

AFTER MAKING A TREE CHANGE, JANE AND RICHARD FLOREY HAVE SPENT A DECADE CREATING A BEAUTIFUL GIPPSLAND GARDEN. SUSAN MURPHY ENJOYS A STROLL THROUGH THEIR HANDIWORK.

PHOTOGRAPHS Celeste Faltyn

t is a work in progress," laughs Jane Florey as she and her husband Richard lead me through Tarradise, their garden in the tiny town of Balook, high in the Strzelecki Ranges. Richard and Jane have been working on the garden, as well as the house, since they bought the property 10 years ago.

"Many of the trees are 40 years old," said Richard as we looked up into the branches of a weeping tulip tree. The garden was started by John and Joy Hosking, who owned the property for 25 years. The Hoskings planted the original trees along with an abundance of flowering plants. "Many of the plants have disappeared over the years," said Richard.

Richard and Jane are slowly replacing the lost plants, adding colour to the backdrop of well-established trees: conifers, maples, golden ashes, weeping birches and beeches. "We have a vision for the garden," said Richard. Gravel paths, stone steps, garden beds and a striking red Japanese-inspired arbour have been added. "We want the visitor to be led around the garden with the least amount of effort."

"We are not experienced gardeners but I plan to do a home gardening course," said Richard. "We don't know all the names of the original plants that were here. Someone had a plant list but it was lost." The garden is a finalist in the Wellington Shire Green Garden Awards. "The main judge is the head gardener at the Royal Botanic Gardens. He might tell us the names of some of the plants and trees," said Richard.

The town of Balook, now with a permanent population of nine, was originally developed by the Country Roads Board for its workers as they built the road through the Strzelecki Ranges.

Richard and Jane Florey (pictured on previous page) have added splashes of colour to the backdrop of magnificent established trees at their stunning Strzelecki Ranges home.

"There used to be 100 houses here," said Richard; "a school, hotels, guesthouses, tennis courts, even a golf course." The Floreys' house is one of only two still standing.

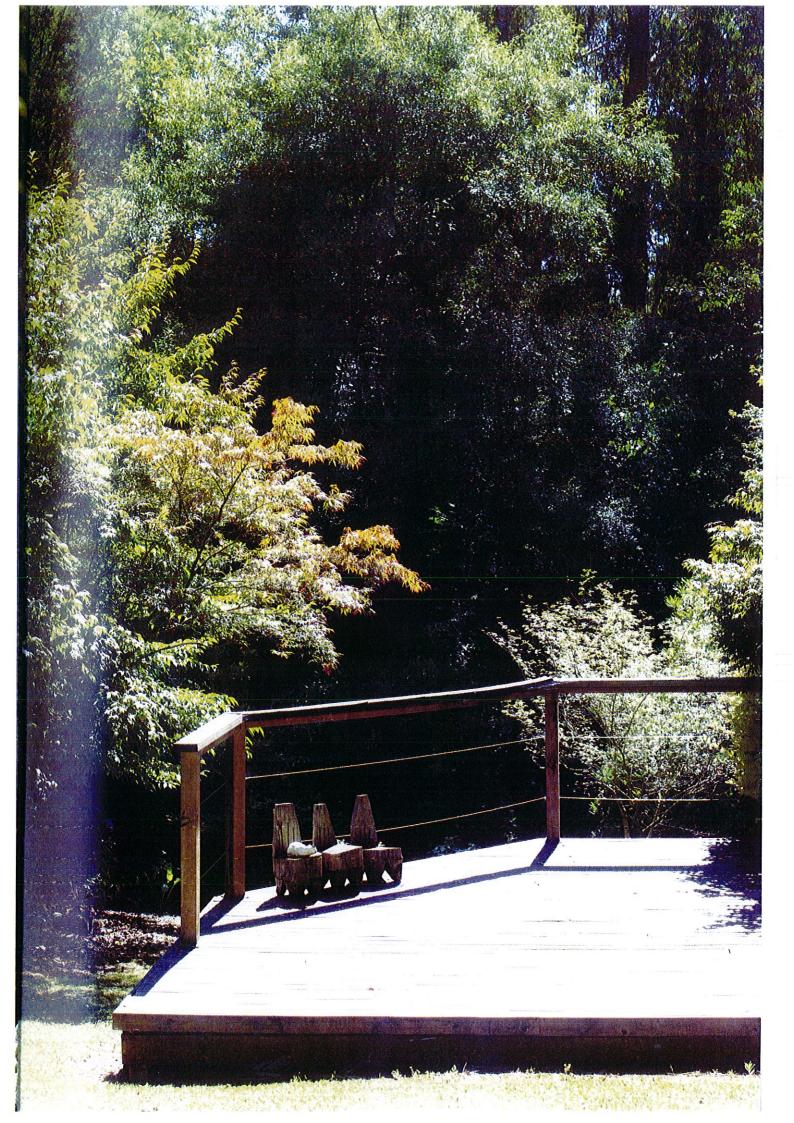
European settlers cleared swaths of the Strzelecki Ranges in the 1840s for farm land but much of it was eventually neglected or abandoned. The Alberton Shire first recognised the significance of the native forest and moves towards protecting it were instigated in 1904 when the forest was divided into two reserves: the Tarra National Park and the Bulga National Park. Tarra is named after Charlie Tarra, who helped Strzelecki and his group find their way through the Ranges, and Bulga means mountain in the language of the Gunaikurnai people, the area's original inhabitants. In a land-swap deal with a paper mill company the two parks were joined into one national park in 1986.

The Floreys' property sits on one-and-a-half acres, bordered by the national park on two sides. The drive into the property drops down from the Grand Ridge road, a razor back with spectacular views around every bend, alternating between sweeping views of the Latrobe Valley to the west and the vista towards Yarram and Bass Straight to the east.

Jane and Richard originally lived in Melbourne but camped in the Tarra Valley during holidays and both longed to move to the area permanently. When they walked past a for sale sign on the property, they jumped at the chance. "There is such a community spirit here," said Richard. "We've made more friends here than we ever did in Melbourne."

Jane and Richard's vision is to share their garden with other people, opening it up to groups such as walking







groups, photography clubs, car clubs and wedding parties. "We think we've got something special here. We'd like to share it with others," said Richard.

They have hosted one wedding party at the bottom of the garden, on a wooden platform with a backdrop of trees. "The bride and her father came down the steps and the guests stood on the grass," said Richard, pointing to an expanse of gently sloping grass. "The wisteria flowers look like confetti at the right time of year," he said. "There are many photo opportunities here."

Richard and Jane have been inspired by various gardens such as those they saw in the NSW Blue Mountains. "There are different contrasts in different parts of the garden," said Richard. "You don't see them until you get to them." The contrast in sights, sounds, smell and feel of the Floreys' garden – the crunch of gravel, the sound of birds, the grip of cool air on your skin – was laid down by the Hoskings and has been enhanced by the Floreys' foresight and hard work. "We aren't green thumbs but we love it," said Richard. [GCL]









Things we love

Simple, rare, rustic and rural: understated beauty is the cornerstone of the Floreys' garden, which nevertheless provides a huge contrast in sights, smells and sounds. The Floreys have a vision to open up their property for weddings and various interested groups.





