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The Schoolmaster's Challenge

MILTON LANDSCAPE DESIGNER JENNY PAUL IS GIVING THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE NEW LIFE, NEW ENERGY AND A DIFFERENT PROSPECT FOR ITS FUTURE.

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STYLING CHRISTINA PRESCOTT

A breakfast spot in the sun on the kitchen verandah. Opposite: The owner's passion for succulents and cacti add interest and texture to rooms throughout the house.

This page: The loft bedroom with soaring ceilings and a modern Scandanavian style is a fresh and inviting sanctuary for guests visiting the Old Schoolhouse. Opposite page, clockwise from top: A neutral pallet in the living room creates an intimate space for evenings in front of the fire and a backdrop for cherished artwork. The owner's collection of vintage pieces adds warmth and character to the living room.

Jenny Paul moved to Milton from Sydney in mid-2014 to take on new challenges at the peak of a working career. With her own professional life revolving around design, she wanted land to work on and a house large enough to offer private spaces for herself, her partner, and friends and family to stay. And she wanted to continue her landscape design work in a new setting.

Jenny is now the owner of The Old Schoolhouse, the residence built beside the school in the late 19th century to be a home for the schoolmaster and his family.

While the Schoolhouse itself is long gone, demolished in 1947, with only a patch of asphalt marking out its former territory, the Schoolmaster's residence, just steps away, is proving a rich ground for renovation. Just over four kilometres from Milton, it is the ideal blend of a rural property and residential home, close enough to the beach for a daily swim.

The main homestead is the heart of this rambling property, which includes a separate loft, stables, a chook shed, a tool shed, and a large and handsome vegetable garden with orchard, and the original 40,000-litre tank and well. A full-sized professional cricket pitch is an invitation to fun with friends and family.

Jenny's vision is to have all the buildings maintain their own identities, while still being linked to the overall design theme of the homestead, with its high ceilings and spacious rooms. To achieve the best possible result, she strongly believes in working with a professional and she is collaborating closely with interior designer Christina Prescott to achieve this.

Though living here for a relatively short time, she is already seeing the future of the house taking shape, inspired by the different generations of family who visit. "I saw my sister and her husband under

the willow tree with their granddaughter at the front, another family member cooking pizzas in the wood-fired oven in the courtyard, two of the children picking tomatoes, and a niece and her husband with their new baby able to be quite separate in the renovated loft apartment," she said.

With a country background and many years in the city, she has a firm idea of the way she wants the property to be. "My notion of designing is to bring things to the table that look holistically at the way the area is to be used, rather than look at each one separately," she says.

To achieve many of the changes already in place, Jenny has relied on local expertise: a team of marvellous plumbers, electricians, carpenters, tilers and builders. "There are so many hidden aspects with an old house," she said. "For example, the huge double brick walls look great and they're soundproof, but a challenge when putting in a power point."

The rooms are gradually coming together, with changes that reflect Jenny's love of light. She is enjoying working alongside local tradespeople and her "hands on" experience has been, she says, "very useful".

She is finding small and delightful details, like the dog paw prints on the handmade bricks outside the kitchen, and the jonquils that appeared suddenly in midwinter.

Gradually, rooms are acquiring the pieces that give them personality, many of which come from world travels, or as family heirlooms. The huge single rabbit on the wallpaper in a child's bedroom is a show-stopper. The periodic table chart wall hanging, bought from a street market in Berlin, was dismantled for travel and is now taking up most of one kitchen dining room wall. There is a

This page: In the dining room, a German periodic table found in a Berlin street market is a talking point. Opposite page, Clockwise from top left: With an established orchard, the old schoolhouse provides an abundance of fresh produce for Jenny to share with family and friends. Simple styling of an old wooden bench with contemporary accessories gives the house a warm but modern feel. An old Ray Burn is the focal point of the kitchen and provides a cosy warmth to the house on chilly days

Tagliatelle with ...
mushrooms, goat's curd, rocket, tarragon, parsley and pine nuts MP

Fish of the day $30

Roasted pork cutlet, cauliflower puree, cabbage slaw, pine nuts, crumbs and apple vanilla chutney

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wooden cabinet of curiosities, displaying the numbered containers of geological specimens and several as yet unpacked boxes, their contents waiting for a home throughout the house and beyond.

One of her favourite spots to get "the sense of place" is from one of the loft's two verandahs, with its views across the different angled rooflines: house, stables, outhouses. Among her plans are for the loft to become a hideaway for weekend and holiday accommodation. "What I want," she says "is to give the house back its glory. It is part of Milton's history, people know it and many of them have a connection in some way." While her initial focus is restoring the house, she is looking forward to the prospect of creating a unique garden to be a showcase for her landscape design.

As well as taking on the challenges of her new location and working in a different professional space, Jenny is absorbing the qualities of being part of a country town where exchanging knowledge and sharing produce is a regular happening. "It is one of the really lovely things about being here," she said. "It's the sensibility of the people".

www.oldschoolhouse.com.au

This page: The living area in the loft apartment is an ideal retreat for visitors. Opposite page, from top left: The outside verandah is the perfect spot to watch the garden grow. Chooks free range around the house, gardens and orchard. A child's bedroom in the main house displays hand-made wood and leather bunting from whilstledixie.com.au

Clockwise, from top left: V groove boards behind the freestanding bath add another textural layer to the bathroom. The living area in the loft apartment is the perfect retreat for visitors. "Do I look guilty? Tui finding a comfy spot to rest in the master bedroom. The use of timber in the vanity gives a soft contemporary feel and is repeated in the leather/timber tray from Ocean Love, Milton.