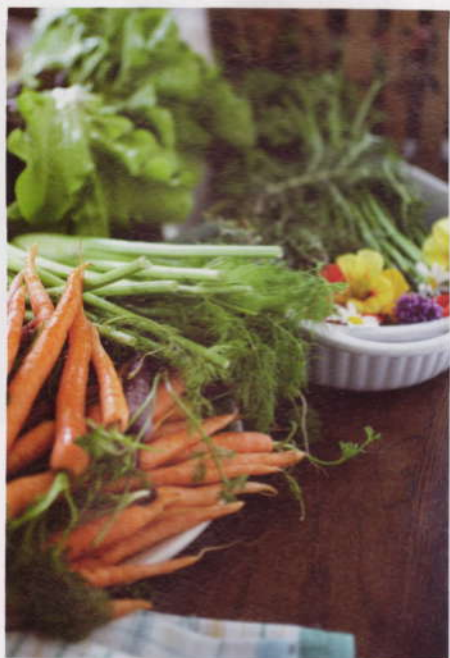


# Romantic escape



Mudbrick restaurant owners Nick and Robyn Jones  
host lunch at their idyllic Waiheke Island bach

Text by JANE BINSLEY  
Photographs by MINKA FIRTH



**W**hen Robyn and Nick Jones need a break from running their award-winning Waiheke Island vineyard and restaurant, Mudbrick, they pack the car and head for the bach – only half an hour’s drive away at the other end of the island.

They admit people thought they were weird when, in 1999, they decided to buy an untamed five-hectare piece of land at the eastern end of the island. But faced with the pressures of running a fledgling hospitality business and bringing up a young family, holidaying close to home made perfect sense.

“We’d try to go away on holiday up north or in Coromandel but we’d invariably receive a phone call from our manager, so we’d end up having to turn around and drive back,” says Nick.

These days they employ up to 60 people at the restaurant and vineyard so those emergency phone calls are a lot less frequent, but Robyn and Nick still enjoy holidaying in their own backyard. Until two years ago, their bach at Circular Bay was cut off from mains power and accessible only by boat. Now a four-kilometre red chip drive provides road access so they often pop out just for a day to soak up the serenity offered by the remote location and sweeping private beach. “It makes you release a lot of stuff,” says Nick.

Not surprisingly for a couple who make a living from wining and dining others, entertaining plays a big part in their holiday plans. “It’s a lot about eating and drinking out here,” says Robyn as she



puts the finishing touches to an intimate springtime lunch with friends. “You pretty much move from one meal to the next. You’re not rushed. There are often lots of children around so you can bake a cake and have a lot of appreciative people to eat it.”

Before she sets off to the bach, Robyn forages in her vegetable garden at home or in the potager at Mudbrick, picking fresh supplies for the special meals she likes to cook at the beach. Today she has harvested several varieties of lettuce, baby carrots, chive flowers, borage, lavender, nasturtiums and rosemary. “It’s a wonderful feeling being able to wander around and pick things,” she says.

Mudbrick was ahead of its time in developing a working garden to produce vegetables for the restaurant kitchen. “It was born out of necessity,” says Robyn. “We had trouble getting suppliers, especially being on an island. So we thought, Why not just do it ourselves?”

Now all the salad leaves, micro greens and herbs used in the dining room come from the pretty potager that surrounds the picturesque restaurant building on a gently



**Opposite and this page, top:** Before heading to the bach, Robyn picked a selection of herbs and vegetables from the Mudbrick potager for the lunch. **Above:** Nick (left), Robyn and Mudbrick head chef Andreas Lindberg on the bach’s deck.