

Escape

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS *June/July 2021*

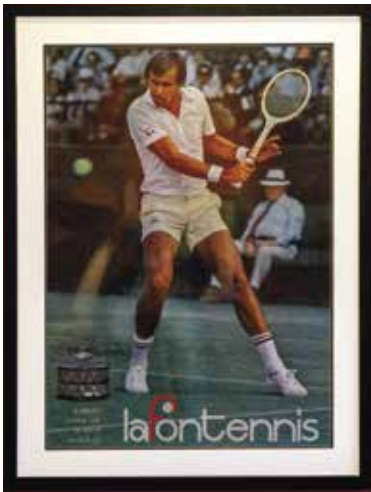


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BRINGING
THE NUDE TO LIFE
IN BOWRAL



Escape SH checks into a monumental Highlands pad that sleeps up to two cricket sides, or five Davis Cup teams, and finds it does what it says – game, set and match.

WORDS ALEX SPEED IMAGES ELISE HASSEY

Question. Does it follow that people with big sporting achievements go on to buy big houses? In the case of John Alexander, former pro tennis player, Australian Open doubles champion, and now federal member for Bennelong, the answer is yes.

Alexander, or 'JA' as he has long been known, bought Iona Park, an imposing six-bedroom mansion, and its 37 hectares in Moss Vale, in 2017. Alexander's plan, according to news reports, was to use the property, a former boutique horse stud, as a weekender for short-term holiday lets, and horse agistment. JA is known to frequent on occasion, too. So, just what does a former sporting star's grand getaway look like, and where exactly does it fit all those 22 bodies it professes to house?

It's a question my kids and I discuss as we make

the quick drive from Moss Vale for the night. Awaiting us in true Highlands estate fashion, Iona Park sits hidden from the road, a wrought iron electric gate adding neck-craning frisson to the back seat.

"Whoa, Mum," says my 10-year-old, more au fait with weathered weatherboard than terracotta terrazzo. "This place is massive. Who lives here? A king?"

Well, not quite but over his 20-year court career, Alexander won seven singles titles and was the youngest ever player to represent Australia for the Davis Cup, in which he played from 1968 to 1980. In 1975, he was ranked 8th on the ATP tour. I grew up watching Alexander and his contemporaries, John Newcombe, John Fitzgerald, Wally Masur and Paul McNamee, play tennis on the telly in the 1980s and there is, I think as we unpack the car, something





faintly nostalgic about Iona Park. It is enormous in scale, with double front doors, dormer and ceiling to floor arch windows. The foyer is a swathe of marble with a great glistening staircase.

My 16-year-old lays claim to the master bedroom upstairs: guess that means she'll be having the king-sized bed, the raised lounge area and bathroom with spa and views overlooking Iona Park's vast estate, then.

Downstairs beyond the foyer, there is an open plan Shaker style kitchen/dining room/living area with nine-seater settees that opens out on to a verandah with table and chairs and barbecue, a front lawned area with swimming pool, firepit, and vine-topped trellis. A dam with a weathered jetty sits in the foreground.

Along the hall, there is a formal living room, a library with a giant-sized walnut desk and floor to ceiling bookshelves (there is everything here from Bill Bryson to Spike Milligan, Agatha Christie to Iain Banks). Determined to seek out all 22 beds, having played some pool with the 10-year-old and admired the JA posters, as well as various bits of winning silver in locked trophy cabinets, we set off on a bed crawl.

Four singles downstairs in plush bedroom number

one, next to the living room. This bedroom has a shower en suite and a walk-in wardrobe as big as a tiny house (beds for four, so far). A double bedroom next door with upholstered bedhead and lush furnishings (six), and along the hall the library, set up with a two-person sofa bed (eight). Further along the hall, another four-person room with king singles (12) and another sofa bed made up in the games room next door (14). Upstairs, there is the master bedroom bagged by the daughter (16) and another lovely double room at the other top of the stairs (18) with an enormous shared bath and shower bathroom that opens on to a nursery-style room with sloped roof and three beds and a trundle (22). There it is... 22 beds for that intergenerational family reunion or weekend getaway party.

But wait. Before you push go on that idea, check the rule book on the foyer table. Iona Park, as it

happens, has a 'strict no party policy'. "We welcome family gatherings, dinner evenings, including late nights and music but please be aware that you will need to move all guests indoors at 10pm and music off by midnight," read the rules.

Cripes. Stand down kids. No parties for us tonight. Chill out instead on the enormous settees in front of the television while I sit outside and watch a sunset over Moss Vale that money couldn't buy.

Thank you ball boys; thank you linesmen. A Highlands holiday option for those who like to hold court.

Escape SH was a guest of Iona Park thanks to Holiday Rental Specialists holidayrentalspecialists.com.au





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WORDS ALEX SPEED IMAGES ELISE HASSEY

Dunollie Rare & Heritage Poultry

Chat chickens and eggs with Angela Dunollie, and find yourself rapidly asking 'but which came first...?'

Well, says Angela, who raises rare and heritage poultry breeds, and sells their eggs, initially it was the eggs, which came from the chickens, which led to more eggs.

"I have kept rare breeds for more than 10 years now to preserve them from extinction, and to have the pleasure of watching new chicks emerge into the world to become someone's new layer or pet companion," says Angela.

"Run of the mill layers and commercial breeds don't cut it for me, so why not go for the unusual and funky-looking chicken?"

Angela's favourite breeds are Campine, white Siciliana, Buff Cochins, Friesian, Crevecoeur, Araucana, Barnevelder and Citroen, some of which she shows. She breeds on her family's 40 hectares at Sutton Forest. The family also grows heirloom fruits and vegetables, and raises ducks, selling duck eggs when available.

"Out where Mum lives, the chickens get to roam among our Speckle Park herd of cows," says Angela.

In their cartons, Dunollie Rare and Heritage eggs



look a treasure box of cloud blues, and warm speckled greys.

"The reason most birds, wild or domestic, have different eggshell colours is to hide the nest when they know predators are around," says Angela.

"Araucanas are the only breed to maintain full eggshell colour inside the shell, making them great for egg artwork."

Birch Store in Moss Vale stocks Dunollie's Rare and Heritage eggs and Angela sells at the Colo Vale village market, the first Saturday of every month.

"I grew up on a dairy farm in the Hunter Valley until mining took over and dairying became too hard to make ends meet. I also work a part-time job as well as looking after the chickens. Educating people on where their food comes from is a big part of what drives me today."

Mussett Holdings

Will and Connie Mussett never intended to become farmers of pasture-raised chickens. What started as a backyard brood unintentionally became a busy commercial venture.

"We initially wanted to get some chickens for ourselves, so we started with five and a backyard coop," says Will Mussett, a former furniture maker and one time part-owner of local timber business, The Woodage.

"But then a friend who had 50 chickens living in a converted caravan mentioned he didn't want the work anymore so we bought them with the view that they would be a great source of fertiliser for our paddocks. Six months later, we built our first mobile chicken van and had 500 chickens and the rest is history."

That was two years ago. Today, the Mussetts run 1600 chickens on their 38 hectares at Colo Vale, and operate an organic market garden where they keep bees for honey and grow mushrooms. The family collects around 1350 eggs a day, says Connie.

"The kids are great at putting labels on cartons and catching chickens that get out but the novelty of collecting eggs quickly disappears when there are just so many eggs to collect," Connie says.

Will is the face and hands of the farm day to night, says Connie, who pre-Covid worked in the city in finance. She keeps the paperwork in order.

Says Will: "It's a team effort and it has definitely been a lot of hard work."

"We started out doing everything ourselves, and I don't think we realised how much work is involved



Taluca Park Free Range

Frank Vigliante had dreamt of owning his Exeter property since he was a kid.

"My Dad has had a farm near Goulburn since I was a boy and we'd drive through the Southern Highlands every weekend on our way there and every time I'd say 'I love it here. I want to buy a farm here one day,'" he says.

Frank, a former builder, and his wife, Annemarie, a former personal trainer whose parents had a weekend property at Bungonia when she was growing up, made their treechange from Sydney five years ago.

The couple run 4000 Isa Brown and Lohmann Brown pasture-raised hens on grass on their 56 biodynamic hectares, Taluca Park. The chickens are faithfully guarded by Maremma dogs and are raised alongside free-range Berkshire and Saddleback pigs and Angus cattle. Raising free-range chooks was a no-brainer for the couple, who have three (partly free-range) young children.

"We have always been into what we were eating and where our food was coming from," says Annemarie.

"So, when we bought here and made the move from Sydney, we decided we would put a few chickens on the farm and see how it went.

"We started off with 30 chickens that turned into 400. Then we started supplying lots of the local restaurants here. And then we had a few friends in Sydney who were running restaurants and said, 'we want your eggs too' so that's when we decided to get a bit bigger."

Frank and Annemarie now supply their cracking eggs to restaurants and cafes throughout Sydney and Wollongong such as Bondi Icebergs, Three Blue Ducks and Fire Door. Locally, they supply eateries and are for sale at Exeter General Store, The Press Shop, Bowral, Berrima General Store, Berrima Highlands Merchant and the Birch Store, Moss Vale, which also sells Taluca Park's salami and bacon. ■



in pasture-raised chickens. A typical day starts with letting the chickens out of the vans around 6am so they can forage in the dewy mornings. After the kids are off to school, we move the mobile vans to fresh pasture, fill the feeders and water if required, collect the eggs, then clean, stamp, sort and pack them."

The Mussetts home deliver their eggs across the Highlands from Moss Vale to Bargo and supply a number of local cafes and restaurants, including Bowral's Coffee Culture, Hill Top Takeaway, and Mittagong's The Boston 107 and The Glass Cafe. They also supply retailers in Sydney and sell at the weekly Bondi Farmers and Paddington markets.



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ESCAPE

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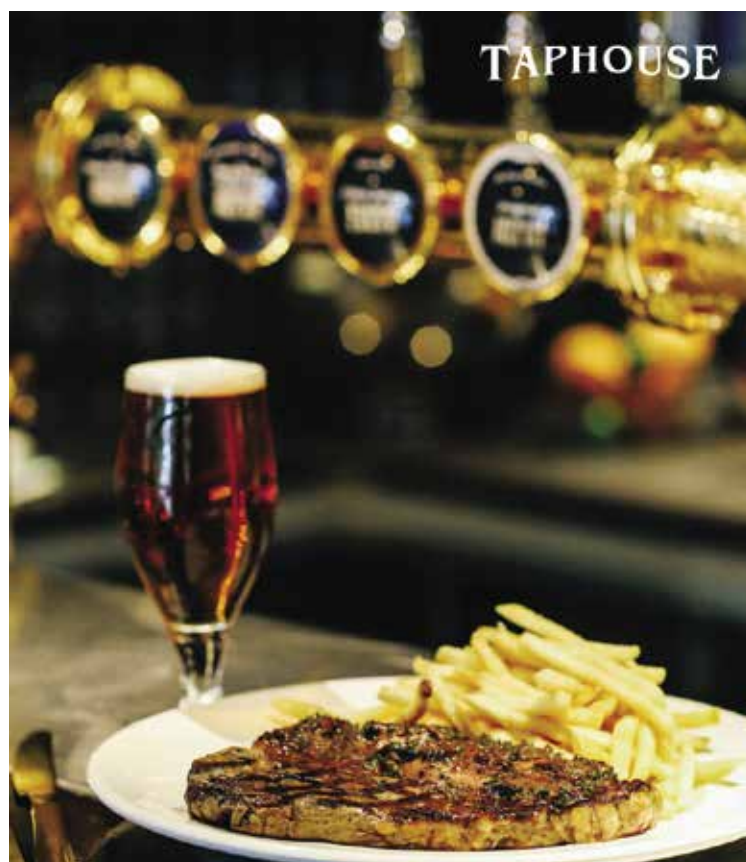
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ARTISTS IMPRESSION

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Ashbourne Stage One will see the commencement of a contemporary community that takes its narrative from the cultural history of the land on which it resides.

Ashbourne will deliver values that understand the dreams of families wanting a home with a country heart; space to live and grow; fresh air and four beautiful distinct seasons; a new community in harmony with its rural heritage.

Adrian Liaw, Head of Development, Australia, for Aoyuan International said, "We are passionate about our vision for Ashbourne and the healthy lifestyle it invites. We are proud to be creating a community that is warm and welcoming, while delivering all the necessities of a modern life at your doorstep. Ashbourne is the place to welcome friends and family to share in a fresh beginning, creating new and lasting memories."

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LOVE *at 21st sight*

Jessie and Alex Bedwell didn't begin their love on a starstruck, trumpets-playing footing. But sometimes, beginnings like theirs build the best foundations. Photographer Darren Wigley captured their slow burning fireworks.

Jessie Bedwell admits she wasn't particularly pleasant to her now-husband Alex when they met.

"It wasn't love at first sight," says Jessie, product manager for an insurance company, who is also studying law.

"We met through friends who were trying to set us up at a 21st. I spent a good portion of the night, and quite a bit of money on taxis, chasing this group of people across Sydney before they stayed in one place long enough for me to meet Alex. So when my friend pointed him out with his mullet, looking like such a dag, I wasn't impressed."

But Jessie got in touch soon after.

"Maybe it was guilt for how rudely I treated Alex initially? We began [Facebook] messaging and I was struck by how intelligent he sounded. I convinced Alex to have a 21st birthday party of his own and scored an invite but I had no intention of being his girlfriend. I had plans to travel overseas."

Cupid had other ideas, recalls Alex and at his 21st, the pair became inseparable. "It wasn't long before we moved in together," says Alex, an associate on the Federal Circuit Court.

Alex's proposal four years later was also unorthodox, recalls Jessie.

"Alex took me for dinner but he didn't realise when he booked, he requested the reservation be sent to me as a guest. In the 'special instructions' comment box, he'd said the reservation was an engagement proposal. I waited until dessert

and then said if he was going to propose he should do it soon because we were running out of courses."

Alex did so.

He says: "I love her drive and her desire to reach higher and get better. I knew I was in love when I was driving Jess home from a date one night. I arrived at her place to drop her off and she said she didn't want to go home. We drove back to my place on the Central Coast and she slept on my shoulder the whole way."

The couple married in July at Melross Farm, upper Kangaroo Valley, six years to the day after they met.

Jessie says: "The venue gave us flexibility to plan our wedding the way we wanted. There are two houses on the farm that sleep 10 people each from Thursday until Sunday plus The Barn for our reception so we organised the catering, BYO alcohol and decorating."

For Jessie and Alex, the ceremony was the most important part.

"We had been to a number of weddings and the most striking thing was how quickly everyone tries to get the ceremony done, like it's the chore for the day," says Jessie.

"The ceremony was very special to us. We wrote our own vows. Alex got his mum to edit his and she cried when she heard them, which was so touching.

It was also really special to have my mother-in-law and friend Danielle do readings."

In the months beforehand, shoe choices had caused Jessie a lot of stress.

"Being a country wedding and walking across paddocks that potentially would be muddy meant typical wedding-style shoes were out," says Jessie.

Her solution came from across the world.

"I found Corral Boots and they had just opened up a store in Brisbane," she says.

"These authentic cowboy boots are huge in America, especially for weddings. They are leather with wooden soles with nails holding it all together! I absolutely love them and still wear them even though they are covered in Swarovski crystals."

After their 'I do's', the married couple walked across the paddock to The Barn with their 100 guests. The front lawn was set up as a garden party, and while photographer Darren whisked the couple away, there were lawn games, live music, canapes and a grazing antipasto to enjoy.

Catering by Rabbit & Co Caterers included a sit-down banquet with braised beef cheeks with whisky porter, crispy duck with game jus and fire-roasted plums and hickory hot smoked salmon. Dessert included sticky date pudding and a dark chocolate and flourless chocolate espresso wedding cake. After dinner, guests danced to live music by western swing, honky tonk band, the Cruisin' Deuces.

Alex and Jessie honeymooned in Bali, where they trekked up Mount Batur to watch the sunrise.

Alex is clear on his favourite wedding moments: "The speeches from family and friends, the reception and waking up the next morning with my wife."

The perfect starstruck, trumpets-playing start to a life together after all. ■





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Bridesmaids' and flower girl's dresses

Bridesmaids by White Runway.
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Caterer and wedding cake

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Photographer

Mr Wigley Photography
mrwigley.com

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Taylor Made Bouquets
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Celebrant

Chris Simond at Side by Side
side-by-side.com.au

Videographer

Native Weddings
nativeweddings.com.au

Hair and make-up

Ella&Me from The Makeup Collective
themakeupcollective.com

Bride's boots

Corral Boots Australia
corral.com.au

Music

Cruisin' Deuces
cruisindeuces.com



BODY of work



A naked stranger soon becomes just part of the scenery at a Bowral and District Art Society life drawing lesson.

WORDS ALEX SPEED DRAWING IN INK FIONA FUDGE

Seen the television ad where the young man turns up at a life drawing class only to discover the nude model is his mum?

Determined not to make that mistake before taking a life drawing workshop with Noel Thurgate at Bowral and District Art Society, I check my mother is safely at home. All good. She's there.

Still, I'm nervous as I navigate leafy Bowral to the white cottage in Short Street. I've interviewed artists over the years, and from Jenny Bell to Philip Wolfhagen to Ben Quilty, each says something similar: sure, I went to art school and honed my practice, but my desire to pick up a pencil and never put it down started when I was tiny.

So, on that reckoning, being able to draw is a bit like rolling your Rs. Either you can or you can't. And I can't. Still. Life is for experiencing, and I've come to the right place. Known locally by its acronym, BDAS is one of the busiest art centres and galleries in the Highlands. Founded in 1950, it cheerfully supports the wide and varied local arts community with 31 year-round exhibitions as well as weekly and weekend workshops, open to all in every artistic discipline. It also holds five prize exhibitions a year and has nearly 500 active members.

Artist Noel Thurgate is our teacher. A former head of drawing at the National Art School, Noel is a five-time Archibald finalist.

"Welcome everyone. Life drawing is all about finding a suggestion of life," says Noel as we busy ourselves behind easels with graphite pencils. I position myself behind a pleasant woman called Sonya, who went to art school, and started drawing again after 20 years of motherhood. There are 11 others here too, including today's model, Ian, a builder. Nudity is, of course, a significant part of a dynamic life drawing workshop. If full frontals bother you, sign up for jewellery making. What's interesting though is how quickly a nude body simply becomes a form to be studied and captured on paper. Early on, I do find myself wondering if Ian does his building al fresco, given his all over tan, but his dexterity and ability to hold a pose is commendable. We start off with a series of one-minute sketches.

"Way too often," Noel says, "life drawing is seen as a copying exercise, and it can be deadly boring if there is a predetermined finish that you want. What we need to do is train our minds to see the curves and angles, because there are no straight lines in the human form. The trick is to look at the pose and read what it can offer you by understanding the inherent qualities in it."

The studio comes to life as papers are attacked. But who knew a blank piece of paper could be so terrifying? Fighting down panic, I recall an artist friend's earlier counsel. Free up your mind and your

hand will follow. I make a mark and begin. The day progresses in two-minute poses, five-minute poses, 10-minute poses, 20-minute poses as all the while, Noel talks and walks, offering advice and giving guidance. I hold my breath as he appears again at my shoulder to survey my sorry efforts.

"Yes. I can see you have found the shape there, Alex. Look how Ian is holding his body and where the weight falls. That feeling of weight adds volume and helps us to see things from the inside out, rather than the outside in. Good job."

Noel's kindness is next to godliness, especially as I have a clear view of how a life sketch should look, thanks to Sonya's excellent efforts. Her drawings have scale, proportion, shade, movement, even expression. Mine are something else entirely and I won't be giving up my day job any time soon. But there is no judgment here, only camaraderie, and it's one from the bucket list to tick off.

It was Leonardo da Vinci who famously said, "Anyone can look, but only an artist truly sees". Hmm. Maybe next time I should have a go at being the model instead.

**ESH was a guest of Bowral and District Art Society, which holds weekly life drawing groups (Fiona Fudge, who did this drawing, regularly attends) bdasgallery.com* ■

MY NAME IS

Wendy Lotter

My life in five words is... cultural, compassionate, friendly, knowledgeable, family.

My favourite thing to do here is... educate people about my culture. Walk around the bush and meet all types of people.

When we have friends visiting, we always take them... on bushwalks with lots of talking.

When it comes to indigenous culture, this is the one truth I know... that we lived here and practised our wonderful culture, and everyone should know this.

I have been a social worker for indigenous kids for two decades because... they are our new generation. I want them to understand that 'no one can knock you down, only you can', so think about consequences before actions always. My father said this to me throughout his life.

I started Platypus Dreamin' Education Program... because I understand not all people have an understanding of my culture. I want them to see, try, enjoy and experience it.

Some things I teach include... mapping (illustrating Connection to Country), ochre (its significance and use), bush medicine, dance, music, White Australia policies.

There is a growing interest in cultural and indigenous tourism in Australia.

Now is the time to... experience our culture and research what is happening around the particular area you are interested in.

With NAIDOC Week, Heal Country, on July 4-11 celebrating our indigenous peoples, can you share some local areas special to our Gundungurra peoples? Carrington Falls, near Robertson, the Box Vale Walking Track, near Mittagong, and Gundungurra Lookout, behind Bowral, are wonderful places to discover the medicinal bush plants used by our people for centuries.

To truly improve our indigenous people's wellbeing and to build a cohesive future, as a nation we need to... consult all people. Consultation is the key.

Teaching Australia's true indigenous, colonial and post-colonial history in schools is... mandatory in government schools but it is still in the early stages. Schools need to educate themselves on the protocol when addressing indigenous people, especially Aboriginal Community Elders.

When it comes to being a proud Aboriginal woman... I am honoured to have had my parents, and my Mob give me an understanding of my culture and to teach me that while we are all proud Aboriginal or Torres Straits Islanders, we are different too.

The most precious piece of affirmation I ever received... was after a program I taught at a local school where we spoke about Aboriginal symbols and their uses. One of the kids later went to a Sydney art gallery, saw an Aboriginal painting and said to his mum: 'I know that's a walking track and there are the waterholes.' When his mum said, 'How do you know this?' he said, 'Wendy told me!'

And finally, please finish this sentence. Esteemed indigenous leaders never die, they just... Surround me. My parents have passed but when I need advice, I talk to them and think about what they taught me. So, they never die because I feel them every day. 📍

INSTA STAR | Wendy Lotter

INSTA
star

Aunty Wendy Lotter is an esteemed Aboriginal Community Elder. A proud Yuin woman, with strong affiliations with nations throughout NSW, Queensland, the Northern Territory and ACT, Wendy was born in Walgett, in northern NSW, and moved to the Southern Highlands 37 years ago. For more than two decades, she has worked as a social welfare expert, helping indigenous children, and as owner of Platypus Dreamin' Aboriginal Education Program, she is driven to raise awareness of Australian indigenous culture. "The first thing I always say to people who tell me they don't know much about the true history of our First Nations peoples is 'talk to people who do. Ask questions, research', and when you have done that, you can come and talk to me."

📷 @lotter58_



Plan your escape...



It's Winter Time, plan your escape in the beautiful Southern Highlands this Winter.

Take a detour on our quiet country roads. Immerse yourself in nature.

Meander through our boutiques, galleries and museums. Enjoy our fine food and local beverages.

Embrace winter in the Southern Highlands with its crisp sunlit days, frosty mornings and open fires.

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