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Delicious Pleasures

...AFTERNOON TEA
ON THE VERANDAH

YUMMY CAKES
YOUR FRIENDS AND
FAMILY WILL LOVE

TAKE A TOUR
THROUGH TWO
GLORIOUS
SPRING GARDENS

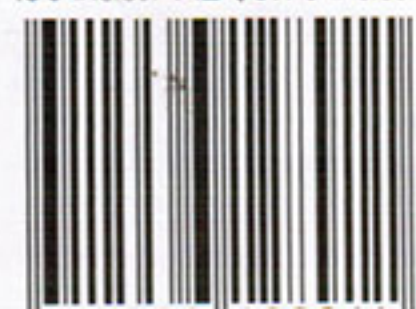
TURNING HEADS:
FASHIONS FOR THE
RACING SEASON

VISIONARY
HOME OWNERS
AND THEIR
RENOVATIONS

THE LONG
CAMPAIGN FOR
DUBBO'S NEW
CUTTING-EDGE
ARTS CENTRE

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Time and the River

When the Watsons moved to the mouth of the Murray, they had to wait four years to buy their dream house. Fortunately, they had a new boating lifestyle to distract them...

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If **Charles Sturt's vision** for the Murray had eventuated, the South Australian town of Goolwa would not be the small, quiet village it is today. When Captain Sturt journeyed down the mighty river in 1830 from its junction with the Murrumbidgee in NSW, he was convinced that a settlement should be established at its mouth if the interior was to be opened up to trade and exploration. The ideal site would be on the last bend before the river entered the sea, he suggested.

Closer inspection determined that the river mouth was probably not navigable, so Adelaide got the development push instead. Nevertheless, Goolwa was established and did become a busy port for a time. In 1854 Australia's first horse-drawn public railway connected Goolwa and the Murray to the ocean port of Port Elliott

to the west and later in the century paddle steamers carrying wool and wheat plied the river. But little by little the main-line railways became the dominant form of transport and so the river never became the "highway of trade" that Sturt had envisioned.

But if history has bypassed Goolwa, Wendy and Phillip Watson are hardly perturbed: to them the town's size and pace of life are positive attractions. They operate a marina and B&B, and live across the road from the river at Birks Harbour. In the evenings they often walk down to the water's edge, glass of wine in hand, to enjoy the view and unwind. The water gently lapping under the jetty, the breeze whistling through the nearby pines and the occasional put-put of a passing wooden river boat offer an antidote to the stress of the working day.



When the sun is shining, the front garden is the place to be. **Facing page, left** Phillip and Wendy named Oscar W and Miss Ruby after paddle-steamers.



As Phil says, "I can be up in the office with a head full of business and by the time I walk down here, I'm relaxed."

Wendy and Phil's love affair with the river — or, to be precise, with wooden boats — began 10 years ago when they were invited out on a friend's craft. Phil remembers being far from enthusiastic about the outing, but says that now even if he were dragged away he could not live inland. The pair went from being landlubbers to sailors almost overnight, buying their friend's eight-metre boat and later living on it for six months.

That first boating trip came when they were still living inland, at Kangarilla, in the Adelaide Hills. The Watsons both worked in the wine industry and Kangarilla is within easy reach of several wine regions. However, when Phil made a change from sales and marketing to recruitment, the central location lost its importance. The new job allowed him to work from home — and home, the couple decided, would be Goolwa.

That was eight years ago. The Watsons started out living in town and three years later, when the marina came up for sale, then saw a chance to combine their love of boats with business and fitted out the old boatshed as a B&B.

They'd always been attracted to the house across the road, but, as Wendy says, "We had no intention of buying it: we thought it would be way out of our reach. Then one night we woke up in the middle of the night and said, 'We have to buy that house! We're mad if we don't; it's our future.'"

A series of fortunate events eventually saw Wendy and Phil become the proud owners of the roomy, 1880s stone cottage. When they moved in, "the house was in good nick" according to Wendy. The previous owners had polished the floorboards (wide, honey-coloured Baltic pine), put in new ceilings and painted throughout, so there was little pressing work to be done... save for the kitchen.

"There was no real kitchen," says Wendy of the low-ceilinged room at the back of the house. "And every time I used the rusty wood stove, I smoked out the house."

Rather than go for a completely new installation, Wendy simply updated the cooker and brought in second-hand dressers and cupboards. In the centre of the room she placed a large wooden table which, like all good kitchen tables, immediately became tea-and-gossip central.

From left A Charlotte Kingsmill painting, *Aerial of the Coorong*, hangs above the bed; daisies tumble down a wall in the backyard; the dining room; the marina.



Despite the warm attraction of this area, Wendy and Phil still use the formal dining room; this is where they eat if they're not heading outside, and where they entertain guests. The character of this room is quite different from the rest of the house: Wendy wanted one "old" room, so it's furnished in a traditional style. However, as in the rest of the house, the walls are crowded with prints, photographs and memorabilia in which boats and the water feature heavily.

"When you think about it, we do have water things everywhere," says Wendy, as though realising it for the first time. "I've got a bit of a thing for lighthouses, too..." Evidence of this interest sits in the bedroom, the sitting room and the hallway; some of the model lighthouses were discoveries while others were commissioned.

Above the mantel in the sitting room is a portrait of their pride and joy, the 12-metre *Fairy Queen* that's less formally known as "Hector's boat". Hector Semasheko was a fisherman and local landmark who lived on his vessel: because "everyone" in town knows the boat, Wendy and Phil say they feel more like custodians than owners of the 86-year-old "piece of living history".

In the fireplace beneath the portrait lie two interesting bits of

boating hardware — an anchor light, and a foghorn that, like most of the "old finds" in the house, comes with a story...

"Phil came home one day and said, 'You won't believe what I just bought'," Wendy says. "I'd purchased something the same day too, so I said, 'You won't believe what I just bought'. I'd got a portable gramophone for the boat — but he walks in with the foghorn! I said, 'Okay, you win.'"

The couple love old collectables and one of Wendy's favourite finds is the large clock in the small room off the kitchen. Phil refers to it as "the most expensive cigar" he has ever acquired.

"We were going to a dinner party, and Phil said he just wanted to stop at the pub to buy a cigar," Wendy says. "There's a tiny little trinket shop next door and, as I looked out of the car window, I could see a clock."

She was back at the shop first thing the following morning to investigate: "I'd always wanted a big clock. Often, you find the face, but not a working clock. It took me nine years to find that one."

Wendy and Phil have wrought even more changes in the garden than in the house. The backyard is still a work in progress but



Top, left The 1880s cottage that the Watsons found in good condition. **Top, right** All aboard the *Fairy Queen*. **Left** Wendy and Miss Ruby. **Right** The kitchen with the new cooker and sociable table. **Below, left** The front garden spills down to the road and marina. **Below, centre** The clock that Wendy waited nine years to discover. **Facing page** Wendy's fascination with the river saw her commission a model of the Point Macleay lighthouse, the only inland lighthouse in Australia.





the bare bones have been laid. The look will be purposefully wild and overgrown; already daisies spill down one wall and, further around the back, against a stone wall that the couple built themselves, roses thrive. It's more protected here, so when the wind is up this will be the place to be.

However, with its view of the river, the front garden also has considerable appeal. The previous owners had started laying paving, so Wendy took up where they left off, creating a formal, symmetrical centre that she edged with soft lawn, and garden beds filled with French lavender, geranium, seaside daisies and lobelia.

This is where Wendy and Phil come throughout the day, drawn by the river. They may start with breakfast on the verandah and finish with drinks in the garden at sundown.

"Things sort of evolved," says Phil, of their purchase of the marina, Hector's boat and the house. "When you think about it, it was just meant to be. I'm not really into all that stuff — but I think someone's looking after us."