

Life in the Hunter & Coastal regions of New South Wales

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Hunter & Coastal

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French Connection



A passion for travel and a flair for design helped create a majestic country escape for tree-changers Mimi and Steve Summers.

Story: Cornelia Schulze,
Photography: MMP Murray McKean Photography



The heart of the home

The kitchen was another key focus of the project. The challenge for the experts from Kookaburra Kitchens was to create a layout integrating modern functionality and high-end kitchen appliances with the French antiques Mimi loves. "This is where we get together as a family and with friends," says Mimi. The end result is a fabulous yet functional space, punctuated by a glorious stone bench top that practically beckons guests to stick around for another glass of wine. A butler's pantry keeps workspaces out of sight. "I didn't want the clutter that comes with a sink in the middle of an island. It makes much more sense in the butler's pantry," says Mimi.

The open plan area is the perfect place for the family to come together whether they are eating, relaxing, cooking or entertaining.



The stone fireplace makes for a show-stopping focal point.



Floor to ceiling terrace doors from Langford Windows create a seamless indoor outdoor flow.



French provincial may not be the first aesthetic that comes to mind when you think of houses in the Hunter, but share a glass of du vin with Mimi and Steve at their magnificent home, and you may begin to reconsider. The couple saw a natural synergy between the architectural style, thought to have originated in French wine regions, and our own proud viticulture history. "Our design vision was to create a home that encapsulates grandeur whilst retaining warmth, character, charm, elegance and the ability to blend seamlessly into the nearby tranquil hills and mountains," says Mimi. One look at their stately residence

set on three acres in Branxton, just a stone's throw from Australia's first winery, and it's clear this talented couple most certainly accomplished their mission.

Holidays at home

Travel has always been a source of inspiration for the Summers. The couple fell in love with French Provincial style holidaying in Europe, whilst back home, they stole away to the Hunter Valley for weekend escapes at every chance. It wasn't long before they began to daydream about creating their own French-inspired haven in the area. Having lived in Sydney's Inner

West with their teenage son, the family of three longed for a different kind of life. "We decided that a green change away from the city hustle and bustle was essential in order to improve our lifestyle," says Mimi, a former Vice President in one of the world's most recognised global banks.

Building the dream

After finding the perfect block of land, their next challenge was to find a builder who shared their vision. "Lance Murray just really understood what we were after. Before long, he was actually finishing our sentences for us," says Mimi. Indecision ▷



The design of the home allows you to see the stunning view, even from the hallway.



△ Enjoy the beautiful surrounds from the terrace off the master. The tiles, from Jacoba Tiles, create wow factor. ▽



Sweet escape
Upstairs you'll find four double bedrooms and three bathrooms, an oasis of calm away from the sense of occasion in the rooms below. Mimi and Steve capitalise on the valley views from the master suite with a 35 square meter terrace, the perfect spot for a sundowner or a spot of stargazing. One of Steve's favourite features is the beautiful grey ironbark timber flooring, which has been used throughout the house. "When it was finally finished, I couldn't wait to take off my shoes and feel the warmth of the timber under my bare feet," he says. Stepping out onto the terrace, the sensation of bare feet on the Travertine tiles (Jacoba Tiles) is equally luxurious.

There are so many options for outdoor living and entertaining. ▽



was definitely not an issue for the couple who had several non-negotiables when it came to the build. Authenticity was at the heart of every design decision, but above all else, creating a home with heart, not just a house, but a sanctuary for their family, was of the utmost importance.

Mimi's passion for design is second only to her eye for detail. "Our mantra throughout the build was superb craftsmanship using the highest quality materials with attention to every detail," explains Mimi. In every room thoughtful accents balance grandeur with all the necessary conveniences of a luxurious modern lifestyle. "The home is accentuated with all the symmetry and details one

would expect from a French Provincial," says Mimi. In the living area the huge stone fireplace, wainscoting and coffered ceilings work harmoniously, while outside the custom made iron gates, a Mansard roof with its bespoke parapet mouldings, and the three-tiered stone fountain give the home a commanding presence.

Rooms with a view

The thoughtfully considered design allows the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape to shine front and centre. The plot's majestic vistas take centre stage thanks to some clever design choices – from the floorplan to the muted colour palette which lets the views do all the ▷



HUNTER HOMES

talking. Custom-made floor-to-ceiling terrace doors in the main living area create an effortless indoor-outdoor flow, while ten foot ceilings create a light, airy feel, with just a dash of drama.

Respecting the environment was also a top priority, with solar panels and a rain water tank installed on site. "Sustainability is very important to us. The house is really well insulated and there were only a handful of times this winter when we had to turn on the heating," says Steve. "We are currently covering about 80 per cent of our electricity needs from solar energy. The experts are telling us that we might actually see that go up to 90 per cent in the summer. Plus we have a back-up battery for the few days when the sun doesn't shine." The rural timber fencing (SMH Valley Fencing) and the garage doors for the multi care garage (HV Garage Doors) perfectly complement the exterior of the home.

Award-winning style

It's no surprise this spectacular residence has won the 2018 HIA-CSR Housing



Solar energy meets around 80% of this magnificent home's electricity needs.

Award in the Custom Home Category. Having completed this labour of love, Mimi and Steve can finally spend more time on their design company, Luxe Home Designs and Décor which they founded in 2015. "We listen closely to our clients in order to create a distinctive home that reflects

their vision, inspiration and personality," says Mimi. "Having planned and designed our own dream home, I wanted to create luxurious and elegant homes for others to enjoy." Judging by the staggering success of their own project, we have no doubt this dynamic pair will do just that. <

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Mimi and Steve's trade secrets

Discover the local trades and services who helped build Mimi and Steve's magnificent home.

Mimi Summers's **design** expertise is visible throughout the house. *Luxe Home Designs and Décor by Mimi, 0412 260 091, www.luxehomedesigns.com.au*

Kookaburra **Kitchens** have custom built and installed the beautiful cabinetry in the kitchen and laundry, the vanities and wardrobes. *Kookaburra Kitchens, 02 4937 1640, www.kookaburrakitchens.com.au*

Jacoba **Tiles** provided expert advice on the choice of all external and internal tiles and the Travertine and beautifully executed the design. *Jacoba Tiles, 02 4933 9311, www.jacobatiles.com.au*

Langford **Windows** custom built and expertly installed all windows and French Doors. *Langford Windows, 02 4953 5000, www.langfordwindows.com.au*

The **motorised garage doors** were supplied and installed by Hunter Valley Garage Doors, experts for both residential and industrial garages. *Hunter Valley Garage Doors, 02 4932 3772, www.hvgaragedoors.com.au*

The **rural timber fencing** was built by SMH Valley Fencing, the Hunter Valley expert fencing outfit. *SMH Valley Fencing, 02 4991 5646, www.smhvalleyfencing.com.au*

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Editorial Board: Tony, Jo, Michael, Gill

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