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BIG IDEAS FOR SMALL FARMS

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# Growing great GRAPES

*The thought of owning a vineyard and wandering among your vines at dusk with a glass of your own wine is an appealing and romantic notion, however, like most ventures, viticulture requires plenty of work and research*  
– Stephanie Maunsell

**L**OCATED in Waiau Pa, south west of Auckland, is Karaka Point Vineyard and Lodge. This stunning property is an Italian-styled retreat established in 1994 by Anno and Mik Martin.

The land was originally part of a drystock farm, which the owner considered the worst of his property, with its swampy, easily pugged ground.

"It was messy and unloved, however Mik saw the advantages of

the natural springs and, of course, the great price, so we bought the 12-acre (5ha) block," says Anne.

Not long after, they bought neighbouring land, before prices in the region spiraled out of control, which took their holding to 21 acres (8.5ha).

"Our motivation in buying the land was to have a great lifestyle for us and our three daughters. We weren't actually sure what we were going to do with it, but we marched on and bought a removal house – the

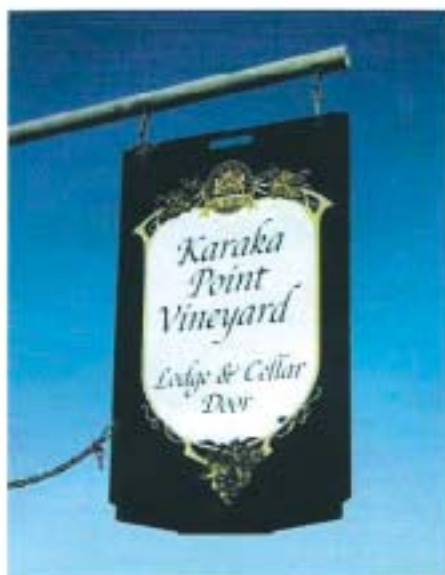
top story of a two-storey house from St Helliers, Auckland – and began landscaping a garden.

"The children began their life going to a country school, having the joy of calf club and rearing every animal that moved. Those puggy unattractive hollows were carved out to create several ponds, now framed by parklike gardens. We felt like pioneers," says Anne.

The property also ran exotic cattle for many years, however, once the







girls were at high school and busy studying, the novelty of feeding all their animals and then the cattle soon wore off. This was Mik's opportunity – he had always wanted a vineyard.

"We called in the help of people involved in viticulture – they weren't easy to find in this region back then, because most were in the South Island – and they visited the property to advise us," says Anne.

The soil was looked at, declared inappropriate, the region was incorrect and not suitable for growing grapes, everything was wrong and Anne and Mik were basically advised to plant potatoes.

However, they ignored the negative advice, went ahead, had soil tests taken and in turn applied what fertiliser and minerals the tests showed their land lacked.

"A family always up for a challenge, we lurged ahead anyway and planted two acres of Chardonnay

grapes, which is my favourite, even now," says Anne.

"Not long after that, we planted eight acres of Syrah and three acres of Cabernet Sauvignon."

At the time, the family also owned a manufacturing company, which made crushed marble Italian-style statues. The family's other love was food and, in 1999, they opened an Italian restaurant in part of their Italian Statuary complex.

The Martins' passion for all subjects Italian, the land, the wine, the décor and the food was shown in all aspects of their businesses which were to develop during the years.

At the Karaka Point property, it took two years to establish the vines for harvest. The grapes were then sent to skilled winemaker Anthony Iveclivich at Westbrook Winery for processing. Their wine was a hit with the support of local retailers and being sold through Anne and Mik's restaurant.

The Martins' empire was steadily growing and it was a life they loved. However, this all came to a head, when Mik became ill and died in 2001.

The couple's three daughters, Rachel, Tamara and Kate, were a huge support having suspended their training at university to return and help run the businesses, while Mik was ill and for the first couple of years after he died.

"The girls managed various sectors and we all put our heart and souls into giving Mik's dream 100% of our time," says Anne.

"However, as time went on the girls moved on. It was apparent there was an opportunity for me to place more emphasis on an aspect of our business which provided me with a new challenge also.

"I had been so busy running three businesses and I felt that our beautiful property, which we had bought as a paddock 25 years ago, wasn't >





Anne with sister Linda (left) and daughter Rachel (right).



Statues and features are scattered throughout the property.



The cellar door has been a great success for the vineyard.



Karaka Point gives you the feeling you are in another country.



Through the cellar door lies an Italian-style hall for wedding receptions and functions.

## Growing great GRAPES

receiving the attention it needed.

"I had to take a step back from something, therefore the manufacturing, retail and restaurant divisions of the company were sold. I could now concentrate on our Karaka Point property."

Anne turned the home into a guest lodge, using three of the five bedrooms for guests – there are also guest lounges, and a conservatory with a heated indoor pool.

"It was a personal challenge to upgrade the property to suit the public and financially make the business more sustainable," says Anne.

"It's not easy to make a living out of a small volume of grapes, so we had to diversify and come up with a niche."

"Karaka Point's niche has been that it is the only vineyard in the area to host weddings, conferences and retreats, and we have the cellar door, which is a retail shop on the property, in which you can taste and buy our wine."

The vineyard still requires fertiliser applied from time to time, however the vines are now old. They are well established, having adapted to the soil and region.

"We are in the greater Auckland area and it is humid, so we do have to be aware of the possibilities of problems caused by powdery mildew, downy mildew and botrytis," says Anne.

"If we don't take care of the vines in their growth stages we can have huge problems."

"We learnt by trial and error in the beginning, not being fully aware of the ongoing costs after posts, wires and nets," she says.

"Also, methods of undertaking certain tasks like tying the nets. It has taken many years to perfect a method that works with the canopy size yet allows us to tie them firmly enough to keep the birds out."

"I have also recently set up a bird scaring gun and it has certainly been successful this year, giving an even better opportunity to pick my grapes in their prime."

Anne says, that in the beginning, her goal was merely only to drink





**Anne has also ensured that the Italian feel carries on throughout the vineyard and into the lodge.**

the wine, however, she has enjoyed learning more about the industry and is now going to formalise this by completing a course.

"You can never learn enough and there are some great correspondence courses for viticulture and horticulture," she says.

If harvest occurs during the week, Anne brings in contractors to pick, or if harvest falls on a weekend, friends and family will pick. It turns into quite an occasion, with a great reward of food and wine once the grapes are harvested and safely on their way to the winemaker.

"Once the grapes are off, you do breathe a sigh of relief, but it doesn't end there. There needs to be a post-harvest spray, eradication of weeds and timing your pruning to when your foliage is well and truly off.

"Pruning is usually done by contractors around June, when the vines are in dormancy, which is also time for maintenance on your equipment. The tractor, vine trimmers, posts, wires, mulchers and nets are all given a once-over."

Then, Anne's prize for working very hard for nine months of the year is to go to Italy for a few months. She is studying the Italian language and puts this into practice on her trip, visiting what vineyards she can and learning different methods from a variety of winemakers.

"I am gleaning information all the time and I am lucky the vines afford me that opportunity," says Anne.

A competent manager is installed in the lodge to "carry on business".

In spring, when the vines come into bud burst, sprays have to be applied before, during and after.

"We are watching the growth by the centimetre at that stage, so it is important for me to be back then to nurture the buds. From then on, there are continual processes until the next harvest," she says.

Marketing makes a huge difference with any business and Anne and others in the area have started an association in their small rural town. They use it to promote their businesses which has "turned the lights on" in an area, which many wouldn't know existed.

The vineyard requires plenty of management and Anne walks through the property at least twice daily, inspecting the vines and nets.

"Most evenings on my walk, I find something – whether it be weeds that haven't been taken care of or a net that needs mending.

"There is always something that needs tending to," she says. "However, when you finally get in for that glass of your own wine, it is all worth while, and I can't think of a better way to make a living."

Karaka Point has received several awards during the years for its wines, gaining a reputation which is seeing the business go from strength to strength.

**Contact Karaka Point Vineyard and Lodge, phone 09 232-0025, email [info@karakapointvineyard.co.nz](mailto:info@karakapointvineyard.co.nz) or visit [www.karakapointvineyard.co.nz](http://www.karakapointvineyard.co.nz)**