


OUR PIECE OF COUNTRY

A SYDNEY FAMILY FOUND THE LAND, THEN LET IT SHAPE
THE HOME AND GARDEN THAT COULD SIT THERE BEST.

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Silver birches underplanted with coastal rosemary echo the silvery grey-green of the surrounding landscape. The house and garden were designed to take advantage of the spectacular view out to the ranges and Mount Canobolas.



MANY WHO QUIT THE CITY do so because they've found a home that captures their imagination. Others decide on a region, then look for a house. And some, like Andrew and Catriona Gilmore, simply start looking at the countryside until a piece of it says, 'Let's build here'.

Andrew, a surgeon, led the move to the Central West of NSW, while Catriona, also a doctor in hospital practice, stayed behind with their three children in Sydney. Andrew started work in Orange in mid-1999 and spent his free time looking for land. For six months he followed what he calls "the spokes", the roads leading out of town — and eventually found a hundred hectares that looked like heaven.

"We knew straight away where the house should go — on this north-facing hill above the two old box trees," Andrew recalls. The couple engaged architect Caroline Pidcock, a specialist in environmentally sustainable design. Her brief was "to design a modern house with passive solar design to fit well in the position above the trees with the kitchen being the focus of family life". The Gilmores were more than happy with the results when, in mid-2003, they finally moved in, but now they needed a garden to match — one which, Andrew says, had an equal degree of "green eco cred".

At first Andrew tried to make everything happen himself, even though he's the first to admit, "We're not very sophisticated gardeners." Perhaps 'ad hoc' is the best description. It certainly fits the occasion when Andrew went to a charity ball and auction and ended up the proud owner of 80 assorted trees and two concrete lions. ("The lions are still in the garage but the trees are going well!" he says with a smile.)

Then inspiration arrived. Murray Bail's celebrated novel, *Eucalyptus*, had won the Miles Franklin Award in 1999: this tale of a man who seeks to plant a sample of every type of gum tree fired Andrew's imagination, and gum trees in great variety started to appear all over the Gilmores' property.

"I guess we do have a bit of an arboretum," Andrew says happily. "Especially if we include the driveway... I've just counted off at least 65 species of eucalypt just in my head!"

While Andrew happily admits to the 'ad hoc' label — "We were just creating beds close to the house and working our way out" — his medical >

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Existing box gums were carefully retained and underplanted with low mounding plants such as silver cotton lavender and coastal rosemary, punctuated by ornamental grasses; Angus, Campbell, Andrew, Louise and Catriona with the family's poodles; the house's orientation to the sun aids the passive solar design.



The contrasting forms and colours of the strappy flax lily, lime-green leucadendron and white cornes make an interesting year-round composition.



background may also have accustomed him to using specialists at crucial stages. The seeds gathered from near and far weren't cast casually about the property, but handed to the Windyhill nursery in Orange, which brought them to seedling stage. And when Andrew realised that he was battling adverse climate conditions, and that a haphazard approach to plantings was easily decimated by drought, he sought more skilled help.

However, he discovered that few professionals made a point of becoming involved in country projects. "I went to the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects' website, but only one — Rodney Cox from Huon Designs — expressed an interest in rural gardens."

Rodney was indeed interested, and accepted an elaborate brief that specified breaking the garden into child-friendly rooms; the establishment of wind-sheltered areas; the retention of the property's fabulous northern and eastern tree-framed views; a large food production area — orchard, vegetable garden and chicken run — not to mention multiple planting areas where the Gilmores intended to grow natives and a few exotics. ("Recently we've been getting into banksias, grevilleas and woolly bush," Andrew confides. "But if the truth be known, much of what we grow is from Bunnings!")

"Rodney was excellent," Andrews says, returning to the landscaping saga. "He built the walls himself, using stones from the surrounding paddocks, and did low retainers with vertical old sleepers — the fluid curves fit the curve of the hill very well. And this was all while he was designing and supervising the rest of the landscaping."

The Gilmores are keen to minimise 'food miles' and hope that the kitchen garden will become their main source of seasonal fruit and vegetables. "The two younger children" — Louisa, 8, and Campbell, 5 — "are interested in the vegie garden," Andrew says. However Angus, 11, is "more into cricket".

But the whole family enjoy their beautiful piece of country, on which the house and garden sit lightly. And Andrew is keen to keep adding gums, though without the obsession of his *Eucalyptus* inspiration. There are, after all, more than 600 species in Australia he has yet to collect... *

ABOVE The entrance of the house is planted with bright red leucadendrons and soft wattles which are the perfect interface with the distant paddocks in view. LEFT The steps, built and designed by landscape architect Rodney Cox, lead Louisa up to a lawn terrace.

