DECO OCEAN LINER OF THE DANDEARGONGS

SIMON PLANT finds that there is more to Burnham Beeches than its Art Deco architecture.

Raymond Hall and Michael Wilson like to visit Burnham Beeches "a place of sunshine and light". But the co-owners of the historic Art Deco manor house in the Dandaringons should add greenery to their description.

Where you are on the 26ha estate established 50 years ago by Asprey "King" Alfred Nicholas, narcissi and daffodils in the breeze, coutures rustle their Feathertops, while peony blooms bend their branches ever so tenderly towards the sun.

The luxurious appointed rooms at Burnham Beeches have views of all-enveloping burn but for the complete effect, spend a night in the original Nicholas Suite.

This remarkable four-room apartment, originally a bedroom for Alfred Nicholas, offers wide-angle views of mountain greenery on three sides. The plate-glass windows are so vast that you almost feel surrounded among the branches like the owner's cats and poodles.

The Nicholas Suite, everything is in abundance: bathrobes, bowls of fruit, thick white towels tekmed in scented boxes, a bar which produces water like a fluorescent fountain.

"The 50-room hotel has adopted a lighter, brighter image,' says Raymond Hall.

"Co-owner of Burnham Beeches, Michael Wilson.

Examples of Art Deco architecture in Australia. Architect Harry Norris was engaged to design the building during the Depression and gave it the streamlined look of an ocean liner.

One popular journal of the day marveled at its interior too. "The house has all the comforts of city dwelling and includes a private theatre with talking machine, electric wire, and electric light in the music room," it said.

These and other elements disappeared after Herbert's death in 1937 and in the next two decades his dream home was turned into a hospital and veterinary research centre.

Raymond Hall and Michael Wilson are restoring shape, line and proportion to Burnham Beeches but, happily, they are doing this without chilling the atmosphere.

From the moment you sweep through the glass doors of the Nicholas Suite you feel tranquility. The mood is warm and welcoming. Porters gather your luggage, walters glide back and forth and the sound of jazz drifts on the air as you make your way up to your room.

In the Nicholas Suite, everything is in abundance: bathrobes, bowls of fruit, thick white towels wrapped in scented boxes, a bar which produces water like a fluorescent fountain.

There are some curious omisions: the television set doesn't have a video recorder attached, there is no liquor in the cocktail cabinet and fresh flowers are in short supply. Those wanting a floral touch in their room can presumably get it from Flowers of Burnham Beeches, based in the lobby.

A late afternoon order for coffee takes 30 minutes to arrive but when it does, the swinger comes with chocolate truffles, wrapped in silver Celophane and tied with ribbons.

No one waits for their drinks in the cocktail lounge. Attention is paid to detail with the receptionist who would like an olive or a twist of lemon or a touch for the Nicholas Suite to serve it with style.

"Well-trained staff not only offer excellent service," Wilson explains. "They understand and reflect the philosophies of the hotel."

The philosophy behind the dining room at Burnham Beeches is simple. Offer the very best. Chef-Stefanos Goodlad, who joined the hotel early last year, is rising to the task and earning a reputation for serving imaginative dishes using superior local produce. He can produce everything needed," Goodlad says. "And the best thing is, it's absolutely fresh.

This applies to breakfast, too, with fresh fruit, buttermilk, mushrooms and pikelet-thick raisins of smoked bacon heading the menu. And while you sip your Earl Grey tea on a round table, the sunflowers and box trees, the garden and the Verries Valley region together with our own garden produce everything needed."

The historic Art Deco manor house was established 50 years ago by Asprey "King" Alfred Nicholas.

Spend a night in the opulent four-room Nicholas Suite at Burnham Beeches for $600.

They invade the balcony outside and gather for a reception on the forecourt. Some guests stay on the balcony all morning, mesmerised by the twirling chancers, but there are plenty of alternatives for the more active - tennis on red clay courts, swimming in the indoor pool, gold at the nearby Emeralnd Country Club, horse riding in Sherbrooke Forest and, of course, ambling through the gardens.

O RIGINALLY the front of the house faced east, but the addition of a garage in the 1960s opened up to the south and added to the house.

High Country Living is an alternative to the High Way High of Melbourne and Sydney. It forms a network of top quality stops between the cities, via Canberra, and gives the "outstanding traveller" plenty of choice.

The network includes some of the leading hotels in Australia (the Regent in Sydney and Melbourne and the Hyatt in Canberra) and a range of high-country-style accommodation.

Options include Milton Park Country House at Bowral, New South Wales, Mitchell's Country Life sheep station at Grampians, NSW, Riverleigh Country Hotel in Bairnsdale, Victoria, and Barossa Country House and Stables at Toolangi, Melbourne and Sydney.

Hall hopes the scheme will not only attract international visitors, who comprise 40 per cent of Burnham Beeches' clientele, but the local traveller too.

This is a place that Melbourne can be very proud of," he says. Leaving the hotel with sunlight streaming through the trees and the mountains stre director of the house, says. "And, the Hyatt in Canberra and a range of luxury-country-style accommoda venus, ranging from $120 for a deluxe room for two in the Today's menu at Burnham Beeches, five-course meal for two people, including canapes and pre-dinner cocktails, $70.