



Crafted with love

A YOUNG COUPLE MAKING USE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTS HAVE BROUGHT NEW LIFE TO AN OLD MINING COTTAGE AND PROPERTY IN CENTRAL VICTORIA THAT WAS A HIGHLIGHT OF ABC TV'S MOST RECENT RESTORATION AUSTRALIA SERIES.

The miner's cottage and new addition blend into the garden.
Left: The Wooten family with *Restoration Australia* host Anthony Burke in front of the miner's cottage.

PHOTOS: ABC RESTORATION AUSTRALIA



“The spaces we occupy, the things we consume and the objects we interact with, beyond mere utility, can enhance and enrich our lives in countless ways.”



Jess and daughter Quincy enjoy the garden.
Right: The studio with rooftop garden.



The rooftop garden adds extra outdoor space to enjoy.

Jess and Kryz Wootten are all about reconnecting with how things used to be, using traditional crafts passed down through generations. They run a small family business in Ballarat, Victoria, making footwear and leather goods by hand.

Around 17 years ago, Jess took over his father's business (established in the mid-1970s) and amalgamated it with another small business, gradually building this up to a thriving enterprise.

The couple have also joined a vibrant community of others rekindling traditional skills, called The Lost Trades, which holds an annual gathering in Bendigo (losttradesfair.com.au). It's all about creative artisans celebrating craftsmanship, ancient arts and rare

trades. Think stonemasons, chairmakers, armourers, toolmakers, spinners, weavers and more.

“We find ourselves in a world where, for many of us, choice is in abundance,” Jess says. “Yet, for the most part, these choices are economically rather than personally driven. We ought to prioritise our own happiness and wellbeing, and start investing in ourselves first and foremost.”

Jess says when it comes to housing and shelter, we seem to have forgotten what an important part our surroundings play in our wellbeing. “The spaces we occupy, the things we consume and the objects we interact with, beyond mere utility, can enhance and enrich our lives in countless ways.”

It is no coincidence then that when Jess and Kryz went looking for a place to call home, they landed on an old miner's cottage that occupied the corner of a 2400sqm block in the small village of Gordon, just 20 minutes from Ballarat. They'd been searching for a year when they discovered the property made up of a ramshackle collection of sheds and mini paddocks surrounding the rather sad and neglected cottage.

They immediately saw its potential as a place they could use their skills and crafts, and those of their friends, to make it liveable and beautiful again. Their journey in restoring the cottage and adding a new sustainably designed building was showcased in the ABC's *Restoration Australia* last year.

“What we wanted was a place with character, good rainfall and decent soil,” Jess says. “A place we could literally put down roots. The little village within which our miner's cottage resides ticked a lot of boxes for us. The history and connection to place of the cottage in the middle of the Victorian gold fields was exactly the type of character we were looking for.”

“There were a number of established trees and a nice slope (10m over 45m) to work with,” Kryz says.

“Basically, after seeing the outside and the many established trees, we decided on the spot that there was a great framework to start with. We spent the first few years slowly removing fences, outbuildings, shoring up

the cottage, and designing and building the garden around where the house would eventually sit.

“The plan was always to extend and restore the cottage. When we first took possession in 2014, we set about making sure that when we were ready to do the proper job, the cottage would still be standing, and of course to make it liveable in the meantime. The plans and designs started from the first day and we spent nearly seven years refining them before we settled on the final design.

“There were many factors to consider: orientation, neighbours, how we lived in the landscape and in the house, the climate and our budget, just to name a few. All of these things evolved over time and we ended up with something that has exceeded our expectations.”

Studio and rooftop garden

In 2017, Jess and Kryz built a 120sqm studio so they could work from home a couple of days a week (at this stage they had a workshop in Melbourne). Later, it also became somewhere to live while restoring the cottage.

Due to the orientation of the original cottage and the location of the studio, they decided to bury it in the hill and put a green roof on top. The northern end is 2m underground and the southern end is above ground.

PHOTOS: KRYS WOOTTEN



The restored cottage is warm and cosy.

“This way we wouldn’t look out the cottage windows and see a shed, it would be as obscured by garden as much as possible,” Kryz says.

The studio building is cloaked in Boston ivy and the roof is covered in 40 tonnes of specially designed, free-draining soil. There is a mix of natives, grasses and ornamentals on the rooftop. The growing medium is approximately 300mm deep and there are some larger planters and mounds for larger shrubs.

The studio is also where Kryz has been making wine since 2018 under the Galotz label.

Before meeting Jess, Kryz studied winemaking and spent many vintages working both locally and internationally at some great wineries.

“We always wanted to make wine as it is a beautiful industry,” Kryz says.

“We source grapes locally in Heathcote and make it all in a lo-fi, minimal manner. We use clay amphora pots made in South Australia to mature the wine in. Everything’s done on a small scale and we currently produce under 1000 bottles a year.”

The cottage

“After the success of this build, we were spurred on to feel confident in taking on the restoration of the cottage and the construction of the extension,” Jess says.

Jess and Kryz pulled the cottage back to bare bones, to the earliest functional configuration,

removing later additions and all internal plaster cladding. They then set about restumping, levelling and insulating the structure, bringing it back to how it might have appeared in the 1860s, but up to modern performance standards.

The cottage is inherently cosy and inward looking. The windows are small and the rooms are warm and scaled down.

“It’s now very textural, from the recycled brick floor to the rough sawn blackwood lining boards or the hessian used on the walls of the front bedrooms and the original timber shingle ceiling,” Jess says. “There are textures and warm browns and ochre colours throughout.”

The extension

The extension comprises three pavilions with 45° vaulted pitched rooves, all tied together with skillion roofed links. The internal ceiling height in the pavilions nears 6m and there is a vast amount of glazing. The internal walls are all lined with locally milled native hardwood boards. Jess says it is a stark contrast with the cottage internally, but talks to the proportions and aesthetic externally. It is clad with board and batten, rough sawn, green timber, locally milled and stained using a concoction comprising mineral turpentine, boiled linseed and bitumen. This oil blackens the timber making the buildings recede into the garden.



Good design keeps the new extension cool. Mostly salvaged materials were used for sinks, plumbing and lighting.

Jess says the extension is designed to be light and airy, and to look out and connect with the garden that surrounds it.

“We have a pond wedged between two of the pavilions, which is fed by the stormwater run-off from the roof. The pond is surrounded by floor to ceiling glass, which means you can sit at the dining table and watch the fish play in the water. And when it rains, which it does quite frequently here, the water rushes out of downpipes filling the pond, sending cascading water across a rocky embankment.

“The pond flows into a creek bed we dug, which wends its way through the garden, distributing the water around its course. Finally filling the larger pond some 60m away at the bottom of the garden.”

Due to the cold and wet climate, the house is super insulated and the windows are double glazed in low-E argon-filled glass. The slab is heated using a hydronic heatpump. Almost everything is electrified. There is a heat pump hot water service,

heating and dryer. The house has a 9kW solar system and a 13kWh battery storage system.

A stand of large established deciduous golden ash trees to the north of the house provide shade and passively cool the house in summer.

There is no air conditioning. Instead, cool air is drawn from under the south-facing, deep verandah and out through a roof vent in the middle pavilion. Last summer, even despite a few stretches of days in the mid-30’s, the house remained below 25°C simply by venting it overnight.

“We used recycled and salvaged materials where possible and where this wasn’t possible, they were locally sourced,” Jess says.

The majority of lighting and plumbing fixtures were salvaged, along with the bath and sinks, internal doors for the cottage, and bricks. Even the furniture was either made on site or vintage. Many other features of the cottage and extension drew on local craftspeople and materials.

PHOTOS: ABC RESTORATION AUSTRALIA.



Right: The Wootten family in their workshop.

Below: For Krys, the garden is an essential part of the property and how it functions.



The garden

Krys is a third generation descendant of Italian migrants and gardening is in her DNA. Her nonno (grandfather) emigrated to Queensland in the late 1920s and grew up and worked in sugar cane farms, before moving to Werribee South in Victoria where he established a market garden. He always grew his own vegies and was very proud of his produce.

“My mother took after him but was also a keen ornamental gardener and currently volunteers at the State Rose Garden in Werribee South,” Krys says. The garden and its established trees informed the siting of the house and its design, says Krys.

“We see a house and a garden as being a partnership. The house needs the garden to function optimally. In our case, the garden came first and the house has been sited within it, which is unusual.

“We have roughly forty fruit and nut trees and are working to reinstate our neglected vegie garden after more than two years focusing on building the house. We have built a greenhouse to prolong our growing season and started planting vegies on the verge where there’s more sun.”

A 22,000 litre water tank is supplemented by water from a large pond.

The results

Taking the long, slow approach with close attention to minimising the environmental impact, doesn’t come without costs, says Jess. But every challenge is an opportunity to improve something.


“It is hard to describe the physical, emotional and psychological energy it required. There were millions of minute decisions to make, thousands of hours of

physical work to do (we literally spent something in the order of 6000 hours on the project).

“At times, especially due to having our daughter Quincy part way through the build, there were moments of intense loneliness. For periods in the mid part of our build I worked entirely alone on the site whilst Krys and Quincy were holed up together and Krys felt like she was a single parent.

“It takes a certain understanding and fortitude to be able to navigate these times and come out the other side still smiling.

“Finding a way through the inevitably tough times whilst still being able to enjoy the process and have a laugh along the way is what it’s about.

“The aim of the game for us was not to create a good return on investment, but to create something that would stand the test of time, that would pay its respects to the wee cottage, which has stood on this place for 150 years, and that would connect us strongly to the place we now call home. We think we have achieved that.” 

You can see the *Restoration Australia* episode featuring Jess and Krys on ABC iview: iview.abc.net.au/show/restoration-australia