



Homeowners Michael and Sue Franklin prepare breakfast on the balcony. FACING PAGE "I love being outside, in the garden, so if anyone's ever looking for me, that's where I will be," Sue says. 58 COUNTRY STYLE APRIL 2024



*c'est la vie*

AN HISTORIC POST OFFICE ON NSW'S SOUTH COAST IS NOW HOME TO SELF-PROCLAIMED FRANCOPHILES.

WORDS HANNA MARTON PHOTOGRAPHY LEAN TIMMS



FROM TOP A Falcon Kitchener cooker adds traditional style in the revamped kitchen, which also features a stone bench in Quantum Quartz Ash Grey and antique brass pendant lights from Zaffero; treasured keepsakes, vessels and candleholders.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Porter's Paints Yacht Race is the backdrop for a collection of old photos of the building, images from the local Historical Society, an original building plan from 1887, and stamps with the Moruya postmark; balustrade beauty; the kitchen holds vintage teapots, a decorative green plate from Spain, and a Dutch wall coffee grinder gifted by Sue's mum; muted blue meets white; the new addition, added in 1925, is a clash of Art Deco influence against the original late-Victorian style.



OFTEN IN LIFE, when one door closes, another one opens. In Sue and Michael Franklin's case, many doors (and many Victorian sash windows) opened. Acquiring the Post and Telegraph building in Moruya on the South Coast of NSW – on the traditional lands of the Yuin tribe – in 2020 was a golden opportunity for the newly retired couple. They had thought about moving from Canberra to the coast for some time and couldn't resist the grand old dame, with her wraparound verandah and stunning period details.

Built in 1887 on the town's main street, it was the post office and postmaster's family home until it was sold to its first private owners in 1997. "It had been on the market for about two years because an old house like this is quite an undertaking; it needed some love, repairs and redecorating," recalls Sue. "It was perfect timing."

This sea change also allowed Sue and Michael, both 58, to bring a little Francophilia to Moruya. Having lived and worked in France – they wed in Paris – Sue and Michael fell in love with the country's provincial aesthetic and lifestyle. "The French just love life," says Michael. "They love to eat well, drink well and spend time in the garden."

With eclectic European antiques and family heirlooms in tow, it was with that joie de vivre that the duo gently transformed the Post and Telegraph.

After engaging local trades, structural issues were addressed, including holes in the rusting tin roof. A "drab and dark" Victorian colour scheme was rectified with bright, light hues by Sue, who has "a really good eye for interiors," notes Michael. Walls were adorned with >



HOME MORUYA NSW

"This is the Great Room, our sitting room. The sofas from Tessa Furniture have moved with us several times and get new slipcovers every now and then," Sue says. The original black marble mantelpiece surrounds a slow combustion fire which provides warmth and ambience during winter. *Wanaka Tree* by photographer Ben Messina catches the sunlight on the wall. A mirror and coffee table from Pottery Barn complete the elegant setting. **FACING PAGE** Garden clippings add natural beauty indoors.



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"All of the renovation elements were decided in conjunction with the Heritage Section of the Eurobodalla Shire Council, who've been so supportive of our efforts to restore the building to its former glory," Sue says. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** The Dove guestroom features curtains from South Coast Window Furnishings by the double sash windows; "It's been a learning process to see what will thrive," Sue says of her garden endeavours; light bathes the bathroom; cat Tiffany hides in the garden.



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locally sourced artworks, including by Michael's sister, Annie Franklin, and her husband, Gordon Robinson.

For the ground-level kitchen, a wall was knocked down to create a roomier space featuring three large windows, previously shrouded by thick velvet curtains. A traditional Falcon cooker, perfect for making Michael's signature scrambled eggs, was installed in the original fireplace.

Rounding out the kitchen are new joinery, brass pendant lights and an array of accoutrements. "They're all things we picked up on our travels, such as Spanish pottery and Dutch antiques," says Michael. "It's a mixture of practical things, like kitchen scales, and things that just look lovely."

Vinyl flooring was also peeled away to reveal ironbark boards. "Ironbark is strong, but has those divots and knocks that point to its history," says Sue. "We also have a beautiful old cedar staircase with a lovely patch in the middle, worn down from footsteps. There are bedrooms upstairs, where the postmaster's family lived. We like to imagine their kids running up and down the stairs."

Locals, past and present, love to share yarns about the post office, often when Sue and Michael are sitting on the verandah or pottering in the garden, gin and tonic in hand. ("We often fight over whose job it is to water the pots," jokes Michael.) "A man was walking past with his

wife one day and knocked on the door," Sue remembers. "He worked in the post office in the 1970s, so we showed them around. He had such a lovely time reminiscing that he later posted us some old stamps." The treasured stamps are now displayed in a living space dubbed 'the library', which once housed the first telephone booth in the region.

The couple's Canberra-based sons, James, 30, and Matthew, 28, and their partners are frequent visitors, although, "they're only here for 15 minutes before heading to the beach," says Michael. Completing the family is cat Tiffany and Josie, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. Sue and Michael also welcome guests to the Post and Telegraph, which previous owners converted into a bed and breakfast. Guests occupy three rooms upstairs, while Sue and Michael reside in a ground-floor apartment.

So much for slowing down in retirement. "It's a different sort of busy," says Sue. "We still get plenty of downtime. We don't want to be flat out constantly - spending time out in the community is important to us. In just three years, we've made some beautiful connections and friendships."

As the French say, *'Mangez bien, riez souvent, aimez beaucoup.'* ('Eat well, laugh often, love abundantly.') *CG*  
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The upstairs verandah received fresh coats of paint, with Dulux Still applied beneath the eaves. "This is a favourite spot for guests to enjoy watching the sunset," Sue says. "The carriage lights were added in 2021 and bathe the exterior walls in soft, warm light." The comfortable chairs hold colourful cushions from Great Outdoor Cushions. **FACING PAGE** Time for tea and a book amid the greenery. "I love a good coffee-table book, mostly gardens and architecture from around the world," says Sue.

#### ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- Sue and Michael bought most of their furniture from Facebook Marketplace, Vinnies, garage sales and stores in France, while other pieces, such as the mahogany dining table and wrought-iron beds, came with the home.
- The kitchen joinery was completed by local business Ernie's Creative Kitchens.
- On show throughout the home are artworks by: Gabriella Kandilla – "a fabulous Tiwi artist from the Munupi Art Centre on Melville Island"; Peta West; Annie Franklin; Gordon Robinson; Raewyn Lawrence; Dave Ramsland; and Stuart Whitelaw.
- The garden is a series of 'rooms' featuring star jasmine, camellias, lilly-pilly hedges and salvias, a favourite of the bees and birds.

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