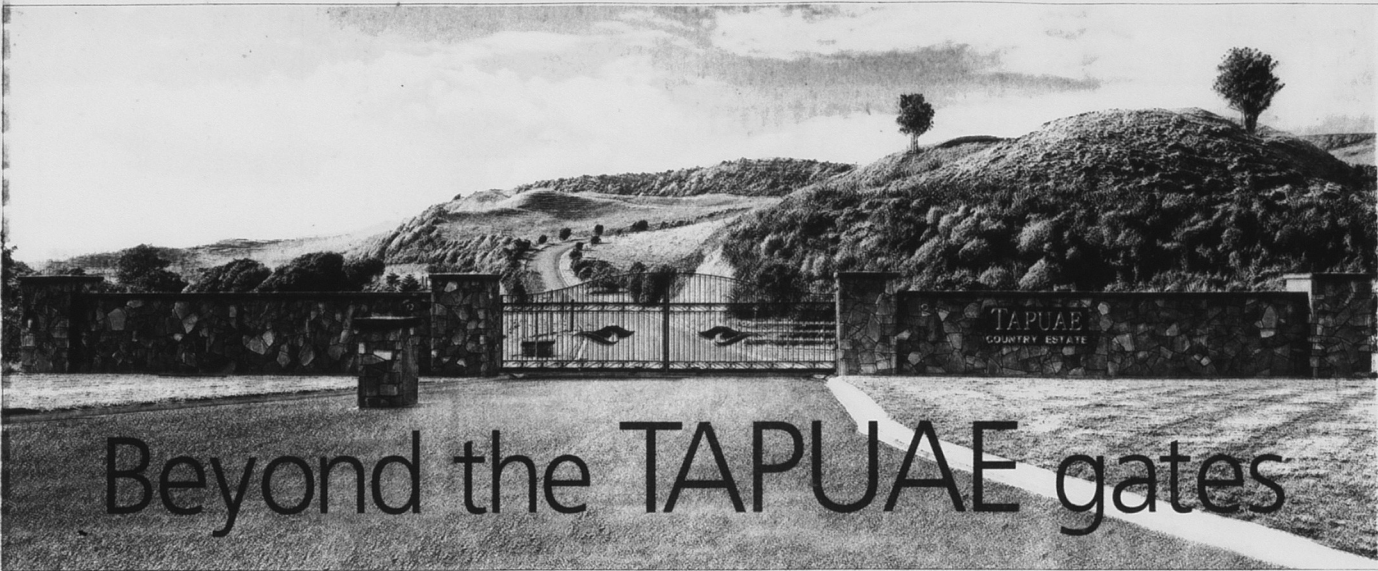


TAPUAE COUNTRY ESTATE

A Taranaki Daily News Advertising Feature



Tapuae Country Estate's unique farm-park lifestyle is on the market after seven years of detailed preparation. Mike Shaw looks at this coastal concept and the people behind it.

GLIMPSES of a dream have become an eye-opening experience for hundreds of visitors at Tapuae Country Estate open days this month. The timing coincides with the release of titles to the 30 exclusive lifestyle properties and the confirmation this week of the first private sale.

Developers John and Mary Washer have spent seven years and \$6 million reshaping the 190 acres of their convoluted coastal property between New Plymouth and Oakura. It's become a unique lifestyle farm park with the 30 building sites created throughout the property, which will continue to function as a 144-acre working dry-stock farm around the homes.

Purchase of one of the 30 sites at Tapuae also includes a third share of the farm property and its operations and an income that will contribute to the maintenance of the estate.

Most of the changes John and Mary have wrought here have been out of sight.

People flashing by in cars have been able to see just slices of roadways advancing through the property and

plantings expanding around a new lake. At other points, viewsheds open up momentarily to show sparkling blue sea and waves rolling in to shore.

Those teasing images gained close-up detail following the official opening of the development last month and the public open days that followed.

John and Mary Washer knew they had a special property here and have always been confident it would appeal to a wide market, but the response to the open gates stunned them.

More than 600 cars drove through them on Labour Day Monday. "We had rave reports back," John says. "People said it was amazing and that they didn't know all this was here. We are absolutely delighted with the positiveness of people as they drive out."

The first open day was an impromptu event but the reaction encouraged John and Mary. "We said 'Okay, we'll open again next weekend'."

The reaction was repeated. Hundreds more people took the opportunity to check out Tapuae when the gates opened again these past two weekends.

Those gates are part of the special welcome for owners and visitors.

Bluestone masonry walls were crafted at a cost of \$250,000 to put a stamp of quality on the approach and reflect the value that has been enhanced within the property. There's also extra value built into the walls in the form of high tech security cameras and automatic gates to control access to the estate.

Beyond the gates, fully kerbed and sealed roads wind into the hills and valleys of the property, guiding owners to the carefully selected building sites. Services have been fully finished, with power, water and high tech communications cabling available at the entry to each of the one-acre settings.

The lake visible from the highway above it is a focus for the Tapuae property, with two tennis courts and a residents' pavilion now established beside it. The lake is also new, of course, part of the comprehensive landscaping that has made this a very stylish lifestyle environment.

Years of planning and preparation has happened hand in hand with years of planting, and the growth around this lake and others on the property, and along the four and a half kilometres of



John and Mary Washer above one of the landscaped ponds on the striking coastal estate. Photo: MIKE SHAW

More than 120 tonnes of bluestone form Tapuae Country Estate's front entrance. The access road leads to 30 exclusive lifestyle properties with a mix of stunning sea and mountain views. Photo: ROB TUCKER

International Airport, but came down here with 62 Jersey cows in 1895 they swam them ashore at Port Taranaki.

We are still milking descendants of that herd, but it looks as if farming's going to finish with us."

John and Mary's children are enjoying professional careers out of Taranaki, and that leaves the couple with a future to settle. "So we decided to get rid of debt and put something back into the community."


"We are lucky enough that we could do that, and this is what this has led to."

The wide view and long term nature of Tapuae's development is now narrowing down for them. Two sites have been reserved for family and with the time-consuming work of construction behind them, John and Mary can now refocus on planning their own home here.

The project came at a good time in our lives," Mary says. "We like people and we met some really nice people on the way."

"Now we really want to share this with other people," Mary says. "We are ready to hand it over."


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TAPUAE COUNTRY ESTATE

Estate has its magic

A VISIT to Tapuae Country Estate with John and Mary Washer to share a dream realised. The couple's enthusiasm for the estate concept and the detailing they have carried out here is impressive.

Access and communication is the key, according to John. That's been achieved with the network of kerbed and sealed roads that carry people through the estate and the high-tech services provided to the entry to each housing site.

Roads and services are the practical aspects of such developments as this and result from careful planning and a thorough application of resources and workforce to put them in place.

There's a magic here, however, that lifts Tapuae into a very special category.

It's in the setting that John and Mary initially recognised and then enhanced to create a unique lifestyle environment.

The views and the folded landscape are the natural assets that underpin the life that residents will relish here.

Hills and valleys and twists and turns are the features that make Tapuae a property difficult, if not impossible, to run as a dairy farm.

That's why John and Mary stock the steep pastures with dry stock.

The rumpled landscape is perfect, however, for a variety of sheltered and private housing sites.

Everywhere we stop, there's a new image - from the stunning 360-degree panorama atop Tapuae's highest section to the wedge of blue water visible from the sheltered nook tucked into the slope of one of the valleys. Each is a variation on a theme.

That topmost site has to be experienced to be believed.

Standing here, you can look across North Taranaki farmland to the graceful slopes of Mt Taranaki - the most beautiful peak in the world," John says, then turn west to look up along the Okura coastline to Shipwreck Point.

Out in front is the apron of Tapuae and the glinting blue Tasman Sea, and along to the right is the sweep of beach and cliffs that draw your eye all the way to Paritutu and the Sugar Loaf Islands.

The complete picture is unexpected but understandable when John notes its position. "This is 98m above sea level," he points out. It's at the back of the property



but above the highway, which takes it out of reach of any traffic intrusion.

All of the Tapuae estate is spread out before it, but every other building site is hidden or located to maximise its privacy. "A lot of people have been blown away by the amount of land between the road and the sea," Mary observes.

Lower down, we pull up on another building site that seems to hang out over the surging water below. This is the spot that John and Mary have picked out for themselves and you could almost cast a baited hook out from the front lawn-to-be. Except there's now a marine park out there. John reminds me with one of his ready smiles.

All 30 properties here offer their own special outlook and different owners will appreciate the different views available.

But the real attraction of Tapuae is the total package that John and Mary have put together around the views.

They contoured areas as roads and access ways were established and created a central lake and several ponds as water features around the property. A pair of

tennis courts and a residents' pavilion - the latter complete with fully equipped kitchen and big screen LCD television - were built adjacent to the main lake as a recreational focus for Tapuae.

Nearby is an area John and Mary have named The Oval - an open activity area that they suggest could see use for a game of cricket or some similar communal sports event. The Village Green alongside the tennis courts has seating and a built-in barbecue facility for relaxed summer gatherings.

One of the building sites is located across the lake from the tennis courts but still enjoys a glimpse of the sea in the distance.

A fairly flat profile here and the nearness of the lake and its riparian plantings has one buyer interested in the chance to have a home surrounded by lawns. The lake and its plantings will be the garden - and someone else will look after it.

The plantings around the lake are part of the major greening of Tapuae that John and Mary and their dedicated team of gardeners have carried out.

Extensive plantings of native trees, shrubs and groundcovers now dress the estate. "We know where we wanted to get to, but we never envisaged the plantings

would turn out as good as they have," John says.

More than 200,000 plants have been bedded into the surroundings, filling up valley bottoms, softening lake edges and giving shade and shelter to the 4.5km of walkway that the couple has established throughout the estate.

That's a lot of plants to buy and green-fingered Mary Washer quickly realised that when they cleaned out Atawhai Nurseries' riparian stocks the first day. The couple established their own nursery at Tapuae to grow their own plants, the varieties that they had found would do well here.

Natives are the natural choice, and there's plenty of opportunity as we travel around the property to appreciate how successful the mix is - from flaxes and hebe to hohoria and pittosporum. It's all greenery, but the variety of hues and textures seems endless.

The nursery contains around 25,000 plants and will keep producing them for residents to continue planting around their own sites. There's an advantage in the relationship that should build up here - the residents will get the plants at half price.

The successful planting programme has been a must-do for Mary. "I had no choice," she says.

Both her mother and John's mother had coastal gardens that had featured in the annual Taranaki Rhododendron Festival. "I would have been in big trouble if I didn't perform, planting-wise," Mary says.



PHOTO: ROB TUCKER

Debate on where six zeroes go

ONE of Tapuae's one-acre building sites is going to have six zeroes attached to its price - and its developers don't see the current credit squeeze as an obstacle.

John and Mary Washer have been assured that a multiple-zero price is what the top Tapuae site should fetch - although they haven't been told exactly where it is.

"Respected valuers tell us that our sites are worth from \$450,000 up," John says. "And there's a million-dollar site here somewhere, but go-one knows where it is."

There are various opinions on that, of course, Mary adds. "People have differing views on which one it is."

You can see that in the response when showing people around the estate. "The first 10 people who looked at it - only one doubled up in their preferences," John recalls.

Plenty of interest has been shown in Tapuae titles since the couple began their redevelopment here. More than 100 names make up a list of potential buyers.

That list has been made up over the seven years it has taken the couple to complete the estate development and have it ready for the market. And the names have come into sharp focus now that John and Mary have changed their job descriptions from developers to sales and marketing executives.

"We are handling all the sales enquiries ourselves in the initial stages to bed it (the project) in," John says.

That list has changed with the time taken to finish Tapuae, Mary admits. "Many couldn't wait. Their timing meant they had to go and do something somewhere else."

Seven years ago, John and Mary didn't foresee the housing market contracting and the global financial crisis coinciding with Tapuae's completion.

The couple aren't worried by that. "We always anticipated this would be a 10-year project," John explains. "We said we wouldn't sell until we got the titles and we planned on having titles by year seven."

"I don't care if it's now a three-year process to sell the sites. There's no urgency to sell," John adds. "And we won't undersell. We are early for the next market."

That fits very comfortably with John's often-stated motto: "Remove the obstacle and get on with the job."

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John Larmer is pleased to have provided advice to the Washer Family.

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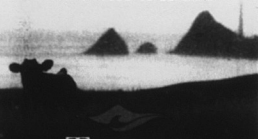
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Visitors at last Sunday's open day at Tapuae Country Estate check out the panoramic views.

Photo: MIKE SCOTT

Development offers wider benefits

DEVELOPERS who give rather than take. That's the way John and Mary Washer see themselves, and their community is gaining the benefits of their approach.

Part of the attraction of the Tapuae setting is the stream on its western boundary that meanders down to the sandy beach that runs across the Tapuae Country Estate sea frontage.

Both the stream and beach are public assets that have been valued

for as long as this land has been populated – the stream gives up whitebait in season and the beach offers a number of relatively safe swimming spots along its generous length. It was also a recent resource for surfcasters but the creation of a marine park covering the coastline between Tapuae and New Plymouth has stopped that.

In the past, the Tapuae property was also the location of an early nine-hole Kaitake Golf Course.

Access wasn't easy in recent times with unofficial off-street parking down a clay track to the beach.

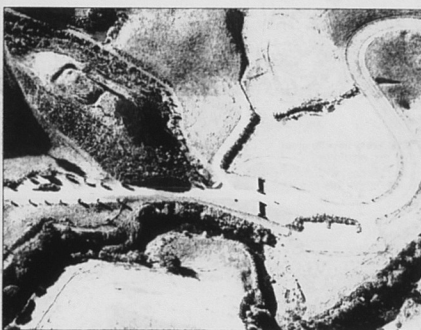
As part of the Tapuae development, John and Mary Washer have had a new road down into the property constructed.

The new road and its merger with the main highway was created at a cost of more than \$300,000 and, following Tapuae estate's completion, ownership has been

vested in the New Plymouth District Council. The road leads to both the Tapuae gates and a public carpark adjacent to the estate entrance.

"We are really pleased to gift the entrance road, car park and walkway to the public as part of the construction," says Mary.

This new access allows people to use a new 700m walkway established alongside the Tapuae Stream and the estate boundary to make their way down to the rivermouth and beach.



This aerial photo shows the new road descending to the Tapuae gates, the car park nearby and the walkway alongside the stream.

Photo: ROB TUCKER



Mary and John Washer's daughter, Fiona McIntyre, above right, enjoying a walk along Tapuae's seaford. Fiona has been closely involved with the estate's promotion through her company, Platinum PR.

Photo: ROB TUCKER

Tapuae fact file

What is for sale & what is the sales process?

There are a total of 30 prime one-acre house sites within Tapuae Country Estate. Just 27 sites are available for purchase. (The owners/developers have retained two sites for personal use and one private sale has been confirmed).

Each freehold house site has protected view shafts so can never be built out and a set of firm clear covenants govern the property to ensure residents live in harmony together and preserve the natural beauty of the landscape. Every house site at Tapuae Country Estate has ocean views except for one that has stunning mountain vistas.

Sales will operate on an 'offer' basis and people are welcome to make an appointment to view the property at any time. Due to the varying nature and positioning of different sites within the estate there are a number of choices reflective of value to suit the offers of most discerning buyers. There are no real estate agents involved and people are encouraged to contact the owners/developers John and Mary Washer for further information about the sales process.

Are there restrictions on what buyers can build?

Yes – building design guidelines (as per NPDC-granted resource consent) incorporated into the property covenants have been devised to ensure, a quality development that preserves natural assets and view shafts and is in keeping with the surrounding environment.

Each house site has a specified house building code guideline that depicts whether a one, two or multi-storey building can be erected on various sites. There are also restrictions, as per NPDC-granted resource consent, on what exterior building materials can be used within the estate to prevent reflective or inappropriately coloured buildings distracting from the landscape. The full legal covenant document is available for further information.

What services are provided in the infrastructure?

The infrastructure (ie, roads, implement shed, stock yards and plant nursery) are all within the Tapuae Country Estate farming estate title. The communal facilities – resident pavilion, two tennis courts, mailbox facilities, security gates and four kilometers of bushwalks – are also part of the Tapuae Country Estate farm title. Additional infrastructure supplied to each house site includes: underground 240 volt electric power, multiple telephone lines (broadband capable), underground reticulation of non-drinking water and electronically operated security gate activation.

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The landscaped lake and adjacent tennis court and pavilion at Tapuae.

Photo: ROB TUCKER



Planting has been an ongoing task for six years for the Tapuae team. Above, Maureen McGregor, left, and Kathleen Brophy have been working under the guidance of Tapuae's horticulturalist Spence Guthrie.

Photo: ROB TUCKER

Setting an example for others

TAPUAE Country Estate is likely to be an example to others looking at starting up rural lifestyle developments, says John Washer.

"I think it'll change how New Zealanders look at land use close to cities."

The North Taranaki development has already been recognised as a guide for others. John recalls his role in a community meeting in the Pohangina Valley, inland from Palmerston North, where residents were considering the future for their picturesque valley.

"The residents' association invited me to go down there and speak and I could tell they were excited about what we are doing here."

Those reactions support John and Mary Washer's decision to develop Tapuae in its estate form, rather than a conventional subdivision of the property.

"That was a choice that the couple faced at the beginning of the project... either we sell this place chopped up into little 10-acre blocks or we do it properly and try to retain the green belt farmlands close to New Plymouth city," John says.

"One day I expect we will see Okara merge with New Plymouth and it is our vision that Tapuae will remain as a green belt forever covenanted as farmlands producing for New Zealand's pastoral export industry."

John and Mary admit they could never have lived with themselves if every time they drove past on the highway, they saw a series of small farmlets lacking continuity.

"They have support in that view."

A conventional subdivision would not have delivered the full potential of the Tapuae site, according to landscape designer Ewen Henderson, originally with noted Auckland landscape design consultancy Boffa Miskell, but now designing under his own name.

"There are undoubtedly natural landscape values in the Tapuae site," Ewen says. "It has the connection to the beach and stream, the potential for public benefit, and some fine carefully selected housing sites."

The subdivision form was driven off these site selections, he says.

"In a conventional subdivision, they would have split the land into long sites running through to the coast."

"There would have been fences between all these parallel sites and no potential for the graded walkway, one owner would have grown goats, another would have grown second-hand cars and another would be into forestry."

"The land use control when you dice up in that sort of way would have fallen away."

"Here there are smaller select lots and most of the land is held for common interest or the residents' association and you have all these interesting house sites with views of mountain, sea, a combination of both, and valley views."

"The opportunities are rare to get a good location on the coast and develop it in a manner that doesn't negate the land form. And this is only minutes away from New Plymouth and its amenities."

"What John and Mary have done here is to be admired. It was a great opportunity and they took it up and ran with it. If everyone exercised the care and commitment of these owners and did it before they put it on the market, we would get better outcomes."

Understanding the processes involved in working with property, councils and contractors has been a significant advantage in the development of Tapuae, John Washer says.

Their farm management background and John's six-year involvement with Fonterra in Auckland helped with managing the processes. "We have both been on high school boards of trustees and that all leads to managing these sorts of things," John says.

Process started with the gathering of around 60 signatures from landowners and residents in the immediate area to support the initial consents application for the changes to the property. The smoothness of that beginning speaks of the trust people had in the couple to do the right thing here, they say.

The progress of the project wasn't always that smooth - it was breaking new ground in the region and everyone involved had something to learn from it.

"No one in the Taranaki region had ever



Stunning sunrises and sunsets can colour the skies over Tapuae.

Photo: ROB TUCKER

attempted a farm park property development before and we knew that this would be something new for council to deal with," John says. "There was no precedent to follow so it was a long process, but we persevered and worked our way through with New Plymouth District Council for more than six years and we finally got there."

Processes were cultural as well as council and contractual - a number of pa sites were identified on the land and a careful approach taken to their preservation.

The appreciation of that care is shown in the gift from local Maori of two carved taniwha to stand looking out over the main lake. "Local iwi held a special ceremony for us... they called us on to the walkway," John recalls. "It was very moving, something we will never forget."

European history is also looked after here, with the position of colonial Fort Robert guarded from any housing incursion following discussions with the local historical society.

It all takes time, John notes. And he suggests it would be difficult for anyone else to start up a similar project today, given the tough regulations that they would now have to meet. "It would take them 10 years... so we wouldn't have any competition for that long."

There's a considerable amount of pleasure in the completion of Tapuae, and gratitude for the help and support they have enjoyed during the project.

"It's been an interesting journey; good times, extremely frustrating times and great camaraderie with an excellent team of local people who have helped to make it happen."

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