

Looking out over the cherry trees on my first day at Basalt, the last of the dawn mist is giving way to sweeping views across the lush Central Tablelands. The air is as crisp as one of the sweet Gala apples that have helped to make this region a major fruit producer. It's not hard to see why Simon Rollin chose this spot, on the thriving orchard where he grew up, to build three luxurious guest studios.

Basalt's story begins in April 2020, during the early months of the pandemic. Confined by Covid lockdowns, Rollin decided to celebrate his birthday with a family camping trip. The destination was an isolated strip of the family's 30ha property, 11km from Orange. At the time, the site was home to little more than a few blackberry bushes and the odd passing kangaroo. The outlook, however, was remarkable. As Rollin and his wife, Kay, sat around the campfire, they realised they had to do something with the block. A little under three years later, Basalt opened its doors.

Perched 1100m above sea level and set in the rich basalt soil that lends the retreat its name, the trio of pavilions is the work of Mudgee-based architect Cameron Anderson, with interiors by Lisa Johnson Design Studio. Although that vista is a tough act to follow, Basalt doesn't try to compete. Instead, its understated design allows it to blend into the landscape.

That's no accident. The architecture was inspired by the process of growing cherry trees, in which a young stem is grafted on to the trunk of an established host, creating a strong union of the two.

Inside, they are just as considered. The interiors are warm (literally, thanks to 300mm-thick rammed-earth walls), with each one dressed in a medley of soft blues, ochres, greys and earth tones, with plenty of rustic stone and timber elements throughout. Named Chaser, Drifter and Yonder and spaced about 80m apart, each of the cosy 42sq m spaces is suitable for two guests and boasts slightly different, but equally impressive, views.

There are plenty of modern touches and comforts, including king bed with French linens from Carlotta & Gee, 53-inch smart TV, fast wi-fi, airconditioning and an internal wood fire, fully functional kitchenette with fridge, dishwasher, convection microwave and stove top, and a complimentary minibar stocked with local produce. Guests can soak up those incredible views from the concrete bath tub, without the worry of prying eyes.

Rollin and his team provide bespoke experiences such as orchard tours and Indigenous bush-tucker adventures, but you won't be left to forage for supper. Basalt has teamed up with Racine – formerly a hatted restaurant, turned local bakery – which offers catered meals that can be ordered via Basalt's website and delivered ahead of time, ready for when you arrive. Think generous servings of beef lasagne, pasta and meatballs, or vegetable curry, as well as lighter options including French onion quiche, salad or arancini. Do yourself a favour and throw in a dessert or two as well.



# FARM FRESH

A labour of love bears fruit in Orange

JAKE MILLAR



Basalt's studios meld into the landscape, above; interiors boast natural materials and take advantage of orchard views

## TO-DO LIST

### EXPLORE

Basalt has connected with a number of local operators that offer everything from scenic helicopter rides to stargazing, tailored food and wine tours, Indigenous cultural experiences and more. Check website for suggestions.

### DRINK

Lauren Rushton of Winery Experiences Orange focuses on delivering private, personalised outings to some of the area's best winemakers – from big players to boutique producers such as Peter Gibson and Deb Upjohn at local favourite Word of Mouth. [wineryexperiencesorange.com.au](http://wineryexperiencesorange.com.au)

### DINE

The five-course degustation menu by head chef Jack Brown at Printhe Estate is one of the best in the region. Perfectly balanced and packed with fantastic local and native flavours, lunch is ideally paired with Printhe award-winning wines. [printhewines.com.au](http://printhewines.com.au)

### VISIT

Stroll the orchards and pick your own bounty of cherries, apricots, nectarines, figs, apples and more at the 30ha family-run farm Hillside Harvest. [hillsideharvest.com.au](http://hillsideharvest.com.au)

## ESSENTIALS

Basalt is at 1100 Pinnacle Rd, Canobolas, 11km from Orange. Studios are \$550 a night; two-night minimum, three-night minimum on long weekends. Not suitable for children or pets. [basaltorange.com.au](http://basaltorange.com.au)

The idea for Basalt might have been sparked in 2020, but the story really begins some four decades ago, back when Rollin's parents Graham and Sue left Sydney in search of a quieter place to raise their young family. While Rollin's dad had something of a green thumb, growing and



running an orchard was another matter entirely. Through trial and error, the family was able to turn what Rollin describes as "a jungle" into Cherries from Heaven, a successful commercial operation that now boasts 12,000 trees and a reputation for producing some of the best cherries in the country.

Sue and Graham still live in the original house on the property and manage the orchard, with help from Simon and brother Michael. Tending a few thousand cherry trees is a far cry from running a luxury retreat but Rollin has taken to his new role with that same happy-go-lucky spirit that his parents harnessed back in 1979.

Basalt welcomed its first guests in February this year. Rollin says the greatest reward has been the opportunity to share this stunning part of the world with others, and let them experience the same sense of wonder that inspired him during that camping trip. It's fair to say the view never gets old. Fortunately, guests get to enjoy it with a few more creature comforts.

Jake Millar was a guest of Basalt.

