

holiday home/bay of islands

WHEN DANIEL MET SANDRA

HE WAS AN AMERICAN PROPERTY DEVELOPER. SHE WAS AN AUSTRALIAN FASHION RETAILER AND SPIRITUAL MEDIUM. THEY JOINED FORCES AND THE RESULT WAS EAGLES NEST, A PRIVATE RETREAT THEY SHARE WITH THE WELL-HEELED, AND A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS THEY SHARE WITH THE WORLD



WORDS JANE AVERY PHOTOGRAPHS KEVIN EMIRALI

Sandra says, "I spent my career dressing women and making them look beautiful and I loved it. But to take land and a building and make them look fantastic, that's something else. We feel we've left a legacy. One friend, an Australian architect, walked in and tears started welling. He said, 'This is exactly what Frank Lloyd Wright would be doing today if he were alive!'"



SANDRA AND DANIEL BISKIND accept that they may appear a little obsessive to their Russell neighbours. In the eight years they've lived in the Bay of Islands they've renovated nine homes and built three brand-new ones. Says Daniel, in his characteristic calm and meditative way, "We call it congenital projectitis. We pray it's not terminal. You might pray it's not contagious!" You bet ... these are far-from-ordinary homes. For "far-from-ordinary" read Luxury with a capital L.

Sandra and Daniel are the owners of internationally acclaimed resort Eagles Nest. Located just north of Russell's Flagstaff Hill, it encompasses a natural bowl with its ridge perched high above the Bay of Islands. Nestled into the 30 hectares are five multi-million dollar homes, all available for rent.

The view is without doubt one of the most spectacular in the country. The green slopes of Waitangi languish to the west and the ubiquitous Hole in the Rock winks across the watery expanse to the north-east. Yachts, launches, tourist boats and the odd cruise liner break their way past this magnificent headland into the great blue beyond. And for those gazing

back from the water, the impression is equally grand. The hill's crowning glory is an elegant line of pale grey granite, glass and steel ... a state-of-the-art architectural creation called Rahimoana which, translated from Maori, means Sun God over the Ocean. When it's not being rented as a holiday home, it's Sandra and Daniel's own home.

In business as a resort since 2002, Eagles Nest has collected an impressive list of international travel-media awards. It's recently been hailed as one of the top 100 resorts in the world and among the top 12 in design by *Dealer* magazine. It also won the World Travel Award as New Zealand's leading resort in 2005.

Its clientele far exceeds the definition of the ordinary tourist. As Daniel succinctly puts it, "They're people of means who want to experience the luxury and privacy of their own homes when on holiday." The resort tariff starts at \$1800 per night for the romantic one-bedroomed home, First Light Temple, and extends to a princely \$37,000 per night for the four-bedroomed work of art that is Rahimoana. Eagles Nest attracts visitors from all over the world, including royalty and movie stars. ▶



Whether it's a sunny blue-sky day or there's a dramatic storm blowing, the massive sliding glass doors surrounding the seaward side of the house effortlessly create a relationship with the outside world. Fully automated venetian blinds are cleverly concealed in the ceiling cavity.





Sandra and Daniel used their other building projects as experiments. "We tried all the ideas we wanted to use here. Does this granite work? Will that glass wall work?" Many things are unique to the house including the Omvivo wash planes imported from Australia. The bathrooms were judged best in New Zealand in 2006.

The couple believe they've created a new product niche in the hospitality industry, especially appreciated by groups booking the entire resort, with each family unit inhabiting its own house. "One family from Texas who rented all the villas said, 'You know, we feel like we're in the Kennedy compound'. That made our hearts sing. They felt safe and had three generations together in a home atmosphere, which was part of our dream come true for the business." You get the picture. Seamless service, personal chef, chauffeured Porsche and all the privacy and luxury you could ask for in a breathtakingly beautiful part of the world.

So how did this come to pass? Daniel's a native of Cleveland, Ohio, with a background in large-scale property development. He was attracted to New Zealand in the 1990s. "I had a gut feeling within hours of landing in Auckland that there was something for me here. It was an intuitive knowing that led me to rearrange things so I could actually spend time here." Part of Daniel's "rearranging" had a rather cosmic ring to it.

Enter Sandra, an Australian born and bred in Geelong, with a 25-year career running her own top-notch fashion boutiques in Geelong, Melbourne and Ballarat. She was also a well-known spiritual medium with a busy schedule as a

keynote speaker throughout Australia and New Zealand. Sandra and Daniel's souls collided one evening in Auckland. As they tell it, sparks flew and their relationship was signed, sealed and delivered in a matter of days. Sandra says, "We call it divine intervention." Daniel says, "It felt like it was an arranged marriage."

Sandra says, "I met Daniel in December 1998 in Auckland at a meditation night I'd organized. I was told about an American gentleman who was attending and all of a sudden I got this message ... 'you're going to marry him' and I thought 'no way, I've got my life sorted out!' But, by the end of dinner the next night, he told me he wanted to take me home and look after me for the rest of my life. The third time we met we agreed we'd be married from that moment."

Daniel says, "Monday I was told about an Australian who did life-changing work and got a strong 'be there.' When I first met Sandra Tuesday there was a sense of instant recognition in my heart. There was also this little voice saying 'caution, caution, caution' which loosely translated meant 'this woman could rearrange your life'. I didn't ask her to marry me until the second dinner. I was a little slow." Within weeks Sandra's Australian business was wrapped up and she was travelling north with her brand-new husband. ▶





Sandra and Daniel say friends and family would come and stay and wouldn't want to leave. "In the end we thought we needed to open this up so the world could experience what we love." They believe the location emanates a frequency that raises consciousness and speaks to the wholeness of the soul.

INTUITION, THEY SAY, WAS TAPPING THEM ON THE SHOULDER AND THE BAY OF ISLANDS WAS EXERCISING A KIND OF PULLING POWER

Intuition, they say, was tapping them on the shoulder and the Bay of Islands was exercising a kind of pulling power. Sandra explains. "We drove through Russell and straight on to this land and we knew this was it. We could feel it." Daniel adds, "There are power places around the world with a variety of metaphysical functions and this one is very, very powerful. It emanates a frequency that raises consciousness and speaks to the wholeness of the soul. Obviously Russell has extraordinary charm, authenticity and history. But we're talking about something that goes even beyond that."

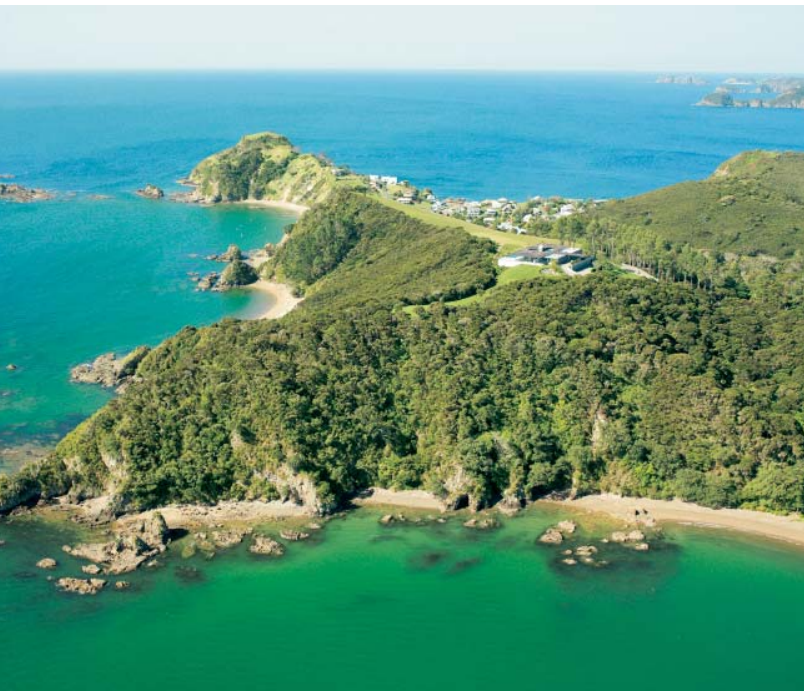
A house on the ridge line was up for sale and they clocked up purchase number one. Within a few years they'd cobbled together seven titles. Sandra says, "We're incredibly fortunate to have had the ability, the resources and the fun to create Eagles Nest. We'll be coming into profit this year. We didn't expect that we would be getting a return so quickly and we're very happy everything we've done has been recognized."

It's the perfect canvas for expressing their creativity. The resort's architecture, interior and landscape design and promotional material are all of their vision and execution. They say the design harmony they've achieved, combined with the extraordinary energy of the location, helps foster

relaxation. "The only negative feedback we get is that people don't want to leave," says Daniel.

"The first house, called Sacred Space, was developed as a place for ourselves. Then First Light Temple developed as a retreat for us when we had lots of guests staying. It was the first thing that we built from scratch." As Eagles Nest began taking bookings and Sandra and Daniel house-hopped around Russell and travelled the world together, the plans for Rahimoana evolved. Auckland-based architect Simon Carnachan fine-tuned their ideas and Phillip Lindesay and Barney Limm of Auckland's Lindesay Construction were enlisted to handle the project. Sandra and Daniel's admiration overflows for these men and their creative input.

The house consists of more than 1000 cubic metres of concrete (including 10-metre-deep foundations), more than 70 tonnes of steel, 1100 square metres of granite flooring and 1000 square metres of copper roof. The aerofoil design of this is tapered both top and bottom, like the wing of an airplane, giving it the fine edge that makes it appear to float. The building is designed to withstand 270kph winds. Since its completion in 2005, Sandra and Daniel's home has won several regional design and building awards. ▶



Handsome travel budgets allow for fabulous modes of transport. Many guests arrive at Eagles Nest and explore the Bay of Islands by helicopter, piloted by Grant Harnish of Salt Air. The headland property lays claim to its own private beaches and bush walks.




Adding to the resort's sense of belonging in the landscape is the Biskinds' devotion to the home's ecological sustainability and the surrounding natural environment. They've spent considerably on native planting around all their housing projects and say it's done wonders for the native bird population.

When guests are in residence at Rahimoana, Sandra and Daniel pack their bags and relocate to another of their properties in nearby Orongo Bay or indulge their love of travel. Day to day, they devote their time to exercise, their passion for living food, overseeing Eagles Nest, writing and their personal development work that goes by the name of The Heartpower Process. The couple is quick to point out that, while Eagles Nest has a profoundly spiritual dimension, it should not be considered as a spiritual retreat.

Heartpower is a completely separate entity, born of a desire to share a journey both Sandra and Daniel say they've spent their lives pursuing. They present their insights and research through weekend workshops, week-long intensives, books and CDs in London, New York, Los Angeles, Australia and New Zealand. It's the sort of thing where experience is everything and explanation can go only so far. Simply put, Heartpower is about levels of awareness and helping people realize the extraordinary potential they possess. It's about living life in a state of love and joy and providing people with the tools to help reconnect with their true selves.

While Daniel's work is as the conceptualizer, Sandra's is with the cosmic connection. As a spiritual medium, Sandra says she works with divine energies and messages from other dimensions every day. She says, "I'm given information that makes sense of what you are doing in your life. I'm able to contact the spirit world. And it is profound for everyone concerned. I've seen people change their lives in an instant." Daniel says, "Everybody has a built-in GPS and that's their emotions. If you're feeling fear, negativity and pain, you can take responsibility, discover the truth, and in any given moment you can feel better."

With such a personal and spiritual stake in their work, their property and New Zealand, this couple doesn't plan on going elsewhere anytime soon. Says Sandra, "We wake up every morning, look at each other and say we are so blessed and so lucky to be able to spend time here. Because we feel the way we do about the Bay of Islands and Eagles Nest we know other people will feel this way too." Daniel adds with a smile, "That was our market research." 

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