

Oast house: Jim and Clare Delany's house near Porepunkah looks out on mountains, grapevines and cattle. Pictures: Earl Carter



HIGH HOPS

One North East Victorian couple had big plans for the derelict tobacco kilns scattered across their farm, writes Natalee Ward

Take a drive through North East Victoria around Bright and Myrtleford and you will inevitably pass at least a handful of abandoned tobacco kilns, rising like giant Big M containers from the paddocks of these parts.

While most lay derelict, a remnant of a crop from an era past, one couple has saved two kilns from the elements and combined them into a stunning home.

Jim and Clare Delany run an Angus stud on what was once a tobacco farm at Porepunkah on the Great Alpine Road.

The property runs along the Ovens River, Mt Buffalo looms in the background and a vineyard on the farm completes the stunning picture.

The property previously had tobacco pickers' huts, which gave Jim and Clare

the entitlements to build additional houses on the property. And there were tobacco kilns, built in three different eras from the 1930s to the 1970s.

Jim grew up in Bright and was keen to see these structures from his childhood remain.

"We had this idea that the kilns would make good living spaces," Jim says. "It was all about recycling and keeping the new building in character with what was already on the farm."

Clare and Jim called on the help of architect Sally Draper.

"I have always gone up to that area and thought they were fabulous structures," Sally says. "When they told me they wanted to incorporate them into a retreat house on the property, I thought it was a fantastic idea."

The initial problem was how to move the kilns. Sally says the builder initially planned to brace each of the kilns and transport them on the back of a truck. Each kiln was going to be moved as a whole, but they soon discovered there were structural problems – the timber had not withstood the test of time as they had hoped – and it was decided that they may not survive the relocation.

So a new approach was taken. The builder removed each piece of rusty corrugated iron and numbered them all as they lay on the ground. The frame was then reinforced and the structure was transported to the new location near the vineyard. The tin was then replaced, piece by piece.

Then the rest of the house was built around them.

Smooth: the new part of the house (right and below), holds the kitchen and dining area, while the two kilns are joined by a large deck (far right).



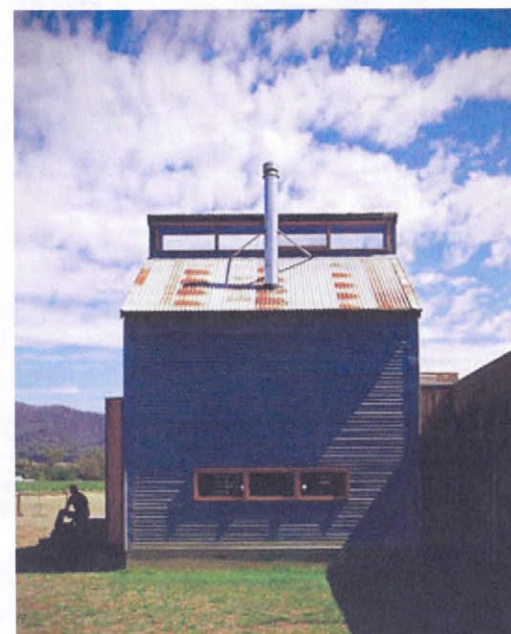
Super mild: inside, the kilns (right) are warm and stylish, while outside, the corrugated iron (far right) has shed none of its rustic character.

The kilns are the living spaces joined by a huge deck that steps down into the surrounding landscape. Behind this sits the “new” area – a long rectangle that houses three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a mudroom-laundry, plus the kitchen and dining rooms.

The kilns have a warm feel. They are lined with plywood and have timber floors and large windows, while the new areas are a contrast with white walls and polished concrete floors. More massive windows let in stunning views of mountains, vines and Angus cattle roaming freely.

“I have tried to let the kilns stand very much in their own right,” Sally says.

“Each one is a separate living space



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– the family area and the children's space – and linking across the back of the kilns is the new structure with the bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchen, designed as areas that 'serve' the kilns."

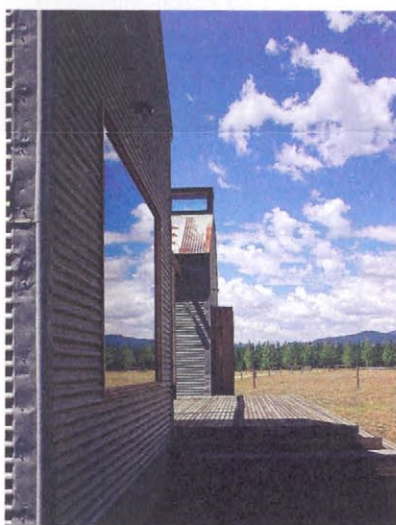
Sally says it was a surprisingly economical house to build.

"Projects like this aren't always economical – they rely on a structure that you can use fairly much as it is," she says. "We cut an opening in the kilns and lined them, but we didn't have to do too much more than that."

The home, known as The Kilns, is now used as a family retreat and is also rented out to guests.

"People love it," Jim says. "You can see it from the road – it looks like a long flat shed with a kiln attached at either end."

From the windows you can also see other tobacco kilns, standing ready, according to Jim, for their turn to take part in a new century of living. ■



Extra light: the kilns have generous windows (above) and create a unique living space (right).

