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Photographs Christopher Morrison and Brad Griffin

WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE

Casie and Michael France are taking it one step at a time when it comes to the renovation of their beautiful Medindie home, which is the perfect size for their blended family of seven. The couple named the house *Le Jardin* – the garden – in honour of the expansive grounds, where Casie grew every flower for their beautiful wedding, which was held here last year.



Above The front of the home with its beautiful greenery. **Opposite page** Casie and Michael in their renovated kitchen. **Previous pages** A view of the back of the home showing one of the couple's favourite elements, the balcony overlooking the lawn tennis court.

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Almost a decade ago, when Casie France was selling a property and needed a few styling elements, she decided to hire some topiary plants from a house in Medindie.

“The owner grew and hired out topiary bushes, so I turned up to pick them up and I just thought, ‘This house is amazing,’” Casie says. “Then I walked around the back of the property and saw the lawn tennis court, and I stopped and looked back at the house and thought ‘Oh my god’. I just fell in love with it. So, I remembered this place as my dream house for many years.”

Fast forward eight years and Casie now calls that house home. It all fell into place when she and then-husband-to-be Michael were looking for a family home in 2019.

The couple, both medical specialists, knew they needed plenty of space to accommodate their blended family – Casie’s daughters Charlotte, 12, and Sophia, 10, and Michael’s sons Jacob, 16, Luca, 14 and Eddie, nine.

“We started looking at the beginning of the Covid pandemic

and bid on a few properties, but everything was going so far above where we were at,” Casie says.

“So, I said to Michael, ‘Let’s just take a break and regroup’. Then one night he said, ‘I found this house in Medindie and it’s got a tennis court’. I looked over his shoulder and went, ‘Oh my god, it’s the one’. Then I said, ‘I can’t even look because if we don’t get this one it’s going to break my heart’.”

But the couple did go and look at the two-storey, Georgian/French provincial-style home, which sits on a 1469-square-metre block and had been in the same family since it was built in 1981.

The block had originally been the garden for the house next door, before the land was subdivided and this house built more than 40 years ago.

The home was designed by the former owner’s architect father, Alfred C. Hughes, and built by WH Blunden. Casie says she burst into tears when the real estate agent called her to say their offer had been accepted.





Above The luxurious kitchen leads into the butler's pantry and laundry beyond. **Opposite page** The home has a French provincial feel, including the Fireclay butler's sinks, **left**, and the gorgeous dining space which retains the original window overlooking the tennis court.

“She said, in the end, one of the things the previous owners loved was that we had children, so there would be another family growing up in the home where their own three children had,” Casie says.

Michael and Casie named the property *Le Jardin*, meaning “the garden” in French when they first moved in.

“The original owner of the house next door loved gardening and spent all his time in the garden here, which is now our land,” Casie says. “So, when we bought the house, we referred to it as the garden, *Le Jardin*, because the house is French provincial style and we love French design and architecture, so we say it in French. And France is our surname, so it’s a lovely tie-in.”

The couple admits this home is a “labour of love”, and they have decided to renovate in stages, in no hurry to get things done all at once.

“We did think of doing a total renovation, but we didn’t have the budget to do the whole lot, and the quote we got from an

architect just to do initial plans was \$50,000, so we didn’t go through with those,” Michael says.

“So, then we thought about what would make the biggest impact on our lives rather than an entire new renovation.

“By then the dishwasher in the original kitchen had broken down and we were washing dishes by hand. Also, one of our criticisms of the house was that it was a bit boxy and the rooms were a bit small, so we knew we’d have to open it all up.”

After talking to a couple of builders, Casie and Michael decided to work with multi-award winning boutique building and interior design company Craig Linke, having seen their amazing Kitchen of the Year in the SA Housing Industry Awards in 2023.

“The other companies didn’t really want us to be too hands-on with our input, which we really wanted to have,” Casie says. “But the Craig Linke team was really happy to work through our ideas and ensure they were workable. They were very collaborative.”

The first step was to knock out the wall that separated the

kitchen from an adjoining living space, and then a huge archway was created, in keeping with other arches throughout the house.

Once the wall was knocked down and the space opened up, the couple set to work planning their new kitchen, incorporating a butler’s pantry/laundry.

“We had done mood boards and a lot of our own research and had our hearts set on a few things, such as the Liebherr wine fridges which we’d seen and just had to have,” Michael says.

The couple worked closely with one of the interior designers from the Craig Linke team, Charlotte Standish, to create the spectacular new area, which overlooks the garden and has large windows that allow for plenty of natural light.

Cabinetry in the former kitchen had blocked off the bottom half of one of these windows, so this was removed and the kitchen reconfigured with the central island bench becoming the heart of the space.

Natural finishes were prioritised in the high-end design, including the striking Statuario marble in the splashback and island bench, European oak flooring, Nicolazzi raw brass tapware, and the bespoke joinery, in natural white, done in a classic beaded shaker-style to match original joinery in the home.

It’s all about the detail in this state-of-the-art kitchen, from the beautifully curved timber island bench, which features a Cremello reeded finish, to the solid brass cabinetry pulls and the deep farmhouse sinks, with exposed ribbed fronts, which add form and function.

The marble breakfast nook is “everyone’s favourite part of the kitchen”, Casie says, showing off the cabinetry, which features mesh pocket doors with a decorative grille finished in antique brass, sourced from English Tapware Co.

With the doors recessed, automatic lighting within the cabinetry switches on, adding another layer of warmth and richness to the space. A key feature of the kitchen is an original painting, *Only You & I* by Lena Baumgartner, over which sits a Soffio wall light by Giopato & Coombes, a beautiful hand-blown glass piece from Italy.





Above The master bedroom and girls' bedroom, **opposite page**, have been renovated and the chosen wallpapers reflect the stylish, botanical theme of *Le Jardin*.

Off the kitchen is the new butler's pantry, which also features warm French provincial tones, including the sage limestone flooring, in French lay pattern, from Tumbled. The fridge recess is a practical use of space, designed to incorporate bookshelves, which show off the couple's colourful cookbooks.

To keep costs down a little, Casie and Michael opted for the Venus Stream honed finish on the island bench, instead of the Statuario marble, in the butler's pantry. This space leads through to the tucked-away laundry and a mudroom area with side entry door, complete with bench seat and coat hanging.

"This was the hardest part for me, we reconfigured this space so many times and I just couldn't get my head around it, but Michael is very good at thinking through spaces," Casie says. "He thought about doing the fridge space with a bookshelf around it.

"Now this area becomes a multi-functional area — we can use the bench for cooking or folding laundry or arranging flowers."

Flowers are an enduring theme in this house, given Casie is a flower-lover and green thumb. In yet another layer of love at *Le Jardin*, Michael and Casie were married here last October and

Casie grew every wedding flower in their garden. The nuptials took place on the back steps of the home, overlooking that tennis court that Casie fell in love with all those years ago.

"We both love gardening and there was a big space down the back, which is where we will put the pool eventually, but it was a bit of a mess so I thought I'll make it a cutting garden and plant flowers we can use in the wedding," Casie says.

"Then I bought some books and started searching the internet and did lots of work. I researched all the seeds that were flowering in spring and I went a little bit crazy."

Michael jokes: "She became the crazy seed lady. She had seeds growing in little pots near the back steps and I came out one morning and heard Casie talking and thought she must be talking to the children, but they weren't out here. So, I thought she must be talking to our bunnies, Honey and Millie. Then I realised. 'My god, she's talking to the flowers.'"

Casie adds: "I even had a journal of when I had to plant things and when they'd flower. I had never done anything like this before, but they just kept growing. Magically everything I

We love the home and we’re trying to be respectful of everything that was here, and keep the origin of the heritage, but just breathe new life into it all



planted flowered for the day. I harvested the flowers the morning before and had some creative family members help me bring the arrangements together.

“The girls and I made our bouquets the night before the wedding. Our bouquets had ranunculi, snapdragon, sweet peas, stock, Queen Anne’s Lace, Nigella Love in A Mist, larkspur, lavender and hellebores.

“I didn’t have a back-up plan or pay for one flower — every flower you see in our wedding photos, they are all ours. That was part of the idea of getting married in the home with the children. I just thought, we’ve both done this before, so let’s just do something simple and get the flowers from the garden. It meant a lot.”

All five children were attendants at the wedding, which was an intimate gathering of close family and friends. The reception was held under festoon lights on the tennis court and the couple and the children posed for photos on the upstairs balcony of the home, overlooking the court. Even the beloved family bunnies Millie and Honey starred in a few wedding snaps.

“It was the most magical day,” Casie says. “Especially having the children as bridesmaids and groomsmen and to have them up there with us for photos.

“We didn’t want the kids to do too much on the day, just so they could relax and enjoy themselves, but at one stage I looked over and they were all twirling each other around on the dancefloor and it was just this moment ... my husband and I, our children, in our beautiful home. Moments like that can’t be planned. I will never forget it.”

Other than the kitchen/dining space and butler’s pantry, the other two rooms that have been revamped so far are the master bedroom, which features a Herman Miller Bubble pendant light, and the girls’ bedroom, which has a fun Fandango hanging pendant lamp by Danny Fang.

The wallpaper in both rooms reflect the garden theme of this beautiful home - Mokum wallpaper *Papillion Parchment* in the master and *Peonia Blush* in the girls’ room. The next phase of the home renovation, planned for the coming years, will involve a new extension built to the side of the house, but first the pool needs to be done.

“We want to do a side extension because there is enough room in the main house for all the children, but we don’t have a proper master suite with ensuite, so the plan is to build that off to the side, and we will also do a cellar and gym below,” Michael says.

“The thing is once you build that, you block off access to the back of the house, so we’ll do the pool first, which will include retaining walls and converting a garden shed into a pool house, and then we will finish the inside of the house.

“We figure it will be about a three-year project all up, but



Above The kitchen, living and dining spaces are flooded with natural light. **Opposite page** Daughters Sophia and Charlotte with their beloved bunnies Honey and Millie.

that’s okay. We love the home and we’re trying to be respectful of everything that was here, and keep the origin of the heritage, but just breathe new life into it all.”

The house does feel as if it’s a work in progress — there is still green carpet in the main living areas, the stair banister has been partly sanded back and paint samples line the handrail, a door remains shut on a living room downstairs, which is currently full of boxes but will end up as the new theatre/media room.

The room upstairs which leads to the balcony is currently a child’s bedroom, but will eventually be converted to a library/retreat, allowing everyone access out to the balcony, which takes in lovely views of the Adelaide Hills.

Living in the house as it gradually reveals itself through each renovation stage might not suit everyone, but it feels right for Casie and Michael, who say they will take on much of the upcoming interior decision-making themselves.

“With a lot of the internal stuff we feel we can probably do that ourselves because it’s not too challenging,” Casie says. “For instance, we will rip the carpet up from the stairs and re-stain the

wood, and we’ll probably rip all the carpet up through the entry hall and main living areas at the front of the house to show off the lovely timber floorboards.

“Then we’ll choose light fittings and paint, and we will get someone in to do the big jobs such as the cabinetry.”

The couple loves to research websites and Pinterest to discover interior inspiration, and one of their favourite go-to designers is Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi, husband of Princess Beatrice, whose architecture and design company, Banda Property, has transformed luxury homes across Europe.

“He combines classic with modern elements, which is what we love,” Casie says.

It was on a Banda Property home that the couple first saw a light they loved — the “Apparatus” cloud light which retails for around \$10,000. So, during the renovation process, they had a bespoke dome created in the ceiling in the sitting/dining room (off the kitchen) where their own Apparatus luxury light will go once it’s ordered.

The couple, who met at a medical charity ball, began dating



Above The happy couple on their wedding day at the house last year. The children, left, were all involved in the nuptials and Casie grew every flower used on the day in the *Le Jardin* garden. **Opposite page** The children, from left, Sophia, Jacob, Eddie, Luca and Charlotte, are all loving their new home.

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eight years ago and have lived between their two houses with the juggle of five children since then. They are now in the process of selling Michael’s beachside property, and once that’s done, they will put all their time and resources into *Le Jardin* – their first family home all together.

“It will be a long process as the house hadn’t really been touched in 40 years,” Michael says. “But we are in no rush. We are just enjoying making our own family memories here.”

Casie says that “*Le Jardin* feels like a magical house” for their family of seven and the kids are loving it.

“They love the tennis court, the big outdoor area, the garden,” she says. “The aim of this house is that we want the kids to feel

welcome and to all feel comfortable and have their own space,” Casie adds. “Children stay living at home for a lot longer these days, so we want everyone to be nice and comfortable and welcome for years to come, that’s the aim.

“And I would love the children to get married here one day as well, like us. That’s the dream.”

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