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Lewis Schulz and Nina Johansen's passive, timber-clad cabin sits on two hectares of land outside Woodend in Victoria.

NORDIC NOSTALGIA

AFTER YEARS IN DENMARK, THIS FAMILY CAME HOME TO CREATE AN ENERGY-EFFICIENT, SCANDI-INSPIRED CABIN IN A RURAL OASIS.

WORDS STEPHANIE HOPE PHOTOGRAPHY MARNIE HAWSON
STYLING BELLE HEMMING BRIGHT



THERE'S A LARGE AERIAL artwork hanging in the dining area of Lewis Schulz and Nina Johansen's home in Woodend, Victoria, that has special significance for the couple. "It was taken in Lofoten in Norway, a place that we love and visited on our honeymoon," says Nina, 50. More recently, they returned to the scenic archipelago with their children Kacey, 16, and Elsa, 10, during a two-year stint travelling around Europe in a motorhome, and Lewis jokes the tiny motorhome glimpsed from above in the photo might just be theirs (see image on page 84).

The couple took a very roundabout yet serendipitous route to end up where they are today, in their newly built Nordic-style cabin situated on two hectares just north of Woodend, on Dja Dja Wurrung land. Lewis grew up on a farm in the Yarra Valley, while Nina was raised in the Adelaide suburbs, and the pair met in 2005 "on a fantastic night out in St Kilda". They married and settled in Melbourne's North Fitzroy, where Kacey was born in 2008, before deciding to move overseas a few years later.

"Both of us had lived in the UK in the '90s and Nina was born in Norway, and we'd always talked about going to live in Europe," explains Lewis, 57. "However, it was only later that it became clear that Nina was thinking of the Nordics and I was thinking of the Mediterranean. We chose Copenhagen as a compromise (of sorts)."

Danish life agreed with them, and they spent many lovely years working there – Nina in risk management and Lewis in the pharmaceutical industry – and renovating an old home in the dynamic city. Elsa was

also born during this time. As retirement loomed for Lewis, they decided to cap off their time in Europe with a two-year motorhome holiday, which took them through Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Morocco and the UK. "It was a good lifestyle and a great way to spend time together, but it did get tiring," recalls Nina. "Along the way we decided we ultimately wanted a semirural lifestyle in Australia, eventually settling on Woodend, in part because of the good rail link to Melbourne."

They purchased a picturesque block with views of established trees and pasture and, while there was a house already there, it proved too difficult to convert into the compact, energy-efficient home they had in mind. They decided to knock it down and built a striking black, timber-clad dwelling in its place, following many of the Passivhaus principles that are so commonplace in Scandinavia.

Simone Schenkel, from Gruen Eco Design, proved extremely knowledgeable in this area, modelling the home using passive-house planning software and factoring in the recommended insulation and glazing specifications and airtightness requirements for this style of home. Lewis notes that it's still a very young industry in Australia and there followed many lengthy conversations with their builders and suppliers to ensure they were all on the same page. "We had trouble getting the right glass for our windows, because in Australia, most standard windows have a layer of reflective glass that pushes the sunlight away," he explains. >

CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE In the entry, the Jules console and Emi Pod side table are from Anaca Studio, the Bjorn mirror is from Warranbrooke, and the Tapis rug is from Hay; the library features artwork by Dinusha Joseph; the mud room has Collection 6 wallpaper from Scandinavian Wallpaper & Décor and an Ethnicraft Bok benchtop from Cosentino in the bathroom; Lewis and Nina with children Elsa (left) and Kacey, plus adorable dachshund-cross Frosty. **FACING PAGE** Nina and Frosty relax in the rumpus room.



“Given the beautiful vista, we had a less-is-more approach to decorating.”

ABOUT THE HOUSE:

- Simone Schenkel from Gruen Eco Design was the home's architect; gruenecodesign.com.au
- Builder Ben Carpenter from BJC Concepts took on all the passive house requests and requirements; bjcconcepts.com.au
- White Pebble Interiors assisted with the material and fixture selections; whitepebbleinteriors.com.au
- Carlie Fraser of Hygge Design took charge of the interior decorating; hyggedesign.com.au

Lewis, Nina and Frosty relax in the living/dining area, which is furnished with an heirloom table and chairs, and a Bok bench from Trit House. The Toulouse sofa and Poppy side table were sourced from Anaca Studio, the vintage Falcon chairs are from Invisedge, the Pebble rug is from Muuto and the Monte Carlo oak floors are by Smarter Timber Flooring. The coffee table and floor lamp have travelled with Nina and Lewis across countries and continents, while the library's Polytec shelves in Cinder and recycled hardwood are from South Coast Kitchens.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT *Lofoten II* by Maegan Brown and a vintage Copenhagen street light repurposed as a pendant hang in the dining area; Frosty waits for a snack in the kitchen, which has Navurban joinery in Ravenswood and Dekton benchtops in Sirius from Cosentino; glossy Moroccan Zellige wall tiles; Andi bar stools from Huset; all the rooms capture the bucolic views.

FACING PAGE Dark meets light in the main bedroom, which has an Oslo bedhead from Heatherly Design, Blown pendants by Samuel Wilkinson, Norah side tables from Life Interiors, an Inverness rug from Tribe Home and Warwick curtains in Sicily Ink.



“We chose Woodend for its closeness to the city, but we rarely have any reason to go there anymore.”



“The Passivhaus uses transparent glass to let the light in and help with warming the house, so trying to get that message across and get the right glass delivered was more complicated than we’d anticipated.”

The resulting home includes three bedrooms and two bathrooms, with an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space in the centre, as well as a study and a rumpus room that doubles as a guest room. The moody black kitchen was chosen for Lewis, the cook in the house. “It’s consistent with the woodland setting and feels a bit Danish-noir,” says Nina. Meanwhile, the green-tiled bathrooms are reminiscent of the homes Nina grew up in, which were designed and decorated by her mother.

While Lewis and Nina brought some key furniture pieces with them from their previous homes, they asked Carlie Fraser of Hygge Design for help with the rest of the decor. “They wanted a cosy interior that provided ease and comfort – a home that was warm and inviting,” says Carlie.

Having recently returned from Copenhagen Design Week, Carlie was brimming with ideas. In the living space, a blue sofa is the hero, paired with two vintage leather Falcon chairs with headrests just made for napping. A floor-to-ceiling bookshelf is filled with an assortment of items collected over the years. “There’s an old carpet-beating brush from Norway, a sculpture of a woman from Mozambique, a big pot from Fiji, a painting by my sister, lots of books we’ve read and lots of greenery,” says Nina. “It’s the nicest thing to look at, full of memories of the past.”

On the other side of the room, a dining table and chairs that belonged to Nina’s family and have followed the couple from home to home are paired with a vintage street light from Copenhagen. “Given the beautiful vista, we had a less-is-more approach to decorating and used some well-known Danish brands and designers that are timeless and fun, such as Hay, Muuto, Verner Panton and Designstuff,” says Carlie.

Lewis and Nina say their country move has been an easy adjustment. “Copenhagen isn’t dissimilar to Woodend – they both feel very village-like,” says Nina. On their property they have a small “fleder” of sheep, cows and chickens, and some newly planted fruit and nut trees.

“I’ve become famous in our street for being a rotational grazer,” says Lewis, who moves his livestock each day to improve soil quality, restore the ecosystem and reduce their environmental impact. “It looks strange to others, having all this land and keeping the animals together on one small 200-square-metre paddock,” he says of the regenerative process.

The longer-term goal is to build a glasshouse to grow standard and exotic crops for sale, and to plan a wetland. “It’s funny,” says Lewis. “We chose Woodend for its closeness to the city, but we rarely have any reason to go there anymore.” And why would you, when everything you need is within easy reach? *CF*
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