

Escapes

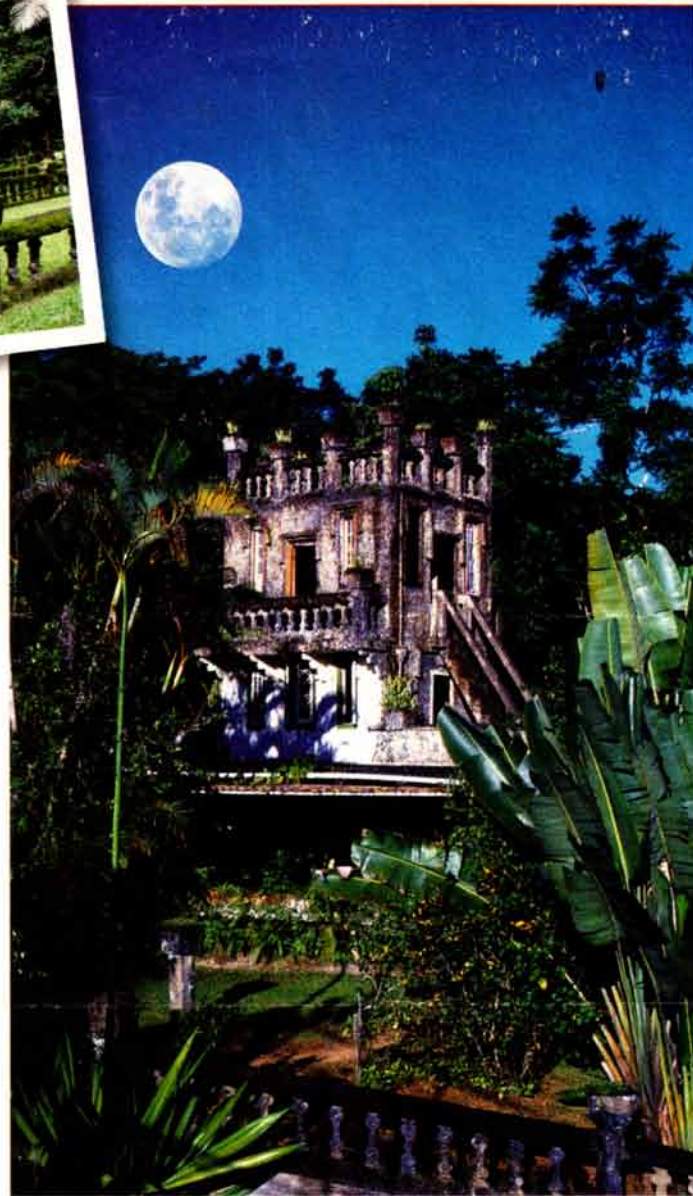
BY JOSHUA GLIDDEN

NORTHERN
gothic

A man's home is his castle – literally, at Paronella Park, where the only thing missing is the princess.

No one would be surprised at Paronella Park if a hapless swashbuckler leapt out of the trees declaring “My name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die!” With its waterfall, decaying castle and dripping foliage, it's a very *Princess Bride* kind of place.

José Paronella created his park in the 1930s using profits from speculating on sugar cane. He built the castle, which housed a cinema, laid tennis courts surfaced with crushed termite mounds and constructed changing sheds and a summer house so that people could swim in the waterfall's pool. He also planted an avenue of kauri pines which now



ROT SPOT Paronella's ambience of decay is the result of painstaking maintenance

tower from the base of the property, and carved a 100-metre tunnel – the Tunnel of Love – out of the soft clay.

He had a vision of the 5ha property, located inland from Cairns on the Atherton Tablelands, as a day-tripper's paradise, and for a long time it was. Locals came every Saturday to watch movies and marvel at the electric lights – a first in the region – powered by a waterfall-driven generator. The generator, although no longer providing power, still exists in a mysterious building tucked up beside the falls. Obscured by the waterfall mist, all it needed was a princess waving from a window.

When Paronella died in 1948, the park fell into disrepair. Eleven years ago, Mark Evans and his family were travelling around Australia after a lengthy period overseas. One day they stumbled across what he says was a “castle for sale”, and bought it with the idea of reopening. Keeping the heritage-listed buildings looking like they're about to be reclaimed by the jungle isn't easy. Much of the concrete, reinforced with old cane-train rails, is rotting, so new pieces must be cast and then left in the rainforest to acquire patina.

Paronella Park is like a childhood fantasy. It's no wonder we were imagining swashbucklers and, although there were no rodents of unusual size, there were microbats sleeping out the day in the Tunnel of Love, waiting for darkness to cover their aeronautical intrigues.

www.paronellapark.com.au