

HAUS IN THE SOUTH

In her native Germany she held cultural soirées;
on Stewart Island Annett Eiselt is enjoying nature's show

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THIS PAGE Annett Eiselt and Phil Dove enjoy spectacular sunsets over Paterson Inlet from their Stewart Island lodge: "There's no need for a TV," says Annett. **OPPOSITE** A deck off one of the guest bedrooms is a favourite place to lounge on warm afternoons; Phil and Annett have ensured that every bedroom has a view.

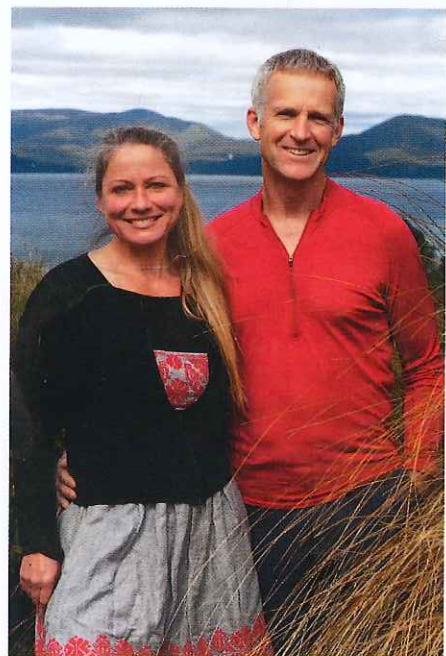


STEWART ISLAND IS 18,000km from Annett Eiselt's hometown of Dresden, Germany. Short of moving to Antarctica, you couldn't get much further away. "It's like the last outpost of civilisation," says Annett, who discovered the island while on an extended sabbatical from a job in theatre management. "I liked New Zealand a lot and especially Stewart Island. It was welcoming and brought me back in touch with my side of loving the outdoors and being in nature."

Not to mention feeling a bit like a pioneer. "Daily life is much different here. Lots of the improvising skills I learned before are very helpful on the island."

Though Annett claims she never had any intention of leaving Germany permanently, just six months after returning to her homeland, she found herself inexplicably drawn back to Stewart Island's shores, volunteering with the Yellow Eyed Penguin Trust. It was here on Stewart Island that she met partner Phil Dove, a trained nurse and keen sea kayak guide.

Phil had lived on the island in the 90s and returned by sea kayak in 2009, when he paddled down from Picton. The pair were then introduced by mutual friends. "Not long before that I had bought a sea kayak for myself so straight away we were on that topic," says Annett. "We have been together ever since." >



THIS PAGE (from top) The dining table is decorated with roses from the garden; Annett re-covered the lampshade with a pretty piece of floral fabric she had been given, which happened to be "just the right size". Annett Eiselt and Phil Dove.

OPPOSITE Much of the furniture at the lodge was shipped from Germany – Annett bought the china cabinet from a garage sale when she was a student and restored it herself.





THIS PAGE (from top) When Annett and Phil first arrived the kitchen cabinets were dark green but Annett, who is fond of rich reds, soon had them replaced. Rimu panels in the bathroom echo the bush beyond. The red lamp in one of the lodge bedrooms is by an Israeli artist: "It was the most expensive lamp I had bought in my life but I have never regretted it," says Annett. **OPPOSITE** Phil bought the round wood carving on the wall from a shop in Tokoroa: "I walked in and thought, 'Wow, I have to have that!"; the string chair in the corner was made by a Stewart Island local and is the perfect perch for Annett to play the cello.

Annett and Phil purchased a property overlooking Paterson Inlet, a short walk from the renowned Observation Rock lookout, and they now offer homestay-style accommodation. The open-plan lodge with pitched rimu ceilings was designed and built in the 1980s and influenced by the arts and crafts architecture of Scotland's west coast, where the home's original owners had lived. "It was very charming," says Annett.

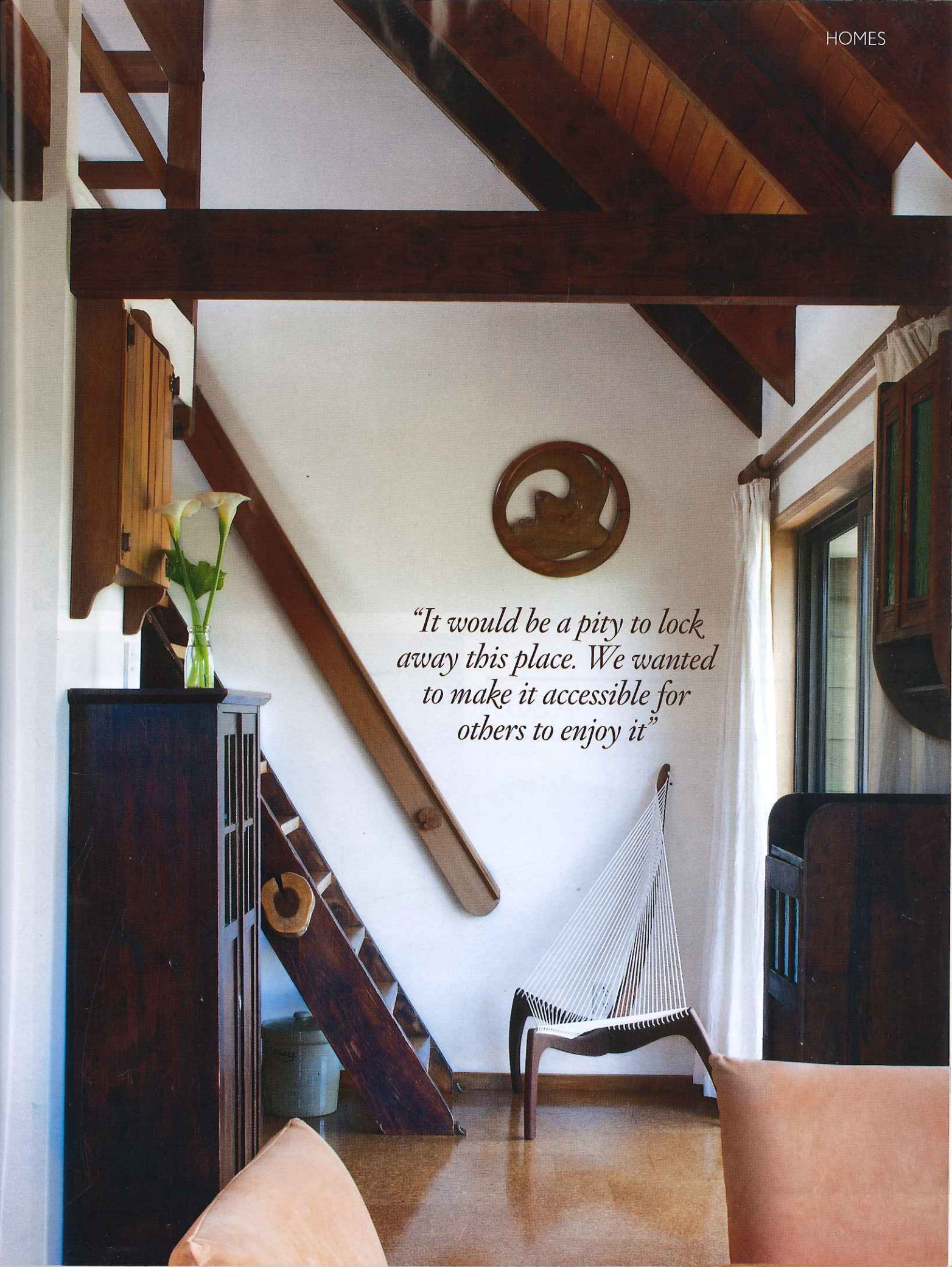
A separate owners' cottage, built by a fisherman's family in the 1930s, made it possible for Annett and Phil to live there and open up the lodge to paying guests. "It would be a pity to lock away this place. We wanted to make it accessible for others to enjoy it."

A fair bit of work was needed to bring the lodge up to standard. Both bedrooms needed en suites, they double-glazed the windows and insulation was installed, as well as a log fire in the living room, though Annett is quick to note Stewart Island weather is not nearly as dreary as mainland New Zealanders believe. "We have lovely sunny weather just like the rest of the country."

Annett has decorated the lodge with a mix of contemporary furniture and antiques. A crystal chandelier that has been in Annett's family for decades, an incongruous sight at this isolated outpost, hangs from the ceiling. "It came all the way from Germany - in one piece!" The walls are hung with art and photos taken by Annett, including a favourite study of a little yellow-eyed penguin that she happened upon in the forest on the island's north coast: "He's my little glowing penguin."

Gourmet meals are prepared in the cheery red kitchen, which also needed some updating: the coal range was replaced with a modern oven and a dishwasher installed. >





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THIS PAGE (from top) Annett and Phil call this spot their own observation rock: "It's a very inspiring place – if you feel like your batteries need recharging this is the place to go." Annett and Phil enjoy kayaking in Paterson Inlet.

OPPOSITE A red hammock beneath the rhododendron is a great place to relax. Walking tracks criss-cross the property; many of the tree trunks are illuminated by LED lights at night.



Each night, Annett makes a different four-course dinner: "It's a challenge but I love it." A self-described foodie, she honed her cooking skills at the salons she hosted back in Germany. "Everyone would bring something to read or some music to listen to – and always there would be lots of people. At first we would have nibbles and then later we would have full dinners."

Annett and Phil have continued to develop the native gardens established by the lodge's previous owners. "They loved to have native trees and plants in the garden that would attract a lot of birds and so do we," says Annett.

One of the former owners also gave her the idea of sitting down and "watching the clouds from time to time. Very wise!"

It's certainly a change from Annett's fast-paced life working in Germany's theatre scene.

"It's a huge difference, no question about it," says Annett. "I still think it's important to keep the culture going. I listen to music and have more time for reading. But I find it easier to introduce more culture here than I would to introduce more peace and nature there. I found freedom here, and a home."

See more at observationrocklodge.co.nz. ■



Q&A

Proudest DIY achievement: The cedar decks off the bedrooms. One is almost 3m high and on a slope, so getting the piles concreted in straight was a big challenge – the foundation holes were huge! *(Phil)*

Best thing about the renovation: The sense of satisfaction that we have been able to do so much of the work ourselves. It is, and continues to be, a huge learning curve. *(Both)*

Favourite power tool: Without doubt my Bosch multi-tool. The plumber and electrician also find it most useful. *(Phil)*

Renovation low point/high point: Low point was getting a sheet of Seratone with lots of glue on it, attaching it to wall bracing and realising it was too big and had to come out. What a huge mess trying to get all the glue off before it set! High point was the finished en suite, which looks amazing. *(Phil)*

Best seat in the house: At the dining table with a view to the sea and the ranges – and a glowing sunset. *(Annett)*

Favourite outdoor spot: Wherever the sun is and kaka, tui and bellbird are around. We even had a kiwi visiting at night. *(Both)*

A well-kept secret about this area: Kayaking the bush-clad shoreline of Paterson Inlet with its golden, sandy beaches and historic sites – and, with luck, spotting a seahorse in the crystal clear waters. *(Both)*

Annett Eiselt and Phil Dove