

From ugly quarry to garden of eden



Landscape gardener Paul Ryan with “Tina” (made by Lust for Rust) who presides over a corner of his magnificent 10-acre garden on Hopkins Point Road, Warrnambool.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]P
[/dropcap]aul Ryan has the salty-haired, stocky, sun-browned body of a person who has spent a life working outdoors and swimming in the sea, and these twin loves are behind a project that has dominated his life for almost a decade.

The self-taught landscape gardener and avid surfer has spent the past eight years slowly transforming an abandoned quarry on the corner of Hopkins Point and Tooram roads, Allansford, from an overgrown and derelict eyesore into a magnificent, 10-acre garden that almost defies description.

Paul, 45, who grew up on a farm on Terang, had always dreamt of creating a “big acreage garden” and when he saw the ‘for sale’ sign on the old quarry property, he could instantly see the potential.

“There was 2.3 acres of flat land at the top that I thought would be ideal for a house block and the remainder was in pretty bad shape, but it was a good size and at a reasonable price,” he says.



Low-water, low-maintenance plants have been used throughout the garden to ensure environmental friendliness and far less upkeep.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] P
[dropcap]aul bought the land and lived in a caravan on the site for eight months while he built his house, then he set to work dividing the garden into different rooms, or zones, each

with their own distinct character: traditional European, modern Australia, renaissance and a gothic garden among them.

Each room has been methodically and meticulously brought to life with mass plantings of extraordinary succulents, grasses, trees, shrubs, bushes and flowers – including rare species such as a South American silk floss tree – that require little water or ongoing maintenance, which are both critical to a large-scale garden.

“When some people see what I have done, they ask how I maintain it all, well a lot of it looks after itself – apart from the mowing and I like my ride-on mower, it is a form of meditation to me,” Paul laughs.



The striking trunk of the rare

South American silk floss tree that is part of Paul's collection of more than 6000 plants.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] W
[/dropcap]hile Paul has not kept count of the number of plants he has planted, he believes there would be more than 6000 that he has collected, bought or been given over the years.

"Nurseries to me are like supermarkets. I can walk in and, within a minute or two, I know if there is something there that I want: I know what to look for," he explains.

"You also learn things as you go along and evolve as the garden evolves. I am always learning more about plants, their heritage and their various meanings to various cultures."



Recycled driftwood camouflages an otherwise ugly shipping container used for storage.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]he plants, however, are only one half of the story. The stunning garden is also a showcase of recycled objects that have been used to landscape or beautify various parts of the property, many of which Paul has collected while surfing – an almost daily ritual.

An ugly shipping container, for example, has been completely camouflaged by long pieces of driftwood. Dozens of discarded fishing buoys decorate a wooden fence and, in another part of the property, a heavy-duty line of marine rope serves as a hand-rail for a boardwalk.

Building materials – timber, bricks, masonry, stones – have also been recycled as paths, walks, and rockeries and the property is dotted with sculptures that Paul has either purchased or made himself.



The two enormous urns at the gateway to the ‘gothic’

garden are recycled cement mixer barrels tipped on their end.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] 0
[/dropcap]ne of the most intriguing and eye-catching installations are two enormous, rust-coloured urns that stand either side of the gated entrance to the “gothic” garden and house two equally enormous plants. Paul explains that the ‘urns’ are in fact cement mixer barrels that he has cut down and tipped on to their ends.

“It is hard work, but it is my therapy. I see it as garden Buddhism – breaking my rocks, mowing my lawn, fixing my mistakes – but it is also an obsession,” he laughs.

Paul’s great uncle and grandfather were gardeners at the prestigious *Minjah* property, near Caramut, so he thinks he has obviously been touched by the same gene that doesn’t shy away from gardening on a grand scale.

Will Paul’s garden, however, ever reach an end point?

“I am giving myself four more years and then it will be finished, but it still won’t be complete.”



Paul has also made some creative sculptures, like these balls of barbed wire, to decorate his spectacular property.

[box type="bio"] Paul holds an open day at The Quarry about once a month until winter. Entry is \$10 to cover upkeep costs. Bluestone will let you know via our [Facebook page](#) when the next open day is scheduled. **Update:** the next open day is March 22 and 23. If you are a [Bluestone Club](#) member, check out how you can win [a double pass](#). We have removed our slideshow in the hope you will go and see the real thing – and tell Paul you read it in Bluestone! [/box]



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Moooove over cows, the goats are coming!



A house full of happy kids: Melissa Lewis with Mason, 2, Paddy, 4, and one of the 50 goats she is raising for milk production in her venture, Buddy Goat.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] G
[/dropcap]iven Allansford is deep in cow country, **Melissa Lewis** is somewhat of a black sheep by using her 20-acre Allansford property to breed and milk goats.

Melissa, who grew up on a dairy farm near Mortlake and is a qualified animal nutritionist, has spent the past 18 months building up a herd of about 50 goats with a mix of Toggenburg (brown and white in colour), Saanens (all white) and British Alpine (black and white) that are all known for their high levels of milk production.

And it is the raw goat's milk – and byproducts including cheese, yoghurt and icecream – that Melissa is most interested in developing through her **Buddy Goat** brand, rather than the more conventional path of using the milk to create soaps and cosmetics.

Despite there reportedly being 19 goats on board the First Fleet in 1788, Australia has never really embraced the idea of enjoying a chilled glass of fresh goat's milk in the morning.

"It's funny, but the thought of drinking goat's milk puts a lot of people off and they are far more comfortable with goat's cheese, yet there are so many health benefits to goat's milk," Melissa explains.



Melissa Lewis with the former cow dairy that last

September was converted to suit the much smaller goats.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] M
[dropcap]elissa experienced these benefits first hand when her first son, Paddy, 4, developed asthma several years ago and she changed his diet from cow's to goat's milk. The asthma attacks stopped.

"We forget that goat's milk is actually consumed more than any other milk around the world. It is easier to digest and a lot of people who can't handle cow's milk can drink goat's milk," Melissa says.

She tells the story of one man who was intolerant to cows milk but tried her goats milk and, for the first time in many years, was able to eat a bowl of breakfast cereal with milk. Another woman uses Melissa's raw goat's milk to bathe her young daughter who suffers severe eczema.

Most of Melissa's raw goat's milk is sold by a distributor into Melbourne and Geelong where there is a big demand among particularly the Greek and Italian communities for goat's milk with which to make cheese.



Paddy takes an udderly different view of where milk comes from, having been raised on goat's milk.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] D
[dropcap]ue to stringent food regulations, Melissa is currently only permitted to sell her products marked for "cosmetic use only" and "not for human consumption", but how customers choose to use the milk is ultimately their decision.

Having spent the past couple of years proving there is a growing market for goat's milk, Melissa is planning to move into the next stage of commercial production.

Last September she and her husband Darcy, a fencing contractor, converted a cow dairy into a goat milking dairy where her girls line up each day – or twice a day when the milk production is high. They also plan to transform part of a large shed on their property into a commercial kitchen.

It is a significant investment, with a pasteuriser costing around \$25,000 alone.

For Melissa, however, it is all about diversification. Apart from her own property, Melissa and her sister **Nicole Ritchie** run a 200-acre farm at Mortlake, across the road from their parent's 1000-acre property where the sisters also agist cattle.

Two young sons and another baby on the way have also made life a little busier for Melissa, but she still has plenty of energy and enthusiasm for her new venture.

"It's about trying new things, seeing where they go and diversifying, because you can't survive off farming alone any more."

[box type="bio"] For more information on Buddy Goat, you can contact Melissa at goatsmilk@live.com.au or find her on Facebook [here](#). [/box]



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