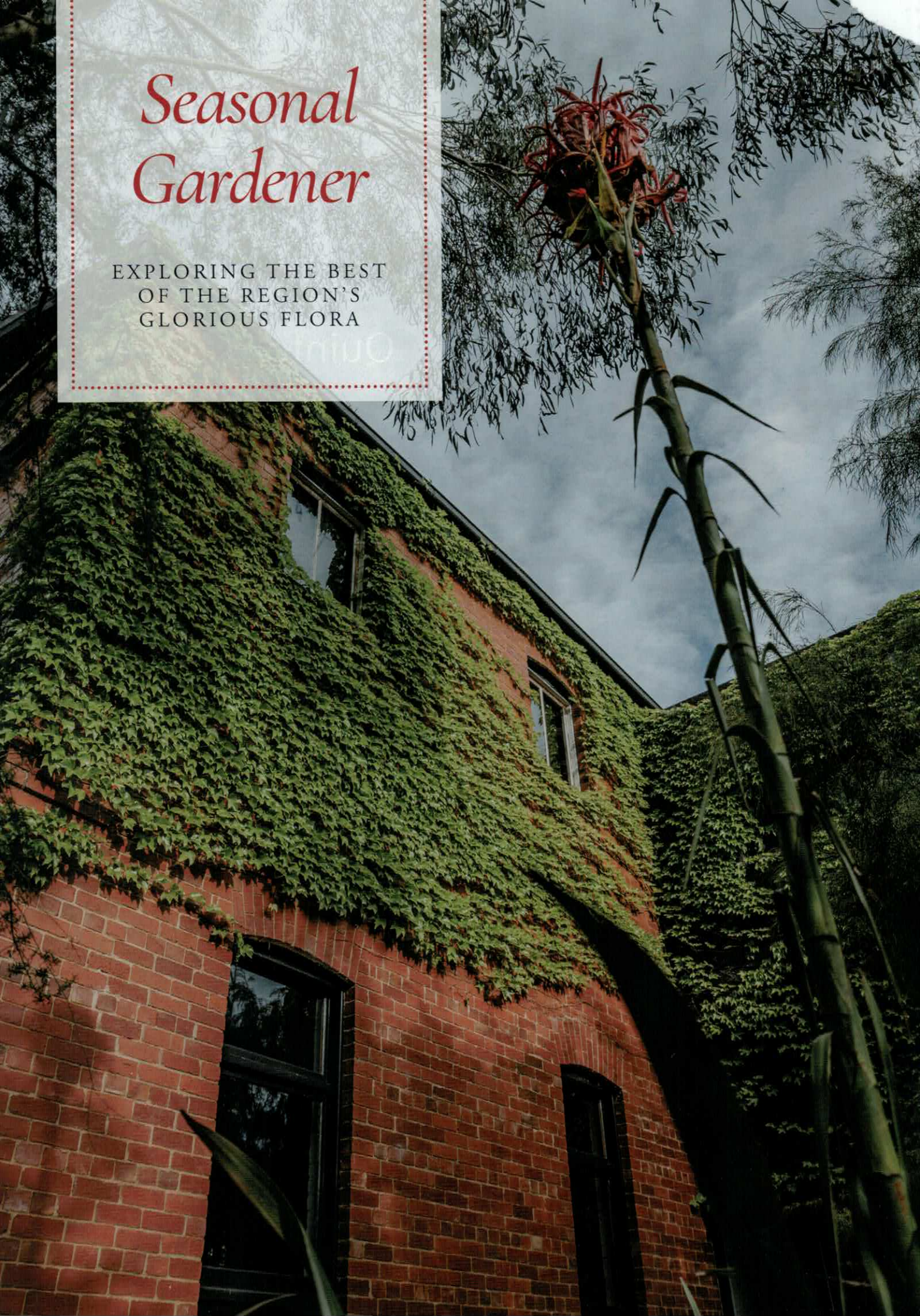


Seasonal Gardener

EXPLORING THE BEST
OF THE REGION'S
GLORIOUS FLORA





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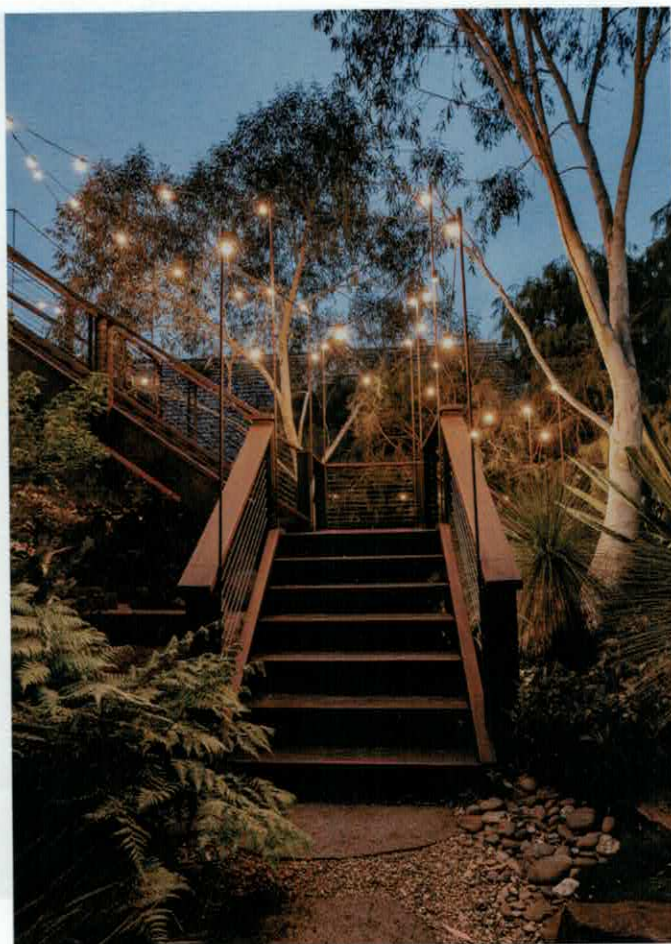
Midnight in the Garden

AFTER TEN YEARS OF PATIENT NURTURING,
THE STUNNING GYMEA LILIES ARE FLOWERING
AT PROJEKT 3488

Transformed from a gravel carpark into a sanctuary of curated natives, the gardens of Warburton venue Projekt 3488 are a masterclass in landscape design. "I wouldn't call myself a gardener, but my mum Sue instilled in me her passion for gardening. When I was a child, she carved off a triangle of our garden and told me I could grow whatever I wanted. Mum rarely bought plants from a nursery, but she was always taking cuttings from plants she liked. I made this garden in honour of her after she passed, and I felt her guide me just as she did when I was a young boy," says Mark Fenech. "She imparted in me a deep respect for the process of nurturing. I've never been trained but I've felt my way in, and I've been prepared to experiment."

Situated in Warburton, just metres from the Yarra River, Projekt 3488 is one of Victoria's most beloved wedding and events venues. Owner Mark Fenech has revived the former Masonic Lodge (established 1923) creating a bespoke space that reflects his love for found objects, modern industrial design and beauty. Framed views of the garden are offered from every perspective within the grand halls of this lovingly designed artefact, an infinity symbol providing the inspiration for the footprint that indelibly links the inside and outside spaces. More than a restoration, Projekt 3488 is a service to the community, to contemporary history and to art, expressing a beauty that gathers together the seemingly unrelated to create harmony. The half-acre garden tenderly expresses this same intention.

"My inspiration for the garden was simple – I wanted to create spaces with texture, light and play. I started from scratch and used a garden hose to lay out the shape of the paths. I wanted to create irregular shapes and winding pathways to surprise people as they weave their way through. I've created little outdoor rooms for private moments to sit and ponder, visually dramatic vignettes, stunning places for photography. I am interested in colour and movement, and the form and texture of plants. My colour palette was inspired by the tones of regenerative growth against the ashen trunks after Black Saturday, layered with the blushes of colour that come through with careful seasonal planting. And natives feature heavily, though not exclusively."





The garden is full of little private spaces to sit in contemplation or conversation



Worn smooth river rock pathways give way to ponds teeming with the six species of frogs that call the garden home. Staggered river redgum planks laid side by side take you deep into the lush growth that softens any hard edges before you arrive at a perfectly placed resting place of basalt. Many of the boulders – the largest being 15 tonne – were donated by members of the Warburton community. “I’ve been supported in so many ways. People wanted to maintain a connection to the property and see this vision come to life as much as I did.”

“As I designed the garden, I considered the sculptural nature of each plant and its growth cycle. There is a coming together of form and randomness that creates harmony. I have been lucky too – the soil and climate here has supported abundant growth. Because everything was planted at a similar time, the plants have matured in relationship to one another. There is no competition it seems between the dwarf snow gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), dwarf lemon-scented gums (*Corymbia citriodora*), flowering gums, firewheel trees (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*), silky oaks (*Grevillea robusta*) or the Illawarra flame tree (*Brachychiton acerifolius*) as just a few examples. We recently did some drone footage and it was fascinating to see how each tree had found its own space. They are respectful of one another. They move and shape around each other so they all get the best chance of survival.”



The expansive deck overlooks the stunning gardens







The many gumtrees provide natural sculptural elements

For the first time in ten years, the Gynea lily and Giant Spear Lily (*Doryanthes excelsa* and *Doryanthes palmeri*) are flowering sending 4-6 metre spikes into the sky bursting into a flame of petals. There are 18 of these sculptural natives planted throughout the garden and the two that have finally flowered have taken months to unfurl. "One of the great rewards is the constantly changing nature of nature," says Mark. "Every day I come out here there is something new to see. It's a place of evolution, of true aliveness."

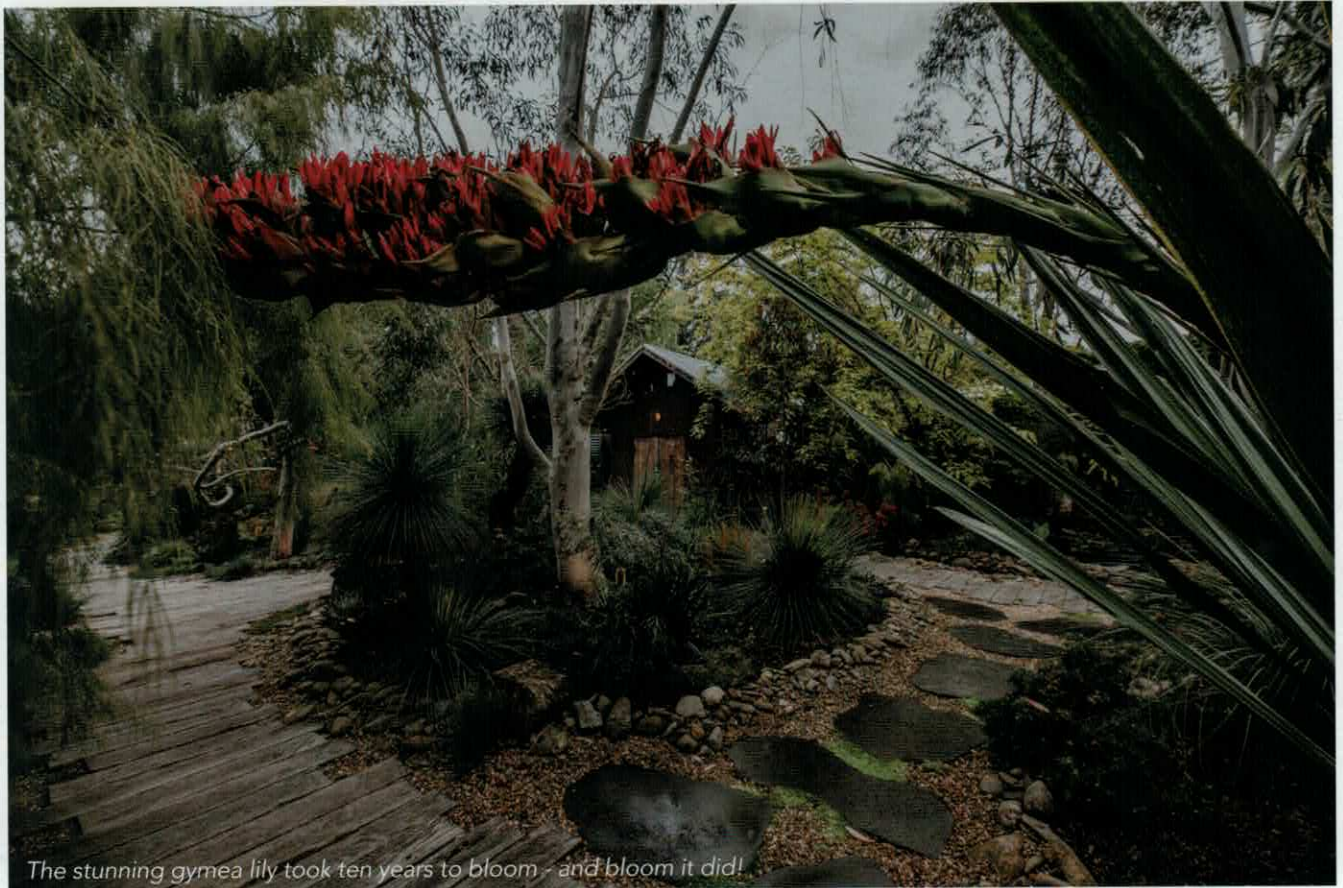
The grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) – he was told they wouldn't survive in Warburton – are among his favourites. "They shoot flowering spikes with 1000 ochre eyelashes that attract butterflies and bees and turn them into living, vibrating sculptures," says Mark. Sometimes at night, he catches them bending their heads together like people having a conversation.

When the sun sets, feature lighting, which can't be seen during the day, creates new shapes and perspectives within the garden. Up-lighting illuminates a hidden world among the foliage, festoon lights and quartz crystal rings define spaces with a sense of wonder and delight. "This garden transports you somewhere else," says Mark. "There is a sanctuary-like feel at night with tree cubbies and tunnels to explore. The ghostly trunks of the snow gums become otherworldly. We send the children out with torches to frog spot, and Powerful owls and flying foxes swoop in to feast on the bugs attracted to the lights."



Mark (left) and Sandy with their beloved dog Pup Pup





The stunning gynea lily took ten years to bloom - and bloom it did!

*"This garden helps me restore my faith.
Every day I find my solace in its spaces...
I am happiest when I feel my own sense of place
within its natural hierarchy."*

"And there is an ever-present soundscape – the tumbling of Four Mile Creek through the fern glade at the rear of the garden, the frogs, the native bird life, the gum leaves whispering to one another in the wind – day and night there is life here."

Now the gums have grown tall enough so that the view through to Mt Bride and Groom Hill (fitting for a wedding venue) has been revealed again. "In a garden, consider the space between and underneath – the negative space – as important," says Mark. Participating several times in the Open Gardens program over the years has meant returning visitors can remind Mark of just how far, how much growth, has occurred.

It's a garden he knows his mum would adore and Mark acknowledges her continued inspiration and presence. The fence, he points out, is made of railway sleepers – an homage to his mum's passion for trainspotting and a tribute to Warburton's railway history at the end of the line.

"This garden helps me restore my faith. Every day I find my solace in its spaces. If I don't know what to do, Sandi, my partner, will say, 'go to the garden'. It centres me and returns me to the quiet. I am happiest when I feel my own sense of place within its natural hierarchy." ■