



# Quintessentially Australian

Story & Images Marilyn Collins



**T**his country timber home with corrugated iron roof and water tanks on the side, looks as though it has stood the test of time literally for decades, yet has only been recently completed.

Approaching the home along the property's winding drive, your very first impression is, "This is the little house on the prairie seen in movies or story books". The image conjures nostalgic memories of yesterday.

Outbuildings, a screened verandah room, a thriving vegetable garden and a traditional timber-prop clothesline complete the picture.

This was how the home was meant to be, and one could say that a mission was certainly accomplished.

Janet Mudge, the owner, gave a brief to Singleton-based contract home builders, Stibbard Homes, to construct a 'whimsical' cottage built of hard, natural materials that resembled a 19th century rural slab home.

It was important to Janet that the end result looked as though it had evolved with several sympathetic additions over time. >





Stibbard Homes, now nationally recognised as the 2006 MBA Builder of the Year, had already completed two building projects for Janet on her property Dyring Park, near Singleton.

Stibbard's first assignment in 1998, was the renovation of the original farmhouse on her newly acquired 225 acres property, a former cattle property.

Janet had relocated from the Matcham Valley, on the Central Coast and is a keen horse rider, very actively involved in competitive dressage events.

The second building project was to construct a custom-designed stable complex for her prized horses with an adjacent covered dressage arena for all-weather training.

Janet planned the actual site aspect and design for her new home so that solar efficiency and views were effectively addressed.

"Once I found the spot I had a good feel about, I made a rough plank bench seat and used to sit and contemplate where all the rooms would be," recalled Janet. "I literally stepped out the floor plan using bales of hay."





Together with Neil Albert, Stibbard's home designer, the concept evolved which proved to be by far the most challenging she had ever presented to Stibbard Homes.

Unusual materials and finishes were called for including sawn hardwood of distinct sections and lengths, corrugated iron, and aged sandstone sourced from the footings of a local building being demolished at the same time of construction, with the shortfall coming from Gosford quarry.

Old-fashioned door furniture and hardware were researched and sourced or custom built by different manufacturers.

The spacious one-bedroom home with verandahs front and side offers open-plan living space. Above the lounge area is a mezzanine loft space secured by specially woven and sized bronze mesh – a place to retreat for a quiet read or for the grandkids to explore and have fun.

This same mesh was duplicated across the timber-framed front verandah and side steps. >





To emphasise the old world image, the doors had to be specially built and sized and the custom-built windows were made of Surian cedar complete with brass fittings and sash cords. As no plasterboard was permitted, internal walls were lined with cedar and the ventilation above the doorways is also timber.

The ceiling lining in the living room was a painstaking carpentry task, being lined with tongue and groove timber. The selection of timber could only be sourced in lengths no greater than 2.1m with a great proportion in lengths of less than 1.2m.

Black steel was used instead of galvanised, except for the bearers and joists which are hidden, and where performance aspects were considered paramount.

The galvanised downpipes required soldered joints to avoid the use of rivets and finding a tradesman capable of doing that properly was a task of its own. The project called on many old skills to achieve the desired finish.

The only visible plastic used was that required by law. >















The electrical conduits were painted black before installation, to resemble the metal conduits, being replicas of the rounded bakelite style.

Where possible, timber framework has been left exposed, requiring the skilled tradesmen to take particular care. Nothing was to appear too modern and even the use of a nail gun was banned.

A prime example of the fastidious adherence to originality is the laundry outbuilding, showing the exposed wall and roof framing. The outside toilet is recessed into a timber seat, replicating the authentic pit toilets of yesteryear.

The flooring is similar to that of the main bathroom - polished concrete imbedded with selected Nepean pebbles and tinted with imported colour.

Wool-lube lanolin-based coating was applied to the raw timber, both inside and out, to create a natural finish and encourage an ageing process.

Where paint has been used, colours were chosen to reflect the era. >





