

GROUNDING FORCE

ADAM BRADY AND LIAM AYRES SWAPPED THE CITY FOR CENTRAL VICTORIA, EMBRACING THE COUNTRY'S RHYTHM AND SEASONS.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY LEON SCHOOTS STYLING ADAM BRADY

Adam Brady (left) and Liam Ayres enjoy a walk on their Tooborac property. When building their house, "We wanted to make sure that we took in the view," says Adam. "We wanted lots of big picture windows so we could look out of every window and see a different part of the property. We have no neighbours and we're completely ensconced in the forest."

HOME *Tooborac Vic*

FOR EX-MELBURNIANS ADAM BRADY and Liam Ayres, moving to the tiny town of Tooborac, in central Victoria, has given them the chance to finally slow down. “It’s like a big exhale,” says Adam, 44. “It’s so calming and grounding – moving here has made us such homebodies.” The countrified couple put the brakes on their fast-faced city lives six years ago and are now firmly established in their local community. Adam owns the Heathcote General Trader, a treasure-trove of hand-picked home goods in neighbouring Heathcote, while Liam’s corporate job sees him split his week between his home office, Melbourne and nearby Bendigo.

Initially, the duo was drawn to Heathcote based on a family connection. “Liam has family history up here,” says Adam.

“His family immigrated to the area from Ireland in the ’50s.” Liam, 41, who teaches Irish dancing on the weekends, adds: “There’s actually an Ayres Street in Heathcote that’s named after the family.”

Ancestry aside, it was really the beauty of the region’s ranges and forests that captivated the couple, who settled on five hectares just south of Heathcote in Tooborac, on the traditional lands of the Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people.

“As soon as we drove up the hill on this property, we saw exactly where we wanted to put the house – overlooking the beautiful ranges behind,” recalls Adam. “We just stood there and said, ‘This is ours.’”

Once the location of their would-be home was decided, the hard part started for the pair, who began building just as the pandemic was taking hold in 2020. “Living in the city while the house was being built was the biggest challenge,” explains Adam. “We never got to walk through the house while it was being built, so we didn’t know what it was going to be, really.”

When restrictions eased, Adam and Liam would pack their tent and stay onsite on weekends, but making decisions based on little more than photos from the builders meant the final product felt a little off. “As soon as we moved here, we decided to change it,” says Adam. “Our style changed from the moment we got here because *we* changed as people.” >

FROM LEFT “We wanted something that was the right size for us,” says Liam (below, holding pet dog Finbar). “Even though we have a large property, we don’t need a big sprawling house.”; a charcoal sketch by local artist Charmaine Virgona features in the dining room, along with a botanical wreath by Elsa Thorp. The walls are painted in a nature-inspired Grounded shade by Haymes Paint. Chairs from OneWorld Collection surround the vintage dining table, while a fishing basket, from Green Chair Vintage in Bendigo, has been repurposed as a pendant light.



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FROM TOP A glossy *Monstera deliciosa* thrives indoors; dried flowers are artfully displayed. FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Old and new decor blends harmoniously, with a vintage score number and timecard rack from Elmore Vintage Emporium, bottles from Bendigo Pottery Antiques and a wire basket from Heathcote General Trader; papillon-cross Finbar is simply adorable; Liam and Adam chose Laminex Battalion for the kitchen cabinets. "It feels both grounded and welcoming," Adam says of the kitchen. "Deep charcoal anchors the space, while timber brings warmth and a simple white benchtop keeps it balanced."



Shedding their 'city style' meant embracing earthier colours and textures that were more in tune with their new surroundings. "Originally, the house was all-white on the inside, but we realised that wasn't for us," says Adam. "We thought, 'Let's make it a bit darker and cosier, and let's bring in nature more'."

Blurring the line between inside and out, their new scheme features neutral and green tones, aged timber and indoor plants. "We wanted to make sure we have all those exterior elements inside the house," explains Liam. "We're both very much nature people, so we wanted to make it like a continuous space." Practical inclusions, such as hardwood flooring and natural finishes, make the modest 140-square-metre home well suited to the mud, mess and movement of country life.

The perfect foil for their carefully designed home is the couple's extensive garden, which is as much a part of their lifestyle as their dwelling. "We actually started some of the garden work before the house was finished," says Liam. "We were so excited to start... and it's certainly ever-changing."

Although they wage a constant battle against the local wildlife and the weather, both find tending to their vegies, native plants and flowers a source of great joy. "It's our unwind time at the end of the day," says Adam. "We'll sit in the kitchen garden with a glass of wine and do a bit of weeding, potter around with the dog [Finbar, an 11-year-old papillon-cross], pick some food, and chat about the day."

With no plans to change anything about their home or garden, Adam and Liam are happy for their country idyll to evolve naturally, giving them time to appreciate their new-found connection to the landscape. "It will just be a gentle evolution. We're not trying to add too much to the list - we just want to enjoy living and slowing down," says Adam. "But we are looking forward to seeing what the garden looks like in 10 years' time when all the trees grow and everything establishes itself." *CL*

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“The beauty of the area really struck us,” says Liam of their first impression of the property. “It was the open space, and it’s lovely and quiet.” **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** Shapely cacti stand tall; Liam and Adam have 10 barnevelder chickens; the kitchen garden holds vegies, herbs and flowers; “It’s always exciting when you need carrots for dinner and we can go and grab them from the garden,” says Liam; the garden continues to take shape; rustic touches add charm; “The garden is always evolving because it’s a very challenging area to grow anything,” says Adam. “We’re always battling the wildlife and the weather. We wanted to landscape with as many natives as possible – working with the environment rather than against it.”





CLOCKWISE, FROM FAR LEFT The Heatilator wood stove works its magic in winter. Chair and brass pot from Mudwood Studio; a painting by Adam rests on an old science lab desk, alongside a white vase from Mudwood Studio and a jug from Heathcote General Trader. Kangaroos, from Studio Australia, hop along the wall; *The Gondolier* by Dominik Skutecky hangs above the bed from Provincial Home Living, with a Mama and Tochter throw, tartan cushions by Riva Paoletti and linen from Adairs. Lights from Fat Shack Vintage; an original cotton wall hanging by Adam makes a beautiful backdrop; basin by New Form Concreting with Caroma taps; vintage sieves from The Amazing Mill Markets Daylesford adorn the living room wall. The sofa, from Harvey Norman, holds cushions by Mama and Tochter, Rustic Linen and Madras Link, all from Heathcote General Trader. Rug from Zebra Home.

