

# extra

edited by Jackie McGlone

## Rolf Harris's nature reserve

Rolf Harris: "We wouldn't worry if it all suddenly ended as we had an old shed to work in and keep our bits and pieces . . ."



### Your TV heart-throbs

IT'S ONE thing for us to find Australians funny old hairy extroverts because in a way the joke's on us. If they weren't reacting to what they think is British formality and remoteness with all that cheery mateship, they could be just like anyone else.

But the Germans, what are they supposed to make of them? And in particular the hairiest, manliest and most extrovert of them all Rolf Harris.

A West German network is showing the German-British co-produced Saturday series *Unser Nachbar Aussie charm*. That whatever it is, it's working with them, too!

Is it something to do with having *big* in your living room? Someone you feel you could chat to after the show?

It's a fact that all that Australian determination not to stand on ceremony reaches its highest point in him, and you can watch him in absolute certainty that he'll be so relaxed that you couldn't fear a moment of awkwardness or misunderstanding.

### Open-plan

Even those daff "paintings" have a happy kind of sincere simplicity about them. They escape mere facileness by a brush's breadth. His own enjoyment of the finished product is absolutely charming.

A desire to entertain, that's what shines out of him. And we are not the ones, not the Germans either, it's *us*, to deny him the pleasure.

"Put the kettle on, luv," Mrs. Harris was saying as we rounded the stairs (lined with her and Rolf's paintings and drawings) and although it was two in the afternoon they were just out of bed. "We took Heidi, our daughter, to school then got back in," they said, craning into soup and toast.

We were handed mugs of tea all round, the cleaning lady scurried round our feet busily, the cat meowed friendly with us all, and something of the Harris ambience began to settle round us. To begin with their living quarters take some believing. Rough branches with the bark still on them support numerous shelves which although planned to a proper smoothness have not lost their outer contour. It's not so much a vast open-plan room, which on reflection it is, as a series of little slides, divided by splendid, untamed chunks of nature. They like bits of rock, bottles full of stones, shells, driftwood. Then there like bottles, too. And

are educated stones. And . . . was there anything they didn't like?

Everything from a gramophone horn painted purple as a lampshade to a baluster that Mrs. Harris had decorated to make a mammoth candlestick is there in tremulous cohabitation, colourful order. It all takes some studying.

Mrs. Harris, Alwen, is not at all your usual showbiz wife. Blonde, plump, and positive, she sculpts huge animal heads that are set about the place like decoration time at the zoo.

Rolf takes you into the garden where eucalyptus trees are coming to terms with our climate and a huge lamp standard, also painted purple, sends brilliance both night and day over a motley of broken stained-cloth windows (from which they have made Tiffany shades) and chunks of wood, among the grass and flowerbeds.

"Now we're getting to it there, at the bottom of the garden, is an old coachhouse, the rear of Sydney's past splendour where the Harries come into their own. It's a pottering shed de luxe."

Rolf starts a diamond saw going, picks up a chunk of something from a heap of stones, says, "It's probably agate. It'll look like that," pointing to a window-bottom full of lovely semi-transparent slivers of this and that with the light from the window

coming through them. He slices off a hunk and there revealed for the first time in wood, is the crystal heart of a pebble. You would have, if you'd caught the expression, to be made of stone not to share his excitement.

They both love these geological chunks so much that they called their six-year-old daughter, Heidi, after the town in Australia which carries the aboriginal name for one of these stones — the birds stone.

Lepidaria is a sort of escape hatch for Rolf. A plain, a bed, a washbasin, more rough tree branches, a general bit of mess. Alwen sculpts below. With all this, how can the Harries possibly need us?

Alwen confirms this disturbing thought. "We were only seeing the other day that that is the whole joy of it all. It wouldn't worry us if it suddenly ended, so long as we had an old shed to work in and keep our bits and pieces."

So what about that great desire to entertain? (Rolf is measurable entertaining the Germans with his fractured German, although their English is slightly better than his believes that part of his new-found German excess is that the Germans will take an Aussie ending up their language which they never would an English man.)

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