

grow

EMBRACE NATURE WITH BEAUTIFUL OUTDOOR SPACES

This month...

A pretty Southern Highlands garden doubles as an outdoor gallery, with works constructed in clay, steel and found materials around every corner. Plus, Jamie Durie shares his ideas for growing your own herbs and vegies, whatever the size of your outdoor space!





where the art is

A Southern Highlands garden is the constantly changing backdrop to one couple's creative vision

Heidi and Sam's garden, located in the Southern Highlands town of Bowral, is not grand; rather, it is homely and appealing. A vine-shrouded pergola stands on a rustic patio, shading an elderly table around which stands a collection of mismatched dining chairs. Beyond, undulating flowerbeds wend their way around garden buildings along a stretch of lawn that extends to a gated wilderness at the far end, home to a family of chooks. "If you have a really close look, it's a lovely, rambling garden but there are a lot of weeds!" admits Sam.

A showpiece, then, it is not, but it is a showcase, a verdant backdrop to the sculptures, ornaments, furniture and pieces that the couple craft from clay, steel and found objects. There are water features in the vegie patch, fashioned from clay, and glazed and fired in Heidi's kiln, that resemble otherworldly wedding cakes; endearing figurative pieces built by Sam from salvaged engine parts and farm implements; a flight of whimsical figures careening over the garage wall; brightly painted ceramic toadstools among a row of silver birches; a fire pit made from an old gas bottle, with dancers etched into its rusted sides; a 'story' panel, crafted from steel; pots in the garden beds and much more.

This artisan garden has really taken shape since Sam moved here from Victoria two years ago. "There were some beautiful trees here already – the plum trees and up the back, beyond the wooden gate, there was a fruit orchard established," says Heidi, "but most of the yard was knee-high with two sheep, Chops and Cutlet, living there!" Having tackled the mini meadow, most of the space is now devoted to the plants, such as bottlebrush, succulents, buddleia, lilac, crabapple and valerian, that are both a scene-setter for and integral to the couple's artworks. "It's the



ALFRESCO APPEAL (this page) An ancient dining table, covered by a pink Chinese Batik tablecloth handmade by the Bai people of the Yunnan province in China, from Mandarin Swing (mandarinswing.com), provides the perfect setting for lunch. Above, a two-year-old vine rambles over the pergola, built by Sam. A row of totems screen a collection of organic clay figures (opposite, top), taking flight across the side of the garage. "When I made this it was a very windy day and the leaves were going crazy," recalls Heidi. "It reminds me of that windy craziness." Pieces made by Sam using found objects, such as the firepit created from an old 1100-litre gas bottle, stand alongside Heidi's works, such as the ceramic and steel seaweed sculpture that divides the lawn from the patio (opposite, bottom).



MATERIAL MATTERS (this page) Heidi's tall pod water fountains, framed by a sea of buddleia and mint, were inspired by a trip to the desert. "While we were out there I gathered bags of dirt and red dust which I put into the clay," she says. Sam's rusted-steel tree, beside them, is home to a pair of Heidi's ceramic magpies.

HAND MADE (opposite page) Sunflowers crafted by Sam bloom in the vegetable garden (top left), while the endearing figure on the patio (top right) was inspired by Sam's nephew, Harry, and incorporates a piston and a towbar. "I do love recycling things," says Sam. "I love having piles of it and putting it together – it generally just falls in place."

TOP IDEA (opposite page, bottom) Heidi's tomato toppers are a colourful way to hold supports for plants such as tomatoes, peas and beans. "My welding teacher had the idea for the bottom bits and I stuck the tops on them," she explains.



most beautiful gallery," says Sam. "It's always changing. Here, in Bowral, you really notice your seasons."

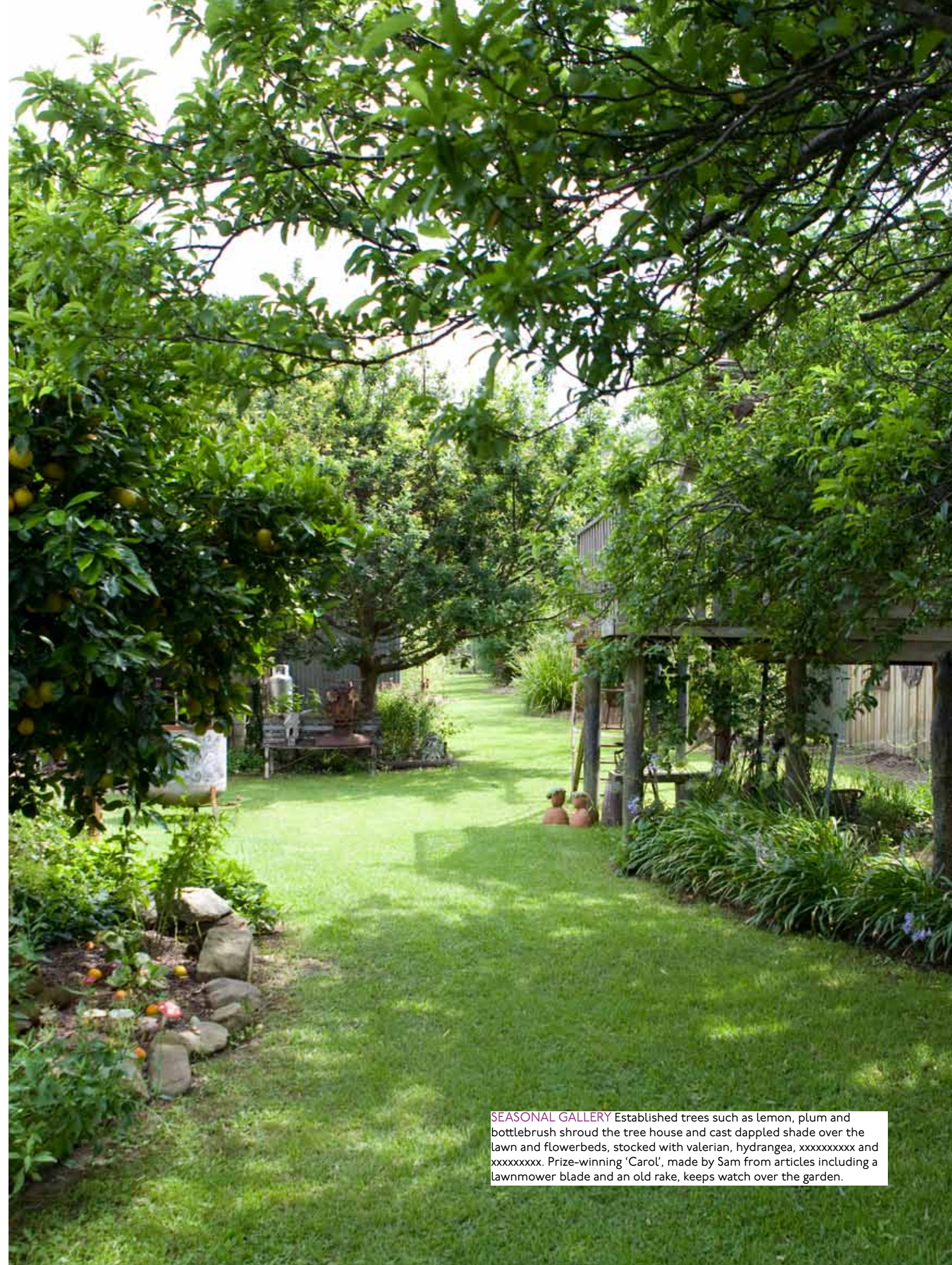
Heidi and Sam first met 20-plus years ago when they worked on a project designing and making furniture, a collaboration that lasted for about a year until Heidi married and moved away. Their creative endeavours continued; Heidi pursued a fine arts course, printmaking and working in clay, wire and steel, while Sam continued to craft furniture in his spare time. Then, much later, following the break up of their respective marriages, they met again, love blossomed and the couple's artistic collaboration was reborn.

Sam's work, recycling found objects into singular, characterful sculptures, dovetails neatly with Heidi's creations; as well as pots and clay figurative pieces, she crafts 'story' gates and panels in steel, every one unique. "Many cultures put their story, like their family history, into something they use or wear – the New Guinea tribes with their shields, and even the Irish with their knitted jumpers," she explains. It was only when she needed to make one for her own home that she had the idea to give its pattern some meaning. "I did a story based around Sam and myself falling in love and children and stars and birds and chooks – everything that was in our life became part of the gate."

Part of the Southern Highlands artists' studio trail and regular exhibitors at markets and events such as Sydney's Artisans in the Garden, last year the couple also began showing their work through a series of 'open gardens'. "It's so much better to see art in situ," says Sam. "Having a sculpture sitting on a table can look great, but it's much better if it's in its proposed environment."

Just as the couple's work is a blend of the decorative and practical, so the garden has function as well as form. The couple have built five large raised beds that are gradually being filled with vegetables and fruit such as strawberries. There are raspberry canes along the rear fence, and spinach, rocket and potatoes pop up among the flowers in the beds nearer the house. It's an ever-changing vista. "We switch the art about a bit and sell a bit so we have to replace it, and it's always evolving and changing, just like the garden," says Sam. "One of us has to build something to fit into a space, and that's a lovely way to create."





PLAN

KEY MATERIALS


Garden gates, panels and furniture: Heidi's 'story' gates, panels and benches are made to order in powdercoated steel. Prices range from \$xxx for a panel, \$xxx for a gate and \$xxx for a bench. Tomato toppers cost from \$xx. Heidi McGeoch, (02) 4861 6891; heidigardenart.com.

Fire braziers and found-object sculpture: Prices for fire pits and garden art, individually crafted by Sam, start from \$xxx for a brazier and \$xxx for a sculpture. Sam Larwill, 0400 897638.

Tree house: Try Bunnings for a range of wooden cubby houses from around \$2000, which can be raised with an additional kit, from around \$300.

Fruit and ornamental trees: Various available from Daleys Nursery, who mail throughout Australia. Meyer lemon, , from \$19.75/175mm, daleysfruit.com.au.-

TIME OUT {above, left} Silvery-leaved xxxxxxxxxx and fragrant mint is the backdrop to a secluded corner of the lawn, the perfect place to take stock for a few minutes while gardening.

CRAFT WORK {top, clockwise from top left} Heidi's steel birds confuse the real thing in the branches of a plum tree. This bench, a finished work awaiting pick up by the client, has been crafted from steel and powdercoated in red. Each of Heidi's 'story' gates and panels is unique; her own garden gate draws on favourite flowers and elements such as xxxxxxxxxx. Giant ceramic mushrooms that wouldn't look out of place on an Alice in Wonderland set, stand among an elegant row of silver birches in the vegetable garden. 

SEASONAL GALLERY Established trees such as lemon, plum and bottlebrush shroud the tree house and cast dappled shade over the lawn and flowerbeds, stocked with valerian, hydrangea, xxxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxx. Prize-winning 'Carol', made by Sam from articles including a lawnmower blade and an old rake, keeps watch over the garden.