

## Assisi Gardens

## Couple's labour of love delights



Destination Wairarapa's Sara Renall uncovers some of the region's hidden gems.

**L**IKE many people I've seen the idyllic Assisi Gardens' image of the stunning view overlooking the pool and I've often thought how it's high time I visited.

So this week, after seeing the gardens announced in November's Pukaha Mount Bruce Wairarapa Garden Tour, I finally decided to head out to Gladstone and see what all the fuss was about.

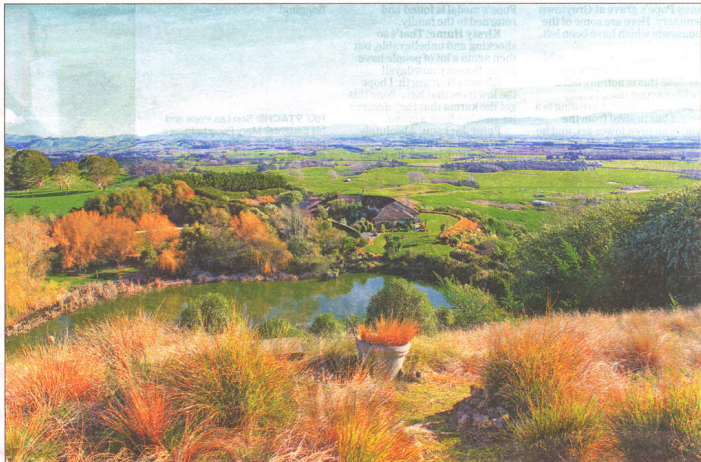
Set on a hillside, 225m above sea level, Assisi Gardens is a 1.5km climb from Te Kopi Rd, Gladstone. This meandering driveway offers glimpses of things to come and a few scarping bars. The drive ends with a charming courtyard and here you meet Andy and Cec Buchanan, the owners, designers and groundskeepers of this immense country garden. Both are incredibly dedicated to this labour of love spending the last 13 years perfecting it and sharing with the public what they have created.

It's also where the two resident laborers introduce themselves. These two girls are great for showing you the best garden paths and quite happy to flush a wild pheasant out of the undergrowth when you least expect it — just to keep you on your toes.

Sprawling down the hillside, this rustic garden has been developed on challenging terrain and hours have been spent planting, designing sculptures and perfecting paths to complement what can only be described as the truly spectacular views such a landscape offers — taking a seat at the top of the garden and looking out over the valley is a must.

Bordered by willow trees and flax and central to the gardens' layout is an expansive pond, home to a pair of black swans and a raft of ducks — who undoubtedly have the best view in town.

Visiting at this time of the year I was



**SPECTACULAR:** A stunning view from the lookout, across the gardens and out into the valley.



**FIRST GLIMPSE:** The 1.5km driveway meanders through the gardens as you climb to the house.

amazed to hear wild bees and a host of tui.

With 80 swan plants along the main garden path there was also an abundance of monarch butterflies floating overhead — features themselves as you wander along.

At the base of the garden sits a small, well-established olive grove specifically designed for wedding marquees. The grove entrance is flanked by sculptures and to the right are hundreds of red hot

pokers, brilliant for the summer.

With a variety of grasses, cabbage trees and other evergreen varieties, including about 1000 redwood saplings, Assisi is a garden to behold no matter what time of year, with each season offering a point of difference.

From groves of hydrangeas, forget-me-nots and echium to red hot poker to wild flowers, each season seems to prove better than the last.

#### Details

- Cost — \$10 per adult
- Location — Te Kopi Rd, Gladstone, 18km from Masterton
- Open — Year round
- Maps and suggested routes provided

Well-established growth and design has led to the beginning of what will be fantastic tunnels created by interlocking tree branches — this place is only set to get better.

Assisi Gardens is well worth the trip, it was such a great way to get out and spend one of these beautiful winter afternoons.

Brides and grooms to-be can catch Cec at the Wairarapa Wedding Expo on August 18 at the Cophorne Hotel & Resort Solway Park.

Or if you're a gardening fan why not visit Assisi during the Pukaha Mount Bruce Wairarapa Garden Tour on November 9 and 10. To pre-register for tickets email [info@pukaha.org.nz](mailto:info@pukaha.org.nz).



**APPEALING:** The grasses and pond give the gardens an almost rustic charm.