

HOME ST HELENS TAS

While it's picture-perfect today, when Michael and Amanda Skipper bought their historic home in St Helens, Tasmania, the verandah was enclosed. They opened it up, but retained the lovely original fretwork and posts. Galvanised iron roofing was also installed.

the history of home

THE GENTLE RENOVATION OF THIS 19TH-CENTURY COTTAGE IN ST HELENS, TAS, REVEALED LAYERS IN TIME.

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The sparkling sea lies just beyond the cottage entrance. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** "My favourite spot is the front verandah," says Amanda, pictured with Skip and their daughter's border collie, Caamp. "I spend most mornings having a cup of tea on the verandah."; the kitchen has recycled hardwood benchtops, and an antique sink from Evandale Antiques.



UNDERSTANDING THE PAST to pave a meaningful way forward is a philosophy that Amanda Skipper, 59, holds dearly. The vintage curator lives on Tasmania's east coast with her husband Michael, 60, a keen sailor and retired builder known to all as 'Skip'. Their circa-1830 home sits on a hill just outside St Helens, on the traditional lands of the Kunnarra Kuna people, with an expansive outlook soaked in the still, oyster-laden waters of Georges Bay. Since purchasing the cottage, set on four hectares, in 2017, the couple has painstakingly and tenderly revived the dwelling, revealing its history in the process.

"When people rip something out of an old home, it's not coming back. Everything had been done with a chisel, and it's so hard to duplicate that craft. You aren't going to get that history again," says Tassie-born Amanda, who owned the popular homewares emporium The Vintage Rose in Launceston for 15 years before closing its doors one last time as the global pandemic took hold.

Spending time in her parents' antique store instilled in Amanda a reverence for timeworn, storied treasures. It's fitting she now lives in what the St Helens History Room describes as "one of the oldest houses on Tasmania's east coast", in the area where Skip grew up: "When we were first dating, we would visit his parents and drive past this house. I loved it then and was always intrigued by it."

Years later the stars aligned, and the couple, who now have two adult children and two grandchildren, with a third on the way, were able to purchase the historically significant property. >





Natural light pours through the windows in the living room, highlighting the hardwood ceiling trusses, bamboo and mesh lights from Sco & Co, and sofas from One World. The coffee table is a repurposed wool baling trolley. **FACING PAGE** In the kitchen, vases and bowls are arranged on a console which came from Amanda's parents' old antique store, Longford Antiques. A vintage portrait from Etsy completes the scene.

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A cosy armchair, found in Daylesford, is the ideal place to relax with a good novel. The seagull, bought on Etsy, sits on a sideboard from Facebook Marketplace.

Records indicate the settler-built cottage was originally a two-up, two-down brick dwelling with rooms of quaint proportions. At one point, it operated as The Black Swan Inn, servicing the whalers and sealers that would dock at the jetty directly in front.

“You could only get here via ship; there was no road,” says Amanda. “The men would wheel their barrels of alcohol up to the inn, where they would have a plug of tobacco and more than a few glasses of rum.”

A fire in the late 1800s reduced The Black Swan to one level, and it’s believed the layout was expanded in its rebuild at the time. This amended footprint is what the Skippers have worked within. “We really haven’t changed the layout,” explains Amanda. “We’ve enhanced it and put the doorways back where they used to be. You get a feel for it as you are going along because you can see where things have been.”

The shorter doorways and ceiling heights in the kitchen and three bedrooms open up to the voluminous expanse of the living and dining space, where the Skippers have removed the damaged ceiling and replaced the compromised trusses with hardwood beams. “It allows us a very lovely living space, with lots of room when the family are all home,” Amanda adds.

Meanwhile, the new galvanised iron roof, ironbark flooring (salvaged from a different heritage property), >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT
The outdoor shower is inviting after a refreshing sea dip; the dining room has a coastal aesthetic with a table and chairs from Walker & Walker, and a pendant light from an antique store on the mainland; the serene master bedroom has a coverlet by Bedtonic and a quilt from Aura Home. The chest of drawers, bought on Facebook Marketplace, was coated in Swedish Grey and Black Wax from Jolie Home paint. Amanda made the curtains with linen from The Evandale Village Store; a pretty vintage seascape rests on shelving from an auction house.



“This cottage has given back to us fourfold... It’s what kept us going during the restoration.”

In the guest room, a vintage portrait from Arabesque Interiors draws the gaze above the bed, which is made up with Bedtonic linen and a Linen & Moore throw. **FACING PAGE** Dreamy bathroom views... the copper bath was covered in grey, lead-based paint and it took Amanda days to strip it back. Skip made the timber caddy, while the tiles, from Montile, were chosen for their look of ‘wet sand’.

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Fence palings made from reclaimed timber found on the property form a border for the yard. "Before we walked in, I knew we were going to buy it," says Amanda. "I didn't care that the house was falling down; I just looked at the vista and I saw potential. There was definitely something calling me."

ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- The cottage stays toasty with a hydronic heating system installed by Acorn Plumbing.
- The exterior paint colour is "white straight out of a can with a touch of black," says Amanda.
- Damaged and compromised interior bricks were replaced with original waterstruck bricks found on the property and finished with a lime-based slurry and layers of limewash.
- The kitchen cabinets are finished in Barnfloor by Dulux, and the master bedroom is painted in a similar custom colour.
- Amanda transforms Facebook Marketplace furniture finds by applying timber waxes and different paint finishes, often using the Jolie Home paint range.

and fittings throughout exist in harmony with the core of the cottage, as if they have always been there.

There is absolute authenticity in Amanda and Skip's approach to creating a home, from their depth of research on old-world building techniques to the tireless sourcing of period-appropriate materials.

"We tried to use recycled wherever we could at The Black Swan, and that's just an ethos we've had since we first started doing restoration and build work," Amanda says.

The Skippers' previous project and home was a rural new build done in an Edwardian style located just outside of Launceston. Constructed with aged materials and a commitment to heritage details, the look and feel of the home belied its young age.

The bulk of the work is complete at The Black Swan, and the couple are taking a pause, catching their breath and settling into full-time living by the sea. The fresh salty air and calm ocean vista are soothing balms for Amanda.

"I didn't realise how much of an impact living by the sea was going to have on me," says the productive creative, whose next goal is to turn their 150-year-old farm shed into a flexible space open to local artists and the wider community. "This cottage has given back to us fourfold, and I will never denounce that. It's what kept us going during the restoration," says Amanda. *CS*

Follow Amanda on Instagram via @thevintagerose_

