



Lairds at large: an '08 retrospect

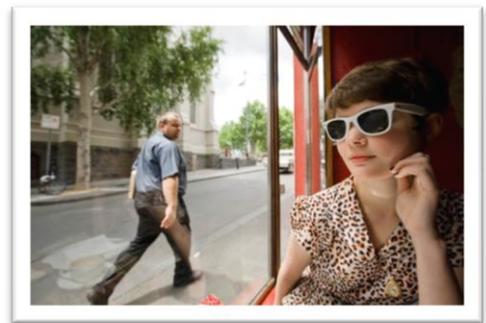
It's been a big year for us all; where to begin? Perhaps the littlest first! Though properly that is **Matilda** (seen vying with Kat for pecking order dominance), it is **Astrid** who has had the biggest impact in her new role as "ball obsessive" for the family. We did not know how important it was to be ball focused until she arrived; she now spends ALL her waking moments remedying this



deficit. Next in line is **Katja**, who has spent the year pursuing her passion for fashion and art – as well as finding *some* time for her VCE. The final year of school is never easy and Kat has given it her best shot. Her art is marvellous – though the shot at the final year exhibition with the girls doing a "face off" does not do her talent justice.



She has got through the folio selection process for Fine Art @ Monash University – so we now await her VCE scores to see whether she's locked in a position. Kat's eye for elegance and parsimonious opportunity shop trawls, have meant she turns eyes whenever she enters a room. (Or sits in a café and allows her father to practise his photographic skills...). Kat has a charming beau; sadly for her away doing a concert in



Sydney while she is at a major concert event in the countryside at Meredith. She has the bad luck of picking the only weekend with really heavy rain in recent memory! **James** has largely completed his

Electrical Engineering Degree. The qualifier, unfortunately, is required as he managed to sleep through a critical exam in June when he mis-read the date. (He does spend a *lot* of time asleep when others are normally awake; much to the irritation of the "parental units"). So he does need to complete this next semester. His "near misses" went on to include exams arrived at on the right day but wrong time, and right day, right time and wrong place; all these permutation however did not have such deleterious consequences!



On the positive side, he won the exhibition prize for the best final year project; well deserved from

his Dad's perspective who had the opportunity evaluate the "competition". James' conceptual and practical engineering skills were streets ahead... (Yeah, yeah, of course that's what a Dad would say!) Some nights prior were spent with parent preparing posters and such; takes one back to primary school projects! In addition to some much needed cash, the result also prompted some job offers and crystallised post-grad opportunities. So James has hopefully lined up a part time job with a Firm that specialises in embedded systems and has found a Masters Supervisor to do an M.Eng.Sc in neurological signal processing. No doubt there will be much of interest to report on this in the future! For the moment, his parents would just be pleased if he cleaned his room and kept more regular hours! Despite these social depravities, his Dad did take him skiing in Aspen in February. Rod's sister, Skippy, also made the trip along with Su's brother and a number of other old friends. **The House** has also been a cause of some aggravation as the





glacially slow water management and garage makeover projects wound their way to expensive fruition. On the right you can see (in addition to picking out Astrid and her ball centre stage) the new “Studio” in this veggie patch panorama. The windows provide great light for Su’s work area and there is



much more space for everything – in part because of a large (high load capacity) mezzanine storage area. “Su’s 50th” kiln also arrived to join its bigger brother, providing lots of capacity and versatility. After nearly 18 months, our water recycling, storage and irrigation systems have been completed and as of this week “certified for use” by the local council. (Of course we’ve been using it for months). The formal usage requirements are bureaucratic overkill – including such demands as “burying all irrigation lines 15cm deep”; needless to say we ignored these and so did the inspectors...

We now have some 14,000l of storage and manufacture ~300l/day from waste water – securing the garden against the inevitable dire water restrictions of the future. Don’t ask what this costs. The upshot of all this is that **Su** (in addition to being ravishingly beautiful as you can see in her “vampire victim” fetish outfit [Halloween]), has better infrastructure for her creativity both through her beautiful garden and her extraordinary ceramics. The creative process has not however been without its frustrations as glazes have failed to



perform as expected, bodies have cracked and the myriad other things that can go wrong, all too often did. Despite these set-backs, she has created much of great beauty – increasingly inspired by Islamic forms and motifs. For most of the year she has also been working as an associate at the Stonehouse Gallery in Warrandyte north of Melbourne. Her works have been increasingly popular – and she now has a significant backlog of commissioned work. The associate membership of the gallery turned out to be more time intensive than useful however, so’09 will continue to see



her works on sale there – but she will be free to enjoy her Studio more productively. Her full gamut of activities remains exhausting to recount though wonderful to behold. She continues as a Selector for the Australian Open Garden Scheme, which in addition to allowing us to be deployed as volunteer help at other people’s open gardens, allows her to hunt for new gardens to exhibit. She has turned out to be a very successful hunter, bringing half a dozen wonderful



new gardens into the scheme for next year's programme. (Rod gets to photograph the gardens which he much enjoys – the gums of a western district property on the left being an example). Su did manage a much deserved respite in September in a quick trip to England for a reunion with the International Quilters of Düsseldorf – this year in the Lakes District. She also managed to squeeze in some time with friends in London and with relatives near

Liverpool. (And take some photos of the countryside viz LHS). Her quilting continues as she returned; she has just completed a lovely baby quilt for a new family arrival... Oh – and she manages all this while also keeping the family and household on track.

Rod has nothing like this cornucopia of creativity and productivity to report. He has been very lucky to have had some wonderful clients that have provided the opportunity for challenging and interesting work and some great friendships. Friends and family have also

been a part of Rod's regular weekly cycling around the beach area of Melbourne – some also joined the skiing in Aspen. A decent camera at last has removed all excuses except lack of talent from Rod's passion for photography. Some of his work you can see at rodlaird.com. Renaissance dance has also continued to find a place in the schedule, but the pistol shooting and astronomy hobbies have had to take a back seat against other priorities. **2009** has many new challenges for us all. Katja at University, James a post-grad, Su really getting on top of her ceramics production. Despite the dire financial environment, it appears there will be some opportunities



for Rod – though the workload may be down a bit on this year. It may be the opportunity to do some interesting pro bono work in the research sector – and perhaps learn some creative skills in the photographic area from people who actually know what they are doing. Katja and James are both threatening (or being threatened...) to leave home in the new year, so this may bring its own excitements for them and us. What is certain is that we all are off to Morocco and Spain on boxing day for three weeks, followed by a week in (cold rainy) Paris before returning home to sunny Oz on James' 21st birthday. "Islamic Culture" is the

theme of the most of the tour – but there will be much, much more I'm sure. Su has kindly allowed Rod to return once more to Aspen in February too – with many of the same friends as last year; fortunately mostly paid for when the AUD/USD was above 90¢... So much excitement ahead – both known and unknown. Reports will follow!

