains. Our bespoke, small and irregular order was an awkward fit. Over time we lost significant stock – items that went into the service and never returned. This meant too that there were occasional but unwelcome moments of stress for Charlotte and for me – last-minute rushes back to Oakley Textiles, Myer, Laura Ashley, Sheridan – wherever I needed to go to replace the urgent shortfall on a turnaround day.

We did eventually reach an equitable settlement with the linen

service for the unreturned inventory at the end of our time running Library House. In truth, given our bespoke orders and exacting standards against their large-scale operation, it was probably the best outcome available to both parties.

If you can hire linen of the quality you need, do so. It is cheaper per item, simpler to manage, and significantly better economics - the linen service can set up a standing order: product delivered on a schedule, returns consolidated into their stock, no tracking individual items.

We always purchased our own towels, hand towels, face washers and bath mats regardless - for quality control - and our Moss River robes and designer tea towels were never going to come from a rental catalogue. But for pillowcases, sheets and doonas - including a proper doona if you prefer one - if you can hire the grade you want, hire them.

Chapter 17

Cleaning – standards that guests feel

Cleaning is the single largest ongoing cost of running a five-star short-stay property. It is also the most direct expression of your standards to every guest who walks through the door.

Charlotte brought her own exacting standards and an instinct for beauty in the everyday - and I contributed a trained eye and a perfectionist streak. Between us, the house always shone.

Our system ran in layers: a full clean after each check-out and a second clean the day before or morning of the next check-in. Between these, when bookings allowed, any opportunity was taken for specific ongoing maintenance - a gardening morning, a full external windows wash, a bathroom deep clean, or a linen and supplies inventory. After Charlotte's second clean - and on the morning guests were due - my own final inspection and preparation in the hour or so before greeting them. It was a system built around one principle: that the house should always be ready, and always be right.

Charlotte's System

Charlotte's cleaning system: 'Start high, finish low.' In all the ways.

Arriving after a check-out, her first move was to read the house. Straight up the stairs for a scan around the upper rooms and deck, back down into the hallway and continuing her look through every room, the back deck, then down the stairs to the lower garden:

an overall assessment of what lay ahead. On this same lap, every toilet was flushed and sprayed with a blue disinfectant solution - left to soak while the rest of the assessment continued - and every light switched on.

Charlotte worked with three dedicated spray bottles throughout - two sourced from a commercial cleaning supplier, and one as simple as white vinegar from the supermarket - each with a specific purpose. All were chosen with Charlotte's characteristic care: eco-friendly, low in allergens, and kind to the surfaces and the people who would encounter them. The first, white vinegar diluted with water, was for all glass surfaces. The second, a citrus-based general-purpose cleaner - fresh and subtle in fragrance - was for all surfaces and the final mop through the house. The third, the stronger blue disinfectant, was reserved for toilets, bathroom bases and any heavy-duty cleaning required. All three were diluted concentrates. And Charlotte's standing professional advice on all of them: use less than you think you need. It's a better result, and a more considered one.

The team allocated to each turnaround depended on the timing and the size of the previous stay. For a same-day turnaround, it might be the three of us - Charlotte, her assistant, and me. For a lighter stay or a turnaround with a day's grace, Charlotte might work alone or with one of us alongside. The booking calendar let us know ahead who was needed.

Two things always shaped that first assessment. The BBQ, if it had been used, added its own pressure - it had to be returned to a state of no prior footprint, and that took time - and valuable time on a tight turnaround. And the fireplace. On walking into the Media Room, an unlit fireplace was always a quiet fist-pump

moment - one less thing between us and a clean house. Although I was always glad too when guests had used it. That was exactly what it was there for.

Once the assessment was done, the dishwasher was next. Through our booking policies guests were asked to leave the house as they found it - and most did in their own way, without any further instruction to this aspect. Sometimes the dishwasher was already running, sometimes it had already finished its cycle, sometimes dishes were stacked neatly, sometimes things were left in the sink and surrounds. Whatever she found, Charlotte made her assessment of what had been used and reset everything to our standard regardless. The dishwasher was always run again if there was any doubt - our benchmark being spotless and impeccable, and nothing less. Once the cycle completed, the door was left open for a minute or so to release the steam, then everything hand dried and stowed. Nothing left in the machine.

All beds were stripped first - top priority, always. On days when Charlotte had assistance, beds would be stripped while fresh linen was simultaneously prepped - an efficient parallel that saved valuable time on tighter turnarounds. And on the way down through the house, any crockery, glasses or cups left in the rooms were gathered as a matter of course - feeding naturally into the kitchen sequence that followed.

Then Charlotte dusted and wiped lightly. Starting from the top of the house and working down - high sills, central light fittings, wooden blind pelmets and slats, then wardrobes, drawers, cabinets, desks, chairs, side tables, the middle-landing bookcase, the stair banisters, and down through every room below. The logic was elegant: every particle disturbed fell downwards, to be collected

later by the vacuum. Nothing was cleaned twice.

All beds were stripped, and every piece of linen - sheets, pillowcases, doona covers, robes, towels, hand towels, face washers, bath mats, tea towels - was removed and logged against our running template before being packed into large commercial linen bags and carried to the front porch for loading into my car. A column for outgoing, a column for what was going back into the house. Once counted and bagged, the fresh linen came out from the locked laundry cupboard, or from the pressed delivery I'd collected when dropping off the last used load to the linen service. All beds were remade, robes reset, towels laid out, and spare sets checked and replenished in every drawer.

Shower products - Aesop shampoo, conditioner and body wash in the shower bays, Aesop hand wash at the vanities, all in their distinctive pump-action amber bottles - were checked, wiped for any marks and replenished. New toilet rolls were fitted, finished with Charlotte's signature fold: the first sheet turned back under at forty-five degrees from each side, the roll presented coming over the top, with a small neat point. We used Kleenex - white, with a subtle lined pattern running the length of the roll. On brand, like everything else.

Bathrooms had their own sequence. First, everything was sprayed - surfaces, shower bays, the spa bath, the toilet bowls. Then the glass - mirrors and shower screens - checked from various angles rather than straight on, which reveals marks and streaks invisible in flat light. Every surface wiped down with the citrus general-purpose solution. Toilets had been sprayed with the blue disinfectant and left to soak, then attended to at the end of the bathroom clean, with a final spray of the citrus solution left in

the bowl for fragrance. Bins were emptied first in every bathroom, before anything else - removing any source of odour before the cleaning began. And a professional's detail worth adopting: a spare bin liner folded flat in the base of every bin before the fresh liner was placed and folded around the rim - so that if a guest removed the first, the next was already waiting underneath.

Charlotte's cleaning cloth system deserves a mention too. As an experienced cleaner, she had long settled on a cotton cloth that did everything - absorbent, lint-free, versatile across surfaces - and her method was to have an abundant supply on hand for every clean. One cloth per area, used and set aside. A fresh cloth for a bathroom surface. Another for a toilet, then discarded. She would move through as many cloths as the house required, bagging the used ones as she went. Back at home afterwards, she would run them through a deep hygiene cycle - always ensuring a full fresh supply was ready and waiting for the next turnaround. The discipline was in the quantity - never stretching a cloth beyond its task, never cross-contaminating. It was a professional's system, and it showed.

Kitchen and bathroom bins were emptied and relined. Then Charlotte vacuumed the entire house - working with an industry-grade backpack vacuum that gave her the freedom to move efficiently through every room without dragging a machine behind her.

And then, once everything else was done, she mopped her way out. Beginning at the top of the house - the spa bathroom, the ensuite - she worked across the upstairs landing floorboards and down through the entire house in sequence: the kitchen tiles, the lounge and dining room floorboards around the already-vacuumed

rugs, the downstairs powder room, shower and laundry tiles, the passageway, the Age of Innocence room floorboards, the middle Media Room with its open fireplace, and finally the front hallway - mopping steadily towards the front door, and exiting.

The house was ready. My part came next.

My arrival always began with flowers. I had a standing arrangement with Just Flowers - a wholesale supplier who knew my order: two bunches of yellow roses, ready for collection on my way to the house, billed monthly. A wholesale relationship like this saves money, time and anxiety - you know the flowers will be there, and to the standard you need, without the uncertainty of a retail purchase on a busy turnaround morning. I would do the final preparation in the under-house workroom - trimming and arranging into one of the two vases I rotated - so the finished arrangements could be carried straight up into the house and the old ones brought back down without any mess inside.

From there: a check of the compendium and the guest key on the hall table - with a spare always waiting in the under-house workroom, should the unthinkable have happened.

Then outside again. Any bird droppings on the deck railings or front fence - the hardest thing to remove - I'd attend to first, with a solution I'll describe shortly. Then a sweep or light rake of the brick driveway and check for any sign of a weed or blade of grass trying to emerge; windswept leaves cleared from the front garden, sandstone paths and gravel.

The water feature checked and attended to - a waist-height stone urn set in the front garden, passed by every guest on their way up the front stairs. A recirculating pump kept the water gently

bubbling at its centre and flowing over the brim. Before each arrival, any leaves that had gathered on the surface were removed, and the water level topped up - just the centimetre or so lost to evaporation in the warmer months - so that it sat at that perfect, still-overflowing meniscus. A detail most guests would never consciously notice. One that said everything.

Any marks on the back deck or upper balcony windows caught in the changing light.

For smokers, the compendium directed guests to two terracotta flower pots filled with clean sand - one beside the BBQ on the back deck, another at the lower garden seat with its view across Hobart.

Before each arrival I'd attend to both. If butts remained from the previous stay they were carefully removed and a little fresh sand worked into the surface - or after heavier use, a complete swap out.

If the pots hadn't been used at all, wind or moisture had usually compacted the sand down, so with a small trowel kept in the under-house workroom I'd loosen it then finish with my fingers - plumping the surface so that whenever a guest first encountered it, the sand looked fresh, clean and prepared just for them. Which it had been. Functional, considered, and entirely in keeping with everything else.

Then change into my Library House shirt and onto the inside.

I had fashioned a great technique for when I was making my final slow walk through every room - utilising a strip of masking tape wrapped sticky-side-out around my right knuckles - for removing any last stray hair or piece of lint trapped in the new linen or speck

that Charlotte's vacuum and mopping might have missed. This was the perfect tool for inspecting every drawer and cupboard, every shower recess. I'd also spend a couple of minutes in each bathroom ensuring the oil diffuser reeds were fanned evenly around the open tops of their bottles rather than bunched to one side. I'd straighten a pillow here, or loosen a bed throw there.

Once I had checked that absolutely everything was ready, and that we had left no visible trace, there were a few final touches. The compendium and guest key were aligned on the hall table to my exacting standards - the Library House monogram on the fob in vertical alignment with the larger monogram on the compendium cover, the key itself sitting at forty-five degrees on the tabletop, teeth side facing downwards. One last check of the flowers, then I'd light the candle.

I'd switch the hall light on (other than on very bright sunny days), pull the front door shut behind me, and wait on the porch.

A few final details

Windows and mirrors were spot-checked on my last round before arrival, walking the house in changing light. Light that is flat in one direction reveals marks invisible in another. If the intention is to make a guest feel no one has been here before them, a fingerprint on a window can undo that careful work.

I've mentioned how the bird droppings on deck railings and elsewhere would often be a pain of my final preparation. My solution was the watering can kept in the under-house workroom with a small scrubbing brush permanently submerged in it. The can's opening was perfectly sized to keep the brush accessible

but without water sloshing during transit. I could carry it safely through the finished house if need be - up to the top deck first, where the jarrah handrails and decking, powder-coated steel balustrade frames and glass panels, and the adjoining section of Colorbond roofing were all prime bird dropping targets, then down through the house again and out to the front fence, the sandstone pavers, then down the driveway and up the back stairs - checking these, the handrails, balustrade frames, large glass panels, all windows, and decking there too.

The water pre-softened the material, the brush removed it gently, and the can rinsed the surface clean - the wet area so localised and small that it had almost always dried naturally well before guests arrived. On the rare occasion it needed a little help, a supply of old hand towels in the under-house storage was there for exactly that purpose.

One hard lesson - the watering can and brush method does not work on glass. I discovered this the hard way with a scratch in the double glazing that I'd rather not have found. Dried droppings on glass require careful wetting of the entire pane and a proper window-cleaning approach.

Chapter 18

Being big on small details

There is a temptation, when writing about travel highlights, to focus on the grand gestures - the view, the architecture, the awards. But the experience a guest has is made by the little things too. Here are some small, big examples.

The tea bags

The setup at Library House started with our intention to provide guests with a level of comfort and service that surprised and delighted. Unexpected details and discoveries that make you smile.

Included in the pantry were six types of Twinings teas - and other things we'll get to shortly - but first, as they say, presentation is everything.

The teas were presented thus: when a guest opened the double kitchen pantry doors, the first thing they would see were five glass jars, arranged in a precise line on the eye-level shelf. The jars themselves were impressive - Le Parfait Super Terrine, the classic 500ml French embossed glass canning jars with the distinct orange rubber seal and silver bail closure. Each containing ten individually wrapped Twinings tea bags.

But the first impression was the five distinct blocks of colour from the Twinings packets within each one. The soft yellow of the Earl Grey, then the red of the English Breakfast, the darker green of the Irish Breakfast, the lighter green of the Peppermint, and finally

either the bright yellow of the Chamomile or the dusty orange of the Lemon and Ginger - the fifth jar holding both, five of each, alternating packet by packet throughout.

Only on closer inspection would a guest notice that each jar was equally ten packets deep - every one precisely aligned behind the first, labels all facing forward and reading the right way up. The tool that made this possible was a pair of ordinary kitchen tongs - the perfect instrument, as it turned out, for reaching into each jar to straighten the packets - square, aligned, and ten deep. The five colourways, so neatly arranged and displayed with all the care of a Hermès handbag in a luxury store, really 'popped'.

This took perhaps three to five minutes before every arrival - replenishing whatever had been used, spacing the jars back on the shelf, then the tongs work. No guest ever commented on it directly, but when someone opened those pantry doors for the first time, what they encountered was a sense that every detail here had been considered for them.

Beyond the teas, the pantry held a selection of staples - each chosen for the quality of its packaging and label, as much as for what was inside.

An unopened packet of Bushells loose leaf tea sat alongside a box of Just Rooibos African tea bags. A brick of Lavazza Crema e Gusto, and a brick of decaf alongside it. A sealed tin of Lindt Dark Drinking Chocolate. A long-life carton of Bonsoy - its distinctive packaging a nod to guests who preferred dairy-free, without us assuming so.

A small, sealed packet of raw sugar.

A sixth matching glass jar, one shelf lower down and to the side, held a plentiful supply of the single-serve sugar straw packets, around a quarter of them the sugar-free equivalent. A jar full, but filled with the same eye for upright and intermingled presentation rather than just jammed in.

The Cole & Mason salt and pepper grinders were always topped to four-fifths full - visible through their glass mid-sections, which made the level itself part of the presentation.

Olive oil and balsamic vinegar sat in quality-branded glass bottles, never allowed to drop below three-quarters full for a new arrival. The bottles were replaced only when their labels began to show wear, and both received a wipe-down with Charlotte's diluted vinegar solution before each arrival.

In the refrigerator: a fresh litre of Ashgrove Full Cream Milk, a 500g tub of Duck River spreadable butter, a bottle of Pellegrino sparkling water, a chilled Bay of Fires sparkling, and the four-pack of Moo Brew Belgo. Ice cubes checked and topped up in the freezer.

When a Hill Street Grocer order had been placed ahead of arrival, both the pantry and refrigerator took on an even more plentiful look - everything unpacked and arranged with the same eye for freshness and presentation as everything else. (See Chapter 7.)

The Towels

Towels at Library House were deliberately abundant. Our strategy was the opposite of scarcity. Two towels per occupant laid out on the beds or dressers in every double room - regardless of numbers staying - with a further set of two per setting in a lower drawer or wardrobe alongside the bathrobes, so guests always felt they had more than enough and never had to ask.

A matching number of face washers accompanied the spare towels in each room's cupboards or drawers. The effect, taken together, was one of luxury - not through expense alone, but through the care with which everything was presented.

Charlotte's approach to towels, like everything she did, was artful. Each towel was held up and folded lengthways into thirds, then concertinaed into equal thirds on the made bed - creating a neat, compact bundle. The folded long edge always facing the door rather than the raw edge. Charlotte would fold the matching face washer into four, with a final flourish - the corner of the top-facing square folded inward to its full diagonal - a clean 45-degree fold across the full face, edges hidden, like a precise origami fold. All items then positioned so that matching woven-in bands were visually aligned. Guests sometimes see quality before they feel it.

Every set of towels in every room was treated this way.

Likewise, the pair of bathrobes waiting on hangers in each room had their lapels folded neatly across the front and waist-belts looped identically - one matching the other.

In the bathrooms, bathmats and hand towels were folded and

presented on the heated and other towel rails, with further spares stored in the cupboards.

Invisible care - what the Japanese call Omotenashi.

All these touches are the evidence of someone who cared enough to do the small thing properly - multiplied across every room and every surface and every preparation, that evidence is what a guest experiences as exceptional hospitality.

Chapter 19

Other products and touches

The bath bomb

The upstairs spa bathroom - with one of the best views across Hobart and the river - always had a Lush bath bomb waiting in the vanity cupboard, presented in its original paper wrapping. Lush's range meant we could occasionally theme the choice - a heart-shaped bath bomb with rose petals for a booking around Valentine's Day, for instance. Most were used.

The candle

On arrival days, I would light the scented candle on the hallway table ahead of the guests - placed alongside the fresh flowers, the compendium, and the house key. The candle was both a sensory welcome and a symbol: the house was alive, warm, and ready. I would open the front door with my own key so that the gesture of presenting guests with their own key remained intact - their key, their house, their stay. A fresh candle was always on hand in the supply cupboard, replaced whenever the previous stay had burned it down significantly.

The No Smoking cards

A small, elegant No Smoking tent card sat on the mantelpiece in the Library Room, the Media Room, the waist-high bookshelves

on the stair landing, and on the sideboard in the open plan dining and living room - typeset in English as standard, or replaced with Mandarin versions for Chinese guest groups. Alongside these, two terracotta flower pots filled with clean sand - one beside the BBQ on the back deck, another at the lower garden seat with its view across Hobart - were there for those who needed them, removing any ambiguity about where smoking was and wasn't permissible.

The fireplace

Set in the Media Room with deep sofas and atmospheric lighting, the fireplace was another of the property's most loved features, used freely by guests year-round. Any excuse, really, when the Hobart evening temperature had dropped.

Between guests the firebox was cleaned completely - ash and every trace of the preceding fire removed from the grate and floor with a dedicated brush and shovel - the hearth tiles wiped to spotless, and the fire set anew.

My own contribution to this ritual was the 'newspaper donuts' I'd prepare for placing under the kindling. From a few old tabloid newspapers kept in the under-house workroom, I would take a double page, fold it lengthways six or seven times, then shape it into a donut-size ring, the excess twisted around itself to hold. Five of these at the base of the cast-iron fire cradle, five or six kindling sticks on top, then three small logs.

The result was a picture-perfect fire setting, ready to light.

Chapter 20

My Library House shirt

I have never liked the idea of wearing a uniform. Which is why it amuses me that Library House gave me my first one.

It was a royal blue shirt I already owned - lightweight cotton, collared, long-sleeved in a way I'd usually wear rolled back a couple of folds. It had a small white diamond pattern that, I came to appreciate, almost perfectly matched the blue gingham background of our guest compendium and the tones of the Library House logo. Comfortable. Presentable.

The shirt eventually lived on a hanger in the under-house workroom. On check-in days, I'd freshen up and put on my Library House shirt for my final walk-through checks. This shirt ritual was focusing - it marked the transition from preparation to presentation, and from labour to host.

There is something to be said for a system that removes the need to make a decision. When you are managing three same-day turnarounds over the coming fortnight, not having to think about what's clean and presentable in the final hour before a guest arrival is a relief. The shirt handled that question permanently.

And an embroidered polo shirt with the Library House insignia would never have been the right answer either. We were a creative, personal property - and when guests arrived, they were being met by me, the owner. This shirt hit all the right notes, and felt nice to put on.

Chapter 21

The final inspection

Before every guest arrival, I allowed myself enough time to do this properly. With masking tape wrapped sticky-side-out around my knuckles, I'd walk slowly through the house one last time - looking for the smallest details that might have escaped notice. A stray thread. A hair. A piece of lint.

Along my final walk-through, lights and lamps were switched on to check that every bulb worked. Throws were adjusted where repetition had made the placement a little too precise - too squared-off to feel inviting.

The fireplace hearth was double-checked that I hadn't missed any tiny piece of charcoal - from wind movement down the chimney since I'd prepared it.

In the kitchen I checked that everything was neatly arranged in the respective drawers. Windows and mirrors were spot-checked in the changing light.

Some days the inspection took twenty minutes. Others - a blown globe requiring the ladder from the under-house workroom, a few specks of dust from the roof cavity to clean up, a leaf blown in when a door was opened - it took considerably longer. I never minded this attention to the details. That was the point. I loved the house and took pride in the way it delighted guests. So I always allowed enough time for whatever it needed that day.

By the time the inspection was complete, there was no visible trace that anyone had been preparing the house.

Only then would I check the flower arrangement on the front hall table one last time, light the candle alongside, step outside, close the front door, and wait on the porch for the guests to arrive.

We were intentional about keeping scent subtle. The yellow roses had a very gentle natural fragrance. The candle - lit just before the guests arrived - was a soft ocean mist. It was a fragrance we had loved at home. When your guest is clear in your mind, your own instincts become a surprisingly reliable guide.

And there was something else I enjoyed about that choice: a first-time visitor walking into the hallway, greeted by the subtlest suggestion of ocean air, would within minutes be gazing out over Constitution Dock and the full panoramic sweep of the Derwent River - whether from the windows of the living room and its decks below, or from the master bedroom and upper deck above. The senses arriving together - smell, then sight - felt like the most perfect welcome we could have offered.

The oil infusers in the bathrooms carried the same subtle fragrance throughout. Many guests have sensitivities to strong scent - so like everything else here, these were chosen to be atmospheric rather than distracting.

Charlotte had done her work before me. My inspection was the final layer. You might wonder whether such thoroughness was excessive. I never did. It took whatever it took - time enough to catch what the hours of cleaning before it might have missed. It was never about distrust. It was about the standard.

Chapter 22

Greeting the guests

I would always greet guests outside Library House. The house was theirs during their stay, and I wanted that feeling to begin before they even reached the front door.

I would wait on the front porch, and on seeing their car or taxi coming up the road, walk down to meet them at the front gate. If they arrived by taxi, I opened the door. The first words were always the same: “Hello, welcome to Library House.”

In those first moments I would establish quickly from the pre-arrival information who had made the booking, who the guest of honour was, and - if it was a Chinese family or group - who the elder was. Getting this right set the tone for everything that followed. I would offer to carry a bag. Most people prefer you don't, but for those who welcome it, the gesture means something.

I'd invite them through the front gate - or via the sandstone steps up from the driveway if they had arrived in a hire car - and then up onto the porch. Even from here people often paused to look along the balcony to where they'd just driven up Forest Road, now revealing central Hobart and the river beyond. I'd open the front door with my key and say, “Please, go through.” Once inside, the hallway table would greet them - fresh flowers, the Library House compendium, their own branded key, and the fragrant candle. For Chinese groups, a welcome letter in Mandarin would also be waiting. These items were always arranged in exactly the same

configuration, which made preparation efficient and ensured the first impression was consistent.

My practice was to enter last and wait in the front hallway while guests explored the downstairs rooms, remaining in earshot but not hovering. If a guest asked about something - the heating controls, the kitchen appliances - I could answer from where I stood or make my way to them. But I never, as a rule, went upstairs.

I always left upstairs for guests to discover. The upper floor at Library House opened to a 280-degree panorama across Hobart - the Derwent River, the city, the mountain. From the hallway below, I could follow their progress by sound - footsteps on the carpeted stairs, the quiet creak where the new floor met the old bones of the house, then a pause. And then the exclamation. "Wow!" Or, "Come and look at this!" Some people hurried back down the stairs wanting to share this discovery with others - though by then, those others were often already standing at the windows of the living room, lost in the same view.

Moments like that cannot be manufactured. But they can be choreographed. By not walking guests through the house too quickly, by not narrating what they're about to see, by knowing that the house will speak for itself.

PART FIVE

What I learned about Service



Chapter 23

A service of no interruptions

A founding principle of Library House: guests should feel, from arrival to departure, as though the house was entirely their own.

I guarded the guest's right to privacy with real diligence. My experience of travelling is that even a chance encounter with support staff or an unexpected caretaker can be somewhat draining when you're in holiday or work mode.

Our intention was the opposite: Library House was yours while you were in it.

The rubbish bins were an example. Charlotte or I would visit the evening before collection, or very early on collection morning, to wheel the bins from their storage under the back deck quietly out to the street. Guests might see them there, that morning as they headed out for the day - lids down, tidy - but the work was done for them, not by them. Knowing approximately when the trucks came, one or other of us would return early afternoon to wheel them back in - almost always before guests had returned from the day's sightseeing. Like the elves, the bins would simply have disappeared. I would always park diagonally across the road, a little down from the house, to check whether guests appeared to be home before approaching. We aimed to be invisible. Practically, that meant willing it. There is a significant difference between wheeling a near-full bin across gravel and brick driveway out to the kerb as slowly and quietly as possible, and simply wanting

to get the job done. The attitude was as intentional as the action. Omotenashi, again. In a wheelie bin.

Linen required a similar program. The linen service's delivery truck could never be relied upon for a precise arrival time - so I would only schedule a collection or drop-off on days when no guests were staying, when the timing of the truck simply didn't matter. On those and other days I would drop off the used linen from the most recent stay and collect the freshly cleaned and pressed linen in return - bringing it back to count, sort and store in the linen cupboard. From there, all fresh linen for an incoming guest stay came from what was already in-house and ready. No truck, no driver, no disruption, no uncertainty - ever during a stay.

When a telco infrastructure issue in the street caused intermittent broadband outages, I sourced and purchased a separate pre-paid mobile modem so that guests would experience no disruption. The note we left for guests during this period read:

Dear Guest, the NBN rollout in West Hobart has unfortunately led to an interrupted internet service at Library House. In order to provide you with uninterrupted broadband WiFi coverage, we have set up an alternative mobile service for our guests. However, given the current circumstances, we kindly ask you to refrain from lengthy and non-critical live video streaming from this service. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

One guest used eighty dollars' worth of data streaming the Test cricket. I didn't mind. The cost of a guest experiencing poor wifi at a property marketed as premium was far higher.

I was available around the clock - but only if needed.

My mobile number was on the reverse of the Library House keyring, highlighted in my greeting and listed in the compendium - alongside a commitment that we would otherwise respect their privacy entirely.

Over eighteen months, I was called to the house when a guest thought they'd run out of hot water (they hadn't), and another time when the guest couldn't get the Foxtel working. The most inconvenient call I received was when I had just sat down to Christmas Day lunch with my family. Ah well. I was back in time for dessert.

I put this record - essentially no disruptions - down to four things: having welcomed guests personally, having set the house up well, having prepared a thorough compendium, and having made my availability clear from the beginning. When people know support is there, they rarely need to use it.

Chapter 24

The Visitors Book that wasn't

When we opened, I had placed a large leather-covered visitors book on the hallway table alongside the compendium. The first guest party wrote a short, warm note in it. Then it sat there, unused, for the next few stays.

I thought about my own experience as a traveller. I have, on occasion, written long and effusive entries in visitors books, often with little illustrations in the margins too. Even when I genuinely wanted to write, I would often wait until the last day - in case something else worth capturing still lay ahead. And then the final morning would arrive, with packing and departing competing for the same hour. And I've also felt that particular obligation: the sense that the book expected something, that departure was slightly in its debt.

I decided to save our guests that final morning task. My overriding goal was their ease and comfort - not work. The visitors book was removed.

What happened instead was something better. Guests who wanted to express their feelings did so in whatever way felt natural to them. Some wrote heartfelt notes on the Library House wine list. Others left detailed reviews online. Both were spontaneous and generously given. I cherish the written notes. And the online reviews became some of our most powerful promotion.

Chapter 25

Going the extra mile

Everything described in the preceding chapters represents the day-to-day standard at Library House. The systems, the preparation, the presentation - these were the baseline. But occasionally, a guest request arrived that went beyond what any accommodation listing would promise. The answer was always the same: yes, let's make it happen.

Private dining

We listed in the compendium the option of a private in-house dining experience with a locally recognised chef - available for guests wanting ready-to-heat gourmet meals, picnic hampers for a day out, or a special occasion dinner without the effort of cooking. This offering was taken up on a couple of occasions, to great effect. Having the options mattered more than how often they were used.

The farm stay

A family visiting Hobart wanted to experience something of rural Tasmania. Based in the UK, they reached out ahead of their stay wanting advice on experiences beyond the city. Through our agency and some work we had done with Tourism Tasmania, I had experienced a wonderful day on a photography shoot and night staying at Brickendon. So I contacted the owners, who were then able to liaise with the guests directly.

The limo

A guest family asked us to arrange a car and driver for their arrival and departure. They had read about Barilla Bay and wanted to visit the oyster farm on their way from the airport - taking in a city tour and some shopping before arriving at Library House. We arranged all of it, including the return airport transfer.

The emergency wifi

The broadband outage story is told in Chapter 23. It belongs there - as a service of no interruptions. Here it simply stands as another example of the same commitment: when something threatens the guest experience, you find a solution. Whatever it takes.

None of these things were in the job description. All of them were in the spirit of it. The extra mile, in premium hospitality, is rarely as far as it sounds.

Chapter 26

Every guest was the first guest

There is a philosophy that runs beneath everything described in this book - beneath the tea bag jars and the newly printed compendium, the fresh flowers in the hallway and the fold in the towels on a bed. I didn't name it while we were doing it. We simply practised it, every turnaround, every arrival, every preparation. But looking back now, I can see exactly what it was.

Every guest was the first guest.

Not in the sense that we pretended the house had never been stayed in - guests knew it was an accommodation property. In fact we'd worked hard to invoke that it was also a special former creative home. But in the sense that when each guest arrived, there was no trace of anyone staying before them. The pantry held a sealed tin of Lindt Dark Drinking Chocolate. Not one that had been opened and used once or twice - a sealed tin. The Aesop pump bottles were always full. The oil infusers always above half full. The compendium was freshly printed. The salt and pepper grinders were topped equally to four-fifths. The bath bomb was in its original paper wrapping.

Every detail said the same thing: this was placed here for you.

That is not perfectionism for its own sake. It is an act of imagination - always thinking about each arriving guest's experience as though they were discovering the house for the first time. Because in every sense that mattered, they were.

I understood the full power of this only when I started to notice why people came back. The footballers who returned with their families. The Sydney professional who stayed twice - a week each time. They weren't simply returning to a place they liked. They were returning because they wanted to give the experience of finding it to someone else. They wanted their children, their partners, their friends to have that specific feeling - of walking into a house full of art and light and discovering it as if no one had been there before.

You cannot achieve that with marketing. You can only earn it by protecting the integrity of the discovery - every time, for every guest, without exception.

That is what all our efforts at Library House were in service of. Not a standard. Not a scorecard.

A feeling.

Chapter 27

What the Reviews said

Over our eighteen months, Library House maintained a perfect five-star scorecard. The reviews told, in guests' own words, what we had worked to create. One guest enjoyed their stay so much they generously posted a review on two different platforms.

★★★★★ Simply superb - Lucychapm... - October 2013

"Wow - Library House is exceptional. So clean it sparkles - filled with art and books that make it feel like home (or better than home!) Luxurious beds - a garden to pick fresh herbs - and a breathtaking view over all of Hobart - in all our years of travel it rarely gets as good as this - thank you Rowan for our wonderful stay - we hope you don't get too popular so we can come again..."

★★★★★ Luxurious Delight - Merelyn - December 2013

"We were a group of four couples and Library House made our 35th get together one of the most special. Tina handled our enquiry efficiently and couldn't have been more helpful. When we arrived at Library House Rowan was there to greet us. And what a wonderful place to arrive to. A beautiful combination of old and new done with such superb style. Comfort from the moment you walk in the door, space to enjoy each other's company without being in each other's way, beds that are divine with linen to match and a lovely garden with herbs, fruit

and berries for guest use as they ripen. The library room is a joy to sit in with a wonderful selection of books. So lovely was this house we chose to eat in on both nights. The view is magnificent. It would be hard to find a better located, more well appointed property in Hobart. We can't recommend this property highly enough. We'll definitely be back."

★★★★★ Beautiful Property! - June - December 2013

"What a stunning property! We thoroughly enjoyed our stay at beautiful Library House. Plenty of room for the 6 of us, the attention to detail was outstanding & the views magnificent. We will definitely be back."

★★★★★ June - December 2013

"What a beautiful property! We didn't want to leave and will definitely be returning. Very close to the city with amazing views. The property was meticulously clean and the attention to detail was outstanding. We had 6 people staying and there was plenty of space for everyone. We would highly recommend this property."

★★★★★ WOW... what a place to stay! - Nicole - May 2014

"Our girls weekend away in Hobart was amazing and this was mostly because our accommodation was FANTASTIC. The Library House was everything and more than we expected. We arrived late at night and Rowan was there waiting to welcome us... what service. We had 8 girls staying and there was so much room for us all. The kitchen and lounge area... you just never want to leave as the view is incredible."

There are just no words to describe the Library House, you will just have to visit it yourself and find out."

★★★★★ AMAZING!! - April 2014

"The house was perfect. It had everything you need. Stunning views, great hosts, very well stocked kitchen, great location. We will definitely come back and stay again. We loved it."

★★★★★ Spectacular accommodation with everything you could want - John058, Melbourne - July 2014

"The Library House boasts magnificent 270 degree views, especially from the master bedroom, of the Derwent, estuary, Hobart cityscape and surrounding mountain range. It provides quality accommodation in every sense. The little touches like Aesop toiletries, comfortable lounges with cushions and rugs, an open fireplace and Foxtel make this comfortable house a pleasure to stay in. We were warmly welcomed by the host which set the tone for a wonderful stay. The house takes its name from the well-stocked library in one of the rooms which is something special."

★★★★★ Beautiful house - Madeleine - December 2014

"We had a fantastic stay at the Library House. We watched the boats come into the Derwent from the Sydney to Hobart yacht race on the deck on a stunning Hobart day. Thoroughly enjoyed our time."

Chapter 28

The unimagined joys of a garden hose and a chopstick

I never knew myself as someone who might be part of creating a boutique guesthouse that earned consistently five-star reviews.

What I also discovered that year was how coiling a garden hose, or using a wooden chopstick to gently ease a rose bush leaf through a front fence paling, could be so deeply gratifying.

The hose ritual came first.

No matter how much had already been prepared outside - the lawn mowed and edged, the gardens tended - there was one small thing I would always do before heading inside on a guest arrival day.

I would coil the back garden hose. Near-perfectly. From the hula hoop-sized circle I first created from its natural arc, I coiled it inward on itself on the ground, adjusting until the overall effect was as circular as I could make it - the orange nozzle resting relaxed across the innermost coils of green. There was no upright structure to attach a reel to, and we hadn't wanted to drill one into the house rendering. So this was the solution.

Anyone stepping down the back stairs to the gravel landing would see those concentric circles immediately. It was simply another aesthetic gesture - one more thing done with care.

The chopstick came later. A guest group had left several pairs of

simple wooden takeaway chopsticks behind, unused and in their paper sleeves. I placed them on my bench in the under-house workroom, and one afternoon found myself reaching for one.

The high front fence was timber with narrow gaps between the palings. Rose bushes and planted grasses along the front garden meant searching fronds and leaves would occasionally find their way through from the garden side, disrupting the clean lines visible from the street. The chopstick fitted perfectly - strong enough to prod, gentle enough not to damage plant or fence - and could return a wayward stem in seconds.

It was equally good for spot-weeding the brickwork in the driveway. For paint touch-ups - a perfect stirrer and applicator for small repairs, used once and discarded. And for clearing cobwebs along the fence line too, without disturbing the surrounding plants in a way no brush or cloth could manage.

I had not expected a chopstick, nor a garden hose, to teach me so much. They did.

Chapter 29

Loving the work of service

I have always been, at heart, an introvert who learned to perform as an extravert. I was always nervous before greeting guests. It took me the better part of eighteen months to become largely comfortable in the role of host.

The most important thing I learned was this: taking a genuine interest in your guests' wellbeing comes back to you. In reviews, in referrals, in the way guests treat the house, in the quality of the stay they create for themselves and their companions.

There was the guest who emailed asking me to arrange champagne on arrival as a surprise for his wife. We had three Tasmanian sparklings on the wine list, and I was faced with the dilemma of second-guessing what he meant by champagne. French? A specific label? I wrote a careful reply asking. He answered, "More than happy to go with your recommendation for the local drop." The lesson: when in doubt about what a guest wants, ask.

For a guest's returning visit - a week's stay each time - I caught that moment to ask in our exchange of emails, "Would you like me to leave the key so you can simply come in?" That guest very much appreciated the invitation. It acknowledged the trust that had been built over the course of their previous stay.

I would never use the bathroom in the final preparations if I didn't have time to fully reset it before guests arrived. I would always offer to carry bags. I would always wait outside and let guests go

through the door first. I would never go upstairs. These were small things. But I like to think they made a compounding big difference.

What I hadn't anticipated - what genuinely surprised me - was how much I came to love this work. Not the strategy of it. Not the brand, the emails, the awards, the reviews. The work itself. The daily, physical, repetitive, demanding work of preparing a house for someone else's joy.

Epilogue

Eighteen months earlier, we'd sat in that cafe with a napkin and a problem.

Library House was sold as a functioning accommodation business, with its systems, reputation and forward bookings established.

OK, napkin, what's next?

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To Byron and Belle - 82 Forest Road was first and foremost, home. Thank you for all the love, fun wrestling, and most cherished memories.

To my then wife, whose love of books gave Library House its name - and whose contribution to that family home we built together over fifteen years is present throughout this story.

To Rachel, with love. Thank you for a new home to finish this book.

About the Author

Rowan Smith is a storyteller, brand builder and musician.

Over two decades, Rowan built and led one of Tasmania's most respected creative communications agencies, working with government and corporate clients across a wide range of sectors - taking him to boardrooms and conference stages across Australia and around the world.

From an unexpected problem - the house that wouldn't sell - Library House became one of the most absorbing chapters of his working life.

Rowan is also an internationally published singer-songwriter and recording artist, with nine albums to his name. His music can be found on all streaming platforms.

He now consults through Rowan Smith Creative and has launched Creative Brand Coach, an online education platform for anyone ready to find and tell the story that transforms their brand.

He lives in Hobart, where he swims laps regularly and is never far from a napkin.