

think about us, how did they hear about us, and do they have any suggestions or complaints? Think of it as free consultations from experts – your customers! We keep refining and changing our surveys as our information needs change.

#### **Number nine: networking**

Sometimes people tend to underrate this, but it is often the people you meet and build relationships with that become your best advocates and may send opportunities in your direction. There are also great opportunities to learn from your peers. At Larnach Castle we belong to quite a few organizations and attend

several conferences throughout the year as well as meeting people at trade shows, hosting travel agent familiarisation sessions and so forth. Remember to hand out your business card and collect as many as possible for your mailing lists and databases. Another great benefit from networking is joint marketing which can help make your dollar go further.

#### **Number ten: create a marketing plan**

Write it down! A basic marketing plan needs to have where you are now, where you want to go and how you are going to get there.

So that is my top ten basics that I feel you need for marketing your garden. If you are interested in more than just these ten, I recommend that you read one of my favourite books, *Marketing for Success*<sup>3</sup>. Marketing is a huge topic and there are many ways of approaching it, but I do think, with a few tools, planning and cooperation, that the open gardens of New Zealand have a great future in attracting visitors.

Sophie Barker is Business Development Manager at Larnach Castle in Dunedin. Her mother, Margaret Barker, is the garden creator at Larnach Castle and has owned Larnach Castle since 1967.

<sup>3</sup> *Marketing for success: a practical, down-to-earth approach to marketing your small business in New Zealand on a limited budget* by Glen Senior and Ian McBride (Enterprise Publications Ltd., Christchurch).

# *My Home My Castle: building the garden at Larnach Castle*

*Margaret Barker*<sup>1</sup>

It was February 1967. Barry, my husband, and I were on an adventure holiday of the South Island, sleeping in the back of our panel van. We had been told of the legendary castle high on the Otago Peninsula. We drove down a dark drive and there it lay, dreaming of past days of grandeur, resplendent amongst trees and a ruined garden. After we had explored the empty and dilapidated interior of the Victorian mansion, the property was offered to us for sale. Circumstances required a rapid decision. We decided to buy, wound up our affairs in Wellington and moved south. The castle became our vocation and a home for our family. Sophie and Norcombe were born within the next two years.

Larnach Castle was built during the 1870s and 1880s on the tide of wealth from the Otago goldrush by William Larnach, banker, politician, land owner, speculator and merchant baron. Skilled

craftsman and precious building materials were brought by sailing ships from around the world to the remote Otago Peninsula to create the magnificent edifice of Larnach's dreams.

Larnach and his family lived in the Castle, somewhat intermittently, for twenty five years, until Larnach took his own life in Parliament buildings in 1898.

Larnach's family sold the Castle in 1906 to the Government who used it as a mental hospital then sold it on. Except for a brief heyday in the 1930s, the Castle was largely neglected, twice being totally abandoned. It slipped into disrepair and became engulfed by secondary growth and self sown trees. At the time of our purchase, the building was locally disregarded and in danger of falling into ruin. We saw the Castle as a potential national treasure and set about to restore the historic property with the intention of making it our home and sharing it with paying visitors.

I had grown up in large gardens and wanted my children to have that same wonderful experience. I had a passion to create a garden, and the land surrounding Larnach Castle was to be my canvas.



Fig. 1a The rock garden at Larnach Castle as it is today, restored by Margaret Barker.

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Fig. 1b The New Zealand alpine plant *Ranunculus lyallii* (the Mount Cook lily) growing in the rock garden.

### The lost rock garden

In the late 1960s we had a visitor, a Mr Ira Thornicroft, who said that he had laid out the rock garden in the 1930s. "What rock garden?" we asked. It had disappeared under all the growth. We discovered then gradually cleared this lost garden. I joined seed exchanges, grew plants from seed, read books, and climbed mountains to see alpine plants growing in the wild. The rock garden was rebuilt and replanted several times, and in this reduced scale I gained botanical knowledge and horticultural and landscaping skills that were to stand me in good stead when I tackled the larger garden.

### A new vision

I travelled to Scotland to increase my garden knowledge. Scottish gardens were the best, I was told. There I met a Mr Booth, landscaper and superintendent of the garden at the University of Edinburgh. "Don't do what we do," he said "use your own great podocarps and tree ferns to create a New Zealand garden." These were the plants, native to New Zealand for millions of years that Larnach and other settlers had removed from the Otago Peninsula to create their homes and farms.

I came home from Scotland with the vision to create a temperate rainforest garden, so I had the old



Fig. 2 Fern walk in the rain forest garden.

North American conifers taken out from behind the ballroom. Podocarps and tree ferns were planted with tī, the broad-leaved mountain cabbage tree (*Cordyline indivisa*), ground ferns, climbing rata and kauri. Some exotic species, including cardiocrinums, the giant lily, and rhododendrons from the Himalayas, as well as lapageria from Chile have since crept in.

### A step out from the ballroom

In front of the ballroom, and now connected to it by French doors, I created a patterned garden to celebrate the changing seasons. It is symmetrically structured with clipped box hedges, totara topiaries, rounded hebes, and fastigate yews. In winter, a dusting of snow delineates the design. In August, crocuses, tiny daffodils, irises and blue scilla emerge. Brilliantly coloured azaleas enhance the warm colours of the sandstone ballroom in spring. Purple clouds of double thalictrum overtop the azaleas in summer, as pink and white cyclamen and purple colchicum flower beneath. Encircling beds of heather and ericas flower in pinks, purple and white. Foliage of the azaleas turn burgundy in autumn and the heathers assume warm russet tones, outlined by the green ribbons of box. These changing patterns can be viewed from all around and looked down upon from the high tower.

### Achieving clarity

A visit to gardens in France taught me structure and clarity and that this can be achieved in green using hedges, trees, and grass with water to reflect the sky. I saw vistas that linked the garden to the landscape. I returned home and cleared out a large scale fearful mess that was in front of the Castle, just beyond the raised front lawn. We levelled the middle ground in the axis. Giant trees were felled to open up a vista to the Otago Harbour, and to Saddle Hill, centrally rising from the distant plane. Now the view is framed by the repeating arches of the pergola which lead to a green hedged "room". This green "room" contains a reflecting pool, which visually links the fountain on the raised lawn to the water of the harbour 300m below.



Fig. 3a Archway of *Laburnum* in flower during spring. View towards Larnach Castle building.



Fig. 3b Reverse view through the *Laburnum* archway looking out to Otago Harbour.

### The serpentine walk

I love flowers and created adjoining herbaceous gardens of contrasting colours. The winding nature of serpentine paths slow the viewer down and present the garden from different vantages. Here I've used New Zealand plants for their coloured foliage and structure. Included are *Cordyline* 'Red Fountain' and *Phormium* 'Majestic Rage.' The herbaceous garden is fertilised twice a year, and watered and groomed during summer and autumn three times a week. It is not a labour saving garden, but this meticulous maintenance and care ensures beautiful blooms for nearly half the year.



Fig. 4 Margaret Barker working in her garden in the summer serpentine walk.

### The South Seas garden

I had a love affair with rhododendrons and planted them all over the place. They were very colourful in spring. Then we removed the ageing and over-tall macrocarpa trees from the steep bank which sloped north below the Castle and revealed a sublime panorama. With the increased exposure, the rhododendrons suffered from the salt laden nor-east wind off the sea and I now thought that their "birthday party" colours squabbled with the beautiful view. So they went. In their place I created a garden inspired by islands where I had been. On the Chatham Islands, to the east of the New Zealand mainland, nikau palm trees thrive in constant gales. I have successfully established many of these robust nikau palms in



Fig. 5a Aerial walkway on the South Seas walk, leading to the belvedere (lookout).



Fig. 5b Belvedere looking out to the Otago Harbour on the South Seas walk.

the South Seas garden. Other coastal and island plants that I have established include the soft-leaved *Aciphylla dieffenbachii*, the white flowered clianthus or kaka beak, and *Carmichaelia williamsii*, a New Zealand native broom with yellowish flowers like moonlight and foliage like seaweed, and its cousin *Carmichaelia exsul* from Lord Howe Island east of Australia. A silver leaved *Senecio* from Tierra del Fuego and *Astelia chathamica* 'Silver Spear' from the Chatham Islands suggest waves amongst the blue flowers of *Agapanthus* and *Lithodora*, linking with the sky and sea.

Down the hill are our iconic Pohutakawa trees, which blossom scarlet in summer. An above ground walkway and belvedere heightens the visitor's experience of the garden and the beautiful view beyond.

### A sense of place

I aimed to enhance the ambience of this historic precinct which is set in spectacular scenery. The garden around the Castle is sympathetic to the period

architecture in structure and mood and is traditional in design and content.

Quaint figures which were in the garden from Alice in Wonderland, a book contemporary with the Castle, have been added to our garden. A Cheshire cat which grins down from a cedar tree is a particular favourite. Dry stone walls, a feature of the Otago Peninsula landscape and the Castle estate are meticulously maintained. New stone walls are being built as the gardens expand and apprentices are taught this ancient craft. Native plants are integrated into the planting to enhance the New Zealand character.

Much of the garden is enclosed, in its own different world. Outer areas are less traditional and reflect our place in the South Seas. Vistas and views link the Castle and garden to the surrounding splendid landscape of the harbour, hills and Pacific Ocean. People use the garden as a theatre for their own celebrations, weddings and parties. Others on a private odyssey come and enjoy the vision both past and present.

Margaret Barker has spent nearly 40 years lovingly restoring Larnach Castle and creating a wonderful garden for visitors from all over the world to enjoy.

The garden has featured on many gardening programmes and magazines in New Zealand and overseas. In 2004 they were assessed as a Garden of National Significance by the RNZIH New Zealand Gardens Trust, for which Margaret has been involved as a Founding Trustee.

Margaret Barker has also been a judge at Ellerslie and has membership of the International Dendrology Society and Dunedin Rhododendron Group, and past involvement with the Council of New Zealand Rhododendron Association, the Board of Pukeiti and the Dunedin Rhododendron Festival.

Margaret has written many articles and is currently writing a book on her years developing the garden at Larnach Castle. This book is scheduled for publication by Batemans in the spring of 2006.