



## PAST & PRESENT

THE GARDEN RENOVATION ON THIS HISTORIC PASTORAL PROPERTY WOULD BE INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE BY THE 19TH-CENTURY PIONEERS.

WORDS CHRISTINE REID PHOTOGRAPHY CLAIRE TAKACS



Blue sage (*Salvia azurea*) contrasts prettily with pink rose leaf sage. FACING PAGE Pink sedums, rosemary and salvia are waterwise plantings in the front garden.

*“The recent plantings reflect the kind of plants that were used before the garden had water.”*

Mop top robinia trees (*Robinia pseudoacacia* ‘Umbraculifera’), shade a paved sitting area and rosemary and teucrium hedges.



FROM LEFT Sweetcorn in the vegetable garden is fringed by pink flowering oregano, the white blooms of garlic chives, and a red-blossoming variety of salvia (*Salvia elegans*); Trish and Ian Taylor; pitcher sage (*Lepechinia salviae*).



**TRISH AND IAN** Taylor are custodians of a garden legacy that stretches back into the 19th century. Their property, Warrambien, at Shelford in Victoria’s Western District, has layer upon layer of horticultural interest, dating from the earliest settlement when pioneer John Bell took up the pastoral run in 1854.

The earliest information about the garden appears in an 1861 book, *Over the Straits: A Visit to Victoria*, written by Louisa Meredith after she stayed at Warrambien on her way to the Ballarat goldfields. She describes the native trees that had been planted in 1847 when the first simple house was built, set on a knoll above the waterholes, and draws a wonderful picture of the resident magpies: “The garden had a belt of native bushes planted round its fence, and a few taller young gum trees stood within. All these were the resort of the beautiful warbling magpies... in the evening, for an hour or two, every bush and bough seemed alive with their glancing shapes of jet and silver, as they met in pleasant little parties to have a gossip and a song.”

From Meredith’s time, there has been confusion over the spelling of the property’s name. Warrambien is correct when referring to the property; these days the name Warrambine refers to a dot on the map. This small plot of Crown land, next to the Warrambine Creek, is the site of the former Halfway House Inn — so named because it was near the halfway point between Geelong and Ballarat on a Cobb & Co. coach route.

In the 1880s and early 1900s, an interesting selection of conifers was introduced around the perimeter. They included hoop and bunya bunya pines (*Araucaria* species) and a cypress hedge — “Anything to stop the wind,” Trish says. In 1902, her grandfather and great-uncle, the Bingley brothers, bought the home block

of the big estate and Trish’s grandmother, Elsie Bingley, further developed the garden.

“In 1933, they built a large lake on their adjoining property, Gumley,” Trish says. “They constructed one of the first concrete pipelines in country Victoria to bring water about five kilometres, so they could develop a lovely garden.”

As Trish emphasises, “Water for the garden has always been an issue.” In the recent drought, Trish and Ian had little water for widespread irrigation and all new trees were hand-watered using a tank on the back of a truck until last summer. “But now we have deepened the house dam, the Gumley lake is full, we installed a desalination plant and we have enough water for two years at least.”

During the drought, they began a serious and ongoing garden renovation. Mature trees well past their prime, fussy labour-intensive garden beds and tiny paths were all cleared away and the garden now has a fresh clarity of design and purpose.

“The recent plantings reflect the kind of plants that were used before the garden had water and really are not new at all,” Trish says. “We live in a true Mediterranean climate: hot summers, cool winters and only the odd frost. Our winters tend to be overcast but the temperature rarely falls below zero.”

The plant roll call is exactly what you would expect to find. From salvias to succulents, citrus to cypress and cistus, rosemary to roses, all would be easily recognised by Trish’s forebears. The carefully chosen ornamental plants do well in this climate zone.

All this is against a backdrop of stone. The basalt or bluestone, as it is known, of these volcanic plains is ever present. “The house and garden are located on >

**garden | SHELFORD VICTORIA**

Sedums tolerate dry conditions. The foreground sedums are 'Autumn Joy', behind are 'Autumn Blush'.  
BOTTOM The silver foliage of wormwood and santolina contrast with the dark Italian cypress trees.  
FACING PAGE A garden path leads past a sculpture and through salvia, lavender, succulents and sedums.



a bluestone ridge, which is just one reason we don't have a swimming pool," Trish says. "That's where the outdoor living area is now... Some of the rocks have been there for at least 100 years; the rose garden is in soil built up over the rocky base, and the ivy over the bluestone blocks at the edge of the drive has probably been there for a century."

The Taylors have enhanced the existing stonework with magnificent additions. "Expert stonemason Greg Savage and his team constructed the walled vegetable garden and re-worked the entrance gateway," Trish says. All the rocks were gathered from the surrounding paddocks.

Below the driveway the cultivated flower garden gives way to a series of grassed terraces — the mowing is Ian's preserve — with the remnants of a ha-ha beneath the old conifers. At the bottom of the garden, on the flat ground along a series of waterholes that feed into the Warrambine Creek, the pears, apples and mulberries of the former orchard remain; but the large vegetable patch tended by a Chinese gardener is no more. There are several large beds here that Trish fills with echiums, agapanthus and succulents when she has a thinning out.

The garden renovation continues. On the east side of the garden, where the conifers, mostly *Pinus radiata*, are reaching maturity, Ian has begun a clearance and replanting program. "He has bought a second-hand excavator and we are slowly tidying up this neglected area," Trish says.

By blending hard stonework with softer flowers and foliage, the Taylors have created a garden oasis around their homestead where past meets present in true harmony. \*

