

CHILL-OUT ZONES

Holidays are all about *leaving reality behind* – the owners of these three very different holiday places let their *imaginations run free* to create relaxing *bolt-holes*

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THIS PAGE The two tiny beach huts at Vanessa and Richard Owen's property in Kerikeri, known as Driftwood, each measure just 10sqm; to the left is the kitchen and dining hut, with a lean-to for doing the dishes; on the right is the sleeping hut.

OPPOSITE Vanessa and Richard's son Rees, eight, keeps watch over the private bay.

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BACK-TO-BASICS BLISS

VANESSA AND RICHARD OWEN built the first of two tiny beach huts on their coastal Kerikeri property 10 years ago. The first 10sqm hut, located in the next bay from the Owens' home, was built using bits and pieces left over from the renovation of their villa – short lengths of timber and roofing iron that would otherwise have gone in the skip. Another hut was added a few years later, with the help of friends and family. (“We built it in a day,” says Vanessa. “We started at 8am and it was finished by 10pm.”)

The huts weren't built with the intention of hosting paying guests, says Vanessa. “We thought, ‘Who would pay to stay here? There's a long drop and no hot water!’” But their friends felt otherwise. “You're hogging them,” they said. So, a couple of years ago, the Owens began renting out the huts during the summer months. “They've been so popular,” says Vanessa. “They're great for people who like camping, but don't want the hassle of all the extra gear. They smooth the edges of roughing it.”

HOW BACK-TO-BASICS ARE THE HUTS? They really are rustic. There's a long drop and no hot water. The shower is a solar-heated bag that's hung up outside and the lights are solar-powered. There's a gas fridge and hob to boil water for the kettle – and the dishes! >

THIS PAGE The cupboard in the sleeping hut was Vanessa's first Trade Me purchase: “It cost me a dollar and \$350 to ship it!”, an old chair has been découpaged with sepia prints of the children mucking around in the huts; the floor is macrocarpa.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) Rees with Annie, the SPCA orphan, who is investigating a retro-style chilly bin bought from The Warehouse years ago. Vanessa spotted the kitchen and dining hut's vintage meat safe at a garage in Kaitaia when she was taking her car for a warrant of fitness; she convinced the garage owners to sell it to her for \$50 and then painted it pink; vinyl floors are a necessity in this high-traffic area: “You need something that's going to be bullet-proof,” says Vanessa. The back-to-basics kitchen.



THIS PAGE Flags from countries visited during Vanessa and Richard's previous life as sailors hang in the kitchen/dining hut, including the flags of Grenada, Turkey and Greece; the dining table and chairs were a gift from friends; the table was too big for the small hut so Vanessa simply chopped off one side so it could be pushed against the wall. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top right) Shells collected locally are strung from the rafters of the sleeping hut. The raft is from the marae across the bay; appropriately, it is named Ra (sun). Rees and Richard Owen hanging out with Annie. The doors of the sleeping hut are thrown open to let in the sun.

WHAT SHOULD GUESTS EXPECT? They should think of a stay at the huts as a camping holiday (but one where you go to bed at night on a proper mattress with Wallace Cotton linen). They're not holiday homes. They're best for two or three nights – you can get away from it all for a couple of days and then go home and have a real shower!

WHAT WAS YOUR APPROACH TO DECORATING THE HUTS? I wanted something really beachy and natural that wasn't precious. People should be able to come back from chipping oysters off the rocks and not have to worry about taking off their shoes.

WHAT'S THE MOST PEOPLE YOU'VE HAD STAYING HERE? The hut sleeps four but on New Year's Eve all our friends and family come to stay and there are tents all over the place, people sleeping in boats... It's become quite a tradition that our guests put their watches forward two hours when they arrive and we celebrate New Year at DWT (Driftwood Time), which is really 10pm. Some go back to town and celebrate it all over again, but we are asleep by 10.30pm!

HOW DO YOU MAKE GUESTS FEEL WELCOME? We make sure everything is ready for them – ice in the chilly bin, the pizza oven ready to go, marshmallows for toasting – but then we leave them to it. Most people who come here are trying to get away from everything. I also spent a lot of time producing a magazine that has absolutely everything they need to know about the huts and the area (and would probably take me about three hours to tell them in person), which they can read in their own time.

WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT A HOLIDAY HERE? It's a nostalgic, old-fashioned holiday – people feel like they're kids again. They can look for crabs on the beach and swing in the hammock. They even enjoy doing the dishes! They get to go back to a simpler time. *Find out more at driftwoodnz.com.*

