

A kinder magic

Nestled on river's edge, enclosed by sub-tropical gardens, Magic Cottage lives up to its name



PHOTOGRAPH BY MEGAN BOWERS



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZANNE MCNALLY



MORE THAN 10,000 NATIVE TREES HAVE BEEN PLANTED AROUND THE FARM OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, WITH THE AIM OF INCREASING THE BIODIVERSITY OF THE AREA AND CREATING A 'KIWI CORRIDOR'

Magic Cottage is built for two. Perched over the bank of the Takou River, the one-room cottage sits in perfect seclusion, nestled among pohutukawa and surrounded by sub-tropical gardens.

The timber cabin is warm and cosy, the lighting dim and romantic. For the energetic, there's a two-person kayak for paddling downstream to the deserted beaches of Takou Bay. For soothing muscles afterwards, an antique claw-foot bath beckons from the deck.

Actually, the claw-foot bath

is built for more like one-and-a-half. My husband and I wedge ourselves in regardless, sending scalding hot water spilling over the tub's edge and my eco-cred into disrepute. We top up the bath with hot water three times as dusk turns to dark, splashing more over the edge every time.

It's difficult to feel guilty. Partly because we're simply too content to care; mostly because it's rainwater. Heated by gas, admittedly, but as we luxuriate in our eco-friendly abode, surrounded by solar powered lights, reclaimed timber and organic farmland, we forgive

ourselves the indulgence.

Magic Cottage and its neighbours, the larger River and Garden Cottages—nearby, but completely out of sight and earshot—are set on the edge of the Takou River amid 150 acres of pasture and native bush, 25 minutes from Kerikeri in the Far North.

The pasture is home to a healthy herd of certified organic Hereford beef cattle; book in for the Gourmet Organic Retreat and you'll even get to eat some of one, along with a selection of other local, organic treats. Gourmet meals can be requested or you can

bring your own and make use of the gas barbecue or small indoor kitchen (see takouriver.com for details).

More than 10,000 native trees have been planted around the farm over the past three years, with the aim of increasing the biodiversity of the area and creating a 'kiwi corridor', joining the kiwi zones surrounding the property. If you can bear to leave the sanctuary of the cottage, owners Ian and Anna Sizer are happy to give tours of the gardens and tree-planting areas. They'll also show you around their own stunning off-grid home.

featured in Good #2 (page 70)—an invitation open not only to guests, but also to anyone with a genuine interest in eco-building.

The boutique cottages are run on similarly sustainable principles. The romantic lighting at Magic Cottage comes courtesy of a single solar panel and a few energy-efficient light bulbs; nature-friendly cleaning products are by Ecover and Ecostore; complimentary toiletries are from Living Nature, whose paraben-free skincare products are made just down the road.

None of that matters, however, when you're bathing alfresco under starlight, river gently burbling beneath. When you're surrounded by nature just as it's meant to be, it's time to stop worrying and—just this once—let the hot water overflow. *Annabel McAleer*



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZANNE MCNATTY

Eco Chic ... Nelson

EAT ...

from **Freshchoice** (69 Collingwood Street). Arguably the most onto-it supermarket in the country, Nelson's Freshchoice has been selling organic food for a decade. Two years ago, with organics accounting for 7% of the supermarket's total business, it went local. Bright yellow swing tags proclaiming "This product has travelled less than 200km" mark local products from booze to peanut butter, and its eco-bag incentive (use one ten times, get one free) has resulted in 47,000 fewer plastic bags used over the past year.

STAY ...

on **South Street**. It's the oldest street in New Zealand with all its original homes still standing—and it's just a couple of minutes' walk from the centre of town. Window flower-boxes line the inner-city cobbled street, residents still have their milk delivered in glass bottles, and several of the historic 1860s cottages are available as self-catering accommodation on a night-by-night basis. See inside one of them on page 64.

SHOP ...

at **Coastal Merchant** (63 Bridge Street). With 85 percent of its jewellery, clothing, accessories and homeware sourced from local, up-and-coming design talent, Coastal Merchant specialises in 'cool Kiwi' retro, vintage, kiwiana and Pacific-themed kit at good prices. The store is the major agent for Vicky's Originals colourfully reupholstered furniture and stocks various other upcycled and recycled products. There are Coastal Merchant shops in both Nelson and Raglan, and the shops conduct 'domestic exports' of local designers and artists between the two towns.

VISIT ...

for the **Nelson Arts Festival** (16–27 October). See clowns and flamenco dancers from Spain, a Parisian one-man orchestra, and international cabaret sensation Meow Meow, plus countless New Zealand plays and performers. Held at Founder's Heritage Park, a replica historic village containing many of Nelson's original buildings, festival highlights include The Sitting Room with music cognoscente Grant Smithies, instruction in circus skills for the bold and, for the more sedentary, readings from Emily Perkins, Joe Bennett, and poets Kate Camp and Sam Hunt.

DRINK

at the **Sprig & Fern Tavern** (134 Milton Street). With two bars in the Nelson region, and a third opening soon, the Sprig & Fern is bringing the local pub to New Zealand. Promising no gratuitous television, no pokies and no pool tables, this homely 103-year-old villa is like popping over to your mate's place ... if your mate had a choice of 20 different brews and a menu that changes daily. The beer is brewed locally by the Tasman Brewing Company in Richmond, and you can even fill a rigger to take away your favourite drop at brewery prices.