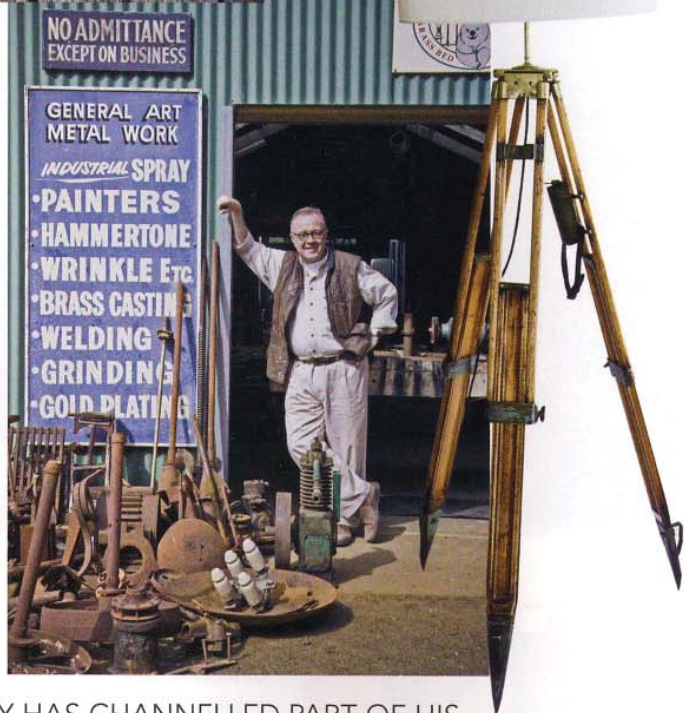




enterprise | BOWRAL NSW

FROM LEFT Each lampshade is made to suit its base; the old Wombat Hollow sign; Michael outside his shed; a lamp made from a surveyor's tripod. BELOW A French breadboard base supports an antique drill and a shade of box-pleated white silk.



light touch

FORMER NSW MINISTER MICHAEL YABSLEY HAS CHANNELLED PART OF HIS POST-POLITICAL LIFE TO TURNING DISCARDED MACHINERY INTO UNIQUE LAMPS.

BOWLING BALLS. For some they're trophies of retirement but as the former Liberal politician Michael Yabsley winds down his public life, he's not planning on rolling them down a green any day soon. To Michael, the beauty of an old bowling ball — or, come to that, an old washing mangle — is as enticing as a commissioned work of art and it's such treasures that have become the signature of the Wombat Hollow Iron Bed & Lamp Co.

"I've been restoring iron beds for quite some time now but a few years ago I found some beautiful old surveyor's tripods, so I made them up as lamps. After that I just kept seeing lamp bases everywhere!" says Michael, now a director of Government Relations Australia after a parliamentary career that included stints as NSW Minister for Tourism and Corrective Services. "Just recently I found a fantastic old leather bowls bag, complete with its set of balls, perfect for a lamp base. The only hard part is finding a drill bit to get through them!"

Michael, his wife Susie, daughter Alex, 14, and son Edward, 21 (when he's visiting from Sydney), live at the end of a meandering driveway deep in the bush outside Bowral in the NSW Southern Highlands. At the bottom of the garden, flanked by a chook house full of bantams and the odd territorial goose, is Michael's shed. It's here, surrounded by a collection of old pieces, that you will find Michael and the family's loyal companion Harley, an English springer

spaniel, designing the bases and shades to transform relics into unique pieces of designer lighting.

"I'm fanatical and obsessive about collecting artefacts — and I use the term 'artefacts' because I regard them almost as affordable art," Michael says.

Ask him to describe the pieces collected at sales, auctions and scrap-metal yards over the years and you'll see a twinkle in his eye. As Michael strokes the aged patina on an old industrial drill it's easy to appreciate his enthusiasm for design and form. "If you were to brief a designer or an artist to make something as intricate and beautiful as this drill, it could take them up to a year," he says.

Finding the right piece is just as important as perfecting the scale and proportion of the shade — each one is made to suit the individual base.

The materials range from pigskin and porcupine quills to Spanish hessian and pleated silk.

Michael inherited his love of collecting from his mother, an avid patron of auctions and sales. Recently this love of seeking out "orphan artefacts" has recruited the third generation, with Alex joining her father on a two-week trip to the central west of rural NSW. "We packed our bags into the flat-bed truck and had a fantastic time digging up old pieces and visiting friends at their properties along the way," Michael says. *

Contact Wombat Hollow Iron Bed & Lamp Co on (02) 4888 2011; www.wombathollow.net.au

