

Circle of LIFE

As a Masonic Hall it has hosted many gatherings. Now cleverly remodelled as a home and venue, this Yarra Valley charmer is the talk of the town.

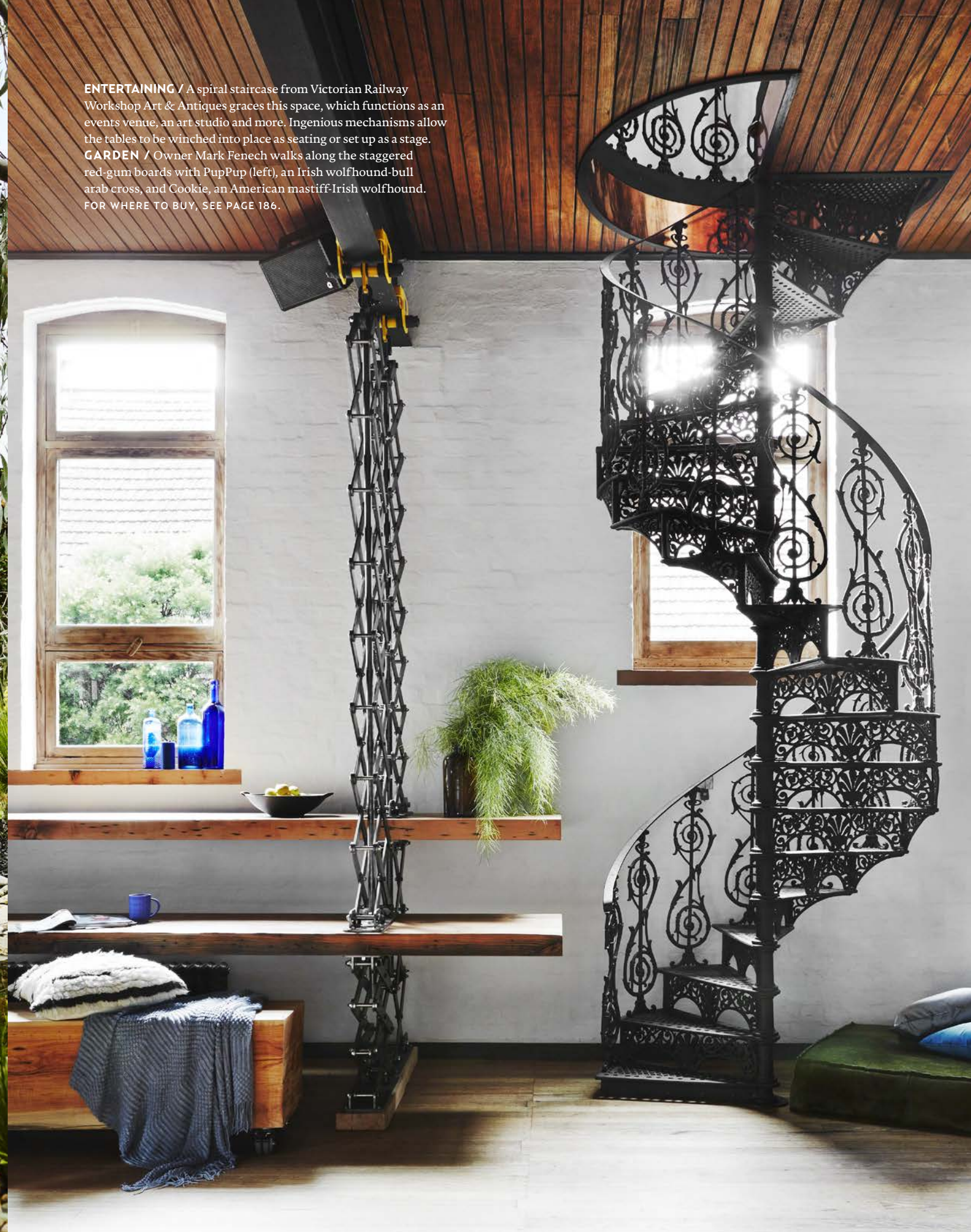
STORY CARMEN CROMER / STYLING REBECCA LITTLE / PHOTOGRAPHY ANNETTE O'BRIEN



ENTERTAINING / A spiral staircase from Victorian Railway Workshop Art & Antiques graces this space, which functions as an events venue, an art studio and more. Ingenious mechanisms allow the tables to be winched into place as seating or set up as a stage.

GARDEN / Owner Mark Fenech walks along the staggered red-gum boards with PupPup (left), an Irish wolfhound-bull arab cross, and Cookie, an American mastiff-Irish wolfhound.

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This is the life

Ever since Mark moved in, this home has attracted a lot of visitors. "In fact, I see more people now than when I lived in Melbourne!" he says. "I've got a little rustic bungalow in the back garden, and that's where my friends stay." For the owner, as for his guests, the beauty of the surroundings proves irresistible. "As much of my time as possible is spent in the garden, and it's my favourite place for entertaining friends."

The inherently Australian theme of the bush bursting back to life after bushfire set Mark Fenech on the path to transforming a former Masonic Hall into a contemporary home ringed by nature. "I watched the garden for a year to see where the light fell before I started planting and renovating," Mark says of his property in Victoria's Yarra Valley. "I pictured white serpentine trunks, green shoots, the charcoal colours after a bushfire... Those colours and silhouettes led the way."

Originally from Melbourne, Mark was living in the area with his then partner and had been house-hunting for two years when fate intervened. "My partner decided to see a psychic, and the psychic said I was going to find this place. She described it to a T. When I heard about it, I said, 'That's the place we walk past every day.'"

Inspired by this prediction, and the fact that he'd been dreaming about the hall, Mark snuck onto the property for a look. He then got in touch with the owner, who told him emphatically that it wasn't for sale. "But then, out of the blue, on my birthday in 2011, she rang and said she'd changed her mind. It was quite emotional for me, because my father had passed away on my birthday several years before, so it felt like he was giving me this place."

Mark moved into his new home and lived through three years of renovations, carried out according to his own plans. He met with builder Geoff Lawson on site every day, ordering materials and workshopping ideas. "Every morning I'd say to Geoff, 'I want to do this...' And he'd say I was crazy. However, it always worked out."

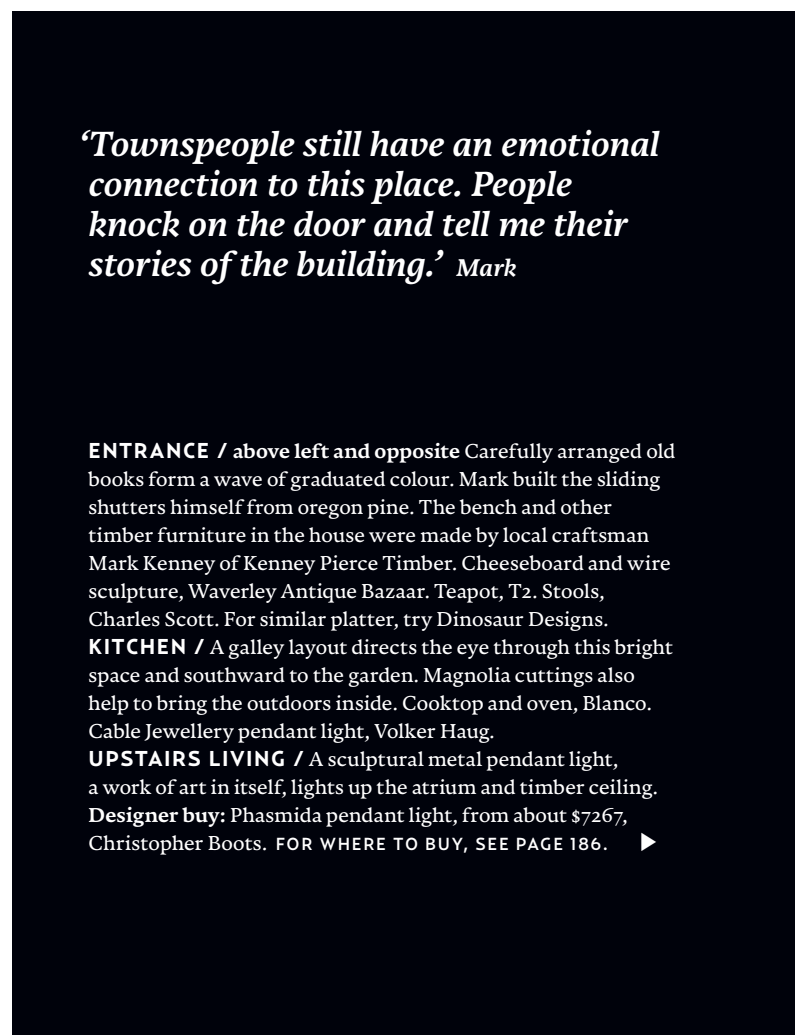
The 1920s facade was retained, as was a side section added in the '40s. Inside, the new layout reflects the building's dual character as a home and a venue for hire. Downstairs, there's a living area and galley kitchen on one side, and on the other, a commercial kitchen and a large entertaining space where Mark hosts weddings, corporate functions and other events. The bedroom is upstairs, next to a larger living area opening to a deck with garden and bush vistas. ▶



"The walls were panelled in dark wood and the windows were frosted and dark so I ripped the building back to its bones." Mark Fenech

UPSTAIRS LIVING / A rotating fireplace keeps this large space cosy. Simple modular seating is upholstered in dyed cowhide, while storage takes the form of a Japanese bathhouse locker and a vintage plans cabinet. Fireplace, Oblica. Mirror, Kyo. Railway trolley (used as coffee table), Tarlo & Graham. Throw, Shelley Panton. Artwork by Connie Burgos.

ENTRANCE / A photograph of Mark's mother sits on a vintage desk from Kyo. **FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.**



THE PALETTE

*Dulux
Ceiling White*
interior, throughout

*Dulux
Rust Effect*
bathroom feature wall

Add a dash of

*Porter's Paints
String*

Amazing homes

An added bonus of this property is that it doubles as a venue for hire, thanks to its large, adaptable entertaining space. Leo Fenech of Anlee Industries turned Mark's sketches into clever 'concertina' mechanisms to manoeuvre the heavy timber fixtures downstairs. When there's a special event, these can easily be adjusted to become dining tables, bleacher seating or a stage, or moved out of the way to clear space for dancing.

'Townpeople still have an emotional connection to this place. People knock on the door and tell me their stories of the building.' Mark

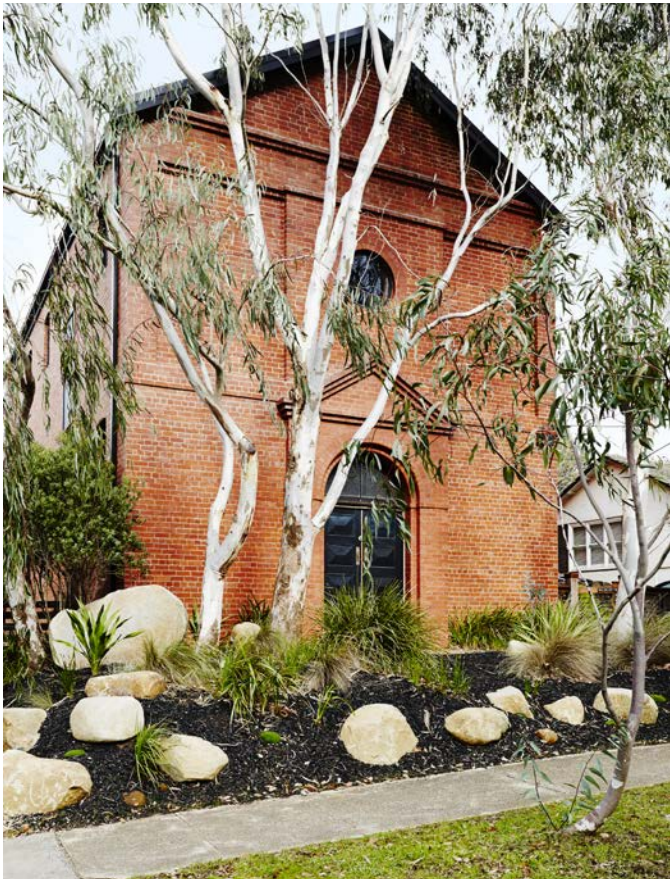
ENTRANCE / above left and opposite Carefully arranged old books form a wave of graduated colour. Mark built the sliding shutters himself from oregon pine. The bench and other timber furniture in the house were made by local craftsman Mark Kenney of Kenney Pierce Timber. Cheeseboard and wire sculpture, Waverley Antique Bazaar. Teapot, T2. Stools, Charles Scott. For similar platter, try Dinosaur Designs.

KITCHEN / A galley layout directs the eye through this bright space and southward to the garden. Magnolia cuttings also help to bring the outdoors inside. Cooktop and oven, Blanco. Cable Jewellery pendant light, Volker Haug.

UPSTAIRS LIVING / A sculptural metal pendant light, a work of art in itself, lights up the atrium and timber ceiling.

Designer buy: Phasmida pendant light, from about \$7267, Christopher Boots. **FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.** ►

Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.



◀ Throughout the interior, walls once panelled in dark wood are now resplendent in gallery white, balanced by the rustic warmth of oregon pine, cedar and Tasmanian oak. Mark describes the home’s dominant style as “industrial steampunk”, referring to its retro-tech aesthetic and repurposed vintage pieces. Focal points include an antique spiral staircase in wrought iron – restored by Mark’s uncle, Leo Fenech of Anlee Industries – and an atrium surrounded by bespoke iron panels.

An arresting line of sight directs the eye right through the ground floor and to the gardens beyond. “Some may call that bad feng shui. But I did this deliberately because I wanted to lure people out to the gardens,” says Mark.

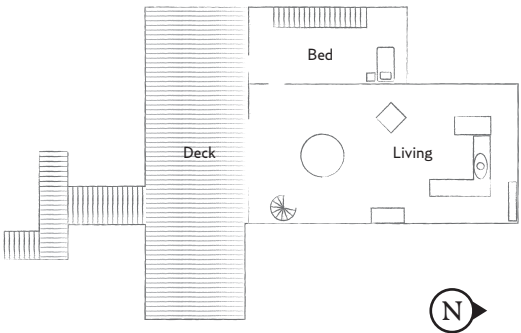
Indoors and outdoors, this home connects Mark to a wider community, as well as to his past. “The renovation is a homage to my friends, family and parents,” he says. “To my mother, who gave me a great love for art and gardens, and my father, who gave me a love for architecture and history. At times, when I was renovating and planting, I would feel as if they were there with me, and that drove me on.” **H&G**

For more information on the venue, contact Mark on 0400 215 785 or go to www.projekt3488.com.au. Builder: Geoff Lawson, East Warburton, Victoria; 0413 579 633.

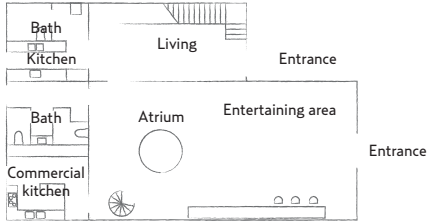
BATHROOM / A mirror reflects the shape of the building’s porthole window.
Smart buy: Citadel hand towel, \$17, Shelley Panton.
FACADE / The building features a new roof and fresh brick pointing. Boulders of local bluestone dot the front garden beds, under a canopy of snow gums.

THE LAYOUT

FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



GUESTHOUSE / With its corrugated roof and corten-steel cladding, the guest bungalow presents a picture of classic Australiana. **FOR WHERE TO BUY, SEE PAGE 186.**
To see more of this property’s delightful gardens, turn to page 119.

