



# GENTLY DOES IT

A FORMER INTERIOR DESIGNER TAKES AN UNHURRIED APPROACH TO RENOVATING HER CENTURY-OLD FAMILY HOME IN NEWCASTLE, NSW.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT STYLING JODIE GIBBONS



The dining room features a Cotswolds ruffle linen light shade by Ramble Interiors. The mirror, from Pillow Talk, was coated in Porter's Paints Himalayan Salt. Homeowner Alicia Doyle made the sideboard curtain using strawberry block-print fabric by Molly Mahon. Thonet No. 18 classic chairs, from Monsoon Living, surround the heirloom table. **FACING PAGE** The family's whippet, Artie, relaxes in the family room. Alicia created the sofa slipcover using fabric by Annie Everingham for Land Home. Raspberry ticking stripes by Ian Mankin tie in nicely. A festive wreath by Rebecca Syphers from Porter & Hudson sits beside artworks by Whitney Spicer and Jessica Olpp, and paintings by Alicia's children and mother.



IN NEWCASTLE'S HISTORIC MAYFIELD, Alicia Doyle, a former interior designer and local business owner, has patiently upgraded a 120-year-old worker's cottage with love, self-restraint and her own brand of creativity. "I call it a gentle renovation," says Alicia. "I knew better than to go through a big renovation – it's just too difficult with little children, and we didn't want too much debt or a huge amount of maintenance."

Alicia, 39, lives in the storied home – on the traditional lands of the Awabakal and Worimi people – with her husband Des, 42, a project manager, their children Alec, seven, and Emmy, five, as well as a spirited two-year-old whippet called Artie.

Alicia and Des's early married life was spent living in a tiny apartment in Sydney. Back then, the busy couple was stuck on the corporate treadmill. Everything changed when Alicia fell pregnant with their first child in mid-2016. "We had a shoebox apartment," she recalls, "but we wanted more space to raise our children and a slower pace."

As fate would have it, soon after finding out they were going to be parents, Des was headhunted for a new role in Newcastle, so the duo eagerly left behind the relentless rat-race and set their sights on a comfortable family home in the port city.

"Alec was 10 months old when we moved in," recalls Alicia. "It's funny – we wanted more space, and we've ended up with quite a small block, but what we've got now we would've killed for in Sydney."

Resisting the urge to gut the dated layout and start from scratch, Alicia and Des instead chose to renovate slowly, without changing the existing floorplan. In what's turned out to be a labour of love, choosing this gentler approach meant the Doyles avoided a huge mortgage and a disruptive renovation.

"We ended up buying something smaller that we could pretty up and make feel more like 'us', without the need for major renovations," says Alicia. "It's been a very challenging floorplan to work with, and at times >

Alicia and Des with Alec and Emmy, plus whippet Artie. **FACING PAGE** The lounge room features a James Lane sofa with seat pads in Raffles Textiles linen, plus cushions and a pendant light by Ramble Interiors. Alicia made a slipcover for the ottoman using Walter G Marbella linen. The patterns continue with a Walter G tablecloth, a Roman blind featuring Walter G Luxor Saffron fabric, made by Layered Home, and a rug by Weave Home. The artworks – *Rodeo Clown* by Tuft Luck; *Australian Road Trip* by Kara Rosenlund; and *landscape* by Giorgia Bel – blend with the room's caramel tones.



**ABOUT THE HOUSE:**

- The home's exterior features rendered walls in Dulux Smokebush with trims in Dulux Antarctic Deep and Porter's Paints Popcorn.
- The golden tapestry linen wall hanging above the fireplace in the lounge room is by Alicia's business Ramble Interiors.
- Much of the bed linen and both bedheads were handmade by Alicia from fabric collected over many years.



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT "Artie is quite naughty and his 'needs' have formed a lot of our design choices – especially with fabric," jokes Alicia; the vintage painting above the meat safe "started my love affair with pink," says Alicia; Christmas bonbons made by stylist Jodie Gibbons; the linen tapestry over the mantel is by Ramble Interiors. FACING PAGE Vibrant waratahs add a splash of colour in the kitchen, which was revamped with tiles from Earp Bros. "I also wrapped kangaroo leather around the cupboard handles to soften the existing black," says Alicia. The timber cheeseboard is from Ivy Alice Vintage.



“I’ve been really adventurous with colour in this home – I don’t have one white wall in the entire place.”



“On the first of December, I bring out my own version of an Advent calendar – it’s a collection of vintage Christmas books I’ve thrifted. Emmy and Alec get to open one every night, and we read it together,” says Alicia. “It’s way better than a lot of plastic toys or chocolate.” **FACING PAGE** The walls of the master bedroom are painted in Dulux Kinder, with trims in Porter’s Paints Popcorn. Alicia crafted the gorgeous quilt using a tablecloth from Molly Mahon, a sheet from Cultiver, a striped sheet from I Love Linen, and binding made from Walter G scrap fabric. “I made the bedhead from fabric I picked up in Shanghai,” she says. “The bedside lamps were Vietnamese lanterns that I recovered and hand dip-dyed with madder.”

I’ve wanted to completely knock down the back end and rebuild.

“Surprisingly though, embracing the quirks, the layout and the history of it all has ended up being what has made me love it the most.”

Instead of limiting her styling abilities, the home’s constraints have fuelled Alicia’s innate creativity in unexpected ways. “I was an interior designer for 17 years,” she explains. “But I have experimented a lot more in the past few years, and I’ve been really adventurous with colour in this home – I don’t have one white wall in the entire place.”

More than just a family home, the Doyles’ cottage is a backdrop for Alicia’s artistry, allowing her to utilise every square inch of the 310-square-metre block, which includes a studio for her business, Ramble Interiors.

“When we moved in, there was an unused deck at the back of the house, so I enclosed it and it’s now my studio,” says Alicia. “It’s really tiny; I have to be careful when I make large things in there, but I’ve designed my business around school hours and working from home, so I don’t want to move.” >





Emmy's bedroom is painted in soft Newport Blue from Porter's Paints. The antique bed is topped with a quilt Alicia created during lockdown. Floral pillowcases from Adairs, a Numero 74 canopy and a swan from Etsy complete the look. Artwork by Alicia's friend, Jilly P Studio, hangs on the wall. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** Alec's bedroom features Murobond Toile on the walls. The gingham pillowcases are by Carlotta + Gee, while the stonewashed sheets are from Adairs. The vintage bedside table was a roadside find, while the antique coach lantern, on a hook from The Society Inc, is now a lamp. Alicia created the bedhead using Shibori fabric from Materialised; a vintage painting is tucked beside an Alba Atelier rattan urn from Foray Design Store; Alec and Emmy are eager to rip open their presents. Gift wrap and ribbons from: Lyn McCreanor via Dirty Janes; Bespoke Letterpress; and Spotlight.



Specialising in vintage-inspired textiles and homewares, Alicia initially ran Ramble Interiors as an interior design business. However, the focus naturally evolved into products when Alicia couldn't find what she was looking for on the market for her clients.

"Large-scale tapestries and wall hangings were either non-existent or cost thousands of dollars, and there was a real need for textile lighting with a shallow depth for low ceilings. So, that's where it started," Alicia explains. "I did millinery and garment production prior to studying interior design, and I learned how to sew from the age of about four, so all that has blended together with my business and our family home. I can't explain why, but it feels like this is what I'm meant to be doing."

Turning away from mainstream home trends, Alicia is also planning a non-traditional end to 2024, with a family Christmas at home for the first time since they moved in seven years ago. "We haven't had a family Christmas here, and I'm pretty excited to do one my way," she says.

"I'm not sure of all the details, but I definitely want to host outside, in the evening and under the fairy lights, with cocktails, of course! We always have lots of seafood and salads too - it'll be a very Australian celebration." *CS*

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