

When you think about staying in what is effectively a shipping container in a far-flung paddock on Kangaroo Island, it probably doesn't sound particularly appealing to most ... but this is no ordinary shipping container.

This is a CABN, or, more specifically, a CABN X. Think your own private sauna, outdoor bath on the deck, luxe furnishings and tasty produce to enjoy. All of a sudden this shipping container is sounding – and looking – a lot more enticing.

This is also no ordinary far-flung paddock.

We're at Cape St Albans, towards the eastern tip of Kangaroo Island, a stone's throw from Cape Willoughby and its iconic lighthouse.

It's practically deserted – aside from the kangaroos and birdlife – and is accessed via a 30-minute drive from Penneshaw, mostly on dirt, after disembarking from the SeaLink ferry. You could say it's pretty isolated.

The paddock this luxury CABN has been dropped into was formerly a farm and is blessed with an idyllic view looking north-northwest over Antechamber Bay and into Backstairs Passage, with SA's mainland to the east and KI to the west. It's a view too good to only be enjoyed by sheep.

Herein lies the ingredients that were part of the impetus behind South Australia's Michael Lamprell establishing CABN back in 2017.

Find a pristine patch of nature, add some compact accommodation in keeping with the surroundings, and ensure it is run in an environmentally conscious manner so your stay leaves as little of a footprint as possible. The other part behind CABN's foundation, Lamprell explains, was the fact that after 20 years doing the same job he was feeling a little lost, unfulfilled and harbouring some unhappiness.

“I grew up on farms and riding motorbikes and with shacks and swags. And that was my happy place,” Lamprell says.

“I’d just drifted away from that into a person that I wasn’t really that impressed with when I looked in the mirror.

“And so I just decided if I didn’t make a change that was big, that I might continue to be unhappy. So that was the genesis of it.”

Add in a “life-changing” recommendation from a good friend to try meditation, and some overseas travel with some mates on a study trip, and CABN was born.

“It was this incredible set of events that triggered me coming back from overseas and drawing the first CABN and drawing up the business plan – and away we went,” he says.

Fast forward to now and CABN X has been a pretty natural progression for the brand after the original CABNs were up and running at multiple sites, and CANVS (think pretty epic glamping) were set up at Seppeltsfield in the Barossa Valley.

“We trialled (CABX) in McLaren Flat probably two years ago. But what’s developed and evolved lately is a lot more of them. Because we just recognise that part of the market, definitely in those certain spots where we’ve been launching them, really lends itself to that kind of experience,” he says.

“What we’re trying to do, in a broad sense, is a nature hotel. We can offer the same amenity (as a hotel), if not better, in our rooms, but with the advantage of being surrounded by nature and wildlife and the seasons.”

Lamprell says in CABN’s nature hotel, the original CABN is akin to a standard room, the CANVS a deluxe suite, and the CABN X is the penthouse.

Unlike most of the travel industry, Lamprell says the Covid pandemic was a boon for CABN.

“I think we were just one of those very few beneficiaries of Covid,” he says.

“And it was not by design, it was just by circumstance, but people just had this huge shift in their own values through that Covid period.

“One of the key things that we noticed, and it wasn’t just us, it was really well documented through national parks and forestry visitation to conservation areas, is it went through the roof.”

So when an opportunity came up to secure a pristine patch of KI farmland with its own section of private coast, the CABN X Cape St Albans dream could become a reality.

“We’d been looking for some time and we had actually been looking at that property at Cape St Albans for years and we were fortunate enough that we were in the right place at the right time,” Lamprell says.

“We were lucky enough to purchase the property off the previous owners who had it in the same family since European settlement.

“So we’re the next custodians, which is a pretty, pretty big responsibility. We take it really seriously and hopefully that translates into what you experience when you stay there.”

The cost of buying the land and setting up the five luxury cabins they’ve dotted on the site totals about \$10m. It’s a serious investment.

It also represents a rarer model for CABN – they own everything, rather than partnering with a private landholder or a government agency, such as Forestry SA, for the site.

The CABN X boasts the kind of luxury you wouldn’t expect to find in a far-flung paddock.

There’s the luxury kingsize A.H. Beard bed with a skylight overhead that you can have open overnight to stargaze and then close with the touch of a button to reduce the natural light in the morning if you want to keep snoozing.

There’s a well-equipped kitchen with a coffee machine. An outdoor deck with a bathtub on it, of course, with glorious views over the bay. A WeberQ. Bluetooth speaker. Gas fireplace and reverse-cycle airconditioning.

Then there’s the expansive bathroom, bigger than many might have at home, and the most unique offering: a sauna with a full-length window affording serene views.

Lamprell says the addition of the sauna ranks “easily” as one of his favourite chapters in the evolution of CABN: “It’s just such good therapy.”

Hopping between the steaming sauna and a cold outdoor bath on the deck is a thing of purity. It’s the kind of thing that CABN has been conscious to offer and encourage, with the accommodation compendium offering a guide on the best way to do so.

There’s also information on various self-guided nature walks and meditation routines, which can be completed on the deck with the yoga mats provided. Breakfast provisions, as well as a couple of local KI wines and snacks, are included in the stay. In-room dining options and local produce packs for self-catering are available for an additional cost, but don’t come particularly cheap.

Not resting on its laurels with Cape St Albans, CABN now has its next project in its sights – providing its accommodation at The Cedars at Hahndorf. The company has been granted development approval and is poised to build nine of its eco-cabins on the 13ha property that was owned and made famous by revered artist Sir Hans Heysen.

“It’s easily one of the most exciting things we’ve done,” Lamprell says. “It’s going to be an incredible homage to Hans Heysen and his legacy and ... it’s going to be pretty cool.”

With a solid growth story behind it in South Australia, CABN is now also looking to take its offering national.

Lamprell says the company is looking at a project in the Yarra Valley in Victoria, as well as something in Tasmania. It’s further advanced in its plans to add some of its eco cabins along the 102km Cooloola Great Walk in Queensland, between Noosa on the Sunshine Coast and Rainbow Beach in the Fraser Coast region.

The company has been working closely with the Kabi Kabi – the traditional owners of the land – and the Queensland government on the development.

“We’re still fine-tuning the plans, the designs and all of those negotiations. We had a great milestone last year with the signing of the ILUA – the (Indigenous) Land Use Agreement – and we’re just working through the next steps. But that’s a significant project,” Lamprell says.

“We really just want to expand on the good work we’re doing in SA in other key regions around Australia.

“If we can bring what we’re doing to other regions and bring some positivity into the community and some economic benefit into those regions, as well as get people off their phones and computers for a couple of days, then we’re keen to share that.”

The writer stayed at Cape St Albans – and Kuitpo Forest (see next page) – as a guest of CABN