



creative people

ALLISON JONES AND PAUL MATTHEWS LARK, DAYLESFORD

When Allison Jones and Paul Matthews decided their life in Cambridge, England had lost its appeal, they thought about moving to France or Italy, but couldn't figure out how to make a living there. Instead, they packed up their "cute 17th century cottage" and their busy, creative lives (Paul worked in a museum and Allison in publishing) and moved half-way around the world to Daylesford, country Victoria.

"We'd lived in Melbourne before and really missed the place," explains British-born Allison "Paul's Australian and grew up in Bendigo. He liked the idea of bringing our kids up in the country, but was worried that he and I would struggle being city dwellers."

While the two discussed their next move, some "lovely London shops" began showing interest in Allison's side business Lark - a tiny enterprise making little dresses from vintage fabrics and badges from old storybooks. After selling a few items, Allison dreamt that working on Lark full-time from home, anywhere in the world, could be a possibility.

"I guess it was one of those times in your life when everything just comes together. Lark was taking off, I was offered a redundancy package at work and our youngest son was due to start school. Daylesford offered a place where we could both work on Lark as a family business and not have to worry about mortgages and house prices."

After "taking a deep breath" Allison and Paul - along with their two young sons - hopped on a plane and headed into the unknown. "I can remember driving through the forest that separates Daylesford and Melbourne and thinking, 'Gee, I hope this works out!'"

Three years later, Allison and her family couldn't imagine living anywhere else. "Daylesford has been a great place to make friends and bring up a family. It's beautiful country around here, with luscious forest, a big sky, and lots of pretty little country towns to explore. The locals and other people who've moved here for a 'tree change' make it a really interesting place to live."

And being able to work on Lark full-time has meant the business has grown as Allison imagined. It's also allowed her to launch Lark & Friends - a craft collective that helps indie designers sell their products more widely around Australia.

"These days we design handmade toys and all manner of cute accessories, including soaps, pocket mirrors and stationery. Everything in Lark is made by us, by local people, or by a group of women in Bangladesh who we have been working with for four years. They are really amazing and our work with them, which has Fair Trade accreditation, has enabled them to build essential community facilities, including schools and midwife centres."

And, says Allison, it's all thanks to Daylesford. "Living here has enabled our family and our business to grow into something that we're really happy with, without the pressures of city life."

www.larkmade.com.au, www.the-lark.blogspot.com