APRIL 2019 | AUSTRALIA COAST TO COAST

COUNTRY STYLE

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Designing the heart of the home

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A YOUNG FAMILY BUILD THEIR DREAM HOUSE ON A GOONDIWINDI FARM

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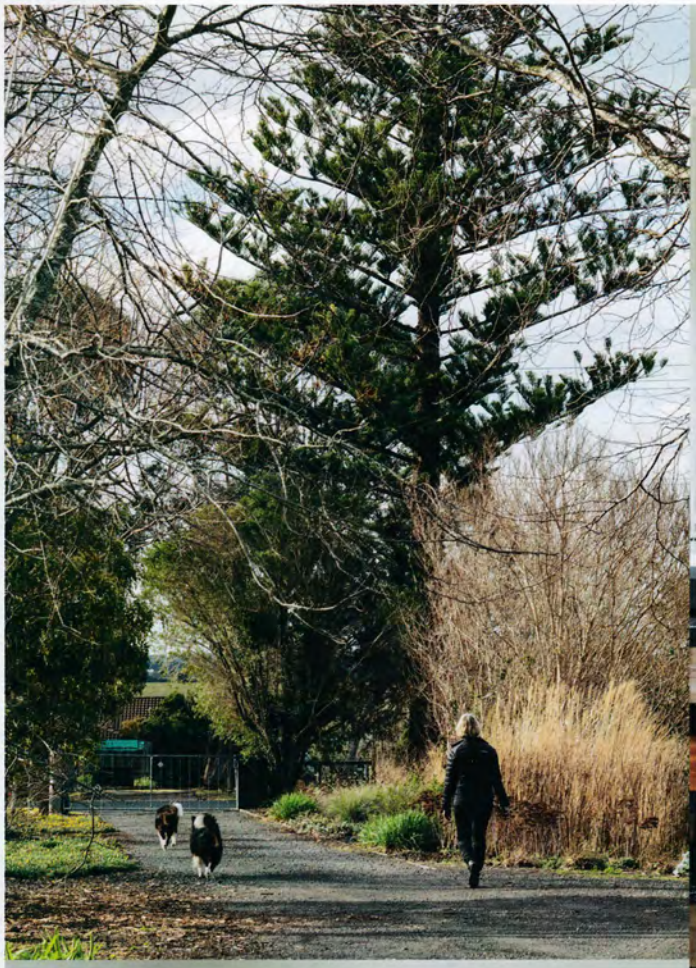
HOME WORK

AN OLD SCHOOLMASTER'S HOUSE AND ORCHARD IN NEED OF REPAIR WAS AN IDEAL PROJECT FOR A HESITANT RETIREE.

WORDS **PENNY CARROLL** PHOTOGRAPHY **BRIGID ARNOTT**
STYLING **VANESSA COLYER TAY**

A Kenya Peterson sculpture in the Milton, NSW, home of landscape designer and horticulturalist Jenny Paul. **FACING PAGE** Jenny's chickens, pictured on the cottage's verandah, include a silver laced wyandotte and light Sussex hens.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Jenny and border collies Molly and Tui; the cane chair in the kitchen is from Lincoln Brooks. The vase on the antique farm table is an old car battery. Jug and mugs from Chalk on Stone; Tui keeping an eye on the chickens; an Artecnica 360 Light Deep Jungle lamp makes a statement above a Bonnie and Neil Palette cushion and a woven basket from Mossy Store. **For stockist details, see page 136.**

Allan's favourite spot is this picture window complete with knitted throw from Spaces 2538 in Milton. A Bonnie and Neil Flowering Gum cushion sits on one of the Boyd Blue sofas covered by Christina Prescott Design. The marble vase, on the T and C Furniture coffee table, is from Chalk on Stone. For similar roller blinds, try Luxaflex. **For stockist details, see page 136.**

SITTING AT HOME recovering from surgery on her hand, landscape designer and horticulturalist Jenny Paul had an epiphany. The 62-year-old had begun envisaging her retirement and quickly realised that pottering around her small cottage and garden in the beachside Sydney suburb of Avalon just wouldn't cut it. "I'm a worker," she explains. "I thought, 'I'm absolutely going to be bored'."

That light-bulb moment set Jenny and Allan, 71, her partner of 10 years, off on a search for the perfect country retreat. It needed to be rural enough to satisfy Jenny's yearning for wide-open spaces, close enough to Sydney to entice friends and family to visit them, and near enough to a beach to ensure the couple could continue their daily swimming ritual. In 2014, they found the ideal scenario in the charming town of Milton on NSW's South Coast, where lush dairy pasture rolls into white sand beaches. However, finding the right property took a little longer.

After negotiations on their first choice of home fell through, Jenny decided to rent a cottage in Milton (Allan heads up a technology company and travels extensively, so they also have a base in Sydney), which allowed her to scour the area for a gem. It took six months, but she finally struck gold. "I would walk past this one property and say, 'Why can't I find a place like that'," Jenny recalls. "And lo and behold, it went on the market!"

The property was located where the local Croobyar district school once stood — the school was demolished in the 1940s, but the site retained the 1880s schoolmaster's house, a small building updated in the '70s with an attached garage and loft apartment, along with another tiny cottage that was originally the Milton Hospital laundry. The historic homestead set on a hectare drew a crowd of Sydney sea changers to the auction, but not a lot of bids. "A vendor bid and then we put a bid in and that was it," says Jenny. "I didn't know if I was happy — I was actually terrified to be honest, because I was thinking, 'What have we done?' But there's just something about this property," she muses. "It's got a soul, and it's breathtakingly beautiful looking out across the fields."

Jenny's trepidation was valid — all the buildings needed a major overhaul, thanks to wear and tear, and several unsympathetic renovations in the '70s and '90s. Add an "incredible" but neglected orchard to the list, and Jenny had all the work she had hoped for, and then some. Luckily, her experience working on construction sites meant she was well equipped for the job, and she enlisted friends and colleagues Christina Prescott, an interior designer, and architect Jim O'Brien to oversee the renovations. They started with the loft and the small cottage, now dubbed The Stables, to give friends a home away from home >

and allowing Jenny time to plan the perfect makeover for the schoolmaster's house. "I'm really pleased I didn't rush to do the house because having two years to discover the impact of summer heat and winter winds, and how we interacted with the whole property helped us to get the best result," she says.

Previously dark and dreary with just two small bedrooms, the schoolmaster's cottage was transformed into a light and comfortable home in 2017. A generous two-storey extension has tripled its size, with an open-plan kitchen and living room at ground level and a large master suite above. The extension involved an enormous upheaval — the entire home's floor was jackhammered to remove two layers of tiles and a top-up slab was poured to ensure a seamless connection between old and new — but Jenny was determined not to lose the building's character, including elements such as V-board panelling and dormer windows. Restoring the original brick fireplace's facade was also high on the list. "We really wanted to keep that country charm, but with some modernity," she explains. Her brief to interior designer Christina was to keep it simple. "I wanted it to be comfortable enough that people feel that they can come in and put their feet on the couch, but gee, I hope they don't put their feet on the couch!"

It's mission accomplished with the bright, revamped house decorated in a peaceful palette of natural tones and textures. A built-in daybed below a picture window framing the countryside is Allan's favourite nook — and even Jenny's "menagerie" of 20 chickens feel at home. "It's not unusual if someone leaves the door open here they'll come in and lay an egg on my bed!" she says with a laugh.

A keen cook, Jenny revels in her kitchen and vegetable garden, but maintains she's too busy to spend much time relaxing, as she's now opened up the loft and The Stables to guests looking for a self-contained holiday. "I decided it was silly having all this accommodation and leaving it empty," she explains. "I set it up and it took off like wildfire."

Just like their steady stream of visitors, Jenny and Allan are fully embracing the coastal country lifestyle. The day begins with a swim at the beach seven minutes down the road with their border collies Molly and Tui in tow, before Jenny heads into the orchard to harvest whatever's abundant — figs, apples, nuts, berries — then to the kitchen to whip up a batch of jam for guests. "It's a really busy life, I never stop," she says. "But there's nothing nicer than sitting down under the fig trees, or on the front verandah with a glass of wine at the end of the day. It's absolute bliss." CS

For more information about The Old Schoolhouse, visit oldschoolhousemilton.com.au. *To read more about Jenny and Allan's kitchen renovation, turn to page 80.*

"There's just something about this property. It's got a soul, and it's breathtakingly beautiful looking out across the fields."

Mosaic Carrara marble floor tiles from Surface Gallery add a modern feel to the bathroom. **CLOCKWISE, FROM RIGHT** The house is framed by oak trees; some of Jenny's antique gardening tools alongside the outdoor shower; a lamp from Beacon Lighting illuminates the bedroom. The woven basket is from Worn Store. **FACING PAGE** The property is surrounded by picturesque farmland. **For stockist details, see page 136.**

The couple's master bedroom is filled with natural light. By the window, they've created a desk nook including a café chair from Revival Antiques and 20th Century Design in Milton. For a similar bedhead, try the Bed Builder from Snooze. **For stockist details, see page 136.**

ABOUT THE HOUSE

- Jenny's renovation team included architect Jim O'Brien of Viewthru, interior designer Christina Prescott and local cabinetmaker David Gunn. 0437 222 389, viewthru.com.au; 0417 455 563, christinaprescottdesign.com; 0410 446 871.
- The handmade tiles in the kitchen and bathrooms are from Surface Gallery, as are the Carrara marble floor tiles in the bathrooms. (02) 9566 2002; surfacegallery.com.au
- Gubi Ronde pendant lights and Kendrick stools in the kitchen are Cult Design. 1300 768 626; cultdesign.com.au
- Grey tones feature throughout the property. Achieve a similar look using Taubmans Wizard Grey and Arctic Dawn in the kitchen and Taubmans Windsor to replicate the bedhead. 131 686; taubmans.com.au

Jenny was determined not to lose the building's character, including elements such as V-board panelling and dormer windows.

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COUNTRY CHARM

UNDERPIN A POP OF AUTUMN COLOUR WITH MONOCHROMATIC TONES.

PRODUCED BY **JESSICA HANSON**

1 *Snow Sheep* limited edition **photographic print**, from $290, Kara Rosenlund. **2** Chambray linen **cushion** in Natural, $69.95, Aura Home. **3** Flowering Gum **cushion** in Black, $195, Bonnie and Neil. **4** Gubi Ronde pendant **light** in Matt White, $627, Cult Design. **5** Nordlux Nexus wall **light** in Black, $219, Special Lights. **6** Arabella tall **basket**, $140, GlobeWest. **7** Bianco Carrara 100mm hexagon mosaic **tiles**, $27.82 per sheet, Earp Bros. **8** Leather **cushion** in Tan, $119, MJG by Mr Jason Grant. **9** Leather hold-all storage **basket** in Tan, $229, from MJG by Mr Jason Grant. **10** Hudson three-seater **sofa**, $8175, Molmic Furniture. **11** #4 Café Daum **chair** in Dark Oak, $408.10, Thonet. **12** Acacia round **chopping board**, $59, Città. **13** Linen **pillowcases** in Black, $85 for a set of two, from Cultiver. **For stockist details, see page 136.**

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KITCHEN SPECIAL

NEW SOUL

FROM A COAT OF PAINT TO STARTING FROM SCRATCH, THESE KITCHENS EMBRACE THE COUNTRY WAY WITH MODERN LIFE IN MIND.

Gubi Ronde pendant lights from Cult and the stainless-steel appliances add contemporary appeal to the traditional elegance of this kitchen in a restored cottage on the NSW South Coast.
For stockist details, see page 136.

The island bench combines durable Smartstone quartz, ideal for preparation areas, and timber.

JENNY PAUL IS A KEEN COOK so a beautifully light kitchen was high on the renovation list when she and her partner Allan bought a house in the NSW South Coast town of Milton. "The 1880s house was so dark and gloomy and we just wanted to lighten up the place with some modernity but still a classic country feel," explains Jenny.

Housed within a new two-storey extension is an open-plan kitchen with enough character and charm to meld with the original cottage. Jenny consulted with interior designer Christina Prescott on the design details, selecting a striking sweep of Dulux Mt Eden for the island bench "for a bit of oomph and to ground the room", with a paler grey Dulux Wairakei double-strength on the cabinets. She used white surfaces such as Smartstone benchtops in Arcadia and the splashback features handmade white tiles from Surface Gallery. Black stained stools sit at the bench lit by feature pendant lights — both from Cult — and engineered oak flooring in a warm timber grain ground the entire look.

The kitchen living area conveniently overlooks the vegetable garden and the chicken coop, while a highly productive orchard is close by. "We have 20 chickens of every assortment and at first we thought we'd have to move the chicken house from view, but now we love looking at them." For Jenny, the new kitchen is everything she dreamt it would be. "It's not pretentious, it's just easy, simple and welcoming." *For more on Jenny's renovation of The Old Schoolhouse Milton, turn to page 56.* >

WORDS **VIRGINIA IMHOFF** PHOTOGRAPHY **BRIGID ARNOTT**
STYLING **VANESSA COLYER TAY** PRODUCT SOURCING **JESSICA HANSON**

GET THE LOOK

A simple palette of white and navy finished with timber and the polish of stainless steel creates a modern classic appeal.

1 NT906WMP 90cm oven freestanding **cooker**, $4799, Ilve. **2** Plain cast semi-circle **drawer pull**, $6.25, Schots Home Emporium. **3** Cupboard **knob**, $5.95, Schots Home Emporium. **4** Gubi Ronde **pendant light** in Matte White, $627, Cult. **5** Majorca **tiles** in Gloss White, $89 per sq m, Teranova Tiles. **6** Oak **flooring** in Sierra, $100 per sq m, Premium Floors Australia. **7** Verona **tap** with pull-out nozzle, $769, Franke. **8** Nau Kubrick **stool** in Black Stained Ash, $283, Cult. **9** RF522BLGX6 ActiveSmart 519L **fridge freezer**, $2199, Fisher and Paykel. **10** The Little Guy **espresso maker**, $699, Otto Espresso. **11** EasyVJ100 **wall panelling**, $22 per sq m, Easycraft. Wall panelling painted in Wash&Wear low sheen acrylic **paint** in Mt Eden, $48.55 for 1L, Dulux. **12** Acacia round **chopping board**, $59, Città. **For stockist details, see page 136.**