

CHRISTMAS ON THE COAST

It's al fresco feasts and views for miles at a collection of beach houses on the coast north of Kerikeri

Text by Fiona Ralph. Photography by Melanie Jenkins. Styling by Catherine Wilkinson and Shani Luckman.



Let your surroundings take centre stage this Christmas and indulge in a relaxed, outdoor family feast. Skip the formal lunch and head straight to the bach, entertain on the deck at home or take a picnic to the beach. There's no need for fussy decorations when you have the beauty of New Zealand as your backdrop. For our Christmas cover shoot, the *Your Home and Garden* team headed north of Kerikeri to Driftwood Seaside Escapes, a collection of gorgeous beach houses tucked amid the bush. With stunning views over the Bay of Islands, all we needed were a few well-placed festive touches.

A FESTIVE TABLE For a stylish Christmas lunch, drape an outdoor table with a white linen tablecloth, and lay fresh foliage down as a centrepiece. Rustic wooden dishes and serving platters will match the casual spirit of the day, and linen napkins and fine cutlery will bring a sense of occasion to the look.

THE TREE Keep things natural with a mix of wooden decorations, gold accents and strips of linen tied to branches. You can also tie fabric strips around a foam wreath (we bought ours from Spotlight) to create an alternative, textured look.



OPPOSITE Milli and Reef with Archie the Jack Russell. They share their house (above, a 1913 villa relocated from Dargaville) with parents Vanessa and Richard Owen; the couple's eldest daughters, Dione and Poppy, are currently working overseas.



On table: Nkuku pizza board, \$125, and bowls, \$49 each, Fog Linen brass bowls, \$19 each, all from Father Rabbit; Spiegelau Champagne glasses, \$28 each, Ay Illuminate Z5 lightshade, \$645, Laguiole knives, \$92 for six, and forks, \$92 for six, all from Tessuti; napkins, \$59 for four, from Nest; Your Home and Garden for Farmers Niseko side plates, \$13.99 each; tablecloth, \$299, from French Country; towel, \$89, from Atolyia. **On tree:** Antlers, \$5.90 each, and stars, \$4.50 each, from French Country; Nannestad & Sons angels, \$25 each, from The Market NZ; acorns, \$6 each, and Bloomingville decorations, \$9.50 each, all from Father Rabbit. **Under tree:** Ashby basket, \$24.95, Walton basket, \$49.95, Mai basket, \$27.95, Tahoma basket, \$139, all from Freedom. All other items, homeowner's own.



THE HOMESTEAD

In the family home, Vanessa has opted for a comfortable, coastal style, using lots of vintage and upcycled pieces. The house is a former retirement home, moved onto the site after the land was purchased.



COCKTAIL HOUR After an indulgent Christmas meal, retiring to a shady spot for a gin and tonic or homemade lemonade will be welcome. Add a sprig of rosemary and some lemon slices for a refreshing touch – we were lucky to have a miniature citrus grove on hand for our shoot. The family home sits on a headland, surrounded by views of the water. As well as walkways to the beach, private seating areas are scattered throughout the garden.

KEEP IT GREEN Natural tabletop ‘trees’ are a big trend this year. To make your own, trim some stems from your Christmas tree – or a similar tree in your garden – and pop them in a vase. You can also attach stems to a wreath as we have done on page 60.

Below: Gold stars, \$9.90, and hearts, \$5.90, from French Country; vase, \$125, from Father Rabbit; Laguiole knives, \$92 for six, Mayde towel, \$70, both from Tessuti; tablecloth, \$15, from Kmart. Other items, homeowner's own.



MEET + GREET

Vanessa Owen, 48 (designer and boutique bach developer), **Richard Owen**, 57 (renovator and boutique bach developer), **Reef**, 9, **Milli**, 17 (horse riding instructor), **Poppy**, 21 (superyacht crew), and **Dione**, 23 (superyacht crew).

Eight years after setting sail from England in 1988, Vanessa and Richard Owen landed in New Zealand. With them were two extra crew members – their elder daughters were born en route. The family fell in love with the barefoot lifestyle of the Bay of Islands and stayed on, renovating and selling as many as 27 houses in 13 years. When they were finally ready to put down roots, they started looking for their dream home. They wanted access to water and a holiday feel. When they found the land at the head of Te Puna Inlet, they were sold. As well as their house, there are two baches (The Hammock and The Bach) and The Beach Huts (twin huts that form a single dwelling), which are available to rent. See driftwoodnz.com.

House tealight holders (on mantel), \$19 each, from Father Rabbit; Javanese dilli bag (on wall), \$235, throw, \$139, and cushion, \$225, all from Indie Home.

*Nestled in the bush,
the mini hideaway
called 'The Hammock'
is the perfect spot
for a romantic or
solo escape*

THE HAMMOCK

Homemade touches like driftwood signs add character and a homely feel to the baches. Each dwelling has a name, and a Penguin Books sign to match. The Hammock, pictured here, is a cosy retreat near the main house.



BY THE BEACH

With a balcony overlooking native bush and a bed enjoying the same view, the retreat-like feeling of The Hammock is hard to beat. There's even a pathway to your own beach. The first cottage built by the family was The Bach, which offers magnificent views from the top of the property. It was built in 2009 as "a bit of a hobby", says Vanessa. When it proved popular, The Hammock was built to meet demand. "Since then, we've been either building or buying baches to meet the overflow," she laughs. Unsurprisingly, they are nearly always fully booked – Vanessa's attention to detail in the styling and presentation is rare in the bach rental business. In honour of a late friend, Vanessa and Richard also offer May Days, a free night of accommodation for people in the community in need of a retreat.



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THE BEACH HUTS are a quirky glamping experience. The family camped out in the huts when they first bought the section while they relocated and renovated their house. One hut functions as a kitchen and the other as a tiny, four-person bedroom, featuring a double bed and two loft beds. Showering and washing up takes place outdoors, as does most of the living. Guests can also put up tents to cater for extra visitors. ●