

THESE PAGES:
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TEA, ROSES AND REST

GREEN TEA AND A LAMB NAMED BOOFA ARE JUST A PART OF THE STORY OF HEATHERLY IN VICTORIA'S ACHERON VALLEY.

By Kathy Moxed, photography Kim Selby

The garden at Heatherly was awash with roses when Georgie Leckie moved to her husband, Will's, family property in Victoria 16 years ago. "Will's mother had a passion for roses and after living here for 25 years, she left me a beautiful garden," Georgie says. "I either had to run with it or decide that gardening wasn't my thing and bring the fences in."

Motivated by touring Open Gardens Australia properties and taking inspiration from garden writers such as Paul Bangay, Georgie and Will took the bit between their teeth and ploughed on. Buoyed by what had gone before, they are now writing their own chapter into the Heatherly history book and the garden was just the beginning. Beyond the boundary fence, a shearing shed became a workshop, the sheep gave way to cattle and some of the calf-high pasture is now waist-high green tea. 





“The first time I came here, I was mesmerised by the beautiful valley, surrounding hills and the drive through the Black Spur, north of Healesville,” Georgie recalls. “I’d met Will on a plane as we both returned from working holidays in Europe and four years later, I was invited to the property with mutual friends.”

Back in Melbourne, Georgie worked in interior design at Georges Department Store. “I have a beautiful memory of a bathroom I’d seen while nannying in the UK,” she says. “It was wallpapered in Fuchsia, a \$150-per-metre chintz fabric by Colefax and Fowler.” When one of her Melbourne clients was nonplussed about 20m of the same leftover fabric, Georgie readily accepted it and it now hangs in the Heatherly dining room as a graceful reminder of a special place.

Though the house didn’t require renovation, the Leckies made cosmetic changes and decorating the bedroom sowed the seed for Heatherly Design Bedheads. While she may not have made her own winged bedhead, Georgie had already grasped the opportunity to make her own simple bedheads for her children. The Heatherly bedheads evolved from there to what they are today.

“In our room, I didn’t know whether to start with curtains, wallpaper or the bedhead,” Georgie says. “I’d always wanted special fabric for my own room and though I’m a ‘blue’ girl, I



also love crisp apple green and so the Designers Guild fabric in the master bedroom was perfect. My early days were spent juggling children, and at mothers’ group I threw around ideas for upholstered bedheads. I began with three plain designs and 20 fabrics and sold to friends in 2006 and 2007.”

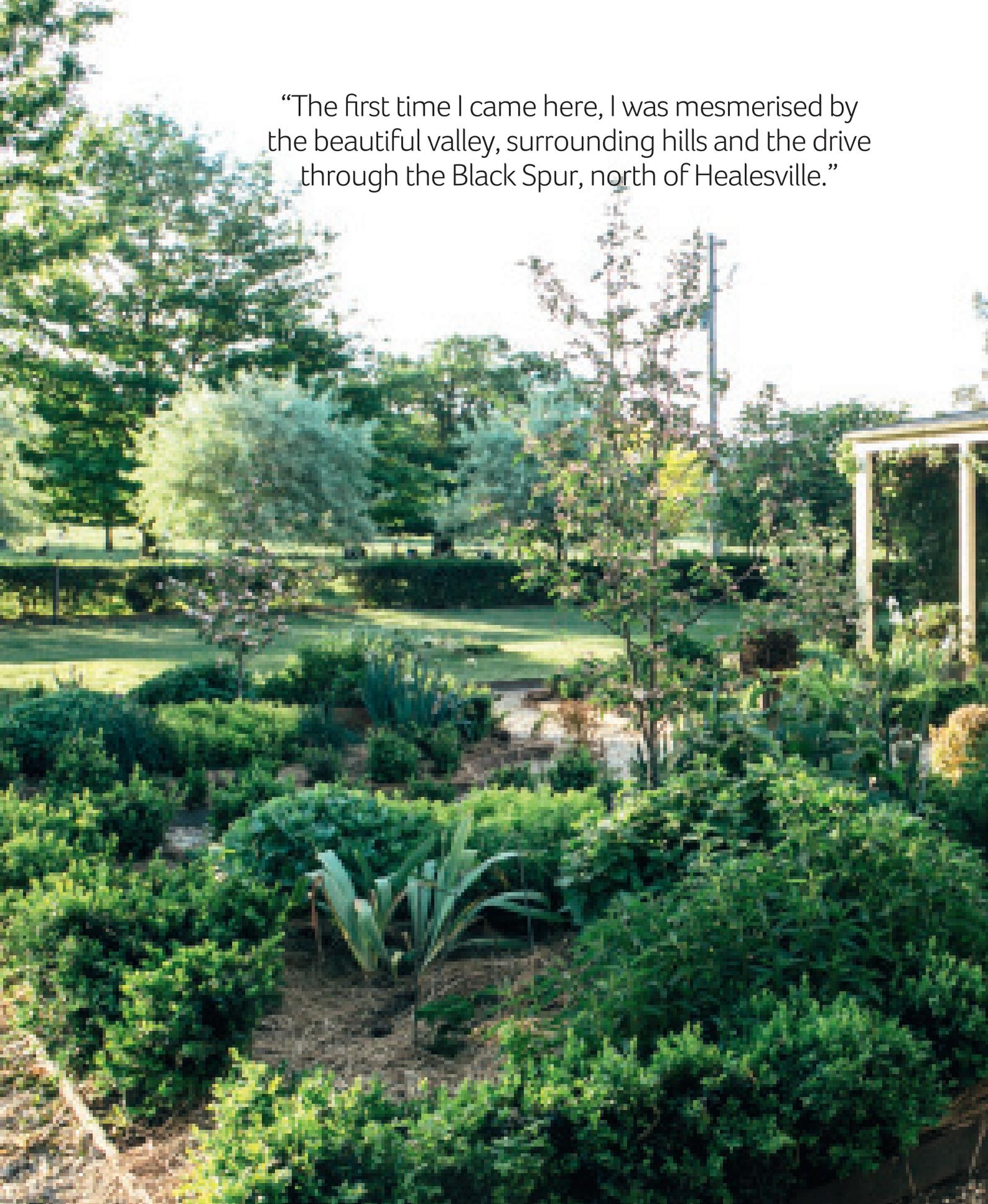
With toddlers at her side, Georgie converted the disused woolshed into a workshop. A large rug covered the floor and the skirting table, with its revolving top and



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

Georgie and Will and their two children; Boofa is as much a part of the family as the rest; the Heatherly home sits beautifully in its Victorian country setting.

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CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Heatherly is home to many creatures, large and small; 10-year-old Hugh is a natural with animals; Georgie and Will drew inspiration from landscape designers such as Paul Bangay for their own garden; a shaded spot from which the family can look out onto the land; roses in bloom.



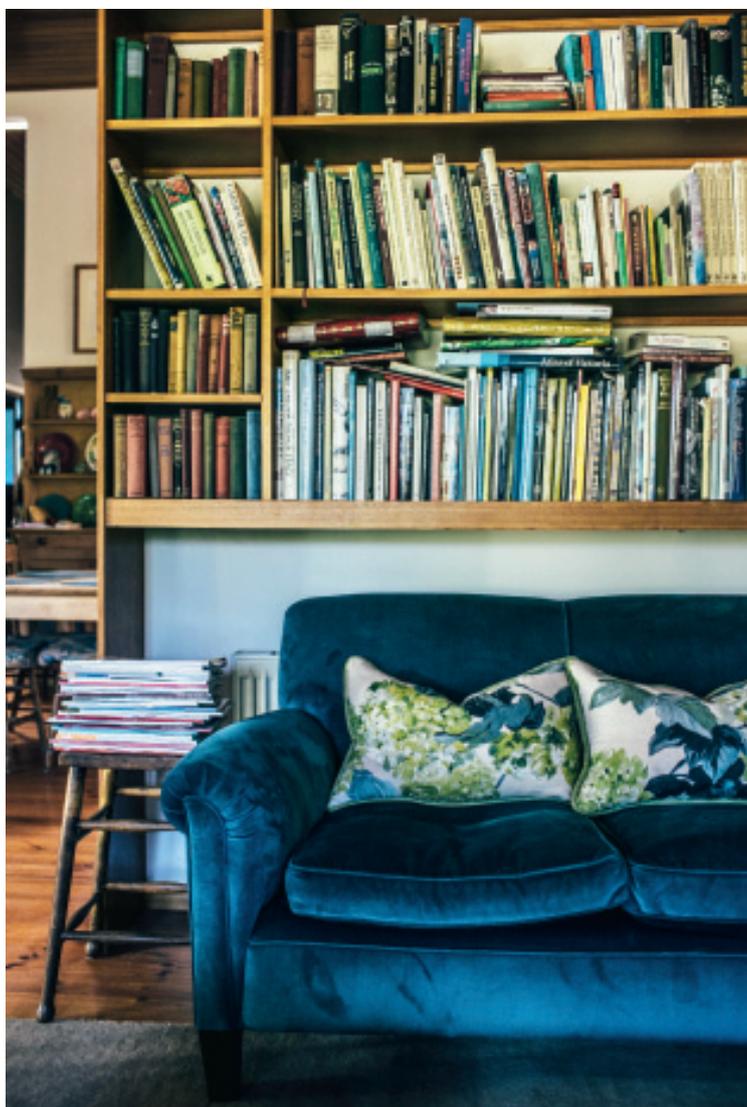
new Laminex veneer, was the perfect workbench. An air compressor to drive the staple gun was a very welcome Christmas gift.

“Once I got to handling big orders, like king-sized bedheads, the versatile workbench was brilliant and the compressor saved my hands when using the staple gun,” Georgie says. “Going slowly in those early days, taking orders and figuring out transport and logistics was invaluable.” While Georgie was sewing and stapling, the children were playing on the floor making cubby houses out of the remnants. It only took six months, however, to realise that the business was ready to shift up a gear.

“I was doing up an order to be sent to Bondi, NSW, and realised that was the moment I’d been waiting for,” she says. “When there is so much to choose from in Sydney, this customer had chosen my product and ordered online. It was remarkable that I could create something in my woolshed and send it to a wider market.” The woolshed was soon repurposed as a storage shed and the business moved to Melbourne where Georgie now employs specialist upholsterers.







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

A warm palette of brown and neutral tones is offset by pops of bright colour in the living room; Georgie's fondness for blue is evident in the home; a Designers Guild Fabric was used to upholster the bedhead in the master bedroom; the mother of two's creative flair is showcased throughout the interior; the same Designers Guild fabric is used as a cushion cover in the main part of the house.

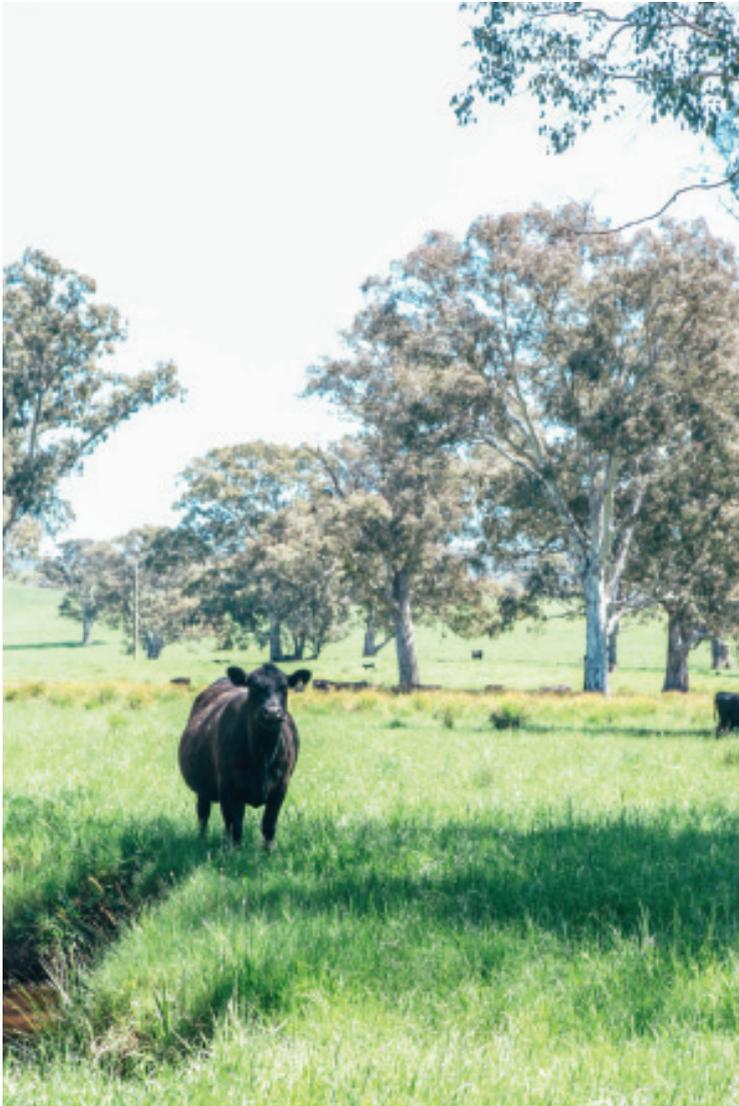
Parallel to Georgie's business, the farm had taken a surprising turn when a Japanese green tea merchant came to the district seeking growers. Heatherly now grows 30 acres of green tea. "The tiny plants, all 170,000 of them, were 10-20 centimetres tall and struck from the mother plants," Georgie says. "They were vulnerable little things going into paddocks that needed everything in their favour to get where they are today. It took about five years to get reasonable yields and we now harvest up to four times [a year] between October and March. We had some excellent input from the Japanese to mentor us through this delicate process. Recently, a Melbourne food guide's dietician included green tea as one of the top-10 super foods you should consume daily."

Under the label Two Rivers Green Tea, Heatherly produces four varieties of tea. Shincha meaning "new tea" is produced from spring's first harvest. These lush leaves are rich with nutrients and create an intense flavour. Summer and autumn harvests produce sencha, which is a sweet full-bodied tea. The sencha is also mildly roasted, resulting in houjicha, an amber tea with a smooth, toasted flavour.

The variety that has surprised Will and Georgie with its 







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

The cattle were brought in when the family took over the land; Georgie and the family pooch seem contented at Heatherly; the Leckies produce four varieties of green tea, which they sell under the label Two Rivers Green Tea; an inviting home entryway; the tea is harvested up to four times every year.



popularity is genmaicha, which is a combination of sencha, roasted brown rice and matcha powder, resulting in a mild flavour with undertones of roasted rice.

Using biological farming methods, the Leckies respect the natural processes in the ecosystem in order to yield top-quality products, provide a viable living for the producer and sustain long-term productivity. The tea is untainted by the application of toxins and is enhanced annually by the addition of nitrogen, then composted chicken and pig manure in accordance with strict quality-control procedures.

Ready to harvest, the tiny bright-green tips are almost waist high — high enough to hide a young boy and his pet lamb. Resident lamb Boofa was raised by the couple's son, 10-year-old Hugh, who looks after a small mob of sheep and some hand-reared poddy calves. When Boofa was old enough to be put out with the flock, he refused to integrate and kept going back to his gang — the calves. Boofa is so attached to the family that he has learnt to nudge open the screen door, believing his rightful place is with Hugh.

The orphaned lamb is as much a part of the Heatherly landscape as the old garden and its improvements. 



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

A tranquil spot for the family to enjoy some afternoon sun in the vast country landscape setting; some fun for the kids (and adults alike); the drive up to Heatherly.



He is as indulgent as the gorgeous green wicker birdcage that has never housed a bird and as delightful as the bulb meadow that tumbles down to the lake. He belongs as much as the Heatherly-milled timber beams in the tennis pavilion and the wave of purple wisteria that topples from it.

As he skitters along the circular drive that meanders between aged and young trees and beautiful garden sculptures, Georgie nurses a steaming mug of green tea and considers all the weekends that she and Will have devoted to maximising their garden ... their place of rest.

"The art of gardening is constantly trying to determine what goes where," Georgie says. "Victorian garden designer Ben Scott brought fresh eyes to our project and saved us an enormous amount of time and effort. At end of the day, our feeling of arrival is into this beautiful valley." *46*

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