



The little chapel in the valley

The plan was to plant olive groves in Paparoa as a way to ease into retirement but Barry and Verity Baines say they have never worked harder.



Barry and Verity outside their cute chapel with the bright red door and their award winning oil.

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by Rose Rees-Owen

We love it — it keeps us young and fit."

Before becoming growers the pair had office jobs in Auckland — Varity worked for statistics New Zealand and Barry was a marketer for an engineering company and the pair decided it was time for a change.

They live on a 20 acre block nestled in an off shoot of the Kaipara Harbour and their idyllic location is complemented by their house, a wooden chapel with a bright red door, which was once the Chapel of the Good Shepherd in Remuera, Auckland.

"Barry found it on the internet and we

instantly fell in love. When we moved it here in 2001, it was quite dilapidated — the gutters and the roof needed fixing and it was quite sad looking."

Once the pair began renovating they found little treasures that brought out the chapel's charm.

"When we pulled the carpet back, the floors were maitai and they were absolutely pristine and hadn't been touched, just like the day they had been laid."

Now an impressive and interesting lounge with a kitchen, family room and bedrooms added on, the couple have made it an icon naming their

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product, Chapel Olive Oil.

"The hardest thing for us is marketing and finding a point of difference and we believe we have with our label which depicts our chapel."

They add that with the groves being planted so close to the sea, the salty air gives them a unique flavour and a sense of freshness.

"Our best trees are planted on the hill where the wind whips through them — we have to stake them to hold them down."

They planted a small patch of trees in 2002 and their first harvest in 2004 was caused for excitement and celebration with a modest 170 litres of oil produced.

"That was a fun time, every single olive got picked," says Barry and Verity with a chuckle, "now we leave a lot of them to the birds."

They now produce around 1300 litres and have around 1100 trees with three varieties of olives — Frantoio, leccino and koroneiki.

Having bigger groves, they choose to use a mechanical picker which sends a vibration up the tree freeing the olive onto netting.

"It's easier that way and harvesting can be completed in a week instead of drawn out over a long period of time."

The machine collects only the ripe olives and leaves around a third of under ripe olives behind.

"In the beginning it really upset me to see all these beautiful olives not being used, but you have to look at whether getting the picker in to harvest them is



Barry showing where the olives will fruit when they come into season in the Autumn

going to cover your costs, and it isn't so you have to let it go," says Verity.

De-leafing the olives and driving them to the press in Wellsford is a family and community affair. Their large family of six children and several grandchildren often come up from Auckland to help and Barry is a member of the Paparoa Lions and his connections come in handy during harvesting.

"When we pulled the carpet back, the floors were maitai and they were absolutely pristine and hadn't been touched, just like the day they had been laid"

"We call a working bee and anyone who can help will come up."

The workers are rewarded with olive oil and the couple give a donation to the Lions club each year.

Verity is a committee member of Oliveti, the Northland olive growers association, and recently they hosted a field



The little chapel olive grove

day where around 20 growers met to talk shop, get tips and discuss problems.

"Olive growers are passionate about what they do. It's a real community and information flows freely between the growers."

Her role is organising the Oliveti awards, much to Barry's dislike as it means his oil can never win "best in show." Nevertheless the frantoio won gold and the leccino and koroneiki took away silver in a tasting competition very similar to wine with only certified extra virgin oil being accepted for judging.

Next year the couple plan to take some time out and travel to Africa visiting Kenya and Uganda where Barry went to school.

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