

Supermodel Kate Moss, poster-girl for a life of excess, has done a stint in rehab. Far right: Clients at The Sanctuary in Byron Bay, NSW, are offered intensive one-on-one therapy.



They may be celebrities or the super-rich, but when they go off the rails, who do they turn to? **David Leser** discovers an Australian refuge that nurtures the battered bodies and egos of the seriously rich and famous when their addictions and low self-esteem threaten to overwhelm them.

**DURING ROUGHLY** the same period that Kate Moss was checking into an Arizona rehabilitation clinic and Britney Spears was checking out of a Californian one, and Mel (Gibson) and Naomi (Campbell) and Robert (Downey Jr) and Lindsay (Lohan) and Charlie (Sheen) and Kiefer (Sutherland) and countless other celebrities around the world, not the least of them being two of our most famous footballers – Andrew Johns and Ben Cousins – were having their various alcohol and drug afflictions exposed for all to see, a 42-year-old Melbourne stockbroker was making a desperate phone call to an ultra-exclusive Byron Bay drug treatment facility known as The Sanctuary.

“Help me,” he begged the psychologist on the end of the line. “I think I’m dying.”

This was no melodramatic flourish. The stockbroker – and let’s call him John for confidentiality’s sake – had flown into the Gold Coast that evening after a three-day cocaine, booze and sex binge, and was now standing on the edge of his metaphorical cliff, threatening to jump off.

“He couldn’t get into any rehab centres and was just a jibbering wreck,” the psychologist, Elizabeth Williams, told *The Weekly* recently. “I assessed that

maybe he was on the verge of being suicidal. I couldn’t leave him alone.”

Elizabeth Williams came to this do-or-die phone conversation with 18 years’ experience working with addiction, both as a psychologist and psychotherapist. She had worked in government-run rehabilitation centres, in prisons, in private practice, with the young and old, in Australia and overseas. She was now clinical director of The Sanctuary in Byron Bay, arguably the most discreet, luxurious and – at \$25,000 a week – expensive therapeutic retreat in the world.

On this particular evening, she decided the best way to save this man’s life was to keep him talking while a colleague drove to the Gold Coast to get him from his hotel room. During the phone conversation – but more particularly in subsequent face-to-face talks – The Sanctuary team came to hear a familiar story.

John was from a family where his father had been a highly successful businessman, but largely absent from – and deeply critical of – his son’s life. Growing up with his father’s cold reprove, John had learnt to manage his emotional pain, first with aggression and later on with drugs and alcohol.

When he’d joined the prominent Melbourne stockbroking firm, he had discovered – to his initial delight – a corporate culture revolving around the twin principles of hard work and even harder play. The company had an unwritten policy of regularly entertaining clients by hiring a hotel floor, paying for the most glamorous prostitutes in the city, ordering in enough cocaine – and Viagra – to kick-start a Bolivian army and then partying solidly for three days and nights.

John, a regular on these bacchanalian >>>

# CELEBRITY REHAB

GETTY IMAGES. COURTESY OF THE SANCTUARY, BYRON BAY, NSW.



benders, now wanted out. He was using coke or speed on a daily basis, as well as prescription Valium to manage his anxiety. Two of his colleagues had suicided and he felt increasingly that he might be a candidate for number three. He tried to enlist support from within the company, but his colleagues viewed the change of heart as not only a sign of weakness, but a breaking of ranks.

"Everyone was laughing and talking about him," Elizabeth Williams explains, "and I told the boss, 'He needs support', but the boss said, 'It's not part of our culture'. The boss himself was a caring man. He actually came here to check us out, but the culture of his firm was that, even though it revolved around drink and drugs, once an employee became an addict himself, he was no longer playing by the rules."

For a month, John received the kind of one-on-one attention most of us could only dream of: a personal therapist to assess his psychological history, a doctor and registered nurse to look at his bio-medical condition, an acupuncturist and

Only recently did a European billionaire arrive at The Sanctuary with this kind of easy-to-mock profile. The man lived on a property that was so vast, three European towns fell within its borders. He owned businesses all over the world and a private plane that flew him anywhere he wanted to go, whenever he wanted to go.

The businessman, married with three children, was also hopelessly addicted to cocaine, alcohol and high-class prostitutes. His particular predilection was South American call girls, whom he liked to visit on a regular basis for coke and sex-fuelled weekends. His behaviour had become so outlandish that news of it had started to enter the public domain. A scandal of major proportions was now brewing. In desperation, his long-suffering wife discovered The Sanctuary on the internet and insisted, *demanding*, that he go. (She joined him later for some much-needed couples therapy.)

"For him to come halfway around the world was a good choice," Greg McHale says. "His every move at home was monitored in the press, whereas here he

their client's behaviour. As the son and grandson of famous industrialists and political figures in his country of origin, he had never felt his own man, had never felt capable of filling their oversized shoes. He might have been running an empire, but that didn't mean he'd built it himself, nor derived any true sense of fulfilment from what he was doing.

"He tried to make himself feel better with wine, women and song, but it only made him feel worse," says Greg.

This man had become overweight, anxious, depressed and seriously addicted to cocaine, but like the stockbroker at the beginning of this story, his crisis was one of meaning as much as it was damage to his nasal passages or nervous system.

As Greg McHale recalls, "He said to me, 'I've lost connection to myself, my family and my children, and I've been involved in business practices that have been exploitative and haven't helped humanity.' This is a very common theme for men stepping into their father's shoes, or having careers and lifestyles imposed upon them. They feel inadequate. They

## "HE'D BEEN LIVING A LIFE THAT HAD RUN COUNTER TO HIS SENSE OF INTEGRITY ... WHEN HE LEFT, HE HAD A SENSE OF WHAT HIS LIFE WAS ABOUT."

shiatsu specialist to work with his internal organs, a personal trainer to supervise his overall fitness, a yoga and meditation teacher to fine-tune his nervous system, a masseuse for relaxation, a chef, naturopath and dietitian for his food intake, a night carer for those tormented hours when it was too difficult to be alone, a chauffeured private vehicle to ferry him to the beach ... all from his own private residence overlooking the sea.

"By the time he left us, he had a sense of wellbeing and meaning that he hadn't had before," his psychotherapist, Greg McHale, tells *The Weekly* now. "He'd been living a life that had run counter to his sense of integrity and self-worth and, when he left, he had a sense of what his life was about."

**T**his is an easy place to poke fun at if you're so inclined. Poor, unfortunate tycoon flies into Australia – first class or in a private plane – only to be then chauffeur-driven or flown by helicopter into a luxury Byron Bay retreat, where for \$25,000 – the cost of a champagne supper with friends – he can overcome the pain of his awful existence by watching whales as he goes cold turkey.

wasn't going to be known by anyone else."

This European man was desperate for confidentiality. While extremely sophisticated and charming, he was also filled with deep shame. There was no way he was ever going to sit in a group with other addicts and divulge his deepest, darkest secrets. He needed a treatment package tailored to his individual personality and circumstances, plus he needed anonymity and discretion.

The Sanctuary provides it all and then some. To try to locate The Sanctuary is a physical impossibility. That's because there is no Sanctuary as such – no reception, no resort centre, no cluster of buildings where you will ever bump into another guest. The client arrives at the airport, is met by private limousine and is then taken to his own privately leased home in the rainforest or overlooking the beach, where he then begins his treatment program. If he wants to go dolphin kayaking, or run to the lighthouse, or go out for dinner, he does it with his personal trainer or his nurse, or one of the other therapists. In that sense, he remains cocooned from the world for the entire time he is there, under constant observation.

During this European man's four weeks at The Sanctuary, his team of therapists – led by Greg McHale – came to see the psychological factors at play in

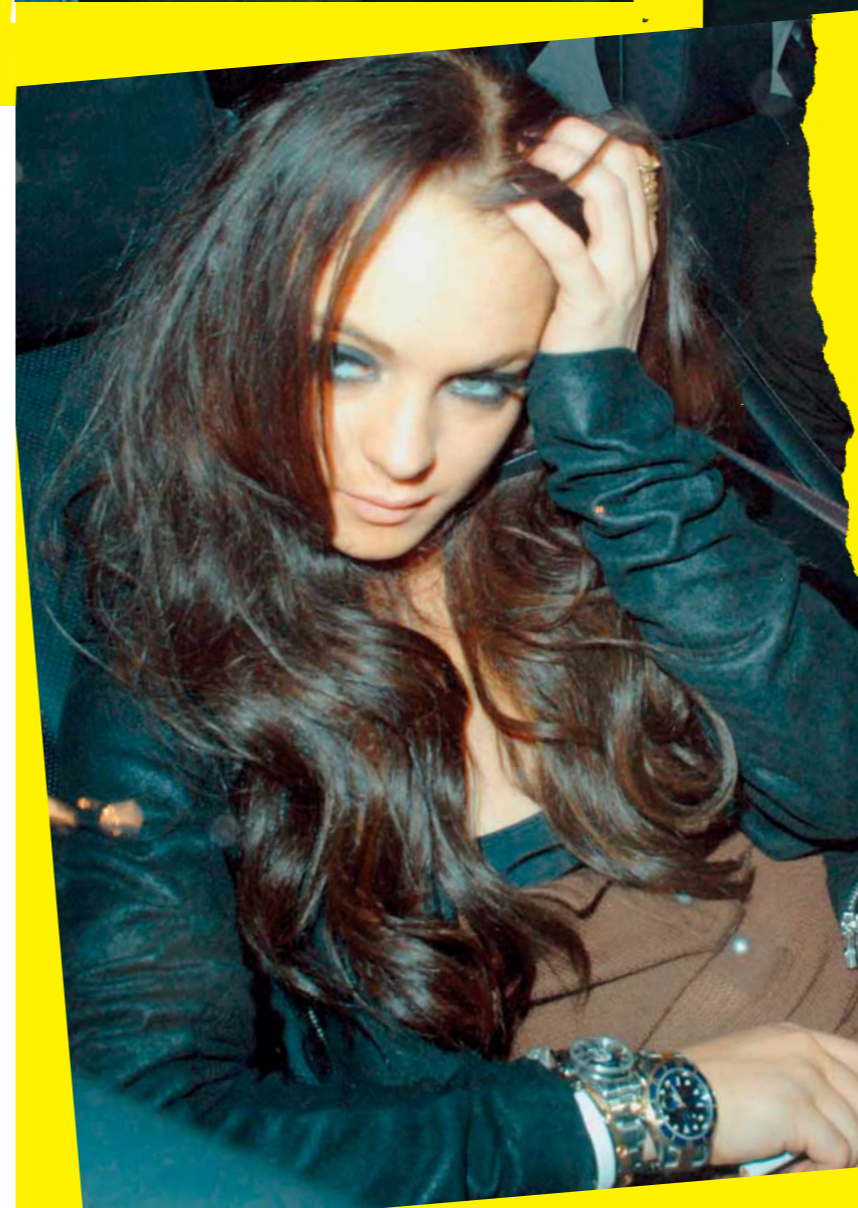
realise that power and money haven't delivered them meaningfulness. In fact, quite the opposite, it has cost them loving relationships."

THE SANCTUARY NEVER STARTED out being a place for the rich. It started out being a place that could best reflect Melbourne businessman Michael Goldberg's own personal recovery program.

During the 1990s, Michael was the chief executive of a highly successful building company by day, raking in a fortune from his property developments, by night spending some of that fortune on a ravenous cocaine habit. As he admits now to *The Weekly*, "Sometimes I would go through \$1000 a day worth of coke. But then I got into heroin and it was heroin that broke my spirit."

Michael admitted himself to The Buttery, a northern NSW residential program for people addicted to drugs, alcohol and gambling. He was asked to leave two months later. "They said I was too functional. I owned my own house ... but, basically, I was a pain in the arse for them."

Shortly after leaving The Buttery, Michael met Byron Bay yoga teacher Consta Gourgeossis and from him began learning the transformative benefits of yoga and meditation. He also began >>>



Clockwise, from top left: Britney Spears on a night out in Hollywood. The embattled pop star has had several public meltdowns and been in rehab. Singer Amy Winehouse, looking the worse for wear. Her battle with alcohol and drugs is fodder for the tabloids. Musician Pete Doherty's addictions have resulted in jail time and trips to rehab. Actor and party girl Lindsay Lohan spent much of 2007 in and out of rehab.

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**"THIS IS WHAT IT COSTS TO HAVE THE BEST ... WE ARE STRENGTHENING THESE PEOPLE IN WAYS WHERE THEY HAVE NEVER HAD SUCH CLARITY."**



**Above: Melbourne businessman Michael Goldberg's own addictions led to the creation of The Sanctuary.**

talking to a psychologist, visiting a naturopath, receiving acupuncture and shiatsu for his digestive system, eating organic food and – curiously enough – taking disabled people for swims on a regular basis. “Helping others definitely helped myself,” he says.

It was this personally tailored and holistic approach to his own addiction that became the blueprint for what is now one of the most highly regarded drug, alcohol and eating disorder treatment facilities in the world.

Michael Goldberg is unapologetic about the cost. “This is what it costs to have the best,” he says. “Anyone can get all these practitioners on an individual basis, but to get them working together as a team for the client ... well, this is what it costs to bring these people together. And we are strengthening these people in ways where they have never had such clarity.”

In the past four years, The Sanctuary has worked with European industrialists, English aristocracy, American record producers, *taipan* or chief executives from Hong Kong, lawyers, bankers and chief executives from around Australia and New Zealand, and, yes, for the gossip-hungry among us, movie stars and top models, too.

The only famous name to have ever been made public was that of supermodel Naomi Campbell, who visited last year and was caught in an unguarded moment on the beach by a photographer. Was she at The Sanctuary? No one who works for the place will confirm or deny it.

“We will never say whether she was here or not,” says Elizabeth Williams.

“Confidentiality is absolutely essential to what we do.”

Elizabeth is keen to scotch the notion that The Sanctuary’s clients are pampered merely because they receive a diverse range of therapeutic treatments. “This is a kind, compassionate and respectful program,” she says, “carried out in a comfortable environment. There is an attitude in society that addicts need a hard line. I think, generally, most people respond better to the carrot than the stick. This is an extremely expensive model here, but for every single client who comes, it is the hardest thing they have ever done.

“That’s because looking at yourself and your failings, and where you have let others down, is not easy. We are meeting people at a unique time in their lives.”

**S**pare a thought then for the troubled rich. They might appear happy and successful, they might be raking in the filthy lucre, but they, too, are fragile. They, too, need somewhere to go, someone to talk to, far from the prying eyes of the media and those who would devour their daily offerings.

British psychiatrist Dr Brian Wells knows this only too well. A recovering addict and alcoholic himself, Dr Wells was tour doctor in the ’70s and ’80s for artists such as Bob Dylan and bands such as Led Zeppelin, ACDC and Manhattan

Transfer. For a brief period in 1993, he was also Michael Jackson’s psychiatrist, a subject he refuses to discuss today. He understands, nonetheless, the destructive cocktail of wealth, fame and addiction.

As a London-based consultant psychiatrist and director of a company called Leading Health Care International, Brian Wells travels the world assessing and treating super-rich clients in their mansions, palaces and castles, and when that doesn’t work, sending them to exclusive rehab clinics. One of his preferred centres is The Sanctuary.

“There is no other place in the world where you can get such a personally tailor-made treatment program,” he tells me when we meet one morning at a Byron Bay cafe. “This is particularly useful for people of means.”

Dr Wells doesn’t normally talk to the press, but has decided to make an exception for The Weekly because of his high regard for Elizabeth Williams and her team. He has referred a number of clients to The Sanctuary, accompanying some of them on the plane when they were too ill to travel alone.

One of his clients was an American multi-millionairess, a heroin addict and anorexic, who had tried practically every deluxe rehab clinic in the world before finally settling on Byron Bay. She arrived in a wheelchair, sick and emaciated, broken by a lifetime of pain and addiction.

“We all thought she was going to die,” Dr Wells says, “but then she came here and they managed to turn her around. If I had been asked to put money on it, I would have said she was going to be one of life’s disasters.”

While men outnumber women at The Sanctuary by a ratio of two to one – and that’s the standard figure for most rehabilitation centres – The Sanctuary has had its fair share of troubled women seeking help.

“Some are independently wealthy women,” says Elizabeth Williams, “who have come from tragic circumstances in their family and have learnt to medicate their pain with substance abuse.

“Some are the wives of successful men who’ve developed a substance dependence because they feel empty and neglected, and because they feel their lives have no meaning. And some are young women from wealthy families with a huge inheritance, but with no impetus or drive to find their own passion.”

A 28-year-old Australian woman >>>

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHELE ABOUD.

**"SO MANY OF MY CLIENTS HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED BY THEIR PARENTS AND MANY ENDED UP MANAGING THE PAIN ... WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE."**

recently spent a month at The Sanctuary trying to overcome her alcoholism. Every night of the week, she'd be drinking herself into oblivion. She lived alone, had no job, nor any incentive to find one because of her access to enormous sums of money.

Dr Wells says he finds these clients – the children of the rich – the most interesting and, invariably, the unhappiest. Their parents were often absent and because they grew up in a world where people were servile to them, they developed few inner resources. Not only were their fathers a hard act to follow, so too, in a sense, were their own childhoods, given that many were showered with expensive gifts inappropriate for their age.

"My message to my clients is, if you are a VIP and you want healthy children, don't buy them a Tiffany bracelet at the age of 12 or stick them on a Lear jet ... put them at the back of a [commercial] plane. And be there for them, be a real parent.

"Because those things do nothing for your self-esteem and self-esteem [or lack thereof] is the core ingredient for anyone with an addiction."

Greg McHale agrees. Many of the people he sees are just the kind Brian Wells describes. "So many of my clients have been neglected [or worse] by their parents," he says, "and many of them ended up managing the pain of that with substance or alcohol abuse."

One, for example, an Australian businesswoman with a young family, came to The Sanctuary recently suffering from depression and alcohol dependence. As a young girl, she'd been physically beaten by her parents and now, years later, was feeling its toxic, ruinous effects.

"This woman has a very high profile," says Greg, "yet some days she just couldn't get out of bed. And yet she needed to function at a very high level and to be accountable. She'd pursued a number of therapies in the past to deal with her emotional and physical abuse, but without success. Finally, she came to The Sanctuary."

As did the daughter of a very powerful, corporate Australian family who arrived at The Sanctuary addicted to heroin. Once again, Greg McHale was her psychotherapist and, once again, he was able to see the trouble that success had wrought in a seemingly privileged person's life.

"She was just oppressed by her parents' success and value system," he says, "and so she rebelled against them and that, in turn, led her into the counter-culture and underworld. There was a lot of outrage



**Above: The facilities at The Sanctuary boast every comfort, but the privacy of the retreat's clients is paramount.**

and rejection from the family at her behaviour, so that just pushed her further into the underworld. She just felt even more abandoned."

**O**n a golden morning in Paradise recently, The Weekly is invited to sit in on a staff meeting, to witness first-hand the way in which clients are assessed and monitored by The Sanctuary's team. On this particular morning, the focus is on a wealthy young New Zealand man with a 20 bong-a-day addiction to marijuana. His uncle is forking out the \$100,000 for his treatment at the same time as his wife is threatening to leave him. The man is desperate to get well, as can be seen by the little affirmations of good health he has posted on the cupboards and fridge door of the house where he's staying.

As the dolphins leap and cavort in the bay and the hang-gliders soar above the cape, this man's clinical director, psychotherapist, night carer, chef, yoga teacher, acupuncturist, naturopath, art therapist, personal trainer and physiotherapist gather in a cramped office on the outskirts of Byron Bay to discuss his condition.

The conversation ranges widely from his aggressive, bullying behaviour and incessant talking to his bowel movements and the state of his digestive system; from his newly discovered love of cooking to

the effect that art therapy, guitar playing, martial arts and meditation are having on his damaged psyche. "At the end of his meditation, he was weeping," Consta Gourgeossis informs the group. "He said, 'I've just hurt so many people in my life and I feel terrible about it.'"

"He is really looking at how he impacts on people," agrees Greg McHale, "and the way his anger gets in the way of who he wants to be."

"Yes, because underneath that anger is a huge ocean of tears," counters Consta. "It's like, 'What have I done?'"

These are the drug years, aren't they? Every day, another headline, every day, another famous person's fall from grace. Where do they go? To whom do they turn? And how do they face up to a lifetime of private pain while trapped behind a public façade?

We can pour scorn on these people for their excessive lifestyles and daily habits, but in a little surfing village on the most easterly point of Australia there is a sanctuary that awaits them. As Consta says, "We are not meeting the private jet they flew in on. We are not meeting the beautiful face in the magazine. We are not meeting what they do or who they look like. We are meeting who they *are*."

Some people, rich *or* poor, would give their earthly possessions just for that. ■

*Postscript: Certain identifying features have been changed in this story to protect people's identity. For further information on The Sanctuary, phone (02) 6685 7555, email [info@sanctuarybb.com](mailto:info@sanctuarybb.com) or visit [www.sanctuarybb.com](http://www.sanctuarybb.com).*

COURTESY OF THE SANCTUARY, BYRON BAY, NSW.