

# BY DESIGN

A COLLECTOR AND A DESIGNER COMBINE ARTWORKS, CERAMICS AND FABRICS IN THIS CENTURY-OLD COTTAGE IN BOWRAL, NSW.

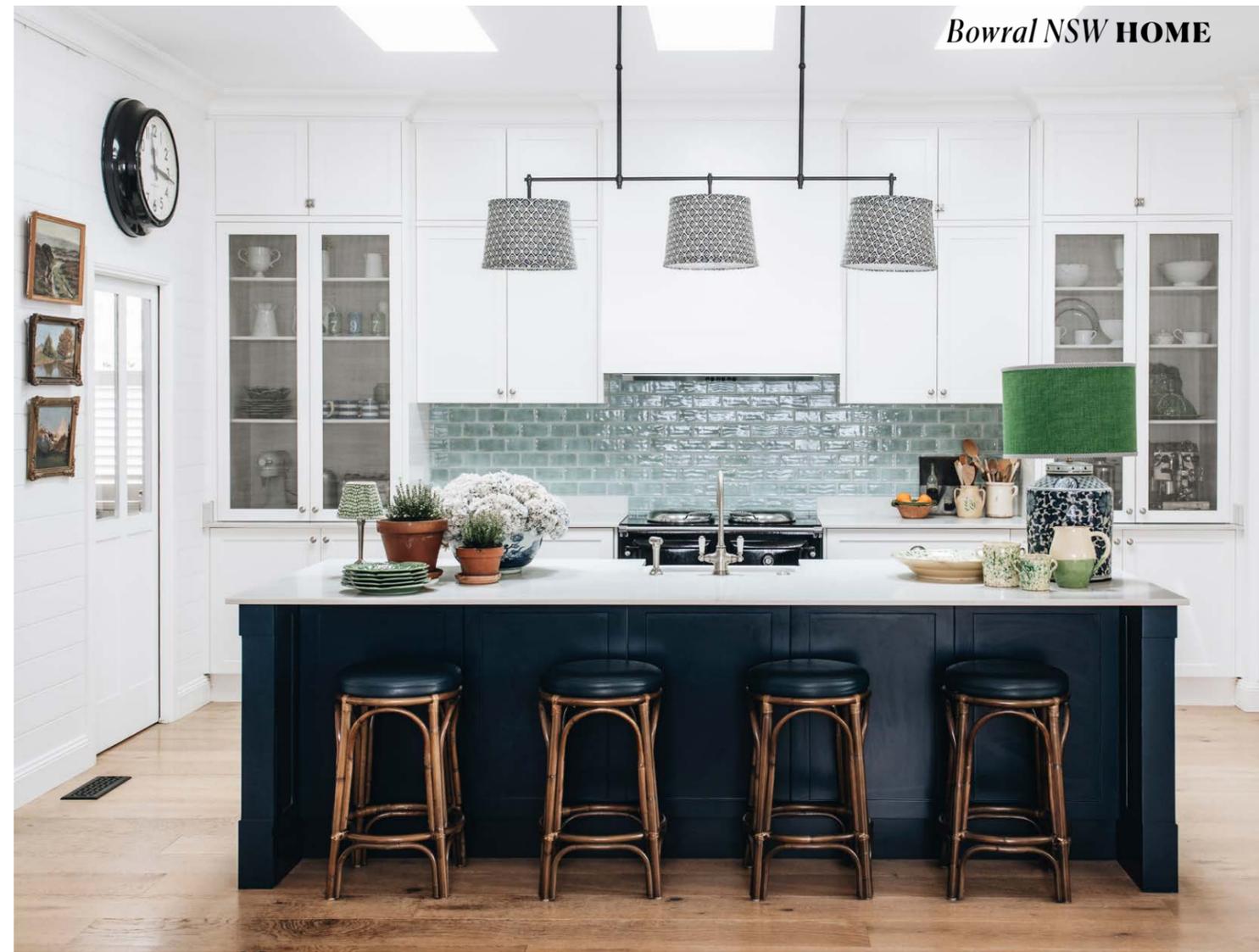
WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY ABBIE MELLÉ



"I've always loved English countryside homes, and we've collected a lot of things over the years," says homeowner Sophie Santo. "Our furniture is a mishmash of things we've collected since the mid-'90s." The Frame TV screensaver was bought at French Home Living. **FACING PAGE** Sophie with children Emilie (left), Annabel and Tom, plus Jack Russell terriers Daisy and Wilfred.



"The hallway was a dark, sombre little space when we began and it ended up being a feature entrance that inspired the chandelier hunt because the light became so lovely in there," says Anna. Decor includes vintage art from Etsy and Vintage Art Emporium, horns from The Inspired Paddock at Dirty Jane's Bowral, and pleated lampshades from Alice Palmer & Co. **FACING PAGE** Blues and greens add depth in the kitchen, with lampshades in Anna Spiro Paniola Multi fabric, a lamp from Magnolia Interiors, and landscape scenes from Vintage Art Emporium. Stools from Naturally Cane.



WHAT STARTED AS A SMALL COMMISSION to refresh some soft furnishings in a heritage home evolved into the complete overhaul of Myee, an 1880s double-fronted weatherboard cottage in Bowral, in the NSW Southern Highlands. "The initial visit was to help refresh the soft furnishings, but it ended up being a full-scale design project," says interior designer Anna-Marie Bruechert from Beautiful Home Life. "I found myself with a very expanded brief that included everything from the joinery to the bespoke trim on the lampshades, and even a spa deck in the garden."

The storied four-bedroom property is situated in the heart of Old Bowral, just a block from the town's heritage-listed Bradman Oval, on the traditional lands of the Gundungurra and Dharawal people. It has been home to the Santo family and their menagerie of pets for almost a decade. Homemaker Sophie, 53, and her husband James, 56, cohabit with two lively Jack Russell terriers called Daisy and Wilfred, and a mother-and-daughter pair of cocker spaniels called Tammy and Maisie. The couple's three children, Annabel, 28, Emilie, 25, and Tom, 19, have all left home but visit Mum, Dad and the dogs regularly.

"We bought Myee in 2016, but it needed a total renovation, so in 2017 our friends, who are builders, pulled off the old extension and built a new one," says Sophie. "Once we'd lived in it [for a few years], we started thinking, 'Oh, I wish we'd

done that, or we'd done this', and that's where we started with Anna." Expanding into far more than a redecoration project, in the end, Anna touched every inch of the house, from the now-expanded, light-filled hallway to the joinery, bathrooms, bedrooms and even the back deck.

Introduced to each other through a mutual friend, Anna and Sophie enjoyed an unusually harmonious relationship throughout the 12-month project. In fact, both say it was more of a collaboration than a traditional designer-client relationship. "Sophie is a bowerbird," says Anna. "She has her own eye, but needed some design direction to create the perfect foil for her wonderful items."

Instead of taking over, Anna's approach was to curate and display Sophie's many artworks, ceramics and collectables to their best advantage, bringing out each item's distinctive beauty with the right backdrop, frame or setting. "We defined the living and two dining areas within the open plan by anchoring them with joinery, rugs and light fittings and building a partial wall to the formal dining area," says Anna. "This, in a sense, gave Sophie room to play and avoided the home feeling crowded or heavy."

An important piece of the puzzle was colour. "I'd always loved Christopher Farr's Carnival fabric; it all started from there," says Sophie. Inspired by the fabric's ornate pomegranate floral design, Anna injected soft shades of >

green into the existing blue and white interiors to mirror the fabric. “The Christopher Farr print is a lively blue and green combination,” says Anna. “I introduced gentle blue-green tones in the sofa fabrics and wallpapers, along with natural fibres and textures, as base notes for the more saturated greens and inky blue accents.”

The final step, and most important piece of the puzzle, came after the walls were painted, the sofas were re-covered, and the vintage chandelier was hung. It was the moment when Sophie and Anna decided where each artwork would hang. “I have a very good framer and art restorer who worked on some of the older paintings to bring them back to life,” says Anna. “Then there was a lot of editing and regrouping >

Patterns, plates and plants create visual interest in the informal dining area, which features lampshades in Anna Spiro Paniola Multi fabric. A cabinet from Suzie Anderson Home houses Bordallo Pinheiro servingware from Minimax. Artworks from Vintage Art Emporium and Etsy hang above the striking Tibetan Cloud cabinet, which Sophie bought at Smith & Caughey’s in Auckland about 20 years ago.





"It's now just the garden that needs doing. That's next on our agenda," says Sophie. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** "With curtains, I'm very specific about not crowding the window and I have a brilliant maker who does the loveliest work, creating headers that are full, but informal," says Anna; "When I started, there was a fireplace but no joinery," says Anna. "We needed to create definition between the spaces, so I put in a nib wall into the formal dining area as a way to dress the room and make it separate from the casual living area."; "It's such a lovely, peaceful home with all the things we love in it," says Sophie; Anna sourced pet-friendly grasscloth-style wallpaper for the dining room. Original artwork by Sophie Galton.

"It feels like a proper home. It has a real lived-in feeling."





"I found the bath on Gumtree and had it re-enamelled by Antique Baths Sydney," says Sophie. The towels are from Adairs, while the bath caddy is from The Timber Line on Etsy. The scalloped blind is made from the same Anna Spiro fabric as the lampshades seen throughout the house. **FACING PAGE** The guest bedroom features a charming series of vintage *Vanity Fair Cricket* prints, purchased from Chelsea Coco in Brisbane.

in the hanging process until everything found its happy home." Getting there in the end, all of Sophie's artworks, curios, flowers and ferns are now displayed in a way that feels authentic to her. "Sophie and I had fun creating harmonious arrangements for everything, and everything she loves can now be seen and appreciated," says Anna.

Although she's not likely to stop collecting anytime soon ("Literally week to week more artworks would appear," says Anna with a chuckle), Sophie is basically content now that the renovation is complete and her collection can be enjoyed to the full. "We bought a couple of paintings recently, so we're still collecting things, but now it's just an add-on," says Sophie. "Not that we really need any add-ons!"

Sophie and James can now focus on whipping the garden into shape and enjoying their perfectly imperfect home. "As James says, it's hard to go on holiday when you live in such a beautiful home," says Sophie. *CS*  
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“Sophie has her own eye, but needed some design direction to create the perfect foil for her wonderful items.”



“The colours in the main bedroom were inspired by the seascapes, many of which were reframed with custom, colour-washed frames for overriding unity,” says Anna. The artworks are from Etsy and Vintage Art Emporium. The bedhead, from The Upholstery House in Glenlyon, Vic, showcases Wortley fabric in Ronas Hill Carrick, while the custom bedside tables are from Andrew Farquhar.



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COMPILED BY KATE LINCOLN & JUDIE SIU

- 1 Carnival vinyl wallpaper in Fern Roll, from Christopher Farr Cloth.
- 2 Paulette table lamp in Bayleaf & Beige, \$130, from Provincial Home Living.
- 3 Still Life with Gerberas, \$495, from Vintage Art Emporium.
- 4 Celeste Natural Brown scalloped jute round rug, from \$199, from Miss Amara.
- 5 Genuine Bentwood bar stool with padded seat in Black Vinyl and Walnut, \$329, from Apex.
- 6 McKenzie bedside table in Dove, \$350, from Provincial Home Living.
- 7 Skyler outdoor dining chair, \$549, from Harvey Norman.
- 8 Bordallo Pinheiro Cabbage dinner plate, \$79, from Williams Sonoma.
- 9 Bordallo Pinheiro Cabbage jug, \$188, from Williams Sonoma.
- 10 Luberon console table, \$5875, from Gramercy Home.
- 11 Kenley fabric armchair, \$1499, from Domayne.
- 12 Antique Floral Blue & White ginger jar set, \$249, from Luxury & Co.
- 13 French flax linen pillowcase set in Hazelnut Stripe, \$84.90, from I Love Linen.
- 14 Tartan Paddock pillow (cover only) in Winter, \$159, from The Grampians Goods Co.