

A thriving accommodation business

Karen Phelps

What began as a casual conversation with a friend about successful rural Airbnb ventures has evolved into a thriving boutique accommodation business that perfectly complements Georgie and Duncan McGregor's sheep and beef operation in East Otago's Nenthorn Valley.

Georgie started Havrincourt Farm Boutique Accommodation around seven years ago, initially listing a single cottage on the farm on Airbnb to test the waters. Today the business spans two restored farm houses on the 1650-hectare property accommodating up to 14 guests and providing an important income stream that fits seamlessly with the farming operation.

"We encourage people to come here and relax and be in the countryside, see the light in the morning, the clear skies at night. We are centrally located and there is lots to do locally," says Georgie.

The business got an initial boost within a short period of listing when a tour operator on the Central Otago Rail Trail approached the family as there was an accommodation shortage from the Hyde stop-off point, just 20 minutes' drive from Havrincourt Farm. When pickup logistics while running a farm became challenging Georgie trialled leaving a spare car at Hyde, allowing guests to self-drive to the farm at their convenience.

"They could come when suited them and it worked as I couldn't always go to pick them up with a young child," says Georgie.

The success of this initial venture encouraged continued investment and expansion. The original cottage was progressively upgraded but the significant growth opportunity came three years ago when the family acquired additional land with

a rundown farmhouse that many advised should be demolished.

"Most people thought we should have put a match to it," recalls Georgie with a laugh.

This coincided with Georgie's decision to phase out her landscape architecture business in Wanaka as the travel became increasingly challenging. Instead she channelled her design expertise into renovating the farmhouse, undertaking most of the restoration work herself.

The renovation of what became the Nenthorn Farmhouse enabled the business to accommodate larger groups and families, transforming the derelict building into an eight-guest facility with valley views, separate dining and sitting rooms, both featuring open fires, and a well-equipped kitchen with rear courtyard.

Complementing this is the Farm Cottage, located in a rustic garden setting amongst the working farm with views across farmland to Billy's Ridge.

This six-guest accommodation features three bedrooms and an open-plan living area opening to a courtyard, perfect for couples and families seeking a sunny, cosy retreat.

The accommodation business operates alongside the traditional farming business which runs approximately 4,400 sheep, mainly crossbred Romney with some Perendale and a smaller mob of half-bred Romney Merino, plus 190 cattle, predominantly Angus Hereford Cross, across 5,000 stock units.

Duncan's focus is on the farming with Georgie assisting during key times during the season while she primarily manages the accommodation business including all the cooking for guests. She can provide catering for up to 10 guests or guests can choose to self-cater in the houses' well-equipped kitchens or visit one of the local hotels in the area.



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Georgie says the location is ideal for guests, situated one and a quarter hours from Dunedin and two hours 40 minutes from both Wanaka and Queenstown, making it an accessible base for exploring both East Otago's gold mining heritage

and Central Otago's many attractions. There is also an historic stone cottage and woolshed on the farm. "I've got a lot of growth to do with the business," says Georgie. "It's still got a lot of potential to explore."

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