

HOME BOWRAL NSW

The garden is a constant source of inspiration for artist Zoe Young. Here, foliage from the garden brings a splash of green inside. Zoe painted the small work on the wall, *Lemonade*, in 2018. **FACING PAGE** The 2018 Portia Geach Memorial Award winner at the front gate of her home in Bowral, NSW.



THE PAINTER'S PALETTE

ARTIST ZOE YOUNG IS INSPIRED BY EVERYDAY LIFE AT HER HOME IN NSW'S SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS.

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Zoe with her husband Reg Iremonger and their children Lucy and Wilbur. ABOVE The work above the fireplace, *Vuillard and Wendy*, was painted for her 2016 'Space Between Hours' exhibition. FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT A display of ceramic pieces; Lucy contemplates her next step; the timber benchtop and dishwasher are essentials in the family's kitchen. For a similar model, try the IVBIX8 dishwasher from Ilve. Domestic still lifes *Port Melon Aperitif* 2017 (left) and *Life with Picasso* 2017 (right) add colour; fruit, such as these apricots, often feature in Zoe's paintings. For stockist details, see page 136.

AN APRICOT ROLLS ACROSS the coffee table in the living room of artist Zoe Young's Bowral home. The fruit, with its golden skin, is likely to catch the eye of the Portia Geach Memorial Award winner. Who knows, you may even see a glimpse of it at her next show in one of her sought-after still-life paintings.

This is a common scene at Little Alcorn — the cottage Zoe shares with her husband Reg and their two children, Wilbur, five, and four-year-old Lucy. The flotsam and jetsam of everyday life that could be mundane in the eyes of some, gains a gentle beauty by the time it reaches the Belgian linen of the 40-year-old painter's canvas. Washing in a basket, *The World of Interiors* sitting alongside freshly cut oranges and a blue floral teapot, or a solitary king prawn gracing a white dinner set on a cherry-red gingham tablecloth — all have been the subject matter of sell-out exhibitions around Australia.

Zoe, a graduate of the National Art School in Sydney, works from a studio in the garden and often brings her paintings into her white-washed home to "live with them" while she thinks about adding their finishing touches.

"Time is one of the overlooked mediums in art — good paintings take time," she explains. "I'll be in the middle of a conversation with a friend, having some wine and cheese in the kitchen, and realise I've solved what colour needs to go in the background of a work."

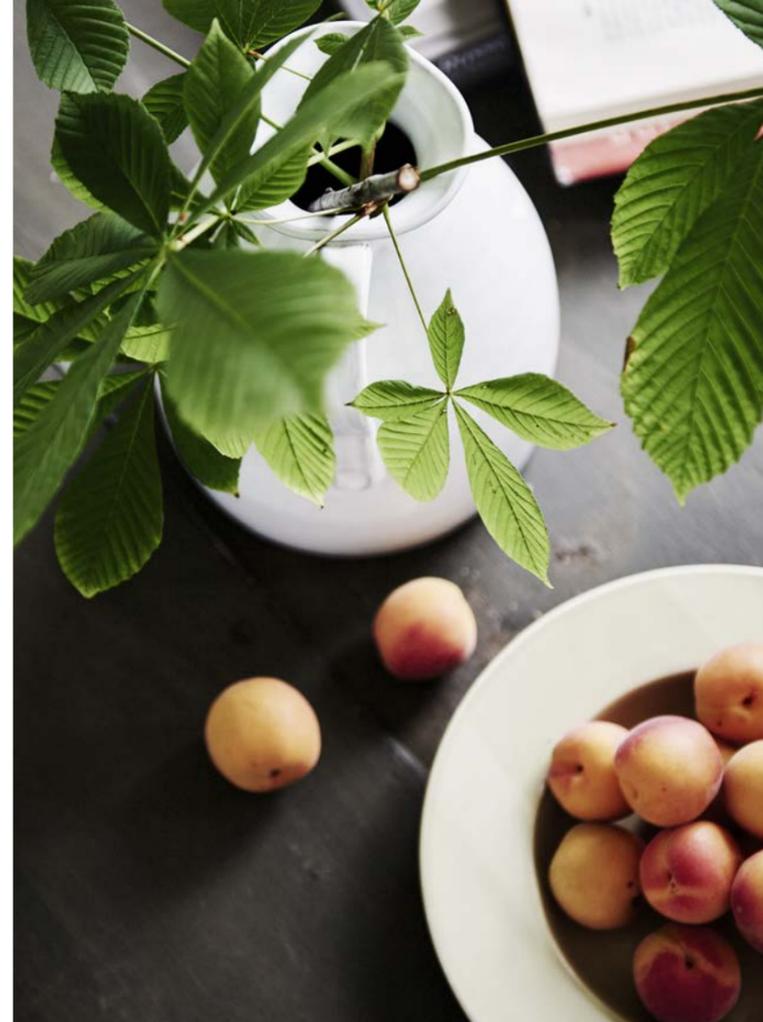
The house — partially hidden from the street by towering hedges — is in many ways an extension of the two-time Archibald finalist's studio.

"I'm constantly rearranging the spaces, often getting ideas for still-life compositions from the incidental moments of the everyday. One afternoon Wilbur was riding his skateboard through the house and I was about to tell him to go outside when the beauty of it caught my eye and I thought, actually that looks really cool. Can you do that again please," she says. The resulting painting ended up being part of a huge two-by-three-metre artwork, *My mother, myself (self portrait)* that was a finalist in the 2017 Portia Geach.

The decision to live in Bowral, the pretty town in the NSW Southern Highlands, was a natural one. Zoe's parents Butch and Margy live nearby and she had spent part of her childhood there when they owned a restaurant. Butch and Margy also started the well-known Crackenback Farm in the Snowy Mountains. "I went to school in Jindabyne in winter, Bowral in spring and Double Bay in summer. As the fourth child I just went everywhere my parents did, as my older brothers and sister were already in boarding school," she says.

Located in an industrial part of town where warehouses are mixed in with weatherboards, Zoe and Reg bought their rundown two-bedroom cottage in 2014. "I remember walking past our little cottage after a dismal day of searching for houses to buy and finding nothing that suited us. I thought why isn't there a gorgeous little decrepit weatherboard with a rundown workshop surrounded by a big hedge like that on the market?" she explains.

As luck would have it, the house came on the market the next week and the discovery of a beautiful mulberry tree >



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Wilbur's Dream 2014 hangs above the bed in his all-white bedroom. FACING PAGE Lucy runs around the picturesque garden, while the family's chickens wander in the background.

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"The wild strawberry duvet cover was a gift from my sister Sarah. She lives in San Francisco and is always sending me unusual things that are hard to find here," says Zoe. **BELOW** The family spend a lot of time out on the deck. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** "Reg and Mum have worked to create a series of micro gardens, entwined by little paths," explains Zoe; Wilbur lounging on a chair; fabric hanging in front of a window; Zoe at work.



in the garden cinched the deal. "We also found out in the same week that my portrait of Torah Bright was a finalist in the Archibald Prize and I was pregnant with Lucy! Needless to say, it was a big week."

Previously occupied by a roofing company, and then an antiques dealer, the house required a lot of work — for one thing, there was no kitchen when the family moved in. "We lived with a makeshift sink and a barbecue for quite some time. On reflection I laugh when I think of our first days in the house — we were so happy to just have a space of our own that we were truly blind to all the work that needed to be done," Zoe says.

But the transition from Bondi to Bowral wasn't without its drawbacks for Reg, a keen surfer. "He needed to find the fix that surfing used to be," Zoe explains. "We'd always had a vegetable garden in Bondi, but a month into living here, he had become completely obsessed with growing things. At one point there was a sea of pumpkins making its way through the kitchen door."

It also wasn't long before the commute to Sydney lost its appeal and the 42-year-old graphic designer decided to enrol himself in a horticulture course.

"Designing surf posters was out and flowers were in," says Zoe. "I remember him coming home with a whole bunch of flower drawings one day and putting them all over the kitchen table. He would say, 'I used to be only interested in vegetables but today we learnt about flowers. They are the most amazing things! Do you know how a flower is made? It's a miracle...' It was really funny. I'd always berated him for not buying me flowers. Finally I get my flowers, but in a vase, not a ribbon from the shop."

Zoe trained in sculpture early on and this skill has had surprising uses around the house. "A degree in sculpture comes in handy with Wilbur's growing, and rather imaginative, demands. He wanted a little bed with secret drawers and we had some wooden pallets left over from paving a garden path. After a weekend of sawing, sanding and painting, Wilbur was proudly perched on his new bed."

Her creative approach — that sees an old hardback copy of *The Reader's Digest Complete Atlas of Australia* serve as a painter's palette — has also helped with the home's steady restoration, which is still a work in progress. One of Zoe's future plans for the cottage involves designing wallpaper. "I'd really love to make my own for some of the rooms."

But for now, this talented painter is busy working towards her next show. "I've just found a box of all my mum's recipes from the various hotels, cafés and restaurants that she and Dad have created over the years," she says. "I like the idea of painting things in their various stages from the garden to the finality of a dish on a plate. There's the further challenge of time — you have to paint the lettuce before it wilts. I like a good old-fashioned Impressionist challenge." *CS*
Zoe Young's next exhibition will be at the Olsen Gallery at the end of the year. 63 Jersey Road, Woollahra, NSW. (02) 9327 3922; olsengallery.com

