

COROMIND



Issue 35

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Caitlin Moloney and Matt Sephton
Find a Different Rhythm in Samoa

Should We Feed the Birds?

Annemieke Kregting Teaches us
How to Help Without Harming

Melody in Motion in Paeroa

Singer-Songwriter Keegan Lewis
Finding his own Voice

ANOTHER FAMOUS DAUGHTER OF THAMES

Veronica Cummings' Legacy
in Māori Portraits

On Air



Watch & Listen

MIND^{THE}ARTIST

The first time I saw a Coromind magazine was when my English teacher was waving it above the class, explaining we could submit a piece of our writing to potentially have it published. The beautiful and vibrant cover art immediately caught my attention and gave me an incentive better than any grade could ever be: bragging rights.

I started noticing the magazines everywhere on cafe tables, at the library and it even snuck into my Instagram feed. Every chance I got, I would sit and read. Every page was filled with local stories and art. It was amazing to see how many artists are packed into the tiny corner of the world that is the Coromandel. All creating such unique works united by what I can only describe as the soul of the Coromandel.

One day as I was reading I noticed a familiar title; my piece had been featured in the magazine. This was a pivoting moment for me as it was the first time that my art had been recognised by somebody outside the school. This was real, professional, organised. There was an audience, sponsors and right there in between it all – my art. One thing that really sets Coromind apart for me is the care they have for the artist – unlike most magazines, which spend most of their time catering to audiences.

Coromind's goal is to uplift the artists' featured in its pages. It's something you can't fabricate.

Being on my gap year at the moment, I've been taking every chance at new experiences to help me find my way for the future. So, when I was offered the chance to join the Coromind team as a narrator for their online version I had to accept. Working behind the scenes has given me a greater understanding of what goes into creating something like this and what working in the art industry is really like. Thanks to this, I am now pursuing a career in acting, something I didn't believe could be a feasible option.

That to me is the true mission for Coromind. To create an invested audience, give artists a voice, and create a space for artists to inspire one another – making sure the Coromandel will continue to be the creative hub of New Zealand.

Working for the magazine has given me greater insight into how much work really goes into producing each issue!

Words by
Sam Ribet



COROMANDEL
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ARTS TOUR

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The 19th annual Coromandel Open Studios Arts Tour has wrapped up; over two weekends, the Coromandel came alive with creativity, connection and colour as artists opened their doors and welcomed visitors from near and far. By every measure, this year's event was a huge success, the best one yet.

The opening night exhibition set the tone beautifully, drawing a record crowd and filling the space with energy, laughter and the unmistakable buzz of excitement that comes when a community gathers to celebrate art. The evening was officially opened by Leo Magri from Coromind, whose inspiring speech about creativity, courage and community struck just the right chord. His words reminded everyone why events like this matter; they bring people together and make space for art to thrive.

The crowd was clearly inspired too, so much so that the People's Choice Award turned into one of the night's biggest highlights. Newcomer Iona Matheson wowed visitors with her striking bird sculpture, taking home the top prize and plenty of admiration. Three lucky voters also went home happy, each winning beautiful art prize packs donated by the artists themselves – a lovely example of the generosity that runs through this creative community.

Over the course of the exhibition, more than 800 visitors came through the doors, exploring the studios and meeting the artists behind the work. Guests travelled from Auckland, Taupō, Tauranga, Te Awamutu, Matamata and all across the Coromandel Peninsula,

eager to see what our region's creative scene had to offer; they weren't disappointed.

Everywhere there were smiling faces, great conversations, and new connections being made. Visitors described feeling inspired by the variety of work and the warmth of the artists who welcomed them in. The artists, in turn, were thrilled to see such genuine engagement and support. "It wasn't just about people looking at the art," one artist said. "It was about real conversations – sharing ideas, inspiration, and a love for creativity."

A standout feature this year was the Signature Hunt, which encouraged people to explore multiple studios and really get out and about. It was a huge success, with many visitors visiting at least five studios to collect artist signatures. The feedback was fantastic; people loved discovering new studios and meeting artists they might not have found otherwise. Three lucky winners received vouchers to spend with the artist of their choice.

Of course, an event like this doesn't just happen on its own. Behind the scenes was a passionate team of organisers, sponsors and volunteers who worked tirelessly to make everything run smoothly. A huge thank you goes out to all the visitors, sponsors, prize donors and supporters, whose energy and enthusiasm made the tour such a joy. And a very special thank you to Coromind, whose partnership this year has been absolutely invaluable. Their support helped bring fresh ideas and

new energy to the event, and the results truly showed.

After 19 years, the Coromandel Open Studios Arts Tour has become much more than just an art event – it's a celebration of creativity, community and connection. Each year seems to build on the last, and this one felt particularly special. "There was something magical in the air," said another artist. "So many beautiful connections were made, it reminded us why we do what we do."

With this year's success still buzzing, plans are already underway for the 20th anniversary next year. If the 19th was anything to go by, it's going to be a blast. Expect even more artists, more visitors, and more of that signature Coromandel creativity and heart.

Until then, here's to those who made the 2025 Coromandel Open Studios Arts Tour such a shining success – the artists, the organisers, the visitors, and the community that makes it all possible. See you next year for the big 20th!

Words by
Charlene Scott

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video about the tour!**

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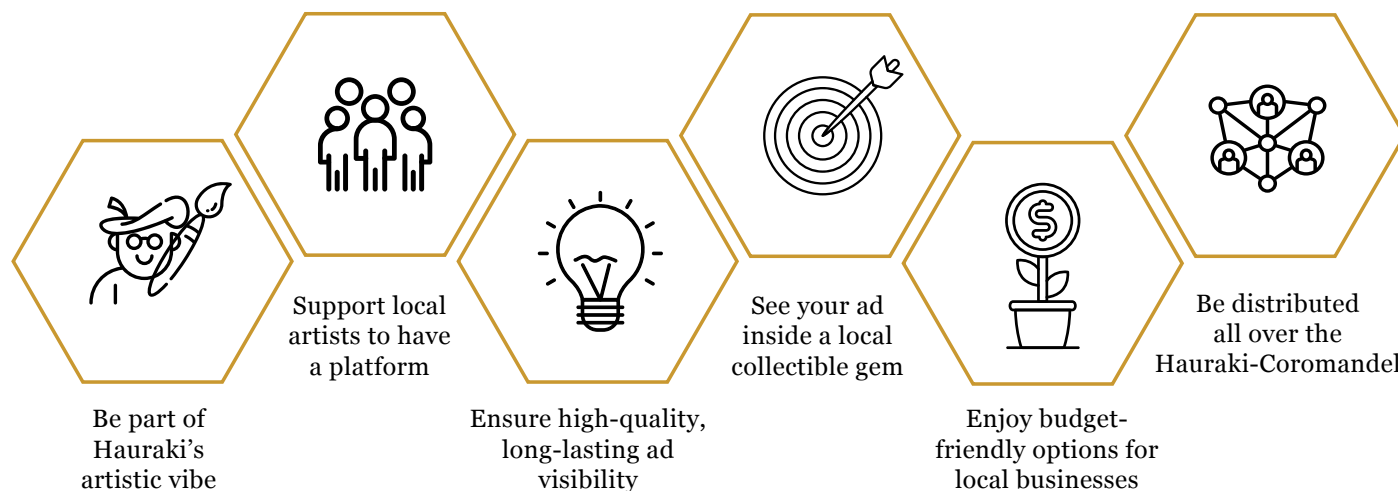
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COROMIND

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BERNADETTE BALLANTYNE



Kia ora, I'm Bernadette Ballantyne. I grew up in a small town in Taranaki and went to art school in the early 2000s. After that, I spent 13 years as a primary teacher before finally fulfilling a long-held dream and becoming a full-time artist about three years ago. My work has always carried a thread of New Zealand nature and the passing of time, with themes of nostalgia running through. Much of what I create is about celebrating life's natural rhythms and the small, fleeting moments that stay with us.

I began my art business focusing on portraits, capturing people and their pets in soft pastels. Portraiture is still central to my work, not only as likenesses but also as a way of telling stories and holding onto memory. Alongside this, I've become increasingly drawn to florals, fascinated by the way flowers can hold emotions and histories. Whether it's a hydrangea from a grandmother's garden or an apple blossom recalling the freedom of childhood.

Soft pastels have been my chosen medium for 3 years now. I love their immediacy and vibrancy, and the way I can build luminous layers of colour. The process itself feels grounding and meditative, an invitation to slow down and notice the details that might otherwise slip by. I've been fortunate to have this work recognised with several awards, particularly for my portrait pieces, which has encouraged me to keep exploring these and pushing the ideas further.

Recently, I've returned to teaching in a new way through my painting classes, art tutoring and now a Soft Pastel Membership. It's an exciting step in my career where I can share tutorials, tips, and encouragement with others who are learning pastels, helping them grow their confidence and skills. These moments give me the chance to connect face to face and pass on the joy of art creation.

Although I no longer live in the Coromandel, Whitianga will always be a special place to me. I spent many years teaching at Mercury Bay Area School and treasure the time I had in the community. It's always wonderful to return, catch up with old friends, and revisit familiar places that still feel part of my story.

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 Words by
**Bernadette
Ballantyne**



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MILLY MOON AND THE SPACES BETWEEN SERIES

The Necessity of the Artist

Why artists must keep changing

I previously shared a story of my time in Pádraig Ó Tuama's poetry retreat, and my lesson in regaining ownership of naming myself an 'artist'. I have denied and fought to regain this name countless times, the fight with the voice of self doubt is a constant battle and at each foray, I try to return to the comfort of my mantra that 'evolution is uncomfortable'.

I find great solace in this simple truth, and I ponder the possibility of evolution, of the growth and depth that can be found in discomfort when I'm reflecting and questioning the necessity of the artist.

For many years, in my music practice, the imposter would sneak in through dark cracks of self-knowing, thriving on sabotage of all I had built. She would ask "Who the hell do you think you are?" and serve a platter of comparisons, to those more successful, more talented, more infinitely interesting. I refused to call myself a musician because I didn't play an instrument but when, on hiko, without music to play aloud, I began to sing in rhythm with my feet on the earth, I was elated to find this supposed lack in my musical ability was not a confirmation of my limits, but an invitation to try something different.

So, I did. And because I feared my voice alone was not enough to be a musician, I pushed harder, I reached further and in doing so, my practice evolved.

This is the necessity of the artist. That we are challenged, and we change.

I'm always floored when the people in my life whom I admire, express having experienced doubt of their ability or worthiness. My dear friend Annita is the most talented, hard-working and ever-evolving visual artist I have had the honour to know. She spends countless hours honing her exquisite craft, she is an artist I would consider an expert who refuses to stagnate for the exchange of comfort. Of imposter syndrome, she offhandedly said to me "Oh yeah, I get that all the time. If I ever feel like an expert at my practice, I'll do something else".

This is the necessity of the artist. That we are willing to explore. That we refuse to stand still.

My parents have demonstrated throughout my life how performance, and art, flow into the everyday. Building projects become creative expressions of space, colour and medium. Running a business presents an opportunity to eschew the traditional cafe expectation and spread joy in creative kai and an art filled space. Even the clothes they wear, op shopped, outside of trend, home-made and rich in pattern and colour, lend eccentricity to the repetitive daily grind.

This is the necessity of the artist. That we can transform the mundane into magic.

Listening to a neuroscientist speak in a symposium recently, I was reminded of the effects of creativity on our neuroplasticity as we age. Engaging in creative activities, even as simple as spending an hour cutting and pasting a collage for the sake of fun, helps to generate connective tissue in our brains, creative practice being a proven prevention of degenerative decline. You don't have to be an artist of a particular discipline to benefit from art. Nor do you need to be an expert in any field. Simply carving time to engage in a creative activity will benefit your quality, and longevity it has been shown, of life.

This is the necessity of the artist. That we are willing to try it all. That we know it is good for us even if we are not good at it.

What might happen if we honour the insecurities, hold the self-doubt in reverence, transmute it to experience and instead of denying our inner artist, turn the music up loud and sing! Take out some paper and pencils and scribble a picture, press flowers, dance, take a class, snap some photos, cook an unfamiliar meal or write a story no one may ever read.

This is the necessity of the artist. That we are inspired, and inspire. That we intrinsically know evolution is uncomfortable, but necessary.

Words by
Milly Moon



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PROUD TO BE LOCAL

Yvette Kloss (Prestage)




WHAT ARE YOUR FAMILY LINKS WITH MERCURY BAY?
My grandmother Thelma Prestage was a Simpson before getting married and lived in Whitianga all her life, and her son my dad Richard Prestage was born in Whenuakite and also lived in Whitianga most of his life.

WHERE ARE YOU LIVING NOW?
I live in a small town in the United Kingdom in West Sussex, about an hour south of London. I have lived in the UK for 18 years.

WHEN DID YOU LIVE IN MERCURY BAY AND WHICH SCHOOLS DID YOU ATTEND?
I moved to Whitianga from Canada where my dad was logging, when I was five years old. I started MBAS in 1984 and left in 1995 after 5th form. I then went to St Peters in Cambridge for my last two years of school.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING SINCE SCHOOL?
I moved to Sydney when I left school. I trained as a beauty therapist and did that for a while. I then moved to the UK with the intention of travelling around Europe but met my husband; we had three children and the rest is history. We have run a painting and decorating company based in London for the last 16 years.

WHAT WOULD BE THE ACHIEVEMENT YOU ARE MOST PROUD OF?
I am most proud of the family we have created. My children are happy and productive and are all winning. I am also proud of having helped many people through the volunteering work I do in the mental health field.

HAVE YOU BEEN BACK TO WHITIANGA RECENTLY?
I haven't been back in 14 years BUT I am coming back March 2026 and I cannot wait.

WHAT ARE YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES OF MERCURY BAY?
I have a lot of fond memories of where I lived up the 309 Road. I loved shooting my gun, swimming in the waterhole, going to work with my dad and watching the logging crew. I used to get up to a lot of mischief with my friends! I really loved MBAS and have so many fond memories of the various school trips we took. I remember having the best time at the Hot Water Beach camping trip, the Rotorua trip and the Mt Ruapehu ski trip.

WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS IN THOSE EARLY YEARS?
Shelly McPherson, Stacey Garland, Jade Harris, Andrea Lockwood, Amanda Rolls, Beah Beamish, Caitlin Evans, Allan Johnston, Brad Finnerty, Vaughn

Condon, Harish Giri, Nick Strachan, Bruce Goodall, Vicky and Kylie Cosson, David Jackman, Anna Collins, Kiri Kohu, Bonnie Beck, Niki. I considered all my classmates my friends!

ANY FRIENDS YOU WOULD LIKE TO CATCH UP WITH?
I would like to catch up with all the old gang and anyone I went to school with.

.....

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Portrait of a Māori Woman, 1895. Oil on canvas. HxW 662 x 510 mm.
Vera Cummings. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
gift of Mr Frank Fairfield, 1996

ANOTHER FAMOUS DAUGHTER OF THAMES

Veronica Cummings' Legacy in Māori Portraits



Kathleen Veronica Cummings (08/01/1891 - 14/07/1948) was a New Zealand painter, and a student of Charles Goldie. She is known for her oil paintings of Māori which are in great demand from overseas buyers, and have been offered at auction many times over. Her work, *Portrait of a Māori Woman*, is part of the collection of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. In 2020 an oil on canvas of Harata Rewiti Tarapata, circa 1910, sold for \$32,000 at auction.

Vera was born 8th January 1891, in Thames, New Zealand (BDM 1891/3983). Her parents Matthew Cummings and Annie Teresa Cunningham were of Scottish and Irish descent. Annie Teresa Cunningham was born in 1850 in Glasgow, Scotland. Annie came to Auckland from Tasmania as a child with her mother and stepfather Sergeant James Knox, during the Waikato War. Matthew was born July 1839, in Tandragee, County Armagh, Ireland. He

arrived in New Zealand via Victoria, Australia aboard the *Caduceus* in 1862. He joined the militia in 1863 and served in the First Waikato Regiment during the Waikato and Tauranga campaign. On his discharge he was granted land by the government.

Matthew and Annie married circa 1866. They lived in St John's Redoubt, Hamilton and later moved to Tauranga, and from there to Auckland. Matthew was well-known in the building trade, both in Thames and in Auckland. He built a number of large timber houses in the suburbs of Ponsonby and Herne Bay, Auckland. In the early years of their married life, Matthew and Annie experienced the ups and downs of pioneer life. By 1870 they had moved to Thames, the goldfields having opened in 1867. The availability of work and the prospect of striking it rich may have been an attraction. The Thames Advertiser,

May 1877, recorded that Matthew Cummings was on the Electoral Roll, and in 1880 that he was working as a carpenter in Thames. He and Annie had 7 daughters and 2 sons – Mary Ann Teresa, 1866 - 1955; Arthur Lewis, 1871 - 1960; Charlotte Mabel, 1874 - 1952; Anna Bell, 1876 - 1926; Miriam Bridelia, 1879 - 1971; Bertha, 1881 - 1922; Leonard Matthew, 1884 - 1968; Dorothy Ruth, 1886 - 1888; and Kathleen Veronica, (Vera) 1891 - 1948. Dorothy died from bronchitis aged 23 months. Matthew and Annie solved the problem of their different religious allegiances by bringing their sons up as Protestants, and their daughters as Catholics. For many years, Matthew was a

member of the Thames Volunteer Fire Brigade. He died, 28th September 1906, aged 67/68 years.

Due to poor health, and the possible shortage of money, Vera did not have the opportunity to study, and develop her art overseas. However, when Vera was 11 years of age, she received a scholarship to Elam School of Fine Arts, and was one of the youngest students to attend the school. Whilst there, she studied under C. F. Goldie, a portrait painter of renown. Following her graduation, Vera continued to paint alongside Goldie, painting in his style and often sharing the same sitters.

Charles Frederick Goldie formed connections with many elderly Māori, and believed his paintings were a record of the last surviving Māori, who had lived through many changes brought on by colonisation. The contemporary view was that Māori were a dying race. Despite his belief, he had a good relationship with his sitters, and spoke fluent te reo Māori. With his health deteriorating, Goldie stopped painting in 1941. He died in Auckland, 11th July 1947, aged 77 years.

Vera died 14th July 1948, aged 57 years (BDM 1948/29983). She lived in Parnell, Auckland near Judges Bay for nearly 60 years. She is buried at Waikumete Cemetery, Glen Eden, Auckland, with her mother, who died on the 23rd March 1930, and some of her sisters.

Words by
Robyn Pearce

Volunteer, Thames Museum
Te Whare Taonga o te Kauaeranga

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Auckland Commute?

No, Thanks

Sarah J. Building a Career Close to Home

Sarah Jamieson has the same first name as me and grew up in the same area. We used to work at the same dairy. There is one obvious difference between us, however: I left and she stayed.

The Thames-Coromandel District, found on that little peninsula that points out and up in almost an accusatory way at Auckland, is home to several small towns and villages that consist collectively of just over 30,000 people.

Residents aged between 65-69 years make up 10% of the overall population, while those aged 20-24 make up just over 3 per cent.

This is because the young people often flee to big city life the minute they finish up at one of our three high schools.

But Sarah (Sarah J, that is) did not.

Sarah, now 20 years old, grew up as the third of four siblings on a farm in Patetonga, a village just south of Ngatea. Patetonga's population is a few hundred I guess; I have to, as apparently nobody has thought it necessary to record online.

But as we small-town-raised know, the places you can't find any solid information about on Google can be the best places of all – especially for a child.

"I'm the third of four siblings. I grew up rurally and went to Kaihere School which had roughly 30 kids. [...] I got to know everyone on a personal level."

There are two types of small towns: the ones with shops, hotels, and an abundance of places to eat, and the ones with a single fish and chip shop and maybe a dairy. The latter often circle the former, like pilot fish.

They took her on as a receptionist at first before moving her up to secretary when she asked for more work.

"I told them I wanted more of a challenge."

That's the kind of person you have to be to cling on to the Coromandel quiet life through your 20s: the kind that is ready and willing to contribute to that same society.

It's also a credit to the businesses that reside here. It's certainly not the first time I've heard of Thames, Whitianga, or Whangamatā businesses helping young people to hone their craft.

"It was a bit weird coming straight out of high school and then everyone talking to me like an adult. I'm like, I'm just a girl," Sarah joked.

"But after a while you realise, 'Oh, I'm just as knowledgeable as you.' And they know that."

Now on the weekends she engages in her hobbies of crocheting and photography. She said one day she might venture outwards, but for now she's content still living on her parents' farm.

"I was never a huge fan of the farm, but I've always loved how peaceful it is. Especially at night, being able to see all of the stars in the sky."

The stars shy away the further you get into the city. It's as good a reason as any to stay home.

 Words by **Sarah Morcom**



Everyone wants to come to Coromandel. We're already here so why leave?

Those of us from the smaller small towns know the neighbouring big town is simply referred to as 'town'. For Patetonga, town is Ngatea.

"I always envied the kids who lived in town because they were able to walk to their friends' houses," Sarah said.

"Most of my memories on the farm were with my younger brother in tow, forcing him to play with dolls and promising to play tractors and bikes soon."

There was no strong desire to venture outwards after her school years for Sarah. This was in part because she did not feel a call to a traditional tertiary education.

Neither did she need one. She had barely passed NCEA level three before she called up local law firm Miller Poulgrain and asked if she could work there.



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Standing Tall, Standing Together

Protecting Kauri for the Future

Wander into the ngahere (forest) of the upper North Island and you will likely find yourself among kauri trees – towering giants whose roots stretch wide, anchored deep in the whenua (land). Their presence is a reminder of resilience and the natural beauty of Aotearoa.

Kauri are woven into the landscape of Te Tara-o-te-Ika a Māui (the Coromandel Peninsula), standing as living links between the past and present. Despite the toll of the logging era from the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, mature stands remain across the rohe (region) including Waiau Grove, Square Kauri, Wai-o-umu Kauri Grove, Te Puru, Cookson Kauri, and the Twin Kauri.

These ancient trees are more than just forest giants – for Māori, they're whakapapa, they're taonga. Kauri carry stories of the land and are a sign of general well-being of the ngahere and people. But they need our help.

Kauri dieback disease, or *Phytophthora agathidicida*, is a microscopic pathogen living in the soil which attacks the roots of kauri, slowly starving the trees of nutrients and water. While there is no known cure, there is hope.

Kauri are ecological engineers, shaping the environment around them. They change the soil, provide protection from erosion and flooding, and are a kāinga (home) for indigenous species. This means kauri dieback doesn't just threaten the trees, but also the life they sustain.

Hauraki Community Ranger, Shania Hills, says kauri protection is at the heart of much of DOC's mahi (work), supported by Tiakina Kauri (a kauri protection programme), iwi/hapū, council, and communities.

"We all have a role in protecting kauri and it doesn't take much – clean your boots and gear before and after visiting the bush and stay on the tracks. It's small actions that make a big difference."

1: Twin Kauri at Waiau Kauri Grove lookout walk © Shellie Evans
 2: Te Puru track post track upgrades © Blair Quax
 3: Mark II cleaning station at the entrance to Te Piringa/the Cascades track in the Waitākere Ranges
 4: Track upgrades on the Pinnacles Summit track, Kauaeranga Valley



Square kauri © Blair Quax, DOC

A recent hui (gathering) at Te Waonui-o-Tiriwa (The Great Forest of Tiriwa – in the Waitākere Ranges) brought together iwi partners and agencies, including DOC, for a glimpse of the devastating impact of kauri dieback. In this region, one in five kauri are infected – a stark contrast to the low infection rates in the Coromandel. The visit was a reminder of the disease's toll on kauri, but also of the strength and commitment of communities, iwi, and agencies working together to safeguard the ngahere.

"Across the rohe, people are stepping up. Every boot scrubbed, every pest animal removed, and every track upgraded helps keep our kauri safe for future generations. It's not just about the trees – it's about connection. When people care for kauri, they're also caring for the whole forest."

With manaaki (care), community and commitment, we can keep kauri standing for generations to come. For more information on kauri protection, visit: www.doc.govt.nz or: www.kauriprotection.co.nz



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Time Warps in Tiapapata

CAITLIN MOLONEY AND MATT SEPTON
FIND A DIFFERENT RHYTHM IN SAMOA

Earlier this year, Caitlin Moloney and I were fortunate to spend time at the Tiapapata Art Centre in Samoa for an artist residency. The purpose of this residency was simple: to step outside our familiar surroundings, immerse ourselves in a different culture, and see how being in a new environment might transform our work.

Residencies such as this create the space for artists to explore without the distractions of everyday life. They allow us to slow down, to pay attention, and to create in dialogue with people and places beyond our own, making new work in an environment where every interaction and experience feeds into the process. For both of us, Tiapapata offered this opportunity in a way that was both grounding and expansive. We could explore our respective practices: Caitlin with ceramics, and myself working in sound.

Perched in the lush hills above Apia, Tiapapata Art Centre is a hub for artists from Samoa and abroad. The centre itself is alive with daily activity – studios open to the warm tropical breeze, a café and communal spaces that invite conversation, a dojo where locals and expats practise MMA, boxing, and jiu-jitsu. There's also a papermaking workshop, where Awal from Ghana creates beautiful handmade paper using native and pest plants. From the beginning, it felt like a place that encouraged openness: to experiment, to connect, and to learn.

What made the residency extraordinary was the intensity of the process. We had never made work like this in such a condensed time away from New Zealand before. It was as if doors flew open inside us – we found new spaces and resources within ourselves, discovering fresh ways of working. This is the beauty of travelling: tapping into new ways of experiencing ourselves and others.

For me, the residency culminated in the creation of Vā, a twelve-track album built from field recordings, collaborations, underwater sounds, and bass-heavy electronic production. The sounds became like an audio and visceral journal – a literal way of recording our time together. Recordings of rainstorms, village life, birds, and sand on the coral reef merged with electronic textures, forming music that reflects both the environment and the connections forged during our stay. This album will be released in March next year, with a couple of singles coming out before then.

For Caitlin, the experience felt like entering

a time warp of intense making, as though a deep taproot had reached into the earth and fuelled her creativity. Working with clay in Samoa meant adapting to new materials and conditions, but it also pushed her into a hugely experimental and ambitious project. To emerge with a single finished ceramic piece that held the weight of that process was an incredible achievement – one that carries the imprint of land, memory, and presence. The resulting piece, titled Skin, is extraordinary. We are now working through ideas for an exhibition of this piece and others emerging from the residency.

Being surrounded by other makers in such a fluid and transient environment was also inspiring. Meeting artists from different disciplines, each working in their own way, stretched our thinking in exciting directions. The conversations and chance encounters were catalysts, sparking ideas we might never have reached on our own.

The outcomes of the residency are tangible – an album, a ceramic piece – but perhaps more importantly, the residency gave us new ways of seeing and creating. It reminded us of the importance of stepping outside the known, of taking time to work slowly and with care, and of trusting that place and people will leave their mark on what you make. If you are an artist, we highly recommend seeking out residency opportunities; it can open you up to a whole new way of working.

We are grateful to the Tiapapata Art Centre for holding space for this kind of work, and to the people of Samoa for their warmth and openness. Our practices are richer for it, and the conversations we began there continue to resonate long after our return.

You can see more of our work from the residency on our Instagram pages: [@mattsoniclab](https://www.instagram.com/mattsoniclab)

and [@caitlinmoloneyartist](https://www.instagram.com/caitlinmoloneyartist)

Other links:

Caitlin's website:
caitlinmoloney.com

Matt's website:
mattsepton.nz

Matt's bandcamp:
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Words by
Matt Septon

WOOD WHISPERS WITH JAZZ GILSENAN-FITZGERALD

The Coromandel's Nature Distilled Into Form and Finish

Imagine this: morning light filtering through the trees near Parakiwai, where Jazz Gilsenan-Fitzgerald's workshop hums with the sound of planes smoothing wood. Inside, native timber takes shape under her hands – transformed into kitchens, cabinets, and furniture that marry function with quiet beauty.

A cabinetmaker for twenty years, Jazz crafts pieces that feel destined to become heirlooms. Yet ask if she considers herself an artist, and she hesitates. "I've never really called myself one," she admits. But her work tells another story – from the bespoke solid wood kitchens and finely formed and finished furniture down to her delicate circle chimes, fashioned from timber offcuts, every piece screams dedicated artisan to me. The designs feel thoughtful, yet effortless and the finish is impeccable.

There is a profound, living dialogue at the heart of Jazz's work, one that begins long before a tree becomes a table. It is the intrinsic relationship we share with rākau. They breathe in what we breathe out; we breathe in what they breathe out. This reciprocal breath of life – oxygen for carbon dioxide – is the original dovetail joint, a perfect, seamless join between our species. To work with wood is to collaborate with this ancient cycle, to shape something that has literally helped sustain life. Jazz's respect for this material is a respect for that life-giving connection, a recognition that timber is not merely a resource but a gifted, breathing entity now stilled into a new, beautiful form.

Jazz's journey with wood began early, a path deeply interwoven with family. Growing up in Laingholm, she spent childhood days in her father and brother's workshop, learning the trade that would become her calling. "I realised working with my hands was the dream job," she says. "No separation between making and living." Her father, Dave, recalls a natural aptitude, noting her good eye and her determined, modernist style. Theirs was a relationship built as much in the workshop as at home, a comfortable, seamless partnership where precision and a refusal to cut corners were the fundamental lessons passed down.

Twelve years in Kūaotunu and now based in Whangamatā, she's honed a style that blends Japanese minimalism, Danish functionality, and mid-century warmth. "The whole should be greater than the sum of its parts," she explains. Whether it's the tōtara shelves and countertop she crafted for her sister's shop, Nook Grocer, or a custom bedside table, her designs celebrate wood's natural character. She speaks of tōtara with a particular fondness, drawn to its "soft and subtle grain, and beautiful warm colour variations".

Jazz's days start at sunrise – "I can't get up if it's dark" – with coffee, a run, and then into the workshop. These days, she's swapped the seclusion of working from home for a dedicated space in Parakiwai, where podcasts and audiobooks keep her company as she works. The rhythm is methodical, the process patient.

As I said, her finishes are flawless, a testament to that patience and precision. "You can't rush the end," she says. And while she credits her Festool sander for part of the magic, it's her deep-seated respect for the material and the process that truly shines. This respect is palpable. I always marvel at te taiao, mother nature, the way every colour is exactly right, every composition a perfectly balanced masterpiece. Such ease and grace. I get kind of the same feeling looking at Jazz's creations.

I sense an understanding that to work with wood is to honour that initial, life-sustaining bond. This is a serious craft, and as Jazz wryly notes, there's no room for error: "No accident in the workshop is ever happy – If you know, you know!"

Living in the Coromandel means Jazz is never far from the source of her inspiration. When she needs to step away, Otama Beach is her retreat – a place to unwind with her dog and let the coastal air clear her mind. "Nature here keeps you in awe," she says. That connection to place echoes in her work, where native timbers are not just a medium but the very essence of the whenua.

Jazz may not claim the title of artist, but her work does it for her. From exquisitely crafted functional furniture to those waste-free whimsical circle chimes (available from Nook Grocer in Whitianga), she shapes wood with a quiet mastery that speaks volumes. In each piece, you can sense the legacy of her father's workshop, the breath of the rākau, and the calm, focused intention of a true craftsperson.

Find her circle chimes: **Nook Grocer, Whitianga**

Connect with Jazz

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Website: [fitzfurniture.co.nz](#)

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Words by
Lana Garland



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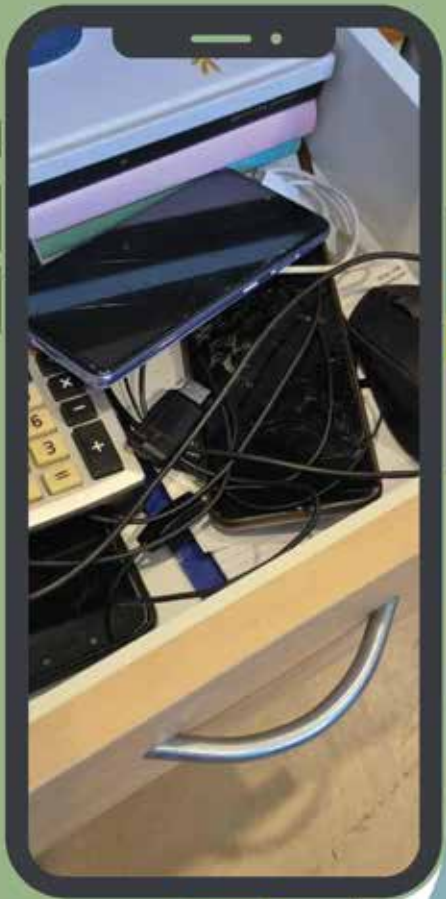
Before you sneak it into the wheelie bin, here's the good news: you can drop e-waste at Wāhi Tukurua in Whitianga (or other Resource Recovery Centres around the Bay). Instead of ending up in landfill, it gets responsibly dismantled and recycled.

"But why the fee?" Because e-waste recycling isn't simple. It takes skilled work to remove hazardous materials like mercury, and to recover valuable metals such as copper, gold, and rare earth metals. That small charge ensures safe processing and protects our environment.

Once collected, e-waste is sorted, stripped, and sent to specialist recyclers. Some parts are reused, others melted down, while batteries and hazardous bits get extra care. Recycling e-waste keeps toxins out of landfills, reduces the need for mining, and supports local jobs. Plus, it's the perfect excuse to finally clear that drawer.

So next time you upgrade your phone or retire your toaster, give it a proper send-off. Drop it at Wāhi Tukurua or your nearest Resource Recovery Centre. Your junk drawer, and the planet, will thank you!

Words by Tracey Bell



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Should We Feed the Birds?

How to Help Without Harming

Backyard bird feeding is an enjoyable hobby that many Kiwis enjoy. Previous studies (Forest and Bird) have found around half of NZ households provide food for garden birds. It also showed that bread, seeds, and kitchen waste are the most common foods used. Unfortunately, such practice is harmful because it attracts introduced grain-eating species, such as starlings, doves and mynas, that outnumber native species.

This article is not an attack on bird feeding; it is a reminder that it should be done in moderation and hygienically.

Food

First of all, birds are quite capable of finding their own food. Daily feeding will reduce the natural foraging they do and seed dispersal.

Birds do not need to be fed more in winter and the winter weather especially in the north is not that harsh. Tauhou/silvereye DO NOT naturally eat dead animals, so why feed them rancid balls of fat? Tūi, bellbird and silvereye all live on subantarctic Auckland islands and survive naturally without food from people. Commercial energy logs, cakes and seed mixtures are made-for-profit human inventions that are nothing like natural bird foods.

Feeding human food can lead to physical harm to birds such as bone and beak deformities (metabolic bone disease); during the spring season, this food gets carried back to the nests, and young birds can develop deficiencies.

What is clear is that bird feeding is becoming more popular. Some people believe that feeding massive amounts of food to birds is a good thing, but is it? Ian McLean (Ornithological Society of NZ) says the commercial bird seed industry is partly to blame for the message we need to feed birds. "It is to sell products."

Many believe you need to supplement the nectar-eating species. Refined sugar is not the same as natural nectar. We know nectar is scarce over winter but too much dependency on sugar may create other health problems and reduce pollination and seed dispersals, as birds find it an easier option and will not visit their native plants as much.

Diseases

Bird poo in and around food can cause salmonella infections and intestinal parasites. Salmonella (a zoonotic disease that can pass on to other species including humans) is an absolute killer of birds, but those birds affected do not drop dead around your feeder, they die unseen under bushes hundreds of metres away. Sparrows easily carry diseases such as salmonella, by soiling the feeding equipment and mixing bird droppings with food if fed on the ground.



Avian pox disease



Scissor beak in kākā caused by metabolic bone disease

Hygiene

Daily cleaning of bird feeders is essential, but unfortunately, daily cleaning is not a normal practice for many. A study by Josie Galbraith from the University of Auckland found that only 29% of people cleaned the feeder after 2 to 3 days of use, whilst an additional 25% cleaned it at least once a week. That leaves 46% of others not cleaning them after a week of use. As you can appreciate that is really poor hygiene – can you imagine eating your dinner off the same uncleaned plate for a week? In particular, sugar feeders should be cleaned daily with hot water; if you are not prepared to do that, you shouldn't be feeding birds.

Behaviour

Mass concentrations of birds around feeders are unnatural and cause aggression. Certain species, like sparrows, doves, feral pigeons and tūi dominate the feeder (depending on what you are feeding), whilst the insect-eating grey warblers and fantails are pushed out of your garden by these more aggressive species.

Suggestions

Rather than putting out bird food, plant native trees, shrubs and flowers. A layered mix of ground covers, shrubs and trees in your garden can provide insects, nectar, fruit, seeds and shelter for many species of birds. These include the insect-eating grey warblers, fantails, welcome swallows and shining cuckoos that are ignored and even disadvantaged by other species when you feed shop-bought seeds and sugar water in your garden.

Install a bird bath in your garden. This is great for the birds, whilst providing an excellent opportunity to view them without the bird-versus-bird aggression associated with bird feeders.

We all have the power to do something bigger than ourselves for those we share our planet with.

wSPCA, Forest and Bird, Auckland Zoo, Auckland University, WrenNZ (Wildlife Rehabilitation Network of NZ), Ian McLean (Ornithologist)



Words by
Annemieke Kregting



Salmonella deaths



Fledgling with deformed leg

KEEGAN LEWIS, MY OWN VOICE

Melody in Motion in Paeroa



I first encountered Keegan shortly after relocating to New Zealand. I'd developed a persistent penchant – one that endures – for the occasional indulgence in the decadent temptations of local bakeries. While queuing to pay, a voice behind me inquired:

“Hey, are you a musician?”

Uncertain if the question was directed at me, my ego compelled me to turn. Perhaps because I am one. There he sat in his wheelchair, accompanied by his personal assistant, offering an earnest, slightly awkward smile, his eyes alight with defiant curiosity. I couldn't resist a playful challenge:

“Why would you think that?”

“Because you have dreadlocks,” he replied.

Simultaneously judged and disarmed by his candour, I conceded. Our exchange was brief – my turn had come to pay – but as I prepared to leave, charmed by his guileless demeanour, I retrieved a business card from my wallet and handed it to him. I departed, soon forgetting this serendipitous encounter. Too often had I offered cards without consequence; I expected nothing.

Days later, a concise email from Keegan surprised me, inviting a meeting. That message marked our friendship's inception. But enough about me – allow me to introduce Keegan properly.

A lifelong Aucklander until recently, Keegan is a 29-year-old singer-songwriter living with cerebral palsy, a condition affecting movement, muscle control, coordination and balance. He discovered his voice at age three in a chapel. Inspired, he began composing original music by thirteen, determined to forge his distinctive sound. Music became his sanctuary – a conduit for self-expression and a compass toward independence. In 2017, he relocated with his parents to a lifestyle block in Paeroa. Curious about his perspective, I asked him to elaborate about his upbringing.

“Growing up, I perceived my childhood as normal despite being unable to walk and facing societal exclusion. My resulting traumas led to a generalised anxiety diagnosis. Over years, I've learned to manage it, working daily to prevent its dominance. Each morning, I strategise my day for maximum productivity. My aspirations are independence, meaningful connections, and nurturing friendships.”

Regarding education, he reflected: “I wasn't homeschooled and found mainstream schooling traumatic. Most institutions were ill-equipped to support my disability. I attended nine schools – only two were exceptional; the remainder failed to accommodate my needs or acknowledge my voice. After leaving most friends in Auckland, forging new bonds proved challenging. Rural life, while peaceful, can be profoundly solitary.”

I enquired whether communities or governmental institutions in New Zealand adequately supported his needs during his youth and presently.

“School provided minimal support, though I've received more post-education. Transitioning proved difficult initially due to scarce options. Recently, collaborating with a behavioural specialist and social worker has been transformative. Of course, my parents' unwavering love and support remain my eternal foundation.”

Given the physical challenges of his condition, I was particularly intrigued by his choice of songwriting as his artistic medium.

“I lack sufficient instrumental proficiency to compose, so my voice is my instrument. Through melody and lyrics, I articulate my continuous struggle navigating life as a man with a disability. Music centres me. Fortunately, I collaborate with musicians who arrange and produce my work. To date, I've released two albums on streaming platforms like Spotify, with a third imminent.”

He also shared some insight into his daily routine.

“As a young man living with a disability, I have found that routine and planning help me remain positive, focused, and in control of my independence. I like to plan my week in advance, then break it down day by day as I go. A typical day for me starts with waking up nice and early (8 am) after a good night's rest. I stretch to help my body wake up and kick-start the day. Completing my morning routine usually takes me two hours. This includes breakfast, taking medication, using the bathroom, getting dressed, and brushing my teeth. Then I'm ready to tackle my first responsibility of the day – property jobs using my 6-wheeler.

“I head out to feed the chickens, check on the cows, and check the mailbox. During the summer, sometimes I go to the orchard to pick fresh fruit. Once my property tasks are complete, I return home and continue with other responsibilities, such as checking emails and messages and then spend some time on my music. After dinner, I retire to bed and reflect on my daily achievements. I then enter wind-down mode, after which I let my personal assistant know I'm ready for ‘lights out’.”

Finally, I asked about his future ambitions, both personal and musical.

“My ultimate goals involve cultivating friendships with like-minded individuals for camaraderie, music-making, and companionship. Naturally, in time I hope to find a life partner. Rural life offers tranquillity but also loneliness so I'm currently seeking flatmates who'd appreciate this setting. Musically, I work weekly with my producer, Isaac Smith, targeting my third album's release by year-end. Long-term, I aspire to tour New Zealand, sharing my music and story to raise disability awareness. Until then, I'll persist in creating and performing locally whenever possible.”

 Words by
Amir Yussuf

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Ross' Ramblings Hawaii · Part 1

Dragons, Dolphins and Waves

Nearly every surfer dreams of one day riding the waves at the place some claim to be the birthplace of surfing, the islands of Hawaii. So it was that in 1990, at the age of 39, I took a six-month leave of absence from my teaching job and headed to what became the 50th state of America in 1959. The Kingdom of Hawaii had been stolen from the native Hawaiians after a coup by US businessmen backed by US marines 60 years earlier and remained a US territory till its statehood.

Of course, the colonisation, as in other Pacific islands like NZ, was accompanied by the decimation of the local population, mainly through diseases like smallpox, measles and influenza, while the church and avaricious settlers ensured that the majority of land was taken from native ownership. While there I was taught a popular saying which states, "The missionaries came to do good and they did very well."

Anyway, on arrival in Honolulu on board Air NZ, I discovered that my surfboard had been broken in half inside its bag which had small tyre marks across it, possibly the work of an airport employee disgruntled by evidence of another haole there to crowd the waves, not the best start for a Kiwi on the surf trip of a lifetime.

It was the start of the winter North Shore big wave season so off I naively went through the pineapple plantations to the famous Pipeline. I was lucky enough to secure a 'job' which entailed managing a backpacker's in return for free accommodation. Surfers from all over the world started booking in, in anticipation of the first winter swells. The North Shore is always flat during the summer. The more stories I heard of the winter waves on that seven kilometre stretch of coastline, the less confident I became about my surfing ability in such an unforgiving, competitive environment.

While I waited for the swell to arrive, I went snorkelling at Pipeline and immediately saw why it is considered one of the most dangerous big wave locations in the world. The reef is quite shallow and is pockmarked by great crevices and caves into which many a surfer has been slammed by the giant barrels that crash onto it. Some of them didn't make it out in time for rescue. Since 1989, seven surfers have been killed and countless others seriously injured. This seems awfully high for just one surf break, but when you

watch videos of crowded days at Pipeline where 100 or more mostly competent surfers compete for barrels, one wonders why the death rate isn't much higher.

There is a thing called localism at many surf breaks in the world where locals intimidate visiting surfers. This is especially true on the North Shore where some are told in no uncertain terms not to enter the water, to avoid dire consequences. I was fortunate enough not to be a victim of this fate, because before the first winter swell arrived, I was offered another job on the island of Kauai around 100 kilometres from the main island of Oahu.

I had been given another surfboard by a friendly Brazilian who was returning to Brazil and on arrival at Kauai, I bought an old rusty heap of a car which would never in a million years pass a warrant here in Aotearoa. The police didn't care about a car's condition, only whether or not it was insured. I made my way to Hanalei Bay to start my new job as a boatman on a small tourist boat which took international tourists down the famous Napali coast to see the wonderfully steep, craggy mountainous coastline shrouded in mist and rainbows, with dolphins and whales frolicking in the, sometimes, rough ocean swells. My job was similar to a Whitianga boatman's, helping passengers with lifejackets and giving safety briefings, quite often facilitating their feeding the fish with the contents of their churning bellies when the sea got a little choppy, and finally washing down the boat at the completion of the tour.

Hanalei is an interesting name and means 'crescent-shaped bay or lei making', reflecting the shape of the bay and the cultural practice of making the flower decorations to celebrate special occasions and as a symbol of affection, honour, love, friendship, and appreciation in Polynesian cultures. Hanalei is also the abode of the mighty dragon Puff in Peter, Paul and Mary's famous song "Puff the magic dragon" who "lived by the sea and frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Hanalei". There is even a cave that some called Puff's Cave to add a bit of myth and mystery to a tourist's experience.

Another interesting place on Kauai is what is called the consistently wettest place on earth, the Alaka'i Swamp on Mount Wai'ale'ale, a volcanic plateau with extreme annual rainfall averaging over 11,430 mm. This high rainfall is caused by the mountain's peak accumulating moisture from

Mikey, who had lent me the 10-footer, sported a metal hook hand, the result of a shark attack while body boarding at Hanalei

trade winds, leading to persistent precipitation that nourishes the lush, high-elevation swamp. I visited Alaka'i Swamp and took my raincoat – but wouldn't you know it, it wasn't raining.

While not working, I went surfing at Hanalei Reef at the mouth of the river. An American friend I had met lent me a surfboard to ride on big days. It was a super narrow 10-footer with a sharp pintail. I had never ridden such a gun and secretly hoped the waves would never reach the 20-foot mark that I was assured would happen sometime over winter. I was secretly elated that the biggest it got while I was there was a scary but rideable 10-12 feet. It was a disappointing winter for many of the big wave enthusiasts but perfect for me.

It was also a dangerous place to surf. Mikey, who had lent me the 10-footer, sported a metal hook hand, the result of a shark attack while body boarding at Hanalei; during my stay, there were two other non-fatal shark attacks. Some said that the increase in attacks was due to the sea turtles becoming legally protected in Hawaii. A few years later, well-known professional surfer Bethany Hamilton lost her arm to a shark a few kilometres from Hanalei river mouth.

To be continued ...

 Words by
Ross Liggins

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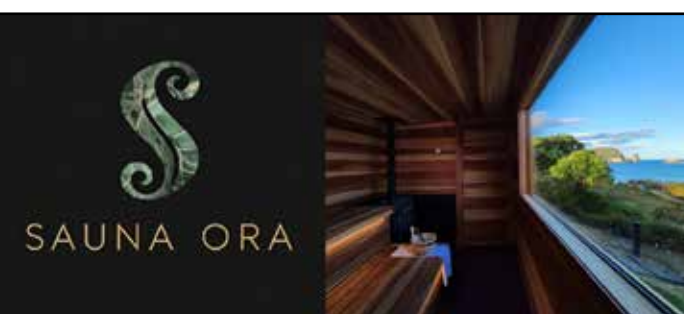
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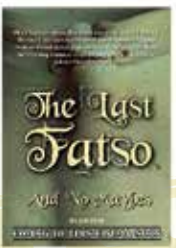
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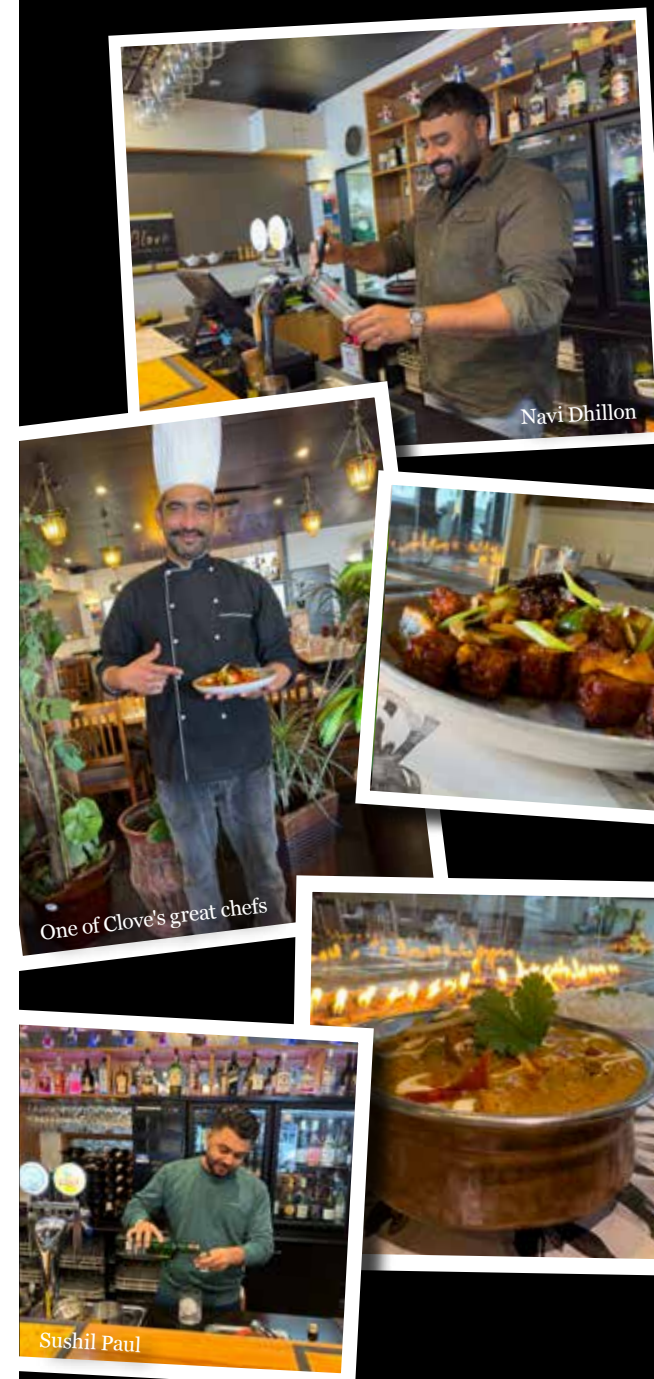
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INDIAN CUISINE WITH ATTITUDE AND CARE AT CLOVE



I've known Navi Dhillon for a few years now, and we've often connected over our journeys in Whitianga and how we came to call it home. Both of us arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand young, and the community gave us the space to put down roots. That sense of belonging is exactly what you feel when you step into Clove on Blacksmith Lane. From the moment Navi greets you with his kind smile, there's a calm that settles in. You know you've come to the right place.

For Navi, the path to hospitality began long before Clove opened its doors. "I've been working in hospitality for about six years, and it's always been a passion of mine," he says. "Even when I stepped away for a while to pursue my apprenticeship as an electrician, I couldn't stay away. There's something deeply satisfying about serving food and connecting with customers. It's a simple pleasure, but it means a lot to me."

Originally from India, Navi moved to New Zealand at eighteen. "I felt like a lost kid, trying to figure out where I belonged. Auckland was where I studied business, but it was Whitianga that embraced me. The town made me feel at home, and I knew this was where I wanted to build my future." That blend of business know-how and hands-on hospitality experience gave him the confidence to take the leap into opening a restaurant.

Clove was born out of a shared dream with Navi's long-time friend and business partner, chef Sushil Paul. "We wanted to create a place where authentic Indian cuisine meets sophistication and service," Navi explains. "No shortcuts, no 'cheating', just genuine, flavourful food the way it's meant to be." With Sushil's culinary expertise and Navi's operational and customer-focused strengths, Clove quickly became a dining spot known for both elegance and warmth.

The name Clove itself carries layers of meaning. In Indian culture, the spice has long been prized for its flavour and its healing properties. "Clove is not just a spice; it's a remedy, a symbol of warmth, comfort, and healing," says Navi. "That's what we want people to feel when they dine here: relaxed, rejuvenated, and cared for." He smiles as he adds, "And there's a fun twist too. If you separate the C from Clove, it becomes C-Love, or Curry Love. That's what we want to share."

Spices are the soul of Indian cuisine, and at Clove they're also part of the restaurant's educational approach. Navi loves talking about the healing properties behind the flavours. "Turmeric is amazing for digestion and inflammation. Cumin helps the stomach and adds depth to curries. Cardamom is full of antioxidants, and of course, clove itself is good for circulation and has antimicrobial benefits. We want people not only to enjoy the food but also to know that it's nourishing them."

Behind every dish is a strong sense of community. Navi recalls arriving in Whitianga as a young man and feeling embraced by the locals. That gratitude guides how he and Sushil run their restaurant. "We want people to feel like they're part of our family, welcomed with open arms and treated with respect. This is our way of giving back to the community that made us feel at home."

Clove offers a fresh, inviting vibe where every detail shows the care Navi and Sushil put into their craft. Whether you're discovering Indian cuisine for the first time or returning for a favourite dish, Clove makes dining feel effortless, welcoming, and full of flavour. Stop by and experience it for yourself. You'll leave feeling nourished in every sense!

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Words by
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BOOM BUST ON GREAT MERCURY ISLAND

A Post-Eradication Shakedown

Rats eat seeds, bugs, larvae, eggs, whatever is easiest at the time. With rats gone, a boom-bust population relay cycled around Ahuahu / Great Mercury Island. Bumblebee larvae from nests in the ground were no longer gorged on by rats, leaving the bumblebee population to explode; likewise spiders, with seamless cobweb carpets on the ground and tunnel webs in the swampy wetlands and bush, plus ground wētā (giant native crickets) on the forest floor – all things we hope for to support a kiwi population in future years.

Because of the bug boom, birds boomed next; with so many bugs to feed on and nest eggs safe from rats, chicks were fledging freely from nests and the birds exploded. Grassland birds flocked in huge waves foraging across the pasture on the farm; kingfishers nested in holes in the banks; tūi, bellbirds, kākā, kākārīki (local birds) in the forest, pūkeko (swamp hens) in the swamps (a topic for another time) – all flourished. Pāteke (brown ducks) formed defensive circles in pockets of swamp to protect themselves from the overwhelming pūkeko numbers and ventured up small creeks on the edges of the forest. Morepork (small native owls) nested on the ground under brown ponga (tree-fern) cloaks and in the daytime could be seen sitting way up high on headless ponga trunks looking like cloaked Māori elders in the misty dull light of the forest.

Caspian terns owned the upper Huruhi Harbour and ventured out across the Long Beach tombolo, a natural sand isthmus; nearby one bittern lurked, aloof on a pond full of frogs. Dotterel made nests far back from the beaches into the dunes and paddocks, unlike on the mainland where they are forced into habitat on the high tide line, the very limit of land which is itself under pressure from intensive human activity. The exploding birdlife around the forests and fringes consumed more seeds and dispersed them in flight around pockets of terrain, creating a big surge in sapling tree growth after a few years, emerging across the many landscapes.

The landscape was changing rapidly, reverting to a better balance. The island had been left to shake itself down post eradication for the first five years in a boom-bust sequence,

including pūkeko. The kākārīki (red-crowned parakeet) population I knew of grew from two or three commonly seen birds, usually in flight or hearing them calling from a tree in one area while monitoring traps. After a few years, three kākārīki became six, eight; then I began seeing them in other places and then widespread across the island, flying corridor to corridor as far as the very northern tip of the island, barren and windy, the closest point to Cuvier Island.

The northern half of Great Mercury Island has native tree corridors thanks to Libby Richwhite, who insisted on farmland in gullies being retired and planted in many thousands of native trees (over 600,000 in total). Libby's vision and passion for restoration many years ago established corridors, an opportunity to create a very broad habitat across the more barren northern half of the island which was essential for the pathways of birds in flight.

Interestingly the kākārīki I was seeing initially were off the ground in a tree or in flight. Over time, I saw them more often reverted to their instinctive ground foraging, under thick grass matting and bending grass stems over to feed on seed heads as you might see a parakeet do in a cage, standing on the floor looking up at a seed head hanging there for it to feed from. This behavioural change was because it was safe for them to do so because of the lack of predators. Many New Zealand birds really do prefer to be on the ground, given a chance. Kākārīki began to migrate back and forth from the other Mercury Islands and gradually they stayed on Great Mercury Island longer and longer, because it was safe for them to forage a new abundant food source; these birds could breed with confidence, they could fledge more than one or two clutches in a season.

Words by
Andy Hopping

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TATTOOING THE COROMANDEL WAY WITH LEE JONES

Nestled in native ngahere, on the hill in Whitianga, Lee Jones creates masterpieces with ink on skin. Lee has been a professional tattoo artist for two decades and has won awards in New Zealand and Australia. Over the course of his career, he has completed hundreds, if not thousands, of tattoos in all shapes and sizes, on people from all walks of life. An art form that was once considered undesirable has moved into the realm of fine art, and tattooing is now a respected and valued profession. Tattooing can offer many things to different people – from defining identity and adorning the body to commemorating, celebrating, healing, and sometimes just a bit of fun!

Drawing was Lee's first form of artistic expression, and it has been an innate skill since childhood. It was a form of entertainment during an upbringing in the bush of Ōpōtiki without electricity (therefore no TV to stifle creativity!). Tattooing was a natural progression from drawing when, while working as a butcher, he met his teacher and mentor Marcus Wilkinson, a well-known tattooist in the Bay of Plenty. He was a natural from the start, with an eye for precision, a steady hand, and a natural understanding of good design and placement. Marcus taught Lee to solder tattoo needles together, prioritise autoclave sterilisation and hygiene, and deconstruct and reconstruct tattoo machines – much of which has become obsolete in contemporary tattooing. Design work was done by hand, often using a lightbox, and stencils to apply designs to skin were made with tracing paper and blueprint paper.

Lee has continued to refine his craft over the course of his career and move with the times by designing digitally with an iPad and design apps, and using quiet, battery-operated machines rather than noisy, plugged-in ones. All equipment now comes pre-made and sterilised, and stencil-making machines have streamlined the preparation process.

After establishing a tattoo studio in Gisborne, Lee went to work in a large studio in Queensland in 2014 for 18 months with some highly accomplished artists to further his skills. This was inspirational for Lee, and he learnt much. He then decided to return to Aotearoa and, with his partner Tiffany, opened Evolution Tattoo Studio NZ in Coromandel Town, which was well supported. They later moved it to Whitianga, where they employed other artists and created a thriving business. They sold this at the end of 2021 to current owner Nathan McMahon to simplify life, have more time for family, and fit in a bit more surfing.

Lee's strengths as a tattoo artist are his versatility across different styles, his ability to listen and deliver clients' visions, and his skill in doing successful cover-up work – rather than stamping a new image over an unwanted tattoo, he skilfully uses existing areas of light and dark ink to create a new piece. His preferred styles are realism and surrealism, in both colour and black and grey. He enjoys large-scale work but is equally happy working on smaller pieces. He often creates sleeves on arms and legs and full back pieces and enjoys the challenge of designing unique, beautiful art for his clients to wear. Many hours go into his designs, and Lee is particular about getting each one just right. He has a talent for art that extends to other mediums – airbrushing, mural art, paint pens – but always returns to tattooing.

He feels very fortunate to make a living from tattooing and to be utilising his creative talent. He's also very grateful for his client base and past clients, many of whom travel from far afield to get inked by him. Lee enjoys the entire process – the design, the application, and the people aspect – and finds his job deeply rewarding.

Please reach out if you'd like a tattoo from Lee or advice on your next piece: leejones.tattoos@gmail.com

Words by
Tiffany Reed



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