



COUNTRY TABLE

A new location brings a fresh perspective for a Sydney antique dealer.

AN INNATE SENSE of generosity and hospitality exists within the large dining table: it encourages a more sociable school of dining, where dishes are passed up and down as needed and the odd extra guest is never turned away. This sits well at Mount Ashby Estate, the winery and restaurant started by antique dealer Sally Beresford and her husband Chris Harvey just outside Bowral in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, which now houses Sally Beresford Antiques and their French Farmhouse Tables business.

The pair is well versed in the pleasures of round-table hospitality. “We had about nine people around the table for years as the children were growing up, so we understand why a big table is so friendly and warm,” says Beresford. It’s a knowledge keenly conveyed in the offering of French farmhouse tables that pepper their relocated showroom, an old produce store dating back to 1918. Each table is handmade on site and constructed using timbers sourced from Europe; whole oak trees from France, baltic pine from Holland’s Edam cheese factories and the carriage floors of disused French trains.

Beresford, whose love of antiques comes from her mother, takes a custodian approach to the pieces she finds. “We’re really just caretakers. We look after them, polish them. They’ll still be here in generations to come.”

The decision to leave their Queen Street store in Sydney’s Woollahra after seven years came when the pair began to feel restricted, their search for

a larger space cut short when an interested party snapped up their existing locale. “It occurred to me that we already had the bigger space at the farm,” says Beresford. “The farm” being Mount Ashby Estate, a property the couple had bought 14 years earlier with the intention of turning it into a winery. “We wanted a small vineyard, a bit like the French do where you know almost every vine,” says Harvey.

The couple pulled down the original dairy and faithfully rebuilt to better accommodate a restaurant that serves a modern take on French fare, a natural choice for Beresford. “My French ancestry has always made me more inclined to French cuisine, and I was doing French furniture, so it just made sense.”

The new location brings with it the opportunity to expose customers to more than just their furniture. “I thought it would be great if we could give people a total experience, so it didn’t feel like they were coming all the way from Sydney or Young just to look at a table,” says Beresford. “They can come and watch a table being made, then sit down, eat and drink, then be back in their car at three p.m.”

Beresford’s approach flags a trend that invites the customer to encounter a brand in a new way and, in the process, fall in love with something new. CONOR BURKE
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From above: a ‘William and Mary’ four-drawer oak chest on bun feet, circa 1680, underneath an 18th-century parcel-gilt French barometer by Selon Coricelli and French chandelier; the French oak ‘Versailles’ table, set for lunch at La Palette Cafe; a 17th-century French verdure tapestry, walnut fauteuil chair in the style of Louis XIII, circa 1810, near a French oak refectory table. **Opposite:** Sally Beresford and Chris Harvey at their rural retreat, Mount Ashby Estate.



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