



Beautiful blooms and glassware from Vanessa's Kyneton flower shop, Prunella. FACING PAGE Fritz the deer presides over the living area. The cat linocut on the wall is *Freak* by Melbourne-based artist Rona Green, and the painting of a tree is by Kyneton's John Lloyd.

time to flower

WHEN THIS COUPLE BOUGHT A RUN-DOWN COTTAGE, IT NOT ONLY LED TO A NEW LIFE IN THE COUNTRY BUT ALSO A CAREER IN FLORISTRY.

WORDS VIRGINIA IMHOFF PHOTOGRAPHY SHARYN CAIRNS
STYLING GLEN PROEBSTEL





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE The house was the first the couple saw in Kyneton; Vanessa has relished the move from Melbourne; in the guest room, a painting by local Peter Cole (left) sits beside a Japanese print. FACING PAGE A painting by Benalla-based Tony Flint, a friend of the couple, hangs above Jeff the Cape Barren goose.

"I'M A ROMANTIC, with rose-coloured glasses," Vanessa Partridge cheerily confesses. Brimming with plans and optimism, Vanessa and her husband, Richard Cooper, say they ignored "good advice" when they bought a timber cottage at the end of a leafy street in Kyneton, an hour north of Melbourne.

"My dad came up and said we'd be better off buying a brick veneer around the corner instead of this," Vanessa says. "It was really run-down and inside it had been painted pistachio green and rose pink, and was so unfinished. But to us it looked okay..." After nearly five years, their decision has been vindicated. A clever renovation has brought their vision to life, so much so they recently celebrated their marriage in the newly designed garden.

The couple first visited the town in 2006 to join friends at Annie Smithers' Bistrot at a time when Kyneton was just becoming one of the state's noted food destinations — and increasingly noticed by Melbourne people contemplating a move to the country. Straight away Vanessa and Richard decided this was where they wanted to be. Returning soon after, they began house hunting — and first on their list was the Federation-era weatherboard overlooking a creek and Crown land. For all its obvious superficial faults, the house ticked important boxes.

"We had an apartment in St Kilda and we didn't want to buy in the suburbs; this was nice, we could afford it," Vanessa says, before adding, with a smile, "It had been on the market for ages — and now we can see why!"

Richard is a graphic designer and children's book author and illustrator, whose books include *Benjamin Pillow in the Land of Nod* (Windy Hollow Books); he works from home, so Kyneton did not involve a change of career. However, for Vanessa the move allowed her to wind back her Melbourne-based PR enterprise to follow a long-time dream. With her business partner, Caris Haughan, she opened Prunella, a flower shop in Kyneton's Piper Street, in 2010.

Working to a strict budget, Vanessa and Richard carefully planned the house's transformation. At first they merely >





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Richard used recycled timber from Kyneton's old mill for this table. The hanging lamps are from Schots Home Emporium, and Portuguese tiles from Aeria Country Floors form a panel beside the bench. FACING PAGE Looking into the kitchen from the hallway.





painted the two front rooms, which became their offices. When they started work in earnest, it took another two years to complete. Looking back, they're glad not to have rushed.

"We had lots of stops and starting and paying as we went," Vanessa explains. "We're really glad we lived in it for a while, as the first ideas we had were not what we did in the end."

However, it didn't take long to discover a few less visible faults — such as how the timber floors had been whitewashed around the furniture. "It was like a 30-minute makeover," Vanessa says. "We just laughed, it was so dodgy!"

A wall was ripped out to open up the living room and a narrow lean-to sunroom at the back of the house. Floors were replaced and stained, doors stripped and painted, and architraves and dado rails fitted. The new streamlined kitchen in the old sunroom area is now a joy to cook in. But initial quotes stunned them. In the end, Richard's brother Jason stepped in to help. "He works for a cabinet manufacturer and when Richard told him we were getting quotes of \$30,000 for a kitchen and we couldn't afford it, he offered to do it for us after hours."

Reclaimed vintage windows behind the kitchen benchtop now frame views over the garden where Richard's 'shed', an old outhouse, is flanked by a cherished wedding present — a pair of hot pink flamingos. Beyond, they can watch nature playing out along the wild creek, especially in the early morning and evening when Vanessa says the watercourse becomes a "fox superhighway".

The main bedroom now occupies the former kitchen. Centrestage in the bay window is an enormous bath from Kyneton manufacturer Boyd Alternatives — which was never meant to be there... "We chose a smaller version, before we did anything else," Vanessa explains. "But it would have taken up the whole length of the bathroom, so we thought, 'We may as well go for a bigger bath and put it in the bedroom', even though we had to cut a bit out of the bay window to fit it in!"

The interior is painted in Dulux Antique White USA, allowing Vanessa and Richard to indulge their love of colour against a blank canvas. Bright Portuguese floor tiles are used >

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Above old lockers from Kyneton's Kabinett, preserved butterflies are being fashioned by Vanessa into dioramas, like the glass cloche in the centre; the white colour scheme shows off the aqua Egyptian doors; resting against Richard's tool shed is the wedding present of pink flamingos. FACING PAGE The splendid bath from Boyd Alternatives was too big for the bathroom.



as vertical accents in the kitchen and on the hearth, and their eclectic collection of artworks, most created by friends, hangs on the walls. There are also quirky finds from the Kyneton store Kabinett, including taxidermy specimens 'Fritz' the deer and 'Jeff' the Cape Barren goose ("Everything has a name..."), and a colourful Indian quilt thrown across the bed. "It's not a good idea for me to go in that shop!" says Vanessa, laughing.

Aqua doors from Egypt that open into the living area from the hall were picked up at a friend's Melbourne store, Vixen & Velvet. Here and there, glass cloches display specimen butterflies and other arrangements. Vanessa says the cloches are her latest project which she and Caris are making to sell in Prunella. "They're really popular and we now hold cloche workshops to show people the techniques to create a little display. I really love all those detail things."

Looking back, they have no regrets about their move and the rose-coloured glasses. In fact, time has proved that trusting their instincts was the best advice they could have taken. As Vanessa concludes, "We love Kyneton and we're really happy here." *



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In the main bedroom, the fireplace holds an Indian metal cabinet, also bought at Kabinett, above which stand brass birds, another present at the couple's recent wedding. On the left, a painting by Kyneton's Lucy James sits beside a second Japanese print.