

GARDEN NOTES

BOLOBEK

Bolobek has arguably been one of the most written about gardens in this country. Although most of the books and articles concentrate on the period from the 1970s to the early 1990s when it was owned by Sir Robert and Lady Law-Smith, in fact the history of the property goes back to the early 1900s, when it was purchased as a number of different parcels of land by Oswald Syme, son of the founder of The Age Newspaper.

The Symes owned Bolobek for over 60 years and were responsible for the original layout of the garden and for planting the majority of the mature trees you see today. Unfortunately, history does not reveal who was responsible for the original design, but Mildred Syme was known to be a keen gardener. The Symes also had the foresight to construct a secure water supply for the property and garden, without which the garden would probably not have survived.

The Law-Smiths purchased Bolobek in 1960. They demolished the very unattractive original house and built – on the same site – the house that is here today, adding to it in the 1980s. The house was designed to be an intrinsic part of the existing garden and sits well on its site. Lady Law-Smith did not change the original layout of the garden but altered the plantings particularly to the east of the house, simplifying the plantings and the colour schemes. Joan Law-Smith was a very talented botanical artist and writer, and whilst at Bolobek published a number of books including *The Garden Within* which is a wonderful record of the garden under her ownership, and which has also been a fantastic reference document for us over the years.

We arrived at Bolobek in 2006 in the middle of a severe drought. The first couple of years were spent maintaining and observing the garden. It soon became obvious that one of the most important requirements was a new watering system. There was also a significant amount of tree remediation and replanting that was needed. All this work has been done but the garden is ever changing and comes with a myriad of management issues including changing climates, competition, disease, labour costs, drought and, perhaps the most insidious of them all, wind!

Other works that have been completed include the replanting of the old orchard and the development of a vegetable and picking garden to the south of the house and renovation of the stream adjacent to the Oak Lawn. We have also converted one of the original workers' cottages into an extremely comfortable self-contained accommodation business.

Unfortunately, the storms of June 2021 resulted in significant tree loss on the north side of the garden with associated catastrophic collateral damage necessitating major changes to the Crab Apple Walk and the perennial borders. These works are ongoing.

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Bolobek is more than a garden; it is a working farm running sheep and beef cattle. The garden and the farm sit well together, and with the thousands of trees that have been planted on the property since 2006 (with many more to be planted) and much work in the garden still to be done, the whole enterprise remains a work in progress.

We hope you enjoy your visit today. Please watch your step – there are many uneven surfaces to contend with.

Brigid and Hugh Robertson

Bolobek is located on the lands of the Taungurung People. Open Gardens Victoria wishes to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au

