

AUSTRALIA COAST TO COAST

OCTOBER 2009

# COUNTRY STYLE

*Back to basics*

ESCAPE THE  
EVERYDAY

A bush nurse makes  
Jane McGrath's  
dream come true

ROOM TO GROW  
DAYLESFORD LURES  
A UK FAMILY HOME

100  
years in  
a Bellingen  
house



## SIMPLE PLEASURES

\* A COOKING SCHOOL IN TASMANIA

\* AFTERNOON TEA WITH THE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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## my country childhood

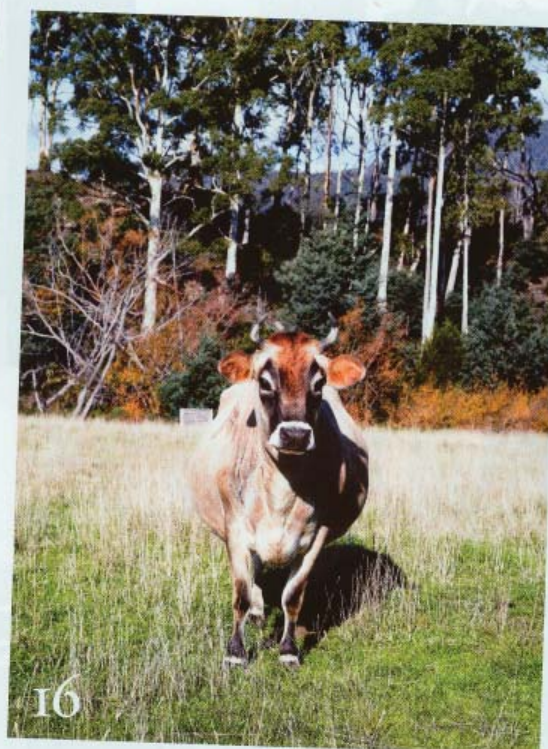
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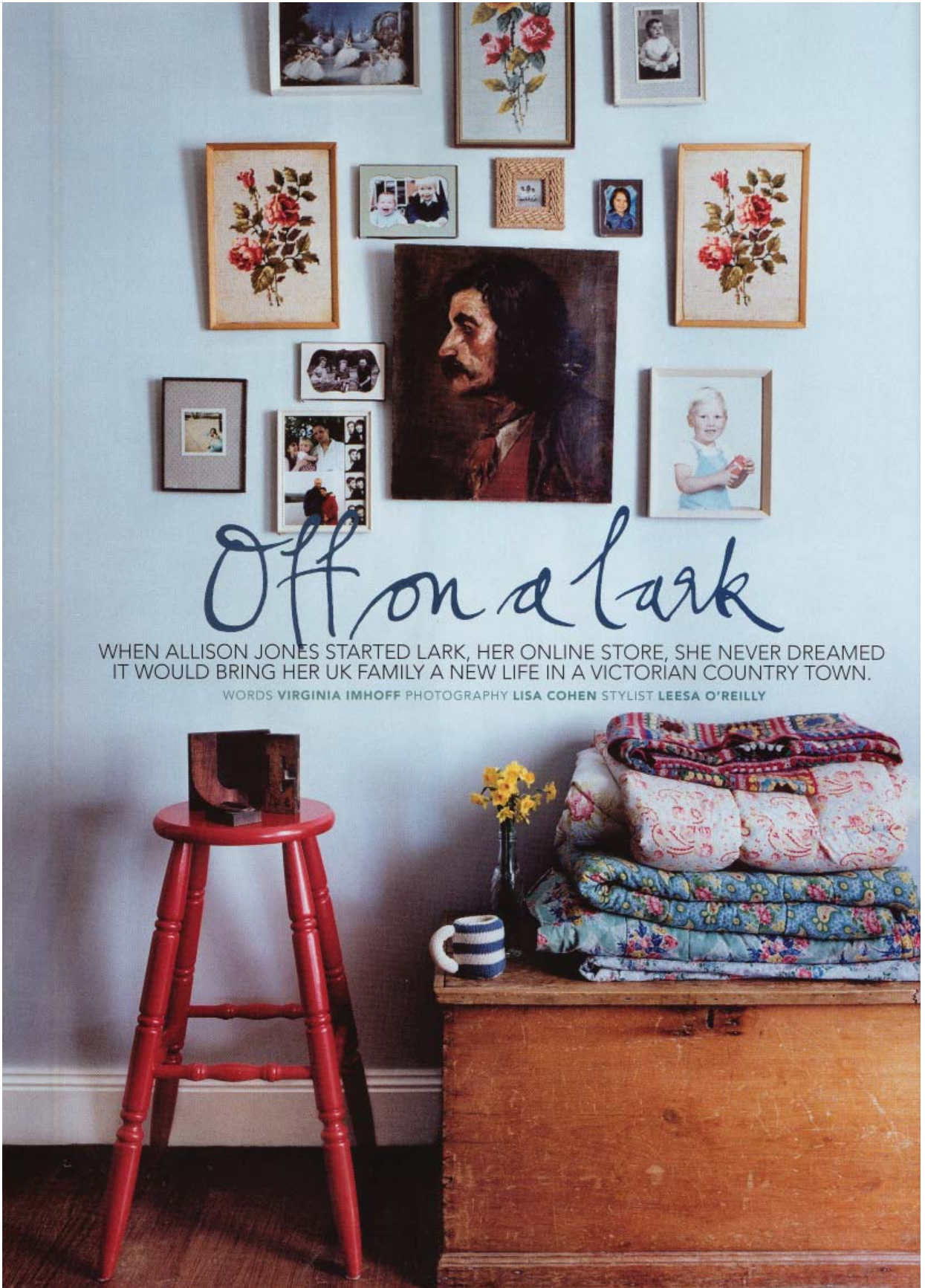


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# COUNTRY STYLE



## Off on a lark

WHEN ALLISON JONES STARTED LARK, HER ONLINE STORE, SHE NEVER DREAMED IT WOULD BRING HER UK FAMILY A NEW LIFE IN A VICTORIAN COUNTRY TOWN.

WORDS VIRGINIA IMHOFF PHOTOGRAPHY LISA COHEN STYLIST LEESA O'REILLY

# COUNTRY STYLE



DAYLESFORD VICTORIA | home

Allison with sons Jacob (left) and Jules, who can't wait to try their freshly baked cakes. **FACING PAGE** Family photographs, needlepoint samples and a portrait from an op shop hang above a stack of vintage quilts.

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**THE JOURNEY THAT** brought Allison Jones and Paul Matthews halfway round the world shows how simple, old-fashioned values can blossom thanks to modern, cutting-edge technology.

What they wanted was a simpler, less stressed life, with plenty of wide open spaces for their two young sons — and what made it all possible was the internet. Allison's online business Lark could operate in rural Victoria just as easily as England, and the couple even found their new home in Daylesford while browsing the net from Cambridge.

Nevertheless, this was not quite a blind leap of faith. Though Allison, 41, is British-born, Paul is a Bendigo boy; the couple had not only already lived in Victoria, but had visited Daylesford and liked the town.

Allison and Paul, an art historian, met while he was working on a doctorate at Cambridge in the late 1980s. The couple moved to Melbourne for seven years before returning to the UK, where the boys — Jacob, now 8, and Jules, 6 — were born. Nine years later they were ready to return to Australia.

"We felt it was time for a change for the family and Paul was keen for the boys to experience Australia," Allison says. "We were living in Cambridge in a 16th-century pub, but we had a huge mortgage and the boys weren't really experiencing the country and nature. Here there's space for our family, and for our business, to grow. >

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT A reproduction wartime print sits in front of a feature wall covered in Cole & Son wallpaper; the table is set for fun with Lark's knitted tea set; the house was originally two cottages. FACING PAGE Allison designed the kitchen at the back of the house.



# COUNTRY STYLE

DAYLESFORD VICTORIA | home

“We were living in Cambridge in a 16th-century pub, but we had a huge mortgage and the boys weren’t really experiencing the country and nature.”



# COUNTRY STYLE

home | DAYLESFORD VICTORIA



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Retro knit and crochet pot holders hang above a table covered with a vintage cloth; old wallpapers in op-shop frames adorn a wall in the main bedroom; bright olive-oil cans make attractive planters on the verandah.

“We love Daylesford. It’s beautiful, there’s a young community — and everyone



“We had thought about different towns in Victoria but we loved Daylesford. It’s beautiful, there’s a young community — and everyone seems to want to be more self-sufficient with a big garden and chickens.”

There’s room on the 140-year-old property for the family to raise chooks and grow chokos, though Allison is happy to declare that Daylesford is far from a rural backwater — “I’m a city girl and I love going to bookshops, but there was enough going on here for me to be happy.”

Just to make sure, she packed up her English job and brought it with her. After a long career in publishing — “I’ve worked for all the academic presses over 15 years” — Allison turned a life-long interest in craft into a part-time career. Launched in 2004, Lark, which sells handmade toys and accessories, soon grew from a hobby into a fully fledged business.

She started with children’s clothes fashioned from vintage fabrics, then expanded with nostalgic badges and pocket mirrors depicting classic illustrations from childhood storybooks.

“Lark’ with its joyous, playful connotations is an apt description. “I love vintage images and I started collecting things that I loved — knitting books, for instance — and pulling together ideas of what Lark could become,” Allison says. “Then I connected with an English woman

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CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Handmade throws and 1960s travel posters give the living room a colourful touch; a steel office cupboard with an ancient typewriter and reproduction poster; a dresser holds Allison's collection of vintage linen and china.



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who teaches knitting to women in Bangladesh so they can be productive and sustainable in their own communities, rather than go into factories.

“Knitted toys are now our best thing. They knit all the products that I design — and luckily, with her being English, when I say ‘I want a Cornish tea set’, she gets it!”

With Paul ready to join her in the business, the discovery that the Daylesford house was actually two semi-detached dwellings was a bonus.

“We bought it because we could make one of the cottages our home and use the other for the business,” Allison explains. The two gable-roofed cottages, each with a maze of tiny rooms, are joined at the front by a central hallway. With only a limited budget for renovations, Allison and Paul set up Lark at the back of one of the houses, then started on the one next door, knocking seven small rooms into one space for the family kitchen, dining and sitting room. They resurrected a fireplace in the sitting room, and took up concreted floors and laid boards in their place.

“We had to get this room sorted first,” Allison says. “From then on we did it as we could afford it; it’s all put together in a very low-cost, DIY way.”

A self-confessed “thrift-o-holic”, recycler and collector of domestic linen, eiderdowns, vintage pictures, posters and >



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green matters

## TEA CLEVER

*Why buy new when clever recycling around the home can add colour and character, as well as save you money? Allison Matthews, whose house you can admire on page 32, is a big fan of re-using items. "It conserves resources and there's a unique charm you can often only find in something that has history attached to it," Allison says. These Twinings tea tins (left) have been turned into pretty windowsill herb planters: "I'm British and a big tea drinker, so I really love them!"*

## GREEN MATTERS

VIRGINIA IMHOFF ON SUSTAINABLE LIVING.

### Some bamboos are greener than others

While bamboo fabric is touted as eco-friendly, harsh chemicals are often used to transform the fibres into yarn. Be sure to look for organic accreditation when choosing bamboo cloth, as this signals that only mechanical pulping and natural solvents have been used in production.

*Ride to Work Day* Join the peddling throng on Wednesday, October 14, and improve your own wellbeing — and that of the planet. Register to ride with [www.ridetowork.com.au](http://www.ridetowork.com.au)

## STEPHANIE'S KIDS GO NATIONAL

Thanks to the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, thousands of Victorian schoolchildren are growing their own produce and preparing delicious meals to share with friends and family. Recently the initiative went national and about 190 primary schools across Australia will receive funding to set up their own gardens. For more information about the program or Stephanie's book, *Kitchen Garden Companion*, call (03) 8415 1993 or visit [www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au](http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au)



## NEW SHINGLES FROM OLD FENCES

BRETT SMITH LOVES TO GIVE NEW LIFE TO WOODEN FENCES BY CUTTING THEM INTO SHINGLES TO MAKE CLADDING FOR EAVES AND GABLES, GATES AND FEATURE PANELS (RIGHT). "THE ROT IS USUALLY IN THE BIT OF PALING THAT HAS BEEN NAILED TO THE RAIL AND WHEN WE CUT THAT OUT WE'RE LEFT WITH ABOUT 50 CENTIMETRES OF GOOD TIMBER SHINGLE." BRETT SAYS. "THERE'S ALL SORTS OF USES FOR THEM." 0422 211 949. [TIMBERTEXTURES@LIVE.COM.AU](http://TIMBERTEXTURES@LIVE.COM.AU)

