



**COVER STORY:  
Comfort at its  
luxurious best  
is beckoning at  
Barrington as  
LANA BEST  
discovers when  
she visits  
French hosts  
extraordinaire  
Remi and  
Ginette Bacal.**

YOU MIGHT not be able to afford a professional decorator, but a clever home owner can find inspiration and ideas by visiting public showcases of style.

The classiest restaurants, accommodation and business receptions need to make the right impression and they go to great expense for the perfect look.

For lovers of the French provincial style, there's few better examples than that of Glencoe Rural Retreat, on the Sheffield Main Road at Barrington.

The lavender and cream farmhouse, with the impressive Mt Roland as a backdrop, has only recently received the finishing touches of a magical makeover by Ginette and Remi Bacal, who have inserted an intriguing slice of their own stylish French culture into the Australian Federation architecture.

It was the project they never meant to start.

After seven years spent building up the quality and reputation of Calstock at Deloraine, the couple were planning to buy a camper and tour their adopted country.

But a Latrobe estate agent suggested they look at the Glencoe farm. That same day they made an offer on the place — unable to resist a challenge and the opportunity to continue working together.

The former dairy farm was already operating as a bed and breakfast, but the Bancals were keen to give it a fresh look and expand the horizons of the commercial kitchen.

Two reception rooms were in the process of an update, but the basically solid old home was soon to be stripped of its tired wallpaper.

Where necessary wiring and plumbing were replaced, hardwood floors were sanded and polished, new carpet laid, and the same Sydney firm that handled Calstock's redecoration was commissioned to coordinate the look for Glencoe.

"At Calstock the old home very much dictated the decor — an old English theme in keeping with the history of the house was important — but here we didn't have that restriction," Remi said.

Built in the 1900s, the farmhouse still has many original features, but the simplicity of the French look suits it well.

The Bancals describe Glencoe as "a place of harmony and appropriately, the decorating style is unmistakably French harmony, blending an eclectic sophistication with the warmth and conviviality of a family home.

"But who would have imagined watermelon and green for the lounge room?," Ginette asked, rhetorically.

"It's amazing how well it works, and really the furniture is simple, everyday modern pieces bought together by the choice of fabrics and colours.

Cherry-toned furniture against taupe walls is a stimulating combination and Tony Smibert's triptych of Mt Roland makes a stunning feature wall.

All around are items to entice guests from their own world into the comforts of French provincial: a collection of intriguing framed drawings, little watercolours of Calstock, a book collection — from Bryce Courtenay to Li Cunxin and Louisa Ann Meredith — to satisfy many tastes, and coffee table décor; and CD music from Josephine Baker to The Beatles.

Accommodation is in one of the four French provincial-styled rooms on offer, and it is here the ideas start to flow for stunning, simple decoration.

These are everyday bedrooms made to look extraordinary by the use of classic lines, fabulous fabrics and a few pieces of timeless, solid furniture.

Each of the four guest rooms at Glencoe has a different colour and decoration theme; the effect is a personalised, salon feel, with comfort.

Against a backdrop of soft taupe-coloured walls and carpet, the toile de joly-patterned fabric of the cushions, curtains and lampshades is picked up in delicate blue, green and rose tones in three of the rooms.

The fourth room has a more Asian feel, highlighted

in the charcoal-coloured painting by Tasmanian artist Tony Smibert.

Each room has an antique carved wardrobe and cream-painted French provincial-style tables.

Lighting is important, from the choice of table lamps to the pretty shades on the main overhead lights.

The ensuite bathrooms in grey and white are compact and luxurious: shower, basin, toilet and masses of the fluffiest white towels.

The Bancals' personal bathroom is also a beautiful blend of old and new, from the claw-foot bath and vanity made from a recycled door, to the walk-in shower with waterfall shower head.

"We wanted to open the business as quickly as possible, so the guest area was the first to be remodelled, Remi said.

"The rest of the house where we live is still to be done, but we can do that in our own time."

Remi Bacal's epicurean finesse as chef and sommelier is reflected in Glencoe's food.

Hospitality experience at the Ritz of Paris, followed after moving to Australia by Mietta's in Melbourne and Banc in Sydney, means that a simple breakfast cup of coffee from Remi is a total experience from the depth of flavour to the Villeroy & Boch café au lait cup in which it is served.

Using local produce, vegetables from their kitchen garden and fruit from their orchard, the Bancals serve breakfast, light gourmet lunches and three-course dinners to guests.

On a fine day dining at intimate tables on the lawn under mature elm and cherry trees, is a wonderful way to relax and take in the view of camellias, hawthorn and blackwood trees, and the banks of lavender and pink country roses dividing the house from the road.

Light lunches are also available for day-time visitors. These can be enjoyed al fresco or in the poinsettia-coloured dining room, complete with country plates on the whitewashed sideboard, Bentwood chairs and lively paintings.

As Glencoe becomes more established the Bancals plan to establish an olive grove and a berry farm on their 10ha so that they can create their own line of home-made produce.

**Glencoe Rural Retreat, 1468 Sheffield Main Rd,  
Barrington, (03) 6492 3267. Open for light lunches daily.**

