



Mountain Landing Press

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Drawn by Nature to New Zealand



Arno Gasteiger for The New York Times

The Bay of Islands is one of New Zealand's most celebrated outdoor attractions. [More Photos >](#)

By ANNE GIBSON
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“Another world at the edge of the world” is how Peter Cooper likes to refer to his isolated beachhead on the remote northern coast of New Zealand.

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Mr. Cooper, a developer whose family splits its time between homes in Newport Beach, Calif., and the Takapuna section of Auckland, is building a 16,000-square-foot family house on four acres in his new Mountain Landing development. It will be one of the 44 residences that will eventually make up the development on the remote beachhead.

“When I first saw the property, I knew that it was a very special place and then I subsequently grew to understand why, in terms of its unique role in New Zealand’s pre-European and early European history,” Mr. Cooper said. He has registered 43 archaeological sites and areas with

the New Zealand Archaeological Association and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

European settlement in New Zealand began in the nearby town of Oihi, when the Rev. Samuel Marsden, an English missionary, landed in December 1841 on a voyage from Australia.

“But even before Reverend Marsden and his fellow missionary artisans arrived, the Rangihoua Pa served as one of the foremost trading places for visiting whalers needing fresh food,” Mr. Cooper said, referring to the Maori settlement in the area. (Mr. Cooper is part Maori.)

The first European owners of Mr. Cooper’s property were Thomas and Elizabeth Hansen, whose eldest daughter, Hannah, is believed to be the first European child to survive birth in New Zealand.

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Mr. Cooper is a New Zealander, but he has strong ties to the United States, beginning with a year he spent in high school in Kansas City. He studied law in Auckland and worked for some large corporations before returning to the United States in 1989 to develop a 90-store shopping mall in Southlake, Tex.

Currently, his company's largest project is a \$277 million (350 million New Zealand dollars) refurbishment of 18 historic buildings on Auckland's downtown waterfront, the largest single conservation and restoration project in New Zealand today.

Mountain Landing, which is a four-hour drive from Auckland, totals 1,000 acres at the tip of Purerua Peninsula. It includes six white sand [beaches](#) along the Bay of Islands, one of the country's most famous vacation spots, and is covered with dense forest that is alive with tui and other woodland birds.

Mr. Cooper bought the property eight years ago for about \$4 million and has spent many more millions to develop it. He is offering building sites of one acre to 10 acres, each with broad views over the Bay of Islands, for prices ranging from more than \$1.7 million to \$5.5 million.

Four sites have sold, and construction has started on one of them. Mr. Cooper has established a project management and construction company but while houses must meet certain design standards, buyers are not obligated to use his builders.

Mr. Cooper and his wife, Sue, both in their 50s, decided they wanted a home anchored in the landscape rather than dominating it. So they began to create a house that would be a base for their family, which includes five children in their 20s, as well as a spot for large-scale entertaining. It is expected to cost \$11.8 million by the time it is finished in 2010.

The house will have two wings, linked by a series of underground rooms that include a wine cellar and barrel storage and aging areas for Mr. Cooper's Mountain Landing Vineyard. (Last autumn, chardonnay and shiraz grapes were planted on property adjacent to the development site, and production of 10,000 bottles of each variety is expected by 2010.)

One of the wings will have a three-level tower with a rooftop garden; in all, the house will have six bedrooms, eight bathrooms, a spa, a game room and a bunkhouse intended for guests and staff members.

Construction, which began in March, will use stone taken from paddocks on a nearby property and heavy cedar beams. The house is positioned to capture the warmth of the sun, whose energy will be used to heat water for an under-floor heating grid and to power other systems in the house. There will be no air-conditioning.

Mr. Cooper visits the building site often, taking a helicopter from Auckland. As he said, "Man may come and go, but the land remains forever."

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