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BRICK BAY SCULPTURE PARK IS A 2KM ART TRAIL SURROUNDED BY FARMLAND AND LUSH NEW ZEALAND NATIVE FOREST JUST NORTH OF AUCKLAND AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVEL IN THE NATURAL GLORY THAT IS 100% PURE NEW ZEALAND WHILE GETTING THE BIG FIX OF CULTURE THAT CITY DWELLERS CRAVE. ALL WASHED DOWN WITH SOME ARTISANAL CHEESES AND A NICE GLASS OR TWO OF FINE WINE, OF COURSE.

Text by Thomas Jones

Brick Bay Farm is located in Matakana, just one hour from Auckland and ten minutes from one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in the North Island. It's a chic rural area of quiet beauty, where wineries, holiday homes, and hip cafes sit comfortably alongside public camp grounds, fish 'n' chip shops and paddocks filled with sheep. For those people who have decided to make the move to the land beyond the city limits the abundance of space and scenic wonder allows for the imagination to run wild. People such as Christine and Richard Didsbury, who bought Brick Bay Farm to use as a weekend/holiday retreat and slowly turned it into a wonderful cultural - and *viticultural*- destination that now attracts thousands of visitors a year.



Brick Bay Farm's vineyards with the cafe in the foreground; the start and end of the sculpture trail.

HAVING LONG BEEN PATRONS OF THE ARTS THEY DECIDED TO INCORPORATE SCULPTURE INTO THE GARDENS TO LIVEN THE PLACE UP AND ALSO TO SHOWCASE THE WORKS OF SOME OF NEW ZEALAND'S MOST TALENTED ARTISTS.

Soon after buying the farm in 1986, Christine and Richard realised that it was a more compelling place to live than the city, so they set about making it into their full-time home. But how to make it pay? "For the first eight years we focused on farming the land with sheep, cattle, and goats and general beautification of the property," explains Christine. "We fenced off the small areas of native bush to allow for regeneration, we created seven small lakes, put in many trees, including an olive grove, and planted the main vineyard block." Five years ago they opened up part of the property to the public and built a tasting room adjacent to the vineyard to share the fine wines coming off the vines.

Like all labours of love, the ideas never stop flowing and there was still more that could be done. Having long been patrons of the arts they decided to incorporate sculpture into the gardens to not only liven the place up with a semblance of culture, but also to provide a platform to showcase the works of some of New Zealand's most talented artists. "We talked to a number of sculptors before we launched into the project and their enthusiasm matched our own," she says. "This was largely because the traditional gallery indoor space is very limiting to the artistic imagination, which often longs to break free of the gallery walls and express itself on a grand scale in the natural environment. There is an ongoing conversation between the sculpture, the bush and trees, changing weather patterns, birdlife and so on." The result is a happy conjunction of the two ideas of the grape and contemporary sculpture, something that is reflected in their branding, 'Art and Wine Entwined.'

Starting at the café the circuit passes by lakes, the vines, swamp, farmland and shady, bird-filled forest glades. Large works command

hilltops, pieces emerge from the waters, they lie on the grass, sound installations haunt the forest and smaller, eclectic works are to be found in the Shrunk courtyards, a perfect setting for their more intimate scale. All manner of media are represented from glass to bronze, rope and wood to brick, chrome, steel, plastic and stone. Adding so much more to a peaceful walk through the forest the artworks inspire discussion and creative criticism and offer guests something a little different in their country sojourn.

The number of sculptures at any one time varies from around 40 to 55 depending on when works sell and when new works come online. They have sold many pieces on behalf of the artists and, in fact, sold six works in the last six weeks of 2010, including two major pieces to an overseas collector. "A growing number of our pieces are sold offshore and this is a wonderful development of the business," says Christine. Great for the artists, too!

They also encourage and inspire the artistic endeavours of the artists through the Brick Bay Sculpture Trust, which is designed to assist selected artists in meeting the considerable expense of building outdoor work. This has allowed many sculptors to expand the scale of their works, and also consider working in more costly materials.

Brick Bay is proving to be a big success drawing around 13,000 visitors a year, a number that continues to grow. And when it's all over and the wine has been drunk, the cheese nibbled and the art critiqued, it's just a quick nip down the road for a swim. You have to love those small cities and the imaginations they inspire. Why else is half the world clamouring to get in? **FRV**





Wooden pathways wend their way through the bush, protecting both tree roots and shoes.

■ **Brick Bay Sculpture Trail**

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Townie
Lauren Lysaght.



The Memory Windmills
Leon van den Eijkel.



Awaiting Transportation
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Step Lightly
Virginia King.