



RELBIA TAS GARDEN

Sandstone blocks from a local bridge demolition form the steps, with climbing roses and hydrangeas offering a romantic welcome. **FACING PAGE** The salvaged bricks dictated Amanda's plant choices: "I've put rusty pinks and purple-blue in because they look beautiful against the exterior."



heart land

A MAGICAL GARDEN ARTFULLY LAYERED WITH COTTAGE BLOOMS HAS BEEN A LABOUR OF LOVE FOR ONE HARDWORKING TASMANIAN COUPLE.

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IF YOU LAID A MAP OF TASMANIA over someone's chest, Relbia would sit near their heart. A handful of long, lone roads stretch through the semi-rural area made up of rolling paddocks dotted with ancient gums, roos and sheep; conveniently, it's just a 10-minute drive to the city centre of Launceston and the airport. Amanda Skipper, a vintage merchant and curator, and her husband Michael, a retired builder known to all as Skip, purchased their Relbia property 18 years ago, enchanted by the lay of the land and the way the light danced through the eucalypts.

They have since transformed that bare three hectares into a thriving English-inspired idyll they call Woodridge Farm. The historic look of the Skippers' home and the garden's settled feel belies the property's young age. "There was no house or garden when we bought here, and we've worked hard at it," Amanda shares. "It was the two of us doing all the work, with some labourers thrown in along the way." Building from scratch gave the couple the opportunity to orient the property for the best conditions. Each side of the house opens onto a terrace, with sunrises hitting the eastern terrace, and sunsets soaking the west, while peppermint gums form a natural windbreak. "The old trees cop the wind and then it just floats over the top of us, which allows us to have delicate plants in the garden," explains Amanda.

After extensive excavation and redistribution of soil, the house and garden sit on a flat platform. The land dips and rises beyond the home's stone wall perimeter, offering quintessentially Australian views of dams and thickets of century-old gums. "We had done the stone walls before the garden was actually designed, so I then had to work within the perimeter of the walls. If I had my way, I would have pushed that wall out by quite a long way!" says Amanda. "I love meandering English gardens, but ours isn't actually that big, so I couldn't make it too meandering. It had to be square with clean lines." Neatly trimmed box hedge frames the gravel pathways and delineates the outdoor areas, while free plantings of perennials and grasses create a looser feel and a sense of pretty abundance. Beds overflow with cottage-garden mainstays like viburnums, salvias and *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy', and varieties like bronze elderberry and flowering cherry add to the beautiful patchwork of colour, texture and shape. >



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Salvia glows in the sun; Theo the staffy (belonging to the Skippers' daughter) relaxes on the terrace, whose flags are from Thunder Stones; flowering artichoke; the cast-iron fountain is antique. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Amanda and Skip saved the barn from a property 50km away and restored it over four months, adding wool scales at the front for their charm; sedum 'Autumn Joy'.





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CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT Beside a gravel path and hedges, sedum and bog sage grow among viburnums, hydrangeas and flowering cherry; the terrace. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** The garden gate; salvia; the barn adjoins a veggie garden that’s “a big job,” says Amanda.

A rich depth of textures abounds at Woodridge Farm. The Georgian-style home is made of historic Tasmanian Machens bricks, while the mossy sandstone steps were once the footings of a nearby bridge. The garden wall is made with local stone that dates back to the convict era. While the garden’s inspiration may have been English in origin, there’s no question that the property is firmly grounded in Tasmanian history. “I’ve always had an affiliation with history and I love to give a new purpose to old things,” Tasmanian-born Amanda explains. “It’s just something that has always been there, right from when I was very young.” Her parents owned an antique store, and Amanda followed in their footsteps when she left her career as a fashion designer and opened up a lifestyle emporium that sold vintage and old wares. The Vintage Rose in Launceston traded successfully for 15 years before closing in early 2020.

Balance is a recurring concept in Amanda’s gardening ethos, and getting the right plant into the right place is her key to a happy, healthy garden. “It’s about working with

nature,” she says. When you work with nature, she believes, it gives back in myriad ways, ultimately allowing you to regain balance in your own life. “Gardening is so good for the soul,” Amanda muses. “I 100 per cent find solace in it.”

Amanda’s personal journey of gardening starts with her mother. “She was a great gardener, and she and I used to garden together all the time. When she passed away, I would go out and garden and it was a place we could come together again. It was really peaceful for me to do that, and it helped me grieve.”

Endless love and countless hours of care have gone into creating Woodridge Farm. Amanda and Skip, looking to downsize, have recently sold the property and are moving to the coast where they are carefully restoring a whaler’s inn that dates back to the 1820s. Amanda’s head is filled with ideas for the coastal garden she will grow, yet leaving Woodridge feels bittersweet. “We can walk away feeling proud that we have not only left our mark on this land but we have established an everlasting sanctuary for another family to love,” she says. *CS*