



KANGALOON NSW PEOPLE
 Hand-dyed merino wool with a timber beater, used in weaving - **FACING PAGE** Natalie Miller and daughter Scarlett take a walk into the woods with Roxy, the family's blue heeler.

weaving magic

NATALIE MILLER LEFT A DESK JOB IN THE CITY AND MOVED TO THE COUNTRY ESTABLISHING A NEW LIFE AS A GLOBALLY RECOGNISED TEXTILE ARTIST.

WORDS AMBER CRESWELL BELL PHOTOGRAPHY FELIX FOREST

Natalie Miller should have been a natural at art and craft. The 44-year-old architect and interior designer came from a family of makers and recalls being impressed by her mother's interest in dressmaking and macramé, and her grandmother's penchant for knitting and crochet. But it was only after 20 years and a move to the country that Natalie got back to being hands-on — and discovered her true destiny.

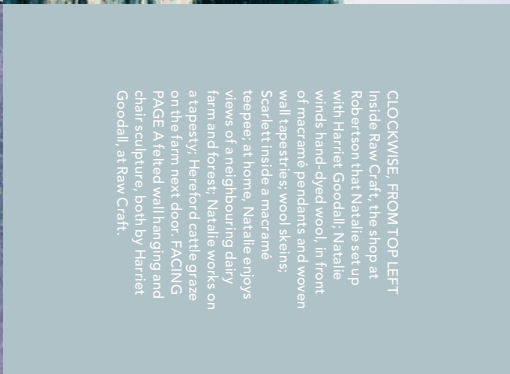
Natalie had long felt that her career had been overpowered by technology. "I found I was sitting at a screen for 45 hours a week," she recalls. "When I studied architecture 25 years ago, we were taught to draft plans on tracing paper with different ink pens, to render sketches with coloured pencils and watercolour, and to build models. I missed that part — the creating just with my hands."

Originally from Sydney's Paddington, Natalie and her builder husband Darren had for many years rented holiday properties in Kangaroo Valley and Wollombi, taking their children — Connor, now 15, Finley, 11, and four-year-old Scarlett — to these country towns within easy distance of Sydney. These forays convinced the couple that they eventually wanted to bring their children up in the country, waiting only to find the right place with the right schools.

"Then one day, we took a drive in the Southern Highlands that lead us through Kangaloon — and we were blown away by its beauty," Natalie says. Three years ago, up a long, tree-lined drive on a ridge with a view of endless green hills punctuated only by grazing cattle, they found their home in the country.

The couple had anticipated the benefits of fresh air and wide open spaces. What Natalie did not expect was the new career that came with her new life. "I found since moving out of the city, there was no longer the stress of a busy lifestyle, the congested traffic and constant movement. The space and the >

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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Inside Raw Craft, the shop at Robertson that Natalie set up with Harriet Goodall; Natalie winds hand-dyed wool, in front of macramé pendants and woven wall tapestries; wool skeins; Scarlett inside a macramé teepee; at home, Natalie enjoys views of a neighbouring dairy farm and forest; Natalie works on a tapasy; Hereford cattle graze on the farm next door; **FACING PAGE** A felted wall hanging and chair sculpture, both by Harriet Goodall, at Raw Craft.





CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT
Natalie's studio is at the rear
of Raw Craft; Natalie works
on a macramé piece for an
exhibition in Sydney; a silk
weaving and other pieces;
a tapestry in progress.



stillness in the country really allows you to stop and think, to open up your mind and creative side.”

And the path that opened led to the Sturt Craft Centre in nearby Mittagong, which claims to be Australia's oldest craft teaching institution. There she completed a year-long tapestry course — “And I just knew this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

Natalie is now a prolific weaver, teaching classes around Australia and also abroad. She shares a studio in nearby Robertson with Harriet Goodall, a friend and sculptural basket maker. Last year they decided to open a small shop at the front of the studio — called Raw Craft, it sells baskets, weaving and contemporary craft supplies.

“I'm very passionate about my craft, and my tapestries are an exploration of colour, texture and fibre,” Natalie says. “I'm taking a traditional craft and using it in a radical and contemporary way — especially my use of colour.”

Natalie's studio is a kaleidoscope of colour, texture and pattern. Her love of bold shades is evident both in her surroundings and her work. “It's my trademark,” she says.

“I'm always clothed in bright and patterned outfits, and my home's much the same. I adore my studio, filled with its coloured yarns and textile works. I dye all my wool and rope just so I can achieve the exact colour palette for my work.”

Now the Millers look forward to moving into a new home nearby, on a site overlooking a large dairy farm, with its own river and rainforest. After working together on the design, Darren is building the house while Natalie looks forward to filling it with her art and textiles.

And she may have help. The children have revelled in the move, spending the time once wasted in Sydney traffic riding motorbikes and horses, catching yabbies, growing vegetables, climbing trees, and playing with puppy Roxy, the blue heeler. But they also like spending time in their mother's studio and get quite involved with art and craft.

“They too love making anything they can, playing with different fibres, paints and clay,” Natalie says. The hands-on family craft connection looks set to continue. *

Natalie will be exhibiting at Koskela, Rosebery, NSW from June 20–August 2. See more of her work at www.nataliemillerdesign.com