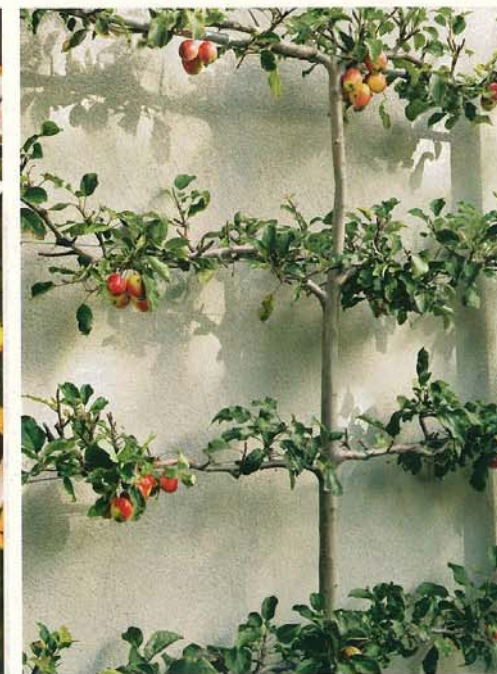


# *In the swing*

*The fairway lured these retirees to Martinborough, but it's the garden that keeps them busy*

STORY ROSE THODEY / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MCCREDIE

THIS PAGE: The golf course beckons beyond the layered hedges of teucrium, viburnum and hornbeam. FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ornamental grape leaves decorate the river stone paving. Tony Tait rakes the autumn leaves. An espaliered Jack Humm crab apple. Colourful pin oak leaves.





WHEN WELLINGTONIANS Elizabeth and Tony Tait were thinking about where to retire, their love of golf proved the deciding factor. Tony had a sister in Masterton and the two families would occasionally meet at the Martinborough golf course to have picnics and play golf.

"The Wairarapa was so different to Wellington, often with warmer weather," says Elizabeth. "You get to the top of the Rimutakas and suddenly there it is – a clear and inviting vista across the whole of the valley."

Tony was retiring after 35 years in the IT industry and Elizabeth from a job with an accountant in Khandallah, where the couple had lived in the same house for 25 years. On an exploratory trip to the Wairarapa, they stopped for coffee and a local directed them to the new development by the golf course, Martinborough Estate.

"That was in 1999 and the development was just a large paddock with no trees," Tony explains. But with the prospect of a golf course at their door the decision was made. "Golf was definitely the clincher for me," he admits.

The 55 sections in the development are covered by a covenant with strict rules about no fences, no caravans and no visible washing lines – all of which suited the Tait's.

Back home, both were in agreement and the decision was made. Initially they envisaged coming over for weekends but, once their Warren & Mahoney home was built, that soon stretched out to four days from Friday to Tuesday – the remainder spent in a Wellington apartment they had bought.

So far, so good, but when it came to the garden Tony says Elizabeth's imaginings were slightly different from his. "I thought we would have low maintenance and no flowers, leaving more time for important things (like golf)."

Elizabeth's beautiful garden in Khandallah hadn't come about without a struggle. Although she had firm plans for her Martinborough garden, she didn't want to make any costly mistakes. Landscape architect Hamish Moorhead drew up a plan to incorporate Elizabeth's vision of a green garden with well-defined spaces around the house.

A series of hedges give a crisp edge to the design, softened with Mediterranean planting to suit the hot, dry climate. Most striking of all are the beautiful autumn colours provided by hornbeam hedges, ornamental grapes covering the pergolas and an espaliered Jack Humm crab apple.

Elizabeth likes the way the hornbeam hedges hold their withered leaves through winter until the new spring growth pushes the old leaves out. >

THESE PAGES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A solid macrocarpa seat sheltered by teucrum and hornbeam hedges. Ornamental grapes frame a view of the house. The house seen across open space from the golf course. Hamish Moorhead's design evokes a series of garden rooms. Elizabeth cuts a crab apple branch for a vase.



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: The hedges provide subtly contrasting shades of green. Mediterranean plants such as English lavender work well in the hot, dry Wairarapa summers.

A repeated motif of viburnum hedges had to be removed as they became easy prey to sap-sucking thrips in the dry Wairarapa summers. One of these also shaded a row of standard 'Iceberg' roses at the end of a pergola. Another at the entrance has been replaced with smooth river stones.

Laurel hedges have been used effectively as a sheltering screen from neighbouring properties on either side and the front of the house, overlooking the golf course, is gloriously open. All of the houses in the estate are set well back by a sweep of common ground, allowing clear, uninterrupted views.

A well-clipped silvery grey *teucrium* hedge cocoons a solid *macrocarpa* seat from the wind and in the summer a random scattering of bright red poppies adds a dash of welcome colour. Other Mediterranean plants that thrive in the conditions include lavender and rosemary, olives and the odd gum tree left over from the originals planted by the developer.

Tony claims to have felled up to fifty gums to make way for other planting as the need for shelter has changed. Leyland cypresses and limbed-up poplar trees still remain, along with oaks, Italian alders and a chestnut tree. "We want wind protection but don't want to block too much sun."

The result of this thinning process is a flourishing orchard and vegetable garden with apples, apricots, lemons, limes, mandarins, figs, quinces, hazelnuts and walnuts all coming into their own. Locally available pea straw is used generously as mulch and bore water throughout the development ensures a plentiful supply of moisture for the garden.

Raised wooden beds sheltered by a *feijoa* hedge overflow with salad greens, courgettes, rhubarb, acid-free tomatoes and strawberries, among masses of herbs. Thirty trees are now producing olives, which are cold-pressed in the village to produce their own olive oil.

These days Elizabeth enjoys taking the bountiful fruits of her labour back to friends and family in Wellington. "From a bare paddock 10 years ago it's very satisfying to now have an established garden attracting birds, butterflies and bumble-bees."

One of Elizabeth's favourite pastimes is fossicking for old wooden beams, fence posts and gates, which she commissions experts to make into tables, benches, chairs and even a unique mantelpiece in the living room. With these clever personal touches, it is no wonder the Taits now prefer to spend most of their time enjoying their place in Martinborough. ■