A
one point, you could switch on a TV almost anywhere in the world and you'd see an ... beauty is very interesting.”

Country cuties to city chic!

McLeod’s Daughters reunion
LOOK AT US NOW!

It’s been 11 years since the series burst onto our screens, and the girls of Drover’s Run are as gorgeous as ever. Michala, Bridie, Jessica and Lisa tell PHILLIP KOCH how they stop the clock

LISA CHAPPELL
Gone McLeod (first 3 Seasons)
Lisa spent the past five years in her birthplace of New Zealand, but now the happily single actress lives in Sydney with her adored five-year-old Shih Tzu, George.

A very youthful 44, Lisa insists the does nothing extreme to maintain her movie star looks, but she does credit 14 years of being a vegetarian for her enviable figure.

“I’m not annoying – I don’t work hard at it,” she confesses. “I eat a lot and drink, but I don’t have a car, so I do walk everywhere, and I walk my dog George a lot too.

“A girlfriend who’s known me for 25 years recently said she wanted to become a vegetarian, because my figure hadn’t changed in that time. It helped her stabilise her weight. I’m not stick thin, but I’m happy with the way I look.”

Lisa embraces getting older, saying the only real difference is in the types of acting roles she is offered.

“I don’t have a problem with aging in terms of looks, and I don’t feel the need to get Botox,” she says. “I’m not saying it’s wrong for people to do it – I just don’t have any looking at my age.”

Lisa single following her 2006 divorce, but admits she may have missed her opportunity to become a mum.

“That’s the sad aspect of getting older, but I’m at peace with that now,” says Lisa, who relishes the time spent caring for her children.

“I adore my kids and husband,” smiles Bridie. “I’m very grateful for my family life – it’s number one for me – but I’m also passionate about my work. I need to work. It’s the great juggling act that all women know, work and family, and I believe we can have both.”

Lisa must recently starred in Wild Boys, Rescue Special Ops, as well as the movie I Love You Too, and for the past two years has been developing her own series.

“Staying living in a natural paradise helps the busy mum maintain her healthy glow. And that includes eating lots of raw vegetables. Bridie was a vegetarian before she started work on McLeod’s in 2000, when she was diagnosed with an iron deficiency. She ate meat every day before then on, to help boost her energy levels. And now she’s happy to embrace her punishing workload.

“I love cooking for my family – most of the time – and cook every night,” she says. “Because we’re in the country, we don’t have the luxury of take-out, but I don’t feel my family anything processed or pre-prepared. Cooking with love makes all the difference.”

Lisa, who followed up McLeod’s Daughters with a role in the TV series House, is ready to get several acting and writing projects off the ground, after appearing on stage in New Zealand

BRIDIE CARTER
Tess Silverman-McLeod (first 6 seasons)
Bridie’s still breathing in fresh country air, but nowhere near the McLeod’s location in rural South Australia. She lives on a property near Byron Bay on the NSW north coast, and continues to travel interstate for work. Married to Michael Wilson, she is mum to Otis, 7, and Tallow, 2, and stepmom to James, 15.

“Tess’s location in rural South Australia was so beautiful to be in the countryside,” says Bridie, who left the show in 2006 after nursing her Shih Tzu, George, through a cancerous lump.

“I still miss Claire,” says Lisa of her character, who was killed off in a truck accident in 2003, leaving fans shattered. “I loved playing her, but it’s Bridie Carter who really amazes her.

“Bridie looks exactly the same – it’s quite remarkable,” she says. “But then, they all look remarkable. I think it’s inevitable that we have all changed, but my time on McLeod’s really does seem just like yesterday.”

Bridie, Lisa and Jessica were in the original cast, which included Rachael Carpani, Aaron Jeffery, Myles Pollard, Sonia Todd, John Jarratt and Brett Tucker. Simmone Jade Mackinnon joined in Season 3, while Matt Passmore, Luke Jacobz and Abi Tucker starred in later seasons.

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Nobody rocks an Akubra like these girls, but Michala, Bridie, Lisa and Jessica relish the chance to glam it up, city-girl style.

Michala can’t believe it’s around 10 years since Lisa Chappell and Jessica Napier left the show, as they’ve barely changed – though Lisa has lopped off her locks. But it’s Bridie Carter who really amazes her.

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JESSICA NAPIER
Becky Howard
(first 3 seasons)
Since becoming a mum to little Emily last September, Jess has toned down her workout regime. “I used to be a mad exerciser. Now I just take the time I get! My husband [David] commits to coming home early two nights a week so I can do a gym class, usually yoga or spin.”

Maintaining a fitness regime during pregnancy saw Jessica bounce back from her baby weight quickly, however, she’s quick to point out to other mums that she didn’t put a huge amount of pressure on herself to get back into shape. “I just gave my body what it wanted and nourished myself,” says Jessica, who’s been a vegetarian since the age of four. “I kept exercising the whole way through, and practised yoga and did boxing until I was 30 weeks pregnant. I did lots of walking in the last 10 weeks.”

Her great love is Ashtanga yoga, and she does a 90-minute session every Sunday, while Emily provides lots of incidental weight training. “I push an eight-kilo baby around in a seven-kilo pram, which any mum will tell you is punishing!”

Jess has also been kept busy on the small screen. She’ll be seen later this year in new ABC series Janet King, a spin-off of the successful legal drama Crownies.

MICHALA BANAS
Kate Manfredi (seasons 4-8)
While life “on the farm” kept her fit, when it comes to exercise, Michala’s the first to admit she could do more. “I go for walks, but really, I’m terrible,” says the 34-year-old. “I’m quite lazy in terms of exercising, and that’s the honest truth. I’m just lucky, because I’m naturally small. “I have a generally healthy diet, but it’s more through need than desire – I’m intolerant to many foods. A few years ago I got a virus, and was diagnosed with fructose malabsorption, which means I’m allergic to certain foods because they do crazy things to my body. So, I eat pretty healthy food now. It’s a curse, because I do love a meat pie!”

Michala says the physical aspect of McLeod’s was initially daunting, although she fell in love with the great outdoors during her four-year stint. “There was something really empowering about hanging out with guys who taught us how to ride and work with animals,” she says.

These days, Michala’s hanging out with just one guy – fiancé Kade. She announced her engagement to the actor/videographer last year, and the pair plan to marry next year.

For now, Michala, who also appeared in Winners & Losers, is excited to be starring alongside Glenn Robbins and Robyn Nevin in upcoming series Upper Middle Bogan.