

JEREMY BOURKE

Should firewood-stacking become an Olympic discipline, and after what we saw in Tokyo anything is possible, Ed van der Hoeven is sure to bring home gold. It's not just the scale and strength of the great wall of wood that greets guests at the luxury accommodation Ed and his wife Vickie have created outside Mansfield in Victoria's high country, it's the precision, with each piece dovetailing into a work of art. It points not only to the warmth that awaits inside at BullerRoo but the level of detail.

The stack lines a wall of the entry court to this ultra-modern, two-bedroom chalet on the couple's hillside property, 20 minutes' drive northeast of Mansfield. It's been designed to deliver a view the pair had been eager to share since moving to the area – he from The Netherlands, she from England, and as a couple via Indonesia – in 2003.

They started with a conventional cottage available for rent before realising that, to get the wow factor, they needed a second, higher-end offering, and the best position was right next to their home. However, the architect's design for a one-bedroom place with a kitchenette/living area and a small balcony didn't speak to this adventurous couple's vision, so they set about expanding the concept themselves. Ed, who is a tiler by trade, did most of the work. He admits he basically made it up as he went along, and in early 2020 BullerRoo was born.

Inspired by architecturally unique projects he worked on in the area, including on nearby Mt Buller, Ed has put the ski chalet concept into a farmland setting, making the most of practical materials such as stone, steel, timber and concrete. Glass also dominates. The main wall is a window facing southwest, across the fields, flocks and fences of the Barwite Valley to hills behind which the sun sets big. There's no balcony to spoil the sightlines; for a fresh-air view, it's up to the rooftop terrace with barbecue.

BullerRoo sits at the bottom of a 1km-long driveway. As we pull in under the house, four-legged bundles of fur gambol up to the fence to check us out. The couple raises pygmy goats to be sold as pets, while larger specimens in a neighbouring field turn out to be alpacas.

Leaving footwear in the drying-room – BullerRoo is strictly shoes-off – we ascend an industrial-strength steel staircase to a landing lined in sturdy timber. A barn-style full-height steel door slides into the wall and we're into the generous open-plan kitchen-dining-living room where, contrasting with the soft green of the landscape outside, is another of Ed's wondrous creations, a full-length feature wall of granite. With no two stones the same size or shape, it must have taken a sharp eye and infinite patience to piece this beauty together.

There are many more examples of Ed's design mantra of "textures and imperfections", such as the dining table made of chunky planks salvaged from old cattle yards on the property. The couple has also decorated with pieces picked up around the region that underscore the rural character, such as vintage ammunition boxes, an old safe that serves as a bedside table, even whisky bottles that Ed fashioned into bedside lamps.

The main king bedroom lies just off the lounge area, through another significant metal sliding door, and if BullerRoo is rented out just for two, then the place works well as a large studio, with no need to shut off the bed from the view. The second (queen) bedroom, discretely tucked away behind the kitchen, also has a bunk bed reached by a ladder to maximise floor space, so the place comfortably sleeps five.

There's only one bathroom but it's something else. It has a Turkish hammam feel to it, with an un-screened shower at one end, illuminated by a narrow skylight above and featuring no fewer than



Things of stone and wood

Personal touches and creativity shine at a Mansfield home



BullerRoo's living area, master bedroom, bathroom and well-equipped kitchen



three showerheads: twin overhead roses and a hand-held hose.

BullerRoo's sleek kitchen lacks for nothing if your intention is to cook up a storm, although there are so many great providers in

the area we've let them do the hard work. So while we wait for our osso bucco and sweet potato mash to warm up – the star elements of a sumptuous dinner hamper picked up at The Produce Store in Mansfield – we cosy up in front of the Cheminees Philippe, a bespoke and efficient French wood-heater that is slowly fed from Ed's pile, and toast the sunset with a local nebbiolo.

We've also ordered BullerRoo's optional breakfast, a spread mainly sourced from Mansfield producers, including pork sausages and superb bacon, buttery pastries with raspberry jam, fresh mushrooms and some smoky gouda. Then we take a walk down to the bottom of the 10ha property, to get a closer look at some of the bounding critters that inspired part of BullerRoo's name – Ed and Vickie couldn't believe how many they saw when they first came here. The first bit of the name is more of a conundrum, because the farm's overall moniker is A View to a Hill, and Buller, some 50km to the east, isn't the hill in view. The one they mean is actually not one hill but two, called The Baps. Yes, it's only a detail, but at BullerRoo the details are where the delight lies.

Jeremy Bourke was a guest of Victoria's High Country and Mansfield Shire.
victoriashighcountry.com.au

TO-DO LIST

DINE

In Mansfield, The Fields' fusion offerings can include Chinese, Japanese and Mexican influences.
thefields3722.com

The Produce Store has everything for self-catering, including local wine, while The Coffee Merchant produces excellent single-origin roasts.

theproducestore.com.au
mansfieldcoffeemerchant.com.au

DRINK

Local star Delatite Winery has a new cellar door and high-end restaurant.

delatitewinery.com.au

Book a tasting at Swiftcrest Distillery for its unique gin and vodka.

swiftcrest.com

RIDE

Hire a bike from All Terrain Cycles and tackle the Great Victorian Rail Trail, with one-way shuttles available.

allterraincycles.com.au

EXPLORE

Mt Buller is a year-round adventure destination, whereas Stringybark Creek (Ned Kelly country), north of Mansfield, is a sobering site.

victoriashighcountry.com.au

ESSENTIALS

BullerRoo stays from \$650 a night (two-night minimum). Bookings of three or more nights receive a local wine and cheese hamper. Optional breakfast packages available.

BullerRoo offers full refunds for cancellations due to travel restrictions.

A package with two nights' accommodation, plus a catered hike on Mt Stirling and a gourmet three-course dinner at Craig's Hut launches in November.

aviewtoahill.com.au

