

CLEVEDON COAST OYSTERS AND THE FABULOUS MCCALLUM RESIDENCE

BY PENNY TWISS

Oysters may well be considered among the finer things of life. In this story we see them enjoyed straight from the sea in a roadside galley and in a marvellous mansion right by the sea. The McCallum family have been farming and quarrying in Kawakawa Bay for generations. In 1986 they began an oyster aquaculture operation in the clear waters of the Hauraki Gulf and just last year Jan McCallum undertook the restoration of the original family home fondly referred to as The Residence.

On a fine autumn day Keith Chandler, manager of the aquaculture operation, shows me around the oyster processing factory and, with some of the staff, takes me out on an oyster barge into Clevedon Bay to look at the oyster racks as the tide drops. Clad in waders, staff hop off the flat deck barge and wade along the baskets of oysters laid out in racks three rows deep across the 14ha marine farm. They are returning small oysters to be grown on, as on this day there is no harvesting due to a weather closure caused by recent rain. MPI

closes marine farms to harvesting after significant local rainfall because run off from surrounding land may compromise water health.

Water quality is a constant concern for the industry. Clevedon Coast Oysters are organically grown in United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) certified waters that are tested weekly for contamination and algal bloom and processed under the strict food safety conditions required for export approval.

Barges deliver oysters right to the fac-

tory door along a tidal inlet that runs in from the sea. Clevedon Coast Oysters can proudly claim that nothing in the growing, harvesting and processing of oysters is wasted. In the factory oysters are graded and the undersized ones are returned to the farm to grow on. These are Pacific oysters which grow freely, unlike rock oysters that do not survive once prised from the rock. The oysters are shucked with pneumatic knives. Sula, who has been with the company since 1996 and heads this department, shows me how it is done. The



The harbour is shallow enough for staff to jump in with their waders on to tend the growing racks.



Stately and elegant, the McCallum Residence from the water.



Dan has been trained in the fine art of butling.



A sumptuous bedroom decorated around the blue faced clock already in The Residence.



There is a chef on staff with a beautifully appointed kitchen for creating meals for all occasions.

knife is like a tiny jack hammer, the process is swift and competitive. To date the record is held by Joe, who shucked 500 dozen in a day and went on to compete in Japan and Ireland. The only waste product is shell, which is given away and used mostly for paving, equine arenas and chook grit.

In summer, oysters are preoccupied with spawning and, in winter, when food is plentiful, they feast up. This is when they are at their most tasty. Clevedon Coast Oysters are exported to Japan, Russia, China, Hong Kong and the States. You can find them on the menu at Sky City and in restaurants and supermarkets around the country, or you can call in at the factory shop and buy your own.

From Thursday to Sunday Marina runs

the Oyster Galley at the factory, an onsite food caravan, serving up an oyster storm in fritters, tempura, and sliders, steamed and, of course, raw. You can buy curly fries and kumara wedges too, and sit out at the tables on the lawn, a scrumptious stop on the way to the beach.

Further along towards Kawakawa Bay in a private bay is the McCallum's private residence. Built in the 1930s, the home has been restored to almost its original state and made available as luxury accommodation. Jan McCallum, who led the restoration, says that although the building had been uninhabited for many years the furniture remained. They even found curtain fabric in perfect order. The task was to renovate and redecorate, as minimal building

was required. Magnificent oil paintings have been restored, brass chandeliers redipped and furniture polished and made to gleam.

The entrance hall is large, the library cosy and the living room opens out to courtyards, lawns dotted with ancient palms and the sea beyond. The dining room hosts an enormous table glittering with fine linen and cutlery. Climb the majestic stairway to luxurious bedrooms, each named for a boat owned by the McCallum family over the years since they arrived from the Isle of Lismore in 1884 seeking safety and self-sufficiency. Jan has taken pains to make these rooms superbly comfortable.

The Residence is available for hire, but

to just one group at a time. Sleeping up to 20 guests, it is a wonderfully private venue for special occasions, weddings and conferences. Butler Dan will attend your needs. He will greet you wearing the McCallum tartan kilt and he will remember your name and pour you a wee dram should you wish. To top it all off there is resident chef Jeffrey, known in The Residence as Chef-fery. Apparently, he's a multi tasker who creates menus suitable for any occasion and can also be found ironing sheets and attending to other tasks in the house.

If oysters are your thing this is a gorgeous place to dine on them. After all, as the McCallum family and Clevedon Coast Oysters say, "we're growing the best oysters, we're not bluffing." ■