

rescuing the **everything** house



The very visible historic house attached to The Everything Store in Sutton Forest has finally been restored. Owners Greg and Kathy Barnsley explain the painstaking work involved and tell DEBORAH McINTOSH about some amazing discoveries

PHOTOGRAPHS **TONY SHEFFIELD AND KATHY BARNSELEY**

PERHAPS IT'S BECAUSE GREG BARNSELEY had to wait half a lifetime to restore his family home. Perhaps it's because he learnt the art of fixing things at his father's knee. Or perhaps it's because he married an architect who appreciates heritage and a well-finished home. Whatever the reason, when Greg and Kathy Barnsley finally embarked on the restoration of their mid 1800s Sutton Forest home, he went at it with the energy and attention to detail of a shoemaker's elf. He cleaned locks and escutcheons and crafted new keys. He stripped and polished light switches and washed 1920s chandeliers that had never been cleaned. He repaired windows and doors, amending them to fit. "Some had 10 coats of paint. I spent hours a day with a heat gun scraping paint off," he says.

When Greg found enough good floorboards from around the house for the hallway, he spent three days de-nailing them. "Because

they had handmade, rusted nails in ironbark, I had to drill beside each nail to get it out. I would have taken out three to four hundred."

Greg's passion – matched by Kathy's in a different way – stems from his family's links to the building, one of the Highlands best-known landmarks. The house is attached to The Everything Store, at the T-junction where Exeter Road meets the Illawarra Highway. It is also the house where he was born and raised, along with four older siblings.

Barnsleys have lived in Sutton Forest since the mid 1800s. In 1885 they established Barnsley Brothers Butchers in the building across the road from The Everything Store. From 1987 to 2010 this building was home to a shop called A Little Piece of Scotland, run by Nerida Barnsley. Greg's brother and sister-in-law, retired solicitor Garry and his wife Nerida, still own the building.

Greg's father Geoffrey bought the general store and attached house in 1950. The shop had been built around 1830. The house was added in two parts, probably by the mid 1800s.

In the 1920s, a man called James Wickins returned from World War I and bought the store, later employing young Geoffrey from across the road as a shop boy. When Geoffrey returned



THE EVERYTHING STORE WAS BUILT AS A GENERAL STORE IN THE 1830S AND THE HOUSE TO ITS LEFT WAS ADDED DURING THE MID 1800S.
OWNER GREG BARNESLEY WAS BORN IN IT IN 1960.

from World War II he married, started a family and bought the shop and house from his old boss.

Geoffrey and his wife Daphne ran the shop as a general store but it morphed into The Everything Store (a name suggested by their eldest son John) thanks to their unrelenting gathering instincts for old wares and antiques. “In James Wickins’ day it was a general store,” says Kathy, “but Greg’s parents were the original pack rats; they collected everything. They still sold groceries, newspapers and petrol, but they also stuffed everything they could find into it.”

Nothing was spent on the property. “Because they grew up through the Depression, they never spent a cent – they just saved,” says Greg. They also worked seven days, often helped by their children, John, Garry, Pam, Robert and Greg.

Everything changed in the early ’80s. After leaving school, Greg ran the shop with John, but in 1981 John died from leukaemia. Within three years, Geoffrey and Daphne also died, so Greg ran the shop alone.

“In 1987 (aged 27) I decided I had to get out of here,” he says. “I went for a two-month Contiki tour and came back three and a half years later with Kathy. Then I had to start again.”

The couple met in Cape Cod in Massachusetts. Greg was selling clothes from an old school bus he and a friend had converted into a mobile shop. Kathy had just finished her architecture degree and was at her parents’ holiday house for the summer. She was waitressing in a cafe when Greg walked in for lunch. By the end of lunch he had asked her out to a drive-in.

“Later on, Greg was based in Brooklyn and I was in New Jersey, so we dated for a while and lived together. We had known each other a year and a half when Greg got a call from Garry saying, ‘We’re going to sell the shop because you’re not coming home.’”

The four siblings all owned a share of the \$120,000 property, but Greg was the one desperate to keep it. He immediately flew home and told his siblings he would buy them out. But finding the money wasn’t his only problem. “After three years, the place looked like a bomb had hit it. I thought, ‘How can I bring Kathy here?’ There was grass growing through the floorboards. So I had two months to get it looking liveable.”

Kathy came out a few months later with a return ticket, as she had never been to Australia. But the dilapidated house wasn’t too much of a shock. “Greg was pretty honest,” she says. And



ABOVE: THE BACK OF THE HOUSE PRIOR TO THE RENOVATION, AND THE LIVING ROOM DURING THE PROJECT. **CENTRE:** THE HALLWAY IS MADE FROM RECYCLED FLOORBOARDS FROM AROUND THE HOUSE. GREG RESTORED THE FRONT DOOR, WHICH CAME FROM A 1830s SUTTON FOREST HOUSE. **OPPOSITE PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP):** THE RESTORED KITCHEN AND LIVING ROOM; AN S-SHAPED BRACKET HOLDS IN A BRICK WALL; THE FRONT VERANDAH.

living in it didn't put her off marrying him 18 months later.

The following year (1993) the couple restored the shop, which had virtually no remaining floor or verandah. They needed to run it or rent it for income. "One wonderful thing was we got tenants who made a deal with us," says Kathy. "Because we had no money, they said, 'We'll pay a year's rent up front for you to fix up the shop, then we'll have it rent-free for a year. We were so lucky with that.'"

The Barnsleys were itching to renovate their house but didn't start until March 2012, almost 20 years later. "We had a long-term plan. It just turned out to be a very long-term plan," says Kathy. The delays were laudably sensible, but required superhuman patience – especially as Kathy was working daily on other people's beautiful new homes and renovations.

First Kathy had to establish herself as a local architect, and when ideal Moss Vale premises came up for sale, the couple knew it would be a wise investment. Four years later they again had enough for the renovation, and the neighbouring one-acre block came on the market. They decided buying it would be the smart move, so once more they bided their time.

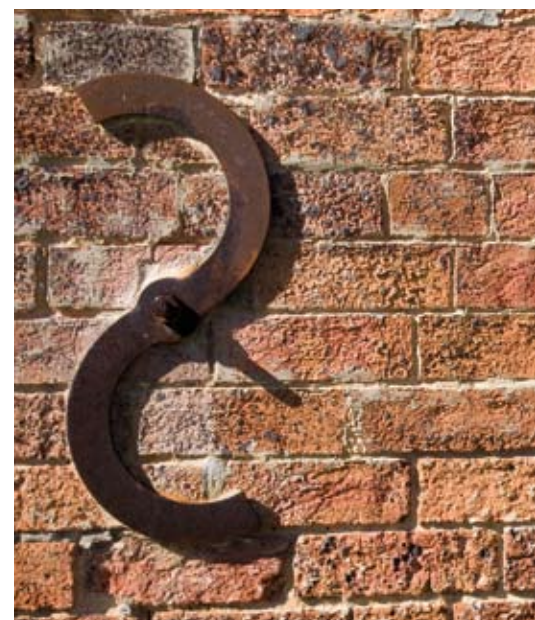
Having bought the land, they were fortunate that Kathy was



working on a site in Burradoo where the owners wanted to get rid of a 1920s cottage. The Barnsleys moved it to their block, renovated it and added front and back verandahs, and now have a cottage to let out to guests. They were able to live in it during their own renovations and Kathy's parents use it when they stay. "The cottage and shop are my income," says Greg. "I lease the shop and they sell pieces that I find and restore on consignment."

When they were finally ready to renovate the house it was literally falling apart. "The catalyst was the termites – falling through the lounge room floor. It was ridiculous," says Kathy. "You'd move a piece of furniture and put a foot down and a floorboard would collapse."

They had no hot water in the kitchen and cooked on an Early Kooka stove (its door now hangs on the wall). They could only



live in three rooms and had just five power points, so they had five power boards and 18 double adaptors. "It's amazing we never burnt the place down," says Kathy. "We were very conscious of that and careful of what we used."

When they moved out, they realised the house was in an even worse state. Little had changed since Greg's parents had crammed every last inch with furniture. As Greg and Kathy moved the furniture out, they discovered shocking rising damp, staining the peeling vintage wallpapers hung during its last renovation in the '50s.

In came the builders and more discoveries were made, some that could kindly be called challenging but also a few nice surprises including an old pipe in a wall cavity, historic newspapers under

the floor, and a box of receipts in the roof, neatly wrapped in brown paper and string.

"They are as good as the day they were put up there," says Kathy. "James Wickins probably left the box behind when he moved out, and there are receipts of everything he bought and sold and from 1927 to 1930. He owned the shop from around 1920 to the late 1940s."

The newspapers were under lino in what was the lounge room, dating three renovations. There were layers from 1955, 1934 and 1923, with different lino on top of each.

When the corrugated iron roof was removed they discovered hand-cut shingles underneath, each hammered in with the chunky handmade nails used throughout the house.



TOP LEFT: THE SECOND BEDROOM TODAY AND (BELOW) DURING THE RENOVATION.
RIGHT: THE BEDROOM'S FIREPLACE.



"They would have had a blacksmith on site who did nothing but make nails," says Greg. "He would have had a sheet of wrought iron and he would have heated it up and hammered out a piece and belted it into shape and thrown it into a bucket of cold water. They would have had a forge going all day."

The couple now use the shingles to light their fire, and have a woodpile to last a lifetime at the back of their one-acre property. "They're not beautifully shaped or worth keeping – and they're nicely seasoned," says Kathy.

The roof framework had to be replaced at the far end (away from the shop), but the timber in the older part (circa 1830s) was fine. A brick wall at the far end was also falling away from the house, so it was secured with iron rods (the rod ends have decorative S-shapes which feature on the exterior).

Paint was sandblasted off the sandstock bricks, which thankfully were in beautiful condition on the front and part of the side. Those that weren't were rendered, and the back of the house,

which was altered slightly, was done in weatherboard as it had never been brick. The former enclosed back verandah had actually been repaired with old enamel signs.

The '50s front door was replaced with an 1830s door Greg bought at auction 30 years ago from a local house. He restored it over two weeks, ordering replacement red glass for one panel from France. The doorway was raised, as were many in the house (all were just 178 centimetres). The bricklayers reused bricks from elsewhere in the house to make a new arch, placing one with a cat's paw maker's mark at the centre.

The floor plan was slightly changed, and one cracked triple brick wall was rebuilt. Bricked up doorways were reopened and excess bricks were used to build a fireplace in the living room. The house is still small, having two bedrooms (one with a dressing room) a dining room, living room, kitchen, laundry, bathroom and mud room. It's hard to believe it once housed a family of seven.

Greg restored every window with the help of a young local, Mikel Keyes, who has since started an apprenticeship with a builder. Some needed broken glass replaced but Greg left one cracked panel as it was. "I cracked it when I was about six. I threw something at my brother and missed – so I decided to leave it there."

Before the renovation Greg had collected locks, escutcheons, door knobs, window lifters and casement latches, so he restored these and those already in the house, most of which had been painted many times. The brass locks are all Carpenter locks, made between 1830 and 1860. He also restored half the light switches (the rest are reproductions).

The entire termite-ridden floor was removed, and now only the hallway and thresholds are made from timber original to the house. Most of the house is carpeted in an old-style Axminster carpet removed from a Sydney house a year after being laid.

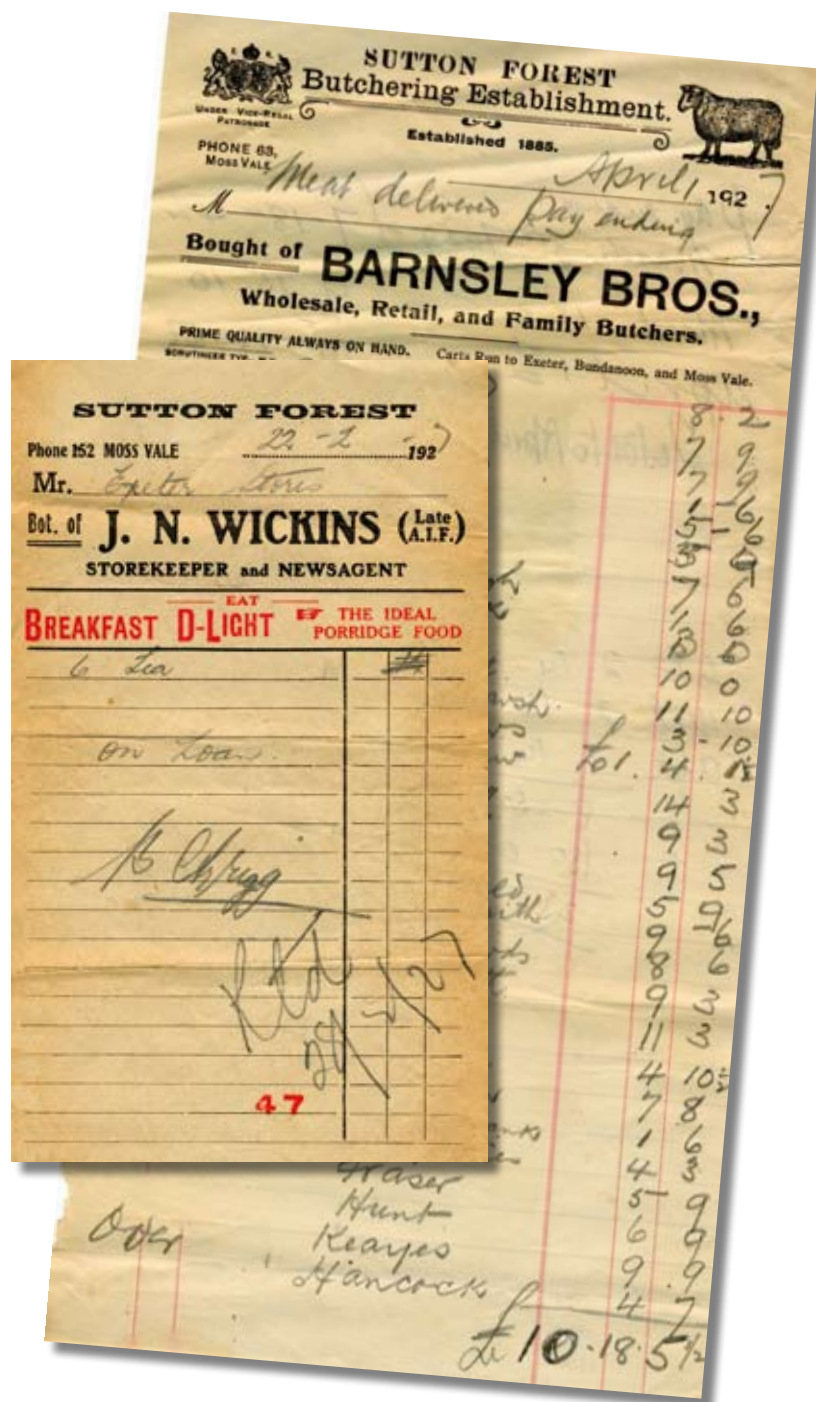
One item wasn't restored – the old cast iron bath tub. The Barnsleys were ready for "a little modern luxury" and now have a spa bath. "It's like living at the Hilton," says Greg.

The couple moved in last October, having had the house painted by professionals. Both hate painting and knew that when people try to save on renovations by painting themselves, the job often remains unfinished. "The last five per cent of a



renovation is the hardest work you do," says Greg. "You have to force yourself to keep going, because you think I can do that any time – and then it never gets done."

Greg is naturally ecstatic that the restoration is finally complete, but Kathy is equally thrilled. "It's so important to Greg and I'm a Barnsley now so it's my family too. Six generations of Barnsleys have lived in Sutton Forest and we're the last ones here."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KATHY AND GREG BARNESLEY; RECEIPTS FOUND IN THE ROOF FROM 1927; CAN YOU SPOT THE OWNERS? GREG'S PARENTS GEOFFREY AND DAPHNE IN THE CENTRE OF THEIR WELL-STOCKED EVERYTHING STORE IN 1963.

She has always felt fortunate that Greg came from the Highlands and not some other part of Australia. "If you think about it, how lucky was I to start my business here. I started in architecture in (America's) New England area which is very sympathetic to the architecture we have in the Highlands. It all fitted."

But didn't she want to build a new home to her own design? "I'd love to build a house for myself, but I'm really proud of what we achieved here. We worked so hard. Greg spent a lot of physical time and I spent a lot of time researching, doing drawings and instructing builders, so it was really a team effort."

"I love designing new buildings, but I also work on a lot of heritage buildings and have a lot of respect for restoring and retaining heritage architecture. I love this house, and it's so nice after all these years to have put my own hand on the building."

"For 20 years I lived here with all of Greg's family's stuff around us. Then we emptied the whole place out and both of us put a 50/50 effort into the new version. Now it's both of ours." **TL**