



crafting a legacy

CONNECTED TO GEMBROOK IN VICTORIA VIA GENERATIONS OF POTTERS, BOBBY GORDON IS MAKING HIS MARK ON A HOME HE HAD LONG ADMIRIED.

WORDS JESSICA BELLEF PHOTOGRAPHY MARTINA GEMMOLA
STYLING ESTHER NAVARRO-OREJON



Border collie Olive guards the family's front door. **FACING PAGE** A timber rack holds daily work gear – a fabric bag from The Yarra Store, a fishing basket by Orvis, and a vintage Akubra. Basket and throw also from The Yarra Store.



WHEN BOBBY GORDON WAS a young boy growing up in Gembrook, an hour south-east of Melbourne's CBD and on the traditional lands of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people, he would stare at the white house on the ridge across from his family home and marvel at its proud facade nestled into tree thickets.

The house was built in the mid-20th century by a local chemist, a family man with 11 children. "All of old Gembrook seemed to go there for some kind of celebration or kid's birthday party at one stage! It's quite entrenched in Gembrook's history in that sense," says Bobby, 43, who along with his wife Rowena Henry, 41, now owns the stately house and its rolling three hectares. Their children – Harry, 11, Gus, nine, and Quinn, four – and a border

collie named Olive enliven the property with the busyness and sweet mischief that would have defined its past.

The familial ties to Gembrook run deep in Bobby's family. His parents, Robert and Barbara Gordon, founded Robert Gordon, the uniquely Australian pottery studio that produces beautiful handcrafted ceramics and supplies to retailers and restaurants across the globe.

"Robert Gordon Pottery originated in Gembrook," Bobby explains. "In the 1950s, my grandparents, who were potters, set up Dyson Studio in town. My father and mother did a ceramics apprenticeship and started their own studio in the '70s, which became Robert Gordon Pottery. The studio expanded and moved to Pakenham in the late 1980s, where it is based today." >



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Quinn among quirky collectables: a handmade model plane and antique surveyor's stick. Art by Bobby rests behind a bentwood chair from Thonet, while a vase by Robert Gordon sits atop a vintage drinks trolley; family time; a vintage mirror reflects art by Stephanie Turner and snowball bush from the garden; a dining table from The Yarra Store is paired with bentwood chairs from Thonet. FACING PAGE Art by Lionel Lindsay, Barry Thomas and John Chambers adorns the mantelpiece, along with a vintage vase from Royal Winton.



The cosy, sunlit living room features a woodfired stove, a large self-portrait by Bobby, an Ikea floor lamp and a rug from Pottery Barn. The plump armchairs, sourced from The Yarra Store, are draped with a blanket knitted by Rowena's mum, Rosemary Barry. A shapely vase hand-thrown by Barry Hayes sits on the hearth. The French doors lead to a citrus hedge with lemon and lime, while a creeping rose adds cheer on the verandah post.

ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- The home's updates were designed by Gordon & Henry, Rowena's architecture and interior design studio; gordonhenry.com.au
- The interior walls are painted in Dulux Natural White, and the laundry joinery is Dulux Monument.
- "We ripped out all the old carpet upstairs and had made plans to reinstate new carpet, but we discovered lovely floorboards throughout that had been cared for really diligently," says Rowena. "So we had to call the carpet supplier and say no-go!"
- Ceramic pieces made by Bobby's parents and grandparents are proudly displayed throughout the rooms.





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Border collie Olive leads the way; eclectic treasures; treetop view; the master bedroom has art and a vase by Robert Gordon, while the vintage chair holds a throw blanket by Città Design. **FACING PAGE, FROM LEFT** Quinn's room has a bed crafted by family friend Bruce Bolton, Bobby's childhood art, and a fairy letterbox sculpture made by aunt Liza Hayes; backyard work essentials.



A family business in its purest form, Bobby is the director and general manager of Robert Gordon, and his two sisters, Kate and Hannah, are co-directors working in marketing, production and creative design roles.

Bobby's input at Robert Gordon is shaped by his formal fine arts and architecture training. During his architectural studies at university, he met Rowena, who now runs the design practice Gordon & Henry. As their own family grew from two children to three, they decided it was time to upsize their living situation.

"We originally thought, as architects, we might like to get a piece of land and build a home, but when this house came on the market in 2017, we wanted to be entrusted with the opportunity to bring it back to what Bobby had seen as quite an aspirational home as a child," Rowena says.

The creative couple has enjoyed the slow, steady process of refurbishing the white house on the ridge. Its elegant bones were lost amid layers of '90s chintz and mismatched flooring, but the original floorplan remained. The dwelling is straightforward in form – a long, narrow box – and harks back to the era before open-plan living was the norm. "We have separate spaces, but the rooms are beautifully proportioned and still interconnected," Bobby says. "For a family of five, it works really well."

Storage isn't an issue, with a basement offering plenty of extra space. "The home has a lot of American design influence," Bobby adds. "It was quite unique for the area. By today's standards, it's actually not a very large house, but it would have been back then."

Coats of white paint and the restored timber floorboards have created a fitting backdrop for subtle modern touches, like the organically elegant Robert Gordon ceramic wall sconces. The soft transformation will continue as the couple turn their attention to the kitchen and bathrooms. "It's been a nice challenge to complement the existing details here without making it kitsch and, at the same time, adding functionality for our family," Rowena says.

Handmade pieces, treasured objects and Bobby's artworks further personalise the rooms. "In the past, our collections were crammed into smaller homes, so it's been lovely moving into this house and seeing the pieces fit so nicely. It all has a bit of space to breathe now," she adds.

The home's past is very much in the present and often literally knocking at the front door. "The chemist's grown children pop by to have a look, so they clearly have fond memories of their childhood and a bond to the home," says Bobby, adding that during one visit, a son revealed some decades-old graffiti in a hidden section of bedroom joinery. "There it was – his initials and the names of past girlfriends!" Bobby says, chuckling.

It's moments like these that charm Bobby and Rowena further, assuring them they have made the right choice for their family. "There's something relaxing about doing up an old house," muses Bobby. "Architects strive for perfection, but it's quite lovely buying an older family home that just needs TLC." *CG*
To learn more about Robert Gordon and his family of potters, visit robertgordonaustralia.com

HOME GEMBROOK VIC

Bobby and Rowena relax with loyal Olive. "I love having a cup of tea on the terrace and taking in the morning sun," says Rowena.

"Architects strive for perfection, but it's quite lovely buying an older family home that just needs TLC."

