

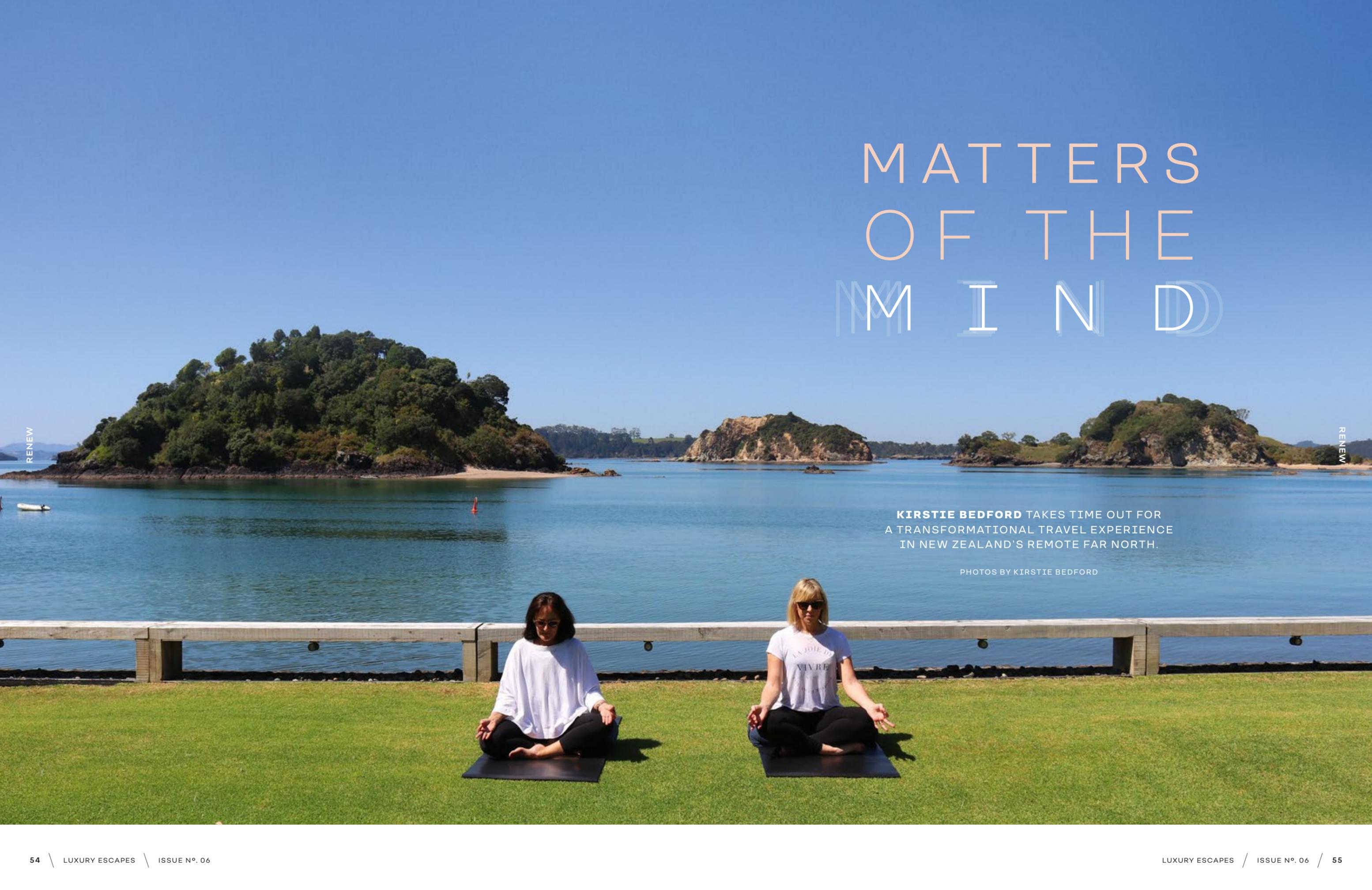
MATTERS OF THE MIND

RENEW

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KIRSTIE BEDFORD TAKES TIME OUT FOR
A TRANSFORMATIONAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCE
IN NEW ZEALAND'S REMOTE FAR NORTH.

PHOTOS BY KIRSTIE BEDFORD





I am sitting by a crackling fire in the lounge of my private residence at The Landing in Wairoa Bay, on the remote Purerua Peninsula, drinking rosé with my mindfulness coach, Barb Draper.

I'm on a transformational travel experience, but thankfully, wine's still allowed. *Cheers to that*, I think, as I'm poured another glass of the crisp, fruity tippie made from grapes grown at the onsite vineyard, the largest north of Auckland.

It's my first night at this hidden gem, down a long, windy gravel road. It feels as though you are in the middle of nowhere – and in a way, you are.

Getting here involves flying to Auckland then catching a domestic flight to the tiny town of Kerikeri (the largest town

in Northland) with a population of about 6,500. From there it's a 30-minute drive to the isolated but stunning Purerua Peninsula. But it's well worth the effort. The landscape is picture perfect and looks as if it must surely have been created by a fine artist. Green hills are covered in vines and dotted with 150-year-old fig trees that roll towards a deep blue bay.

The only sounds are the moos of grazing cows, the whistles of birds and the quacks of the ducks that live in streams winding through the 400-hectare property.

Hidden in the landscape are four architecturally sensitive residences. Mine, The Boathouse, is waterfront and has huge bi-fold doors on three sides. The front opens to the bay and offers views of a tiny island named after Maori chief Te Pahi,

who set up his village there in the early 1800s. It's fitting then that The Landing was developed with the blessing and contribution of the local *iwi* (Maori tribes).

The acknowledgement of Maori is everywhere, including inside the largest of the properties, the Cooper Residence. It sits on the headland with 360-degree views of the ocean and countryside, and houses New Zealand's largest collection of Maori artefacts outside of a museum. This is where owner Peter Cooper, a California-based Kiwi, stays with his family when they come home. It's also hosted former US President Barack Obama and rockstar Mick Jagger. Its pièce de résistance has to be the tower, which has a cellar, barrel room, bedroom and en suite, as well as its own roof terrace with a window that frames a slice of the landscape. The Gabriel Residence has four bedrooms and is surrounded by lush farmland, while the Vineyard Villa is, as its name suggests, tucked among the vines.

THE LANDSCAPE IS SO PICTURE PERFECT IT FEELS LIKE IT MUST SURELY HAVE BEEN CREATED BY THE HANDS OF A FINE ARTIST.



Opening image: Mastering mindfulness on the lawn in front of the Boathouse residence. Above: The view from The Boathouse and across the sparkling bay. Left: One of the Maori artefacts you'll find in the Cooper Residence.



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MASTERING MINDFULNESS

When I arrive early in the day, I'm taken to my residence where Barb greets me with a cheery hello and a big embrace. We talk about the importance of mindfulness in a busy world and she explains how she is most interested in the neuroscience behind it. Barb believes we can all influence our health and wellbeing, as well as the way we feel, and she has extensive research and personal experience to prove it.

"It's scientifically proven we can actively calm our nervous system through breathing and meditation techniques," she explains. "Research shows paying attention 'in the now' can be profound in helping with our response to stress and depression."

Barb's personal motivation to move into mindfulness came from tragedy, having lost her sister to breast cancer and both her parents within a short period of time. She was then forced to make the decision to have a double mastectomy to save her own life.

Mindfulness was a way to cope with the trauma, and reduce her stress as a busy architect. While we're chatting we practise Yin Yoga poses – light stretches that involve being kind to yourself – and being present.

"As a society, we're always trying to push harder and faster," Barb tells me. "But there comes a time when it's really important to just be kind."

IT'S A SPIRITUAL PLACE AND EVERYWHERE AROUND US ARE CONNECTIONS TO THE MAORI.

When we're done my personal chef and a team of two waiters arrive to cook a gourmet meal. As I'm seated at the outdoor table at The Boathouse, looking out over the crystal blue bay and drinking another glass of that amazing rosé, I can't think of a place I'd rather be.

The next day we start with some meditation to the sounds of lapping waves and birdsong. Barb tells me many people believe they are going to have an epiphany or leave their body while meditating. "While some people do, it's not really about that," she says. "It's about paying attention in the moment – noticing your surroundings or your breath and thoughts, or being aware of your body's sensations."

This, she says, will stop your mind from wandering. "Once you make meditation simple and realise there are no mistakes, it changes everything because you never feel like you are falling short."

We head out for a walk around the property and practise being present, feeling the slight breeze on our faces and the soft ground underfoot. It's a spiritual place and everywhere around us are connections to the Maori. The very land where we are walking was once a Maori village called Te Puna, described as the capital of the country. Barb also points out adjacent Oihi Bay, home to the Marsden Cross, a stone monument that marks the site of the first mission settlement and where the first Christian service was conducted in New Zealand.

Back at the lodge we sit down to talk about techniques I can take home. She says it's vital to recognise what your 'stress signatures' are – things like whether you are having negative thoughts, withdrawing socially or feeling tightness in the



shoulders, then applying techniques and practices to deal with it. That includes the STOP technique: stopping what you're doing, taking a breath, noticing what you are feeling and proceeding in a positive way, like picking up the phone and talking to someone about it. Another technique is activating the vagus nerve, the longest cranial nerve in the body, by breathing in and out slowly for five seconds, six times. Barb tells me she did this regularly while sitting in doctors' waiting rooms, but it's something you can use at work without anyone knowing.

LAND OF PLENTY

In the afternoon I go foraging with head chef Jackie Smith, whose team has been whipping into my residence each mealtime, cooking up a feast and retreating again in what feels like minutes. On their departure I'm left with dishes like sorghum, smoked salmon, cavolo nero, mung beans and avocado. Every dish, even breakfast, includes Jackie's signature fresh edible flowers. I tell her it's some of the best food I've ever had and ask what other luxury properties she's worked at, thinking she'd hit me up with a long list. Instead she laughs and says she didn't train in cooking until she was in her 40s, when her kids were older. Until then she was a stay-at-home mum, although food was always her passion. "My parents taught us how to survive on bush food and my mum always put flowers in our food, borage and nasturtiums, and that's where it began," she explains.

Left: Some of the incredible cuisine whipped up by the head chef Jackie Smith's team. Above: The onsite vineyard produces award-winning sustainable wines. Below: Head-chef Jackie Smith always uses fresh flowers from the onsite gardens in her dishes.

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We visit several of the six gardens and the property's chickens. "Do you eat them?" I ask, looking at the plump free-range birds. "No, they're just for the eggs," Jackie tells me. "I couldn't do that, even though they get in the berry house sometimes," she adds with a laugh.

She grows five different kinds of tomatoes, lettuce, kale, herbs, beetroot, eggplant, carrots and various berries. There are also beehives on the property where she collects honey.

When she drops me off at my residence, I tell her how taken I am with the quality of her food and ask her what her secret is. "I just love fresh produce," she says. "When you have great produce, that makes the dish." If only that worked for me.

Early that evening there's an offer of a boat trip out in the bay, but I decide to spend more time exploring the property. There are books everywhere on New Zealand literature and history and pictures of Maori chefs on the walls. A giant *waka* (Maori canoe) hangs from the ceiling in the living room. In the kitchen no detail has been left to chance. There's a selection of Harney & Sons fine teas, a bowl filled with fresh New Zealand

fruit and, in the fridge, a cheese platter and handmade local chocolate from nearby Makana Confections. Then, of course, there's the property's own award-winning rosé, syrah and chardonnay. Surely it's okay to have another glass or two now my yin has well and truly balanced out my yang.

Above: Outdoor dining at The Boathouse residence provides spectacular views.

▶ GETTING THERE

Air New Zealand has flights from all major Australian cities to Auckland and connecting domestic flights to Kerikeri/Bay of Islands airport.

airnewzealand.com.au

🏠 STAY

The Landing

thelandingnz.com

The Boathouse is A\$4,200 per night. A personal chef is A\$660 per person per day and a mindfulness coach A\$190 a session per person.



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