

The modern home features Weathertex Weathergroove cladding in Dulux Monument, with shrubby agapanthus and teucrium to soften the effect. **FACING PAGE** Homeowner Kate Hardy takes a stroll at her Exeter property.

COMING HOME

INTERIOR DESIGNER KATE HARDY'S SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS WEEKENDER IS A MODERN HOME WITH COUNTRY ROOTS AND A FOND NOD TO HER CHILDHOOD IN RURAL YORKSHIRE.



WHEN INTERIOR DESIGNER KATE HARDY and her consultant husband Andrew, both in their 50s, decided to invest in a country home in 2021, there was no doubt in their minds where that home should be. “Our list of must-haves was fairly limited because we really wanted a home in Exeter, and there’s a finite number of properties here,” says Kate. “We wanted that village feel that you don’t get in bigger towns.”

Like many families during COVID, Kate and Andrew, along with their adult children Beatrice, 22, and Will, 19, realised something was missing from their lives in Sydney. “I’m from a small hamlet in North Yorkshire and it was during COVID, when we couldn’t travel, that we missed seeing our family and being part of rural life,” recalls Kate. “When you grow up in the countryside, you reach your teenage years and it’s quite frustrating because nothing’s nearby, your friends live far away and there’s no nightlife, so you turn away from country life. But now I feel that connection is coming back from my childhood.”

Although she and Andrew, both originally from England, have lived in Australia for almost 25 years, for most of that time Kate thought life in this country’s untamed and isolated regions wasn’t for her. Her opinion changed over time thanks to a series of family holidays spent in and around Exeter, a village in the New South Wales Southern Highlands, on the traditional lands of the Gundungurra people.

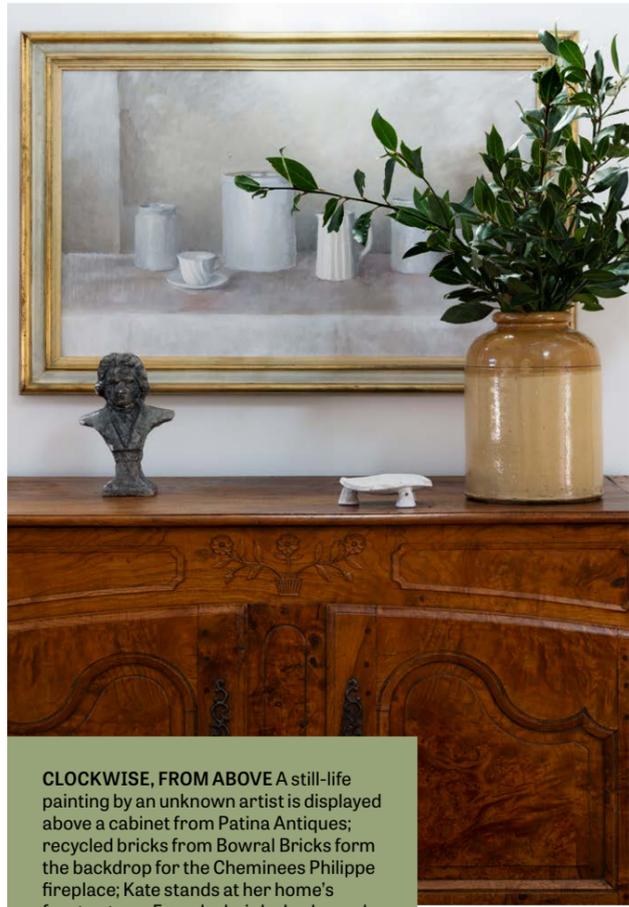
“When we got to know the Southern Highlands better, we began to value the cool, misty mornings, the scent of eucalyptus after a shower and the gentle quiet that settles in the evenings,” reflects Kate. “There’s a different kind of energy here, that feels grounding and unhurried.”

When it came time to choose a place of their own, the limited supply of homes in the area meant Kate and Andrew briefly entertained the idea of buying elsewhere. They even looked at a property in nearby Burrawang, but the notion >

The sunny kitchen features Moroccan splashback tiles in Igloo from Surface Gallery, cabinets coated in Porter’s Paints Olive Grove, Smartstone Nieve White benches, a Perrin & Rowe Ionian mixer, Blinds by Peter Meyer Manhattan woven blinds from Fybre Furnishing Solutions, and Gibson Karlo Piper stools from Design By Them.



“When we’re here, the overall feeling is almost indescribable. It makes me so happy.”



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE A still-life painting by an unknown artist is displayed above a cabinet from Patina Antiques; recycled bricks from Bowral Bricks form the backdrop for the Cheminees Philippe fireplace; Kate stands at her home's front entry; a French chair by Larkwood Furniture is draped with a sheepskin from Temple & Webster and paired with a Swift side table by Soho Home. **FACING PAGE** Etna rattan pendants by Dunlin Home hang above the Global dining table from MCM House. Walls in Dulux Natural White are filled with Liz rattan sconces from Anthropologie, abstract artworks by Berit Zetterman, and two framed cow photographs taken by Kate.



was short-lived. “For me, Exeter feels like coming home. It feels like coming back to my roots,” says Kate.

She was secretly hoping to stumble upon a pretty old weatherboard cottage that she could furnish like a proper English cottage, but fate had other plans, and they eventually bought a modern home with an acre of land and onsite dam.

“The house itself was pretty ugly when we bought it,” says Kate. “It was like a Melbourne apartment transplanted in the country. It had a black kitchen, the carpet was dark grey and it was tiled downstairs with grey tiles; it felt so cold.”

Despite their lukewarm feelings about the house, Kate and Andrew loved the site’s borrowed views across surrounding farmland and its proximity to Exeter’s cafe, local wineries and monthly market.

The first step in their home’s transformation began when Kate and Andrew approached local architect Alison Stephens of Coble Stephens Architects in Moss Vale.

“When we had Alison around for an initial consultation, we weren’t really sure what we were asking her to do,” says Kate. “We just knew we wanted to expand the internal courtyard, which was a waste of space, and convert the internal garage. Alison seized those ideas and ran with them. The whole thing was a collaborative process and her ideas were transformative.”

Elevating the idea of an enclosed courtyard, Alison rotated the roof 180 degrees to create a dramatic A-frame, which doubled the living space and increased the ceiling height

to a roomy seven-and-a-half metres. Other key changes were less obvious, but “really interesting” nonetheless, says Kate. These ideas included making the front door more prominent to create a sense of arrival and choosing natural exterior materials to settle the home into its surroundings.

Once the layout was complete, Kate went to work on the interiors, taking inspiration from the warm colours, natural textures and floral patterns typically found in English cottages, but applying them with refrain in this contemporary dwelling. “I wanted to countrify it a bit, but had to keep in mind it’s a modern house,” explains Kate. “I do have bits of pattern and pretty fabrics, but I didn’t want it to look like some sort of strange pastiche.”

Far from an imitation piece, Kate has created an original four-bedroom, three-bathroom home that perfectly straddles the line between modern and country-style interiors, while catering to the needs of her family, both present and future. “When we’re here, the overall feeling is almost indescribable. It makes me so happy,” says Kate.

And while her interior design business, Cloth + Stone Designs, and Andrew’s work are based in Sydney, the duo says a permanent move to the country could very well be in their future. “We do have a plan to spend a lot more time here,” says Kate. “We may even eventually live here, but we haven’t entirely decided just yet.” *CS*

Visit clothandstonedesigns.com.au and coblestephens.com For more beautiful homes, see homestolove.com.au



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT Stone, timber and brass blend harmoniously in the bathroom; a *Primroses* artwork signed by Kate’s grandmother is proudly displayed in the bedroom; the shower recess is wrapped in Spanish tiles in Sage from Surface Gallery; a custom bedhead by H&J Furniture is covered with Zappa striped fabric from Style Revolutionary. The seaside painting is from Vintage Art Emporium. FACING PAGE The striking A-frame suits the landscape perfectly.

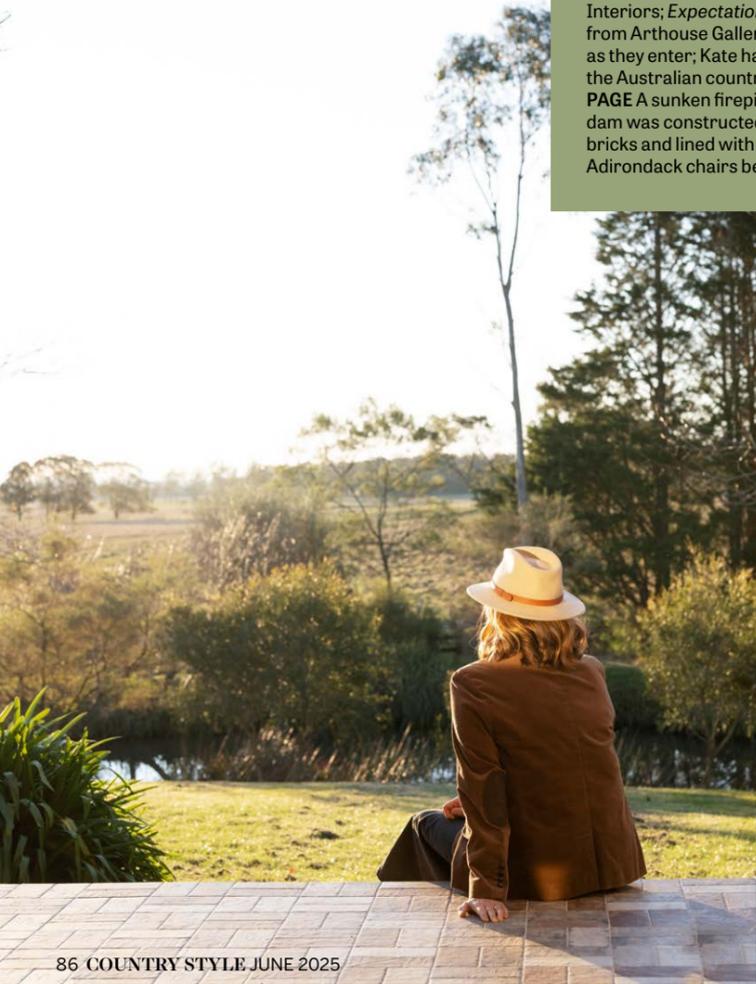


“For me, Exeter feels like coming home. It feels like coming back to my roots.”





CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT A side table from Dirty Janes Bowral and framed horse print by Rachel Stribbling bring a country flavour to the interiors; the laundry is a haven of Dulux Currency Creek cabinetry, Spanish tiled benchtops and a Kalista ceramic sink from ABI Interiors; *Expectation* by Michaye Boulter from Arthouse Gallery greets the family as they enter; Kate has grown to love the Australian countryside. **FACING PAGE** A sunken firepit area next to the dam was constructed from recycled bricks and lined with river pebbles. Teak Adirondack chairs beckon on sunny days.



“There’s a different kind of energy here, that feels grounding and unhurried.”