

Set ⁱⁿ stone

WORDS **GRETEL SNEATH**
PHOTOGRAPHS **GRAHAM SPRING**

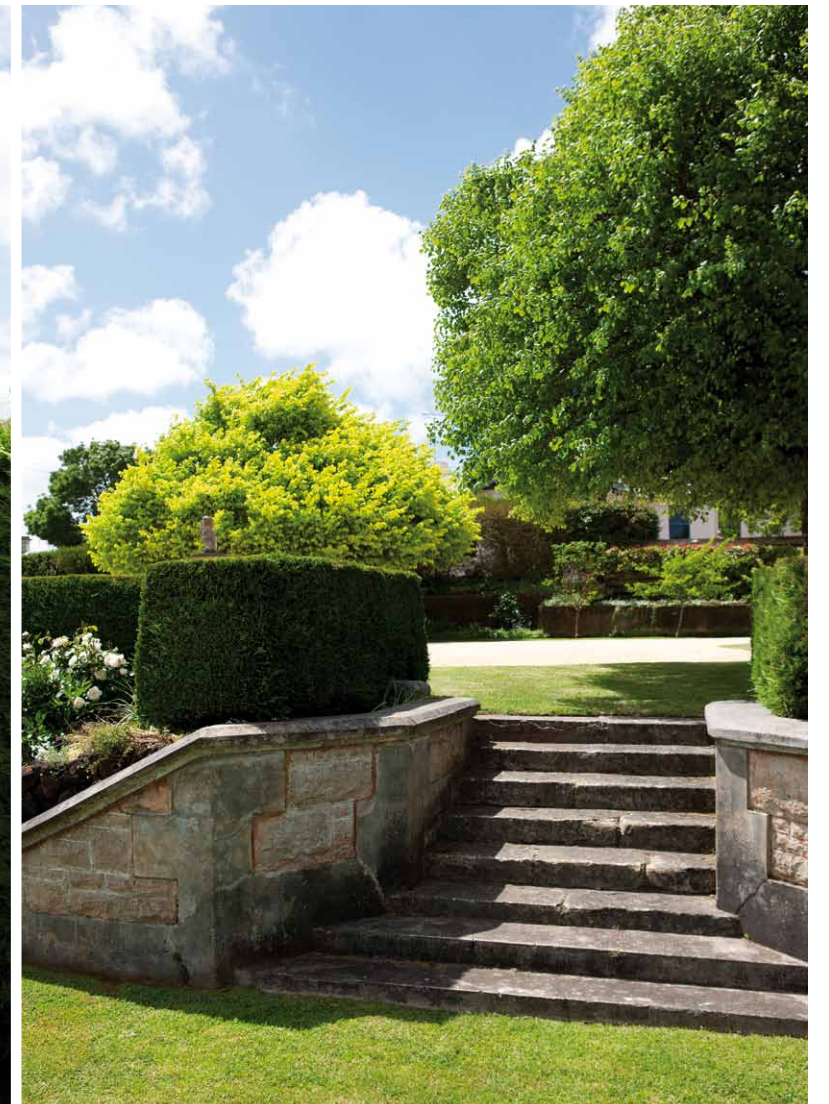


An elaborate town garden surrounding an historic Mount Gambier home truly encapsulates country life.

WITH THEIR ELEVATED VIEWS OVER Mount Gambier's ever-changing vista, Trevor and Ros Hodson compare life at The Terraces to a journey at sea. "It's like being on a ship sometimes, going through the landscape with the rolling clouds or sometimes a rainbow over the city," says Trevor.

Closer to home, the views of the garden surrounding their 1880 villa are equally appealing, with the couple transforming almost half a hectare of rich volcanic soil into a place for all seasons. A series of original stone terraces and steps forms the backbone of the garden, and captivated the former Melbourne couple when they moved to South Australia's Limestone Coast in the mid-'90s. "The beautiful stonework certainly wasn't a feature of Melbourne gardens, and we found it very appealing," recalls Ros.

A landscape architect friend came up with a design that preserved and unified the character features, leaving room for expression when it came to plant selection. "He came and walked through the garden, and then a month later, delivered a plan which we stuck to," says Ros. "I was so grateful for it because I would have been fiddling to this very day, chopping and changing. It seems to have worked very well for us."



Above: A formal parterre on the middle terrace is filled with Iceberg, Bonica, Apricot Nectar and Elina roses. *Left:* Ros is fond of creating “little places to sit”, such as this inviting bench seat below a magnificent Golden Elm. *Opposite page:* A Pinkie rose brings life to a charming shelter (*top left*) and stone steps (*top right*) lead to the croquet lawn bordered by a hedge of Cypress leylandii on the lower terrace (*bottom*). *Opening pages:* The formal parterre is well protected by towering poplars (*left*). Sparrieshoop roses have been planted along the front fence. The Hodsons say they will never tire of the views of the St Andrew’s steeple (*right*).

The property’s central location demanded an element of privacy, which was largely achieved by planting a long row of towering poplars along the rear and side walls. Ros loves them for their “lovely dappled light and shadow effects on the lawn area”.

A wisteria arbor leads to a croquet lawn hemmed by a Cypress leylandii hedge. The Hodsons regard it as a living wall, which is green year-round, and believe the species has an undeserved poor reputation. “They’re difficult to control when cut back properly; we have ours clipped twice a year and it’s never got any higher than this.”

Adjacent to the croquet lawn, a “royal rose bed” of creamy Princess of Wales and pink Queen Elizabeth is interspersed with miniature agapanthus and a run of soft pink peonies, which put on a lovely show in spring. “They’re difficult to grow here as the climate isn’t really conducive; they can take hot sun, but if we don’t get a really cold winter, we don’t get the flowers.”

The highly decorative original outhouse, a “charming little folly”, adds curiosity to a formal parterre on the middle terrace filled with Iceberg, Bonica, Apricot Nectar and Elina roses.





*Salvias, geraniums and hardy penstemons have been planted inside the box hedge borders. "This area gets little sun, so I decided to have two busy squares and two formal squares," says Ros. **Below:** In early summer, David Austin's Abraham Darby rose bears large, deeply cupped blooms in shades of pink, apricot and yellow.*

Overhead, the south-facing balcony offers a breathtaking display of standard old-fashioned Ballerina while at the front of the property, more roses share the limelight with a golden elm and a much-loved linden tree.

"It gives fabulous shade and protects the house from the western sun, and during winter, there's something lovely about a tree without its leaves against the skyline – it reminds you that new life is just around the corner," says Ros.

Despite the strong sense of formality, visitors are encouraged to step off the path and share the couple's joy in experimenting with different varieties such as the blue and white bacopa rambling over the raised beds and the run of hellebores and fragrant daphne flanked by standard lilly pillies. "It's all very well to have a spring garden where roses are lovely and the perennials

are performing beautifully, but during summer they're looking sad and sorry, so it's nice to have year-round appeal."


Beyond a corrugated shed concealed by creeping ficus, a delightful chook "Hilton" is home to the happy cackling of the four resident Isa Browns – "and that's enough," says Ros. "They're meant to get the slugs, but they denude the ground of any green pick when we let them out to have a little play."

Other daily treats are more likely to come from the robust orchard rather than the vegetable patch, with Ros confessing that she finds kitchen gardens a challenge.

"There's all of this talk about the joy of growing your own vegetables, but it's actually hard work. They're like little babies – they need constant attention! I'm more of a reactive gardener who goes to work when I can see something getting out of hand."

Trips abroad have inspired a fondness for mass plantings of bulbs, and there are dedicated areas for plants with a limited lifespan. Ros and Trevor also appreciate the stalwarts such as camellias, which largely look after themselves. "My mantra is that a garden should serve you, but of course there's things that we do have to do when the time is right," says Ros.

With their eldest son living in London with his own young family and a second son settled in Melbourne, the Hodsons view themselves as grateful custodians in a chain of ownership at The Terraces, and sense that there is more history to come. But in the meantime, there is much to enjoy.

As Ros explains, "There's a sense of openness that comes with having a country property right in the city, and I'll never tire of the views of the St Andrew's steeple and Mount Gambier on the horizon, especially in that soft evening light – it's sublime." 



 FOR MORE GARDENS VISIT
WWW.SALIFE.COM.AU