

Historic home gets the Coote touch

AT HOME

Colouring outside the lines has never been so much fun

SUE WALLACE

The historic Mt Macedon residence Marnanie now sings with colour – rhododendron pink in the dining room, all shades of blue in the library, green, white and sky blue in the master bedroom, and green hues in the kitchen.

Melbourne-based interior designer Charlotte Coote has spread her love of colour and breathed new life into the house she shares with husband Geordie Taylor and their daughters, Sybil, 8, Francesca, 6, and Daphne, 5.

Coote lived next door to Marnanie for a few years when she was growing up, but little did she think one day she would call it home.

The talented interior designer, known for her use of striking textiles and fabulous colour – who has transformed some of Australia's finest residences – says she simply fell in love with the house built in 1890 and its sprawling 7ha garden with a meandering drive-

way lined by ancient elm, linden and maple trees.

"We wanted to get out of the city with our three girls and give them a country lifestyle, and when this came onto the market we bought it within the week," Coote says.

It was owned by the first Australian-born governor-general, Sir Isaac Isaacs, and was later the home of Melbourne society florist and gardener, the late Kevin O'Neill and partner John Graham.

Coote, who has spent five years renovating the two storey five-bedroom, three-bathroom weatherboard home, says they had a steep learning curve taking on the massive garden under the guidance of family friend and gardening designer Paul Bangay.

"We laugh, as we were told we'd only need a gardener about once a week but it's so huge that



you could have an army of five gardeners five days a week and still not be done," Coote says.

She describes the garden as whimsical with a heated pool, tennis court, garden ponds, creek, lawn, woodland and picking gardens.

Her love of interiors was inherited from her late father, design doyen John Coote, who once said "my role is to overcome the heavy hand of drab".

He was a universal name when

it came to interiors, especially in mansions in Ireland and Britain.

It is hardly surprising Coote's love of colour has been the subject of her first book, *Colour is Home – A Brave Guide to Designing Classic Interiors*, which she describes as a guide from a design brief through to the finished room.

Due to launch in April, Coote says she loved writing it and hopes it shows how to balance comfort and style, light and shadow, colour and neutral, and old and new.



Charlotte Coote has spent five years renovating the home she grew up next door to, transforming it room by room

PICTURES: LISA COHEN



mark, as is sourcing eye-catching pieces for clients worldwide, and there's an emphasis on collaboration with the client.

She favours generous-sized rooms, "everything looks so much better bigger", and is not afraid of colour, "but they need to be layered and in various shades," she says.

Marnanie features a formal drawing room, library, dining room and flower room, and the large upstairs bedrooms have magnificent garden views.

Coote says she's still starry-eyed over her favourite room – the spacious new kitchen and dining area – where her collection of Astier de Villatte ceramics are displayed on an 18th century Welsh oak sideboard.

At the end of a busy day when she opens the front door, Coote feels a sense of belonging and privilege to be a custodian of this grand heritage house for the next generation – to the tune of giggles from their gorgeous little girls.