

THE Daily Telegraph

Making lifestyle an art form

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Daily Telegraph

By **Barbara Sweeney**
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TO REACH the small coastal village of Coledale, about an hour's drive south of Sydney, you traverse the Illawarra escarpment.

The road is steep and narrow and snakes down through thick-trunked gums. Treetops meet overhead, creating cool, shady glades and the soft cadence of running streams dances in the air.

The ocean bursts into view near Stanwell Park, as does a view of the narrow plateau that runs south beside the sea.

An undulating mantle of forest meets crescents of biscuit-coloured sand, forming a ragged line like the scalloped edge of a crochet rug. Breathtaking is the only word.

Which makes it easy to see why Mike Dove and Lizzie Buckmaster Dove chose to trade in their life in a frenetic metropolis.

Here the landscape shapes the days to a slow and measured rhythm for Lizzie and Mike, and their children Max, five, and Wilkie, two. After nine years in London and Barcelona, and a short stint in Sydney, they've come to rest in a place where the footwear of choice is bare feet and the beach is a mere stone's throw away.

Grass welcome mat

TREES and bushes mark each boundary, and more have been planted, so that in years to come it will be even more private. A soft carpet of grass leads to the front steps and the wide-open front door.

Newly built when Lizzie and Michael bought it last year, the house is so spacious and open that one thinks, incongruously, of a dance hall.

"It's delicious," says Lizzie, who relishes the space, the view and the rare quiet moment.

There's one large room on each of the two levels - a combined kitchen, living and dining room downstairs and the main bedroom above.

These spaces are so large that it's almost a shock to step beyond them into the boys' bedroom, a guest room and the television room - areas that are contained by traditional walls and doors.

"This is the house we came back for," Lizzie says. "It's what we wanted - space, a better lifestyle, the outdoors ... all those things that Australia embodies."

When they first met, Mike, a town planner, was living in New Zealand while Lizzie, an artist, was in Sydney.

"We had a trans-Tasman relationship for a year, then had to decide on a city in which we could live together," Lizzie says.

"We thought that would be Melbourne or Wellington, but it turned out to be London. We bought our first place there and that's when we started buying furniture and art.

Mike and I have really different tastes, but we've found a taste that we share."

It's a look that is based on simple, streamlined shapes and muted, neutral colours.

Much of the furniture, like the lime green Eames chairs in the kitchen, and the light fittings in the stairwell, was bought second-hand.

However, the most striking decorative element is the art collection. Paintings and photographs - solo and grouped - feature on

every wall.

Mike has had some for years, others were purchased in London, a few are by friends and many are by Lizzie.

Some of her early works of art are propped on the shelves of the bookcase in the living room, an apt spot since they involved cutting shapes through the pages of books.

There's a hot-air balloon floating from the pages of the Reader's Digest Great World Atlas and a tree grows out of Garden Trees And Shrubs In Australia by Harold Sargeant.

"I call it three-dimensional paper construction," Lizzie says.

"Cutting through the books and making them three-dimensional satisfies the urge – when you have a book that's just so beautiful – to look at every page at once. You want to absorb it."

In preparation for a new show in May Lizzie has been making delicate cubes from pages taken from books about Australian birds and cutting and mounting complex wallpaper patterns from native plant posters.

Birds also feature in her most recent series, in which pages are rolled into cylinders that create a picture.

The work is delicate and intimate; the images seem to flutter before your eyes. For Lizzie, the work is about her return to Australia and seeing it through new eyes.

Noisy bird life

"I'M thinking about the first settlers and how the country must have seemed to them," she says

"It's so different from England. The flora and fauna are so aggressive – I still can't sleep through dawn because the birds are so loud!"

Mike, who hasn't lived in Australia before, is seeing all this for the first time and has been profoundly affected by the move to Coledale. "I love how the spatial boundaries appear infinite," he says.

"I adore the intensity of colour, the obnoxious noises of nature and the climate – and I find the visual and spiritual power of the escarpment overpowering."

Lizzie's next show Into The Woods is at NG Art Gallery, 3 Little Queen St, Chippendale, (02) 9318 2992; www.ngart.com.au

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