



THE WALKER WOMEN

Kokomo is more than a Fijian island in the sun for this close-knit Australian family. It's a home away from home where three generations can retreat, reconnect and recharge. Katrina Israel gets a rare insight into this private family and their passion for a very special private island. Styled by Emma Kalfus. Photographed by Dan Roberts.

From left: Georgia Vesperman, executive director of the Walker Family Foundation, with her mother, Sue Walker; Georgie Walker, married to Sue and Lang Walker's eldest son, Blake; and Camille Walker, Kokomo's communications director and wife of middle child, Chad Walker. Georgia wears her own Banana Republic dress, and her own jewellery and shoes; Sue wears her own La Perla dress and her own jewellery; Georgie wears a Johanna Ortiz dress, \$1,440, and necklace, \$545, both from Belinda. Other jewellery, her own; Camille wears an Agua by Agua Bendita top, \$355, and skirt, \$640, from Matches.com. Her own jewellery.

It's the school holidays and Sydney's Walker family is descending on Kokomo: the tropical Fijian hideaway that patriarch Lang Walker AO transformed from the jungle-covered remains of a half-built Aman resort into a sustainability-minded six-star paradise. The exclusive resort, a billionaire's vision of barefoot luxury, sits on Yaukuve Levu island, part of the Kadavu archipelago. It first opened to guests in 2017 and Lang, with the help of his travel-astute family, has been perfecting perfection ever since.

The legacy of the founder and executive chairman of one of Australia's biggest private development companies, can be seen through the transformation of Sydney's Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf, the reimagining of Parramatta's CBD, Melbourne's Collins Square, Queensland's Hope Island, and Fiji's most luxurious island retreat, Kokomo, which he built with families in mind, particularly his own.

For the extended Walker clan, this intergenerational South Pacific pilgrimage usually takes place during the island's New Year's Eve white party celebrations, or for the Easter holidays, when the Easter Bunny miraculously arrives via stand-up paddleboard.

But with Lang and his wife Sue en route home from Europe, where much of the European summer was spent onboard their Northern Hemisphere-based *Kokomo* superyacht, their three children's families are more than happy to meet them in Fiji to say *bula*. Camille Walker, communications director for Kokomo and wife of Sue and Lang's son Chad, and sister-in-law Georgie Walker, who is married to the Walkers' eldest child Blake, have flown in from Sydney, while the couple's daughter Georgia Vesperman, executive director of the Walker Family Foundation, arrives via Singapore. Each has their families in tow.

When the Walkers are in residence, family gatherings centre on Sue and Lang's vast thatched-roof residence overlooking the west side of the 57-hectare island. The residence is located at the end of a secluded row of villas, each with its own private pool and lush tropical gardens. The Walkers' holiday home also overlooks the pristine white sandy beach that first captured their imagination back in 2011.

"It's most unusual for Fiji to have a long, white sandy beach that is accessible at all times," explains Sue. "Often the tide goes out and it's coral. But we always have deep-water access. That's the thing that really sold us on it," she says of the initial discovery. "We'd sleep on the boat, and then go ashore every day and have a barbecue lunch. It was all lots of fun. We thought, 'We can fix this up and transform it into a beautiful resort.' We didn't know anything about hotels, except the places we love to stay in, so that's all we could go on – something that we would enjoy."

Vision is not something Lang Walker lacks. "Of course, he certainly thought he could do it quite cheaply," smiles his wife of more than five decades, "and of course, it turned out to be about 100 times more expensive than expected, but we've ended up with something beautiful, so it's been worth it." →

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From left: Georgia Vesperman, Sue Walker, Camille Walker and Georgie Walker.

The white sandy beach which first drew the Walkers to Yaukuve Levu, the island that would eventually become Kokomo.



HAIR: MARIAM ROTA; MAKE-UP: MAKE-UP; FLORENA NATOLI



From left: Georgie wears her own Agua by Agua Bendita dress; Sue wears a Melissa Odabash dress, P.O.A., from Kokomo Private Island store. Tiffany & Co. earrings, \$10,600. Her own sunglasses, watch, bracelet and ring; Georgia wears a Zimmermann dress, \$650. Her own jewellery; Camille wears her own Missoni dress and her own jewellery.



Sue wears an Alémais dress, \$595. Jimmy Choo shoes, \$1,125. Her own jewellery and watch.



Georgia wears her own Banana Republic dress, and her own jewellery.

"It was a long journey," Sue continues, "But it wasn't as though we were doing it from afar, we were there a lot of the time. What does he say? 'Vision into reality.' It was 'challenge accepted!'"

"When Lang and Sue first came across the island, we came ashore with them," recalls daughter-in-law Georgie. "Our [twin] girls, who were four at the time, asked, 'Why do you want other people to come to our island Gamma?' she says, laughing. "But Kokomo is a unique island that had to be shared and we were lucky to experience its progression in all its chapters. To now see and hear couples and families all drawing different individual but special moments from their stays is very rewarding for our family and the Kokomo family. As our children are getting older," she says of sons Hugo, 21, and Will, 20, and daughters Jemima and Matilda, now 17, "it's fabulous to be all together and they love celebrating special milestones with us at Kokomo."

"From the moment you step off the seaplane and feel that warm Fijian air, you feel a sense of relaxation," agrees Camille, "and then comes the beautiful welcome singing ... there are a lot of hugs and tears of happiness running up the jetty and into the arms of their nannies," she says of her three children Milla, 10, Lang, 8, and Lachlan, 3. "That [feeling of] 'We're home' ..."

Fiji has long been known as a family holiday destination, but Kokomo Private Island is unique because of its encouragement of

"We have a program where you can sponsor a manta ray. Sustainability is so important for our whole family and we need to help protect these impressive creatures"

intergenerational travel. Here, children are not only welcome but thoughtfully catered to, starting with a playroom at Kokomo's private airport hangar to a resort menu that kids absolutely love.

"There has been a huge amount of thought put into accommodating children of all ages," says Camille, who has clearly been pivotal in much of the implementation. "You may find the only problem is that you don't see your kids for the duration of your stay," she says with a laugh, referring to the Kaji Club, which entertains children aged four and up, with activities ranging from arts and craft to glass-bottom boat rides over the surrounding coral reef.

"Our grandkids range from 21 right down to three," shares Sue with a knowing smile. As a result, the resort has evolved with the Walkers and is forever being finessed to cater to their family's changing needs: a win-win for guests. "We found that when they get to about 14 they start to get a bit old for kid's club, so we put in a teens' retreat." It's thoughtfully located away from the beachside villas

in the central part of the island, and includes a generous pool, complete with waterfall, a pizza restaurant, games room, tennis and basketball court. "Last time we started a big roundtable conference with our 16-year-olds to arrange programs for them like sailing races and volleyball games." Sue and Lang have also added a 'bunkhouse' within their compound: "It can sleep about 10, so the older ones bring their friends," she smiles. →



Seclusion is central to the resort's Philip Garner-designed villas, which are separated by stone-walled tropical gardens.



Georgie wears a Zimmermann blouse, \$395, and pants, \$495. Tiffany & Co. bangle, \$36,300. Other jewellery, her own.



Palm fronds overhang the walkway to the beach.

vogue voyage

The Walker women together at Sue and Lang Walker's Kokomo residence where the extended family, including 10 grandchildren, congregate during their stay. **Clockwise from top left:** Camille wears a Johanna Ortiz dress, \$1,165, from Mytheresa.com. Vintage bangle, \$320, from Harlequin Market. Other jewellery, her own; Sue wears an Alémais dress, \$595. Paspaley choker, worn as bracelet, \$19,800. Other jewellery, her own; Georgia wears a Rebecca Vallance dress, \$449. Her own jewellery; Georgie wears a Zimmermann blouse, \$395, and pants, \$495. Tiffany & Co. bangle, \$36,300. Other jewellery, her own.



Sue, pictured on the sandy beach that first captured the couple's imagination back in 2011, wears a Melissa Odabash dress, P.O.A., from Kokomo Private Island store. Tiffany & Co. earrings, \$10,600. Her own hat, bracelet, watch and rings.

Australian property developer Lang Walker and his wife Sue, at their Kokomo residence.



DAN ROBERTS



Happy snaps: Georgia, Georgie and Camille.

Lang Walker AO.

The exclusive Fijian resort opened in 2017 and with the help of his travel-savvy family, Lang Walker has been perfecting his vision of perfection ever since.



A tropical canopy.

The rest of the family battle guest reservations for one of the island's 21 villas or five additional expansive residences. "Chad and I love the three-bedroom Sunrise Villa for its privacy and large gardens," says Camille, who also covets the five-bedroom Dravuni residence with ocean views from sunrise to sunset: "It is always booked!"

Seclusion is central to Kokomo's appeal, as is the guest to staff ratio of 1:3. "The people are what makes Kokomo the most magical place," assures Camille, who says they kept their staff employed during the travel pause, using the time to implement upgrades across the resort's interiors and landscaping. "The island was designed to always feel a sense of privacy," she adds of the Philip Garner-decorated villas, separated by stone-walled tropical gardens. "We often get told by guests even when it is at full occupancy you can walk around and not run into anyone."

"There has been a huge amount of thought put into accommodating children of all ages. You may find the only problem is that you don't see your kids for the duration of your stay"

For Sue, Kokomo days begin with a walk around the island. At 11am there is always a boat booked for snorkelling and, at this time of year, swimming with the manta rays. "We have a program where you can sponsor a manta ray," she explains. "Sustainability is so important for Lang and our whole family and we need to help protect these impressive creatures so they are thriving for future generations to enjoy swimming alongside as well." Georgia agrees: "They really are the most incredible and majestic creatures, and to be so close to them makes me feel unbelievably lucky."

For Georgia, Camille and Georgie, a typical morning includes the steep climb to the top of the island for 360-degree views of the surrounding reef, followed by beach time with the kids. It's hard to venture past Kokomo's overwater trampoline, or a deck chair on the beachfront pontoon, where drinks arrive via stand-up paddleboard.

The afternoon can be anything from a long lunch at Walker d'Plank – whose Asian fusion menu utilises Kokomo's 2.2-hectare organic farmland and dock-to-dish seafood philosophy – to diving the Great Astrolabe Reef or visiting Kokomo's coral nursery and restoration project, which has already transplanted 2,000 corals back onto the house reef. "The perfect ending is watching the sunset at the Beach Shack bar with a margarita," says Camille.

On Kokomo guests are encouraged to do as much or as little as they like, but because the family often stays for extended periods, they have also ensured the activities are endless. Special occasions for the Walkers – such as Georgie's son Will's most recent birthday – will include a picnic on a nearby uninhabited atoll. "The staff create a very special set-up with beach activities, a beautiful barbecue lunch and we relax on daybeds under the beach umbrellas," says Camille. "We usually watch the sunset before heading back; you feel a million miles away from the world."

And that's entirely the point. "It's definitely a passion project for our family," she says, "and Lang's vision is for Kokomo to be recognised as one of the top resorts in the world." Mission accomplished. ■