MY GEELONG

Geelong artist Barbara Gleeson has a strong passion for animals and art and has been creating different styles of art all of her life. She talks to Justin Flynn about what it means to live here.

(Supplied)

What's your connection to the region?
I have been in Geelong since I was two. I did all of my schooling here – Tate Street Primary School and Geelong High. I completed year 11.

My husband and I had three hairdressing salons – Styleway and after a number of years we both became TAFE teachers and I taught for 18 years at the Gordon Hairdressing Department.

What do you like about where you live?
I love to be on the coast, love the sea breezes, and it's a great place for schooling our three children.

What, if anything, would you change about where you live?
It makes me so sad to see our city as it is, empty shops everywhere. I can nearly shed tears over the state of my home town.

Where is your favourite local place to spend time?
When I was younger I would say our great beaches, now I like to find interesting and great places to go for lunch. Some gems are Cucina 12, Sawyers Arms Tavern, The Dunes and Fork and Flower. I'm still looking for places, though.

Tell us something people would be surprised to know about you.
A lot of people still see me as a hairdresser, which I was, but I have been creating art since 2009. My husband Leo and I travelled a great deal and then we found Africa. We just kept going back. We had four trips there before my husband died of cancer in 2018. I was supposed to go again to Africa, taking my daughter with me, in 2020, but then the pandemic hit. To me it is wonderful to see the magnificent animals there, in their natural habitat, where I could photograph nature at its best.

What project are you working on now?
I find even now that I must be creative and therefore I am still spending days and weeks creating wildlife art. Something deep inside me says I must use this natural wish to create. I have always loved a challenge. It is a big part of my nature, and I have always loved animals.

Offering local building solutions

By Elle Cecil

Left: John and Anita Ekberg are deeply proud of their team of local employees and subcontractors and their support for the community. **Above:** Coastyle Building Solutions specialise in custom homes, new builds, renovations and extensions on the Bellarine Peninsula, Surf Coast and surrounding area. (Pictures: Supplied)

Established in 2007 by husband and wife team John and Anita Ekberg, Coastyle Building Solutions is a family friendly, community proactive company.

Specialising in custom homes, new builds, renovations and extensions, corporate social responsibility (CSR) runs in the veins of Coastyle Building Solutions. Combining a strong local focus, care of its workplace and an eye to the growing needs of the community, Coastyle gives employment to over 40 trades in the region, all while promoting and contributing to local schools and community groups.

"We're not out to become the biggest builder in Australia, not even slightly interested. We really want to make sure the work we do is very good and that we're known for our skillsmanship, but also that we're well known for being active in our community," Anita explains.

Registered builder John and interior designer Anita are extremely proud of their involvement in the community, from sponsoring and donating to local charities and sporting clubs to employing a team full of local tradespeople.

"We get so involved with the local community, and that's our business model. We hire local, we work local, all our team are local, we support local suppliers and traders," Anita says.

"Our proudest achievement is probably the fact that our 12 full-time employees have all come through apprenticeships with us and they want to stay, and that we've trained around 20 apprentices to go on to other jobs in the industry."

As the winner of the 2021 Geelong Business Excellence Awards (GBEAs) Corporate Social Responsibility Award, sponsored by gen U, Coastyle Building Solutions has once again entered the Geelong Business Awards, aiming to add to its collection of achievements, including consecutively winning HIA Victorian Small Professional Builder of the Year six times, and representing Victoria at the National Awards from 2016 to 2021.

Anita explains that the decision to enter the GBEAs this year is a testament to the hard work of Coastyle's amazing staff and that it helps to highlight the increasing need for businesses to support the local community.

"Doing the Geelong Business Excellence Awards, it gives us a chance to really focus on why we're doing things and that our focus is on being part of the local socioeconomic group and how important it is that we are part of Geelong," Anita says.

"It's a real chance to have a look at your business from the inside out, but then also have somebody else look at your business and show you ways you can improve. It's the opportunity to step away from the day-to-day running and really think about who you are, where you're going and what you want to achieve."

The 2022 Geelong Business Excellence Awards are proudly brought to you by major sponsor LBW Business and WealthAdvisors.

The awards are open to clever, creative and connected businesses, business leaders and young entrepreneurs, and provide a platform to celebrate businesses that have adapted, survived or thrived over the last 12 months.

Entries to the 2022 Geelong Business Excellence Awards are now open and close on July 15. You do not need to be nominated to enter the awards.

For more information and to enter the awards, visit www.gbea.com.au.