

BRUSH WITH WILDLIFE

My daughter insists I have a fetish for old shacks. I fear she is right. Several houses I have bought, renovated and sold could definitely have been termed "shack" at the start.

I'll even admit ownership of a very beautiful "shack" lithograph – a garage sale purchase long ago from a retired printer who entrusted me with his very last one.

When I gaze at that wattle and daub cottage I can imagine sitting on the old verandah, a fistful of damper and a brew of billy tea, sheltered by the canopy of gums overhead on a golden summer afternoon.

It's a cliché, sure; but does such an experience still exist?

The Old Brush certainly does.

At the end of Liebert's Lane in Brunkerville and teeming with wildlife, The Old Brush Studio is one of just two guest cottages nestled into a private 40-acre rainforest owned by retired photographer Robert Bignell and his wife Gail.

On its own and a mere metre or so from a large natural billabong, The Old Brush Studio can be yours for a night or a month.

But be prepared – an uninterrupted afternoon's reverie on the charming verandah watching the wildlife will ensure that

you'll not want to leave any time soon.

The sheer beauty and seclusion of the bush and how close you are to nature is as seductive as it is tranquil and calming.

We were there for three days recently and the only sounds heard were the ducks landing like seaplanes on the billabong and birds calling to each other.

At night a constant frogs' chorus lulled us to sleep, which kept me thinking we humans are meant to live this close to nature.

The first view of the studio had us exclaiming, "wow look at that!" a lot.

Built from a creative mish-mash of recycled materials, the hut itself is small but extremely comfortable, with a unique ambience.

Everything is supplied except food, bed linens and towels.

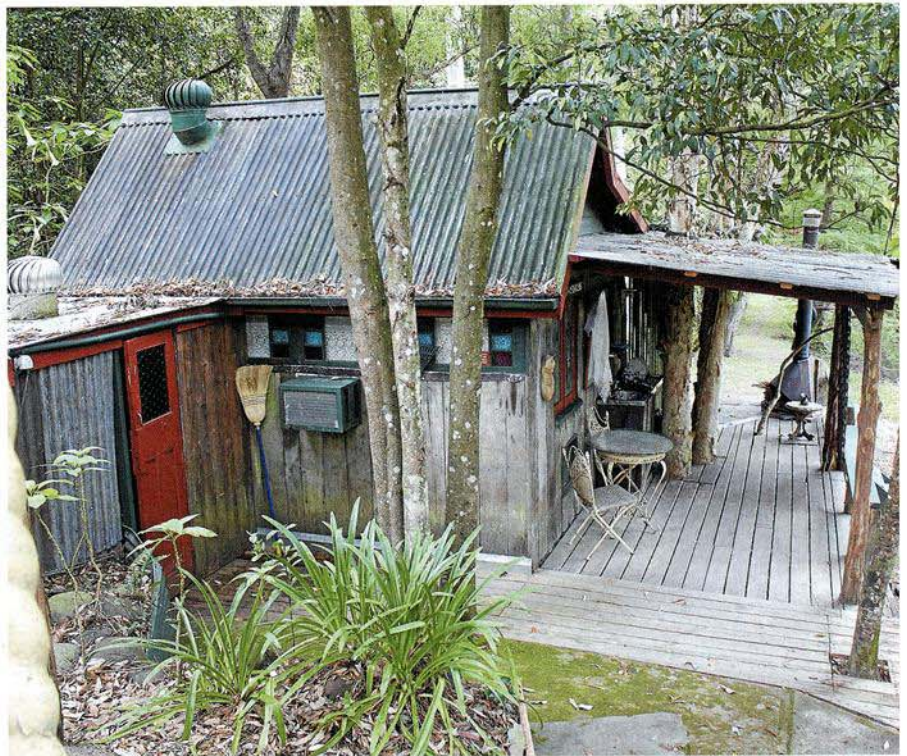
Very tall folk may need to stoop in sections due to the low roofline, the old floors have a bit of a slope to them and nothing at all matches.

External walls are largely grey-weathered timber slabs and the ceiling is sheets of exposed second-hand tin overlapped to cover the old holes.

There are few internal walls – the largest a fixed Japanese-style screen between the only bedroom and a tiny lounge room; large enough for just a day bed.

A curtain serves as a door to the bedroom and antique stained glass push-out windows provide a beautiful view of the billabong.

A semi-circular window overlooks a creek at the back and the dining table is a timber



RETREAT: The Old Brush Studio guest cottage in Brunkerville is nestled in a rainforest and next to a large billabong.

PICTURE: YVONNE CAMPBELL

bench running along a window with a view over the billabong.

Open fires inside and on the verandah, and airconditioning in the bedroom, provide necessary levels of comfort.

To cook you are spoiled for choice. Inside is a bar fridge, microwave and an electric frying pan, while outside on the verandah is a great barbecue.

A short walk away an open fire is the perfect spot for dinner at sunset.

The bathroom is outside, accessed via the verandah, but well equipped.

Alternatively, there is a cold shower set up in the forest a little way from the cottage.

On the verandah is a sink for washing up, a couple of easy chairs and seed for feeding the wild birds.

Noticeably absent are mosquitoes, but pay close attention to posted signs along forest tracks because there are leeches – hindsight is a wonderful thing!

You'll also find interesting statues, pots and curios in unexpected places.

Take a wander up to the other guest cottage – called the Back Hut, and you'll discover a pair of red Mick Jagger-ish lips mounted on a shed wall and, further along, kangaroos snoozing under some trees.

It's a tough life – not!

Yvonne Campbell