



REALITY CHECK

JUSTINE TYERMAN BUNKS DOWN AT ONE OF SYDNEY'S
MOST SPECTACULAR HARBOURSIDE APARTMENTS.



A foghorn woke me from my dreams and I opened my eyes to see a huge white cruise ship gliding past the window of our Sydney apartment. When we'd arrived at La Corniche the previous night we'd found the views so mesmerising it seemed a sacrilege to shut them out, so we'd slept with the curtains and doors to the balcony wide open. Now we watched as hundreds of passengers filled the liner's decks, excited at the imminent prospect of sailing under the Sydney Harbour Bridge and past the Opera House.

I was happy to be awake early in such sumptuous surroundings and besides, I had many things to achieve in a short time – a workout in the gym, some laps in the pool and a pampering beauty treatment, followed by a momentous decision about what to wear

for a celebration lunch cooked by celebrity chef Clancy Atkinson.

Our fabulous Luxe Houses property came with a concierge and a tantalising list of services, including having their chef-to-the-stars cook for us. It was my birthday, so the concierge had arranged for Clancy to do lunch for three “at home”.

This was one of many delightful surprises at the über-luxurious Sydney harbourside apartment, the flagship of Luxe Houses' portfolio of private rental properties in Australia and New Zealand.

The jaw-dropping view from almost all 14 rooms and wraparound balconies at the McMahon's Point apartment is the first thing that strikes guests when they arrive by private lift at the circular marble entranceway.

The panorama was quite literally staggering – I took

a step or two back as my eyes struggled to take it all in. The Opera House was perfectly framed by the Harbour Bridge, the iconic shell-shaped roof glowing in the last rays of the sun. Ferries buzzed back and forth across the harbour and, as daylight faded, Luna Park came to life in a dazzling display of lights.

The next surprise was the sheer size of the apartment, which takes up the whole floor at La Corniche, one of Sydney's most sought-after waterfront apartment buildings. At 300 square metres, it is super-spacious, especially the living, entertainment and dining area with its marble floors and Italian sculptures.

I claimed the best seat in the house, the comfy leather armchair with footstool in the window beside a set of powerful binoculars mounted on a tripod.

The others sprawled on the generous white leather

L-shaped couch in front of a wall-mounted TV set and played with the sound system linking all parts of the house.

The palatial master bedroom with dressing room had a super-king bed and sheets so thick I thought they were doubled, while the plush carpet looked soft enough to sleep on. A balcony offered a different angle on the same spectacular view and a spacious tiled en suite had a glass-walled hydrotherapy shower and spa bath large enough for six. You can sightsee while you soak or shower.

The second bedroom has a balcony with a lovely view, and an en suite with a spa bath, while the third bedroom has an en suite and, interestingly, a piano. There's also a guest bathroom near the apartment entrance.

My foodie husband and daughter spent much of their time exercising the impressive array of German Gaggenau

The jaw-dropping view from almost all 14 rooms and wraparound balconies is the first thing that strikes guests when they arrive at the McMahon's Point apartment.

RIGHT: Jessica Kirkpatrick founded Luxe Houses in 2011 after noting a demand from luxury travellers for fine bespoke accommodation.



OPPOSITE PAGE: You can't escape those views at La Corniche, whether you're in the huge living/dining area, at the marble bar, in bed or even in the bath.

appliances and the Nespresso machine in the well-equipped kitchen with its acres of marble bench space. I was fascinated by the nooks and crannies of the butler's pantry and laundry adjoining the kitchen.

The handsome oval walnut table in the boardroom adjoining the living area would be an excellent venue for a small conference, apart from the distraction of that view. You just can't escape it without lowering the blinds. A pair of massive antique doors is an imposing wall feature in the room but, surprisingly, they do not appear to conceal a secret passageway for La Corniche's many celebrity guests to come and go undetected.

A heated indoor pool, Jacuzzi with supercharged bubbles, a sauna and gym are handily located a few steps down from the apartment.

I leafed through the list of bespoke services at our disposal: apart from Clancy's fancy lunch, dinners or cocktail parties, there were hair, skin, beauty and massage treatments, a personal shopper, cruising aboard a luxury superyacht, flights by private plane, or even some acrobatic manoeuvres high above the harbour in a fighter jet, should we so desire.

Being a *Top Gun* fan from way back, I was sorely tempted to pick the latter but played it safe with some female pampering and the lunch instead.

Our timing was perfect. Clancy just managed to fit us in after his three-month stint as private chef to Gerard Butler and before catering for a birthday soiree at La Corniche that Ronan Keating was throwing for his girlfriend.

Clancy worked for Gucci and other luxury brands for six and a half years before taking up the position as official chef for Luxe Houses. Sweet natured, amusing and unpretentious, Clancy does not fit the modern image of a temperamental celebrity chef at all. He's a real gem.

Our delicious Gourmet Spring Lunch was presented on elegant Pillivuyt French porcelain plates by the picture window overlooking the harbour, but for once the view was upstaged by the food.

I can still taste the fabulous fresh flavours: Goats' cheese, braised leek and mint pie with handmade olive oil pastry; Salad of shaved cauliflower, fennel, green apple and hazelnuts with sweet and sour honey dressing; Chargrilled asparagus with parmesan, pickled red grapes, baby cos and pickling juices. And then the sweet stuff

– Banana gelato popsicle dipped in Belgian chocolate; White chocolate, cranberry and quinoa cookies; and fresh blueberry and bitter chocolate brownie.

The clever entrepreneur behind the Luxe Houses brand is Australian Jessica Kirkpatrick, who founded the company in 2011 after spotting the emergence of the domestic and international luxury traveller seeking bespoke accommodation.

"Our Luxe Houses portfolio provides these discerning travellers with a five-star hotel experience in some of Australia and New Zealand's most opulent private houses," says the 34-year-old.

"We are the first port of call for stars, black-book celebrities, VIPs and well-to-do expats seeking outstanding accommodation. And we spoil guests with our exclusive



concierge service. No one else is doing that in Australia."

Luxe Houses holds the keys to sought-after properties like fashion icon Collette Dinnigan's former pad in Paddington, stylish Tamarama mansions and Bondi Beach apartments overlooking the sand and the sea.

Businesses, too, use Luxe Houses for corporate, public relations and media events, VIP client entertainment, product launches, advertising campaigns, movie/photography shoots and conferences.

Later that evening we had drinks with friends at La Corniche's marble bar as the lights of the city danced across the waters of Sydney Harbour. A helicopter landed nearby. Was it picking up guests for a trip to the airport (easily arranged by the concierge) or maybe bringing the Ronan Keating party a day early? If so, they'd just have to share – the bedroom with the piano was free... **M**

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