Back to nature

LONG ADMIRED FOR ITS BATH AND BODY PRODUCTS, THE COMPANY NOW KNOWN AS MATAKANA BOTANICALS HAS UPPED ITS GREEN CREDENTIALS TO COVER EVERY ASPECT OF PRODUCTION WORDS **JANE WARWICK**

The background

If you're trying to keep a green ethos and the neighbourhood is becoming greyer and greyer, what do you do? Pack up and shift to the other side of town; way, way on the other side. Not that his East Tamaki neighbours weren't doing their best to be green, but Danvers Devereux's ambitions were even greener. He relocated his business Les Floralies to Matakana north of Auckland and renamed it Matakana Botanicals, bringing the company's Earth Botanics and Great Barrier Island Bee Co under one umbrella.

It was no small job. The two-hectare property he bought came with an abandoned house tenanted by wildlife and the section was a dump; clearing it took months. The previous owner couldn't bear to throw anything out and the items Danvers found – car wrecks, record players, heritage fruit trees – will become Devereux family legend, but at last it was done. Perhaps, in retrospect, it was the easiest part, despite the intense labour, because it really was simply a massive clean-up.

The construction

Danvers reckons he struck it lucky with Customkit/Ecospan which specializes in board-and-batten barns with a unique timber portal system. The portals are made from laminated veneer lumber (LVL) connected with nailed plywood gussets onto the LVL component. The way LVL is used here means it doesn't have to be treated as the fully exposed portals can be seen and monitored.

However, the ply-board walls are regarded as structural and building regulations forbade staining the outside in favour of paint. He chose an elegant coat of black – Resene 'All Black', to be exact – iconic, sporty and staunch – and discovered Resene CoolColour technology. This innovation means the paint looks like a standard colour but surface heat will build up more slowly and to a significantly lower level than a "not so cool" traditional colour.

Danvers' four barns were built using pine from regenerating forests, positioned in such a way as to allow natural light to enter and heat the space in winter. More than 90 percent of the light bulbs are either LED or energy efficient and skylights help light the space even in gloomy weather. The building also has windows, bi-fold doors and louvres which open to create airflow for coolness, bypassing energy-guzzling air-conditioning units. The cupboard doors to the computer system's server generator are left open at night to let out the day's accumulated warm air to heat the office. Wool insulation also helps maintain warmth without using excess power.

REGENERATED FORESTS
Customkit's LVL components are made by Carter Holt Harvey at Marsden Point, which sources its timber from Northland forests.

PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A particular success has been the Biolytix Biopod and its clutch of tiger worms that munch through the household waste and create an end-product brew so rich that Danvers' lavender bushes – another project, another story – are thriving in a quite spectacular way. Tiger worms are raised in Karaka, South Auckland, by Worms R Us. The installation of a Biolytix Biopod includes the provision of a kilo of tiger worms, about 4000 of the invertebrates, which within a year have increased to more than one million. Worms have been decomposing organic matter for more than 650 million years and often eat their body weight in waste each day.

Danvers' extensive raised herb garden and other botanicals are also irrigated via a natural spring which passes through an innovative DIY tank system storing nutrient-rich seaweed collected from local beaches. The seaweed simply decomposes in the water and produces a powerful infusion.

Biolytix Biopods

Going solar

After a lot of research into solar-energy systems, Danvers finally settled on one through Vector which he monitors via an app on his smartphone. The SunGenie new generation of mini-solar power plants is a three-kilowatt system which includes a fridge-sized battery cabinet installation and its low elevation barely changes the profile of a building. The power generated is stored in the battery bank and surplus power is exported back to the energy company for a credit. Danvers' smartphone app for SunGenie monitors his savings, how much energy is being generated at any one time and shows historical reports. Already he has achieved an 80 percent saving on past power bills generated by the East Tamaki plant.

> "Walk lightly on the ground today so our children can follow tomorrow"
>
> DANVERS' GREEN MISSION STATEMENT

Into the future

It took three years to reach the stage where Danvers is now; going green is time-consuming. He attended eco-trade shows and read a lot of books. He learned to be savvy about things such as water pumps, natural light and shredding paper to use for packing around Matakana Botanicals orders instead of putting it out for someone else to recycle. He learned to go down several sizes in the large boot of his previous ecological footprint.

Ironic that his quest to create a more energy-efficient business should take up so much energy of his own. But it was worth it, not only to Danvers but to the district which has welcomed new job opportunities. Most of all, Danvers now feels the business is environmentally transparent, that he can offer a true farm gate to high street product from a company so self-contained it can operate without outside influences.

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