

# Windswept and wild

When you reach Stony Bay Lodge on Wairarapa's Tora Coastal Walk you've got to the mid-way point, an idyllic setting just 30 metres from the wild coastline. So when the decision was made to build at the site overlooking the sea, a warm and welcoming lodge for weary hikers was paramount. Jill Wild explains.

IT'S two decades since the Tora Coastal Walk was launched, an initiative between two neighbours to create an alternative income from their farms and at the same time allow people to enjoy the natural beauty both families experience every day.

Such has been the outstanding success of the walk that last year Kiri and James Elworthy and Jenny and Chris Bargh commissioned Martinborough architectural graduate Victoria Read to design a lodge for the middle point on the walk.

"We had a tight budget considering it had to include the extra cost of building in such a remote place. The builders had a two-hour

trek each day just to get to the site. So Vicky did amazingly well with the budget, plus she project managed it which meant throughout the whole process we never needed to worry," says Kiri.

The lodge melds into its raw surrounds, the Colorsteel exterior broken by plywood inserts, huge cedar-framed sliders and a stone chimney, a nod to the traditional Kiwi outback shearers' quarters, a contemporary take on the old.

"The brief was minimal, we needed to sleep 14, we wanted a big living dining area with communal cooking for eating and lounging, plus two bathrooms. It's a

challenging 16-kilometre walk out to the lodge so it needed to feel warm and inviting when people arrived."

The lodge is nestled under steep hills and by staggering the build over two levels the steep terrain is used to accommodate a tall ceiling on the lower level.

"We didn't want the building to impose itself on the landscape so it is long and low with strong references to the local architectural language," explains Read.

High-spec double-glazing and insulation ensures warmth on the most rugged days despite being situated just metres from the south coast.

Sliding back the big picture frame doors you can move from a wild and fresh day into a haven of comfort with a huge open fire. It's precisely what the Elworthys and Barghs envisaged, a place where hikers arrive, unlace their boots, slouch down, kick back, relax and talk long into the night about the day's achievements.

"The concrete floor acts as a heat sink so even without the fire, it's warm, it's got such a fantastic ambience, a contemporary build and I love that feel of the modern. With views stretching over the rocky shoreline and out to sea, it's what all our guests love," Kiri says.

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE



**Long and lean:** "We didn't want the building to impose itself on the landscape so it is long and low with strong references to the local architectural language," says designer Read.



**Spread out:** The big lounge with huge open fire is big enough to suit a group of walkers or a family get-together.



**Spectacular:** Stony Bay Lodge at sunset.

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FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

STONY Bay Lodge is a world apart, with silence and the surging sea as neighbours. The quarter-acre slice of coastal paradise was an opportunity the two couples bought with the lodge in mind and it's been a quick procedure to take concept to completion.

"We started the design process in March last year, building in September and finished in January this year and that was with a couple of major issues along the way caused by weather. The whole front of the building blew away, the entire framing, we lost four-and-a-half days construction and at another stage 120 kilometre winds blew out the cedar doors destroying them."

But it's that unpredictability of the elements, that untameable environment that holds so much appeal.

"I grew up just a kilometre down the road so, as a kid, used to play at that beach. I referenced my childhood vernacular to the project to capture the environment in the design, it's such a magical place," Kiri says.

The lodge is 200 square metres with an added 55 square metres of kwila decking, four bedrooms accommodating 14 people, two bathrooms and spacious lounging and dining. The ceilings and walls are lined with blue gum milled from a forest planted by James' father Edward Elworthy. The gum was selected for its pale colour and grain and has been simply finished with a clear coat.

"But we ran out of wood so part of the lodge is lined in plywood, while the next crop of gum is drying in a yard in Carterton, after a second felling. The funny thing is no one has ever noticed, but for us using the gum trees James' father grew had much significance."

The kitchen is stylishly practical, a stainless steel workbench, with upstand rising to a floating shelf of plywood. Like the kitchen functionality the bedroom doors are sliding on industrial Henderson sliders, the bathroom fitouts are also practical for large numbers.

The open fire is a feature with a surrounding wall that towers three metres to the ceiling, natural stone selected to reflect the rocky

coast line. The latest addition is a bespoke antler chandelier made by James Elworthy (nicknamed Sky because he's 1.98m tall) using antlers from their farm.

"We have so many feral deer, they shed their antlers annually and over the years Sky picked them up thinking they'd be good for something at some stage."

The "chandelier" is now hung, and to complete the project it's a matter of waiting for the blue gum to season to finish the interior.

"It can be bitterly cold here, but that's what make it so very special, it's raw and natural," says Kiri. "When we close Tora Walk in the winter to have a break, the lodge is a popular haven for us all just to relax."

Victoria has enjoyed every moment of the project including the unexpected challenges blown in or out by the elements.

"You're dwarfed by the enormosity of the hills and ruggedness of the place so it was hard to design something suitable for the environment."

In the few months since opening Stony Bay Lodge hikers are unanimous in their response, inspired by the raw and rugged beauty and isolation.

"We did hire out the lodge when the walk was closed this year but were inundated, it was so popular, so next winter who knows. For those wanting to experience a night at Stony Bay Lodge the best thing is to go on the walk, the beautiful cuisine served on your night at the lodge is an added bonus."

■ For more information go to: [www.toracoastalwalk.co.nz](http://www.toracoastalwalk.co.nz)



**Kitchen duties:** A meal in the making, many hands make light work.



**Top spot:** The window seat is a perfect spot.



**On track:** A group of trampers wind down after a day's walking.



**Local character:** Seals are common along the coastline.



**See the sea:** Huge double-glazed picture windows and sliders provide unobstructed views over the coastline and out to sea.