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JULY/AUGUST 2017

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Universal Magazines NO. 122 VOL. 20 NO. 4 AUS \$8.95* NZ \$8.90 (both incl. GST)

ISSN 1323-9708



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Zagy, the dappled gelding, makes himself at home in Zephyr's HQ shack out in the bush.

CHASING A ZEPHYR

A DARING YOUNG EQUESTRIAN HARNESSES HER THIRST FOR ADVENTURE TO BUILD A BOUTIQUE HORSE-RIDING BUSINESS BESIDE ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST FAMOUS BEACHES.

STORY & STYLING BY TAMARA SIMONEAU, PHOTOGRAPHY ANASTASIA KARIOFLIDIS

It's a special feeling atop a horse, ask anyone who's been there. There's a tangible bond between rider and steed that stands alone. For some it conjures a feeling that can't be lived without, as natural as breathing. Kate Moller first inhaled the intoxicating lure of the saddle before she started school, thanks to her mum. "Mum was always a horse person, so I guess she got me into it initially," she says. "She always had us around horses, but I really started to ride when I was four years old. There was no stopping me after that. I love everything about them, especially the smell. Zephyr is the west wind in Greek mythology — it's that feeling you get when you ride, the wind in your hair, feeling free."

An adventurer by nature, Kate took every opportunity that came her way to spend time with horses during her childhood in Cabarita, on the New South Wales Tweed Coast. "We used to race our horses down the beach after school, seeing who could turn around to sit backwards in a gallop and then turn back again," she recalls of days spent mastering bareback riding. "People definitely gave us some strange looks. Everyone has their own opinion but I believe riding bareback allows you to connect with your horse a lot better. It teaches you movement and focus. People get lazy in saddles sometimes, so bareback riding every now and then is a good way to freshen up."

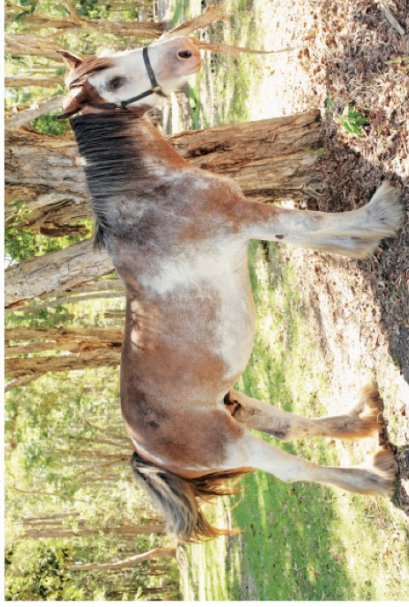
By 12 she was learning equestrian vaulting — described as gymnastics on horseback — with some equally fearless friends. "Back then vaulting was really new to Australia, so it was exciting and fresh," she says. "Horse riding is always a bit daring if you push the limits but vaulting was such great fun. Like anything, some of those first attempts were scary."

They were soon travelling the east coast of Australia, performing at shows big and small, including Sydney's Royal Easter Show and Brisbane's Ekka. "It was a beautiful team spirit we had and we travelled around with this sense of freedom," Kate recalls. "It didn't come without injury though. I've had big injuries from horses like most riders. We were lucky enough to have a beautiful big





Kate takes Zoh for a stretch, with trail guide Jordie and pooch Brutus along for the ride.



“I always had some sort of a dream close to my heart but had no idea I would one day open a business based around the horses.”

Percheron horse named Barney. If we fell underneath him he would jump us to avoid stepping on us. One time at the Toowoomba Show in Queensland, I was strapped in sitting backwards and Barney slipped and fell on my leg. He just lay there really calmly until people were able to help get me out from underneath him. Having such a calm, gentle horse like him actually prevented a lot of injuries.”

Afterwards came stints mustering in the New South Wales Northern Tablelands, and breaking in stock horses from western Queensland, but it was time spent working at Iesters Flat, an equestrian farm and vineyard near Margaret River in WA that resurrected a long-held dream. “I just thought, ‘wow, these guys are just amazing,’” she says. “Even though back then I had no idea I would one day open my own space, they really set an exceptional standard of quality.”

Three years ago Kate settled in Byron Bay, not far down the coast from her childhood home, with her son Jasper. And 18 months ago a new baby came into her world — her own business, on a lush piece of Aussie bush beside Byron’s five star resort, Elements of Byron. “I always had some sort of a dream close to my heart but had no idea I would one day open a business with horses,” she says. “I always just enjoyed working with them. I constantly had friends asking me if they could come riding or come and visit and use my horses for photo shoots and it just got me thinking about starting a new type of trail riding in the area.”

Zephyr: Horses is Byron Bay’s only trail-riding

Clockwise from this pic: Kate takes a break on the veranda; the shack was built as a set for a TV series; Zola the Clydesdale is the star of the show; artwork captures the freedom of Zephyr. Pure shaving wool throw and leather-free sheep rug on rocking chair from Magnolia Lane (magnoliainc.biz).





Clockwise from right: Kate and Zola are the core talent of Byron Bay's only trail-riding experience; leading riders out on a beach trek; Kate says riding bareback improves the connection between rider and horse.



“When I took over, we renovated the property to keep it looking rustic and very authentically Aussie.”

experience, and Kate makes it her mission to capture the spirit of her own life on horseback in every ride she leads. “I am a perfectionist and really push to deliver something special for our guests,” she says. “I understand that for most people our tour will either be the highlight of their holiday or a once-in-a-lifetime thing — riding along one of the most beautiful beaches in Australia and through our private beachside tracks.”

She has a staff of seven, and a stable of 15 beloved horses including Zola the Clydesdale, who has been the star of many weddings and fashion shoots and now is an *Australian Country* model. Zephyr headquarters is a picture-perfect old shack, built on the land as a set for the ABC series *East of Everything*. “When I took over, we renovated the property to keep it looking rustic and very authentically Aussie,” Kate says.

Not one to sit still in the saddle, Kate has big plans ahead, including mounted archery lessons. “We want to have something for everyone to do and want to be able to offer different and fun challenges around horses,” she says enthusiastically. At the ripe old age of 30, this horsewoman has set a cracking pace so far, and she’s enjoying every second of it. “It’s an opportunity not many people get to live out, so I am very, very grateful,” she says. *AC*