

WORLD'S END

LYING EMPTY FOR YEARS, AN 1840S COTTAGE ON BRUNY ISLAND IS BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE WITH AN AWARD-WINNING RESTORATION.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY TREVOR MEIN

The new living area in Captain Kelly's Cottage, situated on Bruny Island in Tasmania, lies between the existing kitchen and bedrooms, and features custom-made furniture and innovative built-in pieces. **FACING PAGE** In the 1840s, Captain James Kelly's whaling crew constructed the cottage during the off-season.

HOME Bruny Island Tas



BEFORE ARCHITECT JOHN WARDLE bought Captain Kelly's Cottage, on Tasmania's windswept Bruny Island, the historic home had undergone a series of haphazard renovations, leaving it lacking authenticity and genuine character. "The original cottage was deteriorating due to its age and the harsh environment," says John. "Over 175 years there had been several unsympathetic alterations. Our work involved the removal of these non-original works, to respectfully return the cottage to its original form."

Purchasing the cottage and associated sheep farm, called Waterview, more than 20 years ago, John took a decade to properly observe and acclimatise to the home's idiosyncrasies before beginning the restoration in 2015. "Between the time that we bought the property and commencing the works, I was researching and designing how the cottage might take shape – through reading, travelling and visiting other historic homes," says John. "The luxury of having lived in the cottage for 10 years prior to beginning the refurbishment paid dividends."

The cottage's original floor plan consisted of two small structures – one containing four bedrooms, and the other a kitchen surrounded by a wide verandah. The first phase of reconstruction involved peeling back layers of neglect and decay, and meticulously removing all non-original additions. This painstaking process revealed a glorious patchwork of heritage features and materials from the 1840s, including mortice and tenon joints, nogged brick walls, aged timber panels, original paintwork and even newspaper clippings. Instead of covering these, John chose to reveal them in sections, creating a tangible link to the building's origins.

A new living area was inserted between the two structures to create a modern layout responsive to current building standards and spatial expectations. Four bedrooms were

reinstated, along with a single shared bathroom. Blurring the line between old and new, layered soffit details and exposed ceiling rafters extend from the existing sections through to the updated entry and living spaces. "In effect, the verandah extends and encapsulates the new works, tying new and old together," says John.

A sleeping beauty reawakened gently, Captain Kelly's Cottage has been reimagined so seamlessly that it's impossible to separate the old and new; it's a heritage restoration and a modern dwelling simultaneously. John's respect for the cottage's beginnings is evident, and his nuanced approach to modernisation has brought the home's past to life while catering to present-day life effortlessly.

"Overarchingly, I felt a duty to be true and authentic to the cottage, its history and its place on the island," he says. "What began as a simple exercise in renovation became a historic and personal undertaking – to reveal the original character of the cottage and to create contemporary living spaces for family life."

Buffeted by the tiny island's near-constant winds and watery surrounds, the cottage's isolated location, on the traditional lands of the Nuenonne people, made it >

FROM LEFT John shucks delicious oysters; an innovative seat emerges seamlessly from the wall. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** "The beauty of the place captivated us. With next to no experience running a sheep farm, we jumped in," says John; the verandah connects the new and original structures.

PHOTO OF JOHN WARDLE GABRIELLE CONNOLLE



“The challenge was getting materials and trades to the site as it’s located on an island, off an island.”



a tricky renovation to execute. “The location provided a bit of extra logistical gymnastics,” explains John. “The challenge was getting materials and trades to the site as it’s located on an island, off an island.” Balancing his loyalty to local tradespeople with his pursuit of excellence, John invested the time to lead, guide and inspire his team effectively.

While the Wardle family primarily reside in Melbourne, where John’s architectural practice, Wardle Studio, is based, they seek out opportunities to visit the secluded cottage as often as possible. “In some respects, Captain Kelly’s Cottage is a holiday home, but it’s so much more to me and my family,” says John. “We’ve owned the property since 2002 and operate a working sheep farm of 440 hectares; we try to spend as much time there as we can.”

A world away from city life, the cottage and adjoining property allow them to experience life at a different cadence. “The opportunity to decompress and immerse ourselves in the life of Waterview is incredibly rewarding, and we enjoy being part of the community in North Bruny,” adds John.

Captivated from the beginning by North Bruny Island’s wild and untamed beauty, John says his slow and considered approach to this restoration, which has earned him a swag of trophies, was well worth the effort.

“It is an honour to have been acknowledged widely in the profession for the labour of love on Captain Kelly’s,” he says. “But overwhelmingly, it’s a joy to share the cottage and the property with family and friends, which we have done over many years and will continue to do.”

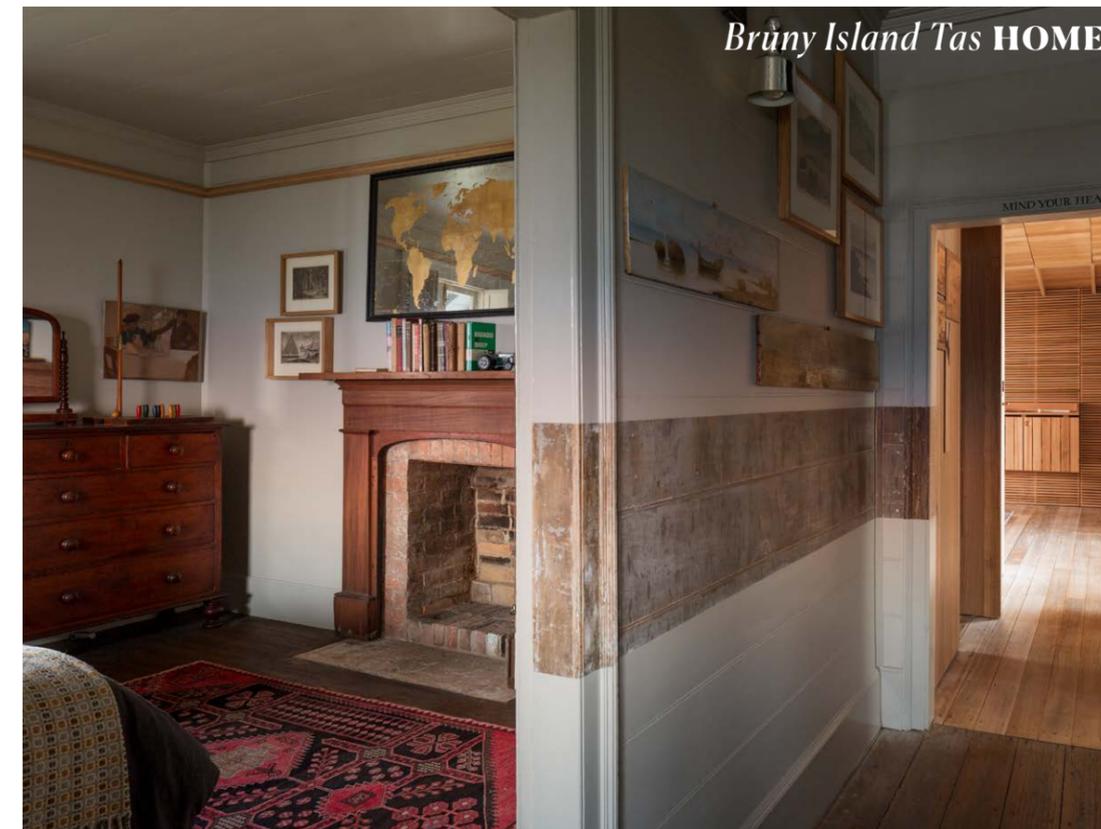
And with the renovation well and truly complete, he adds, “There’s little left to do now but enjoy it.” *CB*

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“The heritage of the building was an important factor in the restoration; it was a very gentle approach to bringing the building up to contemporary building standards,” says John. **FACING PAGE** Constructed with timber and bricks, the rustic, spacious kitchen holds a variety of earthenware.



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT The view from the new living room in Captain Kelly's Cottage follows the arc of the bay; extensive research was undertaken into the history of the dwelling and property – from logbooks to original diaries; "The historic cottage was the only dwelling in situ when we purchased the property and is now our main dwelling," says John; timeworn timber; John enjoys inviting family and friends to the property, and also manages guest accommodation: "We're able to share the stories, history and spectacular beauty of the property more widely."



ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- John Wardle's team found evidence that Waterview was one of the first land grants awarded to Captain James Kelly, a well-known mercantile adventurer, in the 1820s.
- The building work was completed by Cordwell Built; cordwellbuilt.com.au
- In 2018, Captain Kelly's Cottage was awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Award for International Excellence.

TAKING SHAPE...

Photos taken before the renovation and mid-construction reveal the scope of the work involved.



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BEFORE PHOTOS CHRIS CRERAR AND JOHN WARDLE

Fire pits blaze beneath the night sky, while a new chimney delivers warmth to the sheltered courtyard space. **FACING PAGE** Renovations begin at the cottage. "We were fortunate to have our friend [architectural historian] John Matthews on site during the demolition," says John. "He researched and documented what was revealed of the original structure – many stories and building techniques were discovered and these informed the rebuild."