

A Jonima Flowers bouquet bursting with silver gum, viburnum roses, lilac and crabapple. **FACING PAGE**  
From left: Marco, Luca, Ingrid, Nicola, Daniella and John Padovano. The family's gorgeous maremma sheepdogs, Daisy and Artemis, play in the foreground.

## FROM BUD TO BLOOM

MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK FOR THE PADOVANO CLAN AT JONIMA FLOWERS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS, NSW.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY ABBIE MELLÉ





**CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT** Seasonal bunches showcase vibrant blooms, including lilacs, gerberas, cornflowers and poppies; Nicola holds pretty pink ranunculus, Marco has a bunch of fresh snapdragons and Luca carries bold grevilleas; the delicate patterns in succulents; an armful of gerberas; chocolate lace seedling; wiry-stemmed scabiosas. **FACING PAGE** A sea of gerberas ready for bouquets.



FLOWER FARMERS INGRID and John Padovano simultaneously raised four children and built a business surrounded by blooms in Yanderra, a village in the foothills of the Southern Highlands in New South Wales.

“We’re actually third-generation flower growers,” says Ingrid, 50. “I married into it, but John’s nonna started growing flowers for the Sydney Flower Market in the ‘60s, which then translated to John’s parents, and eventually he got the bug, too. I suppose it’s in the blood.”

Coming from an entirely different background, Ingrid brought her own unique skill set to the family when she married John, 49. “I was in finance, but once we started having kids that wasn’t conducive,” Ingrid explains. “I was always more creative anyway, so I started doing floristry.”

By the time they had welcomed two children, with a third on the way, the Padovanos decided it was time to put down roots of their own. Their goal was to find a way to bring Ingrid’s floristry skills and John’s prodigious green thumb together, and so, Jonima Flowers was born.

“It was something John always wanted to do; he had a vision of where he wanted to go,” recalls Ingrid.

“At the time, I thought, ‘Oh my God, where are you taking me?’ but I’ve come to love where we are.”

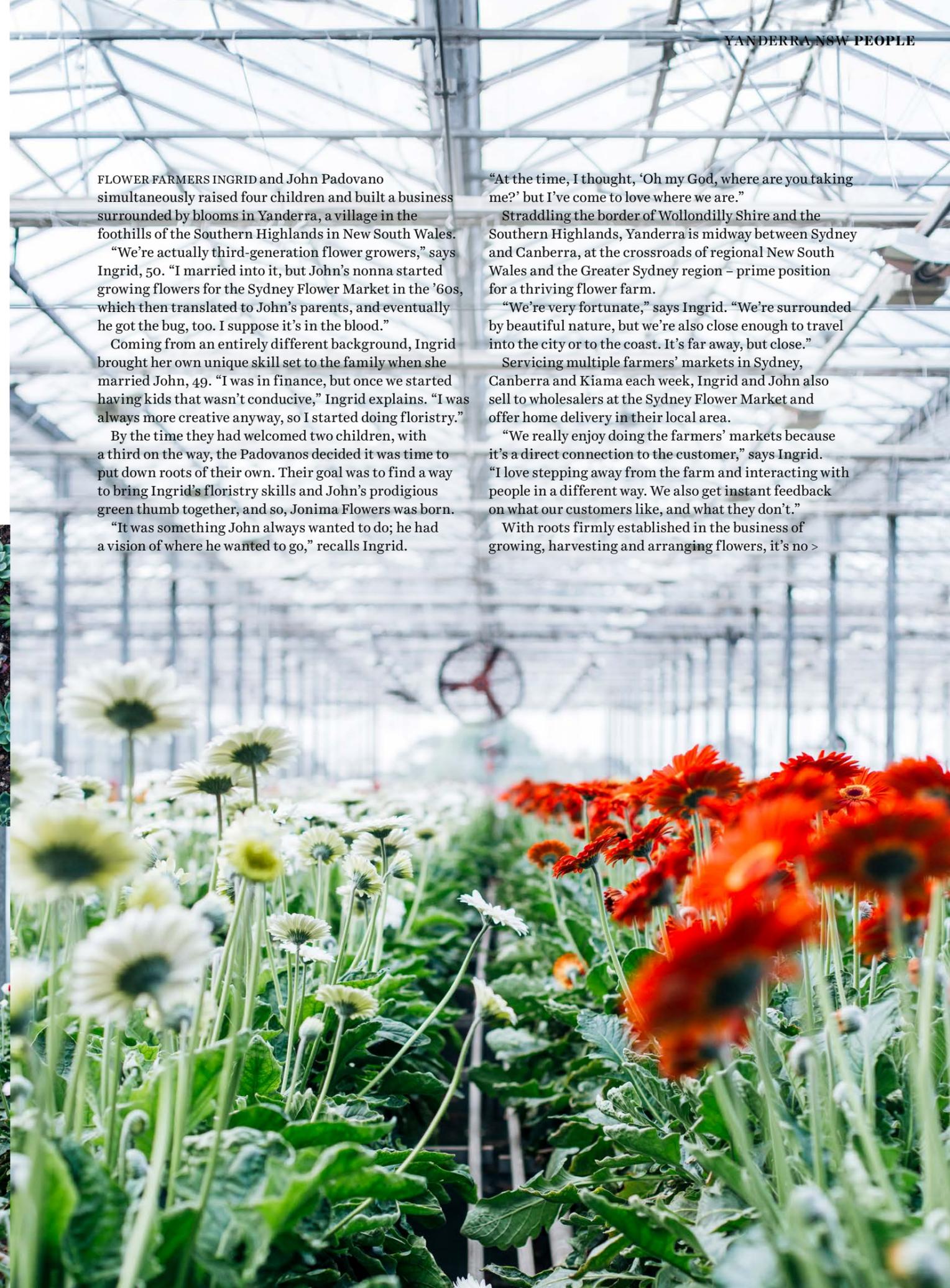
Straddling the border of Wollondilly Shire and the Southern Highlands, Yanderra is midway between Sydney and Canberra, at the crossroads of regional New South Wales and the Greater Sydney region – prime position for a thriving flower farm.

“We’re very fortunate,” says Ingrid. “We’re surrounded by beautiful nature, but we’re also close enough to travel into the city or to the coast. It’s far away, but close.”

Servicing multiple farmers’ markets in Sydney, Canberra and Kiama each week, Ingrid and John also sell to wholesalers at the Sydney Flower Market and offer home delivery in their local area.

“We really enjoy doing the farmers’ markets because it’s a direct connection to the customer,” says Ingrid. “I love stepping away from the farm and interacting with people in a different way. We also get instant feedback on what our customers like, and what they don’t.”

With roots firmly established in the business of growing, harvesting and arranging flowers, it’s no >



“We really enjoy doing the farmers’ markets because it’s a direct connection to the customer.”



Ingrid enjoys the interaction with customers at farmers' markets and finds out which flowers are the most sought after. **FACING** PAGE Rows of beautiful, vivid kangaroo paw.

surprise that a fourth generation of Padovanos is keen to keep the family tradition alive. “The kids have naturally been a part of it from the beginning,” says Ingrid. “As we worked, they were by our side. When we did the farmers’ markets, they were always in tow – our customers have seen them grow up.”

Now almost fully grown, ‘the kids’ include adult children Nicola, 21, and Marco, 20, as well as teenagers Luca, 17, and Daniella, 15. “We wanted Jonima Flowers to be considered a business, not a farm, so the kids could see potential here,” explains Ingrid. “The younger two are still at school, so they’re in and out, but the older two are full-time.”

“We’ve never pushed them. As parents and business owners, it’s about learning how to hone your children’s skills; viewing them as the assets they are. John and I told them they’re free to go off and find other jobs, but they’ve chosen to stay, which feels like justification of our approach.”

Taking a characteristic hands-off approach, Ingrid and John have now stepped back somewhat to let Nicola and Marco find their individual niches in the family trade.

“Nicola is more creative,” says Ingrid. “She’s our sales manager and she also does the bouquets and styling. Marco is a kind of farm manager. He looks after our employees, and works on production and planting. As a mum, it’s nice to see the kids develop and grow, and take over things as the business expands.”

Almost 20 years after making the move from Sydney to Yanderra, the family is looking forward to an exciting future doing more of the same, all while keeping things local, seasonal and sustainable. “We’re advocates for what is locally grown,” says Ingrid. “It’s always been one of our biggest drivers, along with educating people about seasonality and making sustainable choices.”

Fittingly, the Padovano family’s plans for growth don’t detract from their local focus.

“With the kids on board, we’re looking at expanding further into the Southern Highlands, so we can start growing exotics that enjoy the cold weather,” says Ingrid. “Picture *Pieris japonica*, flowering magnolias, blossoms, daphne, hydrangeas and climbing clematis. We’re really excited about this next chapter.” *CS*

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**CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE** Customers love the blend of delphiniums, scabiosas and stative roses; the old farm truck is laden with colourful strelitzia (bird of paradise), stative roses, cornflowers, grevilleas, silver gum, proteas, gerberas, bearded iris, paper daisies and delphiniums; succulents make great gifts; each season brings a variety of cut flowers; John and Ingrid. **FACING PAGE** Silvery, woolly dusty miller lies alongside a bed of sweet william flowers.

