

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.

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[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.

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[/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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