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**FOOD WINE CULTURE HOMES GARDENS**



Image: Styling by Julia Green and Noël Coughlan for Greenhouse Interiors, assisted by Sarah Walsh, Annie Bell, Jemma Bell and Alison Lewis. Photography by Armelle Habib.



WORDS Penny Harrison | PHOTOGRAPHY Armelle Habib & Penny Harrison

# Bohemian Rhapsody

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHOEBE BELL IN HER  
NORTH WARRANDYTE HOME

Almost a decade ago, Phoebe Bell was an inner-city girl, on track to become a lawyer.

Nowadays, you're more likely to find her tucked away in the treetops at her North Warrandyte home, or travelling to India to design and curate products for her renowned online homewares store, Sage x Clare.

"I could never have imagined this is where I'd be, or what I'd be doing," Phoebe says with a laugh. "I grew up in South Yarra and Richmond, and studied law, media and communications. But I came out of that not really knowing where I wanted to go with it, so I thought I'd try something completely different."

With a strong eye for fashion and homewares, Phoebe decided to try her hand at styling and before long had landed a job as in-house stylist for Country Road.

It was a Christmas trip to India, with her husband Chris, that changed everything. Captivated by the riot of colour and pattern, along with a plethora of striking artisanal wares, Phoebe and Chris started talking about starting their own homewares business.

Two months later, Phoebe had thrown in her job at Country Road and was back in India to pursue her newfound dream of opening an online homewares store, showcasing a unique and vibrant range of handmade, bohemian and artisanal products.

"It was absolutely crazy and pretty scary, really," Phoebe says. "We had moved to Templestowe and worked out of our little unit for a year to get the business ready. We kept products in the garage and I turned the living room into a photo studio. It was a huge learning curve. We had no money or resources so I did everything myself, from styling and photography to web building."

Luckily, Phoebe's twin sister, Jemma, is a textile and graphic designer and was able to lend her skills to helping start the business. "She was living in India, with her husband Paul at the time, but she played a big role," Phoebe says.

*'Captivated by the riot of colour and pattern, along with a plethora of striking artisanal wares...'*



Image: Penny Harrison



Image: Styling by Julia Green and Noël Coughlan for Greenhouse Interiors  
Photography by Armelle Habib



Image: Penny Harrison





The business, named after Jemma's middle name (Sage) and Phoebe's middle name (Clare), was launched six years ago and warmly welcomed in the homewares world for its soulful and colourful eclectic aesthetic and exquisitely crafted textures and details.

"Growing up, I never thought I was creative," Phoebe recalls. "But, looking back, I spent a lot of time styling my room and cubby house, and I understood from an early age the impact a beautiful space can have on our emotions."

Shortly after launching the business, Phoebe and Chris moved to Warrandyte, to be closer to Chris's family. Then, after the birth of their son, Jude (now three), they crossed the bridge to live in North Warrandyte, in what could only be described as a treehouse. "It's one of those houses where I just knew it was right as soon as we walked in," Phoebe says. "And it's such a beautiful place to live."

The light-filled house is a reflection of Phoebe's stunning aesthetic, rich with colour and texture, along with her love of mid-century design and eclectic, vintage treasures.

In another unexpected twist, Jemma and Paul announced they were returning to Australia to have their baby, Nelly, and ended up moving in with Phoebe, Chris, Jude and the family spoodle, Billy.



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Image: Penny Harrison

*“There are so many fabulous aspects to shared living, especially when it comes to child rearing; I don’t know why more people don’t do it.”*

“I guess it’s unusual, living with each other this way, but it works really well,” Phoebe says. “There are so many fabulous aspects to shared living, especially when it comes to child rearing; I don’t know why more people don’t do it.”

Jemma also started working with Phoebe, helping design the new range of products each season. “We work closely together and are a great team because we have similar taste,” Phoebe says.

“I concept the ranges, pulling together colour palettes and inspirational imagery and then we drill those down into patterns and prints, which Jemma creates. We then move into application; how the products will look. We like to use really traditional techniques in really different ways. I think that’s what makes our products so unique.”

Travel remains the key inspiration for Phoebe and she loves visiting her team in India and exploring new places, whether it’s a different country or a little country town. “I think any new place or experience is exciting,” she says. “Often, I’ll visit a new place – sometimes it’s just a new restaurant – and I’ll see a colour or object that catches my eye.”

Pregnant with her second child, Phoebe says she still relishes her days in the Sage x Clare Melbourne office, where she now has a team of 11, with five more located in India. “It’s funny; I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but now, I’m so passionate about my work. I love what I do and I love my team. It’s a beautiful place to be,” she says. “And, then, at the end of the day, I get to come home to my family and this sanctuary.” ■