

NZ Life

& Leisure

OUR WAY OF LIFE

The Slow Road

The Pooles' family life on the road, soaking in what's important

The Art of Celebrating

Evie Kemp gets us in the festive spirit

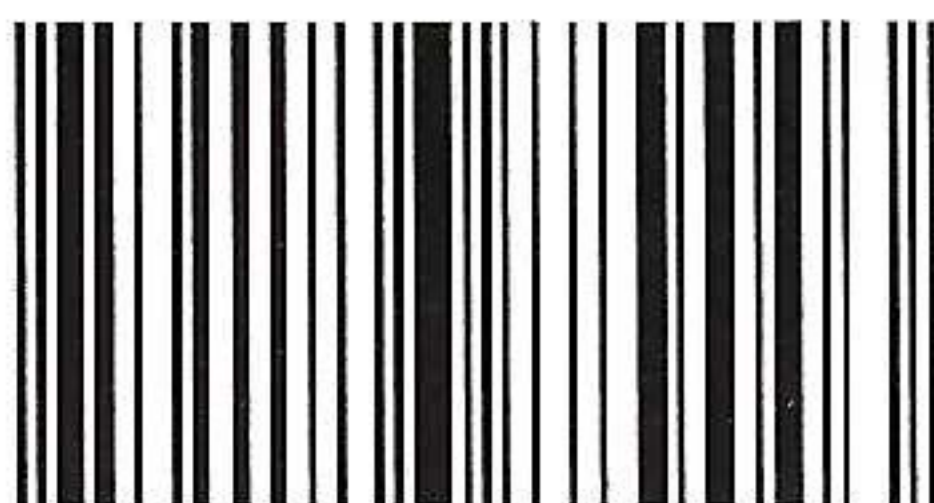
A FLORAL LOVE STORY

Laura Tait's Puhoi haven



\$14.50 incl GST

Issue 118 Dec - Jan 2025



9 771176 889003

METAL ARTISTS IN HAWKE'S BAY / A MITEY GOOD SPREAD IN AUCKLAND / PIGEON BAY'S KORUKAI HERB F
GARDENING IN WAIRARAPA / MOTORING IN LINCOLN / THE RARE HAMILTON'S FROG IN WELLINGTON & M



More Than a Gardener's Paradise

Tucked away in one of the eastern bays of the Banks Peninsula, Cornelia Holten and her family are quietly building a local herb farm treasure with a global reach.

Words **Kathy Catton** Photos **Cornelia Holten**

CORNELIA AND KAI Holten never expected, on arriving in New Zealand 10 years ago, that they would be growing herbs and running a successful sustainable herb business from their backyard in Pigeon Bay. The couple moved from Germany in 2009 and settled on a small home in Christchurch. Kai was a software engineer, and Cornelia was a primary school teacher. Things were pretty normal. But coming from a rural village in southern Germany, they were used to being in the countryside, and so when they rediscovered their love of nature, the writing was on the wall.

'Our property in Christchurch had a small vege garden, but by the time we left there to move to Pigeon Bay, we had no lawn left,' smiles Cornelia. 'We had seen our grandparents working the land, milking the cows, tending the soil, and we both realised we wanted the same thing.' So they sold up in Christchurch and moved to a 15-acre property in Pigeon Bay in 2013, intending to become self-sufficient.

As part of this ambition, Cornelia undertook a herb apprenticeship at Phytofarm in Little River, where she received thorough instruction in the growing, harvesting, processing and manufacturing of a wide range of herbal products. At the end of the course, the students were set the task of creating their own product, coming up with a company name and creating something unique. 'My son was just one year old at the time, and so I created the Baby Bottom Balm to deal with nappy rash. I was pregnant with my daughter, so I showed the product to my midwife, and she loved it.'

Husband Kai soon came on board with the idea of starting a business, and in January 2015 the couple launched their herbal remedy business with just three products and a website. 'I look back now, and I wonder how I managed it,' she reflects. 'In between naptimes for the children and establishing the property we had just bought, I managed to create a business.'

It is this unwavering dedication that comes across when talking with Cornelia. She loves what she does and believes passionately in making a difference in people's lives.

Ten years on, the business is selling products to as far afield as France, Germany and Singapore, as well as to every corner of New Zealand. She is growing more and more herbs each year, with a total of 90 different varieties now growing. The herbs are grown chemical-free and follow the BioGro standard for organic production. Although the farm is not certified organic at this stage, it seems almost an academic exercise. With all the herbs being visible from the house and readily available, there is no need to worry about sprays or irradiation. 'Everything gets my attention when it needs it,' states Cornelia. 'We only work with small batches of herbs, so I know everything about each herb's journey.'

Harvesting starts in spring with leafy crops like plantain and ends in winter with



‘We want to teach people how to grow their own organic produce filled with nutrition and love.’

medicinal roots like echinacea, liquorice and valerian, ‘giving us a total harvest of one tonne of plant material per year’, says Cornelia. ‘Harvesting of herbs is done at the peak when they are full of volatile oils and potency to achieve the best possible results. We harvest by hand, and dry them on racks in a solar-ventilated drying shed.’

The purpose-built solar-ventilated drying shed keeps the herbs away from direct sunlight allowing the colour and potency of the herbs to be maintained. Once dried, the herbs are further processed by hand to remove stalks and other unwanted plant materials like grass or weeds. ‘The herbs are then used in our various product ranges – blended into herbal teas, extracted for the health remedies and incorporated into our skincare products.’

‘All of our inputs are also made right on the farm: compost, compost extract, vermicast and fish hydrolysate,’ she

explains. ‘They inoculate our seeds, bring vitality to the soil and introduce vital soil microorganisms to cycle nutrients for our plants.’

‘We believe that our health is anchored and directly related to the health of the soil. Chemical-free, seasonal, local and nutrient-dense food makes and keeps us healthy and strengthens our immune system. We enjoy sharing our knowledge of organic horticulture, herbalism, wild medicinal plants and fermentation.’

‘The highlight of my job has to be when I get an email from a customer who has bought one of our products, and it’s turned their life around,’ states Cornelia. ‘Summer can be a very intense time for us. Sometimes everything is ready at once. We are harvesting, drying and processing and then packing orders and shipping them out. Knowing we are making a difference keeps us going.’

The motivation of raising healthy children has led Cornelia and Kai to continually evolve the business. They have expanded their range to include herbal teas, household and cleaning products and health remedies alongside the natural skincare range. They also run workshops and farm tours to educate others and reconnect people with nature. ‘We want to teach people how to grow their own organic produce filled with nutrition and love,’ she explains, ‘and help them create wholesome nourishing food, while bringing back health and wellbeing to the home garden and kitchen where it belongs.’

From an unexpected beginning, Cornelia has grown a haven of wellness in the form of her modest herb garden. But broader than just this, she has created a beautiful family business, in tune with her philosophies and beliefs around wellbeing and living off the land, with the capacity to touch many people’s lives. ●



ABOVE LEFT KoruKai Herb Farm overlooking Pigeon Bay. **MIDDLE** The new drying shed with 72 trays makes drying herbs a breeze. **RIGHT** Elecampane crown ready to plant in its winter dormancy. **TOP OF PAGE** Kai harvesting lavender flowers with a flower rake.