

Conservation and creativity in the same basket



Cherree Densley in her Killarney studio – a re-commandeered bedroom – where she creates baskets using the timeless techniques of many cultures.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] B
[/dropcap]ushwalking with **Cherree Densley** would be an eye-opening experience, as not only does she know the names of hundreds of native plants, she can also see the potential for each to be the inspiration for a stunning work of art.

Since retiring from her 30-year career as a secondary school teacher about 10 years ago, Cherree has devoted a large portion of her life to plants and, through them, tapped into her twin loves of conservation and creativity.

On the outside, the garden of her **Killarney** home is a two-acre

sanctuary of low-water succulents, bulbs, native plants and perennials while inside, the remnants and off-cuts of native plants and grasses are transformed into beautiful baskets and fibre sculptures.

Cherree recently reclaimed her son's old bedroom to create a simple, sun-filled studio in which she spreads out the seed pods, grasses, leaves, prunings and various fibres that she has collected in her travels, or from her own land, and that would normally be composted or left to rot on the ground.

From this raw harvest, she creates the designs that she has sketched in her journals as part of daily ritual that keeps her disciplined and captures inspirational ideas before they float away.

[quote]

I find it is a lovely thing to be able to make something useful or beautiful from things that might normally be thrown away," Cherree explains. [/quote]

"You can take this discarded material and turn it into something entirely new: you can make an object that is not just creative, but which also has a purpose."



The exquisite range of baskets reflect the raw materials from which they are made.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] C herree's range of baskets and fibre sculptures is astonishing and shows influences from her fascination with how baskets have been used in various cultures for thousands of years.

Some of her work reflects the baskets and eel traps made by Indigenous Australians, others have a distinct African style, while others are uniquely her own.

"I collect books on basket-making and was reading just the other day how an African community used tightly woven baskets to store their beer," she says.

"With almost any culture, you only have to scratch the surface

and there is a history of basket-making there.”



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[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] C
[/dropcap]herree also makes much larger sculptural works using fibres and found objects and is currently preparing for a second exhibition with her sister, painter **Di Holland**, who lives near Edenhope. The pair held their first SisterShow in 2012 at the Warrnambool Art Gallery.

The **SisterShow2** exhibition will be held at **CEMA, Portland**, from March 24-April 29 and will again see Di's meticulous wildlife paintings paired with Cherree's sculptural works. The 2012 show included, for example, a large painting of a platypus by Di that was exhibited alongside a metre-long platypus nesting burrow woven by Cherree.

This time, the challenge includes enhancing Di's painting of a

Southern Right whale, but Cherree is already well underway with a piece that reflects the whale's 'song lines'. The sisters plan to exhibit 25 large paintings and 30 sculptural works in total.



This delicate basket made of New Zealand flax was part of an exhibition held at Whalebone Gallery, Port Fairy.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] P
[dropcap]erhaps not surprisingly, the sisters come from a line of grandparents and great grandparents who loved gardens and crafts – textiles, leatherwork, basketry, mosaics, floristry, spinning and dyeing wool – and both grew up in bushland near Heywood.

Cherree used her superannuation to return to those roots by buying a rare slice of 200 acres of native bushland near Portland that is protected with a covenant to ensure its preservation into the future. Since buying the property, Cherree has recorded 299 individual plant species growing on the property.

"I am really struggling to reach the 300, but I think I may

have found a native mint that will take me over the line,” she says, laughing.



To market, to market: some of Cherree's work at the recent Port Fairy farmers markets.

[box] Cherree Densley's work is often for sale through the Port Fairy markets and F Project pop-up markets at The Artery, 224 Timor St, Warrnambool. Cherree also offers basket making classes at her home for individuals or up to groups of eight. You can contact her on 55 68 7226 or via cherree@hotmail.net.au for more details.[/box]



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