

SOUTHERN BELLE

THE REMOTE BEAUTY OF NEW ZEALAND ATTRACTED JULIAN ROBERTSON WHEN HE WAS ON HIS WAY UP THE FINANCE LADDER. LATER, AS A BILLIONAIRE PHILANTHROPIST, HE BUILT WITH HIS LATE WIFE THREE STUNNING LODGES AMID SOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SCENERY.

STORY MILANDA ROUT ■ PORTRAIT ETHAN HILL

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ulian Robertson chose New Zealand long before it became known as the billionaire's playground. It was 1978 and he was an investment adviser living in New York with his wife Josie and their two young sons. He had spent two decades rising through the ranks on Wall Street and planned a break to write the great American novel. The North Carolina-born Robertson wanted to go somewhere completely different with his family, and plumped for the Land of the Long White Cloud.

"I was looking for somewhere which had the greatest geography in the world," Robertson, 85, says, of the move that kicked off a 40-year love affair with the country. "It was between the island of Kauai in Hawaii and New Zealand and I thought New Zealand may be a little bit better because it was not part of the United States. And I had a great wife who was willing to do it. We made the trip and loved every minute. I

would describe New Zealand as one of the most beautiful places on earth."

Robertson never did write his great American novel. He created a great American enterprise instead. He returned to New York after six months in New Zealand (Josie was pregnant with their third son) to set up a hedge fund on Wall Street called Tiger Management. He turned an initial investment of \$US8 million and a staff of 20 in 1980 into a 100-strong firm managing \$US21 billion by 1998. At that time, it was the biggest hedge fund in the world. He also went on to fund select protégés, dubbed the Tiger Cubs, who became some of the biggest names in the industry with their own firms.

"I changed from the normal investment advisory work to a hedge fund operator which I thought was the best way to practice the investment craft," he tells WISH from New York. "I didn't really know it at the time but it was well ahead of most people in hedge funds." Dubbed the "Tiger of Wall Street", Robertson, like many financial traders, also lost a fair amount of money and closed Tiger Management in 2000. But he continued to invest in his Tiger Cubs, among other things, and is today worth \$US4.1bn (\$5.1bn) according to *Forbes*. "By employing and utilising some of the Wall Street's best and brightest minds, he was able to continually beat the market and establish himself as one of the greatest money managers of all time," wrote Daniel Strachman of Robertson in his 2004 biography.

Throughout his extraordinary career, however, Robertson never forgot New Zealand. He may have only spent six months there but it was enough for the place and its people to make a lasting impression. So he jumped when an opportunity arose in the 1990s to make a more permanent connection: Robertson received a call from a property developer friend in Los Angeles who was out scouting for real estate overseas. "He said, I have sent a man to New Zealand to try and find some property for my family, would you have any interest in



Julian Robertson with a Picasso from his art collection, part of which he has donated to the Auckland Art Gallery

“It is the love and passion that the Robertson family put into building these lodges that sets them apart.”

any property down there?” Robertson recalls. “I said, well, if you could find something in the North Island for me that is on the coast, a nice big property, I would love that. And this [man] found Kauri Cliffs for me.”

Today Kauri Cliffs is a 22-suite luxury lodge and golf course that has won almost every major travel award around the world since it opened in 2000 (*Condé Nast Traveller, Travel + Leisure, Golf Digest*). When Robertson bought the property it was just 2500 hectares of land overlooking Matakauri Bay. “We wanted to build a golf course and we made arrangements to do that, and my wife wanted to build a hotel and we did that,” he says. The fact that neither Julian nor Josie had a background in hospitality didn’t matter; Josie had a flair for design. “She was very good at home decoration,” Robertson says of his wife, whom he lost to cancer in 2010. “She worked very closely with [interior designer] Virginia Smith and they became great friends.”

A few years after Kauri Cliffs, which is three hours north of Auckland, the Robertsons opened The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, a 24-suite resort and golf course, five hours south of the New Zealand capital. His son Jay, who moved to New Zealand to manage the lodges for over a decade, secured a third property, Matakauri Lodge, in Queenstown on the South Island, in 2010. “Every design detail of the lodges was carefully thought through and has been beautifully executed,” says chief operating officer of the three lodges, Euan Taylor. “Josie Robertson had the best eye. I also think it is the love and passion that the Robertson family put into building these lodges that sets them apart.”

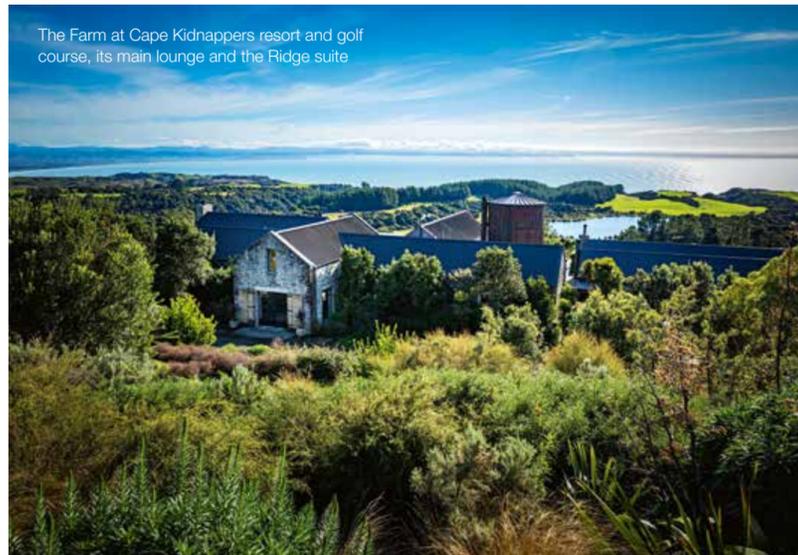
Robertson’s investment in New Zealand did not stop there. When he and Josie turned their attention to philanthropy back home in New York, establishing a variety of foundations that fund educational, medical and environment projects, he did not forget about his second home. Through the Robertson Foundation, now run by ex-Oxford University Chancellor John Hood, he funds initiatives from exchange programs for New Zealand students to attend Duke University to creating a wildlife sanctuary at Cape Kidnappers to re-establish local birds and reptiles (including New Zealand’s oldest reptile called a Tuatara, which has been around for about 800 million years).

But it was the decision by the Robertsons to donate 15 pieces from their personal art collection to the Auckland Art Gallery that took their love affair with the country to the next level and led to Robertson being named an honorary knight of New Zealand. The gift includes major works by Cezanne, Picasso and Matisse and is valued at between \$NZ200-250 million. It is the most significant donation to any New Zealand public gallery and will be officially handed over as part of Robertson’s estate on his death. Some of the paintings went on display when the donation announcement was made in 2009 and Robertson couldn’t believe the feedback he received, including children sending him their own depictions of the artworks. “Frankly, bringing the pictures [here] was probably the most appreciated thing we have ever done,” he said at the time.

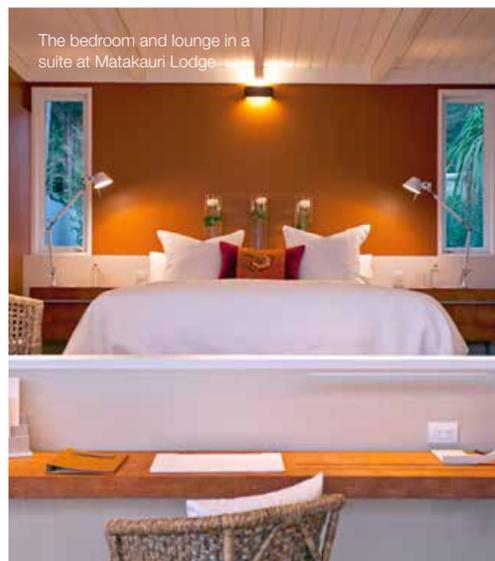
Robertson’s love of art initially stemmed from his



Kauri Cliffs at sunset, a suite, and the fireplace on the outdoor dining deck



The Farm at Cape Kidnappers resort and golf course, its main lounge and the Ridge suite



The bedroom and lounge in a suite at Matakauri Lodge



“The locations add a feeling of luxury – hideaways in the most gobsmackingly beautiful locations you can imagine.”

wife, as Josie had studied art history at university, and the pair amassed quite a collection; some of it is also on display at their lodges (including Picasso pieces at Matakauri). This is part of what makes the lodges so special, says Taylor, as guests feel like they are spending time with friends at their well-appointed home rather than the formality of a hotel. “[It is like] a home full of beautiful furnishings, art, table settings that have been lovingly collected over time,” he explains. “The unique locations of the lodges also add a feeling of luxury – true hideaways positioned in the most gobsmackingly beautiful locations you can imagine – think mesmerising outlooks and stunning views at every turn.”

This is certainly the case at Matakauri Lodge, which WISH visited in the midst of winter. The lodge and its surroundings justify Robertson’s description of New Zealand as one of the most beautiful places on earth. Overlooking Lake Wakatipu, snow-capped mountains surround you at every turn in this 12-suite private sanctuary. It is easy to see how director Peter Jackson imagined Tolkien’s world here deep in the mountains, picturing adventures in hidden valleys or in lush forests along the lakeside. In fact, WISH found it difficult to do anything but stare at the mesmerising view all day.

But that is where the impeccable staff at Robertson’s three lodges comes into play, helping you explore the landscape that makes up that exceptional view. “We have amazing staff who know each guest’s likes and preferences and nothing is a problem,” says Taylor. “That is true luxury.” At Kauri Cliffs, the guest relations manager, John Lewis, has been in the job since the lodge opened in 2001. He arranges heritage walks along the property and even plays the piano at night for guests. Matakauri Lodge is close to four top ski fields, including Coronet Peak (with its exclusive Peak Lounge available for Matakauri guests) and there is a snow concierge that can fit and organise delivery of equipment to the lodge. Staff can even arrange a heli-skiing trip where you can do all four ski fields in one day and be back with a glass of wine in front of that view in time for dinner.

Robertson prefers summer at his lodges; he arrives in December each year and stays until late March. He spends most of his time at Kauri Cliffs but gets to all three. “I love them all,” he says. “They are all quite different.” The billionaire has also decided to finally recognise the lodges for what they are – 100 per cent family-owned – by bringing Matakauri, Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers under the banner of Robertson Lodges. “They have a similarity of management and a good reputation but some people know one lodge and not the other,” he explains. And will he add any more to the family fold? “If we found the right property, we would certainly take a look at it,” he tells WISH.

But Robertson may face some competition this time as he is no longer the only American investing in New Zealand; there has been an influx of millionaires and billionaires seeking a beautiful bolthole at the edge of the world. It seems that Robertson may not only have been ahead of his game on Wall Street but also in his love of the Land of the Long White Cloud. **W**