

stay | FALLS CREEK VICTORIA

Each apartment has spectacular views of the Bogong High Plains. FACING PAGE An elk head made from balsa wood is a tongue-in-cheek nod to the ski chalets of old.



## peak comfort

THIS FALLS CREEK LODGE INTRODUCES AUSTRALIAN SKIERS TO A NEW LEVEL OF SCANDINAVIAN STYLE.

WORDS AMY RICHARDSON PHOTOGRAPHY MARK ROPER



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT The ski slopes are easily accessed from Fjäll; the sturdy dining table is a good place to plot the day's skiing; *fjäll* is Swedish for 'mountain'; Craig Stevenson; the apartments are furnished with designer pieces, such as Hardoy 'Butterfly' chairs. FACING PAGE A view of trees burned in the 2003 bushfire; antlers make striking feature lamps; sunlight filters through hemp curtains in the bedrooms.



**THERE WAS A TIME WHEN** the snow fields of the Bogong High Plains in Victoria were peopled solely by those who were happy to spend hours climbing steep, icy slopes for a few exhilarating minutes careening back down. The lodges that started to appear in Falls Creek in the early 1950s reflected this primitive ethos — rustic wooden buildings designed to pack as many into bunks and communal dining halls as possible, with little regard to comfort and still less to visual appeal.

In 2007, when keen skier and property developer Andrew Ryan started to look for a vacation apartment for his family, Falls Creek was where he turned. He loved the beauty of the alpine village, the vibrant bars and restaurants, and the easily accessible, uncrowded ski slopes, but was not impressed by the accommodation. So he decided to build his own. "I found a lodge that could be developed with a level of finish that hadn't been seen at Falls Creek — or most resorts — before," he says.

The steep site offered some logistical challenges and wild weather often slowed building — snowfalls are common from March to October — but two years later Snowgum Lane had a stylish new resident.

"The aim was to put a modern twist on the existing building, but still incorporate elements, like timber and stone, of the traditional European chalet," Andrew says.

A metal plate announces the building's name: *fjäll* is a Swedish word for mountain. Inside, the six apartments cheekily tip a hat to the ski lodges of yesterday. There is wood panelling, sure, but here it's fashionably Nordic, and the stag heads over the fireplaces are decorative balsa wood pieces rather than fusty hunting trophies.

Each three-bedroom apartment is decorated in neutral colours with a liberal use of natural textures, from the smoked and limed oak on the walls and the marble benchtops to the hemp curtains that frame the views out across the Kiewa Valley. When covered in snow the summits of Mount Nelse and Spion Kopje glow pink

when there's a fiery sunset. The ground-level apartments both have hot tubs on their balconies, perfect for soaking up the magnificent vista while easing any aching muscles over an après-ski schnapps.

The light-filled apartments give an impression of openness, though the use of each section has been carefully planned. A solid wooden dining table near the kitchen provides an area for meals and discussing the serious business of skiing, while window seats are tempting spots to read a book in the winter sun.

The fireplace — an essential element in any self-respecting ski chalet — complements the wall heaters and demarcates yet another area. "The main concern was for people to feel that they weren't living on top of each other," Andrew says. "Creating the different spaces makes the apartments feel more intimate."

Craig Stevenson, the guest services manager, lives onsite to help guests, whether it's picking them up upon arrival at the visitor centre on a skidoo or pointing them towards suitable slopes and the best snow. Craig has been visiting Falls Creek for more than 30 years and works part-time as a ski instructor, so he's well qualified to give advice. He says one of the best things about Fjäll is that Australia's longest beginner ski run — the quaintly named Wombat's Ramble — cuts a meandering path all the way from the top of the mountain to the front door.

"It's one of the most convenient places to stay on the mountain," Craig says. As anyone who has battled uphill in ski boots knows, convenience goes a long way towards making a ski trip enjoyable.

Fjäll provides a luxurious and stylish base for a ski trip. The only problem is that it can be difficult to venture out into the cold from such comfortable surroundings. Perhaps those early skiers knew what they were doing when they built their uncomfortable lodges, after all. \* *Fjäll is at 7 Snowgum Lane, Falls Creek, Victoria. 0433 650 784; www.fjall.com.au*