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By MAREA DONNELLY

Empty beer cans and cartons littered an enclosed front veranda, while the dining room had housed giant aviaries for years, leaving a 50cm-deep layer of bird seed and droppings.

With a price tag reflecting its condition, Marilyn Watson says her three-bedroom Guildford home presented a "very good buy" when she signed up 14 years ago.

"It was a hovel," Watson says. "It had been tenanted for 10 years and had been trashed."

Sitting behind a blue-and-white front picket fence, the 1903-vintage house has a wide wrap-around bull-nosed front veranda under a red and white candy-stripe roof.

Original timber french doors are symmetrically set either side of the central front door



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AWARD WINNER

A Balmoral home designed by architect **Ian Moore** has been listed for sale through Belle Property — Mosman agent **Tim Foote**, with a price guide of \$10 million. The two-year-old, five-bedroom house has achieved accolades, including finalist in the Royal Australian Institute of Architects 2006 Residential housing awards and Steel house of the year 2006. Moore has been a Sydney architect since 1990. His work on the Kings Cross apartment building, Altair, won him Best Housing Scheme in the World at the World Architecture Awards in 2002. Details, 0416 090 191.

PEARL OF A HOUSE

Dr Graeme Hughes, IVF Australia clinical director, and wife **Bronwyn** have put their Pearl Beach holiday home up for auction. PRDnationwide agent **Stuart Gan** says bidding is expected from \$1.5 million. The couple are trading up, having purchased a beachfront mansion in Pearl Beach, through Gan. Bronwyn is leadership research fellow for the Institute of Sustainable Leadership, director of insurer ANVAR and of FM radio station 103.2 FM. The home is open today at noon. Details, 0407 454 974.

GORGEOUS GARDEN PAYS

Smart Landscape Design director **Andrew Donnola** has sold his Bondi semi for \$1.3 million through goodyerDonnelley agent **Jason Pantzer**. Bought in 2004 for \$800,000 the two-bedder was tipped to fetch \$1.1 million, but the renovations and great garden made an impression.

BACK IN THE GAME

Estate agent **Stephen Bock** has launched Ray White Team Bock in Manly. Leaving with key members from McGrath in 2006, Bock returns after a two-year break in a management role.



Powering

This country town owes a lot to mining, writes **MAREA DONNELLY**

In a town where one in four enjoys high incomes from work in mining or electricity generation, sheds are a vital possession. In the upper Hunter town of Muswellbrook, a four-car garage is a popular real estate feature, says L.J. Hooker partner **Phil Lawler**. If the house doesn't already have a shed, buyers want a yard big enough to hold one.

"People are keen on their sheds," he says. "With a high per capita income, people tend to enjoy spending on things like jet skis, boats or motor bikes, so they need a shed for all their toys."

Proposals for three more coal mines and a power station have kept the heat in the Muswellbrook housing market.

Ambulance officer **Tony Rockley** says moving into mine work is a regular conversation in the town of 12,000.

"I've lived here for 20 years and it's grown a fair bit in that time," he says. "It has all the facilities you need in a country town."

The area also has plenty of vineyards, horse studs and general agriculture.

Rockley, whose wife **Annette** grew up in Muswellbrook, says their twins, **Tessa** and **Connor**, 10, are also very happy at the local primary school.

He says preliminary work on new mining projects has created a traffic peak of contract workers from 6am.

Lawler says these workers are firing the rental market, with three-bedroom houses worth about \$330,000 renting for more than \$350 a week.

"Furnished accommodation is at a premium," he says. "Shift workers are happy to live here for four days, then go home for three days."

Lawler says strong rental demand is attracting investors from Newcastle, Sydney, Brisbane and even Perth.

"The town is also attractive to people wanting to get away from Sydney's western suburbs," he says.

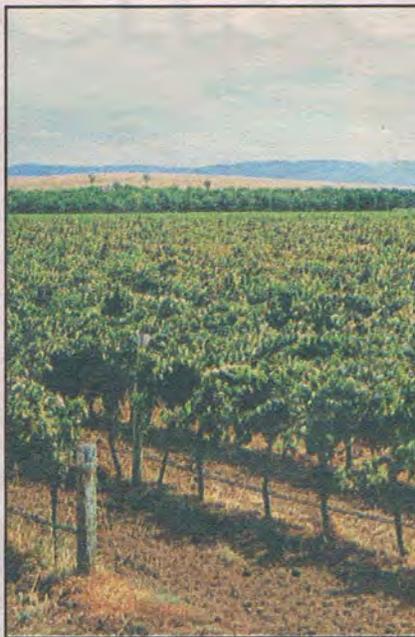
"They can buy land from \$130,000 and build a nice, new house and still be only a few hours from Sydney or two hours to the beach at Port Stephens."

The town has four housing estates under development, with the newer **Eastbrook Links**, **North View** and **St Marys** strongly sought-after.

Old weatherboard cottages near the town centre sell from \$170,000, rising to \$550,000-plus for "grand Federation-style" renovated brick houses in popular **Cook**, **Hill** or **Bligh** streets.

"Modern four-bedroom houses with a swimming pool, good-sized living areas and possibly four garages sell for \$600,000-plus," Lawler says.

The area was discovered by **John Howe** in 1819. Land along the Hunter was surveyed for settlement in 1824



Grapes of plenty . . . aside from being a

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\$275,000

71 Sowerby St

FEATURES > This three-bedroom weatherboard cottage has french doors opening to the front veranda overlooking a rose garden. It also has a lounge room with a combustion fireplace, a large modern kitchen, a renovated bathroom and an above-ground pool in the large backyard.

INSPECT > By appointment
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