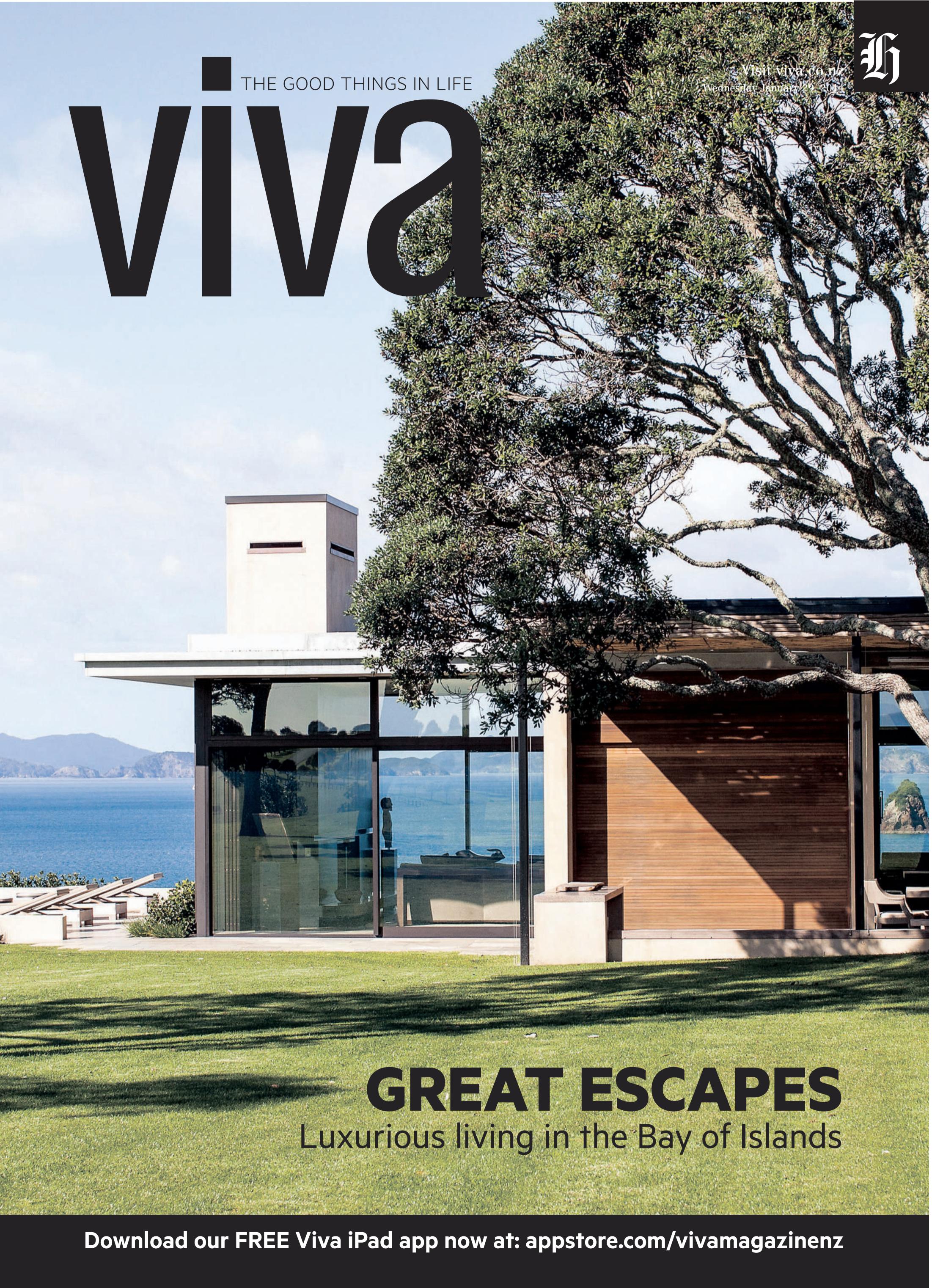


THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE

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GREAT ESCAPES

Luxurious living in the Bay of Islands

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THE GREAT ESCAPE



The owner's brief was for powerful buildings, but which sat comfortably in the glorious landscape and looked like they had been there over time.

Modern architecture, historical importance and an outstanding landscape come together at a luxurious Bay of Islands haven. Amanda Linnell is seduced

There's something about a visit to The Landing that stirs you deep inside, even before you get there. Maybe it's when your car leaves the seal behind and that familiar crunch of gravel taps into memories of carefree summer road trips. Maybe it's the dusty wild grass and toi toi bushes that line the roadside, the warm air that caresses your arm as you reach out the window to grab at the sunshine, or the views across the paddocks of the Purerua Peninsula stretching down to the blue waters outlined with white shelly beaches of the Bay of Islands.

At the southwest tip of the peninsula, The Landing is a haven of ultimate luxury which will take that sense of escapism to a whole new level. As the giant gates slide back and you roll down the driveway, the landscape stretches out before you — green manicured hills push up against patches of native bush and draw the eye down to small secluded bays. High on the headland, a stone tower points into the blue sky marking the main residence of the property — the New Zealand home of Peter Cooper, owner of this 1000 acre (404ha) farm, and founder and executive chairman of Cooper and Company, the investment company which, among many other developments, is behind Auckland's Britomart. Based in the United States, Cooper was born and raised in Kaitaia and The Landing is not just a monument to his success but a reflection of his connection to his spiritual roots and respect for the land.

The property oozes with history, having been an early settlement for Maori and Pakeha. This has imbued every part of the development. Award-winning architect Pip Cheshire helped realise Cooper's vision for the property, working closely with the owner to create three unique residences which are part of a luxury accommodation programme. "We shared a desire to honour the land by creating outstanding buildings that fitted gently into their sites, where generous facilities for the occupants are all superbly constructed using robust, naturally weathering materials," explains Cheshire.

Guests arrive at the main Cooper Residence by following a sweeping stone wall that

reflects the curve of the stone tower. This leads to the grand entrance, the first indication of the masculine strength and grandeur of the building which sleeps up to 12 people, the bedroom suites each unique and private. The house, says Cheshire, is a series of constructions that "might have happened over time".

"An old stone tower butts against a later barn-like form, which in turn supports two more contemporary pavilions.

"We wanted powerful buildings, those that sit comfortably in that very visible landscape, yet not self-effacing, we wanted to stand strong on this potent place, one with a big history and one exposed to the extremes of our latitudes. We used materials and building forms that are robust in size and solidity, those that require minimal finishing and those that wear their age with elegance — these are timber, stone and concrete. Many of the spaces and walls run inside and out and so the material palettes are continuous in and out. Where those on the exterior are finished to resist the elements, those inside are carefully honed to be soft to the touch, to glow with reflected light and induce a sense of repose."

For us, it is all simply jaw-dropping. From every point of the house there are spectacular views — across the farmland and out to the ocean, while inside every comfort is thought through. There is a clever juxtaposition of industrial textures and luxurious finishes. From the soaring ceilings to the leather ottomans and velvet couches, the living spaces are spacious, while cleverly remaining intimate. The walls are lined with New Zealand art and photos — including images of early Maori — sitting alongside an impressive collection of adzes, anchor stones, tukutuku panels and a collection of hand-selected poems.

From the library to the sunroof on the top of the stone tower, to the wine cellar complete with chandelier, to the outdoor zones each with their own catering areas, this home was designed for large groups — for corporate events or fun-filled house parties where guests can revel in all that is on offer.

Which is everything you can imagine — and everything you couldn't have imagined. On the property there is a tennis court, gym, steam



room and a yoga and pilates deck. There are kayaks, paddle boards, mountain bikes. Walking tracks weave through the native bush and wetlands, and there are the sunloungers on which to do simply nothing at all. Should you choose to go scuba diving, waterskiing, sailing, play golf or have a massage — it can be arranged. There is a team of staff discreetly on hand to ensure your every want and need is met.

We make the most of the talents of The Landings' local chef who is on call to create exquisite food from the finest local produce, and enjoy a leisurely alfresco lunch with wine from the estate's personal vineyard.

In the bay below is the second dwelling, The Boathouse, and this is where we stay for the weekend. Literally feet from the water, this two-bedroom retreat is inspired by the farm building which originally occupied the site. Its simplicity — with open-plan living and master bedroom high in the loft — works to create an immediate sense of ease and relaxation. As in a barn, giant sliding doors can be pushed back to connect the living space with the lawn where Paul Dibble sculptures sit proudly in this secluded environment; there's a row of sunloungers on the water's edge and an outdoor courtyard complete with bar, lounge, pizza oven, a table for 12 and comfy chairs.

We are overwhelmed by the sense of silence; as a heron glides across the bay you'd swear you could hear the gentle flap of its wings.

The Boathouse's warm interiors of stained macrocarpa evoke a pioneer cottage. Our predecessors, of course, didn't have a roaring fire at the switch of a button or a state-of-the-

art kitchen with a fridge stocked with local delicacies, though. It's perfection; we laugh and pinch ourselves in disbelief that this slice of paradise can be all ours — for a few days at least.

We swim in the crystal-clear water, kayak around the nearby islands where locals dive for kina, and use the paddle boards to explore the coastline. We flop on to beanbags on the lawn and read, catch snapper and a kingfish from our private jetty, and sunbathe, just a little more, on the loungers. We eat every meal outdoors, marvel at the sunrise and sunset, drink red wine in front of the fire and shoot hoops on the floodlit basketball court at 10pm. We visit the third property available to hire — the breathtakingly elegant Gabriel Residence which sleeps eight and looks out over Wairoa Bay — and thrash it out on the tennis court. We explore the property's wetland, vineyard and native bush.

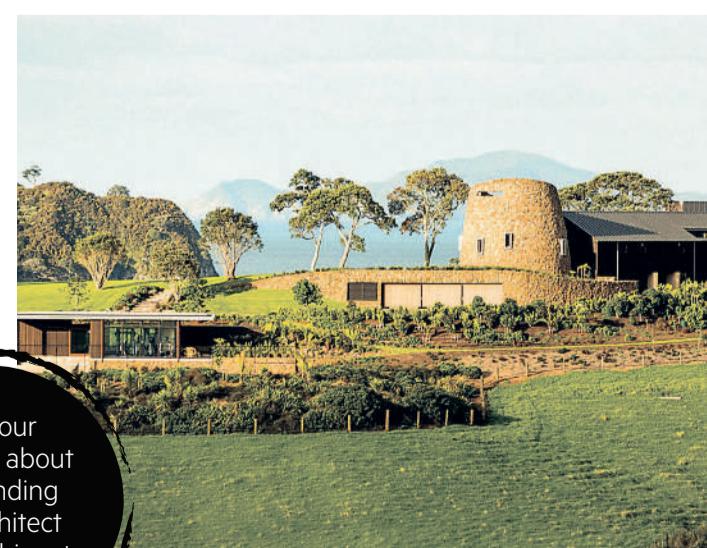
We sit quietly under a giant Norfolk pine — planted by the first European settlers on the land in honour of their first-born child, Hannah King Hansen, thought to be the first European child to be born and survive in New Zealand. We learn that Maori have lived on the Purerua Peninsula for about 700 years, and that in 1807 the Maori Village of Te Puna, which was situated at The Landing, was described as "the capital of the country". The first missionary leader, Samuel Marsden, landed a short walk from the property in 1814 and we visit the nearby centre which Pip Cheshire is creating

to commemorate the bicentenary of Marsden — under the aegis of local chief Ruatara — delivering the Christmas Day sermon at Oihi.

The Landing is truly a special part of the world and it is a privilege to experience the many layers it has to offer.

On our last day, we bask in the morning sunshine and purr with delight. To our amazement, a pod of dolphins gently glide through our bay. It doesn't get more perfect than this.

• Amanda Linnell was a guest of The Landing. To tailor your own experience contact resident manager Melanie Pope, melanie.pope@cooperandcompany.org or visit mountainlandingresidences.com



Read our interview about The Landing with architect Pip Cheshire at viva.co.nz