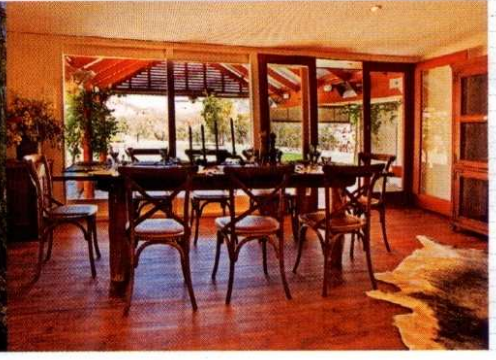
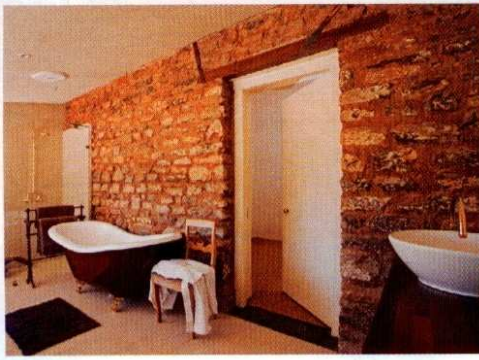


Arkaba station



now the image makers are getting in on the act. Tourism Australia is working on a major new advertising campaign, while Trade Minister Simon Crean won cabinet approval in September for a separate \$20-million, four-year branding exercise, a pet project of our internationalist Prime Minister. According to tender documents, this "contemporary national brand" will "increase visibility of Australia's strengths as a global citizen ... enhance the ability of Australians to succeed in the global marketplace ... contemporise the way Australians think and talk about the nation ... and improve global understanding and respect for Australia's strengths, capabilities and values".

We could certainly do with the help. As everyone knows, the \$90 billion local tourism sector has fared poorly this year. It's no secret operators are doing it tough, not least at the top of the market. But if the effort is overdue and the need incontrovertible, history shows any attempt to refine brand Australia – or even simply say what the country represents – only raises the age-old question: who the bloody hell are we in fact?

"Yes, some concentration on selling the brand Australia could help," James Baillie says. "But what is that brand? I'm critical of the political seesawing over the years. Every time there's a new tourism minister we have a different campaign with another multinational advertising agency dreaming up a new slogan and earning millions. "Why do we have to keep changing? Why can't we just stick to a theme that communicates what's fantastic about Australia and invest in getting the message out?"

Baillie is not alone. "There's been no decent promotional campaign for this country since the Paul Hogan ads in the 1980s. Just a whole lot of wasted money," barks adman John Singleton, who has spent some \$16 million on boutique hotel Bells at Killcare and the Pretty Beach House lodge on the NSW Central Coast. Singleton says the brand campaign is not a bad idea per se but, for a start, the money is woefully inadequate. "It should be \$200 million if they want to do it well," he says. "Harvey Norman spends \$140 million on advertising in Australia alone. How can you sell such a diverse country to the world for \$20 million?"

"They've mucked around with everything under the sun over the years. They've even tried flogging us as a destination of museums and history. No one in Europe is going to get on a plane and fly for f---ing 24 hours to look at museums in Australia. I mean, come on.

"No one knows what they're doing, that's the problem. It's just a load of bureaucracy and bullshit. They should make [former Qantas boss and deputy chairman of Tourism Australia] Geoff Dixon the chairman, and give him dictatorial powers for the next 10 years."

"I want the \$20 million," Harvey Norman's managing director and a good mate of Singleton, Katie Page, jokes, sipping tea by Sydney Harbour on a sunny spring day.

Page is passionate about her swanky tourism venture on the NSW far north coast, the Byron at Byron Resort & Spa.

"Seriously, I was going to enter for the tender," she says. She mentions the brilliant simplicity of the New Zealand "100% Pure" campaign, surveys her surroundings wistfully, then waves an arm: "The sky. Australia is blue sky. That's what I'd go on. We live in this most incredible country, from the reefs to the desert to this Harbour Bridge. The one thing that connects it all, the one thing you dream about when you're living or working in grey old London, is the sky."

It's that kind of simple, cohesive link that is missing, agrees Retail Adventures owner Jan Cameron, one of Australia's richest women and founder of the Kathmandu outdoor leisure wear label. Cameron lived in New Zealand for 36 years and owns property just outside Christchurch, but she recently moved back to her country of birth, buying 12 hectares on Tasmania's pristine east coast, along with Silver Sands, a hotel with postcard views that she aims to redevelop into a luxury destination.

"New Zealand has brilliantly bundled itself into a cohesive package," she says. "When you look at it as a foreign tourist, you can get your head around the package and you can immediately tick off the five or six things New Zealand is known for." Australia, in comparison, has failed to present itself effectively as a "doable", easily comprehended destination, despite well-known highlights such as the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru, Surfer's Paradise and Sydney Harbour. Yes, we are much bigger than our Kiwi cousin, but that's all the more reason to offer tourists a sense of how to package their trip, whether for a week or three months. "New Zealand seems much more of a one-stop shop," Cameron says. "You know you can have a three-week holiday there that ticks all the boxes. That's what tourists want to do, tick boxes."

Over the ditch, they are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the "100% Pure" campaign which lifted international visitor numbers by 10 per cent within a year, and 50 per cent between 1999 and 2004. Tom McFarlane, the regional creative director Asia Pacific and US at M&C Saatchi, which created the campaign, stresses that nation branding is a very different beast from a tourism marketing campaign.

Wayne Kirkpatrick, who has run resorts across the country since 1970 and now heads up Delaware North Australia's parks and resorts business, agrees with McFarlane and starts by defining what a brand isn't. "It's not a slogan, or an advertising campaign," he says. "A brand is a reputation that's built over time by publicity, word of mouth. It's a culture, a reputation."

It is in fact a nation's "soft power": moves by Tourism Australia combine with those of our politicians, corporations, sports people, movie stars, artists and our broader diaspora to create the national image, he says.

"It should flow on and assist luxury resort operators like ourselves. It's not just governments who need to do the right thing, though. It's the BHPs, the Rio Tintos, the banana exporters, the beef suppliers on King Island, the wine



'Why can't we stick to a theme that communicates what's fantastic about Australia and invest in getting the message out?'

Brand new: High-end resorts making a mark, directly above from left, James Baillie's award-winning Southern Ocean Lodge on South Australia's Kangaroo Island; adman John Singleton's Pretty Beach

ly renovated,
s a base for
safari's taking in
ag camps, the
hed on the edge
na Pound. It's
t in a suite that
WBL's luxury
amp Sal Salis
o Reef, Bamuru
ear Kakadu and
untains Private

Safari's. "From the
wetlands to [coastal WA]
to the Blue Mountains,
they're all completely
different," Carlow says.
"If someone's coming to
Australia and they want
to get a variety of habitat
and experiences, they
can now do it with us."
That critical mass will
help combat the difficult

economics of high-end
experiences in remote
and widely dispersed
areas. "It will become
more economical,"
he says. "As much as
anything, it's the time it
takes to get a reasonable
number of people flowing
through, which has
been easier domestically
than internationally.

It's breaking through a
perception that Australia
as a destination consists
of Sydney, Uluru, the
Barrier Reef and east-
coast Queensland resorts
... to some extent it's how
Tourism Australia has
portrayed the country ...
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