



CHANGE OF SCENE

A HUSBAND AND WIFE SET THEMSELVES UP FOR
SUCCESS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS OF NSW.

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A vibrant still-life by Whitney Spicer is right at home alongside fresh fruit and plants in this kitchen belonging to Jessica and James. **FACING PAGE** Boots, baskets, hats and coats are stored in the entryway.





FROM LEFT A beautiful landscape piece by Jeannie Dolan draws the gaze in the dining room, which is furnished with a parquet dining table from Halvorsen Interiors and French rush chairs sourced from Dirty Janes in Bowral; Scarpa Mosaic floor tiles in Carrara marble from Surface Gallery shine in the bathroom, along with Astra Walker tapware, a silver Bjorn mirror, and sconces from Lighting Collective. **FACING PAGE** A neat gardenia hedge borders the verandah, where James and Jessica enjoy daily cups of tea. Three-piece setting from Naturally Cane.

The pull of the Southern Highlands proved impossible to resist for interior designer Jessica Halvorsen and her husband James Parker, who spent many an idyllic weekend at Kangaloon, visiting Jessica’s parents. “James and I never wanted to go home of a Sunday evening. The space, the fresh air, the rolling hills and dry-stone walls reminded us of the English countryside where James grew up. I always felt so free to be creative in the country,” Jessica says.

At the time, they were living in Sydney’s Cremorne Point and decided to transition their roles to suit a country lifestyle. James, 42, ran a business in marketing and sales, while Jessica operated her design company from Neutral Bay. The opportunity to work on large country estates appealed to Jessica and provided the opportunity for James to develop the Halvorsen Interiors online store.

In late 2021, the pair discovered a house on acreage on Gundungurra land, within walking distance to Robertson and overlooking the Kangaloon hills.

“We saw the huge potential of this home as a renovator, as it had good bones,” explains Jessica, 37. “It’s a steel-framed house, which meant we could move internal walls without needing any structure. It also had a Colorbond roof and a nice rectangle shape, which could easily be

converted into a country-style home with new timber French doors across the front.”

Jessica approached the house renovation with the same precision she employs for her client projects, while the master plan or “dream scheme” was inspired by a charming English country cottage. “I wanted to create country charm with lots of beautiful details so it was visually interesting and full of character,” Jessica says. “It isn’t a large home and I am all about quality, not quantity.”

The five-month-long project entailed gutting the entire house and the replacement of single-glazed aluminium windows and doors with double-glazed timber. Hardwood decking and V-groove ceilings were added to the verandah, while plasterboard walls were stripped and replaced with V-groove walls to add texture and character. The fourth bedroom was also removed to create a larger, more spacious living and dining space.

By June 2022, the family – which by then included 22-month-old daughter Phoebe, as well as Bonnie, a two-year-old Bordoodle – were able to settle into their completed home. Jessica and James also happily welcomed their second daughter Hollie in June this year.

The kitchen and sunroom are favourite gathering points for the family throughout the day, while the snug becomes >



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ABOUT THE KITCHEN

- Jessica designed the kitchen, which was built by Farrugia Kitchens & Joinery; @farrugiakitchensandjoinery
- The kitchen cabinets are painted a soft green – Dulux Pozieres – a choice that was inspired by a 2017 trip to the Milan Design Fair. Porcelain knobs were sourced from Tradeco Hardware.
- A Falcon Elise 900 oven and cooktop is a feature of the space, while a Fisher & Paykel refrigerator is hidden within the joinery.
- Wall sconces were handmade in the Cotswolds, UK, and shipped over to Australia by James's parents.
- One of Jess's favourite features is the appliance cupboard designed around her Thermomix. "It's an integrated cupboard behind pocket doors, with power and a sliding shelf so the Thermomix can always be ready to use without cluttering the benches," she explains.



In its north-east corner position, the kitchen enjoys plenty of sunlight. Jessica chose Smartstone Dior benchtops, a Franke 'Bolero' sink, Astra Walker 'Olde English' tapware and Cape Town rattan stools from Halvorsen Interiors for the charming space. Woven Roman blinds are from Peter Meyer Blinds.



a retreat each evening. “I believe in function over form, however our kitchen is both,” says Jessica. “I designed our kitchen specifically for how we use it. It has a perfect triangle for function with the oven/cooktop, bin drawer, sink and dishwasher all within a pivot movement. I love the aesthetic of the English country cottage style – we even had the wall sconces handmade in the Cotswolds, in the UK, and shipped over to us by my in-laws.”

James and Jessica wake at sunrise and spend time with the girls before James walks to their office in town, with Bonnie in tow (Jessica is currently on maternity leave). “When I’m at work, we either spend the day at our interior design studio with our team of five, creating beautiful homes for our clients, or I’m on the road visiting local Highlands clients, or I’m up in Sydney managing projects,” says Jessica.

In Robertson, they were thrilled to find a friendly, laidback community. “We have made so many lifelong friends here that are like-minded, driven, creative and fun,” she adds. “We run our business in a studio next to the renowned Moonacres cafe. We love that we see all our local friends daily as the cafe is such a busy hub.”

For James, the Southern Highlands is reminiscent of his English childhood home. “I grew up in a quaint village called Littlebourne in Kent, which is surrounded by 17th-century Tudor cottages with thatched roofs, leadlight windows and doorways you have to bend down to walk through,” he says. “Littlebourne has a friendly community, which is why I love living in Robertson as it offers the same. I love living here in the Highlands; it’s the perfect space to raise a young family and run our business, and we’ve made some really great friends in the process.”

For this successful design duo, nothing compares to the sense of calm they enjoy as they walk through their front door at the end of the day. As for their advice for others about to embark on a new home project? “Preparation and planning is the key to a successful renovation,” Jessica says. *CS*
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Bordoodle Bonnie loves the kitchen, too. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Cookbooks and chopping boards on the Smartstone Dior benchtop; a blazing fire brings warmth to the cosy living room. "I project managed the job myself with Samuel McGrath Carpentry & Constructions and local trades such as Belmore Plumbing, Robertson Electrical Services, Wick Works Painting & Decorating and Rata Eaton Tiling," Jessica says.

