

Retro Van



1949 bondwood van pulled by a 1938 Chevy.

Welcome to a 40s Wonderland



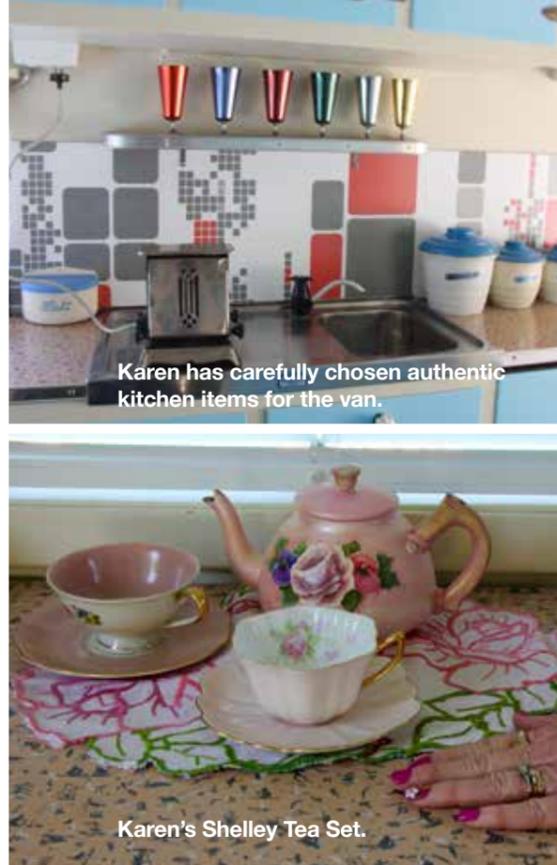
Karen and Lionel showing their swing dance moves.

'I should have been born 20 years earlier', laughs Karen Gayford. They say all people have an era that they are ideally suited to. For Karen and her husband, Lionel, this was the 1940s.

Story and photography by VIVIENNE PEARSON

Not ones to let their date of birth hold them back, Karen and Lionel have embraced the 1940s in all its glory. In addition to their delightfully restored 1949 caravan, the couple's house is full of 40s memorabilia and their garden is richly coloured with older-style flowerbeds. To complete the picture (and to enable the van to be towed in coordinated style), they recently added a 1938 Chevy to the collection. Oh, and they are keen swing dancers!

The caravan is an 11' bondwood van. It is unbranded, most likely having been originally homemade - mail-order plans ad-



Karen has carefully chosen authentic kitchen items for the van.



Karen's Shelley Tea Set.



The van is in demand for afternoon teas.

vertised on the back of magazines was the standard method of caravan acquisition in Australia until into the 1950s.

Karen and Lionel bought the van 18 months ago, in Karen's words: 'after the hard work had been done'. This allowed the couple to work their magic on the external paint and interior design. They know that the previous owner acquired it as an unregistered 'barn find' before restoring it with as many original features as possible. In addition to painting the interior, Karen worked her sewing skills on the curtains and bunting, and has carefully chosen items from her collection to feature in the van, including a set of coloured anodized metal cups and a Shelley tea set.

Despite its immaculate appearance, the van is not just for show. The couple travels with it semi-regularly, including to shows such as Cooly Rocks On and Garter Belts and Gasoline. They are used to becoming the centre of attention everywhere they go. Fortunately, neatness is one of their virtues and they make full use of the extensive stor-

age drawers and cupboards to enable the van to look pristine at all times. 'The van is always uncluttered when we're away as we have a steady stream of visitors', comments Karen, adding that, though they have no intention of doing so, they could easily charge an entrance fee!

One such visitor was Frankie J Holden; of the 50s retro group the 'OI' 55'. Within moments of Karen and Lionel's arrival at the caravan park he owns (Tathra Beach Family Park in southern NSW), Frankie J eagerly lined up for an inspection and a photo.

At that stage, the Chevy was plain blue but was recently painted to match the van. Lionel, a retired mechanic, relishes the job of keeping the engine running smoothly. This is especially before bigger trips. 'We carry a carefully planned list of spare parts', notes Karen.

When not on holiday, the van does not sit idle. It is in demand for morning teas with friends and family. 'Or I just come in by myself', says Karen, looking lovingly around the gorgeous space lit by the sun streaming

through the Venetian blinded windows.

This van was loved even before it was bought. Karen found a clock in the shape of a caravan and brought it home, telling Lionel that she wanted a blue and white van just like that one. At that stage, the couple had finished restoring a larger bondwood van but, as its 14½ foot length was too challenging for the Chevy, it was sold in order to allow space for bringing this new project to life.

Karen and Lionel are living life to the full. It's no big ask for them to dress in 1940s clothes for a photo shoot and they ably demonstrate a couple of neat Lindy Hop dance steps. They share their love of swing dance through teaching a weekly class in their hometown of Lismore (in northern NSW) and clearly relish showcasing their retro van.

The only addition this near-perfect van could possibly need is a calendar from the 1940s, just to reinforce that though most of us are living in 2015, in their world, it's always 1940's time.



The van is used for holiday trips.



1938 Chevy and the 1949 van make a fantastic pair.