



*tale as old  
as time*

Ken Wallis reveals the beauty of pre-loved wares and nature in his store, Seasonal Concepts

WORDS & STYLING VANESSA KEYS PHOTOGRAPHY NICKY RYAN



A florist by trade, Ken's {left} tip when picking flowers is, "Choose in seasons. The blooms last longer and exude a more heady fragrance, and leaves are usually at their best." This Christmas, Ken's bowerbird instincts will be on full display. "I'm creating a tree entirely from soft balls of wool and needles of every shape and size," he says. "I had to take the needles off the shop floor because everyone kept buying them!"

*"My favourite finds* ARE HAND TOOLS FOR TRADES THAT ARE NO LONGER PRACTICED. THE TOOLS ARE COMPLETELY WORN – YOU CAN GRAB THE HANDLES AND FEEL THE SENSE OF THE PERSON'S HAND WHO WORKED WITH IT FOR 40 YEARS OR MORE"

Ken Wallis is a spectacular storyteller, but it's not people populating his beautifully woven narratives. Rather, it's old billy carts, gold-flecked china cups, rusty wartime tea tins and – his newest discovery – a Hoosier all-in-one kitchen cabinet circa 1920 with all its original accessories that he'll happily wax lyrical about for hours. Spend time with Ken among his treasures and, like magic, a seemingly ordinary cabinet transforms into a gleaming relic brimming with heart-stopping history and tales of a life well lived. Add into the mix the collector's enviable ability for unearthing (and reviving) old pieces bound for the junkyard, and it's no wonder he has become Sydney's most sought-after treasure hunter and event stylist.

Working and living out of his Redfern emporium, Seasonal Concepts, Ken and his partner TR take delight in creating Wonderland-like worlds where the wild and the whimsical collide. "I've always been a collector, but it wasn't until 10 years ago that we began to think seriously about our growing stash of old wares," he says. "We started to throw elaborate dinner parties, where we'd decorate our apartment with our finds and gauge our friends' reactions. Even at that early stage, we were fairly out there; we'd mix floral arrangements with old wares. This was before vintage and second-hand gained the popularity that it has today. Our friends loved it and before dinner had finished, would ask if they could buy pieces."





Ken's store, Seasonal Concepts, is a treasure trove of vintage wares. Pre-loved kitchen paraphernalia {left} sits alongside gorgeous decorations {above left & right} while clusters of fresh blooms are scattered throughout the space with snapdragons, chrysanthemum daisies {opposite, top left}, Sweet Williams {bottom left} and Babies Tears {bottom right} on display.

During the festive season, Ken truly comes into his element. Watching him carefully unpack box after box of tiny, twinkly fairy lights and vintage baubles is like seeing a kid let loose in a candy store. Stories of grandiose Christmas trees swathed in a multicoloured wash of jewel-hued decorations and crinkly tinsel evokes unbridled joy. "I have wonderful memories of a particular Christmas event that saw 80 people converge in a wool shed for a hot roast dinner and plum pudding," he recalls. "The fact that it was nearing 50 degrees under the tin roof didn't dampen the fun! For me, Christmas is all about family, friends, food and a nap in the afternoon."

Whether he's creating elaborate festive displays for his store – such as Christmas trees crafted entirely from balls of wool and vintage knitting needles – or styling sophisticated soirees, it's impossible not to get swept up in Ken's highly original take on interior design. "Every piece with which you fill your home should mean something to you. The best interiors are built up over time and evolve slowly; the decorating process should never stop. One coat of paint or a chair doesn't make a home; it's a much richer and deeper tapestry than that."

The Aladdin's cave that is Seasonal Concepts stocks everything from pre-war furniture to kitsch 1970s serving platters, but it's the true blue Australiana relics that get Ken's heart racing. "I find it incredibly sad that anything with an Australian aesthetic, be it glassware or furniture, is immediately undervalued. We should be proud of our history! Last weekend, I found a Depression-era fishing tackle box," he says, eyes lighting up. "All the little shelves inside are made out of cigar boxes, crafted with a fastidious perfection that you just don't experience anymore with mass-produced pieces."

For more information on Seasonal Concepts, call (02) 8399 2435 or visit [seasonalconcepts.com.au](http://seasonalconcepts.com.au). 

## Ken's top 3 tips for a stress-free, stylish Christmas



- 1 "Be at the table, not in the kitchen. There's nothing worse than a host who slaves over their recipes and doesn't socialise. Do as much as you can beforehand and don't sweat over the small stuff. Remember, your guests are there to see you, not the back of your head."
- 2 "Box your presents before wrapping. Not only does boxing the gift eliminate the frustration of wrapping odd shapes, it also enhances the anticipation of what lies beneath! This year I'll be using brown wax paper and industrial bias ribbon in red and blue. And don't forget about the card; sentiment should be written with more heart than head. Don't think, just write!"
- 3 "Let your Christmas tree evolve over time. Throughout the year, I keep my eyes open for special pieces to incorporate into my tree. This year, knitting needles and balls of remnant wool kept catching my eye at the markets, so I decided to create a tree entirely from wool and needles. A little forward thinking makes for an enjoyable creative project rather than a stressful shopping expedition come mid-December. I also like to get kids and friends involved, from the collection to putting it all together – for me, that is the essence of Christmas."