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## *Cleburne*

**B**Y ANYONE'S STANDARDS RICHARD CLEBURNE was an enterprising fellow, a man of Irish decent who arrived in the fledgling Hobart Town around 1821. Richard Cleburne took to colonial life with dash and verve, opening a store in Murray Street, where there is still a building with his name written above it, then purchasing a large tract of land in the lee of Mt Direction in 1825. Here in the 1830s and 1840s he built a fine sandstone homestead, with a quite spectacular wooden verandah running the length of the river-facing facade.

Perhaps the most telling story of his early trading and colourful career is the time the collector of customs seized eight casks of American tobacco because Richard had imported them without paying the necessary duty. With incredible aplomb (and no doubt a good dash of Irish blarney) he managed to turn the tables by insisting in the subsequent court action that, as the hapless tax collector had not fulfilled his duty he, not Richard, was the guilty one.

Richard won his case. However, there was more gossip about his smuggling from then on, especially when he continued his trading on the Derwent with boats that landed at the jetty fronting his house. True or false, history doesn't record, but Richard left behind a fine legacy in this homestead, its orchard, gardens and a cluster of stone outbuildings, named in honour of himself.

It had a narrow escape from oblivion in the 1980s when engineers decided to bulldoze the homestead and its buildings to make way for the new Bowen Bridge. Luckily, action by outraged citizens led to the bridge being realigned by a few degrees and leaving *Cleburne* in all its grandeur.

It is this sense of history as well as fine Colonial architecture that the owners since 2006, David Lander and his partner Penelope Ann, have retained, now sharing its bounty and, incidentally, their fine collection of contemporary Tasmanian art with bed and breakfast guests.

Coming from Hobart, you catch your first glimpse of *Cleburne* among the trees as you cross the Bowen Bridge. A semi-circle later you enter a drive bordered with she-oaks and *Stricta* pines, to arrive at a cluster of buildings around a courtyard. As the late afternoon sun casts a tracery of trees across the mellow stone of the main homestead, it feels as if it is really somewhere in France. But a short exploration later, you can see and feel the impact of Australian history. The various outbuildings now offer charming accommodation. Each is named for its previous calling, and each is differently furnished, though still within the spirit of the times. David and Penelope worked closely with the Heritage Council to achieve the balance between the past and the expectations of today's guests.

Where possible, random stone and rubble walls have been painstakingly cleaned back to pale gold. They found The Stable still had

its original floor of cobblestones, so rather than cement them over, these were overlaid with freeform flagstones. Here, too, are the original feed troughs, an unusual but evocative part of a very stylish room redolent with history, with heavy support beams, wooden ceiling, a rich brown suede cover on the bed – and a thoroughly modern glossy white-tiled bathroom tucked to one side.

The Bakehouse, an exceptional example of early Colonial stone architecture, is in a two-storey barn at the ground level where horses were once sheltered and feed stored. And also where bread for the property was baked, hence its name and the way it has been freshly painted “flour white” as Penelope calls it. The big brick and stone baker's fireplace and oven from those early days remain, while twin blue and white paintings by Tasmanian artist Helen Hopcroft punctuate one corner.

Another building is the Barn, handicap friendly, with a dramatic old four poster bed. The self-contained Cottage with massive sandstone walls and deep-set windows, is believed to be where the family servants lived. It looks into the courtyard, has a combustion stove, grey slate floor, white cotton shirred bed covers tossed with a glossy fake fur throw – a fur throw is on all the beds, an invitingly warm touch. The Homestead Suite is at one end of the big house. Not accommodation, but very quaint and pretty is the Outhouse, a small stone structure built, as David Lander most intriguingly suggests, to hold the gunpowder store.

Guests have breakfast in the former ballroom in the homestead, where they are offered a choice of Continental breakfasts, from croissants to cold cuts in European fashion, fresh juice, and lots of coffee – under the enigmatic gaze of an amazing sculpture made from recycled wire and computer bits and pieces, a more than life size character with CDs for eyes, acquired by chance by Penelope who came across it in a computer shop.

To call *Cleburne* an “art hotel” is very much in the spirit of the diverse paintings on all the different walls. If possible, and bookings permit, check them out while you are there, particularly *Jane Franklin on Laudanum* by John Lendis in the Homestead Suite, and in the guests' book-lined reading room, the stunning – you could say, outrageous – *Captain Cadillac*, by Wayne Brookes.

It's all very bucolic, amazing considering you are only an easy 20 minute drive from Hobart itself. And a final surprise at *Cleburne*: The low smudge of pale-toned buildings across the Derwent is the zinc smelter by day. But come dusk and it bursts into a blaze of lights – creating a dramatic artwork mirrored in the river. There is little doubt that the entrepreneur, one Richard Cleburne, would have approved of this contemporary touch of theatre for his fine historic estate.

