

RESTORATION SPECTACULAR

ALICE AND ANDREW DUNCAN TOOK ON A 159-YEAR HISTORY AND A SIGNIFICANT BUILDING PROJECT WHEN THEY MOVED TO HUGHES PARK IN THE HEART OF THE CLARE VALLEY WINE COUNTRY.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, PHOTOGRAPHY ROSS WILLIAMS, STYLING BRONTE CAMILLERI



Living and raising a young family in a large heritage house in the middle of South Australia's Clare Valley may sound like a romantic fantasy, but for Alice and Andrew Duncan sometimes it feels more like a cold, hard dose of reality.

The Duncans moved into the grand stone homestead at Hughes Park, on a scenic winery drive three kilometres from Watervale in the midwinter of 2013. Even though they'd just completed a significant renovation, they very quickly discovered what it means to live in a house that has 60 centimetre-thick stone external walls and 50cm internal walls. "It's like a bunker," Andrew says. "A storm can rage all night, but you wouldn't know until you ventured out." "And in winter it's extremely cold," Alice adds. "We installed heating in the family area, and underfloor heating in the bathrooms, but in the rest of the house we live with the elements. We put beanies on, run to bed and turn the electric blankets on. The upside is that it's wonderfully cool in summer."

The original part of the homestead, which is built from stone quarried at two sites on the property, ➔



These pages:
Alice and Andrew (pictured right with baby Torn) took on a major project when they moved into Hughes Park homestead, built by Andrew's ancestor in 1860 and extended with a second storey during the 1890s.





Clockwise from above:
The removal of carpet revealed splendid blackbutt floors at the entrance; Sophia and Millie share a bedroom; the billiard table is a fixture; a guest room is papered with Victorian magazine pages and posters; Baltic pine floorboards in the central hallway.



was completed in 1860. It was built by Sir Walter Watson Hughes, who had migrated to South Australia from Scotland in 1840. He was involved in pastoral activities in the fledgling colony and went into business with his sister Joan's husband, Sir John Duncan, who had arrived around the same time. Their real fortune, however, was made when copper was discovered on Sir Walter's farm at Wallaroo on the Yorke Peninsula and they later repeated the success when a shepherd found green rock (more copper) on another farm nearer to Moonta. The mines provided the wherewithal to build the Hughes Park homestead, which Sir Walter left to his brother-in-law (Andrew's great-grandfather), Sir John, when he died in 1887. They added the second storey in 1890 and the farm and its historic buildings have passed through the generations until the opportunity came for Andrew to live on, and manage, the property.

Having grown up on his family's Merino sheep and cereal crop farm at Burra, Andrew remembers visiting his relatives as a child and always admiring the gracious old homestead and its outbuildings. He went to





university in Adelaide where he studied commerce, then worked for an agricultural water pump company for a few years. "I'd always wanted to be a farmer," he recalls. "Initially, I lived in a cottage on Hughes Park."

Alice and Andrew met when he was best man at her cousin's wedding and the rest is history. Eventually he convinced her to give up her marketing job in Adelaide and move to the Clare Valley and the couple married in the grounds of the homestead in 2006. They started planning the renovation almost immediately, but it took a while too be fully realised by architect Michael Fielder and builder Michael Toubia. The job itself took almost 18 months and they moved into the home in 2013 with Daisy, who is now 11, and Millie, now eight. Since then, Sophia, aged five, and Tom, now one, have extended the family.

"The house was designed at a time when the family had a retinue of servants to run it," Alice explains. "We wanted to retain that character, but rearranged a few rooms to make it more family friendly." "Basically we knocked out a few walls to create an open-plan kitchen, dining and living area," Andy adds. "We also installed a combustion heater and double glazing to keep this area warm in the challenging winters."

They also added glass doors at either end of the hallway that connects the living area with the original part of the house to let in more light, and lifted



Clockwise from above:
The Duncans removed a few walls to create an open kitchen, living and dining space; the park-like gardens and outbuildings make a photogenic spot for weddings; Alice mixes contemporary with traditional styles in the family area.



carpets to reveal the original Baltic pine floorboards underneath. The removal of more carpet exposed splendid blackbutt timber at the entrance. The bedrooms upstairs remain pretty much true to their original forms, including the nursery, which is papered floor-to-ceiling with Victorian newspaper cuttings. The section which was once the maid's quarters is now a toy room for the children and a space Andrew is hopeful will become a farm museum. "We have so many archives, books and relics that it would be lovely to see them properly displayed," he says. "That's a task I'm happy to handover to my father, Jock."

Jock has already lent a hand on the property when he helped Alice restore a century-old worker's cottage, which is now rented as a B&B. "The Clare Valley region is increasingly popular as a weekend destination," Alice says. "We are very happy with the way the business is growing."

The couple is currently renovating another cottage for a second B&B and has recently

started offering the property as a wedding location. "We do what is called 'dry hire,'" Alice adds. "That means we provide the location and the grounds and put the clients in touch with local businesses that provide marquees and catering and all the other equipment and services needed for an event."

Andrew insists that his expertise is as a farmer, looking after the Merino flock for wool, prime lambs and vineyards. The hospitality is very much Alice's department and they are hopeful that it will become a significant contributor to the family business.

"As I see it, we are custodians of Hughes Park," Andrew says. "Our children are the seventh generation of our family to have lived here. There will be no pressure on any of them to take over from us. They must reach their own decisions, just as we made ours. Having said that, I must say we are very happy with the way it has all turned out." *AC*

Clockwise from above:
The stone for the homestead came from two quarries on the property; the internal stone walls are 50cm thick; the formal dining room.