

The New Zealand Women's Weekly - November 1995 Their game is mud

by Helen Corrigan

For Glenys West and Kevin Johnston, it was a case of "first, mix the mud" before they could start their dream home.

Nelson-born Glenys and Kevin spent two-and-a-half years living "pioneer style" in a garage on the Upper Moutere site, shaping 10,000 bricks from clay for their adobe-style house. And without running water, bathing was an alfresco affair in an old tub out the back with the stars and the neighbour's sheep for company.

Glenys adds, "We went the other way from most people and traded our brand-new automatic washing machine for a wringer."

They've been aided over the years by about 100 WWOOFERS (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) - part of a scheme begun by a Nelson couple where visitors from around the world trade labour for food and accommodation. Gradually they've turned the clay into The Mudcastle, a seven-bedroomed 5000sq ft home which Glenys and Kevin recently opened as a unique bed-and-breakfast establishment.

Streams of international helpers, most with English as their second language, made for some interesting conversations around the dinner table and, "all left a memory of themselves in the place", the couple say.

Since The Mudcastle opened, visitors have been impressed with Glenys' collection of antiques and curios and her eye for detail, as well as the house's more unusual touches like the bulls' blood - a traditional sealant for adobe houses - used to paint the pantry floor.

For Glenys, previously the owner of popular Wellington eaterie Glossops, and Kevin, a former fisherman, the house contributed to the evolution of their partnership.

"My role seemed to be planning, supervision and the final styling of the place, which Kevin gave me the space to do," says Glenys. "Kevin, on the other hand, handled the technical stuff like psi water pressure that I just would not have had a clue about. We ended up a great team."

