



Rural Retreat

Text / Karine Monié

Images / Courtesy of Luxe Houses



Surrounded by lush, rolling hills and overlooking the bush landscape of Kangaroo Valley, this former olive plantation in New South Wales provides the perfect escape from hectic urban life.

Located along the coast midway between Sydney and Canberra, the Ooralba property was originally built 15 years ago in a mash-up style that combined Texan ranch with Swiss chalet. More recently, however, Nicholas Graham & Associates under creative director Nic Graham has led a thorough redesign of the property for the new owners, who wanted a contemporary look — with Australia at the heart — and a different layout for more connectivity. ‘The project started through a mutual friend and client in Hong Kong,’ recalls Graham. ‘We talked a lot about our shared vision for the ideal country property and we travelled together to see the site for the first time. The owners and I immediately loved the idea of bringing the garden to the table.’

This shared love of food and family mealtimes was the starting point for the project. An open-plan industrial kitchen is at the heart of the house and is a natural gathering spot with its timber shelves brimming with cookbooks, its professional-grade stove and substantial timber island — so large it required seven men to install. For the happy few who rent the property, a private chef prepares healthy recipes using ultra-fresh produce from the property’s sprawling orchards, vegetable patches, olive groves and fruit vines.

To create a space conducive to large get-togethers, some structural changes were necessary. What started out as a small renovation quickly grew to eventually include seven bedrooms, six bathrooms and the addition of an extra wing where a cosy, panelled library is

the perfect retreat for reading or playing games with the family.

‘Although Ooralba allows generosity of scale, it’s not ostentatious,’ says Graham. Rather, the floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room that allow unhindered views over the sprawling and inspiring landscape invite guests to settle in and linger in the moment. ‘There’s a sense of calmness and belonging, high above the ever-changing colours of sky and landscape,’ Graham adds. ‘What I like most about this house is its tranquillity and the fact that it’s understated.’

While aiming for a more contemporary look and feel, Graham also kept some of the home’s more interesting original elements, including reclaimed beams from a nearby bridge demolition. He then added his own eclectic mix of furnishings and decoration. ‘The owners and I shopped around the world for many of the pieces,’ he recalls. ‘For example, the Joshua Yeldham artwork in the dining room, a David Weeks light from FY2K, the glass canisters that were purchased in a London antique store, and French linen tea towels.’ Other happened-upon elements that serve to ground the space include a mid-century velvet sofa, Belgian sisal rugs, a grand piano, an old workers’ union cedar table, and works by Australian artists John Baird and Luke Williams.

While the interiors capture sublime views from a homey environment, the outdoor spaces are an ode to traditional Australian country life. A wraparound deck offers the ideal vantage point to watch the morning mist burn off or enjoy a glass of local shiraz with friends in the evening. Elsewhere on the property, built-in barbecue pits, an outdoor stone oven, a swimming pool and an in-ground trampoline are just some of the other amenities designed to encourage outdoor living. ‘This country property inspired all of it,’ says Graham. ‘For me, it’s important to give priority to functionality with a sense of timelessness.’

Previous page: Completely redesigned by Nicholas Graham & Associates, this New South Wales property embraces the Australian outdoors

This page: Full-height windows and doors serve to frame views of the surrounding landscape





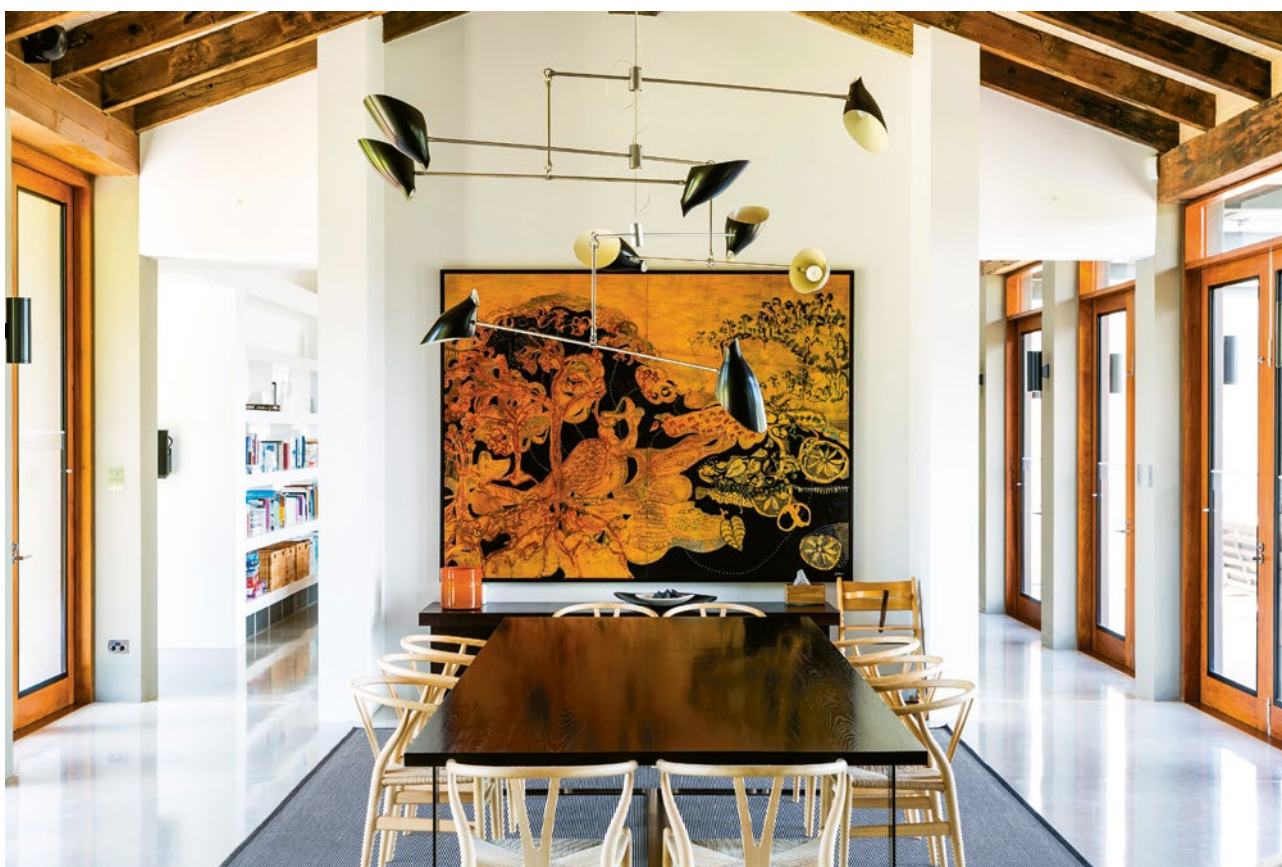
Natural materials such as stone and timber are favoured throughout the residence



Designer Nic Graham combined vintage and contemporary pieces for an eclectic mix



Stainless steel appliances give the kitchen a sleek, polished look that fits the contemporary vibe of the house



The current dining room occupies what was previously an open courtyard that separated the master bedroom from the rest of the house



Interior spaces were designed to feel deeply embedded within the natural surroundings





Overlooking Kangaroo Valley, the large deck is ideal for relaxing with a book or for al fresco meals with the family





The living space extends to the outdoors with terraces, lush landscaping and recreational areas

