

**HOME PORT FAIRY VICTORIA**

Kitty the ginger cat in the garden of artist Colleen Guiney and John Watkinson's family home in Port Fairy, Victoria. Plantings include Bangalow palms, Mexican orange blossom, Tanika grass and a creeping passionfruit vine. **FACING PAGE Blue 1**, part of a series of five works, pictured alongside yellow succulent flowers Colleen picked at nearby East Beach.



**COASTAL MUSE**

THE END OF THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD IS HOME TO AN ARTIST, HER FAMILY AND A BOUTIQUE HOTEL.

WORDS VIRGINIA IMHOFF PHOTOGRAPHY MARTINA GEMMOLA STYLING COLLEEN GUINEY

“Port Fairy is very much a town where there’s a bit of a tradition of people coming here as a family to camp over many years.”

BIG, LIFE-CHANGING moves often start off with a seed of an idea that need years, or even decades, to grow. It happened this way for Colleen Guiney and John Watkinson, who took on one of Port Fairy’s oldest buildings and transformed it into award-winning boutique accommodation, Drift House. Along the way, they also created a home for themselves and their children, 14-year-old Milo and Toby, 12, and made a new life in the old seafaring town in south-western Victoria.

“It all started when we were 21 and were travelling around Europe,” says Colleen who, as well as running the hotel with John, is an abstract expressionist painter. “John’s parents lived in the Yorkshire Dales and had a B&B, and when they went away on holidays we would run it for them for a few weeks to make money so we could keep travelling. We thought it was such a nice life and that maybe we could do something like it one day. It was always in the back of our minds while we were living and working in Melbourne.”

Ten years ago, when they started looking around, they gravitated towards the coast. Colleen recalls they saw a house advertised that reminded them of a property they’d seen on a couple of visits to Port Fairy. “We wondered if it was the big house on the corner,” she says. As it turns out, it was.

Riverdale, as the old house was originally named, was built in the 1850s for John Mason — a captain of the militia, an architect and a licensee of one of the earliest pubs in town. When John and Colleen bought the house in 2008, it had been in one family for 60 years, and was left vacant and dilapidated. They spent the next five years converting it into

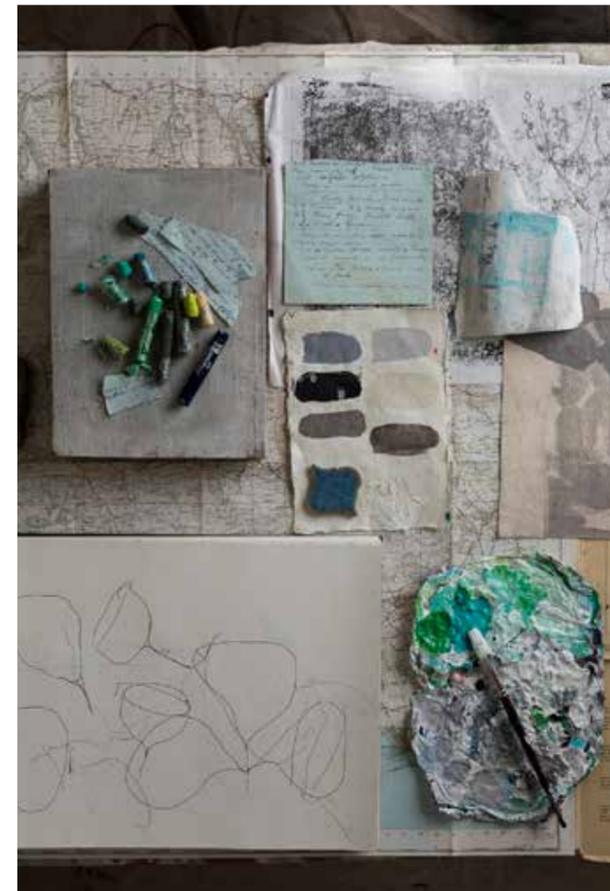
elegant modern accommodation, adding a new structure at the rear and retaining the heritage exterior. Double its original size, it now houses six guest suites. One section of the house had also operated as a gallery and as John and Colleen worked on the garden, passers-by would often stop to reminisce and fill them in on little bits of local history.

“People loved to stop and chat to us because they had visited the gallery as an annual thing in their summer holidays,” Colleen says. “Port Fairy is very much a town where there’s a bit of a tradition of people coming here as a family to camp over many years.”

Meanwhile, part of the plan was always to build their own home at the rear where an old yellow-brick 1950s-era garage stood. However, as time went on that changed. “Drift House swallowed up a lot of our money so we pared our plans right back to converting the garage, plus adding an extra room. Our whole house is only 75 square metres,” says Colleen.

Small it may be, but by recycling old timber and stone left over from Drift House, and some clever fitting out — mostly done by John who loves to work with his hands and took over from the builder after lockup — no space or materials have been wasted. John clad the interior and built benches, storage spaces, hanging cupboards, and even the timber towel rails in the bathroom. “We utilise every bit of space and there’s no area that we don’t use on a daily basis. It was just making do with what we could,” Colleen explains.

The two large garage doors became windows to the living area, with the glazing framed in timber nogging a reference >



**PORT FAIRY VICTORIA HOME**  
Colleen and John with Milo, 14, and 12-year-old Toby at East Beach. **CLOCKWISE, FROM BOTTOM RIGHT** Colleen collects branches on her beach walks and they are a form she enjoys painting; Colleen working on a piece for Manyung Gallery in Sorrento; hexagonal tiles from Academy Tiles give the family’s kitchen artistic flair. The black Udon kitchen cabinets were sourced from IKEA and the tapware is from Roger Sellers; John gifted Colleen the map in her studio. It is one of his dad’s walking maps from the Yorkshire Dales, England. **FACING PAGE** The dunes at East Beach. For stockist details, see page 136.





*Good Morning Sunshine* sits on a timber bench John made for the entry. **LEFT** The window framing is a signature design of architect Multiplicity and was stained in Black Japan from Feast Watson. **ABOVE** Upcycled floorboards and limestone form the dividing wall. The chairs were found on Ebay and at Chapel Street Bazaar. **FACING PAGE** A Heat and Glo wood-burning heater keeps the living room cosy. For a similar pendant light, try Beacon Lighting. Colleen found the vintage sofas on Ebay and the Herringbone rug at Armadillo and Co. The TV unit is more of John's handiwork and is made of limed ply. For stockist details, see page 136.



to a design feature in Drift House, which is also repeated in the main bedroom. The ceilings were lined in limed sheets of ply and the original concrete aggregate garage floor has been ground back and polished.

Another distinctive feature is a wall built of floorboards recycled from a balcony at Drift House. It has multiple uses as a room divider, a gallery wall for Colleen's artworks and artworks she's collected, including pieces by Nicolas Goodwolf and Alex Falkiner, and as a dining area. "The wall divides our work area from our living and as we don't have a dining table at this point, we have a long counter to sit at with a mirror mounted behind it so we can carry on a conversation quite easily. At the beginning our sons thought the mirror was a novelty, and you could see them sitting there watching themselves!"

The family moved to Port Fairy in 2013 when Drift House was completed. Colleen paints in a studio in an old bluestone schoolroom nearby, and exhibits her work regularly at Boom

Gallery in Geelong, as well as other Victorian galleries.

"Sometimes our Drift House guests also buy artwork from me directly, as do locals," she says.

Her paintings are mostly in pastel, pencil and acrylic paint, and have been greatly influenced by the move. "My work has always been abstract with a bit of figurative, and when we were in the city it was very urban. Since moving to Port Fairy it has become gentler and the landscape elements have been appearing. Living closer to nature feels good and I think that is reflected in what I paint."

For Colleen and John, moving to Port Fairy has also brought much more time and space into their lives.

"It's opened up doors and we can support what we both want to do. John likes to ride his bike, I go for a swim every morning, I do my art and in between we run the business." *CS*  
For more information about Colleen's art practice, visit [boomgallery.com.au](http://boomgallery.com.au) or [colleenguiney.com](http://colleenguiney.com). To book a stay at Drift House, visit [drifthouse.com.au](http://drifthouse.com.au)

"Living closer to nature feels good and I think that is reflected in what I paint."

The view over nearby Moyne River to the marina at Port Fairy. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** The facade of Drift House; the hall is separated from the living area by a pivot door lined with Treford Lettuce Leaf and Charcoal coiled carpet; bottles John collected when he was a young geology student, a wooden Japanese doll and a smaller work by Colleen; the Pebble tiles in the bathroom are pool tiles from Buckley Ceramics and were leftover from the hotel renovation. The shower head is from Roger Sellers. For stockist details, see page 136.



## HOME PORT FAIRY VICTORIA

Cultiver bed linen, a woollen throw from Creswick Woollen Mills and a Megan Park cushion in the master bedroom. Colleen sourced the pendant light from Special Lights as Milo and Toby kept breaking her lamps. An iconic Mark Tuckey Egg Cup stool continues the home's timber theme. For stockist details, see page 136.

### ABOUT THE HOUSE

- Melbourne-based architecture practice Multiplicity designed the additions and alterations to Drift House, along with the initial design for the garage conversion. Part of their ethos is based on recycling materials from demolitions and Colleen and John have implemented this in their home through reusing timber, tiles and limestone. (03) 9388 0790; multiplicity.com.au
- Wishful from Haymes Paint was used on the interior and exterior. 1800 033 431; haymespaint.com.au
- The house is heated by a wood-burning Heat and Glo Curve fireplace, which was sourced from Wignells in Melbourne. (03) 9417 3315; wignells.com.au
- Both the kitchen rangehood and splashback are tiled with hexagonal matt mosaic tiles from Academy Tiles. (03) 9429 2544; academytiles.com.au
- John stained many of the pieces he built for the house, including the bedhead and the TV unit in Liming White stain from Feast Watson. 1800 252 502; feastwatson.com.au



## GET THE LOOK HOME



## FORM AND FIGURE

PAIR PIECES WITH ARTISTIC FLAIR WITH FURNISHINGS IN A NEUTRAL PALETTE.

PRODUCED BY JESSICA HANSON

1 *Blue 2* artwork by Colleen Guiney, \$2600, from Manyung Gallery. 2 Oak pendant lights, from \$1094, from Ross Gardam. 3 Oiva/Siirtolapuutarha coffee cup, \$25, from Marimekko. 4 Alpaca throw rug in Herringbone/Dark Brown, \$299, from Creswick Woollen Mills. 5 Big Nest storage cabinet in Natural Birch, \$499, from Plyroom. 6 Atila Hexagon mosaic tiles in Glenoble, \$395 per sqm, from Perini Tiles. 7 Soho shower rose in Nickel, \$1295, from Roger Seller. 8 Tretford Roll carpet in Lettuce Leaf, from \$77 per sqm, from Gibbon Group. 9 Savannah rug in Dust, from \$1490, from Armadillo and Co. 10 FJ 1080 chair by Finn Juhl in Oak and Black leather, from \$2040, from Danish Red. 11 Egg Cup stool, \$550, from Mark Tuckey. 12 Weave bowl in Sage Green, \$75, from Crayon Chick. For stockist details, see page 136.