



Room to Move

Story & Images Marilyn Collins

Old-world trimmings meet modern lifestyle in the varied living spaces of this country home.

A photograph of a traditional country farm house positioned on a hill inspired the building of a home for two city dwellers that held a dream to one day live permanently in the country.

The first sight of this spacious portrays distinctively old-world appeal. Created by the nationally awarded building firm Stibbard Homes, a wide, straight verandah wraps around the residence, providing protection from the elements as well as a welcoming introduction to the design, which is reinforced by the external brickwork colour in a Murobond "Talara" cement paint.

This colour was especially created for the clients to represent the wonderful bark colours featured in one of their favourite gum trees. The Zincalume metal roof, fascia and gutter are reminiscent of traditional farm homesteads.

For fifteen years the couple owned a sizeable land holding at Merriwa, grazing beef cattle and making frequent sojourns from the northern suburbs of Sydney to live the "good life" on weekends and holidays.

For years they reluctantly returned to the big smoke, leaving their property in the care of a resident manager.

"As the time wore on we decided to downsize and set out to find a property within closer travelling time, around 2.5 hours from Sydney yet still in the Hunter Region," said the owners.

"One day out of the blue, a friend asked if we would be prepared to sell them our apartment. This was an opportunity we couldn't dismiss, so the move came much earlier than we ever anticipated."

The Gresford Valley was pinpointed as the possible chosen haven, well known as a pastoral, agricultural, dairying and timber district and sited on the Paterson River. The picturesque area is known as a secluded base for the magnificent wilderness areas of Barrington Tops National Park and Chichester State Forest. It is close to the historic town of Paterson, the bustling and ever-growing City of Maitland and the Hunter's vineyards. >



A 220-acre property was located in a serene valley with access from the main road a few kilometres down a gravel track, and bordering on four neighbouring properties.

This very private, secluded grazing land provided a blank canvas to build the dream home.

On referral from known acquaintances, the couple contacted Stibbard Homes, a Singleton-based building firm with a reputation for building country homes of distinction.

Working with the firm's designer, Neil Albert, a floor plan was devised to create a building which echoed yesteryear.

This was to be home to a couple who enjoy entertaining, and a major requirement for the owners was to incorporate diverse spaces into the residence so that the couple could comfortably entertain friends as well as spending intimate time together.

The finished design achieves this with an open connection between the interior informal spaces and the property's spacious grounds.

Picture rails and tall skirting boards throughout the home emulate the old-world ambience of the traditional country homestead and the internal flooring is serviceable and well

suited to country-style living, being Boralstone "Clay" steel trowelled and honed concrete topped with colourful Persian rugs scattered throughout the house, adding a touch of colour. The bedrooms are carpeted and the wet areas are tiled.

The exterior design is typically country style, with three wide verandahs and a pergola at the rear flowing from the informal living room, offering the perfect outdoor undercover space in all seasons at any hour of the day.

The spacious master bedroom suite is off the formal entrance foyer, and features a walk-in wardrobe of massive proportions and an en-suite bathroom. The master bedroom offers a retreat/sitting area with views across the paddocks to the property's entry driveway.

The owners chose a neutral colour, Dulux "Icecap", to create a muted colour scheme which forms a blank canvas to allow their colourful, original artworks to shine throughout the home.

Likewise, the natural colour flows across the floor tiles of all the wet areas, with gloss-white wall tiles and natural-colour capping tiles to set it off. An Atlantica bath, set in a hob, adds to the luxury of the palatial guest bathroom. >

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Along the wide corridor are two guest bedrooms, the main bathroom, a walk-in linen cupboard and access to the spacious laundry, which the lady of the house calls “my office”.

A stunning feature leading into the informal living space is a pair of 19th century French Baltic pine doors with door furniture of Mother of Pearl. The glass panels are etched with magnificent peacock and dowel designs.

During the building stage, whilst wandering through a Mosman store a pair of doors propped on a wall was discovered, and the lady-of-the-house instantly fell in love with them.

“I measured them, contacted Stibbards and said “Can you make them fit?” and with an assured affirmative the doors were ours and stored until the building reached the fit-out stage. Now they make a definite statement and are a feature of the house.”

The separate and designated traditional formal dining and lounge rooms are now virtually obsolete in today’s home design, especially in country homes where informality reigns supreme.

The relative formality of the entrance foyer and adjacent rooms is left behind as you walk through to the rear of the home, where the spacious and sunlit casual living areas are located.

The honed concrete floors flow from the formal entry and hallway through to the kitchen, informal dining and family rooms, and the expansive glass doors open to the views visible across the paddocks.

This home’s fabulous open space features a double-sided fireplace which divides the study/office on one side and the informal living room, dining and kitchen on the other.

The spacious feature-studded kitchen, created by Osborne Kitchens of Rutherford, combines Dulux “Barnfloor” cabinetry with an island bench and cupboards facing onto the dining area in Dulux “Icecap” to blend with the wall colour.

Quantum Quartz “Silky” features on the benchtops, with a recessed garbage container set into place - handy for readying vegetable peels for the compost heap. Brushed aluminium kick plates feature together with a built-in appliance cupboard, and a huge, adjacent walk-in pantry makes meal-time preparation easy.

Features include counter space to slip a stool underneath, perfect for a quick and easy breakfast, snack time or writing notes.

Powder-coated aluminium “White Birch” windows are complimented by white Plantation shutters, with Wattyl “Panini” paint applied to all external timber work.

Since moving in just over twelve months ago, the owners have been hard at work creating outdoor landscaped areas. Wendfrey Garden Design built substantial sandstone walling at the side of the home which has been filled with roses, herbs and vegetables. A central sandstone walled garden filled with flowering French Lavender creates a roundabout approach to the back door, commonly used by the owners and guests.

The homestead paddock has been planted with a number of specimen trees which over time will grow and create a private screen around the property.

The home was created in very close collaboration with the clients, who had an understanding and appreciation of the type of work Stibbard Homes has completed in the past.

As a result, there is a strong emphasis on indoor and outdoor entertaining areas which ideally respond to both the site and lifestyle requirements of the owners.

