



# LUCKY COUNTRY

INGRID AND PAUL HATTON HAVE SPENT DECADES RESTORING THEIR CENTURY-OLD HOMESTEAD ON DAREEN STATION AND CREATING A HAVEN OF LOVE AND LAUGHTER.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA HOWARD





**It's been almost 40 years since Ingrid Hatton first cast eyes on Dareen, a homestead 54 kilometres along a mostly dirt road from Eidsvold, in the north Burnett region of central Queensland. She was a city teenager dating country boy Paul, and he'd brought her home to the family property for the first time. "It was really run down, but I always felt I belonged," Ingrid recalls. "It sounds stupid, but when I came here, I immediately felt like I was home."**

Their story began further south on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. "I met her father first," Paul says. "I was mackerel fishing and I came into the wharf there at Mooloolaba and Ingrid's dad was a mad fisherman. I met his family afterwards at the beach. I had this poodle that used to chase all the good-looking sheilas and he wouldn't leave Ingrid alone."

It took him another two years to convince the young dental nurse to make the journey north to Dareen. Was he worried she'd hate the bush? "I never even considered it," Paul says. "You did!" Ingrid exclaims. "Yeah I probably did," Paul relents after a moment. "I probably made a promise that if she didn't like it, we could do something else." Everyone laughs at the hollowness of that vow. Dareen was in Paul's blood and it wouldn't be long before it was in Ingrid's too.




**These pages:** Dareen has been Ingrid and Paul's family home for almost 40 years and now their grandchildren are frequent visitors.





Paul proposed to Ingrid on that trip and together they started to breathe life back into the old homestead. "We didn't have a set of stairs that we could walk on," Ingrid says, as she describes its unloved state. "Paint was peeling off everywhere. All the windows were Arctic glass so you couldn't see out of them. There was a party phone line shared with neighbours and 32-volt power, but I think we were really into each other by then, so it didn't matter. When we did our front fence, we'd paint one section, drive up the hill and go, 'Oh yeah, that colour looks good.' Then we'd drive back and paint another section."

Within a few years, Ingrid found herself taking on much of the improvement herself while at home with their three small children, Natalie, Brett and Adam. Paul was away much of the time, developing the properties they'd begun acquiring. "When we kept expanding, the kids were at school, so I had to be home all the time," she recalls. "So even when Brett was born, we bought a property called Bottle Tree and Paul and his parents would live there most of the time and I'd live here by myself during the week, schooling the kids."

The Hattons now own around 100,000 acres (40,470 hectares) of prime cattle country across 10 properties, on which they run 20,000 head of mostly Santa Gertrudis cattle. Dareen is marked by ridges, flowing creeks and its ability to grow grass when many of the neighbours can't. "We're lucky to be in the position we're in," Paul explains. "We don't get big rain, but almost always, it's enough rain. Our country responds to even an 



**These pages:**  
A pampered puss is far from the only family member to appreciate the cooling respite from the elements provided by the verandah, painted in Dulux Pale Eucalypt.



inch so we very rarely have to shift cattle. People can't believe that we go year after year and don't have to shift cattle."

The family business operates like a well-oiled machine. Dareen remains the home property (though Paul insists it attracts no better treatment than the others), while son Brett and his family are on Old Rawbelle station up the road. Brett is passionate about developing the family stud, while other son Adam lives on Delubra 110km away near Mundubbera, where he runs the feedlot. Paul and Ingrid's five young grandchildren are a regular fixture at Dareen, and the sweeping verandah is dotted with their toys, ready for play. "We're so blessed to be able to spend lots of time with our grandchildren," Ingrid says. "It's lovely when this big house is filled with all their noise and laughter. Our sons have beautiful wives and we all love being part of the family."

Dareen's main homestead turned 100 last year, but the original building, which now serves as a laundry, is at least 30 years older. As a testament to the quality of its construction, the Hattons still use the original kitchen, though the mission-brown cupboards have long since been painted white. Red cedar brought by bullock cart up from Chinchilla was used to make the polished floorboards that are still in perfect condition since their last sanding in the early '70s.

"After several years of marriage, we decided to improve one room a year and do it properly," Ingrid recalls. "The bathrooms were first, then the



**Clockwise from right:**

A trusty Singer treadle serves as an entry table; Ingrid in the kitchen; significant station names; red cedar floorboards came up from Chinchilla on a bullock dray and were most recently sanded in the 1970s.



laundry, which was a mammoth task, firstly to cement and then to lay the tiles because we were no tilers! My first big paint job was Adam's bedroom, which took seven weeks by the time I gap-sealed and painted. The bones were there and every time you started doing something, you'd see results. You'd begin sanding the bench and think, "What have I started?" But when it's done, it's like wow." Ingrid has done most of the painting herself. All rooms are now in Dulux's Natural White and the verandah walls, a calming shade of Pale Eucalypt.

The most recent work on the house has been to incorporate a small bedroom into the kitchen. A few years ago, Ingrid knocked out the wall, while raising the ceiling and installing wood planking. It was an unpopular decision at the time, as the bedroom had been Paul's as a child, then their youngest son's, but Ingrid did it anyway. The result is a beautiful, open dining room that's become a gathering point for the tight-knit extended family.

Dareen remains a distinct version of the house Ingrid stepped into nearly 40 years ago — but with enough modern flourishes for it not to feel dated. Much of the furniture has been in the Hatton family for generations or collected from Ingrid's favourite antique stores, but she's teamed it with stylish art, patchwork quilts and lush house plants. "Online shopping has made decorating easier," Ingrid admits. "All sorts of things come out on a twice-weekly mail run thanks to our mailman. You just hope your husband isn't always around to see what comes off the truck." 🐣



**These pages:**  
Much of the furniture has been in the Hatton family for generations and Ingrid supplements with online purchases.





“The garden developed when the children were small,” she adds. “They were outside playing and I thought ‘What am I going to do?’ So I started gardening and I think it’s my biggest passion, even when I have to fight the elements.” Ingrid would buy a few small plants whenever she went to town, gradually building layers of textured foliage that now stretch to two acres. These days, the grand silky oak that shielded her children from the sun protects her grandchildren. Coral vine snakes over a disused birdcage, while large oleander shrubs flower abundantly with pink and white blooms. Pots bursting with lavender lights, pansies and violets are nestled in nooks throughout the expansive garden.

Dareen has three fireplaces — all working, mercifully — as temperatures can fall to -5°C in the depths of winter. “We’ve had winters where everything is covered in a deep frost, like snow,” Paul says. “That would have to be the worst thing about living here. The cold weather leaches the protein from the grass, so it’s hard on the cattle as well.”

But in this land of extremes, winters are as cold as summers are hot. The Hattons only recently relented and installed air-conditioning units in two rooms, holding out for years because they didn’t fit the style of the house.

Ingrid made sure tradesmen discreetly fitted drainage pipes down the outside walls. “I’ve always been aware of respecting the history of the house,” she explains.

It’s under one of these precious air conditioners that we sit to have smoko. The wind is picking up and blowing the elm outside the dining room window, making shadows dance across the table. Could they ever imagine living anywhere else? Ingrid shakes her head resolutely. Paul snorts, then says, “I can’t see myself going anywhere until I die, until I’m properly buggered.” “Except to the surf club at Mooloolaba,” quips daughter-in-law Brodie. The Hattons erupt in laughter. *46*

**Clockwise from above:**

*Cheers and beers at day’s end; the homestead is more than 100 years old; Paul in the paddock with his prize Santas; after decades of work, the garden now covers two acres.*