

AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY STYLE

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for the Festive Season

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INDUSTRIAL

EVOLUTION

INSPIRED BY TALES OF
THE SEA AND OUTER
SPACE AND ACCOMPANIED
BY THE SOUNDS OF
OPERA MUSIC,
TREFOR PREST WELDS
AND MELTS SCRAP METAL
INTO SCULPTURE.
BY KERRY ANDERSON.
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
NEIL LORIMER



Fourteen years ago contemporary sculptor Trefor Prest packed his bag, loaded his family into the Land Rover and, with Doreen the donkey on the back, left Kalorama in the Dandenong Ranges to commence a new life of rural bliss near Newstead in central Victoria.

"We must have looked very conspicuous driving through Melbourne," says Belinda, Trefor's wife. "We had Doreen crammed in the back with all the luggage."

Doreen was the main reason why the Prest family chose to move to central Victoria. Having a large block of land at Kalorama, they rather fancied the idea of having a donkey and when informed by friends about one available at Sandon,



forged by Jim Crowe Creek and Loddon River, the cottage was one of many relics left over from the gold rush of last century, but the yield of gold from the valley was so high that the area was still being dredged until recently. More important than gold, the Prests' new property had a gentle rise overlooking the cottage which was an ideal site for Trefor's workshop, but before the family became absorbed in building the studio, they needed to make the cottage habitable. "It was pretty basic when we first came here," Trefor says.

The original cottage was built around 1890 and later had two lean-tos added. There was only an outside toilet and no bathroom, so these became the Prests' first priority. With the assistance of a friend, Trefor has done most of the work himself including massive renovations and additions to the rear of the cottage which, he says, are "still going on" to accommodate his growing family of Sam, 17, Tegwen, 15, and Bonnie, 13.

From the road, the Prests' cottage looks much like it might have in 1890, but the renovations and additions include three arched windows which are impressive features on the north wall, a second level built from cedar and blending in with the brick work beneath and a wide cool verandah which beckons on a hot day.

Trefor's studio looks as if it has been there for the past century. Progressively built from second-hand galvanised iron,

mostly salvaged from the Castlemaine Woollen Mill fire of 1981, it was later extended to include a gallery for his collection of pressed metal sculptures. Trefor spends most of his time there, up the hill from the house and under the watchful eyes of Doreen, working on his metal creations and listening to his beloved opera music.

There is little left of the original garden with the exception of an exquisite pink rose which Belinda has been unable to identify, the remains of a plum hedge which Trefor had to tame with severe pruning and two enormous cypress trees at the front fence which flagged the cottage's location for bygone visitors walking from Strangways's railway station. Additions to the garden include a young grove of elms, oaks and willow trees surrounding a small ornamental lake



which has a waterfall and a flock of geese that defy all efforts to keep them away.

Trefor's artistic influence is evident from the galvanised steel sculpture which doubles as a letterbox in the gateway to the fire box in the dining room which is constructed from a recycled steel boiler. He believes that the use of steel, wood, brass stock and copper sheet salvaged from scrap metal yards adds interest to his sculptures. "Acting out his engineering fantasies," an art critic once said.

While Trefor has completed many engineering courses, including a welding certificate, it is his childhood memories of



his seaside home in Wales and his love of stories from the sea and outer space which provide the basis for most of his ideas. A friend's yarn about a lifebuoy labelled "for those in peril" prompted one of his more interesting pieces, a glass case featuring a diver submerged in clear oil. Trefor is also influenced by nautical and aerial machines from bygone eras and his sculptures aren't just for looking at, they must be touched and experienced. A sculpture with wings that parody flight is manoeuvred by a handle and in another piece, compartments open to reveal a hidden aspect.

Pieces of Trefor's work have been sold to corporations, as well as the National Gallery in Canberra and galleries in locations as diverse as Newcastle and Launceston, yet he believes that he is still to reach a turning point in his career.

"Young artists often receive a lot of attention early in their careers, but after that you have to wait until you're 60 or 70 years old before your career picks up again," he says. "I hope that I don't have to wait that long."

More recently, Trefor has enjoyed the new experience of tutoring two days a week at Ballarat University. "It's a nice change to be surrounded by people who appreciate what I do in a professional sense," he says. And yet he is also glad to get home and participate in "a bit of domestic life".

All three of Trefor and Belinda's children show artistic tendencies and the studio also houses some of their work, but Trefor encourages them to make their own decisions on what to do with their lives. "From my own experience as an artist, it hasn't been a dream run."



Since Doreen prompted the Prests to make Strangways their home in 1982, the family has extended to include Pinkie the rat, Hugo the ferret, Alfred the guinea pig, two dogs and a number of horses. Firmly entrenched in their rural lifestyle, it would take more than a Land Rover to move the Prest family now.

