

Rob and Pauline Rattray - April 2017



Robert and I met at Tumby Bay on the West Coast and married in 1972 and since then we have bought seven properties and been in nine rentals. I cannot remember my childhood being encouraged to garden, but my Mum must have potted around in her gardens, I only remember lawns being mowed. I look at my Mother now at 88 years and she is still fit enough to always be scratching out in the garden, potting and pruning and showing me her flowers etc.

Rob's parents lived in their house for 40 years and our boys always remember the two large orange trees they had in the front and back yard.

I think when they were old enough they were encouraged to help pick the ripe oranges and spent many times out in the garden having picnics etc with their cousins. Late last year we heard the Rattray family house was bulldozed and a two storey has been built.

When we married we lived in a one storey unit up the road from Rob's parents in Mitcham.

We had no garden, but I must have started collecting pot plants and ever since then pot plants have been transported to where ever we go.

I found it very difficult settling into the city at first from the country. We lived there for about 12 months and then Rob was employed at the SA Tourist Bureau in Melbourne.

We rented a one bedroom unit in Melbourne in Glen Iris for about a year then, a two bedroom at Surrey Hills. At Surrey Hills there was a small plot of garden in the front and this was where I started to enjoy gardening.

We had fun in Melbourne and stayed for about three years.

Our next shift was to Pt Augusta in 1975 to the dry and heat. We rented for a short time and I decided we should buy a house, so we bought in

a housing trust area, over looking a Salt Lake.

• Sylvia Avenue, Port Augusta - 1975

This was our first test at landscaping and garden design from the beginning. Because it is a hot dry climate we planted natives and dry tolerant plants - bit of a trial and error experience.

We also eventually had our first baby, Benjamin who was a little miracle to us in 1977. He was crawling at this stage and we were on the move again and we didn't see our labour of planting etc come to maturity.

• John Street, Mitcham - 1978

This house was an Old Blue Stone Villa a couple of Streets away from Rob's parents. This next 10 years was renovating the house and garden and trials of having another baby with part time work for me. We had a very large pine in the front and the front yard was very small so that was the dominant feature and we had a brush fence installed around it, more or less.

I did try growing a few things next to the old pine, but wasn't successful and the pine would shed a yellowy powder each year which I found out were its seeds.

In the back yard we had herbs and a small vegetable garden, fruit trees, back lane and my pot plants, duck and cat. One feature was a very large OLD apple tree, but it was infested with coddling moth - we tried the usual pest control but it wasn't very successful.

Our next little miracle was our son Kerrin, six years on, in 1983, named after John Kerin the IVF Doctor at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Dr Kerin was tragically killed at his property by a implement accident a few years later - a deep loss to his community in the medical field.

The boys enjoyed having their grandparents nearby and we made dear friends that we still keep in touch with - Rae and Bruce Mitchell who we catch up with each month at the Strath Garden Club.

• The Parkway, Blackwood - 1988

Our house at Blackwood was on the side of the hill and had a beautiful view from the kitchen over the Valley. The boys, Ben and Kerrin went to Coromandel Valley Primary School and Blackwood High.

Rob built a couple of decks and our high light was having our friends Sue and Bob's wedding in our garden in December 1992 - they had Morris Dancers, Quartet, Clown for the kids and the front and back yard was a day of festivities.

The yard was very undulating and we had beautiful 400 year old gum trees, herb and vegetable garden on the side, but mainly lawn in the back. One still night we got a scare as one of the large branches of one of the trees crashed down with a great noise and luckily fell on what we call the chook shed, but no chooks. The shed wasn't the same again. Ben left in this time after high school and uni to further his studies in Canberra.

We promised ourselves that we would never buy a sloping property again.

• **Commercial Road / North Parade - Doctor Jim Fairley's House, Strathalbyn - 1998**

I loved this house but of course it had lots of work with renovating and continued maintenance in the garden. I had great ideas and plans, but Rob didn't, so in the end it was all too much financially for us. I did do a few landscaping changes and had somebody in to help keep the garden maintained. It had lots of lovely old trees like the golden elm (which I see has gone), helorbus under the trees and a pond which we made a screen behind for a veggie garden - we also had plenty of room for chooks and our dog Spotty.

Kerrin went to Cornerstone College in Mt Barker and finished his final year with us at Strathalbyn, then moved to Canberra with his brother - we also had a 15 year old lad, Bernardo from Bolivia, who we had for a year - he could not speak a bit of English and us no Spanish, but it was amazing how he picked it up so quickly.

I think the Strathalbyn Community got to know him more than us as he went to Strath High School and was a very good tennis player and played for the Strath Tennis Club.

Another big highlight at the Doc's House was our friend, Sue, who was married in our garden at Blackwood - her daughter, Sally and Tobin were married in the front garden December 1999 - we had another Quartet, Mac the Town Crier, Chimney Sweep for luck and a beautiful sunny fun day of festivities. We also rented from Don and Gwen two of their houses.

• **American River, Kangaroo Island - 2002**

American River was a lovely little quiet seaside village where we bought a little old shack on the Waterfront. We didn't even transport furniture over as it was furnished, except my pot plants.

We had a large deck added on the front which was another room and we could sit out and admire the Bay. I painted the front of the shack in a blue and terracotta which brightened it up no end. We also terraced the front with collected stones and made a dry wall for the walk way and wall. The soil was very sandy and not thinking I should plant seaside friendly plants, I failed, but of course in the end I learnt.

We could see across the Bay to Cape Jervis, especially the lights at night - our front yard was really the water, with lots of bird life, pelicans we would feed, dolphins, crabs and fish.

• **Vanali Drive - Port Elliot - 2005**

We shifted back to the mainland which I was happy about as I'd found it hard crossing that stretch of water. We had bought a block of land at Port Elliot a few years before and so we decided to build on it even though Rob had a Job in the Wimmera Shire at Kaniva.

I stayed with my Mum in Victor Harbor and organised finding a builder and designing the garden as well as working part time. The block was over an acre of land. We had the house built of white lath and plaster, old doors and timber

with a glass roof in the kitchen and dining area.

People who drove past, had different views of what they thought the building was - some thought it was a church, but to me a Mediterranean or French Provincial Style, so that was the way we tried designing the garden in that style with pencil pines, pentanque court, fenced herb and veggie garden, tree lined driveway and hedges of Rosemary and Lavenders and a court yard. Being a large block it took a lot of work and time and Rob's weekends were filled with jobs in the garden.

Unfortunately for me I had a bicycle accident and seriously injured my left leg. It took me many months to recover and I knew I wasn't able to go back to my work or care for our property, so after five years we sold our lovely house and I moved to Kaniva and lived in the rented house Rob was in.

• **Renown Avenue, Victor Harbor - 2013**

When Rob retired we moved back to Victor Harbor especially to keep an eye on my Mum who is in her late 80's. We bought a 1925 Bungalow - BIG MISTAKE and once again are renovating.

The garden was in bad shape and not cared for in many years. We basically kept the design, but had the front fence pulled down which was over grown with an old creeper and the front yard levelled and re planted with a picket fence.

A couple of features are a bird house and large stone water fountain, with a pot plant - the driveway was resurfaced with gravel - out the back we had a large decking built which is over looked by a beautiful large Manchurian pear tree which gives us shade in summer and light in winter.

Out the back is also a very old fig tree and because it needed pruning, it is only this year bearing fruit again if we are lucky enough to get the figs before the birds.

Behind the shed we cleared a dump to establish the veggie garden, so we levelled it and Rob used sleepers to divide it into areas - again, we have made hedges of Rosemary and Lavender.

We always look forward to our monthly meeting at the Strathalbyn Garden Club, with guest speakers, plants for sale, raffles, catching up with friends and trips. We continue to learn a lot listening to all the experienced gardeners.



Rob and Pauline's garden at Renown Avenue, Victor Harbor.