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FROM SHABBY TO *OH, SO CHIC*

Breathing life into a dark and cramped 1980s Yarra Valley home, this thoughtful renovation balances modern comfort with timeless character.

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TRAIANOS PAKIOUFAKIS

Words by Elizabeth Clarke •
Photos by Traianos Pakioufakis

Reimagining a decades-old home – particularly one from the 1980s – is rarely a straightforward design brief. Yet this inspired revival of a 1986 house by John Pizzey, a protege of architect Alistair Knox, proves that thoughtful design and collaboration can breathe new life into the past.

Gruyere Farm, set amid the grapevine-lined hills of Victoria’s Yarra Valley, became home to Andrew and Tiff Percy when they returned to Melbourne from Utah.

At the time, it was a dark relic with a cramped, greenery-infested layout, but the couple saw potential. Today, the 420-square-metre farmhouse is a chic, light-filled sanctuary, thanks to a clever collaboration between Studio Manifold’s Morgan Novy and Lachlan Cooper, and designer Simone Haag.

“It had amazing bones and incredible proportions, but it wasn’t fit for modern living,” Cooper says. “It needed a family like the Percys to give it love and warmth.”

The trio approached the renovation with the goal of preserving the soul of the original structure. The home’s original bones were maintained, with everything stripped back inside. Only the former garage, converted into bedrooms in the 1990s, was altered.

The layout was reworked, keeping two bedrooms and adding a new bathroom.

The single-level farmhouse exterior was transformed from its original heritage green to a warm charcoal with new timber double doors, and the old, rotting conservatory was rebuilt.

Inside, worn carpet was replaced with terrazzo flooring and the 1990s guest wing was reimagined to integrate seamlessly with the original home’s character and flow.

The home’s mid-century character is anchored by internal rock walls, evoking the warmth of a classic Montana lodge – most notably in the sunken lounge, where unencumbered views stretch across the landscape.

Soaring ceilings, slate floors and wide-board timber walls provide a backdrop for a palette of recycled timbers, ceramic tiles and raw brass. Tones of fallow, fawn and gum green echo the landscape, while brighter tones are introduced through art, wall hangings and finishes.

“Studio Manifold was clever with the palette, knowing exactly when timber needed to stay timber and when a painted finish would work better,” Haag says. “Colour is their superpower.”

Haag is skilled at creating layered, liveable spaces and shaping them into a cohesive whole.

Drawing inspiration from the landscape and the family’s travels, she deftly combined vintage and contemporary furnishings with touch-me textures and a plethora of floor rugs.

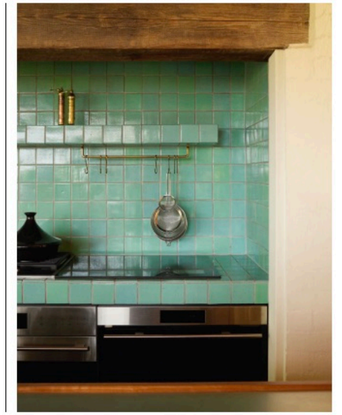
In the green-drenched conservatory, with its encaustic tiles and green-painted walls, Haag paired a Mario Ceroli dining table with vintage Scarpa Dialogo chairs. In the adjoining dining room, the owner’s original Cab chairs sit beneath a modern Perspex chandelier, and a reupholstered Eames chair anchors the lounge.

“Where possible, we always like to integrate existing pieces, especially ones with such pedigree,” she says.

The sunken lounge, embraced by the original rockwork, showcases a mix of eras. Grounding the eclectic space is a tiger rug designed by Haag. “Rather than a big bear, it had to be a sexy tiger,” she laughs.

Equestrian touches are woven throughout, a nod to the client’s love of Western US style. A graphic custom rug with a horse motif anchors the main bedroom, while a bespoke bedhead has hidden drawers and jewellery niches.

The bathrooms are clad in handmade tiles and vibrant colour, each with its own personality.

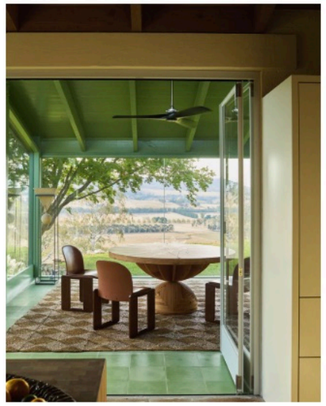


Fact sheet

What: Gruyere Farm, a renovated 1986 house by John Pizzey.
Where: Yarra Valley, Victoria.
Interior design: Simone Haag in collaboration with Morgan Novy and Lachlan Cooper from Studio Manifold.

Left: The home’s mid-century character is anchored by internal rock walls.

Above: The colour palette echoes the landscape, helping the home blend into its surrounds.



When it came to the kitchen, Cooper says the brief was clear. “One of the only references we had from Andrew and Tiff was [influencer] Emma Chamberlain’s green kitchen,” he says.

Flowing directly from the verdant conservatory dining space, its palette was dialled back, with stainless steel introduced to temper the colour.

“I love stainless in a kitchen because it’s very fit for purpose,” Cooper says. “We used an orbital waxed finish, so it’s muted and doesn’t mark easily.”

In the verdant garden, the pool area features an ivy-clad, Hollywood Hills-style pool house.

“The pool house had been a sauna, and we added a bifold steel-framed door with obscured glazing to echo the conservatory-to-kitchen connection,” Cooper says.

Beautifully anchored in the countryside, Gruyere Farm may well be the quintessential country bolthole. Cool, chic and thoughtfully curated, it embraces Australia’s natural beauty while honouring its rich design history.