



# Creative Spirit

AN ARTIST WHO CRAFTED HIS OWN BEAUTIFUL HOME AND GARDEN WILL USE THE DIXONS CREEK PROPERTY AS THE SETTING FOR HIS LATEST EXHIBITION.

WORDS Penny Harrison PICTURES Celeste Faltyn





THIS PAGE An exquisite sculptural vase in Ted Secombe's home. OPPOSITE PAGE Ted Secombe in his Dixons Creek studio. And, Ted pictured with partner Ann.



**T**ed Secombe is always finding new ways to express himself. When he took a break from crafting exquisite ceramic pots, the renowned artist turned his hand to building a stunning home at Dixons Creek.

Next, he designed and sculpted several gardens, including the lush and tranquil patch surrounding the new home he shares with his partner, Ann, and their toy poodles, Luca and Stella. And, now, Ted is planning an exhibition to showcase his latest creative venture: a striking collection of steel and ceramic artworks. "I love the creative process, whether it's landscaping a garden or coming up with a new artwork," Ted said. "It's just who I am and, after taking some time off, I realised I like being an artist."

After 30 years of working in ceramics, Ted said he wanted a new challenge and has happily made the transition from clay into steel. "With ceramics, I felt I didn't have much more to say," he explained. "I had done so many exhibitions around Australia, the US, Europe and Japan, and started to feel I was on a bit of

a merry-go-round," he said. "I'm not sure how I decided on steel as a new medium, but I love the robustness of it and being able to make pieces that borrow from the natural world."

Ted's new collection has a strong natural aesthetic, featuring beautiful sensual steel birds and steel trees hung with delicate ceramic pods. It's a wonderful reflection of his new home, which sits gently in the landscape overlooking the Yarra Valley and exudes a deep organic quality.

"We really wanted to build a home that would have some empathy with the environment," Ted said. "We love the borrowed views and that sense of space out here. It's fantastic."

The house itself is a rustic blend of recycled telegraph poles, stone slabs and timber. Outside, rusted-steel gates and panels etched with autumn leaves, by artist Rudi Jass, enhance the earthy quality. "The property came with architect-designed plans and we just adjusted them to suit our needs," Ted said. "Then I built the house with my son, Joel. It's the first



THIS PAGE The light filled heart of the home. The intricate design of the Secombes home is a striking form in its surrounds. OPPOSITE PAGE Garden art is carefully entwined in the overall design. The gallery underneath the house where Ted displays his work.



house I've ever built and it may well be my last, but it was a great experience."

The new home has been a welcome change for Ted and Ann, who moved from a small house, which they had spent 18 years renovating. "We were raising four kids and running a busy bed and breakfast, as well as a gallery and a studio, so it was very intense," Ann said. "For us, the move was all about peace and quiet. The kids have all moved out, but the house is big enough to entertain and have family come to stay."

The guest bedroom is a welcoming space, with access to a bathroom and a private outdoor deck. It is located off the gallery-style entrance, which showcases some of Ted's extensive art collection, including Aboriginal paintings by Barbara Weir and Ningura Napurrula. "I love collecting and one of the requirements when building was that we have enough wall space to hang paintings," Ted said.

Ann, who decorated most of the home, said a

neutral palette provided the perfect backdrop for the art collection. "It's wonderful, because the artworks change all the time and bring new colours in to the home," she said. "And then you have the large windows bringing the outdoors inside, so I couldn't make the decor too busy."

More artistic touches are on show in the open-plan living area, including a cluster of three vibrant glass pendants, by Robert Wynne, hanging over the dining table. A large stone benchtop presides over the space and an open fireplace adds to the inviting air.

Walls of glass on either side take in the magnificent views and flood the space with natural light. "Each side opens to a deck area, which is fabulous because if it's blowing a gale on the north side, we can sit outdoors on the other side and not feel the wind at all," Ted said. "They're beautiful spots for breakfasts on weekends."

The simple but clever layout includes a corridor that leads to an open ensuite tiled with glimmering slabs of black granite and the main bedroom. On one side of the



corridor, a large sideboard is brimming with ceramics and other treasures. On the other side, a staircase balustrade echoes the leaf-patterned steel touches from the outside gates and panels, and leads down to a gallery.

Here, you'll find more of Ted's exciting collection, including shapely pieces from his years as a ceramicist. Many of Ted's pots, which are displayed in public and private collections around the world, are more than one-metre tall and were made using up to 90kg of clay.

A self-taught potter, Ted grew up on a farm in south-east Queensland and actually studied biochemistry. "It's a hard road for many artists, so I feel very lucky to have had such a successful career in ceramics," he said. "At the end of the day, though, success is not everything. Art needs to be heartfelt and mind-felt."

The gallery opens to an outdoor area and garden where Ted's new exhibition will be on display. "I'm building a mosaic-tiled pond and garden as the exhibition area and think it will be the perfect place, as

pieces will catch the light at different times of day," he said.

This exhibition has been two years in the making, Ted explained, and will feature pieces up to two-metres tall. "It's been incredibly labour intensive, involving several models, before going to the steel fabricators," he said. "The pieces are very simple in concept, but the sensuous curves and lines are very stylised and everything has to be hand-beaten. It's all done with hammers and anvils and there are 100s of hours of work."

Ted works out of a small workshop at the side of the property where views of the valley, the citrus orchard and the pretty garden he created provide the ideal inspiration. "It really is a beautiful place to live and work."

Ted Secombe's exhibition opens on Saturday, September 1 at noon and continues on September 2, September 8-9, and September 15-16, at 240 Bleases Lane, Dixons Creek, as part of the Yarra Valley Open Studios program. Also open by appointment on 0419 572 882. YV&R



OPPOSITE PAGE The house is adorned with artworks including these striking light shades. Neutral tones were used on the walls to allow paintings to shine. Ted's design of the garden was an organic process and evolved over time. THIS PAGE Works in progress line the walls of Ted's studio.