



**THE CONSTANT GARDENER**  
THE ROMANTIC, RUSTIC BEAUTY OF GLENMORE HOUSE AND ITS VAST GARDENS IS TESTAMENT TO THE HARD WORK AND VISION OF ITS OWNERS.

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**GLENMORE NSW GARDEN**

Glenmore House owner Mickey Robertson says: "The garden looks best early in the morning, or in the afternoon when the light is changing. You get that softness in those magical moments of dawn and dusk." **FACING PAGE** A rainbow of hydrangeas.





AN AMBLE THROUGH THE GARDENS at Glenmore House offers a series of enriched sensory moments. These are amplified when you take that walk with the vivacious Mickey Robertson, a self-taught gardener and the heart of all activity at Glenmore. Once a city-dwelling interior designer who lived by the ritual of buying herself a generous flower arrangement every Friday evening, Mickey is now immersed in the world of flowers and colourful seasonal plantings.

The property spans 12 hectares of undulating land in Glenmore, nestled into the foothills of Razorback Mountain on the outskirts of Sydney. After purchasing Glenmore House in 1988, Mickey and her husband, Larry, would visit on weekends, driving from their home in Sydney's eastern suburbs. They were determined to revive the 1850s-era, sandstone farmhouse and the handful of dilapidated buildings surrounding it.

The tumbledown structures were haphazardly placed among long-forgotten garden beds and established trees. "It had been a dairy farm, and while you could sense the enchantment, it was actually a real mess," says Mickey. "Everything was a bit skew-whiff."

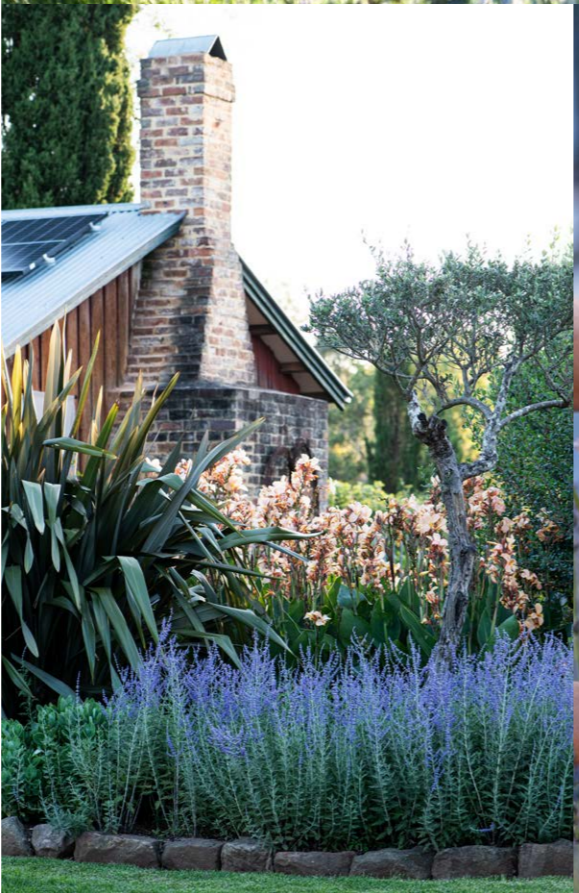
After seven years of arduous weekend working bees, the Robertsons made a permanent move to Glenmore and continued to transform the land as they raised their two daughters, Clementine and Bonnie (now aged 32 and 26 respectively). "It was a big leap from a tiny cottage in Woollahra and a completely different way of life," Mickey says. "If we hadn't moved permanently, I'd still be decorating and looking at gardens from a completely different perspective."

Shaped by Mickey's fascination with botanicals and Larry's big-picture thinking, the grounds now feel connected to the architecture. Pathways, hedges, fruit trees, rustic fences, lush lawns and herbaceous parcels are all carefully placed to link the revived buildings. "The orchard relates to the hay shed, and the kitchen garden relates to the dairy," explains Mickey. "The borders link the dairy with the pool and stables, and they lead us through the hedge towards the house, where the gardens become a little bit more elegant."

While the past 30-plus years at Glenmore have been about creating cohesion and, inadvertently, establishing >



**CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT**  
 "Each area in the garden has a different ambience," says Mickey; agave plants, which hark back to colonisation, flank the house. "I decided that the plants here needed to be handsome rather than pretty. I felt we needed to anchor the house in the time in which it was built," says Mickey; pastel petals; a bell on the barn; a serene spot to catch the morning sun; freshly cut roses; bronze flax and Russian sage.

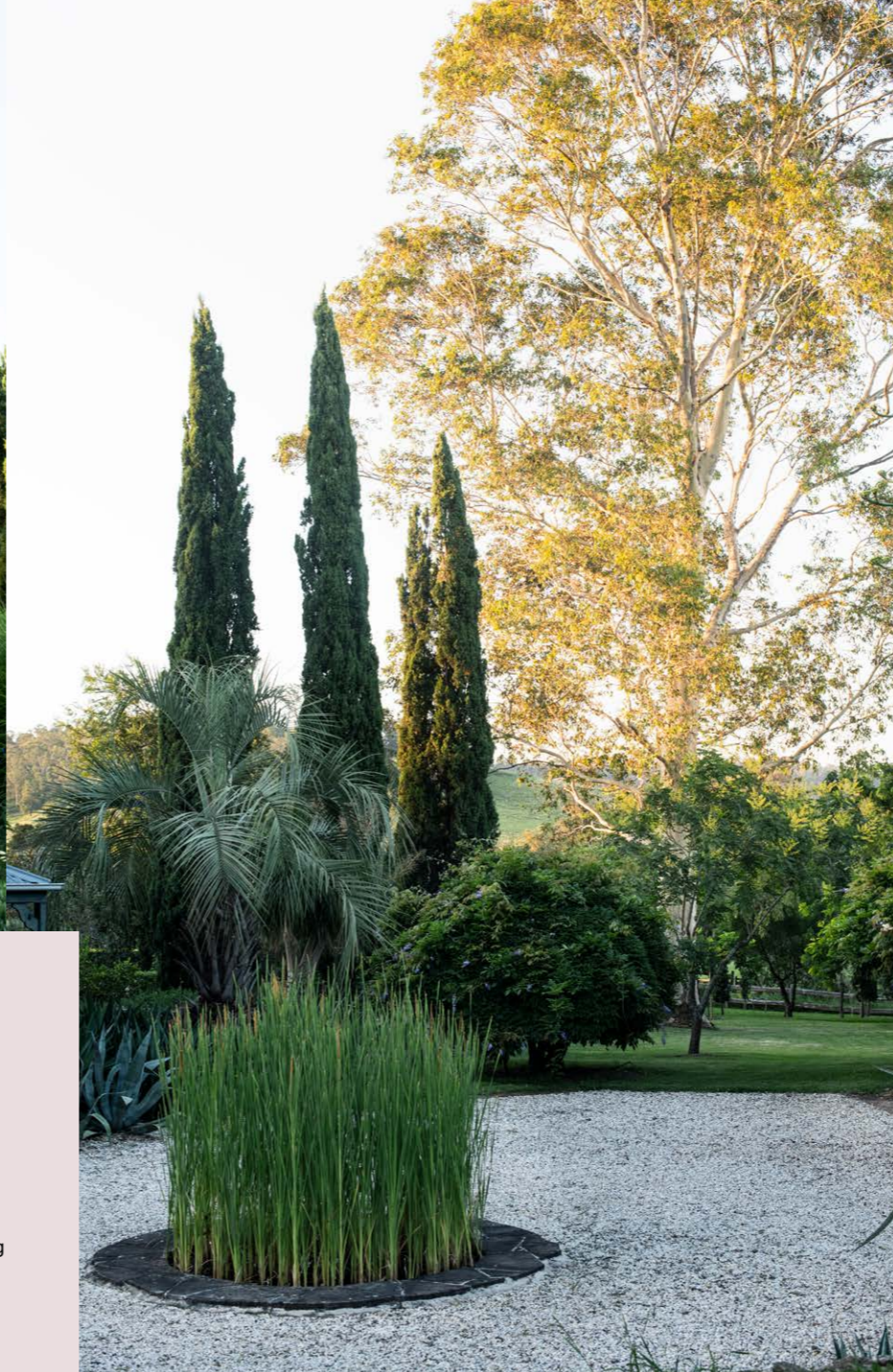




“The garden spills away from the house and down to the creek, where it’s a whole other world.”

Contrasting textures and juxtapositions bring energy, but overall the garden exudes a feeling of calm. “It wasn’t a garden made for the public, but for us to enjoy in the down moments – the stolen moments in between,” says Mickey.





**CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT**  
 A unique microclimate allows Mickey to grow her favourite plant varieties from across the world; wild bulrush in the pond; the historic sandstone cottage; pretty canna lilies; "I love chaos and wildness... within order. If it were all neat and tidy, I'd go bonkers. I need things to be a bit mad," says Mickey; an enchanting path leads to the barn; striking cardoon thistles.



a popular destination for gardening and lifestyle events and workshops, the next phase will focus on connecting the gardens to the landscape beyond the gates. "Until last year, this really was the end of the garden," says Mickey, referring to a field that stretches from the vegie beds to the back creek. "The rest of the garden is mature and balanced now, and the buildings talk to each other. Everything has its place and ticks over according to its season. While I take enormous pleasure in each and every pocket of the garden, it's here in the field that I get super excited."

Since Mickey's first visit to Glenmore, romantic visions of row upon row of flowers have been swirling in the back of her mind, as has the concept of distilling fragrant botanical water. These ideas have converged in the back field, where a series of long, mounded rows form Mickey's burgeoning flower farm. A cavalcade of heritage roses, lavender and other selected aromatics, such as rose geranium and apple pelargonium, are settling into the soil. The final row, closest to the creek, will be planted with native aromatics found in the surrounding terrain.

"The gardens around the house are very representative of Larry and me," Mickey says. "The garden spills away from the house and down to the creek, where it's a whole other world. The final row in this open space puts us back into the landscape, creating a stronger connection, visually and via scent."

Mickey uses a traditional copper alembic still to create her small-batch scented water and intends to work only with plants grown at Glenmore. "The point is to capture and share the essence of the garden on a tiny scale," she says. "The botanical water gives the experience of walking through the garden, when the scent is there for a minute, and then it's gone. It's the ephemerality that I love."

Orange blossom and rose geranium were the first successful runs, but there is one elusive scent Mickey would love to bottle. "It's a smell that all gardeners relate to," she says with a smile. "It's random plant material and soil, adding up to this explosion of scent that gives us a hit of energy, almost like a drug. It keeps gardeners coming back for more, and it does something rather wonderful to your brain." *CS*

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