

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

Travel

+ LUXURY

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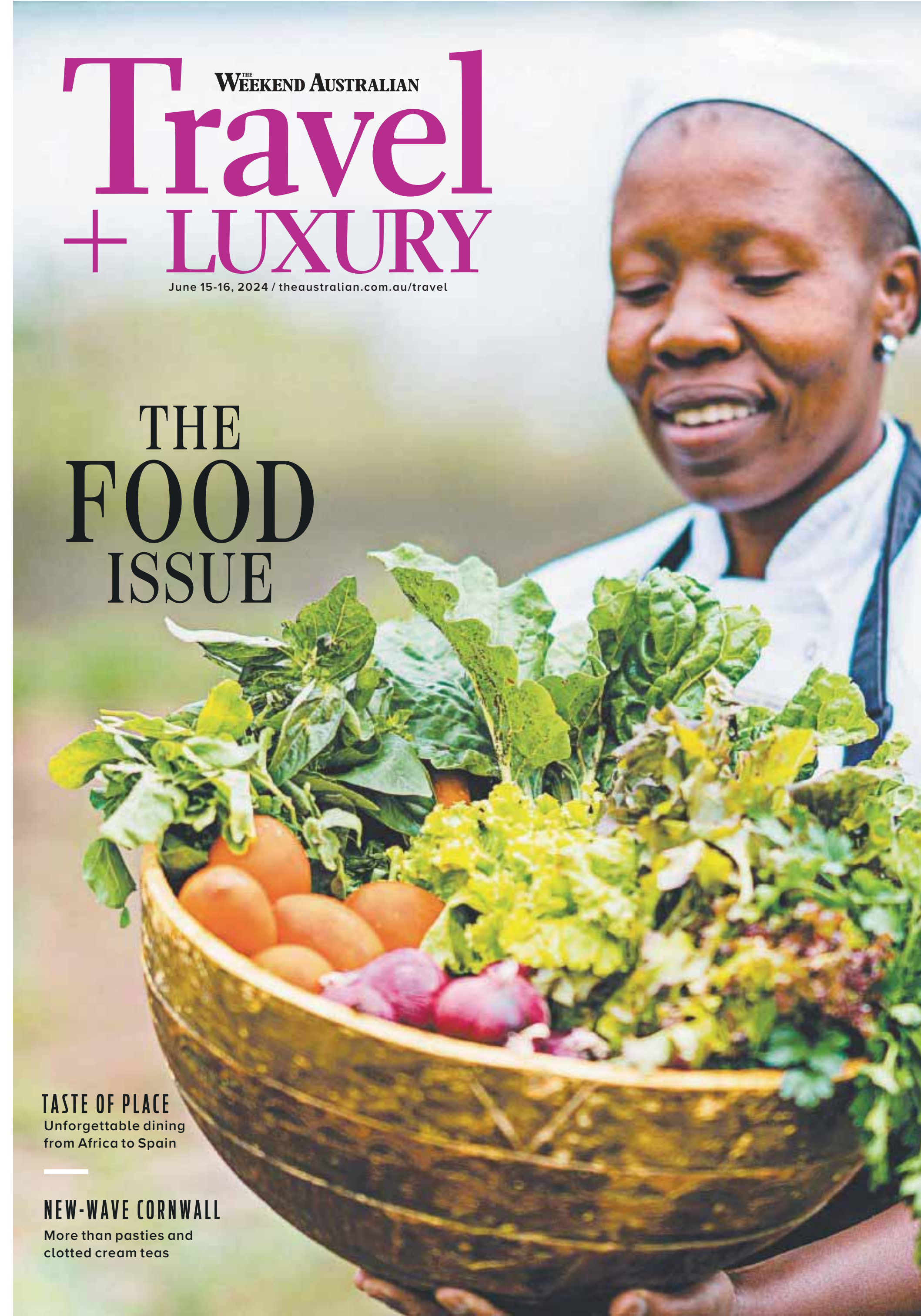
THE FOOD ISSUE

TASTE OF PLACE

Unforgettable dining
from Africa to Spain

NEW-WAVE CORNWALL

More than pasties and
clotted cream teas



MORE TO THE STORY

Storytelling is in the DNA of Hobart's MACq 01, where every guestroom is dedicated to a mover and shaker from Tasmania's past and present. In the hotel's intimate Evolve Spirits Bar, I meet Jane Overeem, who has her own tale to tell. She describes how her father, Casey Overeem, visited a relative who was distilling liquor at his home while on his honeymoon in Norway in the 1980s. He vowed then and there to pursue the craft. His newfound passion placed him at the forefront of the state's nascent whisky industry when he released his first single malt in 2012.

Jane is now heading up the business in Huntingfield, on the outskirts of Hobart, with her husband Mark. She is excited about Tasmania's growing reputation on the global whisky stage, citing the many international awards that local distilleries have garnered over recent years. "The world is already starting to look at Australian whisky, Tasmania in particular," she says. "We've had the most amount of inquiries in the past five months from distributors overseas that we've had in 15 years."

As she leads me through a tasting of Overeem's three core single malts and nip of her special 12 year old, I'm glad there's still plenty available to sip on these shores.

MACq 01 offers a one-hour Drinks with the Distiller experience three times a week; \$45 a person.

macq01.com.au
overeemwhisky.com

deeply photogenic setting. Fur seals bask in the afternoon sun on a rocky outcrop in the harbour, and the gentle winter light highlights moody skies and glassy seas. It must be a wild place in a storm but all is calm as our host, venue manager Thomas Edges, welcomes us into his fragrant workplace where barley, salt, sea and spirit hang in the air.

First port of call is the room where grain and water meet in the mash tun to make wort. This liquid is then moved next door where, with the addition of yeast, fermentation bubbles away for five days. We taste the "wash" at its various stages and it's not unlike an unsophisticated, cloudy craft beer. It's not a patch on the sweet but sinus-searing spirit that emerges from the pair of giant copper stills. This precious liquid is poured into sherry, port and bourbon casks, where the real magic takes place.

Thomas takes our palates on a journey in which descriptors such as salted caramel, Christmas pudding, treacle and banana guide our way. Having lived in Scotland for a couple of years, I was tutored in no uncertain terms on the purist philosophy of drinking single malt neat. Thomas takes a more relaxed approach, suggesting a few drops of water to open up the spirit's character. He's even been known to plonk an ice cube in a glass of Laphroaig, the polarising peaty Scotch from the Isle of Islay. "Just don't drink it with Coke in front of us," he pleads.

Our tour ends in a room lined with barrels on one side and delivering broad harbour views on the other. Gulls wheel over the water as we sip the founder's reserve, a 62 per cent cask-strength beauty that delivers a punch of chocolate and sultana with a maritime twist. Like so much of what visitors to this lovely island eat and drink, it's a taste of Tassie like nowhere else.

Penny Hunter was a guest of Saffire Freycinet and the Federal Group.

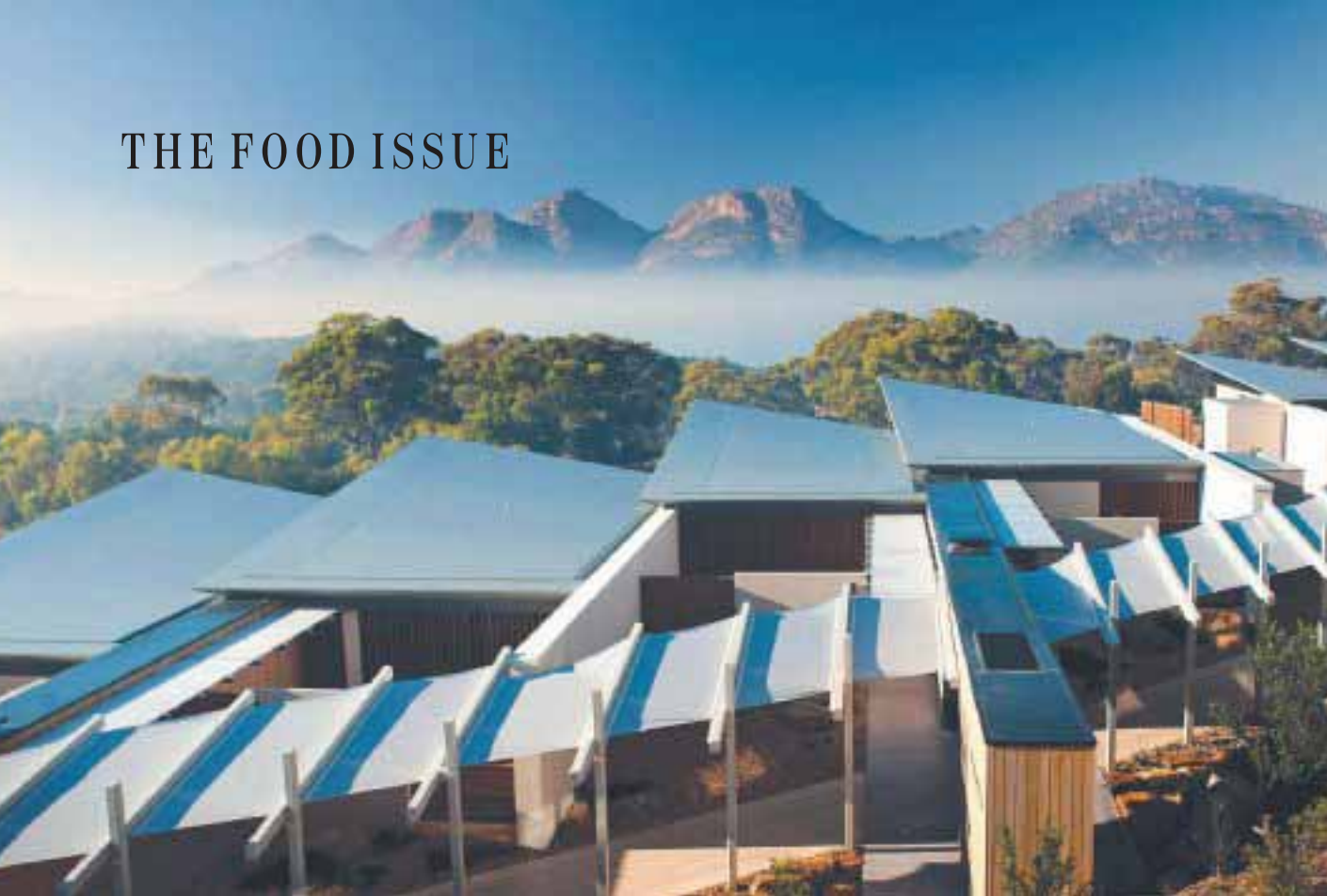
IN THE KNOW

Saffire Freycinet offers tours of Waubs Harbour distillery as part of its all-inclusive accommodation packages; suites from \$2700 a night, twin-share.

saffire-freycinet.com.au

Tasmanian Whisky Week runs August 5-11 with a range of tours and events held across the state.

taswhiskyweek.com



LIQUID GOLD

For an authentic taste of Tasmania, you can't go past the island state's world-class whisky

PENNY HUNTER

"I would prefer barley be fed to pigs than it be used to turn men into swine." With those rather pious words, Lady Jane Franklin, wife of the island colony's governor, put a cork hard and fast in Tasmania's distilling industry in 1838. Prohibition ensued and the industry remained dormant until 1992, when the "godfather of Tasmanian whisky", Bill Lark, succeeded in his campaign to make the commercial distillation of single malt spirit possible.

Zoom forward more than 30 years and Lady Jane must surely be turning in her grave. Tasmania has about 100 distilleries producing whisky, gin and vodka. Lark bottles more than a dozen varieties and has a slew of awards. It recently released Dark Lark, a rich and lightly spiced single malt packaged in a gorgeous black bottle with a label depicting the southern aurora. In a neat act of happenstance, its launch coincided with Tasmanians witnessing an astonishing display of the phenomenon caused by a rare solar storm.

Among the many other brands of note are Sullivans Cove, winner of "world's best" awards in 2014 and 2018, Furneaux on wild and windy Flinders Island in Bass Strait, Hellyers Road near Burnie in the northwest and Callington Mill, with its historic windmill in Oatlands, halfway between Hobart and Launceston. There are plenty more, each producing whisky that reflects the environment in which it is made but all utilising three essential ingredients: barley and Tasmania's fresh air and pristine water.

Hunkering within the bushland of Freycinet National Park on the east coast, luxury lodge Saffire Freycinet has long been a passionate advocate for Tasmania's providores. In the long, curved Palate restaurant, looking out over Coles Bay to the pink granite of the Hazards range, guests might dine on tender Cape Grim beef, pacific oysters from nearby Melshell, tangy Tongola



Saffire Freycinet, main; Waubs Harbour distillery at Bicheno, top and below; Palate restaurant, above; Evolve Spirits Bar at MACq 01 hotel, below left



goats cheese and charred octopus from Stanley Bay. Honey comes from Wild Hives bees that collect pollen from the 30,000-odd natives planted on what was once a caravan site. Seeds from some of those trees and shrubs add crunch and flavour to house-baked breads, and Tassie wines dominate the wine list.

At the bar, more than 30 Tasmanian whiskies glow like golden lamps; they include bottles from one of the newest kids on the block, Waubs Harbour distillery. This operation, in the pretty coastal town of Bicheno about 30 minutes away, released its first bottles only in April last year. It has collaborated with the lodge on a special Saffire whisky edition and guests are invited to take an informative, and delicious, tour of the business.

The distillery virtually dips its toes in the water at its headquarters, a former oyster hatchery that has been spruced up with a smart black and white paint job. It is owned and operated by Tim and Bec Polmear and Tim's brother Rob, a "mad scientist" who took a circuitous route from Antarctic biology to hone his whisky-making skills at Lark and Overmeer distilleries.

Regardless of whether you're fond of a dram, Waubs has a