

# ROOM TO ROAM

MOVING BACK TO THE COUNTRY HAS GIVEN THE ROCHE FAMILY THE CHANCE TO EXPLORE CREATIVITY AND TAKE A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE WAY THEY LIVE AND FARM.

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Seven-year-old labrador Poppy waits by the laundry, which holds tile artwork by Julia and her sister, Jacqui Meyers, that was exhibited as part of *8 Artists* at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. **FACING PAGE** Catching the sunlight in the woolshed, painter Julia Roche takes inspiration from her surroundings.



## HOME MANGOPLAH NSW

On display in the entrance hall is Julia's year 12 art, which she created in life-drawing class while studying French sculptor Auguste Rodin. The house interior is painted in Porter's Paints K2. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Michael and Julia with their children, Rosie, Jimmy and Francesca; vibrant wall art by French artist Léa Maupetit.



ARTIST JULIA ROCHE GREW UP AT WOORoola, a mixed farm 25 minutes' drive south of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales and recalls endless, carefree days as a child, camping outside under the stars, building treehouses and playing in the woolshed. "I have really positive memories and realise how valuable and important those experiences and opportunities were in my childhood. We created our own adventures and fun," the 36-year-old says.

Julia is now reliving those memories with her own children – Rosie, seven, Jimmy, five, and four-year-old Francesca – since moving back to the family property four years ago with husband Michael, 36, a grain trader who was originally from Adelong.

The couple had long discussed the concept of moving from Sydney back to the bush, to give their children a similar upbringing with plenty of space, a sense of community and proximity to grandparents. They have since renovated the 1940s homestead and operate a livestock trading business with Angus cows and composite ewes.

For Julia, it's a departure from painting in a controlled urban environment. Now, she's focused on creating an uninhibited, ever-evolving narrative of the natural landscape – usually from her vista within the corrugated-iron Wooroola woolshed, which was built in 1910. Each painting is left outside in the elements to weather and become imbued with dust, rain and sunlight.

"The way I create art is very intuitive and affected by what's happening around me emotionally and physically," she explains. "I have a strong desire to keep understanding the history of our landscape and that connection to my space. I'm more considerate of the fact I am working on Wiradjuri land, and the significance that holds and what my place is here."

Last year, Julia was one of five female artists from the Riverina region to exhibit in *Regenerative Visions*, which examined the connections between art and farming, and the ability to restore the landscape. "Mick and I are trying to do the best we can from a holistic perspective and be more reflective in the way we live and farm," she says.

Julia was thrilled to find a community of like-minded people in regional Australia. "Here I was, coming back from the seaside and living in the country, and I discovered there are groups of artists exploring the intricacies of the landscape. That's guided me and given me a framework on different ways to investigate the landscape through my art, and connected me to other incredible artists, farming families and people such as Gill Sanbrook of Earth Canvas." >





The north-facing verandah features flowering camellia planted by Julia's parents 35 years ago. "We built the deck around it," Julia says. **FACING PAGE** The exterior is painted in Porter's Paints Jute, with French Green on the windows and gutters, and Popcorn on the eaves.

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In August 2021, Julia launched a solo exhibition, *Under a Winter Moon*, with the Murray Art Museum Albury. She created a series of works outside and painted in the moonlight, working with shadows and silhouettes. "It challenged the notion of what we think is right or beautiful," she says. "Working in the night, with no sense of control in terms of seeing the palette I'm putting down, has been interesting and another layer of letting go. There's something raw and authentic because it's not controlled."

That was followed by Julia's first solo exhibition with Otomys Contemporary gallery in Melbourne, which included a series of 15 originals. Her art continues to be a form of storytelling. "It's important for me to share and explore regional concerns and celebrations," she says.

This March, Julia will take up an art residency at Geelong Grammar, followed by a show at Rosby Gallery in Mudgee in late May. Later in the year, she will hold another solo exhibition at Otomys from November 3-17.

At home, Julia and Michael have made their own imprint on the Wooroola house to create a vibrant abode >

#### ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- Julia's favourite local stores include: Ruby Tuesday, [rubytuesdaywagga.com.au](http://rubytuesdaywagga.com.au); Ted & Olive, [tedandolive.com.au](http://tedandolive.com.au); and Texas Jane, [shoptexasjane.com](http://shoptexasjane.com).
- For homewares, Julia heads to The Speckled Hen, [thespeckledhenwagga.com](http://thespeckledhenwagga.com). "Joan's Shoes, Confetti Emporium, My Shed, and Paper Pear are other local stores I get lost in," she says. "And Wagga is lucky to have The Red Pomegranate, an organic grocer."
- Julia sources art supplies at The Sydney Art Store and Southern Buoy Studios. "Nothing like a box of Charvin oil paints and a 15-metre roll of Arches oil paper turning up at your front door!" she says.
- Local builder Trent Balding, of Balding Constructions, worked on the house. "Trent and his brother renovated our 70-year-old home, seamlessly tying in the old aspects with the new," Julia says. Meanwhile, painter Brent Seach "is the most innovative and visionary painter I've come across!"





A vintage Turkish rug, bought by Julia's father during his travels in the '90s, lies in the master bedroom. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** Giggles on the ute; the 1890s-era Victorian walnut bookcase holds ceramic family portraits that were exhibited at Cadell Place, Wagga Wagga, in 2020; Julia's childhood cast-iron bed is now in Rosie's bedroom.



befitting their young family. They installed new cabinetry and spotted gum boards throughout and refreshed the exterior render with Porter's Paints Jute, while the windows and shutters are painted French Green.

"It has good bones and a good aspect. It's interesting and quirky, with lots of intriguing parts," says Julia. "We were lucky enough to keep some of Dad's antique pieces of furniture, which feel like they belong in the house."

The pair has collected a broad range of artwork. "We have some gallery works we've invested in, but a lot of the paintings around the home are by our children, my folks or local artists, including works by my talented sister, Jacqui Meyers, and her colleagues, who sell through Wagga's supported art studio, The Art Factory," says Julia. "The kids did a beautiful oil stick on cotton rag piece for Father's Day last year, which hangs above our bed. Rosie did an enormous canvas that is pink and sparkly and hangs in the kids' room. She has made a bit of name for herself over that piece and has had offers to buy it!"

Julia and Michael love giving their children a rural upbringing. "We are so lucky with the garden and space - the kids have the ability to be outside and muck around," Julia says. "They are aware of how important nature is; they play in it, feel it, and hopefully they will grow up with a sense of how important and informative it was for them, just as it was for me." *CR*

For more, visit [juliaroche.com.au](http://juliaroche.com.au) or follow Julia on Instagram @\_julia\_roche



HOME MANGOPLAH NSW

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT Julia at work in the repurposed woolshed; *By night, of night* by Nicole Kelly, along with ceramic nudes by Julia; concept mock-ups; Michael and the children, watched by Angus cattle. **FACING PAGE** Julia paints atop the granite rock in Picnic Paddock: "It's our place to go for everything." Her brother was married here, while the family enjoys camping under the stars.



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