

A bro's take on gardening

by Amanda Snow

It's a TV gardening show but it doesn't tell you when to trim the petunias or de-head the hydrangeas and don't expect park-like gardens with equally manicured hosts.

"It's not a rose garden," jokes Pete Smith, the presenter and co-founder of the show, *Maramataka — Once Were Gardeners*. "It's a bro's garden."

Actor Pete Smith (Te Rarawa, Te Aupouri) and his partner Mona Papali'i established Puriri Productions in the Far North two years ago. The idea for *Maramataka* came after several other concepts were pitched to mainstream TV and declined.

The second series of 13 half-hour shows currently screens on Maori Television at 5.30pm on Sundays and production for a third series is underway.

"It's sort of like a Maori *Country Calendar* but with a heavy emphasis on organic gardening rather than cows," says *Maramataka's* co-producer and former Pacific News presenter Mona Papali'i.

The show's name, *Maramataka*, is taken from the Maori calendar and symbolizes new growth and new beginnings.

Pete Smith, who has acted in numerous New Zealand film classics including *Quiet Earth*, *Once Were Warriors*, and *The Piano*, couldn't be more different from the usual garden show presenter.

Wearing a black singlet and dark glasses he negotiates his way around the "gardens" of the Far North with local gardeners who are as diverse as the gardens they have sprouted from.

"All these wonderful, creative people exist in the hollow of this land," he says.

Wine-makers, herbalists, healers, earth-builders, hunters, artists and crafts-people are among the eclectic mix of characters that feature on his gardening show.

"In an area that has the highest statistic in every economic plight — mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, underneath



ONCE WERE GARDENERS: Pete Smith, presenter and co-founder of Maori TV's new gardening show *Maramataka*.

all of that lives, breathes and beats the beautiful heart of the Far North," says Smith.

Seeking the extraordinary in the ordinary, Smith's funny, unobtrusive approach unearths as much about the people of the gardens as it does about the gardens themselves.

"It's what's underneath. It's about the passion of the people and the beauty of the land. *Maramataka* takes me there — to all these beautiful people to convey to the world their politics, their love, their staunchness," he says.

"Maori TV has given me the vehicle to present my people in this light."

In one show Smith cruises the "garden of wrecks" where abandoned cars are retrieved from around the Far North.

In another he swills award-

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winning Okahu Estate wines with local vintner Monty Knight.

The episode ends with a barbecue at the vineyard. As Knight explains which wines go best with whitebait fritters and

other Aotearoa bounty, wild pork sizzles on the barby, and children from the local kapa haka group sing action songs as the sun sets over 90-Mile Beach in the distance.

During his acting career, Smith, a father of four, regularly spent time away from his family.

He says it was a "heart-felt want" to stay home and be more effective in his community that prompted him to establish his own production company in the Far North.

Keen to showcase the talent and diversity of the Far North, Smith and Papali'i looked for programme ideas in their own backyard.

"The dynamic for me was, 'what can I contribute?' The whole community was contributing to the upbringing of my kids — school, football, social activities, all producing strong upstanding kids.

"I thought, 'let's have a film company in Kaitiaki. Let's be the first ones!'"

Their first production was *Nga Waiata o Te Hiku, Songs of the North*, and screened on *Marae* on TVNZ.

From there, the concept of *Maramataka — Once Were Gardeners*, soon followed.

"It's a gardening show," Smith says. "But not like Maggie Barry's."

Climate crisis heats up

by Cameron Broadhurst

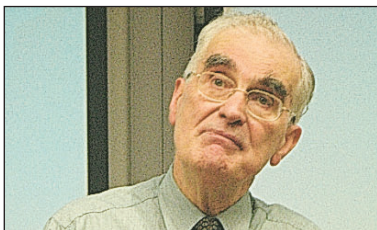
The world has never seen climate change on the scale it has reached today, and governments cannot let it go much further.

That was the message from Lord Ron Oxburgh in a recent public lecture at the University of Auckland.

Lord Oxburgh, former rector of Imperial College London and ex-chairman of international oil giant Shell, is a renowned expert on energy supplies and climate change.

The rise in global warming over the past 150 years is more rapid and widespread than anything known to have happened before, Oxburgh said.

Current atmospheric carbon dioxide levels were approaching 550 parts per million at which point, he said, the change on the environment may be irre-



Lord Oxburgh

versible. "We don't know how fiercely the dragon is going to react," he said.

Oxburgh said the current world infrastructure was set up to run on a cheap fuel economy. But over a period of 45 years these could all be changed within their normal replacement times "if we catch the renewal cycle".

Sir Tom Barnes, who organised the lecture, believed the issue was heating up in New Zealand. "There's no doubt there's a huge debate on energy supplies."

Waging war on weeds

by Anika Forsman

A war against weeds is underway in Auckland — dubbed the world's weediest city by Landcare Research.

Weeds are spreading from the suburbs into the native bush where they are strangling the native canopy, impacting on our native and endemic species.

There are more than 600 naturalised plant species in Auckland. Introduced for ornamental purposes, a naturalised plant is one that has since spread into the wild and become self sufficient.

Peter Williams, a scientific researcher for Landcare Research, believes people are not doing enough to stop the spread of weeds.

"We need to turn off the

conveyor belt from the nurseries into the countryside," he says, pointing to a lack of awareness of what should be replanted.

He says the process of naturalisation takes a long time and builds up slowly, unnoticed until it is almost too late.

There are, however, many community groups within Auckland trying to stop the spread of weeds.

The Auckland Regional Council has been trying to educate people about pest plants as part of its Big Clean Up campaign.

During March and April a weed exchange was set up at a number of Auckland schools where people could swap their green waste for native saplings.

ARC's community relations advisor James Willoughby was impressed with the response.

"We collected over 65 cubic metres of pest plants," he says. "And we gave away over 4000 native saplings."

He says the campaign has helped give people a greater understanding of what's growing in their backyard.

Pest plants like monkey apple, privet and wild ginger were targeted.

DOC community relations manager Bill Trusewich sees the importance of education.

"Weeds are probably the most threatening bio-security issue in New Zealand."

Once the pests are removed, Auckland would start to see nature recover, creating a stepping stone effect across the region, says Trusewich.

"A lot of birds and plants will survive on the mainland if we provide a way for them," he says.