



# THE COUNTRY HOUSE

While parts of this magnificent home have changed little in 150 years, the latest generation have added some modern comforts, and style.

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**M**ANY THINGS WERE DIFFERENT WHEN the previous generations – captured in huge portraits in the formal dining room – lived in this magnificent country estate. A bell pull was used to call servants, who lived in separate accommodation behind the home. In the gentleman's billiard room are photographs of royalty who visited; a wind-up gramophone still plays the collection of old records, and hunting trophies – many from the property itself – adorn the walls.

Now guests enter by a casual side entrance, rather than the grand front door. Here there are renovated rooms that are light and welcoming; where modern art and antique furniture come together in a vibrant space. This is where Andrew and Alice Duncan and their three daughters spend most of their time. “The old part of the house is a bit like a museum, so we wanted this to be modern and liveable,” Alice says. After all, no-one answers the servant's bell anymore.

The home was built by Sir Walter Watson Hughes, an enterprising philanthropist from Scotland who sailed his brig the *Hero* to South Australia in 1840, aged 37. His early involvement

with the pastoral industry began near Macclesfield and after many ventures he took up a pastoral lease named *Wallaroo* in 1856. It was there that copper was discovered and he profited, along with others, from South Australia's first mining boom. He later donated £20,000 to help fund the University of Adelaide.

“He owned other land in the Watervale area and lived in a mud hut known as ‘The Peak’ out on the Hoyleton plains,” Andy says. “Then he built this home, which was single storey, and called it *Hughes Park*.” Hughes' sister Joan married Captain John Duncan in Scotland in 1839; he too sailed out with his family and became a business partner with Hughes. “Hughes returned to England and died at Chertsey in 1887 leaving most of his land holdings to Duncan,” Andy says. “Ever since it's been passed down through the generations – our girls will be the seventh generation to be custodians.”

The second storey was added in 1890 by Andy's great, great grandfather Sir John Duncan. “We believe the stone used in the house is from the two quarries on the property. In the old days this was a summer residence, they came here for six months then went back to Adelaide.” Andy's uncle, Walter Duncan, lived there full time and ran a commercial rose farm in surrounding paddocks



*Above:* Andy and Alice Duncan on their tree-lined driveway with daughters Daisy, Sophia and Millie.

*Right:* The living area features Tasmanian oak flooring; beneath the shuttered windows are custom-made cushions in Pierre Frey fabric. *Below:* The side verandah and entrance, with many old chimneys visible above. *Opposite page:* A painted timber sideboard from Willie Stewart Interiors features inside the new entrance, in front of what was once an exterior wall. *Opening pages:* The grand frontage of Hughes Park; you can see into the library and sitting rooms.





We stretched our imagination  
to give you more space.



along the Skilly River. In 2003 Walter moved to Sevenhill with wife Kay to tend to their own garden (*The Heritage Garden* featured in the Spring issue of *SAGardens and Outdoor Living*).

Andy had studied commerce and was working in Adelaide when the opportunity arose to run *Hughes Park*, which includes 7000 acres of sheep farming country along with some vineyards. "I always wanted to be a farmer – I jumped at the chance. I grew up between Clare and Burra on a family property there called *Gum Creek* and we used to visit here as kids."

He initially lived in a much smaller home on the property, even after Walter moved out of the main house, and Andy met Alice and enticed her to move up from Adelaide in 2005. They married and began planning renovations; by now the main house had sat empty for almost a decade. "We did the renovations while we were living in the other house, it took about 18 months because we were in no rush," says Andy.

Working with architect Michael Fielder, builder Michael Toubia and local tradies, they merged three smaller rooms at the



**Top:** The kitchen is great for entertaining as well as everyday living, and the windows in the new part of the home are double glazed for temperature control, or can open to embrace a summer breeze. **Left:** At the original grand entrance, Andy and Alice discovered blackbutt floorboards hidden beneath old carpet. **Far left:** Feature stonework in the lounge was once an exterior wall; an original wooden travel chest came to South Australia by ship from Scotland in the early days of the state.



Let's face it; there are times when the dimensions of your home are constrained by the size or shape of your block of land. Achieving spaciousness can be a challenge! At Sarah Homes our answer was to stretch our imagination. An integral part of the NEW Drysdale's design is an angled wall and passage that widens as it flows towards the living room. A skillion roof and raked ceiling also enhance the feeling of space. We gave the Drysdale plenty of large windows and sliding doors that connect to extensive decking outside, linking interior and exterior living areas and adding to an ambience of light filled spaciousness. This is the ideal home for an active family lifestyle. View the new Drysdale at our Mile End display village, 9 James Congdon Drive, Mile End.



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**Above:** Solid timber construction is on show inside the shearing shed. **Left:** Hughes Park is located in the rolling hills on the outskirts of Watervale, and the property has beautiful views across to the plains. **Bottom:** Many of the books in the library were collected by John Grant "Jack" Duncan-Hughes, who was awarded the Military Cross for his service in World War 1 and went on to become a politician and solicitor.



back of the house to form an open plan kitchen, dining and living room. This was an especially big job given the internal walls are 50 centimetres thick – the external walls are 60 centimetres. The dining space adjoins a lounge room built between the home and the former maids' quarters, connecting the buildings. Mintaro slate that formed the verandah was lifted out during the build and later re-laid, and the maids' quarters now house a toy room and spare bedrooms.

Alice has a flair for styling and an eye for modern art, while Andy enjoyed helping the tradies install the floorboards. "The fireplace I built myself with Hebel stone, cut with a meat saw and an angle grinder," he laughs. It was a vital addition; they moved in during the winter of 2013. Without servants to keep the other fireplaces going, the living area is the only really warm spot. "We wore beanies to bed, and our breath would fog," says Andy. "It's a much better summer house, nice and cool."

A hallway separates their living area from the original part of the home. "We ripped up carpet there and found Baltic timber floorboards underneath," says Alice. "We put glass doors at either end, so it's much lighter." Their spacious master bedroom and ensuite is upstairs, and the girls' bedrooms add plenty of colour to the old rooms.

A spare room called the Nursery, where some of the early family members were born, has walls covered in Queen Victoria paper cuttings from floor to ceiling, believed to date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the corner on a table is a magnificent cloth book with more cuttings pasted in by those who helped with the young children.

A CASE FOR THE  
NEO-CLASSICAL?



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**Right:** Hughes Park Cottage was built in 1845 and was a workers' cottage for many years before being restored; it is now a secluded B&B. **Below:** Family portraits line the walls of the formal dining room, while the nursery (**bottom**) is decorated in decoupage using cuttings from publications dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. **Opposite page:** Take a step back in time in the formal sitting room (**top**) and the billiard room, which features a working Sonora phonograph and mementos from members of the Royal family who visited in years past.



In the formal dining room – which they have used once for a family Christmas – Andy and Alice replaced the curtains with shutters, and they added new carpet in some rooms and passageways. When removing old carpets they discovered yet more floorboards – blackbutt this time – at the front entrance. Otherwise, the original part of the house is relatively untouched.

In 2009 Alice and Andy's father Jock renovated one of the former workers' cottages, turning it into a B&B. "It was the earliest building, from 1845," Alice says. "We put in a new kitchen, I did lots of shopping, bought new artworks – I even made some myself." They won an award in the 2010 Clare Valley Regional Tourism Awards,

and aim to open a second cottage in 2017. They have recently opened their private garden for wedding ceremonies on the lawns in front of the spectacular main house. "In summer, with the trees out, the house is covered in green. When the deciduous trees drop their leaves the house stands out. It's really seasonal."

It's an idyllic setting for their daughters Daisy, 8, Millie, 5, and Sophia, 3. "For lots of locals, someone in their family worked here or was born in a cottage here," says Andy. "It's got this feel to it, this property – you get attached to it."

"We're lucky to be here. Having our girls here, it's come alive again."

