



Annabel Langbein's Wanaka cabin nestles amongst the fruit trees and ornamental gardens.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANNABEL LANGBEIN

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# A place to call HOMIE

A WANAKA HIDEAWAY  
KEEPS CALLING  
ANNABEL LANGBEIN BACK...

Annabel's cabin with its established garden as it is today. Inset: A photo of the house taken nine years ago (2002).



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANNABEL LANGBEIN

SHE MAY be a highflyer who went to Europe on business half a dozen times last year, but Annabel Langbein's dream is to spend enough time at her lakeside Wanaka property to be able to really call it home.

"What could be better?" she asks. Although the increasingly famous cook, author and television star is based in Auckland, she comes to Wanaka as often as she can, even if it's only for a day or two.

"Being here is like plugging in to a recharger," she says.

She wasn't quite so enthusiastic about their Wanaka property when her husband, Ted Hewetson, first showed it to her 15 years ago. They had been holidaying in there regularly and talked about buying some land.

Ted had already missed out on another property he liked, so when an agent showed him nine hectares on the edge of Lake Wanaka he knew it

was a rare opportunity and signed up immediately. The problem was he didn't tell Annabel.

It was a grey day when he drove her down to see the property. They walked along the waterfront through knee-deep mud and then Ted pointed out a steep boggy bracken-covered hillside.

"Annabel said no," explains Ted. "So I had to tell her I already had an unconditional agreement on it. She was very, very cross."

Fortunately, Annabel soon fell in love with it.

"Our new neighbour, Bindy Wilson, asked us for dinner and seeing her lovely

garden inspired me. I realised I could do something in the bracken and the bog," she says.

When a local contractor was putting in a driveway for them Annabel asked if he knew anyone who could help with the garden design.

"He recommended iconic Wanaka gardeners Pat and Keith Stuart. Next thing I knew there was an old man in overalls pointing with a rake where he wanted rocks." That was Keith (now aged 83) designing ponds for the property.

"It was the beginning of a wonderful friendship," says Annabel.



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Iconic Wanaka gardeners Pat (right) and Keith Stuart (centre) on a tour of Annabel's garden.



**Above: Massed plantings of flowering plants. Right: Annabel, Pat and Keith inspect the progress of the vegetable gardens. Below: Sampling the cherries for ripeness.**



**Inset: Artichoke heads ready for harvesting.**



“Every year since then Keith has taken me on a trip to Southland to buy plants from nurseries owned by his friends and relatives. On the last trip Pat (84) asked if she could come too. So the three of us had a real roady and didn’t get home until 11.30 at night.”

WHILE SHE’S best known for her interest in food, Annabel has always been a passionate gardener. She studied horticulture at Lincoln University, Canterbury and has always planted an ornamental garden as well as vegetables.

Visitors to her home usually get very well fed. They also get taken on a garden tour which includes an energetic march up and down the hillside, with Annabel shrieking in delight at any progress plants are making while gathering armfuls of whatever’s in season for visitors to take home.

The land has two creeks running through it and several springs so there is plenty of water which has been harnessed to help plants grow.

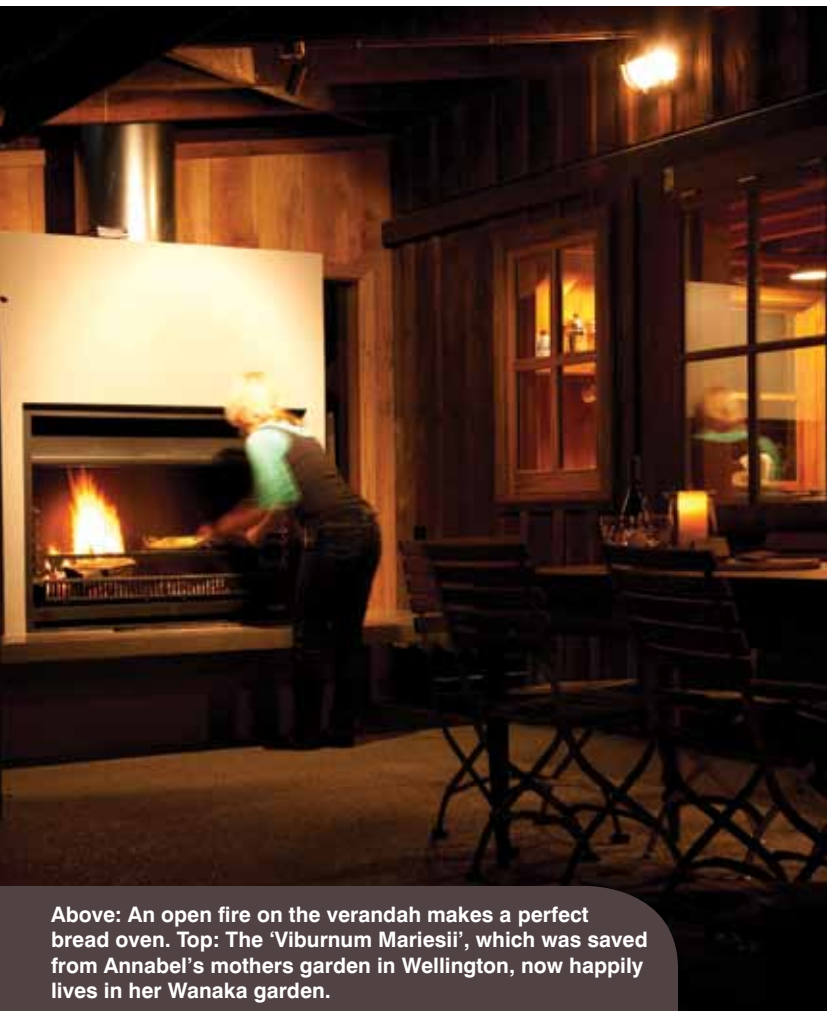
“If you don’t have water in Central you may as well give up,” says Annabel.

Last autumn’s plantings include 63 magnolia trees, a grove of almonds and hazelnuts and a new stand of olives. The earliest plantings – which include

Beneath the protective netting Annabel's strawberries were just waiting to be picked for one of her delicious recipe.

Inset top: Ted's tractor.  
Below: An ingenious trellis made of driftwood supports the cucumbers.





Above: An open fire on the verandah makes a perfect bread oven. Top: The 'Viburnum Mariesii', which was saved from Annabel's mothers garden in Wellington, now happily lives in her Wanaka garden.

totem cypresses, fruit trees, specimen trees and conifers – are now well established.

A favourite is a *Viburnum 'Mariesii'* which came from Annabel's mother's Wellington garden. It had a tempestuous journey getting to Wanaka – sitting on a wharf for months during a strike and then getting lost.

“When it finally arrived it looked very sick so I took it to the Nook Nursery in Hawea and Jamie Urquhart nursed it for a year before he let me have it back. Now it's thriving and I think of my lovely mother every time I look at it. My father always had a Dublin Bay rose so we've got one at the gate to remind us of him.”

Annabel's father, Fred, was Director of Roading for the Roads Board in Wellington.

“He was a very clever engineer. He dropped dead at the age of 70 of a heart attack. It was very sad. Afterwards, Mum turned his veggie garden into a picking garden.” Annabel's mother, Anne, died six years ago.

“She was a wonderful mother. She had a home science degree but she chose to be a stay-at-home mum cooking delicious meals and making clothes for us. (Annabel has an older sister, Prue Langbein, who works for Radio New Zealand.)

“The worst thing I ever did to Mum was to abandon her on a street corner in Naples, Italy when I was 17. Some guy came along and asked did I like pizza and I was off. Twenty minutes down the road I realised it wasn't about pizza so I had to get myself out of that one!

“Afterwards, Mother always said there were three things she needed to go on holiday with me – a jar of marmite, a bottle of gin and a packet of valium. Poor Mother – I was such a toady teenager.”

ANNABEL AND Ted now have teenagers of their own. Sean (19) is at university in Melbourne and Rose (17) is having a gap year in Sweden.

“We've tried to teach them that knowing how to live life well when it's tough is what's important,” says Annabel. “Anyone can live well when it's easy.”

With the children gone, Annabel and Ted have more time to focus on their business. With three books in the top 10 New Zealand non-fiction list and a second television series underway there's not much time to dwell on the empty nest. A second television series of *The Free Range Cook* is being shot in Wanaka. It has a similar format to the first one – visiting local growers and then cooking something simple with their produce. Annabel loves to inspire people to cook their own healthy simple meals.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANNABEL LANGBEIN

The Dublin Bay Rose at Annabel's front gate reminds her of her father, Fred.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and a silver necklace, is smiling and looking down at a large bouquet of red roses she is holding. The background is a bright, outdoor setting with green foliage.

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Below: A picture from the family album of Sean and Rose enjoying the lake. Inset: Rose waterskiing in front of their Lake Wanaka property.



PHOTOS FROM ANNABEL'S FAMILY ALBUM

“Series two is going to be more relaxed and even easier.” She says a lot of thought goes into getting the right mix of recipes in each programme with something to appeal to the wide range of viewers. The first series was watched by half a million people in New Zealand and sold into 70 markets around the world – so she must have been doing something right.

“When I’m filming down here it doesn’t really feel like work,” says Annabel. “Instead of being surrounded by concrete pavements, I’m in this potent landscape, and I really do feel a connection to it.”

Annabel is a big fan of Edward O Wilson’s philosophy – biophilia – which says there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. Wilson says this is why people have such a profound response to nature.

“That philosophy has a real

resonance for me,” says Annabel. “And I really feel it when I’m here. Life is less hurried and pressured. People’s lives seem to be more in tune with the rhythms of nature.”

LONG BEFORE they bought land in Wanaka, Annabel and Ted were coming down regularly to take their children skiing.

“I don’t ski anymore,” says Annabel. “Every time I went up the mountain I would come down with a dislocated something. But now I’ve discovered a lot of women who don’t ski. We go walking and have picnics instead.

“Winter holidays were great but it was when we discovered summer we really fell in love with Wanaka. We used to bring the kids down for weeks at a time. We had a crappy old boat and we wouldn’t come off the lake until eight o’clock at night. We could just slip into

the rhythm of the days. It reminded me of my own childhood.”

Although Annabel likes to head off on adventures when she’s here, usually involving gathering food with family and friends, she also loves to hang out at home.

“I like staying home and being a hermit. Often I don’t even go into town.”

Nowadays going to town involves being recognised, but Annabel doesn’t mind that.

“It’s not about me,” she says. “People come and tell me what they’ve done and are genuinely thrilled with what they’ve achieved. It’s great inspiring people to have fun in the kitchen. They realise ‘I can do that’. The free range thing has really struck a chord – I think people realise that free range means free spirited.

“It’s so empowering to know you can create change in people’s lives.”

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Time alone in  
the garden gives  
Annabel a sense of  
connection to nature.

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