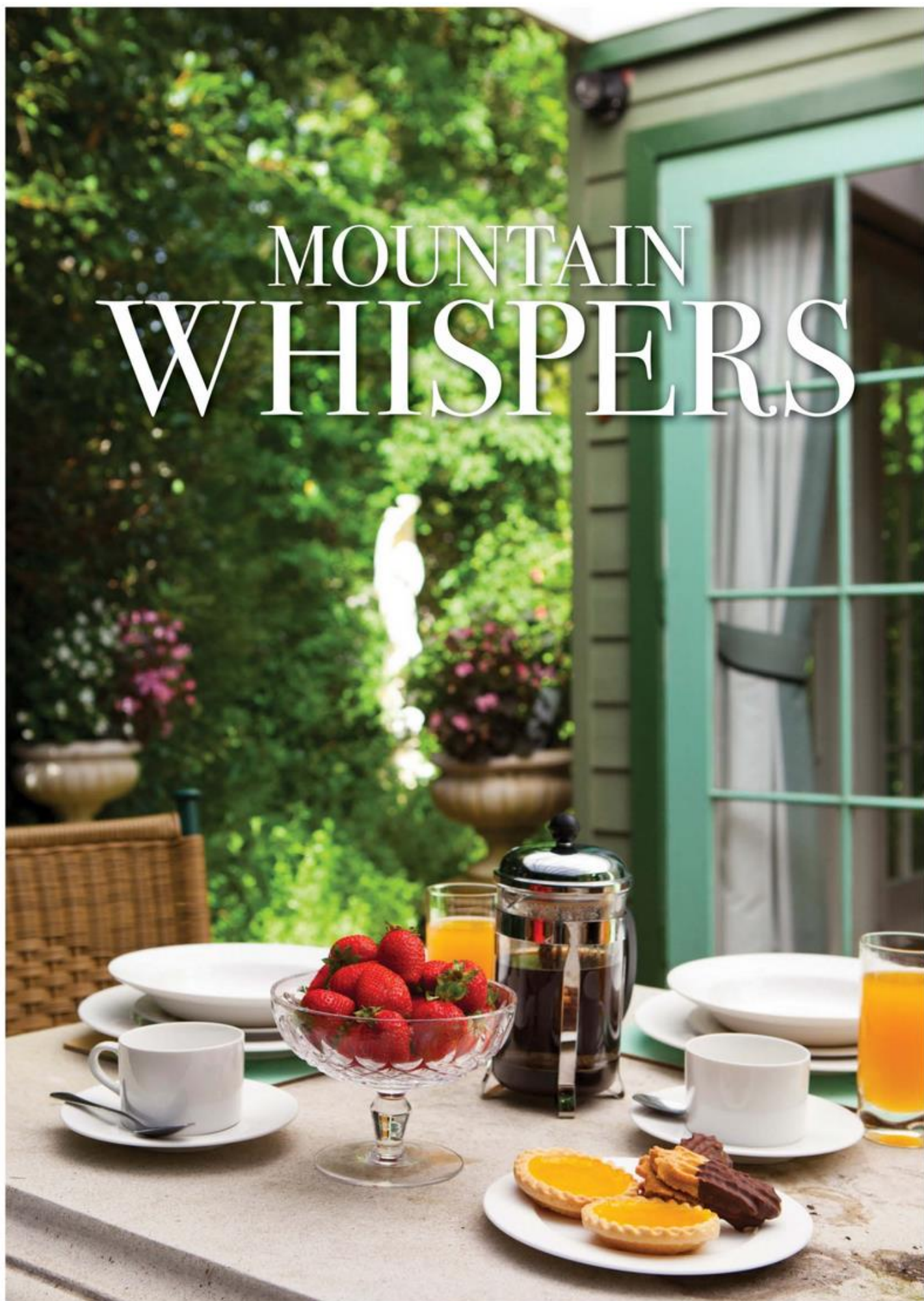


MOUNTAIN WHISPERS



MY HOME

LORRAINE ALLANSON THE VINTAGE HOUSE WHISPERER

Words by Kitty Von Tastique, images courtesy of STEADYC.AM and Mountain Whispers

Lorraine Allanson gave up her corporate day job to become what I affectionately like to call 'the vintage house whisperer'. Her collection of vintage properties: The Gatsby, Leura Rose, Varenna & Strawberry Patch – collectively known as Mountain Whispers – have won numerous tourism awards for excellence and have even been used as TV show locations.

Amazingly these vintage homes are available for long or short stays and as a fellow lover of vintage, I was completely swooning when I recently got to spend the weekend at her amazing property, 'The Gatsby'. From the moment I walked in and heard Ella Fitzgerald playing I was in vintage fan girl heaven! Lorraine has restored all of her houses from scratch with a dedication to vintage décor rarely seen anywhere, let alone a holiday stay. Although, make no mistake – these are luxury holiday locations with a capitol LUX!

Lorraine has gone to extreme lengths to do all of her renovations with respect to the vintage history of these homes; a couple of examples being the bespoke stained glass window in 'The Gatsby' bathroom that was custom made to match the design in the tiles on the wall, and the silver Art Deco ceiling roses which are to die for!

I really wanted to sit down and chat with Lorraine about her inspiration, her passion for vintage and her amazing collection of houses.

Kitty Von Tastique: Hi Lorraine! Your properties have all had such amazing vintage renovations. When did you first discover your love of vintage?

Lorraine Allanson: Growing up and living above my parents' shop in Annandale was where it all began. The whole family were involved in restoring this grand, old building with its ornate fireplaces and tall ceilings, wooden polished floorboards and fretwork, whilst still running the busy fruit shop at the same time. Instilled in me, at a very young age of eight, was the "work hard, don't stop" European work ethic. You simply didn't stop until the job was done. I suppose breathing life back into a building that would have been a standout in its heyday and seeing it come to life is where my love affair began. I've always felt like I'd been here before, an old soul, born in the wrong era. There are some things you just know but don't know where you know them from – well, that's me; a love and passion for vintage that encompassed all that's classy and stylish. A time when everything was handcrafted because of a passion and dedication, not simply drawn to the money.

I can't bear to see these grand buildings disappear and this is what has led me on my journey to create Mountain Whispers for today. A place where time stands still, where people reconnect, where the first kiss is made, a proposal takes place and those seeking solace come to escape the crazy world around them – welcome to my dream!

KVT: What was the inspiration behind each of your houses?

LA: My vision and inspiration for all my properties is for my guests to feel spoilt and to experience what it must have been like to visit the Blue Mountains during the golden age of opulence in the 1900s to the 1920s, when escapes or holidays to the region were for the affluent with access to motor vehicles.

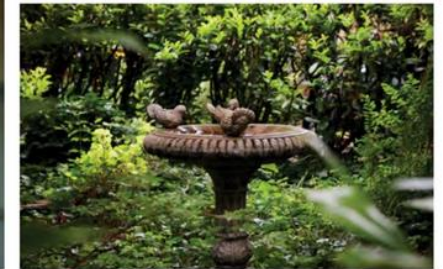
Life is resuscitated into each property with meticulous and painstaking research on the period colours, features, details, textures, furniture, hardware etc., to ensure that I stay true to the period of each property. Classified as a 'historic restore' – a title I very graciously accept – I ensure I do justice to each property and the surrounds in our beautiful destination. As we know, the devil is in the detail and my "attention to every detail" is what guests notice and mention in all their comments.

KVT: How/Where did you source the pieces for your properties?

LA: A lot of time is spent researching the periods to the minute detail. Trawling the internet, numerous days/nights and weekends at antique auctions, travelling nationally to various wholesalers and importing period and restored pieces from the US and UK. There is no simple answer for this, as the inspiration simply comes from within. I live and dream all that I create. I go to bed with a dilemma, dream it and awake to then spend innumerable hours finding that idea which I woke up with. As you can imagine, I don't sleep very much when working on a project. The sheer excitement this process brings, I usually survive on adrenaline alone. I simply can't wait to see the end result and will work through the night to get it out of my head so that I can then rest easy. Sounds a little crazy perhaps, but I simply love, love, love what I do.

KVT: Was it hard to work out which parts of the houses should stay more original and which parts should be modernised?

LA: The decision was actually very easy, as all my properties have been restored to period to ensure all the original pieces have been repaired, renovated and welcomed into the 21st century. Being in the current century there is an expectation for modern comforts with a want for all the luxury bells and whistles of modern life. For this reason, we've made sure to include just what the luxury traveller expects, and also didn't know that they'd come to expect, in the renovation. Luxuries such as double spa baths, central heating, floor heating, gas-log fireplaces, piped music etc., and then there's the added luxuries on in-house indulgences such as champagne on ice of course, roses and rose petals, private chef and waiter service... the list goes on.



Top three images opposite, and previous page: The Strawberry Patch property. Bottom images: Varenna Property



KVT: Do you have a favourite era?

LA: Oh, where on earth do I start – I love them all, although one of my favourite eras in architecture would have to be art deco or, as the French would pronounce it, “art decoratif”. After previously restoring three properties, all of the early 1900s period, I decided to put the Edwardian world aside and pay homage to one of my favourite movies, *The Great Gatsby*. Through my love affair with this era and the debonair Robert Redford, I was thrilled to put my hand and mind to showcasing and expressing this flamboyant and sophisticated era, through “my” rendition of ‘The Gatsby’ – not the movie, but a themed experience like no other.

The style was such an influential visual arts design, a statement that would simply make you stop and take notice. The flamboyancy, the glitz and glamour, the class, the style, the razzle and dazzle. Say goodbye to prim and proper and hello to the flappers. Raise your skirts, bob that hair of yours, put on some wonderful jazz music darlings and flaunt your disdain for what was then considered acceptable behaviour. How could anyone not love this era – it’s over the top but simply brilliant to me. Welcome to ‘The Gatsby’ Katoomba and leave your cares behind!

KVT: You go to so much trouble setting the scene for the arrival of your guests, including having vintage music playing when they arrive. How important is that initial vintage ‘wow factor’?

LA: I only have one opportunity at making an impression and that’s upon a guest’s arrival. It’s almost like going to see a drama or a play. You take your seat, the curtains are then drawn and the music starts – the hype begins. That’s the same emotion I want to create for my guests when they turn that key and arrive to a warm and beautifully scented environment complete with Ella Fitzgerald serenading them on arrival – step back in time and leave your cares behind. The music

is what creates that sensory experience, that which transports us to the days of yesteryear, not to mention the feather boa purposefully draped over a black/white bust, art deco maiden lamps soft and glowing and an oversized silver art deco mirror that welcomes you on arrival – it screams ostentatious, grandiose, pretentious – all that the period was renowned for. I simply love it – it really is my love affair. Hearing guests’ reactions upon arrival is truly priceless.

KVT: Are you ever tempted to move to the Blue Mountains yourself so you can live in one of these amazing houses?

LA: Whilst the temptation is ever so great, I have two boys who are still in high school, so until they have completed high school and made their way into university, I will continue my travels along the highway from Sydney to the Blue Mountains. It certainly is a labour of love.

KVT: Do you think you’ll add more properties to your portfolio in the future and if so, what era will you be looking for?

LA: Oh that’s such a scrumptious question. If you ask me, it will always be a yes. If you ask my husband, he simply advises me to collect shoes instead; it’s a cheaper option. This always gives us a good laugh. I’d love to add more, but nothing on the immediate cards.

What exciting things do you have coming up in the future for Mountain Whispers?

Vintage wedding photo shoots and historical tours complete with dress up, vintage bus tours from Sydney to BM return, murder mystery nights, perhaps a 1940-50 vintage property is on the horizon... shh, it’s a twinkle in my eye, although that’s how all my Mountain Whispers properties began, but don’t tell anyone yet... wink wink!

Images this page: Learn Rose Property, Opposite: The Gatsby