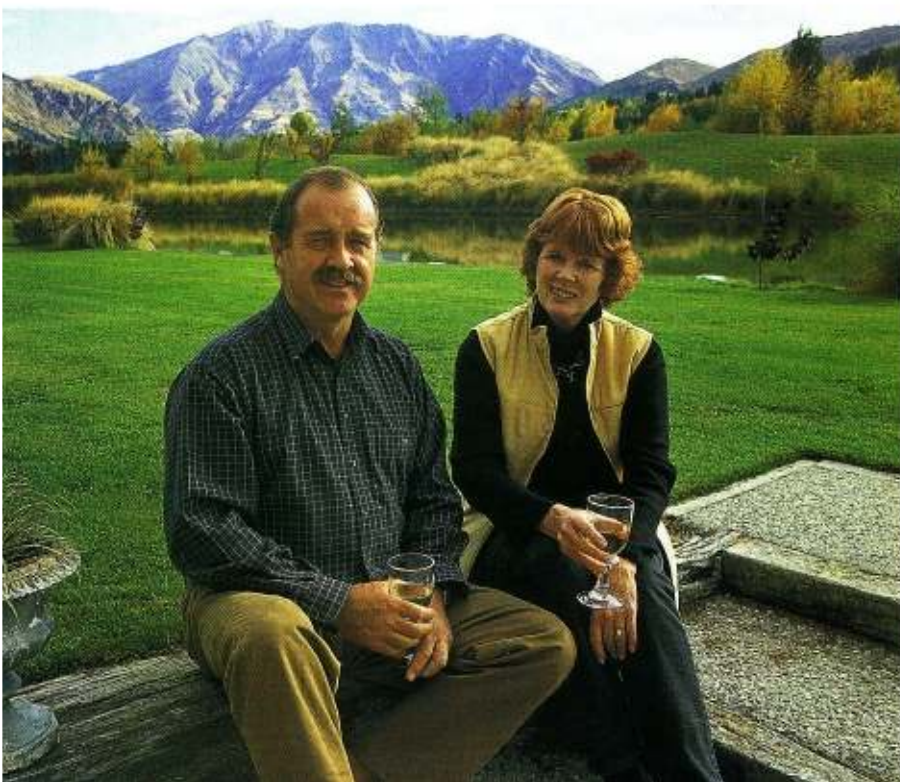


Liz and David Palmer were always attracted to France's Norman and Breton design, a style that influenced their rural hamlet development near Queenstown. The former Aucklanders initially planned extensive tree planting for their twenty hectare site with its stunning 360° views taking in Coronet Peak and Cardrona ski fields and the Remarkables. But slowly the idea of a village-style development with like-minded neighbours living in a cluster and sharing ownership of the large rural property began to take hold.

"Travelling around France we were intrigued by the rural villages and always thought it would be a great way to live. After we had purchased our land the idea evolved into creating our own village with a New Zealand flavour."

Stonebridge was born and subdivided into eight half-hectare lots. Residents have a share of the remaining land which is covenanted to prevent further development. The site has been developed into parkland with lots of trees, numerous ponds, stone bridges and walls. Owners enjoy the benefits of country living without the day-to-day concerns of farming and managing large areas of land. >

PREVIOUS PAGES: The Palmer house looks out across a pond edged with grasses and tussock to farmland and the mountains. A favourite suntrap opens off the library. THESE PAGES: Liz and David with Bowen Peak as a distant backdrop. The house is built of Hebel block with a plaster finish inside and out. It features several courtyards and a pitched roof of Welsh slate.



"Our concepts have driven the design," says Liz. "We knew the sort of home we wanted and we have been collecting ideas and bits and pieces for this house for years."

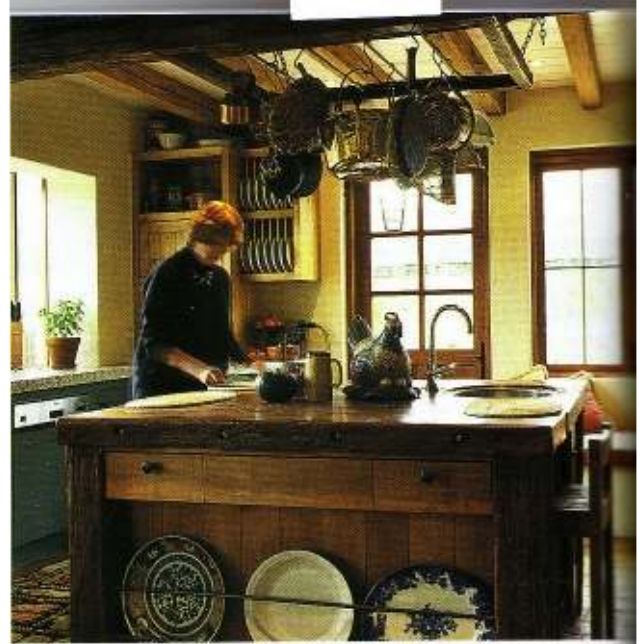
Both are artists and their creative flair is evident. Liz is a painter and David makes furniture and much of their work is displayed in the house. Their workshop and studio in a barn attached to the house are spacious and have stunning views across the valley.

They chose Hebel block for their house because they wanted to use a natural product. "We like the solidity it creates and of course it provides great insulation."

Its use also helps reinforce the character of the house, creating deep reveals for the windows. An undulating plaster finish has been used inside and out. The roof is 19th century Welsh slate once used on a hospital in Aylesbury and features dormers and angled slopes.

The kitchen is the hub of the home. Eighteenth century floor tiles found in demolition yards during a trip to France have been laid through it and much of the downstairs living area. The 10,000 tiles - one marked with the year 1712 and others 1753 - were painstakingly cleaned by the Palmers. Underfloor heating in the winter and plenty of sun ensure they hold their warmth.

"Even the neighbours' cats and dogs like to wander in and enjoy the warm tiles," says Liz. "It's a very simple kitchen and after building two previous kitchens it is absolutely just how we wanted it to be." >



THIS PAGE: Baltic pine cupboards and old French floor tiles add to the feeling of warmth in the kitchen. The central island of recycled Australian hardwood is a favourite place to sit around. While much of the memorabilia decorating the kitchen has been collected some of it - like the pot rack - was made by David. Massive recycled beams have been used inside and outside the house.

OPPOSITE: The dining room dresser is the first piece of furniture David built. The old pine dining table and other pieces of furniture have been collected over the years. The sideboard was made by Carin Wilson. Liz's artwork features on the walls.



Throughout the house roof beams and joists recycled from old bridges and telephone poles and an absence of skirting boards add to the rustic look.

"The light is very intense in Queenstown and we have avoided using polyurethane. All the exposed wood, both in the house and on the furniture, is oiled and waxed because UV tends to break down polyurethane while it enhances the patina when the right oils and waxes are used."

The Godin fireplace, also imported from France, is the living area's focal point.

"We saw one in France and eventually tracked down the shop in Paris." says Liz. "It was no problem to get it home with David being an importer and exporter in his former life. We like it because it's an open fire but it can also be closed off. It is very efficient."

Upstairs is the master bedroom, office and other personal space while downstairs guest bedrooms are self-contained with en suite bathrooms. A mud room off the outside yard provides storage for fishing, hunting and sports gear and a drop-off place for boots and coats.

A wine cellar is hidden away and a library opens off the living room and outside on to one of the Palmers' favourite outdoor areas. The house is built for indoor-outdoor living and depending on the time of day different spaces come into their own.

The kitchen opens to a courtyard where an outside fireplace and barbecue built of local schist are used for entertaining, particularly during the long Queenstown summer twilights.

The home has a timeless quality - after years of collecting very little of the furniture is modern and everything has its place. In fact Liz and David often have to remind themselves their home is new and not several hundred years old.

The design of the property surrounding all the homes in the hamlet is a work of art. Every house overlooks a pond and trees and the widespread use of grass and tussock highlights the park-like setting.

"We want to create something that will live on for years to come and enhance this special part of the country."



Colourful rugs soften the tiles in the hallway. The carved wall plaques were found in an old chateau in France. Liz's purpose-built art studio in the barn attached to the house. She often asks friends to join her in a painting session. One of the guest bedrooms features a bed and an armoire David made from old packing cases.

