

# ORATIA ORIGINALS

PERHAPS SOME SORT of universal consciousness drew Janice Ward, in particular, to Oratia (see previous story). It didn't take her long to discover that her neighbours (not immediate in the way of city neighbours, but just up and down the road a bit as it is in the countryside) had backgrounds that were dear to her: ancestry, creativity, imagination and inspiration.

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**IVAN MANSELL**  
Organic butcher

IVAN MANSELL, kicking school into touch at 15, thought the world was his oyster. Funnily enough, it wasn't. Instead it was beef and lamb that brought him to where he is now, a small corner on the long West Coast Road in West Auckland. Clarks Organic Meat Specialist has produced a lineage in the way that a family can be created rather than born: founded by a father and passed to a son who passed it to a former apprentice who, in turn, passed it on to his apprentice, Ivan. The rebellious Ivan had been coaxed back to class, encouraged to put in another year, when he took an after-school clean-up job at Clarks. This was a pivotal moment in his life because it led to the apprenticeship and eventually, of course, to ownership. That sense of ownership is one of the things that Ivan likes best – being in control of his own future and being able to dictate the quality and terms of the way he interacts with his customers, he says. School-weary he may have been but he was not without ambition and work ethic, a combination that has brought him thus far and has also led to his studying towards an MBA at The University of Auckland.



NAME **RAY** No.

Antiques dealer

UNLIKE THOSE who complain their jobs are taking over their lives, Ray (just Ray; quietly he says no other name is needed) can't believe his luck that his job and his passion have been so wonderfully intertwined for the past 4500-or-so days. His business – now in its 13th year and a seven-day-a-week devotion – gives him permission to collect anything that catches his eye because whatever he finds can be considered stock for his eclectic store, Just Plane Interesting, down the gravel driveway at the historic Tara Orchards. That title is really a misnomer because much of the contents is beyond just interesting, edging into a fair bit of flabber and just plain gasting. "I've always been in awe of the amazing things that people and nature create and I strive to gather the most impressive array of unique and interesting things that I can find," he says. He keeps an eye out for pieces of history that are often considered rubbish and brings them back to life so they can be loved and admired all over again, making him a sort of custodian for that fourth dimension: time. If he has any complaints it is simply that he has too many treasures and too little floor space.





NAME **BRIAN NOLA**

Fruit and vege grower

IN 1935 Brian Nola's parents moved onto land at what is now a major junction of the West Coast Road, where they knuckled down and worked so hard they began selling produce from the farm gate that same year. The second and third generations of Nolas still sell produce off the land, to second and third-generation customers, and Dida Nola was able to appreciate this extraordinary legacy as he lived to be 100 years old. The only things that really changed were the evolution of his soft Croatian accent into the laconic Kiwi dialect of his children and grandchildren, the gate, which is now a bright yellow

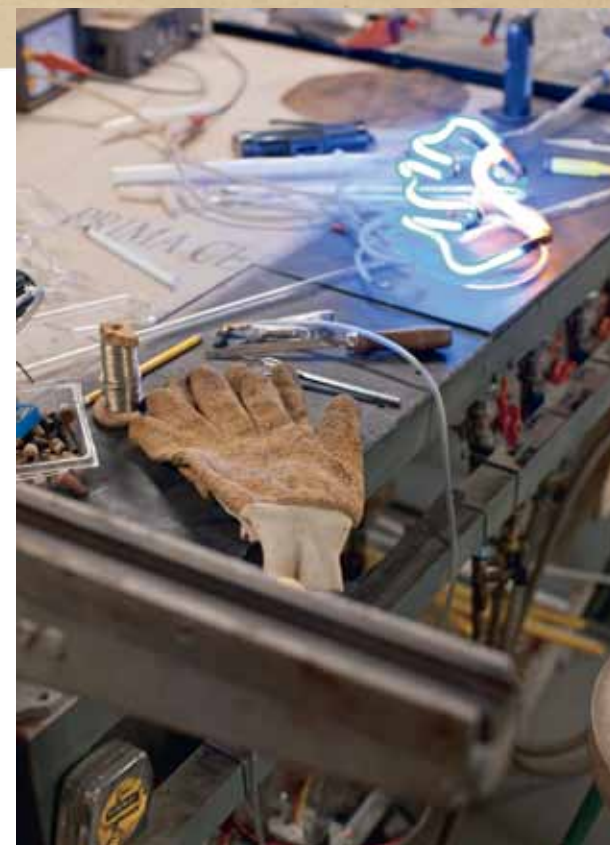
store, and perhaps some of the produce that might not have been known to the first Nolas. This sense of belonging means a great deal to Brian – the fact there is so much family involvement on both sides of the counter with the multi-generational sellers and buyers. There's also that deep satisfaction that comes with the smell of earth and the tang of freshly picked fruit and vegetables: the plums, feijoas, beans, tomatoes, fennel, kale, artichokes, silverbeet, basil, scallopini and strawberries. But Brian plays no favourites. Every aspect of his lifestyle, he states, brings him great enjoyment and satisfaction.



IF JOHN ROGERS had lived not all that long ago he might have been charged with wizardry. Conducting with fire, he coaxes hot glass into serpentine tangles and mixes gases into magical hues, ending up with neon, an aeons-old light source that is thought to have been used in ancient Egypt. The desire for sorcery began when his parents took him to the Blackpool Illuminations in England and he has been spellbound by the glowing tubes ever since. But it took years and a shift to the other side of the world before, after 12 months of researching, scrounging and sourcing components to build a viable neon-processing plant and another 12 months learning how to bend glass, John Rogers became simply Neon John, proprietor of the Neon Cafe. There is nothing, he says, like the feeling of lighting up your first neon tube. "I still get a buzz today when I first light up a nice piece of work and with so many colours, sizes and glass types available, in combination with the various gas mixtures, the options are almost endless." It is a heady mix – fire, gases, danger and beauty – but each piece is a legacy that will last at least a century.

Neon sign-maker

NAME **JOHN ROGERS**





Seven-year-old Lennox (Lenny) Tomes with puppy Marley.



Mel Tomes with nine-year-old Sophie.



**NAME** MELANIE TOMES  
**Organic gardener**

MEL'S MOTHER PRU decided to return to the countryside and retire. But Mel's mother Pru didn't take to retirement so well and decided to go back into business, this time as an organic gardener, and established Weathersfield Organics. She set a happy example and just over a year ago Mel herself took over the business as Pru decided she'd give retirement another go. It seemed a good idea at the time, especially with children in tow, and although Mel has discovered that the business doesn't fit in with the children as well as she thought it might, it is still the best thing she has ever done, she says. She loves to garden, loves to grow things and loves to work at home. Her road to Weathersfield Organics started with cultivating and supplying organic salad greens to local Henderson outlets, so that business was perfect as an add-on to Weathersfield Organics. That experience, combined with a little coaching from Pru – from whom Mel's already-green thumb undoubtedly comes – made for a seamless transition from mother to daughter. The business may even pass down to one-year-old Ned, trotting along behind his mother, his own gumboots covered in good organic earth.



**NAME** STEVE SAPICH  
**Wine-maker**

STEVE SAPICH and his old dog Jess sit at the cellar door contemplating a view that has barely changed over three generations and a society that surely has. It's been an up-and-down sort of existence on an up-and-down sort of road but since Tony Sapich and his two brothers, newly arrived from Dalmatia, turned that first sod in 1932, the Sapich family has been kept by this dependable acreage in the Waitakeres. There's been fruit – fat peaches, juicy plums, crisp apples – grapes, grapes and more grapes, with a few head of beef thrown in. The cows have gone with the apples but the vines remain as does the freedom, says Steve: the freedom of being your own boss, your own person. "A lot has changed in the world. We no longer get the numbers we used to coming into the cellar door and many attitudes and social mores have changed but what has never changed is this wonderful lifestyle and the pleasure you get out of doing what you enjoy every day," he says. And knowing that somewhere down the valley people like Janice and Jules are looking contentedly out over their gully of trees, sipping on a Sapich Bros wine.