

A home for all seasons

MAREE EGGLESTON visits a home filled with generations of warmth and cosiness, all achieved in just three years.

EVERY corner of this New Lambton Heights home reflects the owner's passion for country crafts. With the artistic talent to match, Christmas provides her with the ideal excuse to give her skills free rein in creating a colourful, uniquely Australian Yuletide mood.

At any time of the year the house and its contents have an unmistakably Australian flavour: rustic furniture hand-painted with native floral emblems; hand-made quilts and wall hangings; the warm, cosy glow of polished timber; high ceilings, wide verandas and a wonderful bushland setting.

But at Christmas the owner adds to an already attractive mix. Welcoming wreaths and garlands made from the dried seeds, flowers and leaves of native bushland plants are fixed to doors and windows for a home-grown spin on the traditional European arrangement of holly, berries and pine cones. Koalas, wombats and fellow native animals join angels, Santas and all the usual Christmas baubles on the tree that greets visitors inside the front door.

And wafting over everything, not the scent of cinnamon, nutmeg and fruit mince pies, but ti-tree oil and eucalypt, the unmistakable fragrance of the Australian bush.

Though the owners are spending only their third Christmas in their new home it bears an indelible personal stamp that suggests they have lived there for much longer. The house is a pole-framed design that nestles comfortably among the trees on a steeply sloping block adjoining a bushland reserve. The owners' main stipulation regarding its design was that it take advantage of views to Lake Macquarie in the distance, that it include natural materials such as timber as much as possible, and that it provide a spacious loft where the couple could pursue their recreation and work activities without encroaching on family areas downstairs.

'In our last home I used to have to work on my painting and crafts at the kitchen table,' said one of the owners.

'It was a pain having to unpack it and pack it all up again each night. Now I have enough space for my things that I don't have to do that any more.'

'We hadn't intended originally to build a pole home. Most are very modern, split level, with very stark, geometric lines, and we weren't very keen on that. We wanted something with a more traditional Australian country flavour. What we ended up with is perfect.'

Among their favourite features is the shady 2.5m-wide L-shaped back veranda where much of the family's summertime relaxing and entertaining takes place. French doors open onto it from the living and dining rooms and one of the bedrooms to provide cross ventilation and ready access to precious outdoor space on such a steeply sloping site.

'We use the veranda constantly, especially in summer for outdoor eating. It's so high off

the ground that we rarely get mosquitoes, and even though it faces south it's still sheltered from the weather,' they said.

The contents, like the house, strongly reflect the owners' tastes and talents. They describe much of the furniture as 'rescued', whether from thrift stores, the scrap heap or from the spider-infested recesses beneath friends' and acquaintances' houses.

In the living room, for instance, a battered old meat safe with masonite doors, wire mesh sides and a rickety frame was stripped, braced, given a new paint treatment and decorated with hand-painted native flowers to begin a new life as a child-proof video cabinet.

A coffee table in the same room was previously a scarred pine kitchen table that has been cut down and attractively refinished.

The gleaming claw-footed cast iron tub in the main bathroom was salvaged from beneath a house in Merewether, where it had sat for generations, and resurfaced. The vanity unit is a restored washstand decorated with Federation-era tiles that the owners found still wrapped in pre-World War I newspaper in a Blue Mountains antique shop.

And the list goes on. Almost every piece of furniture in the house has a story behind it, either about its origins or the amount of work that has gone into its 'rescue'.

'We're just not interested in modern furniture,' they said. 'There's something about old timber that's so much nicer than new.'

Even in areas where new timber construction was a necessity, like the country-style oregon kitchen, much of the material has been recycled - in this case oregon from an old building that was being demolished.

The owners' creative touch extends to elements like the decorative paintwork on floors in the kitchen, dining room and entry foyer, the pretty hand-made window treatments tailored individually to the colour scheme in each room, and the striking hand-sewn Bargello quilt covering the brass bed in the master bedroom.

From one end to the other it is a cosy, comfortable house with an air of established warmth and permanence that new homes rarely achieve in such a short space of time.

1. A favourite spot for summertime relaxing and entertaining, the shady 2.5m-wide L-shaped back veranda affords views of the surrounding bush. **2.** A welcoming hand-made wreath adorns the front door. **3.** Christmas is a time for home-made decorations and homely touches, and the owner's creative touch extends to elements like the decorative paintwork on the floor in the entry foyer. **4.** The pole-framed house nestles comfortably among the trees on a steeply sloping block adjoining a bushland reserve. **5.** The country-style kitchen features recycled oregon, rescued from an old building that was being demolished. **6.** The living room is filled with character and 'rescued' furniture, including an old meat safe now serving as a video cabinet and a coffee table that began life as a kitchen table. **7.** A striking hand-sewn Bargello quilt covers the brass bed in the master bedroom.