

Nestled between rolling pastures and rugged coastline, The Farm at Cape Kidnappers was the perfect location for a foodie getaway with Gill Meller, award-winning writer and head chef at River Cottage UK

STORY V Kristina Rapley
PHOTOGRAPHS Florence Charoin

Weekend Wanderings

PHOTOGRAPH GETTY IMAGES

GATHER

- 1. To collect from different places;
- assemble 2. To cause to come together;
- convene 3. To draw (something or someone) close to oneself 4. To harvest or pick

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED to find a better spot to gather with like-minded foodies to eat, drink and be inspired by all things culinary than The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, Hawke's Bay. On a recent Friday, Basie joined an intimate group at the 6000-acre working farm - with its spectacular 180-degree views of the Pacific Ocean and luxurious accommodation - and left with a full heart and tummy (and an ever-so-slightly sore head) on the Sunday. The lodge, which hosts regular foodie weekends, had brought over British chef Gill Meller to promote his award-winning cookbook and share his food philosophy.

As the head chef at River Cottage HQ (home of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage empire encompassing cookbooks and a cookery school as well as the famed TV series), Gill's cooking ethos is very much inspired by the land and sea.

The title of his book, *Gather*, isn't about foraging, he explains. "People see the name and think, 'Oh, it's about hunting for wild ingredients in the forest,'" he says. Gill's interpretation of the word is multi-layered. "The reality is, we all have to eat; few of us can go around picking berries and tracking deer. Between checking emails and doing the school run there's no time.

"That said, we still gather - we still make a considered motion to collect and assemble ingredients: a loaf of bread, fruit, cheese, a jar of honey. We lift them in our arms and take them home. In many cases we present them to someone and share them."

The book isn't just about the provenance of ingredients, either, he says. "It's not necessarily about the people who grow, catch, farm, harvest or collect the food. It is, more or less, a collection of simple recipes I love to cook, centred on a collection of ingredients of which I'm particularly fond."

In his book, Gill, who has a beautiful way with

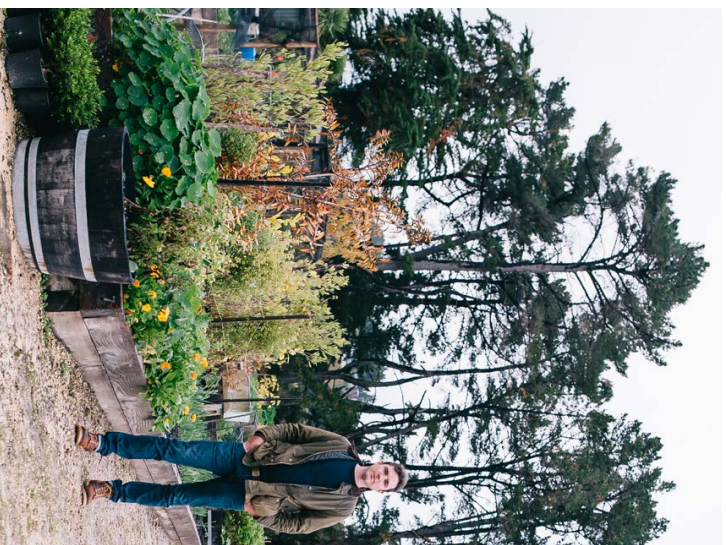
words, describes the joy he takes in both tasting and perfecting a dish. "The fragility of a perfectly cooked piece of fish as it flakes in the mouth, or the crispness of a fried potato, spiced by the hard edge of rosemary's perfume; the clean, glassy crunch of a fresh lettuce leaf, a hint of lemony acidity its only foil. All these gorgeous textures, tastes and smells are owed in part to the cook's careful and sure hand, but also to the journey the ingredients have made before they hit the plate or the pan or the hot embers of the barbecue."

It was this philosophy that inspired our weekend's first foray: a short trip to the lodge's kitchen garden (pictured right). We picked some vegetables and herbs before heading back to The Owner's Cottage - one of The Farm's 23 stunning room options - where he showed us how he likes to prepare them.

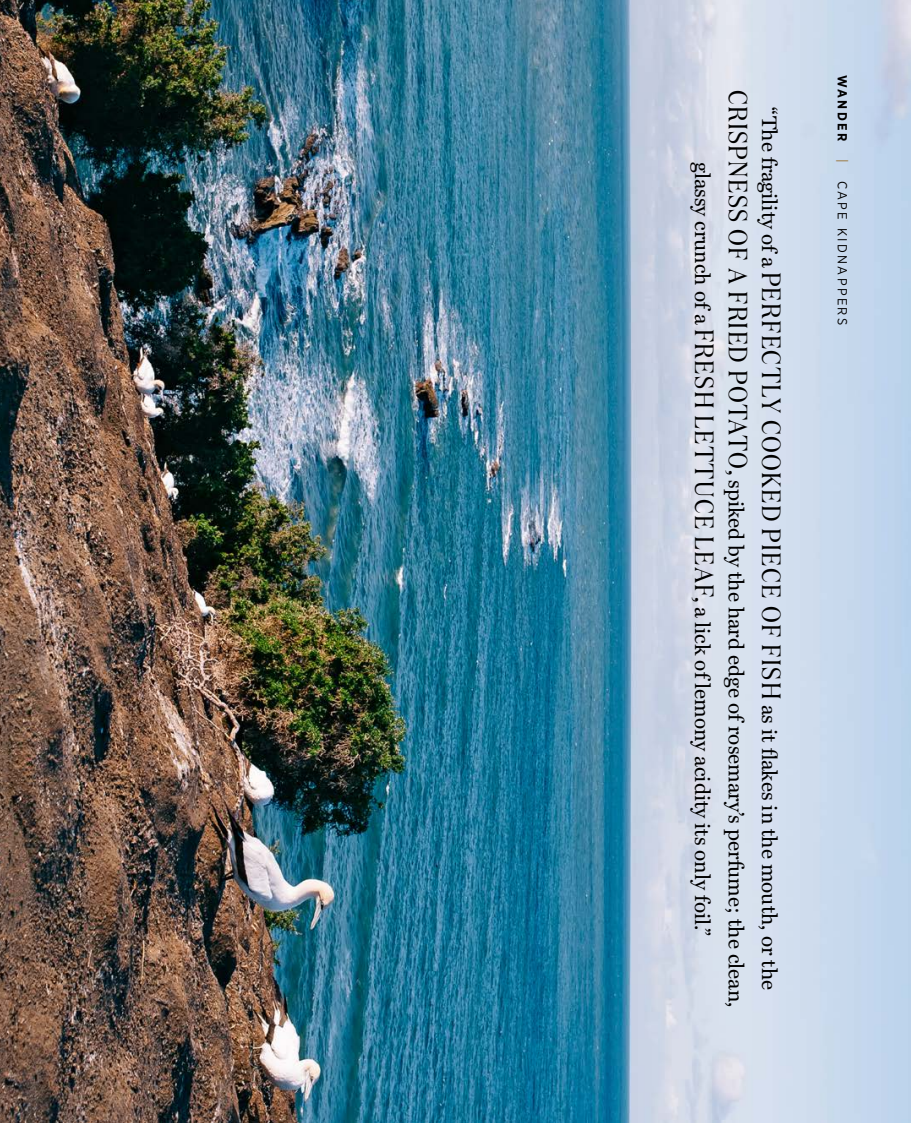
The grand finale was the five-course "supper" (as Gill affectionately calls it) cooked by him and the lodge's talented chefs, led by head chef James Honore, on Saturday night. Each meal was expertly matched to Hawke's Bay's Alpha Domus wines (the 2015 chardonnay was a total weekend highlight).

We started with a beautifully delicate homemade cheese with herbs, lemon and olive oil matched with a 2014 The Wingswalker Virginia, before moving on to some pickled mussels with radish, toasted coriander and apples matched with the aforementioned chardonnay. Next up was barbecued quail (Gill would usually use squired if he was at home in Dorset) with a yogurt, fennegreek and black pepper with a tomato salad, matched to a 2015 The Barnstormer Syrah, and then a fried lamb loin with cauliflower, preserved lemon and smoked paprika paired with 2015 The Aviator Cabernet Merlot. Our dessert was a quince tarte Tatin with a delightfully tangy yogurt sorbet matched to Alpha Domus dessert wine from their 2015 Noble Selection - heavenly!

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Roast pork belly with herbs, broad bean tops & new potatoes

SERVES 4 **QUICKEN FIBRE!**

- 3-4 tsp fennel seeds
- 1.5kg thick end of pork belly, bone in, skin completely dry
- 300g new potatoes
- 3-4 mint sprigs, leaves picked and finely chopped, stalks reserved
- 1 knob butter
- 2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small bunch parsley, leaves picked and finely chopped
- 1 small bunch chives, finely chopped
- 2 handfuls broad bean or pea tops, plus any flowers if available
- Juice ½ lemon

- 1 Heat the oven to 220°C. Toss the fennel seeds in a small pan over a medium heat until fragrant. Remove from the heat, then use a pestle to grind them coarsely in the pan.
- 2 Use a sharp knife to score the skin and fat of the pork (don't cut into the meat). Place the pork in a roasting tray and rub all over with salt and the crushed fennel. Place in the preheated oven for 25-30 minutes, then reduce the heat to 160°C, add half a glass of water to the tray, and roast for 2 hours, until golden, tender and glistening. (Add a splash more water if at any time the pan looks dry.)
- 3 While the pork is roasting, halve the new potatoes, if they're large and place them in a pan along with the reserved mint stalks. Cover with well-salted water and simmer for 8-15 minutes (cooking times will vary according to how fresh your potatoes are and the variety) or until just tender, then drain and return to the pan, discarding the mint stalks. Add the butter and 1 Tbsp of olive oil, season well with salt and freshly



“Roast pork belly with anything would be on the table of my last supper – I love it. It’s to do with the balance of textures, the salted crunch of the brittle, pulled end, the mouthful tender open grains of the meat and the creamy, almost buttery nature of the soft white fat. It’s so deeply savory and so seductively satisfying to me. I can imagine falling quite happily into a big sleep. This recipe is a little different from a typical roast. Simple boiled new potatoes and fresh broad-bean tops, with lots of herbs and lemon, perfectly balance the rich meat. Buy the best pork you can: free-range or organic pork, particularly from rare or traditional breeds of pig, will be much more delicious and characterful!”



- 4 Once cooked, remove the pork from the oven and rest it for 15-20 minutes.
- 5 Add the mint leaves, parsley and chives to the potatoes, stir through, then ground black pepper, stir together, then set aside.

- 6 Spoon the potatoes onto a warm platter.
- 6 Place the pork on the platter, then skin off the fat from the juices in the roasting tray and spoon the juices over the pork and potatoes. Place the broad

- bean or pea tops in a bowl, dress with the remaining olive oil and the lemon juice, and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Stir, then scatter over the pork and take to the table straight away.

“FOCACCIA IS A MEDIUM FOR ALL SORTS OF OTHER WONDERFUL INGREDIENTS.

Here, I use sweet onions, chunky bacon and a handful of fresh sage and rosemary – but the possibilities are endless. Beetroot and blue cheese is a favourite, as is apple, cheddar and hazelnut, or black pudding and ripe tomatoes, strewn with plenty of fresh thyme and trickled with olive oil. Two or three trays of this bacon-and-onion focaccia passed around at a gathering always go down well. With a few salads and drinks alongside, it's a bread that becomes a complete meal.”

Bacon & herb focaccia

MAKES 1 loaf

- 500g white bread flour or high grade flour, plus extra for dusting
- 10g fine sea salt
- 1 tsp instant dried yeast
- 50ml extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for oiling and drizzling
- 400ml water

TOPPING

- 250g large bacon lardons
- 1 large onion, thickly sliced
- 1 large bunch mixed herbs, such as sage leaves, thyme leaves and torn rosemary sprigs

- 1 Place the flour, fine sea salt and yeast in a large bowl, add the oil and water and combine to a fairly wet dough.
- 2 Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead it for about 10 minutes, until it is soft and smooth. (Use a mixer with a dough hook for this part, if you have one.)
- 3 Form the dough into a rough round and drop it into a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a clean tea towel or plastic wrap and leave to prove in a warm place for 1½-2 hours, or until doubled in size.
- 4 Meanwhile, heat a dash of oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Add the bacon and fry for 3-4 minutes, or until rendering a little fat. Scatter in the onion, season with salt and freshly ground black pepper, toss well and cook for a further 10-12 minutes, or until the onion is beginning to soften. Remove from the heat and let cool.
- 5 When the dough is ready, lightly grease a 22cm x 30cm baking tray and dust it with a little flour (or polenta). Turn out the dough onto the greased tray and press it outward lightly with your fingertips so that it covers the tray. Scatter over

the cooked lardon and onion mixture in an even layer. Spike and spear the whole dough with the herbs, as roughly as you care. Press everything deep into the dough with your fingers. Cover the tray and leave to rise for a further 35-45 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 200°C.

- 6 Uncover the tray and carefully prod the bacon and onions back down into the risen dough. Drizzle generously with olive oil and place the focaccia on the middle shelf of the oven for 35-40 minutes, until cooked through and golden. Remove from the oven, drizzle with a little more olive oil and sprinkle over some salt. Eat warm.

Blue cheese with honey, thyme, dates, fried onions & seeds

SEVES 2 | VEGETARIAN | GLUTEN-FREE

I recall overhearing this conversation between my eldest daughter and my youngest as the two of them were snacking in the kitchen after school. For me, it was a priceless and very sweet little educational exchange about food. “You know that mould, don't you?” “No, it's not!” “What the hell, that's mould; I can't believe you don't know that!” “It's just blue cheese.” “No, it's mould!” “Really?” “Yes...!” “Oh...”

The funny thing was that the youngest one really loved blue cheese, but she seemed to lose interest after this. Still, I think this fruity salad, with sticky dates and crunchy pumpkin seeds might very well bring her round again.

- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, finely sliced
- 2 thyme sprigs, leaves picked
- 1 Tbsp pumpkin seeds
- 150g good-quality, strong, creamy blue cheese
- 6-8 medjool dates, roughly chopped
- 4 tsp runny honey
- 2 tsp cider vinegar

- 1 Place a medium frying pan over a medium heat. Add half the olive oil, then the onion. Cook the onion, turning regularly, until soft and caramelised. Add half the thyme leaves to the onions along with the pumpkin seeds. Toss the onion, pumpkin seeds and thyme together and cook for a further 1 minute, then turn off the heat.
- 2 Crumble the cheese over two plates, dividing it equally between them, then do the same with the chopped dates. Divide the warm onion mixture between the two plates, then drizzle over the honey. Roughly tumble each salad together.
- 3 In a small bowl, make a dressing by combining the remaining olive oil with the cider vinegar. Season the dressing with salt and freshly ground black pepper, then drizzle it over the two salad servings, scatter over the remaining thyme leaves, and serve immediately. ●



This is an edited extract from *gather* by Gill Meier, published by Hardie Grant Books. RRP\$35; available in stores nationwide. See epickidnappers.com for accommodation information.

FOOD PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY

