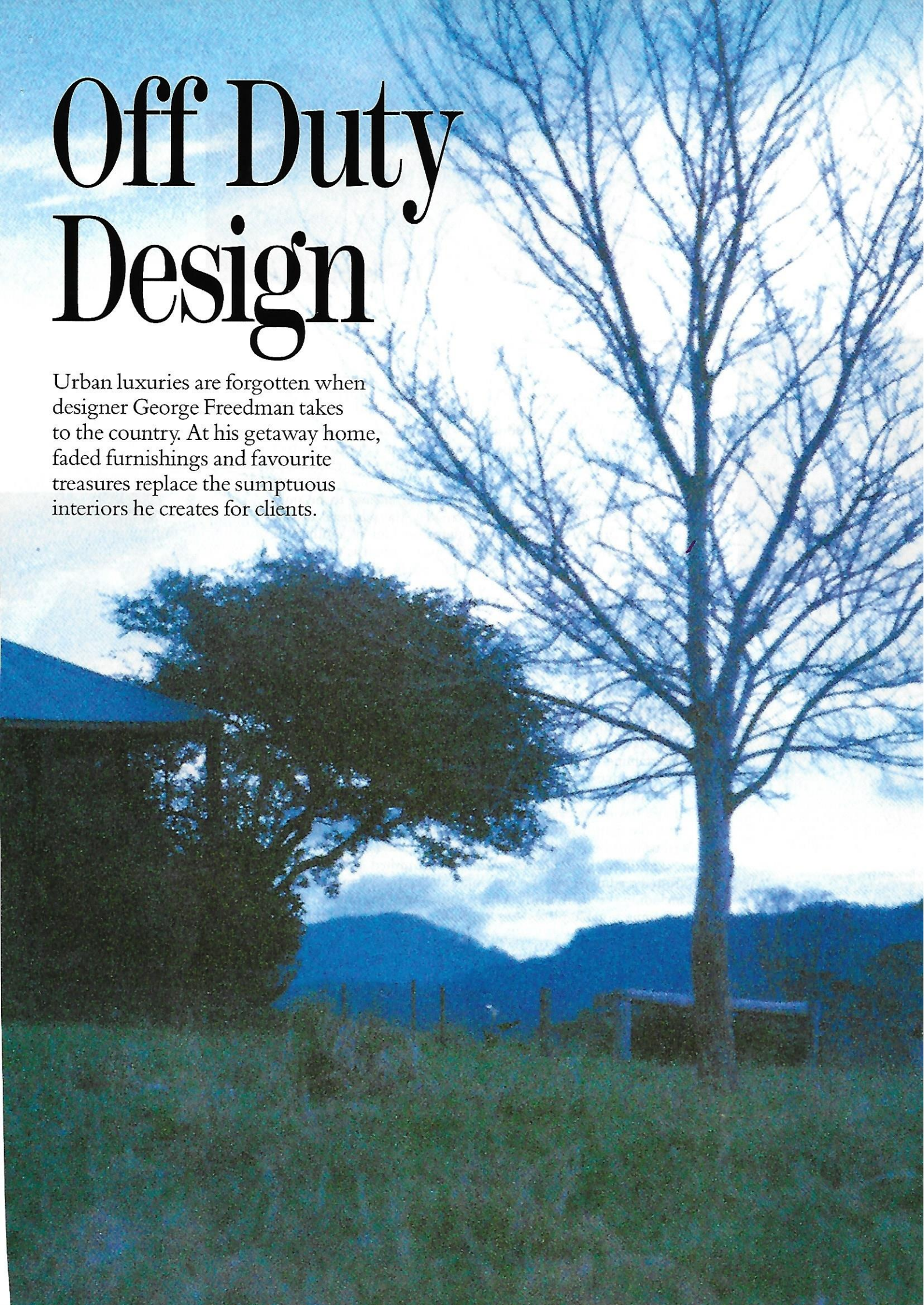


# Off Duty Design

Urban luxuries are forgotten when designer George Freedman takes to the country. At his getaway home, faded furnishings and favourite treasures replace the sumptuous interiors he creates for clients.





**D**esigner George Freedman is responsible for some of Australia's most dazzling contemporary interiors. A perfectionist to the smallest detail, he doesn't care how much it costs to create original, exceptional, enduring interiors.

During the 25 years of his celebrated career, several of his own houses have been splashed across the pages of interior design magazines. The photographs show that he – and former partner Neville Marsh – have been as accomplished and extravagant at home as in their work for clients.

Those were photographs he and Marsh *allowed* to be published. While they represented accurately the partners' urbane and international outlook, they offered no hint of another life away from the city, to which they escaped as often as they could.

Marsh now lives in Rome but Freedman still spends many weekends at the picturesque farm they purchased 18 years ago. Three hours' drive from Sydney, the property includes a classic Victorian sandstone cottage (built in 1865), a crumbling dairy built in the 1920s, and a dam where Freedman sometimes goes fishing for yabbies.

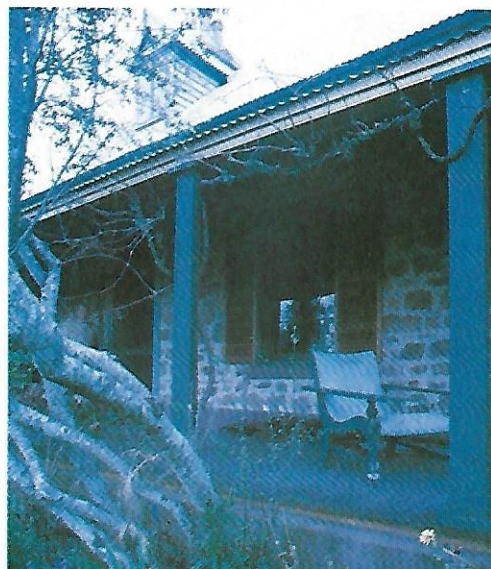
For several years after they found the place, Marsh and Freedman ran their own cattle there. Freedman took the work seriously enough to become a licensed artificial inseminator. But eventually they decided to sell the herd to allow more time for their favourite relaxations: reading, gardening, cooking and entertaining friends. Neighbours rent the paddocks now and graze their cows on them.

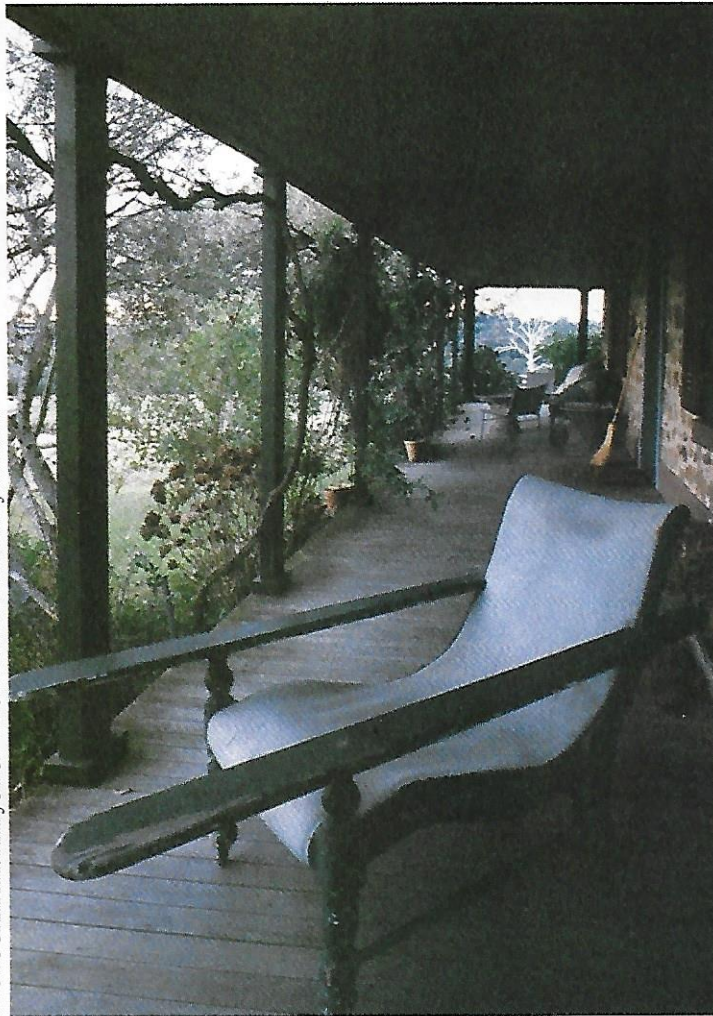
Surprisingly, in view of the owner's public persona, the farmhouse has never been renovated. The fibro bathroom is primitive; the main bedroom has cedar built-in wardrobes that were nailed together, by the look of them, in the mid 1970s.

The living and dining rooms are furnished with cast-offs from Freedman's city houses and a collection of memorabilia, including several framed sketches signed with his initials. There are some notable pieces – in particular, an ornate embroidered

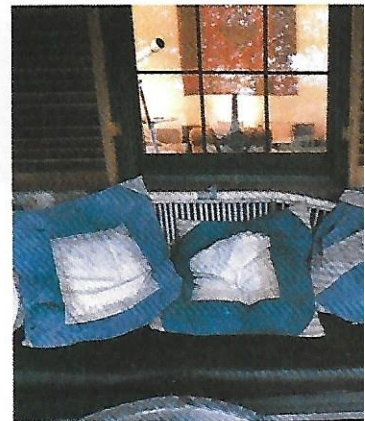


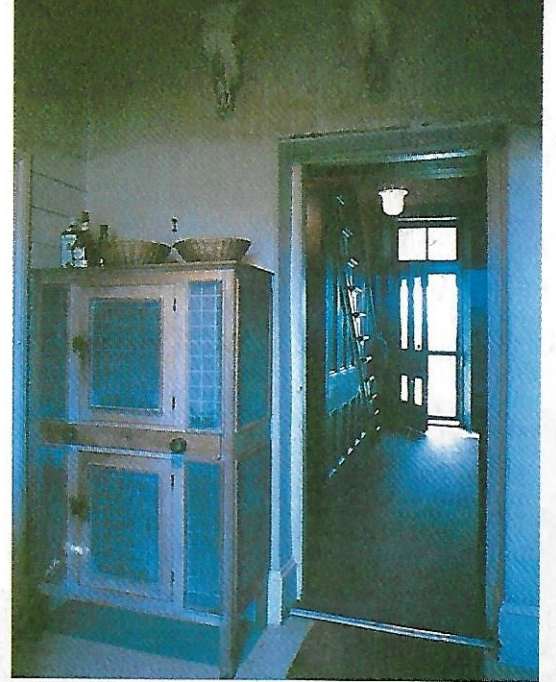
*Preceding pages: winter at Freedman's country cottage. These pages: outdoor activities include collecting wood in the paddocks and relaxing on the broad verandah. Cows graze beside the dam.*





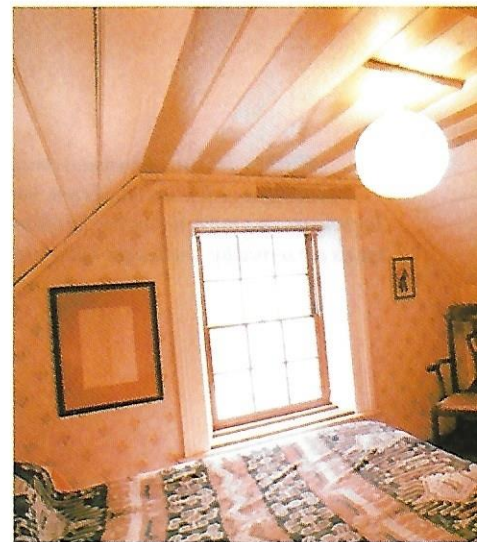
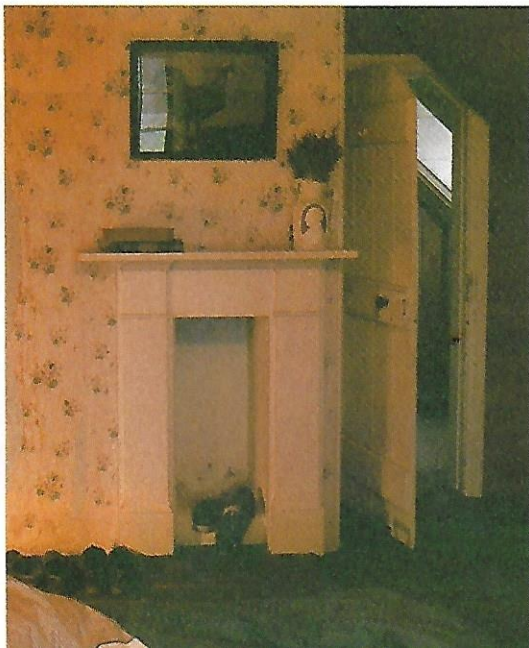
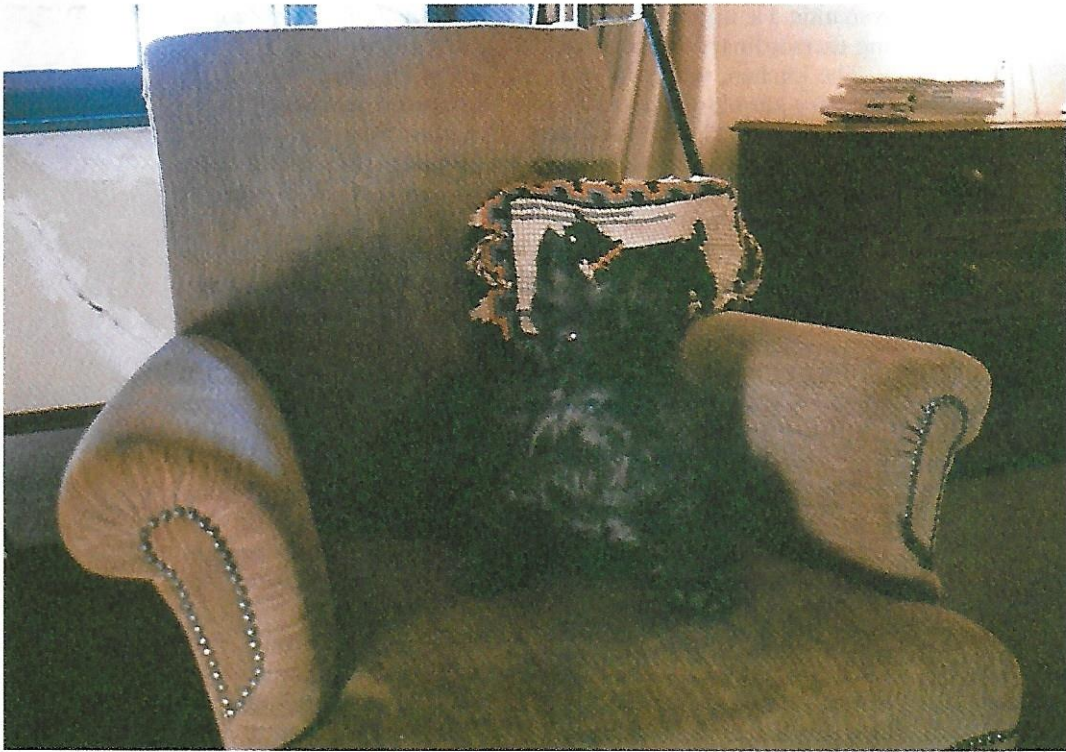
PHOTOGRAPHY: RAY JOYCE PRODUCED BY DAVINA JACKSON





*Indoor pleasures: the house is furnished with favourite paintings, furniture and memorabilia gathered by Freedman and his former partner, Neville Marsh, over several decades.*







stage backdrop (now a wall hanging) made for a Chinese opera company which toured Australia early this century – but there’s been no attempt to create a cohesive aesthetic.

There is cohesion, nonetheless. By day the rooms have an air of faded refinement and nonchalance which seems right for the bucolic setting. At night in candlelight, the mood becomes romantic. He might be off duty, but Freedman can’t help conjuring extraordinary atmospheres.

The kitchen, where he spends much of his time, is an extraordinary jumble of ancient appliances, battered benches and cupboards crammed with cookware. It’s a blast from the past: Bon Ami on the windowsill, flypapers hanging from the ceiling, commonsense cookbooks in the corner and a checked cloth on the breakfast table.

In this unlikely environment, Freedman bakes bread, mixes potent cocktails and tests new recipes from well-thumbed paperbacks. He gathers lettuces and herbs from the kitchen garden; home-grown sorrel is a staple of his diet. Around the house, established trees and grape vines provide abundant fruit. He sometimes gives away baskets of the latest produce to friends who own restaurants – one winter a dish at Taylor’s, Surry Hills, was named after the house.

Though he thinks of the farm as a private retreat, friends often visit. Over meals lasting several hours, they trade gossip and opinions about travel, opera, food, wine and music. Overnight guests sometimes enjoy stocking the fire baskets with “big wood and little wood” collected from the paddocks.

Freedman’s dogs – two Scotties to which he is devoted – are rarely around during the day. After breakfast they scamper over the hill and far away. Usually they’re back in time for dinner but sometimes they delay their master’s return to the city until mid-Monday. It’s not always easy to tempt them back into the BMW. Like Freedman, they’d love to stay at the farm. □

DAVINA JACKSON



*Kitchen delights: Freedman concocts potent cocktails and delicious food from home-grown ingredients in a kitchen that’s a blast from the past; meals are served by candlelight in the dining room.*



