

On the right Jo Davenport made an assemblage from music scores by Brahms, while the table on the left of the hallway features works by Victoria's Clare Leeuwin Clark and a street scene by the late Albury-based painter Harvey Hall. The bare chaise longue frame is an heirloom piece from husband Ken's great-grandmother. **FACING PAGE** Behind Jo hangs one of her paintings, *Beneath the Surface, Night River*.



## THE BIG PICTURE

ARTIST JO DAVENPORT COULD ENVISAGE HER PERFECT HOUSE.

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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT *Boxed Group* by Melbourne's Jon Cattapan hangs over an oak roll-top desk; hand-painted tiles back the kitchen fireplace — the antique jugs came from local auctions; glass-fronted cupboards and marble benchtops in the kitchen.



**JO DAVENPORT'S ROOTS** run deep by the Murray River, near the NSW Riverina city of Albury. This was her birthplace and the surrounding countryside her childhood playground. And it was here that she later met her husband Ken. As she established herself as an artist, the hills and river scenery were often her inspiration.

For the past 14 years, Jo and Ken and their daughter Grace (now 25 and working in Melbourne) have called the riverside community of Splitters Creek home. For an artist it's a tranquil and nurturing environment with a supportive network of painters, dressmakers, cooks and other creative people. "It's a very rich area for artistic talent and that's what I love," Jo says.

Splitters Creek lies in a valley on the outskirts of Albury. In 1997 Jo and Ken found their two hectares along the river road. They lived in Albury where they had an optical business, but had been searching for a property for quite a while. When they found the section, subdivided from a former dairy farm, they fell in love with it.

"Ken always wanted a farm but we found nothing suitable — or if we did, it was too far out of town, or had no water," says Jo. "When this land became available, Ken adored it, and we could pump water from the river." However, it lacked one final requirement. Jo had always envisioned an old farmhouse — "So we decided to build an old-style Australian homestead."

They were determined to build the home of their dreams, without compromise, even though it would be 2000 before they finally moved in. "We built traditionally — to everyone's horror — with double-brick walls, open fireplaces, jarrah flooring and a farmhouse kitchen with marble benchtops."

Other materials for the large, Federation-style home, with lofty ceilings, long hallways and huge fireplace mantels, "came along" just at the right time — such



as the load of granite blocks, left over from a city church restoration, that could be turned into a large sitting room. Luckily, they also found a skilled worker in nearby Wangaratta. "He was an expert English stonemason and he did the most marvelous job," Jo says. "But he was not to be rushed. He'd arrive, light a fire, have a smoke and choose the right stone... He laid just three stones a day!"

Jo originally wanted English flagstones in the sitting room, but in the end she settled for concrete, stained with tea and coffee, and scored like flagging. It was a cost-effective decision, as well as one of the rare compromises she made. "I knew how to lay concrete with a slurry on top," she says. "So we mixed tea and coffee and swished it around, and then cut a flagstone pattern with an electric saw. After it dried, we sealed it and have loved it ever since; it only gets better with age. It's a cheap way to have a surface that's very easy and forgiving — and with the north-facing window, it warms up when the sun hits it."

Large bay windows look out to lush hedged garden rooms planted with peonies, David Austin roses, crabapples, azaleas and cherries. Birches grow in a copse on the lawn, and other trees have been planted to commemorate family members and special events. "Mum has a mulberry, Dad has a walnut and Grace has a magnolia for her graduation," Jo says. "And I planted an avenue of plane trees for our 22nd wedding anniversary."

Soon after buying the property, they put down a bore and added an underground water tank as drought insurance, despite their pumping rights from the river.

The colours Jo painted reflect those in the garden, such as the fiery photinia hedge and Japanese maple seen at certain times of the year that mirror the deep red dining room walls. Floorboards are strewn with rugs, many of Jo's large abstract artworks hang on the walls, >



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT Jo has a penchant for blue-and-white china; her grandfather made the table on which Jo painted as a child with her grandmother — the bronze hare was a gift from Ken; the tapestries above the bed were made by Jo, along with the quilt and curtains.



and ceramics and artifacts — such as the coach-building tools once used by Jo’s great-grandfather, some old keys and handcuffs, and her father’s ceramics — are on display. Jo likens herself to a bowerbird with a penchant for blue-and-white china.

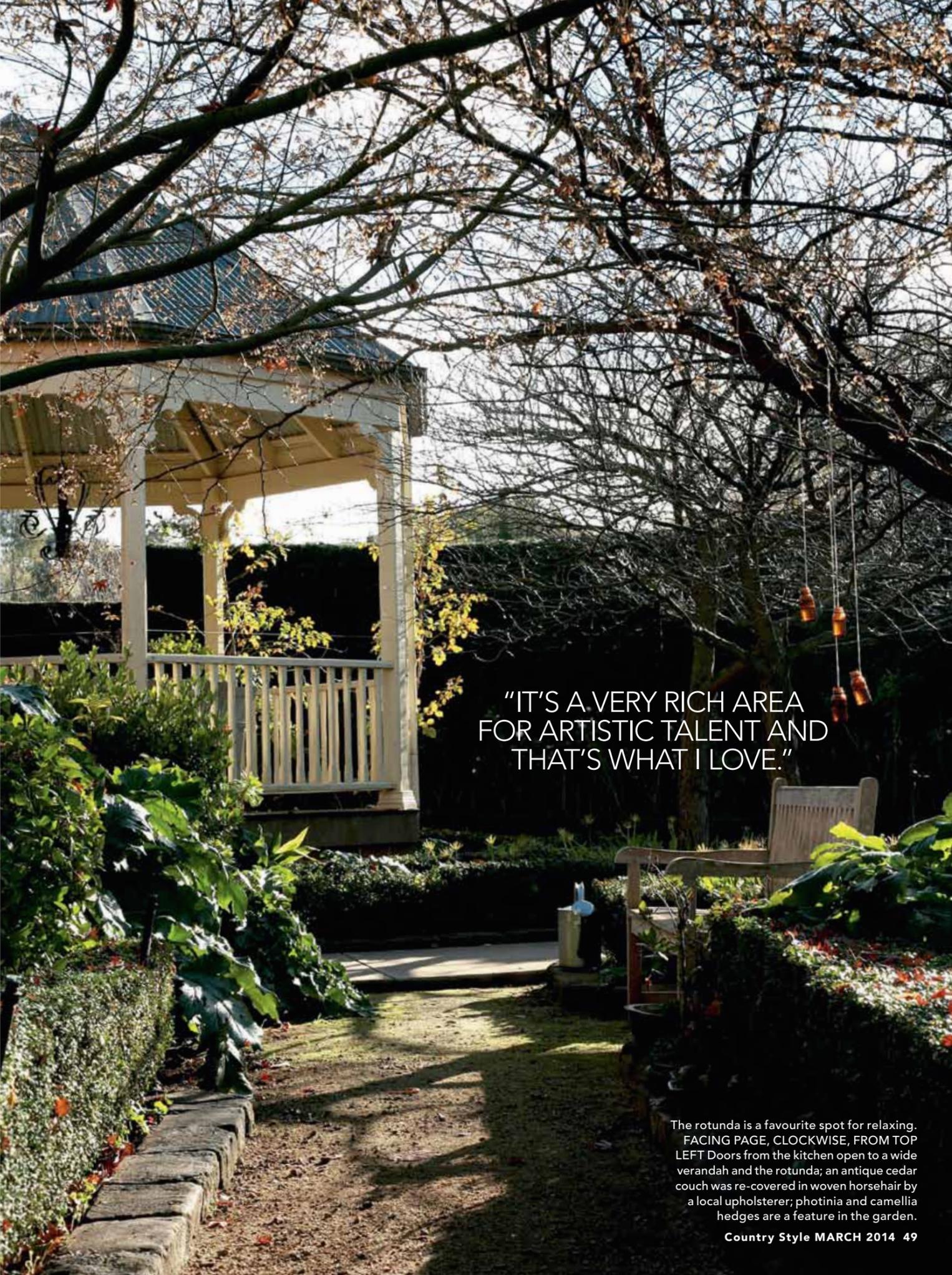
Furniture and other pieces they’ve collected all have a story. “There are bits from all over the place. We don’t set out to buy them — we simply become custodians of things as people hand them down.”

Until recently, Jo painted in an attic. Now she works in a new studio in the garden, where she prepared her current solo exhibition for the Flinders Lane Gallery in Melbourne. She recalls both her grandmothers painting and their homes being full of their work. “I used to spend a lot of time with my grandmother in Bendigo and I loved going there... I sat at a table in the vestibule and I remember painting a magpie.”

Jo started a fine arts diploma in Albury and had a card design business while Grace was young; she also painted with a group of local artist friends. In 2011 she was awarded the Langridge Painting Award and the Shelmedine Acquisitive Art Award at the Victorian College of the Arts. Since completing a master’s degree at the college in that same year, she has been represented by Flinders Lane Gallery in Melbourne and Arthouse Gallery in Sydney.

Jo paints the landscape as an ephemeral, shifting space, full of nuances and fleeting light. She never tires of the inspiration of her surroundings. “I do a lot on the river and the hills because that’s where I am. I love the way the view of the landscape moves all the time. It’s a lovely place to live.” \*

*Jo Davenport’s exhibition at Melbourne’s Flinders Lane Gallery runs until March 8. For more information, visit [www.flg.com.au](http://www.flg.com.au)*



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The rotunda is a favourite spot for relaxing. FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Doors from the kitchen open to a wide verandah and the rotunda; an antique cedar couch was re-covered in woven horsehair by a local upholsterer; photinia and camellia hedges are a feature in the garden.