

A friendship built on rock solid foundations



Nathan Shanley and Leah Ponting, both of Warrnambool, share a strong friendship that has endured the stress and strain of buying and renovating houses together, including their latest project at 40 Lava St.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] L
[/dropcap]eah Ponting and Nathan Shanley might appear to be like any other young couple renovating an almost 100-year-old home they share in Warrnambool, but in fact they are not partners, just great friends.

And their home at 40 Lava St is not their first renovation project together, but their second in four years – even though they are both only 24 years old.

As Leah explains, the productive partnership began when her aunty, **Jenny Ponting**, passed away suddenly in 2011 at the age of 49 and left Leah a small inheritance.

“Jenny was a strong and independent woman and so I decided that I wanted to do something meaningful and worthwhile with the money she had left me,” she said.



A magnificent makeover: the nursery shed at 43 Wentworth St before Leah and Nathan took on the project – and after. Images: Supplied.

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[/dropcap]eah, a business development officer, was already friends with Nathan, who has worked as a builder since he was 15, and knew that he was interested in taking on a project of his own, so the pair decided to combine their skills and tackle a renovator’s delight – or perhaps it could be better described as a blank slate.

The property was the former Pretlove’s nursery at 43 Wentworth St and was not so much a home as “a concrete slab and some walls,” Leah said.

“Nathan and I loved working on that one together – we had so much fun for about 12 months, transforming it from a derelict building into a three-bedroom home that we could live in,” she said.

High on the success of Wentworth St, Leah and Nathan applied to be part of the television reality renovation show, *The Block*, and even though they were not accepted, they still thought the time was right for another renovation challenge.



The entirely new kitchen inside what was a former nursery at 43 Wentworth St. Image: **Kylie Divall Photography**.

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[/dropcap]eah had spotted an old weatherboard cottage at 40 Lava St that had been on the market for about a year and decided it was the one.

“It was one of those places that you have to see past the superficial to see its potential: a lot of people don’t see the beauty behind what is a bit run down,” Leah said.

The property was previously the home of one of Warrnambool’s characters, **Lottie Bowman**, who died in 2013 at the grand age of 104. Ms Bowman’s mother lived in the house before her and little had changed inside.

“It’s such a lovely story behind this house and it is wonderful to be able to make it into a home again,” Leah said.

“These days there are so many homes that are built as one-size-fits-all, but this place has such character and I love bringing it back to life.”

The pressed metal ceiling in the lounge room was of particular interest to Leah’s friends: “they had never seen one before”.



The original weatherboard cottage at 40 Lava St, previously owned by Lottie Bowman. Image: Justin Allen, Northeast, Stockdale and Leggo real estate.

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[/dropcap]athan has a similar philosophy toward the old house, which dates back to at least the 1920s.

“In my job you can build 50 houses a year, but with most of them I don’t drive past and say ‘I built that’, like I would with this place,” he said.

The pair started with a “fast and furious” renovation so they

could live in 40 Lava and work on it at the same time. Up came the carpet, then the lino, then some more lino (layering was popular in the old days) and finally sheets of newspapers from the 1920s.

Nathan framed one page from a 1924 evening edition of the *Herald* that espoused the virtues of asbestos as a “the building material of the future”.

The original fireplaces were restored, walls painted (with the help of Leah’s father **John Ponting**), fire surrounds relocated and repainted, and the rooms redecorated by Leah with help from her mother, **Raelene Ponting**, from whom she inherited the styling gene.



Let the renovation begin. The front room of the house at 40 Lava St had everything from its walls to the fireplace restored or renovated...but the pressed tin ceiling remains. Images: Supplied and Bluestone Magazine.

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[/dropcap]hen undertaking such a venture, it certainly helps to have several generations of timber and hardware experience behind you, as the Ponting family does in Warrnambool.

That doesn't mean, however, that there isn't the occasional "renovation-frustration" between Leah and Nathan.

"Sometimes, when it has been a particularly long day, we go to our respective bedrooms without saying a word to each other," Leah laughs.

Mutual friends marvel, however, at their ability to work together and share the financial risk and stress of buying and renovating houses without being actual partners.

"It's true that a lot of people don't understand it, but we have a great friendship and I have a lot of faith and trust in Nathan," Leah explains.



Having bought the house last August, Leah and Nathan had it partly renovated by Christmas. Image: Supplied.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] T
[/dropcap]he renovation of 40 Lava St is close to a spectacular completion, after which the pair will build two

units on the large block of land at the back.

For now, 40 Lava is home, but is there another project on the horizon?

“As Nath says, ‘not another renovation, they are too much hard work’,” Leah said via an email.

“But then I say to him, no two houses are the same and that is what makes it so rewarding. We are creating something unique; a house filled with character that tells our story. So the answer is we will wait and see how this project goes, but potentially yes??”



A story under the flooring. Old newspapers dating back to the 1920s were revealed when Leah and Nathan (with some help from Nathan's dog, Mac) peeled up the lino coverings. Images supplied.

[box]MORE photos: visit Leah's blog [on 40 Lava St here](#). More images of the 43 Wentworth St renovation can be seen at Nathan Shanley Carpentry [on Facebook](#). Nathan was also involved in the renovation of 222 Timor St, as [featured in our story here](#). [/box]

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