

Memory lane

She has six children with husband Terry and has held 26 solo exhibitions but **Gemma Lynch-Memory**, who lives in a converted hops mill, is always looking for the next adventure

words **STEPHANIE ESLAKE**
photography **NIKKI DAVIS-JONES**

A date in a fancy restaurant didn't really appeal to a young Gemma Lynch when she lived in Bathurst, NSW. So she was thrilled when husband-to-be Terry Memory whisked her away on an unusual first date in 1987.

"Terry loaded up his trailer with two quad bikes and told me we were going somewhere which was a surprise," Gemma says. "He took me out to a country property and we spent our date zooming up and down the side of a river on quad bikes. From that point, I thought, 'You've got me'."

Twenty-eight years on, the couple are devoted to country life and have made a home in a converted barn surrounded by about 16ha of land at Gardners Bay near Cygnet.

Their first five children – Isaac, 15, Josh, 13, Annie, 11, Lucy, 9, and Samuel, 7 – were born in Melbourne and they call the youngest, Emily, 3, their "Tasmanian baby".

The couple found their home, which was built as a hops mill, on a driving holiday in Tasmania in 2009.

"Within about 24 hours of being down here – with no intention of buying a property – we stood in the driveway, looked at the view, and the rest is history," Terry says.

They call the farm Ijalse (pronounced "i-jall-sie"), a made-up name composed of the first letters of their children's names. The conversion into a two-storey home was a major project, with an abundance of recycled materials used.

"We decided to work with the feeling that was already here and the charm of the barn," Gemma says. "We just cleaned it up, polished it off and worked in and around it."

The original barn doors are the home's entrance and lead into a boot room built to keep out the drafts, with an internal door built from scratch out of "bits and pieces hanging around".

"We're very proud of that door – it's our work of art," Gemma says.





RUSTIC RESIDENCE: Clockwise from top left: the corrugated iron and wooden staircase that leads to Terry Memory and Gemma Lynch-Memory's home studio and office; the outside of the Gardners Bay home, which used to be a hops mill; a chicken rests at the 16ha property; Terry and Gemma take a moment to relax; and some of the family's shoes. Opposite page, from top; the entrance to the home features pictures of the children on the wall; and, left to right, Lucy, 9, Samuel 7, Emily, 3, Isaac, 15, Annie 11, and Josh, 13.

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A painting, *New Landscapes*, hanging in that space is one of many of Gemma's paintings displayed throughout the house. The family's lounge area was originally a loading dock for trucks, and they added a wall to make a cosy and child-proof living room with rustic exposed eaves. The kitchen has a square wooden table in the centre and a wood fire instead of a cooking stove. Above the bench, a round window made from stained glass features a sprig of lavender for each child.

Bordering the kitchen is the parents' bedroom, while the three boys and three girls have their own lofts behind the lounge. The kids' rooms feature ladders up to second levels, which Gemma describes as "their world away from the world - Alice has created a princess fairyland up there".

The bedrooms line a corridor with original wooden floorboards.

"They're so beaten up and bashed around. They've had machinery over them and oil spills, and we scrubbed them clean. I just love them," Gemma says.

The "engine room" of the house is a near-industrial size laundry, and it leads to a gym.

"I've got two big boys who live on a farm and I think it's important at that age to give them something to occupy themselves and be really passionate about," Gemma says.

With no television in the house, the kids enjoy an active lifestyle.

The children, who attend Tarremah Steiner School at Huntingfield, build cubby houses, ride go karts, swim in the dams and take bushwalks. They're not allowed technology until they are in high school, when they get a mobile phone.

"We have a predominantly organic food diet and it's wonderful to find an education stream which fits in with the ethos of the way you live your life," Gemma says of the Steiner school.

"Mainstream education doesn't really support our value system."

Producing their own vegetables, eggs, and meat with sheep and cattle, Terry says the farm allows them to live 80 per cent self-sufficiently. But with the freedom of growing their own food comes a lot of responsibility - and it's necessary for everyone to pull their weight.

Each member of the family takes on a different job, and the children share the care of the animals. Terry cooks dinner and when the house is clean and tidy, the kids are ready for bed.

"Within reason, Terry and I run a pretty tight ship. It keeps the stress meter down. It can either be chaos or organised harmony," Gemma says. (Though "sometimes there's organised chaos," Terry jokes.)

The country and family life are demanding but the couple still dedicate time to each other.

"Despite the fact we've got six children, we still have a place of our own within our family and that's really important to us," Gemma says.

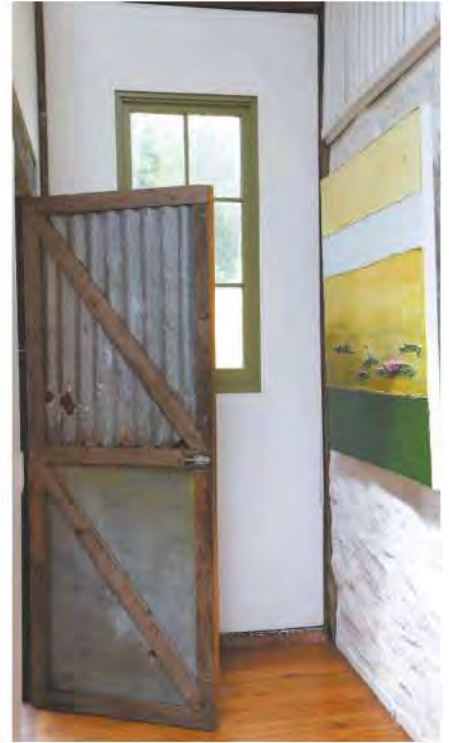
"We start every single day having a cup of tea in bed and we have a lot of time throughout the day. The kids respect that and they've got a real understanding that 'Mum and Dad have got their thing', and it's easy."

The couple work from home - and enjoy the isolation. Above a corrugated iron and wooden staircase, which they put together, is Gemma's art studio and Terry's office. ➤

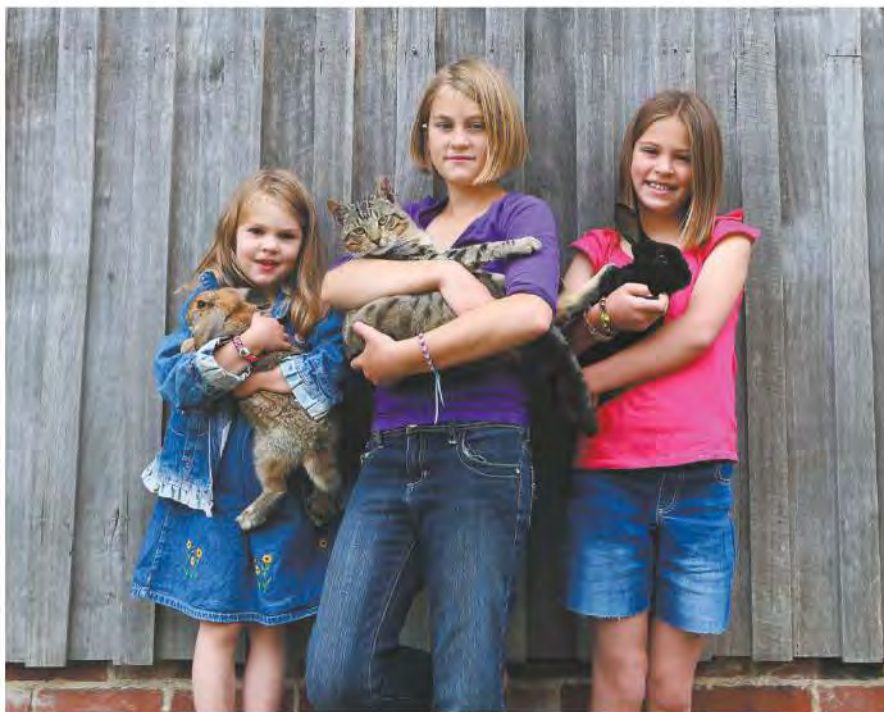
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ATHOME



TREASURED MEMORIES: Clockwise from left, the heart that moved with the family when they came to Tasmania and a photo of a tree with the children's first initials carved into it, spelling out the name of the farm; flowers add a natural feel to the kitchen; one of Gemma's paintings, *New Landscapes*, hangs on the wall; Emily with Lulu the rabbit, Annie with Omo, and Lucy with Blackberry.



They have separate spaces but work side by side as Terry writes the photo essays and media for Gemma's exhibitions. They also run a tea business, the Tasmanian Tea Company, selling leaf tea at markets, online and at Gather in Liverpool St.

"We both have our creative pursuits so we spend time doing that. It all goes into the melting pot of building a lifestyle that we're after," Gemma says.

Their family's long-term commitment to Tasmania was tested when they temporarily moved back to the mainland three years ago, after Gemma's father died. After two months, the kids were yearning to return to Tasmania.

"They begged us to take them back to Tassie," Gemma says. "The kids rallied together and decided they had to convince us to take them home."

The centrepiece of their campaign was a petition incorporating poems, essays and drawings of the barn and animals.

"It was the most beautiful thing I've ever read," Gemma says.

They returned in January last year.

The couple's latest project, which will be Gemma's 27th solo show, is an exploration of rural life in Tasmania portrayed through paintings of real letterboxes around the state. Terry compiles the letterbox owners' stories and Gemma paints a visual representation.

As Terry explains: "We're looking for something that harkens back to an easier time of communication and *Return to Sender* is about that simpler life - and a roadside mailbox embodies all of that. They're very representative of the people behind them.

"This arts project is very much centred on our background and the way we came to live here. We're looking for people who have experienced that kind of transition and done that similar scene change.

"The answer is not up there earning more money, doing more things, having more stuff. It's about finding a more authentic life in this kind of environment."

The exhibition will open in Sydney's Neutral Bay in October before returning to Tasmania. To have your letterbox featured in the project, head to www.gemmalynch-memory.com