

HOME ROBERTSON NSW

A beautiful landscape piece by Jeannie Dolan draws the gaze in the dining room, which is furnished with a parquetry dining table from Halvorsen Interiors, and French rush chairs sourced from Dirty Janes in Bowral. **FACING PAGE** Boots, baskets, hats and coats are stored in the entryway.





KEYS TO SUCCESS

THIS DESIGN DUO CREATED A DREAM COUNTRY HOME
AND BUSINESS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS OF NSW.

WORDS CLAIRE MACTAGGART PHOTOGRAPHY ABBIE MELLÉ



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A blazing fire brings warmth to the cosy living room. "I project managed the job myself with Samuel McGrath Carpentry & Constructions, local trades such as Belmore Plumbing, Robertson Electrical Services, Wick Works Painting & Decorating, Rata Eaton Tiling, and Farrugia Kitchens & Joinery for all the custom cabinetry," Jessica says. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** A cheerful floral painting by Jeannie Dolan has pride of place in the living room. Merricks sofa in Forest, Kelly Wearstler Linden lamp, and Hazel rug by Dash & Albert, all from Halvorsen Interiors. Palecek jute side table by Boyd Blue; James and Jessica relax on the verandah with Phoebe and Bonnie; a vibrant still-life by Whitney Spicer is right at home in the kitchen alongside fresh fruit and plants.





THE PULL OF THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS proved impossible to resist for interior designer Jessica Halvorsen and her husband and business partner, James Parker. They spent idyllic weekends 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 estate and country homes appealed to Jessica and provided the opportunity for James to develop the Halvorsen Interiors online store.

By 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," Jessica, 37, explains. "It's a steel-framed house, which meant we could move internal walls without needing any structure. It 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. >





ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- Interior paint colours include: Dulux Castlecliff in the entry; Dulux White Duck half-strength in the bedrooms; Dulux White Duck quarter-strength in the kitchen, living and dining area. The snug is painted Dulux Buffhide, while the master bedroom is Dulux Pozieres.
- Jessica's favourite linen brands are: Walter G, walter-g.com.au; Cultiver, cultiver.com.au; In Bed, inbedstore.com; and Society of Wanderers, societyofwanderers.com. "Our online furniture store has a selection of all our favourite suppliers covering a range of furniture for different styles," she says.
- Homewares are sourced from local stores, including: Dirty Janes; Lydie du Bray Antiques; Robertson's Cheese Factory; Box & Castle for gifts; and little pop-up stores for handmade ceramics.
- On display throughout the house are paintings by Jessica's favourite artists, including Jeannie Dolan, Stephanie Tetu, Julz Beresford, Trent Nathan, and Whitney Spicer.



Jessica chose Tradco ceramic knobs for the kitchen cupboards, while the wall lights were handmade in the Cotswolds. A painting by Whitney Spicer also adorns the wall. Jessica says: "I designed an appliance cupboard behind pocket doors which has a pull-out shelf for use when the kettle or Thermomix is on, which eliminates the steam inside the cupboard. There are power points inside, so the appliances are always ready to use." Bordoodle Bonnie loves the kitchen, too. **FACING PAGE** A soft grey and green backdrop is complemented by a dreamy landscape piece by Jeannie Dolan in the master bedroom.



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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT For the kitchen, Jessica chose a Falcon Elise oven and cooktop, and Cape Town rattan stools from Halvorsen Interiors; Phoebe's nursery has a kangaroo print by Boobie and Ben, a Londolozzi lamp, and a canopy custom-made in pink Raffles Textiles fabric above the Adairs cot; pup Bonnie, James and Phoebe enjoy the fresh air; 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; garden greenery in the dining room. **FACING PAGE** A cosy Raffles armchair in Mud Grey, available at Halvorsen Interiors, sits by the Stuv 6 fireplace from Highland Fires & BBQs in Bowral.

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FROM LEFT Loyal Bonnie keeps Phoebe company in the garden; in the guest bedroom, an Amara bedhead from Halvorsen Interiors is teamed with bedding in Biscuit Check from Society of Wanderers. Anneu table lamp in Aged Iron by Visual Comfort. FACING PAGE A neat gardenia hedge borders the verandah, where James and Jessica enjoy daily cups of tea. Three-piece setting from Naturally Cane.



“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 last year, the family – which now includes 16-month-old daughter Phoebe, as well as Bonnie, a two-year-old Bordoodle – were able to settle into their completed home. Jessica and James are also happily expecting their second child mid-year.

The kitchen and sunroom are favourite gathering points for the family throughout the day, while the snug becomes 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 Phoebe before Nanny Sam arrives, then walk to their office

in town, with Bonnie in tow. “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,” Jessica says.

In Robertson, they were thrilled to find a friendly, laid-back 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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