



## PATRICK SMITH SPENDS A WEEKEND AT ANNANDALE, A NEW FARM AND LUXURY VILLA EXPERIENCE ON BANKS PENINSULA.

ABOVE: Mark Palmer and Annandale Homestead, an historic house he has turned into an exclusive-use getaway complete with every luxury.

It seemed like a good idea to take a smart new Citroën DS5 for a spin on our trip to Banks Peninsula: French car for a Frenchified destination, right? Well, sort of. But while the peninsula's main town of Akaroa has a distinctly French vibe, we were in fact bound for a place with nary a bonbon or boulangerie in sight. Getting to Pigeon Bay entails leaving the Christchurch to Akaroa road just before the Hilltop Tavern and meandering up over narrow Summit Hill Road before plunging down to Pigeon Bay, a fiord-like finger of water piercing the peninsula from its ragged north coast. The drive, though not difficult, gave our high-tech French automobile a chance to show off and I was glad of the heads-up display that allowed me to watch the bends ahead while watching keep an eye on my speed.

I have to say, too, that the stylish, deep-bronze Citroën looked the part as we passed through the imposing white gates of Annandale, the just-opened "coastal farm escape and luxury villa collection" that would be our home for the weekend.

Annandale has a history stretching back to 1843, 10 years before the first immigrants began to settle Christchurch and Canterbury. Today, however, it's the realised dream of Mark Palmer, the son of a Kiwi farmer who made his fortune in the United States and returned to buy the magnificent 1,600-hectare working farm and its heritage Homestead in 2005.

"I wanted a farm that I could get healthy returns on but that also had some sort of X-factor to it," he said, "some really special additional attributes. And that's what

Annandale offered: 10km of coastline and the setting and a very good farm."

Since then this 57-year-old entrepreneur, whose home base is Austin, Texas, has made Annandale his passion, pouring millions of dollars into restoring the Homestead, developing the grounds, installing world-class amenities, building roads and running underground power lines across the farm to the three other exclusive-use properties that complete the "luxury villa collection".

Mark and general manager Liz Buttimore came out to greet us as we pulled up to the Homestead and we were soon following Mark through the grounds: across the sweeping lawn and along paths beside the bay; under great old trees and past rustic arbours with sea views; by ponds and water features, a rose garden and a fernery.

ABOVE: Annandale is a 1,600ha working farm on the north side of Banks Peninsula. Guests are free to enjoy the farm, its walking tracks and its stunning views.



Neat kitchen gardens sit below a pristine all-weather tennis court, above which is an infinity pool and spa with outdoor fireplace and sofas – and beside it a sparkling new gym and changing rooms.

The Homestead grounds, Mark told us, were originally laid out by a student of Alfred Buxton, New Zealand's most significant landscape gardener in the first half of the last century. Buxton's influence is still evident at Annandale but Christchurch landscape architect Rob Watson has enhanced the formal layouts and natural woodlands and added thousands of new plants to the existing heritage varieties.

Mark's obvious pleasure in our every muttered "wow!" revealed his pride in this king-sized project and his stated vision of "sharing the rugged beauty of Annandale, on an authentic and historic working farm, where guests can escape and make the experience their own".

We were to spend our first night at Seascape, a futuristic concrete and glass cottage at Whitehead Bay, 12km by 4WD from the Homestead. Mark took us on a winding route across the farm, stopping for special views and at Shepherd's Cottage, a lovingly restored little dwelling used by Annandale's shepherds for over 100 years.

Shepherd's Cottage sits on a high point of the farm with the front porch facing the water across rolling farmland, as does the upstairs bedroom, where a king-size bed nestles under the eaves. Inside, the rustic atmosphere has been carefully preserved, with open-beamed ceilings, much scrubbed wood and a big open fireplace in the lounge. And those hardy shepherds wouldn't recognise today's modern comforts and amenities – such as the fully equipped electric kitchen and wonderfully romantic touches like an outside bath.

We arrived at Whitehead Bay late afternoon with the sun lowering over the headland to the west and illuminating the surprising glass-walled hideaway tucked into the opposite hillside. It was this pretty bay, with its Honeycomb Rock sitting at the end of the headland, that finally persuaded Mark to buy Annandale.

He had arrived at the farm earlier that day by helicopter with his daughter Jasmine and had left feeling daunted by "the tremendous amount of work that would be needed" on the Homestead and grounds. But on the way out they flew over Whitehead Bay.

"I saw this lovely little bay and I asked the pilot to drop down and I walked out there with Jasmine. And, my oh my, it was breathtaking: sun glistening on the water, completely private little secluded bay; such a feeling of intimacy. And then you've got this magnificent honeycomb rock formation out there that just sort of... well, it was magical!"

It still is. As Mark's white Prado disappeared over the hill towards home, silence settled over the bay, broken

only by the soft rustle of the waves on the shingle beach, the occasional bird call and the bleat of a distant sheep.

We could see the whole bay through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the open-plan cottage and, way out in Pegasus Bay, the lights of big cargo vessels waiting to enter Lyttleton Harbour. We were among the first guests to stay in Seascape and everything was new and – surprisingly, given its remoteness – state-of-the-art. Lights, blinds, air con, an outdoor gas fire and the spa were operated via a small touch screen in the very modern Miele kitchen. Wi-Fi comes courtesy of new fibre-optic cables laid across the farm.

We found a bottle of Amisfield Rosé in the well-stocked wine fridge and took it out onto the deck



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Rolling farmland with Pigeon Bay backdrop; Shepherd's Cottage living room; the cottage in its rustic setting; king-sized bed under the eaves; Citroën DS5 at Annandale; one of the farm's working dogs.

together with a jar of Annandale spice-roasted almonds. There, we sprawled in big white armchairs and watched the sun go down in a dramatic blaze of colour behind Honeycomb Rock.

Liz Buttimore had given me a few hints about what to expect for dinner but we were unprepared for what we found when we opened the fridge: each shelf contained one course of a three-course dinner, plus a ready-to-cook breakfast, a "Lazy Lunch" and a "Picnic Collection" containing such gems as smoked groper brandade, fennel salami and cured Akaroa salmon.

Along with resident chef Bradley Hornby's pre-prepared fare were simple instructions on heating and serving each course, from entrée (Pork and puha with green scallops and garden vegetables), through main (Banks Peninsula hapuka with potato pavé, caponata, lemon and fennel salad) to dessert (Yogurt and vanilla







crème with summer berries and rhubarb sorbet). The final instruction on the dessert card – aimed at one half of the couple – read: “Destroy all evidence of instructions in order to claim this meal as your own.”

By the time we’d finished dinner, the outdoor spa pool off the bathroom was steaming gently in the chilly air. We lit the fire between the pool and the main deck and sank into the hot water under a sky teeming with stars.

Next morning, after our ready-to-cook one-pan breakfast of bacon and eggs, with fresh coffee from the Nespresso machine, we walked up the track above the cottage and onto the farm. It’s a beautiful landscape of headlands, bluff, hills, crags and valleys, with a wild, frayed coastline as its seaward boundary. We walked over the headland and looked down on Scrubby Bay, where another of Mark’s cottages sits.

The long wooden building – designed, like all the Annandale’s villas, by Auckland architect Andrew Patterson – has sliding shutters and glass doors front and back that open it up completely to the outside world.

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A large wooden deck extends out towards the sea with a hidden spa pool at the end. Inside, designer rugs made from Annandale wool sit on floors of glowing wood and the cottage lacks for nothing in the luxury mod-cons area. Scrubby Bay Cottage will house up to three families in considerable comfort when it opens in the spring.

Mark collected us from Seascape that afternoon and drove us on a meandering course over the farm towards the Homestead, where we would spend our second night and have dinner with Mark and his wife Jacqui.

The gracious two-storey Homestead was built by Annandale’s original owners, the Hay family, in 1884, as a 24-room hotel to accommodate ships’ crews and those taking the overland track from Akaroa to Lyttleton. But when the Hays’ own home and farm buildings were swept into the sea by a huge landslide, the hotel became their home and it has remained the Annandale Homestead ever since.

It’s a meticulously restored house with classical interiors designed by John Staub. Its four master bedrooms and a separate bunkroom all have ensuite bathrooms and views of the garden, bay or farm. Downstairs is an imposing entry hall (featuring portraits of the farm’s working dogs), two living rooms and an open-plan dining room/kitchen. More Annandale wool rugs are scattered throughout the house.

Our bedroom had a large four-posers bed and French doors letting onto a veranda. In the bathroom we found a free-standing double-ended bath with views of the grounds below and filled it up for a soak before dinner.

The Homestead is a very elegant retreat for a group of friends or extended family and like all the properties at Annandale, it’s available only on an exclusive-use basis (high season, \$4,800 a night; low season, \$3,800). “We never wanted it to be a lodge,” Mark said.

Dinner that night was a memorable affair. Mark and Jacqui proved to be warm, easy-going hosts. And Brad’s menu surpassed all our expectations: Pork buns and prawn skewers followed by Mushroom broth (made with mushrooms we’d picked on the farm that afternoon) and then Salmon two ways – smoked and sashimi – egg yolk and horseradish. The main course was magnificent: 70-hour slow-cooked Annandale shoulder lamb and traditionally cooked loin with kumara and goat curd dumpling, pickled greens and veges from the garden. Dessert was a Valrhona chocolate mousse with spiced sponge and fruit.

The exclusive-use concept, Mark said over dinner, allows people to be as private as they wish while enjoying world-class facilities, the freedom of a working Kiwi farm and all the available activities, such as walking, sailing, kayaking, mountain biking and dolphin encounters.

“It’s about people who are looking for something that’s the less-pampered-type experience but want to have the experience of being in a true New Zealand farm setting; and they can be as relaxed and remote as they want.

“I’m just happy to be able to share this wonderful setting with other people, wherever they come from.” **W**

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