



Inn of the FIRST HAPPINESS



AN INTERNATIONALLY
SUCCESSFUL COUPLE
CAME TO WAIHEKE
ISLAND AND
DISCOVERED THAT
THE WORLD THERE IS
INDEED THEIR OYSTER

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Jonathan Rutherford Best (left)
and Andrew Glenn.





THEY OWE IT ALL to the tuatua vongole. It was a sunny winter's morning in 2011 on Auckland's Waiheke Island when partners Andrew Glenn and Jonathan Rutherford Best knew they'd found home. "We were hunting around on the beach in Oneroa Bay and came across these tuatua," says Taranaki-born Jonathan, who had uprooted life in London for New Zealand with Andrew just days previously. "With our feet in the sand, all we could think about was turning these clams into a buttery spaghetti vongole, using simple, local ingredients. It was the ultimate antithesis of our 'Waitrose' life in London: a perpetually damp and cold reality surrounded by packaged produce."

As one night's meal turned into a business plan, Jonathan and Andrew decided to make foraging for dinner their way of life. "The tuatua made me recall the off-grid, food-and-entertaining-based upbringing I had in Taranaki," Jonathan says. "Those clams quickly inspired the creation of a restaurant. It was a way for us to live and work on Waiheke, simplify our existence and reconnect with family values." Within three days they had bought land. After a year of hard work The Oyster Inn opened. Today it's steadily becoming a mainstay of the Waiheke community.

Born and raised in Hong Kong to a Kiwi father and Hong Kong Chinese mother, Andrew had the importance of food instilled in him from childhood. "My mum Ruby had one of the first gourmet-food-importing businesses in Hong Kong," he says. "I grew up surrounded by chefs, winemakers, food producers and hoteliers."

It was a world away from Jonathan's childhood spent on his family's Taranaki sheep farm, eating hogget and attending country afternoon teas. "Restaurants didn't really exist back then – certainly not where I grew up – and all entertaining was done at home," he says. "We'd go to family members' big houses and eat sponge cakes piled high with cream. As I grew older afternoon teas were less popular. My father became obsessed with barbecuing and the entertaining centred around deboned lamb, stuffed with fruit from the farm." ▶



While it was a tuatua spaghetti that started it all, oysters weave their way into many dishes on the inn's menu. "We serve them freshly shucked with a bit of chardonnay vinegar, lemon and shallots," Andrew says, "and sometimes with a shot of Bloody Mary granita."





Despite his history in European fashion, Andrew loved decorating the three Oyster Inn bedrooms in a laid-back bach style.

ONE NIGHT'S MEAL TURNED INTO A BUSINESS PLAN



Jonathan's career hopes after university took him to Sydney where he opened Pastels, a cabaret café. It was frequented by the late-1980s' thespian crowd, including Mel Gibson and Nicole Kidman. Pastels' success took Jonathan to London and in 1991 he launched Urban Productions, an extravagant party-planning business targeted at the Champagne-fuelled social scene in the British capital.

At a meeting for a Louis Vuitton event, Jonathan encountered Andrew, the fashion house's communications director. "Andrew asked me if I was a New Zealander," says Jonathan, alluding to his recognizable accent. "I said I was, he told me his dad was a Kiwi and we made a connection."

Andrew, who started his career at *Women's Wear Daily* in New York before returning to Hong Kong (first as an editor of the city's *Tatler* magazine and then as Louis Vuitton Asia's head of PR), came to know Jonathan through their working relationship. "I was once the client!" laughs Andrew. "Finally, at a Serpentine Gallery party, we made plans for a date," says Jonathan. "I took him to the Tate Modern, then to dinner at Scott's in Mayfair." Andrew interjects: "It was the perfect night. And the rest, as they say, is history."

Three years later the couple, overwhelmed by their high-pressure life in Old Blighty, decided time off was needed. "Jonathan had sold his business," says Andrew, "and I had had two stressful years working as the marketing director of Topshop. So we decided to take 2010 off to travel." Jonathan adds: "It was a sabbatical of sorts. A break from life." While travelling around Europe they planned their wedding ceremony in Bali which took place in August that year. Then they set off for South East Asia.

In Burma they met a tour guide who suggested they never return to their old London life. "This man had never left Burma but spent his whole life looking at the world through books and the internet," Jonathan says. "We mentioned that Australia and New Zealand were next on our travel list. He said, 'New Zealand? Why don't you live there? I've seen it on the internet - it's the most beautiful paradise in the world.'" Light bulbs went on in both Andrew's and Jonathan's heads.

An extended stay in New Zealand proved the Burmese guide right. "We spent two months here and realized how prolific were the great luxuries of space, sea and sunshine," says Jonathan. "We couldn't face life back in London. The Burmese man's dream had become our own. We returned to pack up our stuff and quickly moved to Auckland without any idea of how we'd make a living."

A stroke of serendipity saw Jonathan and Andrew on Oneroa Beach on that luminous August day. Almost two years later it's the same beach where the couple swims every morning. "Well, I swim," says Jonathan. "Andrew normally stands on the beach, holding my towel... he grew up with tropical waters, after all." ▶





BREAKING INTO THE COMMUNITY
 With few connections on Waiheke Island when they arrived, Jonathan and Andrew have been touched by the warm welcome from locals. “The community here is very progressive and very diverse,” says Jonathan. “People exist from all walks of life. After we opened our doors to the inn, locals just started coming in to chat.” Andrew adds: “We wanted to create a place that could be a social hub on the island: a place to meet and mingle.” Working alongside the locals has become Jonathan and Andrew’s biggest achievement, they say. “We have a business that can support every sort of person who lives on Waiheke,” Jonathan explains. “The farmers, the winemakers, the bee-keepers, the fishermen... the inn can source from them all. To us, that’s the greatest thing.”

RIGHT AND ON THE COVER:
 London-based musician Nathan Haines and his designer wife and DJ Jaimie consider Jonathan and Andrew part of their family after a two-month stint playing a mixture of Latin, soul and jazz-inspired grooves at the Inn on Sunday afternoons. The creative couple mixes up DJ duties while Nathan plays his signature live saxophone, inspired by the beach parties of Ibiza. Nathan and Jaimie will be back at The Oyster Inn next March.



The daily life of the innkeeper keeps the pair extremely busy. “We’re renting a place right by The Oyster Inn while we make plans for the land we bought in 2011,” says Andrew. “It means one of us – or both of us – can be at the inn all the time.” Later this year they will build, recruiting architects Lance and Nicky Herbst to design their dream home. “We love their simple aesthetic, their appropriate sense of volume and their iconic-Kiwi-bach vernacular,” says Andrew.

Jonathan and Andrew have breakfast at the inn’s restaurant every morning while they ready it for the day’s service. Local suppliers dip in and out, bringing in the latest seasonal produce. “Our restaurant is like a shop front,” says Jonathan. “It’s been a way for us to break the ice and become part of the community. The locals can come in and out as they please.”

Guests at The Oyster Inn, which features three rooms of accommodation alongside a small shop and the restaurant, usually arrive at the Waiheke ferry dock about midday. Jonathan picks them up in Pearl, a yellow Volkswagen Kombi. Affability is an essential characteristic of an innkeeper, he explains. “You have to be able to talk to anyone; you never know who’s going to walk through your door. You need to be knowledgeable and you must love people.”

In the past, a challenge for Andrew and Jonathan would have been enticing media to a Louis Vuitton shop launch while Madonna and Kylie Minogue held parties on the same night. Today, it’s the funny things that can be trying, Andrew says. “Our problems are so much simpler. A drama for us now is when someone has locked their wallet in a safe on a busy summer Sunday while the restaurant is full.”

Jonathan and Andrew have built a family around the inn. “We knew nobody on Waiheke when we moved here,” Andrew says. “Luckily, when you open a restaurant you create a little family. We all look out for each other.” Jonathan adds: “Less than two years after we moved to New Zealand, we have a full and satisfying life on Waiheke. We’ve become so busy we’re now employing seasonal staff to handle the summer season. We foster them all into The Oyster Inn family – especially as we have young people on working holidays from other countries. They know no one, just like we did. We’ve basically become their fathers.”



Jonathan and Andrew’s suppliers are part of their daily lives. From above: bee kids Leo and Lex Evatt; bee-keeper Richard Evatt from Waiheke Honey Company; Anne Stanimiroff and Colin Sayles with olive oil from Rangihoua Estate; fisherman Terry Gallon of Fishing Waiheke with fresh snapper; lemon suppliers John Forrester and Margaret Bell of Waiheke Fresh.



SEASONAL FORAGING

Seasonality commits Jonathan and Andrew to the Waiheke way. “When we first moved here we were those spoilt Londoners – those who didn’t understand why you couldn’t get blueberries in winter,” says Andrew. “Now, I love that everything isn’t available year-round. It’s healthier and better for the local economy.” Jonathan shares the excitement: “Can you imagine how thrilled we are to be coming into mandarin season?” Of course seasonal seafood is integral at The Oyster Inn. “Right now, our fisherman Terry is bringing in delicious, fresh kingfish, snapper and occasionally John Dory,” says Andrew. “Then there’s the Te Matuku oysters. We wouldn’t have our name without them.”



Nat Upchurch of Te Matuku Bay Oysters.

