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NOVEMBER
2007

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GARDEN of Eden

After thirty-five years away from New Zealand, Bobbie Martin has found her heartland among verdant hills on the outskirts of Nelson

STORY: LYNDA HALLINAN PHOTOGRAPHS: STEVE WOOSTER





When Bobbie Martin, born and bred in Matamata, set off abroad on her big OE in 1967, she didn't expect that it would take her thirty-five years to return home. "I'm a slow learner," she jokes.

Along the way she acquired an Australian husband, Peter, and a career in interior and garden design including qualifications from London's Inchbald School of Design and the city's renowned Chelsea Physic Garden (featured in *NZ House & Garden*, February 2007).

But, when Bobbie and Peter decided to relocate to New Zealand in 2002, the deal took closer to thirty-five hours than thirty-five years to clinch. They signed up to buy the first property the real estate agent showed them, a nineteen-hectare lifestyle block nestled between Motueka and Upper Moutere on the outskirts of Nelson.

"We went from shopping at Harvey Nichols in London on the Friday to New World in Motueka on the Monday but I wouldn't have changed a thing. As soon I stood on the hill with amazing views down Orinoco Valley, I knew that this was where we were meant to be," Bobbie recalls. ➤



THESE PAGES: Bobbie has since planted white and lilac wisteria that will drape over this spa pergola. The jagged silver foliage of architectural cardoons (*Cynara cardunculus*) is dramatic in summer beside an outdoor entertaining area adorned with pots of perennial daisies. Bobbie and Peter Martin.

PREVIOUS PAGES: Edenhouse, framed by the branches of a fruiting walnut tree and a border of golden perennial phlomis in the foreground; against the house wall, the early-flowering ornamental cherry *Prunus* 'Awanui' is a favourite haunt for local wood pigeons.



“When we haven’t got guests, I’m in the garden every day. Sometimes

And who could blame them? Who wouldn’t want to come home to an elegant English-style country house enveloped by expansive verdant lawns and romantic perennial borders studded with fragrant David Austin roses, not to mention a heritage fruit tree orchard overlooking the valley?

Of course, none of it, bar the valley views, was here when Bobbie and Peter bought the farmlet. “The paddocks hadn’t been fenced or fertilised in years; there were some lovely trees but nothing in the way of a garden – we knew it was going to be a huge challenge. The original 1860s cottage, although adorable, was full of borer and had to be dismantled.”

Bobbie drew up plans for the couple’s new house before they left England, faxing her instructions to Mapua builder Paul Nankevell. She designed a gracious but understated home with two spacious suites upstairs to offer lodge-style accommodation for guests. “I was a little nervous because I’d gutted heaps of houses for clients but I’d never built one from scratch. But Paul and his team were wonderful to work with.”

While the house was being built, Bobbie and Peter lodged with the borer in the old cottage. Then they dismantled it, salvaging the foundation stones to edge the paved terrace outside their new kitchen.

They couldn’t bear to demolish the property’s charming old barn, however, so they relocated and renovated it. It has now been converted to offer a further stylish suite in the heart of the leafy garden.

Since starting the garden three years ago, they’ve planted more than five thousand trees. There’s a mix of natives and exotics, from golden kowhai and stately totara to magnolias, dogwoods and cherry blossoms.

In the orchard there’s a plum circle “instead of a plumb line,” jokes Bobbie, ever the designer. There are heritage apples, almonds, nectarines, feijoas, olives and sour morello cherries and, in their second year in the ground, the ‘Blackboy’ peach trees produced so much fruit that Bobbie stocked up her pantry with homemade peach jam.



our guests even join me."

Guests can also enjoy fresh vegetables from the garden. Bobbie grows globe artichokes, curly kale, spinach, sorrel, masses of herbs and succulent strawberries in beds that are hedged with *Photinia* 'Red Robin' to echo the ruby stems of her Swiss chard.

Annie, the couple's Labrador and unofficial "guest liaison officer", makes short work of fallen walnuts but knows she's not allowed to eye up the local quails, pheasants or paradise ducks. Edenhouse is also home to native tui, bellbirds, yellowhammers, chaffinches and thrushes. Under the eaves, opportunistic swallows are already nesting. ▷

THESE PAGES: The garden boasts panoramic views over the Orinoco Valley. The bird sculpture, by artist Tim Wraight, marks the spot where the original wooden cottage stood. When Annie the dog, and unofficial "guest liaison officer", isn't basking on the sun-warmed paving slabs, she's gobbling fallen walnuts.





Bobbie harvests globe artichokes (*Cynara scolymus*) from her prolific vegetable patch. The view from the dining room takes in this formal fountain flanked by a trio of potted native cordylines. Giant hogweed, pink valerian and foxgloves thrive beneath lime trees (*Tilia cordata*) that have since been pleached.

The birds keep the bugs under control and swoop in to feed on nectar-rich seasonal flowers. Bobbie is a floral fanatic, indoors and out. She collects botanical prints, seeks out floral fabrics for curtains and cushions and always has “a house full of cut flowers”.

In early spring, she picks daffodils, daphne and grape muscari, followed by paeonies and scented summer roses. There are hardy *Rugosas*, including crimson ‘Roseaie de l’Hay’ and the superb white ‘Blanc Double de Coubert’. A fragrant climber, ‘Kiftgate’, spills out of an apple tree and ‘Constance Spry’ and ‘Gertrude Jekyll’ are favourites for the vase. Bobbie is also a regular visitor to the specialist rose nursery Tasman Bay Roses, conveniently located nearby.

How much time does she spend working in the garden, I ask. “It’s not work,” counters Bobbie, “because I love it. When we haven’t got guests, I’m in the garden every day. Sometimes our guests even join me. One American lady with a small, formal garden had a lovely time out here with the snippers.”

The ever-expanding garden at Edenhouse now covers three hectares but Bobbie has no plans to put down her spade just yet. “When I get to nineteen hectares, then I’ll know it’s time to stop,” she confesses with a smile. ■