

THESE PAGES Annandale, owned by Mark and Jacqui Palmer, sits grandly on its Banks Peninsula site beside a new rose garden with several dozen varieties, including the pink hybrid musk rose 'Felicia' and the purple hybrid perpetual 'Reine des Violettes'; beyond the English beech hedge, paths lead through lawns and gardens to the sea; in the last series of *The Bachelor NZ*, Jordan Mauger wooed two of his dates at Annandale.

THE COMEBACK

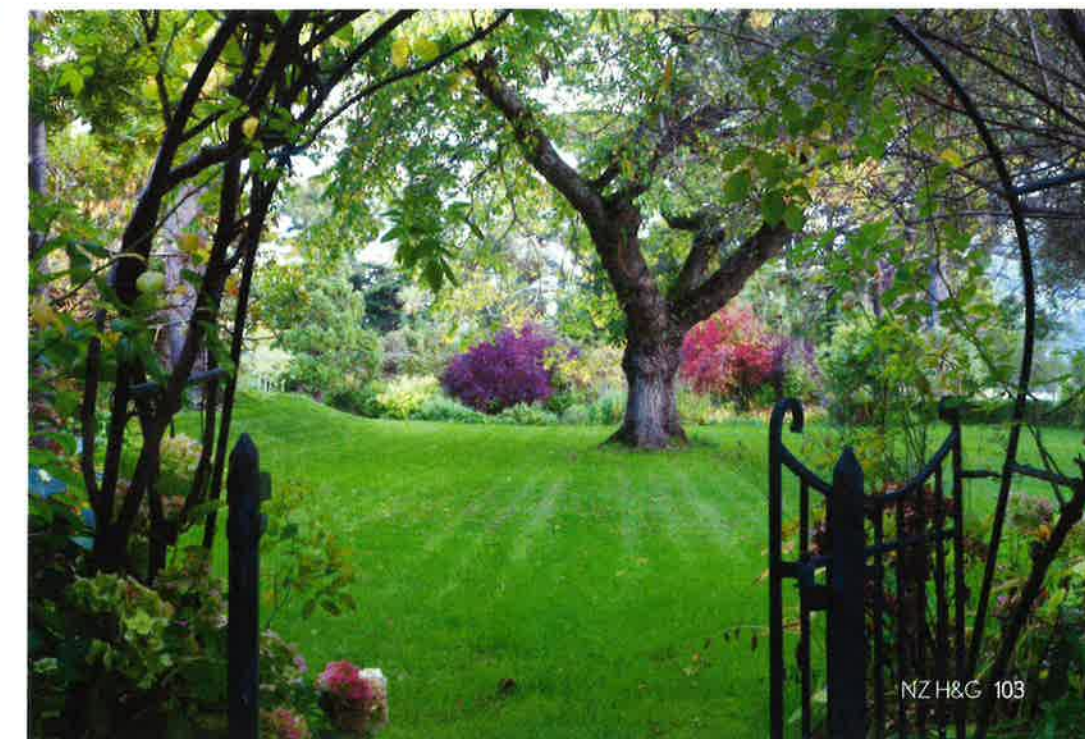
After 35 years in the US, a Kiwi with *farming* in his blood returned to *rescue* a historic property

WORDS SUE ALLISON / PHOTOGRAPHS JULIET NICHOLAS



OPPOSITE Twirly buxus topiaries add a fairy-tale touch to the formal but relaxed rose garden; rosarian Barbara Lea Taylor helped to choose the 35 or so varieties of old, hybrid musk, alba, damask and English roses, many of which are scented; the pergola was built using old totara on the property, and the vegetable garden is up the hillside to the left.

THIS PAGE (from top) Cream and white climbing roses reflect the colour of the shell path leading to the heritage orchard and woodland. From all aspects, the old elm tree dominates the front lawn; this view from the lily pond looks across to the red border, planted by the previous owner, and mixed herbaceous shrubbery.



IN 2008, A GROUP OF English High Court judges deemed the *Oxford Dictionary* definition of a garden (“an enclosed piece of ground devoted to the cultivation of flowers, fruit or vegetables”) to be inadequate. The essence of a garden, they proclaimed, included “the relationship between the owner and the land and the history and character of the land and space”. Nowhere could this be more true than at Annandale, Mark and Jacqui Palmer’s property in remote Pigeon Bay on Banks Peninsula, which is steeped in history and has been moulded both by the elements and its inhabitants.

In 1843, the beady-eyed kereru who gave their name to the bay would have watched from the treetops with some alarm as Ebenezer and Agnes Hay stepped ashore. The hardy Scottish settlers went on to create what was to be one of the leading cattle farms in the country, build a fine homestead and plant trees never before seen in these parts – oaks, elms, European fruits as well as

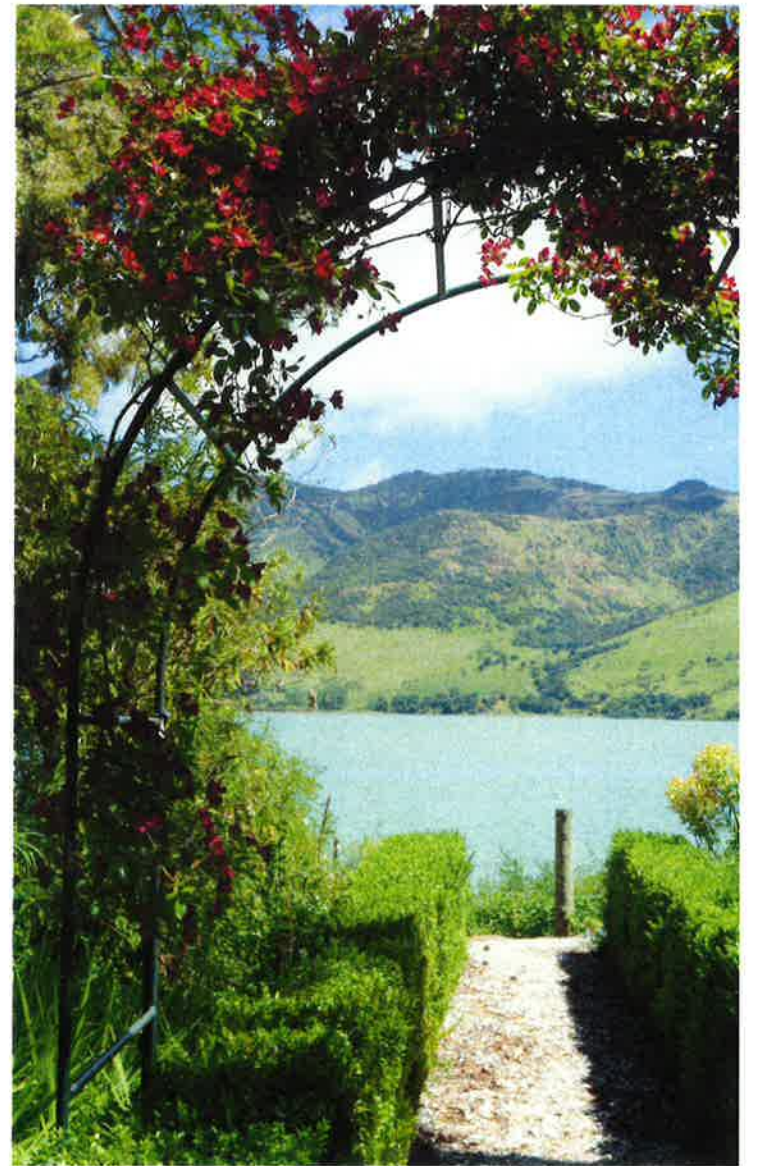
shrubs and flowering bulbs. At the bottom of the garden overlooking the bay, Ebenezer built a pair of seats in gnarly totara and fashioned the letters A and E in their backs (see page 16).

Fast-forward 172 years, after several generations of Hays and many more of kereru, another migrant with a mission enters. Despite his American accent, Mark is a Kiwi through and through and, after 35 years in the US, the farm boy from Pongakawa turned Texas businessman was pining for the green fields of home.

When Mark headed to the US in the early 1980s to study for an MBA in Utah, he didn’t plan to stay. But he met his English-born wife Jacqui over there and, with six children and later nine “grandbabies”, the couple made the US their home.

“I always wanted to come back and have a farm,” says Mark. “It was one of my bucket list items.” Ten years ago, he realised his dream with the purchase of Annandale, a 1600ha farm with 10km of coastline and a garden with its roots in the 19th century. >

THESE PAGES (clockwise from below) Annandale homestead was built in 1884 as a 24-room hotel before becoming a farmhouse two years later; mature trunks of a southern rata stand in the foreground with the craggy, volcanic Banks Peninsula rising behind; the farm still carries around 500 head of beef cattle and 10,000 sheep. The buxus-edged path leading to the sea was the original route from the jetty to the front door; visitors arrived by boat from Lyttelton before the road was built. The lily pond's bronze water feature was made by Bren Olykan of Ironic Art and designed by landscape architect Robert Watson: "It's influenced by (but with apologies to) the great water lily at Kew in London – *Victoria amazonica* – with its lipped leaves," he says. The rose-framed view across Pigeon Bay.



Mark set about transforming the property into a haven away from home for his family, and an exclusive retreat for guests (annandale.com). He sought the help of award-winning architect Andrew Patterson to restore the buildings and landscape architect Robert Watson, described by Mark as "a humble genius with terrific vision", to develop the garden.

"This is a slice of paradise," says Mark, whose brief to them was broad, if somewhat daunting: "I said, 'The real Creator is up there. Your job is to do something that doesn't mess up his work.'"

Mark's aim was to retain the character of the garden while taking it to a new level. "But I didn't want it to be grandiose or pretentious in any way."

Robert and Mark's vision was of a seamless flow of diverse gardens spilling around the homestead, up the rugged volcanic hillsides and down to the sea, with stables, a tennis court, croquet lawn and infinity swimming pool along the way.

"It's more a succession of spaces than a series of formal rooms," says Robert. "It allows you to wander – and your imagination to run." >



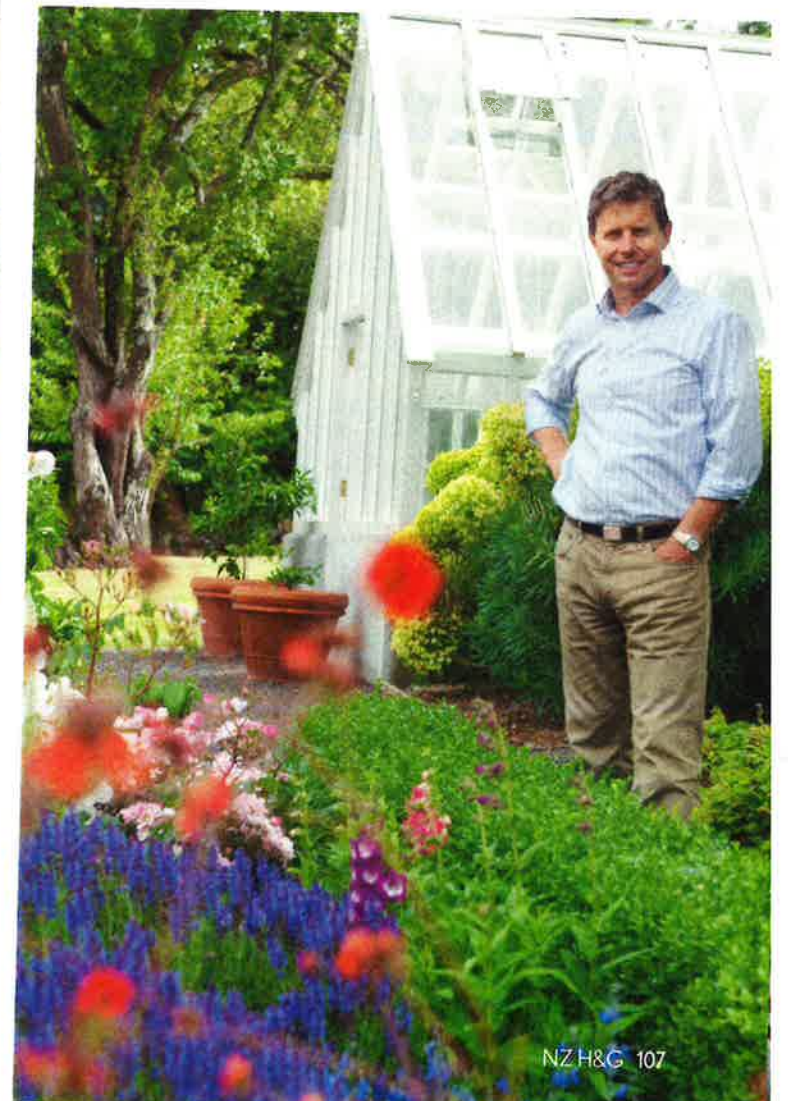
Robert saw from the start that the garden had good bones, but a lot of it had become overgrown and disorderly. "We rolled back the garden to what it had been, then extended it."

"It's been a voyage of surprise, delight and discovery," says Mark. Under the tangle of *muehlenbeckia*, tree lucerne and blackberry they found original shell paths, an old rockery, even a dilapidated garden cottage. Perhaps the greatest delight was discovering a Victorian stone fernery overgrown and in ruins out in the paddock, built by James Gibson (a protégé of Alfred Buxton, who designed Christchurch's much-admired Mona Vale fernery).

Existing quince and feijoa became the heart of an orchard of heritage fruit trees; a lily pond in a secluded dell had its concrete cherub replaced with a contemporary water feature; Robert designed a formal rose garden that looks as though it has always been there. Carpenter Ray Hastie rebuilt or repaired glasshouses, pergolas and the fernery.

Another of Mark's dreams was to make Annandale a self-sufficient, farm-to-table operation. Robert transformed the boulder-strewn paddock behind the house into a huge but orderly edible garden bisected by a flowing rill. >

THESE PAGES (clockwise from above) Old walnut trees have been underplanted with *Symphytum ibericum* and deciduous viburnums, which flower in spring before the walnuts come into leaf; the picking garden alongside the vegetable garden includes dahlias, alstroemerias, irises, asters, roses, salvias, oriental poppies, *gaura*, geum, *penstemon* and *echinacea*. 'Sally Holmes' roses in full bloom with the original stables, now converted into accommodation, behind. "What a difference 10 years makes," says Mark of the garden's transformation.





A mixed shrub and herbaceous border running along the sea side of the lawn had grown high and dense. “There was no longer any connection between the house and sea,” says Robert. The trees were retained but the rest removed to reclaim the view and the sloping lawn was levelled. “The lawn is now essentially a balcony with a clipped *Ionicera* hedge as the balustrade.”

They discovered Ebenezer and Agnes’ broken love seats in the undergrowth, and Ray repaired them with some totara fence posts found on the property. Today Mark and Jacqui’s view from the seats is much the same as it would have been in Agnes and Ebenezer’s day. They, too, would have watched Hector’s dolphins play in the bay and listened to birdsong and the incessant lapping of waves.

The Palmers have added a significant chapter to Annandale’s history, but Mark is philosophical about man’s relationship with the land: “We think we own it, but we don’t. We are just the stewards at this particular point in time.”

THIS PAGE All vegetables in the prolific Annandale potager are propagated on site, with purpose-built shelves in the glasshouse for raising seeds; the gazebo supports kiwifruit vines.

OPPOSITE (from top) Mark first saw the property in spring and was captivated by the blaze of daffodils in the woodland; English beech and lime seedlings have been planted, and bluebells and snowdrops added to extend the spring display. The fireplace on the east terrace used bricks from the original wash house chimney; in front of the glasshouse, the restored mono-pitched grapery has openings in the foundations to allow the roots to take in open ground while the vines grow into the shelter.

Q&A

- CLIMATE:** Temperature ranges from zero to 30°C. The prevailing winds are easterly and southerly.
- SOIL TYPE:** Medium loam.
- MOST SIGNIFICANT PLANTS IN THE GARDEN:** The huge and marvellous old elm tree on the west lawn and the *liriodendron* by the homestead.
- FAVOURITE PLANT COMBINATION:** The daffodils, snowdrops and bluebells in the English woodland and the red camellias in flower surrounding the lily pond.
- WE COULDN'T MANAGE WITHOUT:** Our terrific team of gardeners, Dave and Dale Hole. Their passion for the garden and making it beautiful is part of its soul.
- OUR BIGGEST GARDENING MISTAKE:** Planting jacaranda; it's simply too cold here.
- THE THING I'VE LEARNED ABOUT GARDENING:** Be very patient – every year the gardens get better and better.

Mark Palmer



“THE REAL CREATOR IS UP THERE. YOUR JOB IS TO DO SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T MESS UP HIS WORK”

