

The Myers family live in one of Barham's most distinctive heritage buildings, a 1912 bank on the town's main street. FACING PAGE, FROM LEFT *Circus Hare* and *Harlequin Hare* by Wendy McDonald hang over a family heirloom sideboard, with elephants Katrina collected in Bangkok.

saving grace

A LOVE OF THE LAND — AND THE OLD BANK THAT IS NOW THEIR HOME — DREW THIS TRAVELLING COUPLE BACK TO THE FAMILY FARM.

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CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE The kitchen was added by Katrina's uncle George after he bought the bank in 2000; Tim and Katrina with Chester and Daisy among the avocados; in the living room, the red sofa is an old Fler couch that was bequeathed to Katrina by her great-aunt.



AVOCADOS BROUGHT KATRINA and Tim Myers back to Barham, on the Murray River 100 kilometres south-west of Deniliquin, NSW. After living overseas for three years, they jumped at the chance two years ago to take over the running of Barham Avocados from Katrina's mother on the family farm, Horseshoe Bend. For Katrina, who had studied agricultural science, their return was a chance for their children — Daisy, now three, and Chester, two — to grow up in the place she herself loved as a child, a place that gave her “a good grounding”.

And for Tim, who grew up on a farm in NSW's West Wyalong, and who met Katrina when he came to Barham as a young vet in 2001, it was an irresistible opportunity to get onto the land. “I always wanted to be a farmer, but Mum and Dad said, ‘No, go to uni.’ But my first choice would have been to farm,” he says. “So when we had the chance to take over the avocados, we looked at the lifestyle and just knew it was the right spot for us.”

In the 1970s, Katrina's late father, Sandy Warne, and her mother Debbie settled at Horseshoe Bend, a 1000-hectare grazing and cropping property near Barham. Katrina's grandmother, Gwen Heinz, gave Debbie money to invest, which led to the establishment of the avocado orchard. Thirty years later, when Tim was about to buy into a veterinary practice in Young, Debbie asked them to consider taking on the orchard.

“Both of us always knew we'd end up on a farm,” Katrina says. “And Nan would love it that we're here now.”

It's a short drive out to Horseshoe Bend from the house where the family now lives, in one of Barham's heritage buildings, the >



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The French table and chairs in the open-plan dining area were bought by Katrina's father, while the barometer was a special find at a clearing sale.



The artworks, all by Melbourne artist Sally Joubert, are (clockwise, from top left) *Flinders Stroll*, *Smoking On The Starboard*, *Cheeky Maggie* and *Arthur's Seat*. FACING PAGE The cedar dining room table was purchased for seven pounds by Katrina's grandfather Hal from a Swan Hill funeral home, while the statue on the sideboard was bought by her great-great-grandfather. The rug came from a family trip to Asia during the 1950s.



LEFT A guest room, painted in Dulux Bluestone, with a painting by a relative of a Melbourne stately home on the wall, and a printed All You Need Is Love cushion bought online from Me And Amber. BOTTOM LEFT Above the original fireplace are more elephants from Thailand, and a cowbell from Katrina's great-great-grandfather's Victorian cattle station.



former National Bank, built in 1912. Behind the classic facade are imposing bank rooms at the front and the manager's residence behind. Inside are high ceilings and polished timber floors, while original mantels still grace the fireplaces. Opening off the kitchen, a light and airy family room with bookshelves and comfy couches looks out on the wide expanse of lawn and beyond the back gate, to where ancient red gums hang low over the Murray River. The Myers make the most of having the river at the back door. "On Sundays we hop in the boat and choof down the river for a pizza in Koondrook — the kids just love it," Katrina says.

Barham, too, has strong memories for Katrina. The bank house is still owned by her uncle, George Warne. "This place is about family," she says. "George bought the bank in 2000 and renovated it. He lived here with his family and then moved up to Sydney. And now it's such a nice place for us to live."

When they moved in, it was furnished with antique pieces and artworks collected by George, as well as heirlooms from Katrina's grandparents. To Katrina's joy, Daisy now plays with the wooden doll's house that George made for his children, while her grandfather's old maps from the Wimmera, where he settled, hang on the walls, and her grandmother Gwen Heinz's tea set is on display. Mixed in are their own pieces collected overseas and from local artisans. Brett Sambrooks made, among other things, a steel-topped side table for the kitchen, and artist Wendy McDonald's etchings are a great talking point.

The couple spent two years in the UK before their marriage in 2008, after which they had a year in Bangkok, where Tim worked as a vet. While in Thailand, Katrina started collecting carved elephants, and now takes delight in her grandfather's elephant and owl collections already displayed in the house.

These days, Tim heads out to the orchard every morning while Katrina takes care of the marketing, online sales and social media side of the business. Since taking over, they have increased the plantings from 2500 to 3700 trees, growing four main varieties — Hass, Reed, Bacon and Fuertes — and have improved infrastructure and sustainability. But Katrina doesn't stay indoors all day — at any opportunity she's out there on the farm with Tim.

It's early morning when we visit, before the real heat of the day, and Tim and Katrina are already in the orchard, walking along the shady rows of avocados. Daisy and Chester tag behind, ushered on by Moët, the labrador. As they wait for the dawdling children, Tim reaches into a tree's branches, revealing the hidden, pendulous clusters of glossy green fruit. "I love being up here between the trees, producing something and having a lovely bin of fruit at the end of the year," he says. "It never feels like work, so I find it hard to drag myself away, I love it so much." *

For more information about Barham Avocados, telephone 0428 475 442, or visit www.barhamavocados.com.au