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AT HOME

Two creative legends turned their house into a history of their lives

ANGELA SAURINE

After being separated on opposite sides of the NSW-Queensland border for much of the Covid-19 pandemic, Normie Rowe and Samantha Gowing are happy to be ensconced together in their new home.

The couple moved into the four-bedroom house at Banora Point in northern NSW last year, a few months after eloping in Italy. After meeting at Byron Bay's iconic Beach Hotel nine years ago, Gowing moved to the Tweed to be closer to Rowe, who lived on the Gold Coast.

During the pandemic lockdowns, they would meet for picnics on the border. "I didn't mind exactly where we lived as long as it was in the Northern Rivers or South-East Queensland, because it's a food bowl," says Gowing, a consulting wellness chef and nutritionist, whose projects include editing a cookbook for Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat in the Gold Coast hinterland.

"We also wanted to be near an airport because we travel so much." With a swag of muso mates, the couple also enjoy being able to attend festivals such as Cooly Rocks On at Coolangatta and Bluesfest in Byron Bay to see them perform.

"This end of the coast is a good musical area," Rowe says.

"It's home to some of the best players in the country."

The pair have pooled possessions collected throughout their lifetimes so far to create an eclectic space showcasing their love of food, music, and art. One of the house's main attractions was the opportunity it provided for indoor-outdoor living, with sliding doors leading from the kitchen out onto the terrace, which also has an outdoor kitchen. A wooden plaque with the words "King Normie" that the singer's dad gave him after he was crowned the King of Pop in the 1960s hangs above the barbecue, while a nearby blackboard has a humorous menu with Gowing's take on Rowe's songs, including Bacon All Over, Quiche Sera Sera and Saute with Me Baby.

A small patio on the side of the house has been nicknamed Little Pattie after the singer – an old friend of Rowe's – with a black and white photo of her in the window.

There's also a herb garden with thyme, basil and chilli that Gowing uses in cooking, as well as rosemary which Rowe – a proud veteran of the Vietnam War – wears on Remembrance Day.

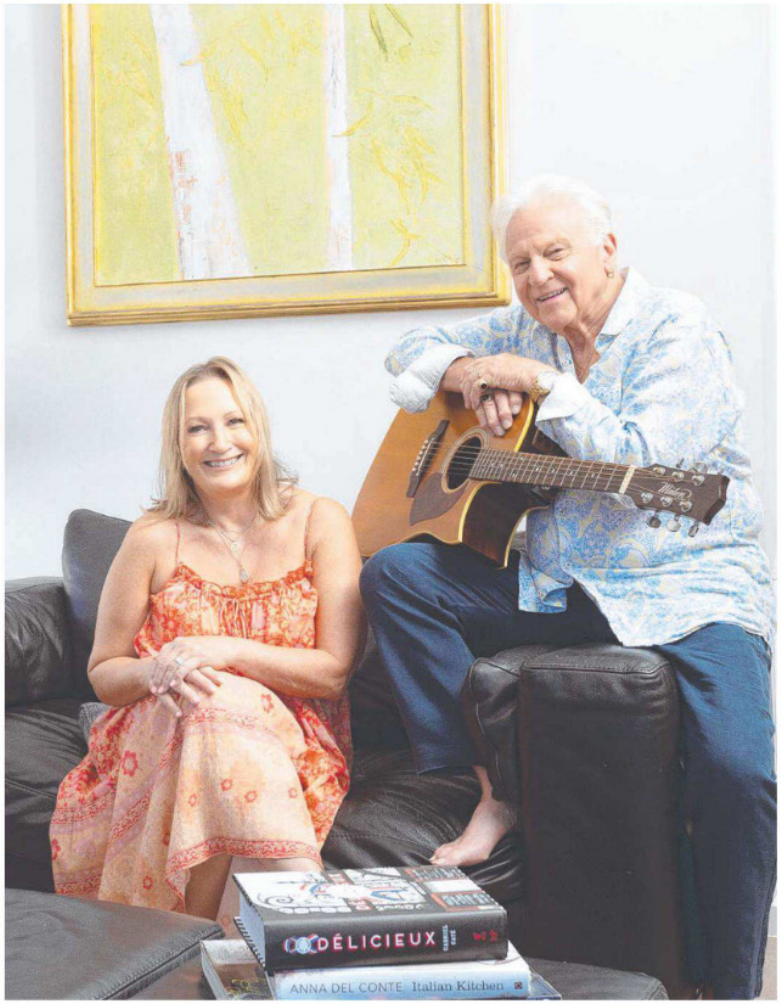
In the loungeroom, a guitar Rowe was gifted by longtime friend and singer-songwriter Col Joye, engraved with his name, takes pride of place on a stand alongside a statue of a jazz musician playing a piccolo trumpet.

"Col has been my idol since around 1957 or '58," Rowe says. "I got to meet him on (ABC TV series and concert tour) Long Way to the Top. He said it was a stage guitar and when he retired, he wanted it to go to someone who would play it. I play it every day when I'm home."

Rowe's own gold records also hang on the wall in his office.

Asian cookbooks by Christine Manfield and Elizabeth Chong sit atop a red Chinese sideboard Gowing bought in Melbourne, near an Indonesian throne she was given by her school friend, Alan Bond's daughter Jody Fewster, for her 21st birthday. "I have always loved the Asian aesthetic," Gowing says. "I studied Japanese at school, teach Japanese cooking, and study Chinese medicine."

As well as being the restaurateur behind such establishments as Gowings in East Melbourne and Grace Darling Hotel – the birthplace of Collingwood Football Club – Gowing's dad Dennis Gowing was an art collector and trader. She has inherited his love of art, with works by Sidney Nolan, Clifton Pugh and Charles Blackman peppered throughout the home. A framed photo of her dad with the Melbourne Cup after a horse he co-owned, What A Nuisance, won in 1985 is one of her most prized possessions. "It was the best day of my life," Gowing says. "Besides the day I married Normie."



Samantha Gowing and Normie Rowe
PICTURES: NELLY LE COMTE