

# MAKING HISTORY

Using local craftsmen and a lot of patience, this isolated historic homestead has been restored and extended with extraordinary attention to detail.

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**M**ORE THAN A century old, this rare historic homestead sits high on a hill down several kilometres of dirt track, off the road between Kapunda and Eudunda, north of the Barossa Valley.

The history of Kingscourt began in the 1890s, when the property was

built by local landowner Abe Shannon. Interestingly, the present owner has an unexpected link to these early beginnings.

"Abe Shannon was obviously a wealthy man and would have kept the property in a very traditional manner. They used to call him the Squire of Kingscourt," says Condor Laucke.

"The family connection is really quite remarkable. Abe Shannon's sister married one of the Daveys. They owned the Angaston mill and the Eudunda mill, and

he was the first person my grandfather worked for when he came out here in 1895."

The Laucke family acquired the Greenock flour mill in 1899 and a millstone from that site has featured at the family home ever since. When their house in Greenock was sold, Condor brought the millstone to Kingscourt, where it has become part of an unusual collection.

"Abe Shannon had millstones in this house from the mill my grandfather first started in, and now I've bought the house and brought along our own millstone from Greenock. It's a nice piece of history, particularly for us, because it's a direct connection to our family."

Having never married, Abe Shannon bequeathed the property to a relative, who sold it within the first year. The homestead passed through the hands of a couple of other families before the Lauckes purchased Kingscourt in 1995, and began a painstakingly thorough restoration.

Other than the dining room and sitting room, not much of the original interior remains, although the untrained eye would find it difficult to guess where the old ends and the new begins. These two rooms were used as a template for the features in the rest of the house, including the intricate leadlight windows, black Japan woodwork, iron door handles and window latches, and the massive thickness of the walls. With the help of architect Jamie Gladigau, the project took a year to design and at least two years to build.

"That's just me, I think; I like to do things properly," says Condor. "If I'm going to add on to this house, I don't want it to look like it's added on. We did everything as authentically as we reasonably could."

It was critical for the owners that the restoration was appropriate to the original nature of the historic building, and local craftsmen were an integral part of that plan. A blacksmith from nearby Marananga made all the door and window furniture, as well as an unusual wrought stainless steel outdoor setting for the terrace. Two teams of carpenters from the local area worked on site for over a year crafting the leadlight windows, door frames, floors and all the other timber detailing in the house, all faithfully reproduced to match the old woodwork as closely as possible.



**Above:** The dining room in the old part of the house features original parquetry floors, now buffed back to their former glory; a rug would once have covered the boards under the formal dining table. The feature window seat has been duplicated in the large sitting room in the extension. A chandelier hanging in the middle of elaborately decorative plaster moulding finishes the space. **Opposite page:** What was once a verandah has been enclosed with perfectly crafted leadlight windows to make an inviting seating area with comfortable leather couches. A verandah post can just be seen in the corner, hinting at the room's former use. **Opening pages:** Reproduction terracotta roof tiles define where the recent addition to this 1890s homestead begins. Period features, including the home's many tall chimneys and Tudor-style gable ends, have been faithfully recreated, and new stonework has been expertly matched to the original exterior.





**Above left:** A modern stand-alone bath forms a centrepiece for the en suite bathroom in the new extension, with a traditional black Japan-framed leadlight window linking the room to the rest of the house. **Above right:** The white window frames, painted by former occupants, have been kept in this original bedroom; ornamental reproduction cornicing and a period dressing table give the room a historic presence.



A wonderfully light and airy corridor connects the new area to the original house, with French doors opening out onto the garden. The floor has been laid with exquisite parquetry in an exact copy of the original floors in the sitting room and dining room. At the end of the corridor, a large west-facing picture window – the only non-traditional window in the house – provides a postcard view of the surrounding rural landscape.

“I don’t know if we would have been game to do this sort of parquetry if it wasn’t already up here, because it’s just a bit different, but I think it works really well,” says Condor.

“All the doors and windows were made on site by the carpenters; they were here for a year or so. What is now the garage was their workshop and they just got on with it.”

All the new woodwork was finished with the same black Japan treatment as the original features, which had the additional advantage of making the new appear instantly old.

“It’s shockingly expensive to put on and then it marks as soon as you get a bit of moisture on it. But I actually don’t mind that, because if we’d painted it in the normal manner, only being a few years old, it wouldn’t look as it should. What I like about it is that it makes the new part look legitimate,” says Condor.

A warm red jarrah staircase leads up to a living area featuring a full-size billiard table and an enormous open fire with a wide hearth of Mintaro slate.

“There’s a concrete floor under here, but we had the boards laid a bit off the ground. Now when you walk on it, it’s a little bit hollow, so it sounds like






*Above:* Exquisite parquetry floors were painstakingly recreated by a local craftsman along the walk joining the extension to the original house. Large black Japan windows and French doors look into the garden, letting in the warmth of the winter sun. *Above right:* A historic millstone from the Laucke family's old flour mill at Greenock takes pride of place in the garden in front of the house.

floorboards. It's a nice room both in summer and winter, with that big open fireplace."

Fireplaces are a theme in this home. Downstairs in the new extension, the family's "bunker" against the very cold, windy weather Kingscourt can suffer in winter, features a capacious hearth and oversized leather armchairs and sofa from which to enjoy it. Adjoining this room, the office is fitted with authentic bookcases that were built into the space.

Outside there is a sheltered terrace with a wide outdoor fireplace and barbecue area. The exterior of the new build has been as carefully considered as the inside. A family of local stonemasons, a father and two sons, spent months on

the property meticulously recreating the appearance of the old part of the house. Even the roof tiles have been matched to the originals. Modern reproductions were used for the north-facing extension, but second-hand tiles complete with authentic moss were sourced for the covered drive outside the original front door, making the new structure indistinguishable from the old part of the house.

"They did a really good job of matching the stone. Because the stonework is of that rustic nature, it's not that easy to copy it and have it looking the same amount of rustic; you don't want it to look too new or too perfect," says Condor. "If I'm going to do something, I want to do it correctly." 



## Run of the mills

The Laucke milling empire has stood the test of time and is now the last of the industry-founding, family-owned millers in Australia. Currently in the hands of the third generation, the mill still has a large presence in and around the Barossa Valley.

Following its inception in 1899, the company expanded over the years by acquiring further mills, which were managed by Friedrich Laucke's sons in Strathalbyn, Angaston, Eudunda and Stockwell.

All the first-generation Laucke mills have ceased production. However, the feed milling business, now run by Condor Laucke, continued to expand and in 1989 a new state-of-the-art facility was commissioned at Daveyston, a small township on the western edge of the Barossa Valley that was named after Edwin Davey, who founded the first mill in the area. The Strathalbyn flour mill was replaced with a new flour mill in 1961 and is now run by Mark Laucke.

The Daveyston mill is one of the largest and most technically advanced mills in Australia, employing around 70 people from the region. The mill plays an important role for agriculture in the area, purchasing crops from the region's farmers and supplying feed for the local pig and poultry industries. The mill also produces horse feed and pet foods. These products are widely available in the Barossa Valley and throughout the country.