

THE STANDARD

Thursday October 30, 2014

Port Fairy accommodation blends historic and modern in award-winning style

By MARY ALEXANDER

Oct. 29, 2014, 4 a.m.

THERE is no doubt that Drift House at Port Fairy is special.



Drift House in Port Fairy has recently been named as the best luxury accommodation at the RACV Victorian tourism awards.

The boutique accommodation retreat opened less than a year ago but has already attracted state, national and international acclaim.

Its list of accolades continued on Monday night when Drift House won the RACV Victorian tourism award for best luxury accommodation.

Owners John Watkinson and Colleen Guiney have been overwhelmed by the response to their unique project, which converted a historic house at the corner of Gipps and Regent streets into four individually-designed suites.

Built in 1852 for sea captain John Mason, the double-storey building is one of the oldest homes in the town. It had been occupied over the years by the town's undertaker, stonemason, publican, doctor and timber merchant and fell prey to a series of unappealing additions and treatments.

Mr Watkinson and Ms Guiney purchased the property seven years ago after deciding to move away from the city.

"We drew a circle around Melbourne that was up to three-and-a-half hours' drive away and settled on Port Fairy," Mr Watkinson said. "It's a strong community. We just love it."

Their vision came together over the next few years in a plan to retain the home's heritage character but give it a modern facelift, with two suites in the original building and another two in a eye-catching new extension.

The pair continued to live and work in Melbourne until they moved down permanently last year at the end of the 12-month building project.

Drift House opened in December and is now hosting guests from across Australia and internationally.

Mr Watkinson said visitors often struggled to decide which of the suites to book because they were all very different.

"People just love discovering the place as they wander around. We get lots of questions and some of our guests even find it offers them inspiration for their own homes."

Drift House is now attracting repeat bookings, sometimes from guests who decide to extend their stay after enjoying the accommodation and the town so much.

"We find that, when they arrive, the guests just park their car and spend all their time in and around Port Fairy."

The tourism award comes after the retreat was named as a finalist in the 2014 Premier's Design Awards and gained a commendation in the Victorian Architecture Awards.

Drift House is also the only Victorian nominee to make the cut in the annual international Smith Hotel awards. It is a finalist in the best newcomer category alongside hotels from Rome, Los Angeles, Mallorca, Lisbon and the Dominican Republic. The winner will be named next week.

Other south-west finalists at the Victorian tourism awards were the Twelve Apostles Walk by bothfeet in the adventure tourism category, the Instagrampians campaign in the destination marketing category and Corangamite Shire Council in the local government award section.