

A PIECE OF HISTORY

In a tranquil Victorian country setting, a doctor's former home that is now almost 100 years old has been carefully and lovingly restored back to life

PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICK REDMOND



1. The formal lounge room. The ceiling, although re-plastered, was inspired by the original design.

In 1917, Eltham, Victoria was just a small rural village close to the Yarra River. Lidia Jane Bradbury purchased an original Crown allotment from solicitor Robert Lindsay Wingrove. One of her sons, Ron, had a medical practice on Main Road and Brougham Street, Eltham. His two-storey gabled residence was a typical Californian Bungalow, surrounded by a beautiful tree-filled landscape and positioned to capture views to the distant northern ranges. Fast forward 75 years and in 1992, Gayle and Bryan Cole, of builders B & G Cole, purchased the property and set about making it their own — not only as their residence but an office for their business.

“We have always loved the old original period-style homes and have taken this passion into our profession as builders of reproduction period-style homes. After building two new homes and establishing two new gardens for ourselves, I longed to renovate a property with ‘fine old bones’ that had established gardens,” says Gayle.

“We stumbled on the property that was being auctioned later that day, but could only peer over the paling fence at the front,” says Bryan. “We returned to the auction and Gayle found herself bidding, as we had both fallen in love with the property from the moment we walked down the driveway and saw the cherry tree in blossom. It was passed in to us and we purchased it later that evening.

“Through Harry Gilham (of the Eltham Historical Society), we were introduced to Geoff Bradbury, who was then in his 80s and had grown up in the house. He gave us some photos, which prompted Gayle to trace the history of the house.”

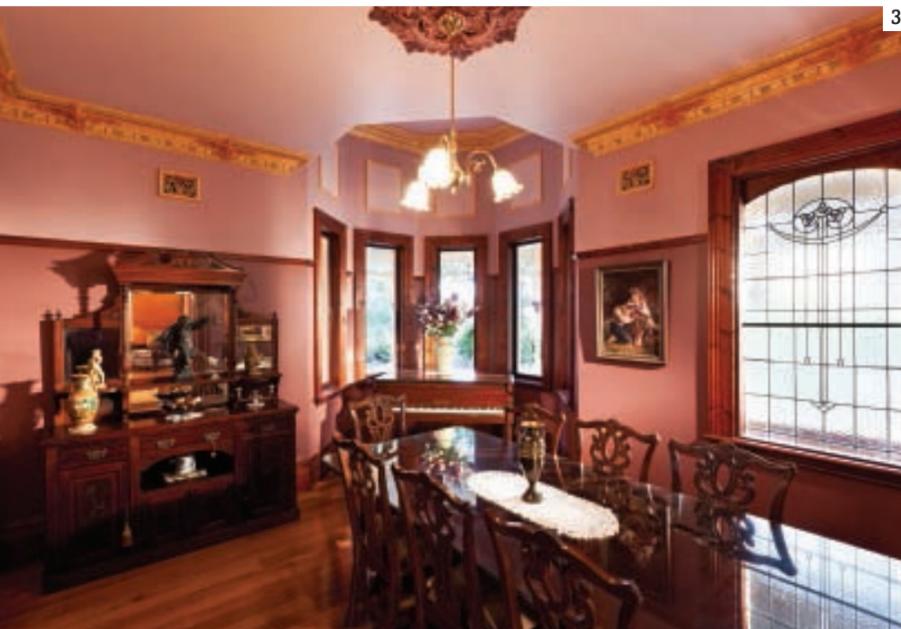
The original Crown grant at Lot 11 Lavender Park Road was made in 1873. The home, originally built in 1917, was ‘updated’ to an Alpine look in the early 1970s, and then totally renovated by Bryan and Gayle, its new owners, from 1993.

When it came time to consider the future look of the house, many designs were considered but the one that inspired them the most came from a house they had seen in Unley, South Australia several years prior, hence the turret and double gable.

“We were locked into the levels of the existing house and the orientation. There was also a large gum tree that we worked around and the existing entry points so we eventually decided to put a garage at the back of the house which resulted



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2. The sitting/rumpus room is Bryan and Gayle's favourite room in the house and Gayle has declared it her "African room" with design inspired accordingly. Its ceiling has been modelled on the Maryborough railway station. 3. The elaborate formal dining room sets the scene for dinner parties. 4. The revitalised home allows the couple to showcase various pieces collected over the years, such as this exquisite dressing table. 5. The home's design was inspired by a house Bryan and Gayle had seen in Unley, South Australia several years prior, hence the turret and double gable. 6. The large study utilises an existing fireplace.

brackets and Colorbond roofing complete the exterior picture.

"Bryan loved bluestones and we bought some large pitchers from a man who also had a similar dream, but it hadn't come into fruition. Bryan built the entire footing from bluestones and used an engine lifter to get them into position," says Gayle.

Each room has many unique items, as the couple has included a host of original touches in the renovation such as original leadlights and pine four-panel doors and recycled Baltic pine and jarrah flooring, which all add to the home's story.

They also chose to maintain the original flooring which still has some Black Japan stain — fashionable at the time. "We purchased some original Baltic pine floorboards which were quite expensive, but when we went to lay them we noticed some had signs of borer. We panicked and started burning loads of it only to find out that the borers had well and truly 'left the building' — an expensive mistake," says Gayle.

"When we stained the timberwork, I liked the honey colour of the old Baltic pine with just a clear stain, but I also loved the red mahogany of the red pine. Wanting to have both, some of the rooms featured one or the other. When we opened the meals area to join the lounge room we didn't use, there was the problem of tying in the two stains on the timber reveals of the opening. We wouldn't suggest doing that again."

The sitting/rumpus room is their favourite part of the home. "The ceiling has been modelled on the Maryborough railway station (although it is much simpler) and we used the original lining boards that we found under the house to line the ceiling. Then we repeated the unique design and had some lining boards machined up in oak for the kitchen. The double-entry doors to our sitting room are from the State Savings Bank of Victoria and feature the original glass with the emblem 'guaranteed by the State Savings Bank'," says Gayle.

"This room boasts dark wooden floors, wonderful old double-hung colonial sash windows with transoms to three sides, two pairs of French doors to the outside, a reproduction fireplace and overmantle built from recycled timber from a Maryborough antiques dealer,



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in a lot of driveway. We also wanted to keep the basic structure of the garden at the front which had stone walls and steps — eventually Bryan re-laid a lot of the walls because of the changing levels on the driveway, so we could accommodate a hard surface rather than the existing Lilydale toppings," says Gayle.

"Our home was to be unique — not able to be reproduced exactly — because of the items and materials we put into it, and the love that was poured in by Bryan's labour and my selections and research."

When it came to the home's layout and design, Bryan and Gayle had some clear ideas,

generated through their years in the building and design industries. "Being our own home, we wanted a kitchen and meals area but no family room attached, as we disliked the idea of having a television in this area," says Gayle. "We wanted a separate family room-come-rumpus room, a formal lounge and dining room (as it turns out I have long outgrown formal entertaining), a large study in which we utilised an existing fireplace, and a master bedroom with ensuite and large walk-in robe (me being a hoarder). Also, there were to be three other bedrooms (one which would be utilised as another TV room), a bathroom;

powder room and laundry. "We also wanted to take advantage of the roof space for possible later development and used some large beams that we sourced cheaply to span the area — we have approximately four or five squares up in the roof. As our home is on a slope, we also wished to utilise the footing as under-house storage and a gymnasium."

Bluestone pitchers have been used as the footing, with reclaimed original handmade bricks in an apricot blend as the dominant wall facing. Rough-cast stucco, ornate hard plaster mouldings, made-to-order eave

with original bevelled mirrors. I have made it my African room, with the interior design inspired accordingly.” The warmth and ambience created in this room — when the fireplace is burning on a cold winter’s night — is luxurious and comforting.

The lounge room ceiling, although re-plastered, was inspired by the original design.

The kitchen is new and features an original box leadlight window which has been painstakingly restored. “We bought a box window from Steptoe & Son and when we stripped it, some was different timber to

the predominant red pine — as we wanted it stained, we had to replace these sections. We also had to do a lot of hand sanding to get the window to stain quality and then the diamond leadlight had to be re-done because it was buckled; however, our leadlighter, Kathy, was able to re-use the glass which was original with air bubbles in some pieces. We also had to have one sash re-made because it wasn’t original — if all costs and labour were added up it would be a very expensive window. However, the unique leadlight in it makes it an irreplaceable

feature in our kitchen,” says Gayle.

The kitchen cabinetry was built from American oak and required turned posts and fretwork to be outsourced and hand-carved. This was inspired by an English kitchen and is in keeping with the period.

“I bought the Rangemaster stove before we renovated our kitchen and held it in storage for about four years as it was going to go out of production and came from England. When we finally went to use it, it was out of warranty and the range had been revamped and renamed. It was now cheaper and there was a newer model with a wok burner and handles that looked more like the AGA stoves which I would have preferred,” says Gayle. “That taught me that sometimes it does not pay to get too far ahead of myself.

“The kitchen took about three months to complete as we had to replaster after removing the old lathe and plaster walls, which anyone who has done this knows is quite a messy and labour-intensive process. We also had to re-level the floor which had been restumped badly and there was the foundation of an old fireplace in the kitchen that was sitting higher than the rest of the floor. The carpenter, Dave, was jackhammering the concrete as well as being on his stomach under the house with the stumps — I felt really sorry for him as he had a new baby at home at the time.

“The home’s entry has an intricately patterned ceiling from panelling found at Steptoe & Son, a black and white marble chequerboard floor and the original timber panelling that has been stripped back and stained. Geoff Bradbury, who was a young boy when the house was built, told us that the original entry door featured a Kookaburra leadlight with the property also being named ‘Kookaburra’ — though it had long since been replaced with a more modern full glass door and side lights.

“We have installed a larger-than-average period entry front door to house a leadlight panel that we purchased in Camberwell years before we bought the house. We fell in love with it as it has a beautiful autumn scene in the middle that was quite unique. We had Kathy make matching side lights,” says Gayle.

The main bedroom features a bow window which was heightened to suit the room. “We purchased a bow window from Steptoe & Son. When we put it in our bedroom I kept asking Bryan to lift it higher, then lower — we



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learnt that it was actually too small for the volume of the room. We had highlights added to make it larger, then it worked perfectly,” says Gayle. It was a valuable lesson.

“The main bedroom’s cornice combines a Victorian gutter with a frieze to produce a unique design which, when I explained what I wanted to the plasterer, he just looked at me. I am sure he was thinking ‘where does this woman get these ideas from?’ I just love doing something special,” says Gayle. The vents and ceiling roses were hand-painted by a client of Bryan and Gayle’s, who they had previously built a house for.

The ensuite features a six-foot-long original cast-iron bath which cannot be called ‘claw foot’ as it has feet that are more like hooves! This is flanked by an original leadlight from an old hotel. “I can sit in the bath and study the leadlight and see where it has been patched up before we bought it,” says Gayle.

The main bathroom houses an old sideboard from Ballarat converted to a vanity

and English tiles from Full Circle, Hawthorn.

The study boasts an original fireplace surround and a boxed plaster ceiling — another idea Gayle had to ‘introduce’ to the plasterers.

The journey to this beautiful home was not all smooth sailing — living in the home while renovating on such a grand scale provided its challenges for Bryan and Gayle and their family.

“We slept in the lounge room on a fold-out bed, then we went into the TV room on the fold-out bed, which eventually broke after approximately nine months,” says Gayle. “We

had no roof covering over the lobby area between the bedrooms and the living rooms and experienced periods of torrential rain that the tarp couldn’t cope with, hence it was very wet and cold. We had no heating except the little gas coal fire inserts during winter as the hydronic heating hadn’t been installed yet.

“On another occasion I arrived home before Christmas with a big Santa Claus

and went to put it in the lounge room. The plasterer was cutting cornices in the dining room and plaster dust had spread throughout these rooms so that they appeared as if they were in a fog. My heart sank as I realised all the cleaning ahead of me.

“Also, the corner window and position of the door in the TV room makes it hard to furnish the room, so this was a valuable lesson on planning for furniture placement. Because wisdom is acquired with experience I have no doubt that, should I have it over again, things would be different, but it is all part of the journey,” says Gayle.

“I realise what an epic project this home has been, even down to removing 16 huge Cyprus trees along the front boundary which required tree removalists to control traffic along the road, and then the subsequent erection of the fantastic brick and wrought-iron fence which we designed and Bryan built.

“Our home is a creative expression of our personality and we have done this just like an artist who pours passion and soul into their work.” APS

The project was built by:

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FLOORING

Living areas: Timber throughout, original Baltic pine, hardwood and jarrah boards

Tiling: Intricately patterned tessellated tiles in the powder room — it was a small area and they are very expensive; octagon and dot with Norwood borders to bathroom and lobby; black and white chequerboard marble to entry, black and white diamond to the ensuite

Bedrooms: Baltic pine to kids’ bedrooms

WALLS

Bathroom: Tiled to dado height with borders and caps and skirting tiles, tile panels with borders

Bedrooms: Dado panels using original Baltic lining boards

Entry: Dado panels using original timber from entry, dressed with a frame to each panel

Rumpus and passage: Dado panels with lining boards on the angle within a frame

Lounge, dining, bedroom one and study: Period cornices, ceiling details and ceiling roses

KITCHEN

Cabinet doors and panels: American oak with individually-crafted turned posts and fretwork detail in oak

Benchtop: Granite

Splashback: Tiles with a discontinued border

WINDOWS

A mixture of reclaimed originals and some made by McKay Joinery

DOORS

Some original Baltic pine four-panel doors, some made from a Ballarat joinery



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7. The kitchen cabinetry was built from American oak and required turned posts and fretwork to be outsourced and hand-carved. This was inspired by an English kitchen and is in keeping with the period. 8. The master bedroom features a bow window, purchased from Steptoe & Son, which was heightened to suit the room. 9. The home’s entry has an intricately patterned ceiling from panelling found at Steptoe & Son; a black and white marble chequerboard floor and the original timber panelling that has been stripped back and stained. The larger-than-average period entry front door houses a leadlight panel purchased years before Gayle and Bryan bought the house.