



STYLE INSIGHT :

## into the woods

LAYERED WITH TEXTURE, DREAMY COLOUR COMBINATIONS AND STRIKING CONTRASTS, HANNAH FOX'S PAINTINGS REFLECT HER LOVE OF THE BUSH

WORDS KYLIE JACKES STYLING WENDY BANNISTER  
PHOTOGRAPHY JESSICA REFTEL EVANS

WHEN HANNAH FOX and her husband David snapped up their inner northern Melbourne home six years ago, its decrepit backyard garage sealed the deal. "David thought it would make a great shed, yet I saw its potential as a place to paint – and somehow I won!" says Hannah.

Add a few structural improvements, a coat of paint, skylights and a purpose-built bench laden with collections of found objects and supplies, and the space was transformed into a charming garden studio. And with three boisterous boys – Hugo, six, Isaac, four, and two-year-old Jude – it's become a creative sanctuary for Hannah.

"I have three painting sessions a week when the children are in school or childcare, and it's time I really look forward to," says the artist, who starts those sittings with a coffee and a tinker before settling in for a day in front of the canvases. "In the studio I feel like I'm in my own world – and because it's devoted entirely to my art practice, I don't have to pack up. I can just come back in, pick up where I left off and immerse myself in the joy of painting."

Art has always been a passion for Hannah, and prompted her to complete a Fine Arts degree at Monash University and work in galleries. Yet for many years, painting was just a hobby that took a back seat to a corporate career as a graphic designer. Ironically, it was while designing an exhibition catalogue for an art gallery eight years ago that she realised she would much rather paint pieces to go in the catalogue than produce it. "I've always enjoyed the tactile process and physicality of painting, and the day I brought my oil paints out again was heaven," recalls Hannah. >

*"There is nothing like squeezing fresh paint onto the palette and imagining the possibilities that await" ~ Hannah Fox*



TOP: Hannah's studio is integrated within the backyard and is a lovely escape where she can lose herself in the artistic process. Painted in Dulux Klavier contrasted with bright Dulux Fair Bianca walls inside, the studio is surrounded by greenery. Potted plants flank the entrance, while a bench seat provides an idyllic spot to take a break, survey the garden, recharge and sketch. LEFT: The studio's interior is a visual feast, with inspiration adorning every surface. Vessels brim with brushes and tools, walls feature photos and pictures from magazines and exhibitions, and paint splatters give utilitarian workbenches a colourful patina. The artwork on the crate is *Introspection #1*.



One of the joys of Hannah's work is there's plenty for the eye to discover. "People definitely see the landscape in my work and respond to the dappled light," she says. "Colour mixing is such an enjoyable part of the process. Often the colours are created on the canvas by overlapping many layers of various transparencies." This is typified in her artworks (from left) Moonrise, Dusty, Landscape with Blue #2, Landscape with Blue #1 (on canvas), Daydreamer (on wall), Wander #2 and Quiet Recollection #4 (both on floor).



*Walls in Hannah's home are ever-changing, with works such as 'Moody Landscape' displayed and enjoyed before being sold. "People ask me if I'm sad to see a painting go, but I don't get too attached to them," she says. "Part of being an artist is you're always keen to produce and discover new work."*



Her first solo exhibition in 2010, a impressive body of work titled 'Recent Abstracts', was a sell-out success and gave her the confidence to branch out as an artist – and she hasn't looked back.

Inspired by the beauty of the local natural landscape, Hannah's art often begins with a walk along the creek near her home or a drive further afield to the Mornington Peninsula, where she'll sketch lines and colour combinations loosely referenced in her abstract pieces. "Rather than depict the physical truth of the landscape, my paintings have evolved into intuitive responses to the natural environment and the qualities of the paint itself, which I've found really liberating," says Hannah, who uses myriad tools and techniques to invent deeply layered, textural works that capture the essence of the landscape. These can take from a month to six weeks to complete. "I'll use anything to add depth, scratch out lines and create the effect I'm after – the pointy end of a paintbrush, a palette knife, rags and sticks," she says.

Drawn to a palette of rich, earthy tones and the luminous quality of oil paint, Hannah's work features dusty pinks and peaches among moody greys, dark indigo and olive greens. "My husband David thinks I use a lot of pink, because I have three boys and I am trying to tap into a little more femininity," says Hannah. "Maybe he's right!"

Keen to further develop her style, she hopes to eventually try her hand at ceramics and sculpture. And with ample room in her pretty backyard studio, there's plenty of space for her to spread her wings.

*For more information, visit [hannahfox.com.au](http://hannahfox.com.au).*

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*"Because there's so many textural elements, I love the fact that even though I've painted a piece, years later I can look at it and see something I hadn't noticed before" ~ Hannah Fox*

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HANNAH'S TIPS FOR...

*creating an inspiring studio space*

1.

Natural light is essential to enable me to see the colours and textures of the paint. It's also invigorating for the soul and brightens the mind. Skylights work wonders!

2.

My work is primarily a reflection of the natural environment. Plant life, leaves, bark, pine cones and stones found on my walks often find their way to the studio, to keep me connected to the landscape.

3.

Being a visual person, I love having images and art books around me to stimulate my creativity. A pinboard is home to photos, art imagery, sketches and colour inspiration.



*ABOVE LEFT: The pages of Hannah's sketchbook are small artworks in themselves, filled with pastel drawings that capture her interpretation of the landscape, whether it be the mood, the way sunlight hits the forest floor or the jagged edges of a rocky creek bed. ABOVE RIGHT: A keen gardener, she loves to surround herself with plants and foliage while she works, with lush hanging plants framing a view out to the backyard. **hb***

ACTUAL PAINT COLOURS MAY VARY ON APPLICATION