

The wonder YEARS

A yearning for room to roam led a Sydney family to make a tree-change to the NSW Central Coast. One year on, they're in seventh heaven.

STORY *John McDonald* | STYLING *Natalie Walton* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Chris Warnes*



With cows among the family's neighbours, there's little doubt the city has been left far behind. **OPPOSITE** Natalie Walton, her husband Daniel Rollston and their youngsters (from left) Isis, Sabina, Charlie and Miles set up for lunch under the cheese tree (*Glochidion ferdinandi*) on a terraced area near the house. Tablecloth and jug, Imprint House. Bunting, Nomades (triangles) and The Society Inc (rectangles). *For Where to Buy, see page 188.*





Travel can be life-changing. Just ask Natalie Walton and her husband Daniel Rollston, who took their children - Charlie, now eight, Sabina, five, and Isis, three - on a trip to Europe in 2015 that included a blissful stay on an organic farm in Verona, Italy. "It was wonderful," says Natalie. "The children loved running freely on the property in Verona and we loved the sense of space."

The time was ripe for a change. Daniel had sold his manufacturing business a short time before the holiday and Natalie, the owner of online homewares store Imprint House and an interiors writer, can pretty much work anywhere. "The weekend after returning to Sydney, we drove up to the Yarramalong Valley, in search of a new home and a new life," she says.

They knew the area, a 90-minute drive north of Sydney on the NSW Central Coast, because a friend's parents have owned a weekender there for many years. Natalie's mum is nearby too.

The original idea was to buy land and build from scratch but that plan fell through. They pressed on and were delighted to find this rambling 10.5ha property, which came complete with an artist's studio, a shed, several henhouses, two ponds and a dam.

The main house is a three-bedroom cabin blessed with banks of large north-facing windows. "Most of the property is bush and it's a steep block, which affords us the most beautiful treetop views," says Natalie. Probably built in 1984 (that date is written in concrete inside the fireplace flue), the house is clad in cedar boards inside and out. On the ground floor is the boot room, an essential in the country, and an open-plan living area, which Natalie says was a big part of its appeal.

While the building itself was in pretty good condition, Natalie and Daniel were keen to overhaul the interior, beginning with minimising the stained-timber panelling. "Before we moved in, Daniel and his dad came up to the house to paint as much of it white as possible," says Natalie. "They focused on the bedrooms, as we didn't want to be living with the smell of paint, especially since I was five months' pregnant at the time." (Baby Miles is now almost six months old.)

After nearly 12 months on the farm, the family has come to realise that life is flavoured by the seasons. Summer sees expeditions to the beach; the cooler months, baking missions and foraging trips to collect kindling for the slow-burning fire; in spring, clearing the brush ahead of bushfire season takes priority. There are year-round activities that the freedom of life in the country allows too: visiting the chickens, tending the vegie patch and mucking about in the treehouse are everyday pleasures for the family.

Daniel and Natalie beaver away on the computer while the children are at school, but weekends are devoted to family time. "Sometimes we'll walk up to the top grove where we have some orange trees," says Natalie. "Other times, it will be a project such as clearing weeds or

tackling the vines that are strangling trees. There's always so much to do here and our days are punctuated by mealtimes, which are always sit-down affairs at the family table."

It was a journey that brought the family to their new home, and the journey continues. "Despite the challenges, we've had an amazing first year," says Natalie.

▶ *Imprint House; www.imprinthouse.net. See more of the family's adventures on Instagram @theindigocrew*



A white-painted bookshelf is a splendid backdrop for the treasures Natalie has gathered over the years. In the spirit of fresh starts, the nearby stone wall that houses the fireplace was also painted white. Ceramics by Milly Dent, Keiko Matsui, Alison Fraser and Tara Burke. Cestita lamp, Santa & Cole. The Jasper Conran for Wedgwood jug was a wedding present. Chair, Garden Life. **OPPOSITE** In the living room, a display of Moroccan baskets and rustic pots attests to Natalie's flair for uniting tone and texture. Foliage gathered from the property is an endless decorative resource. Pots, Garden Life. Bench, Salt & Stone. Headaddress, Les Interieurs. Lamp, Henry Corbett & Co. Woven baskets, Imprint House. *For Where to Buy, see page 188.*

In the living room, the sofa has been positioned to take in the view. The timber lockers from France were once used for horse supplies. Sofa, MCM House. Coffee table, Orient House. Hanging chair, Beachwood Designs. Beni Ouarain rug, Kulchi. Artworks by Sally Anderson (left), Charlie (centre), and Noah Taylor (right). **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Natalie and Daniel were a bit iffy about the slate floors but have grown to like them; the trestle table is from an auction house. Sweet spot in the kitchen: an artwork by local artist Belynda Henry and a Japanese kettle from Ginkgo Leaf. The couple has renovated the kitchen; previously very modern in style. By removing the doors, the pantry has been converted to open shelving – a lovely, country-style way to turn staples into a fabulous display. *For Where to Buy, see page 188.* ▶



A smart black and white theme lifts a timber-lined room.



AT HOME WITH H&G



All white now: bedrooms were freshened with Dulux Vivid White.



'We both enjoy transforming spaces and there is so much potential with this place. It has several buildings and structures that set our imaginations alight.' Natalie Walton

LEFT A walk-in wardrobe is tucked in behind the bedhead wall. To the right of the bed is a mini ensuite "that feels like being inside a boat", says Natalie. Bedlinen, Cultiver. Bedside table, Les Interieurs. The bed came from a store that has since closed. BELOW RIGHT The window seat upstairs is one of Natalie's favourite spots. Cushions, Città and Imprint House. Stool, Orient House. Wall light, Pierre and Charlotte. BELOW LEFT Isis gets creative in the living room. The desk, an auction-house find, is in constant use. The French school poster is vintage too. Pouf, Table Tonic. OPPOSITE The treehouse was one of the first projects the couple tackled after moving in. "At the time, the children were still city kids and cautious about leaving our sides," says Natalie. "Now there are days we only see them when they're hungry." For Where to Buy, see page 188. H&G



TREEHOUSE NOUS

- Ironbark (treehouse 'frame')
Salvaged cypress pine (floorboards)
Oregon (ramp)
Reclaimed hardwood and foraged bamboo and eucalyptus branches (railing, fences)

