

STROKES OF LUCK

THE MEETING OF A WILDLIFE ARTIST AND A JEWELLER WHO WOULD BECOME A FRAME-MAKER WAS THE BEGINNING OF A LIFE TOGETHER THAN CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS CHARMED

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The welcoming committee: Lindsay and Brian at the front door with greyhounds Zorro, Charlie and Cindy.
OPPOSITE: The shop assistant was startled when Brian and Lindsay determined whether this bath was big enough for two by trying it out on the shop floor. It was and now it provides a soak with a view beside the swimming pool.



TONY BRUNT OF ARCHITECTURAL PROFILES LTD

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The round swimming pool completes the curl in the frond of the koru-shaped house; the cheetah painting is an example of why Lindsay is considered one of the pre-eminent wildlife painters in the Western world; the painting of the young Masai in Lindsay's studio is one of her most popular works and has been reproduced as a limited-edition print on canvas. The original hangs in a private collection in Pittsburgh; Brian at work on one of his water-gilded frames.

SOMETIMES BRIAN McPHUN must feel like an original Prince of Serendip. Maybe his life had always contained elements of whimsy so he took happenstance for granted. He trained as a jeweller after all, a vocation with a great capacity for unexpected magic in the colour of a gemstone and the fall of a beautifully crafted piece. It was an instinctive craft for him and it landed him an Apprentice of the Year award. So perhaps the wonderfully unexpected events in his life shouldn't be considered all that surprising; maybe he was simply born under a capricious star. And yet, and yet...

There was the time he and his friend trekked down to Auckland's wharves in the hope of begging a working passage on a freighter to some faraway horizon. Such berths were at the discretion of the captain and not assured but the master of a German vessel decided, just three hours before sailing, that these two young surfers were just what his shipping line needed and the pair set sail with barely time to bid their families goodbye. Union rules decreed that such passengers leave the vessel at the first port of call and so Brian and his friend were put ashore in Newport News in West Virginia. Even if they had had a say in the matter they could scarcely have chosen a more auspicious spot to be off-loaded to start their Grand Adventure. Newport News was founded in about 1610 just down the road from Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in what became the United States of America and the official start of the American frontier.

Brian set off to forge his own frontier, making his way across the breadth of the country to California. There he found a job in a small jewellery business owned by a man who serviced larger jewellery stores with repairs and custom work. Even better, Brian's new employer was happy to sponsor him for a green card. Brian also found himself a wife, twin children and a house in Ventura Beach overlooking the ocean. He didn't yet know it but he was on track for the most serendipitous event of his life.

Sadly but amicably his marriage came to an end and he put an ad in the paper for a flatmate to share his house. One evening some friends came to visit and one of them started on the daily crossword. What is an African country starting with Z she asked, frowning at the puzzle. Zimbabwe, Brian answered, for no reason at all. He could have said Zaire. In those days he could have said Zambia. For goodness sakes, he could even have conjured up the wonderfully exotic Zanzibar. But it was Zimbabwe he offered. ▶



FRAMED

Brian says Lindsay's art has made him look at things in ways he has never looked at them before. "Even though I was a jeweller, surrounded by colour and light, I never noticed either of those elements the way I notice them now. It extends my tangible world like you wouldn't believe." He was commissioned to build a frame for a Raymond Ching work. When the client saw the frame he told Brian, "Raymond would be proud to hang in your art".





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The house is lined with windows and full of the natural light so beloved by artists. The building flows across the hillside and the ceiling imitates this with intriguing dips and angles in most rooms. The pensive statue is by Arizona artist Sally Kimp; Lindsay with Cindy, Zorro and Charlie. All three were found at Greyhounds as Pets, a charitable trust dedicated to placing retired racing greyhounds. Behind them hangs a newly finished commission, due to be shipped to Texas; limestone for interior and exterior walls was sourced from Te Kuiti and paintings and objets d'art both local and global are displayed throughout the house; the sculpture is a bronze raven by good friend Sandy Scott and the ceramic plates on the wall are by Piha artist Zeke Wolf.

The telephone rang. It was a young woman asking about the room to let. "Come and see it now," suggested Brian. "No," she replied, "I need to see it in the morning; I need to see its light because I am an artist." "Good grief," thought Brian, "just what I need – a cash-strapped artist." But he agreed to meet her the next day and in closing he noted her accent. "Are you British?" he asked. "No," she replied, "I'm from Zimbabwe."

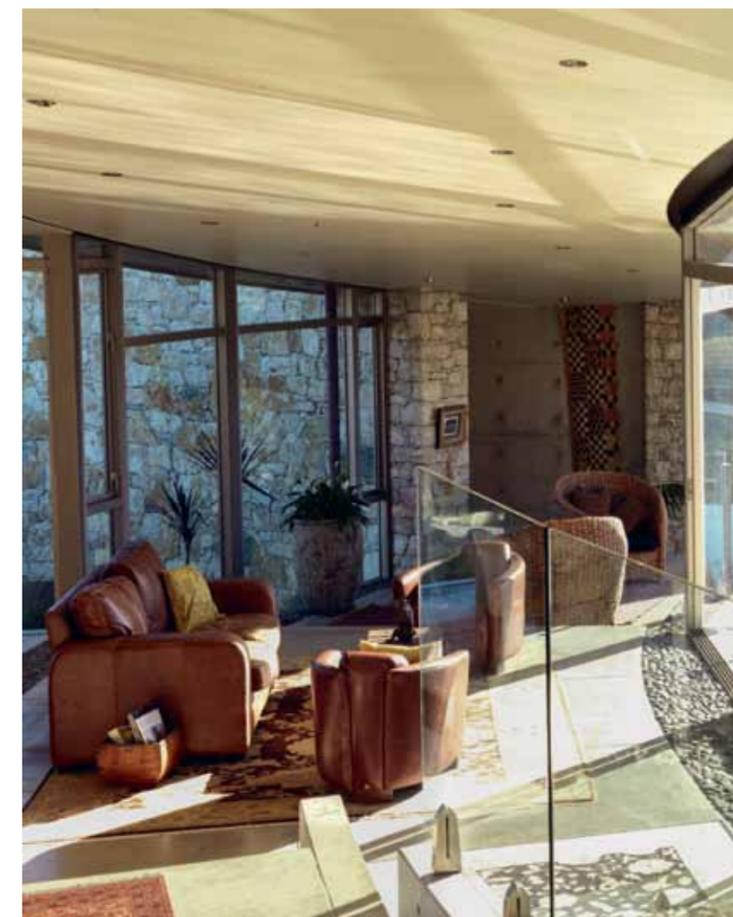
There was one more thing about Lindsay Scott from Zimbabwe via Arizona and a once-upon-a-time American husband, a *National Geographic* wildlife photographer whom she had met when he was on assignment in Africa: her grandfather was a New Zealander. She landed on Brian's doorstep the next day. They both liked what they saw: he the very pretty blonde, she the house's artist-friendly light.

She showed him one of her pencil drawings. It was of two elephants having a dust bath. Lindsay had drawn them from behind, from the two wide rumps at the very front of the picture through to the waving ears and dust-filled trunks at the rear. Who, mused Brian, draws an elephant starting at its butt? But he loved it and eventually, of course, he loved Lindsay and she loved him right back.

A couple of years later, when the spare bedroom had again reverted to just that – spare – Brian was in a bit of a quandary. The big jewellery chains were impacting on the little mom-and-pop-type establishments and work for a jobbing jeweller was becoming hard to find. Brian had noticed ads in the paper promoting the Caribbean: sun, sand and surf they offered. It sounded like fun but it wasn't very practical. He had, after all, two children he would miss dreadfully if he went away. But Lindsay encouraged him to at least have a look; to get it out of his system if nothing else.

Two days after Brian made landfall in the Caribbean so did Hurricane Hugo, a massive Cape Verde-type Atlantic hurricane hurtling in at 260kph. It gave the islands a three-billion-dollar thrashing and the house Brian was staying in blew down. Hugo left behind a shattered and battered population who, in their distress, ran amok for a while. The international airport was closed for two weeks and Brian was trapped. But, despite seeing the weather and some of the people at their very worst, Brian just loved the Caribbean.

He sent for Lindsay. It was a wonderful year of shorts and bare feet, beach barbecues and romantic, balmy nights. To celebrate, they married. Brian found a job at a gemstone store which enjoyed big custom from passengers off cruise ships. They would choose a gemstone in the morning and by ship's departure in the evening the stone would be in a setting and delivered to them. Brian loved the pressure of having to design and build a piece, or several pieces, of jewellery in one day.





ABOVE: From a vantage point on the hill it is possible to see the koru shape of the house. BELOW: An elephant by Kim Brooks of London trumpets across one of the tables built by Brian who made much of the cabinetry and many fitments in the house.



Meanwhile, Lindsay was having a few pressures of her own. Her preferred medium for her art was pencil but in the humid Caribbean the graphite wouldn't stick to the paper and her subjects spent more time as pencil dust on her feet than they ever did as images on her sketch pad. She needed to choose another medium and she chose oil paints. Drawing with a pencil came naturally to her; she had never had a lesson in her life. But oils, those cantankerous oozing daubs with their own furtive agendas, were a whole new challenge. It took some practice but suddenly they were tamed.

Lindsay's work took a whole new turn. One of the most dramatic changes was that now she could make her pictures big. Very big. Almost bigger than Texas which (serendipitously, of course – this does seem to be the theme of their lives) is where a lot of her work ends up. As expected, Brian missed his children terribly even though they had twice been brought to visit during the Caribbean sojourn and so he and Lindsay headed back to the Ventura Beach house. For all that Brian had enjoyed his work at the gemstone store, he now was a little over jewellery. For her part, Lindsay was a little over endlessly trying to find suitable frames for her artwork.

It occurred to her that if her husband could craft fine jewellery he could surely craft a fine frame. It occurred to her husband that she was probably right. Brian took himself off to New Mexico where he learned the art of framing, in particular water gilding, the highly skilled, labour-intensive technique of applying fine gold leaf to a solid surface such as a wooden frame. Brian found a new direction; the resourceful Lindsay found her frames.

Lindsay was a biologist by profession but when she lived in Sedona in Arizona she had considerable success with her true passion – drawings of African wildlife. Sedona had a vibrant art



The view from the front door looks down into the kitchen and the breakfast bar constructed by Brian; both enjoy cooking and showing off their culinary skills to frequent overseas guests; expansive amounts of glass blur the line between inside and out.

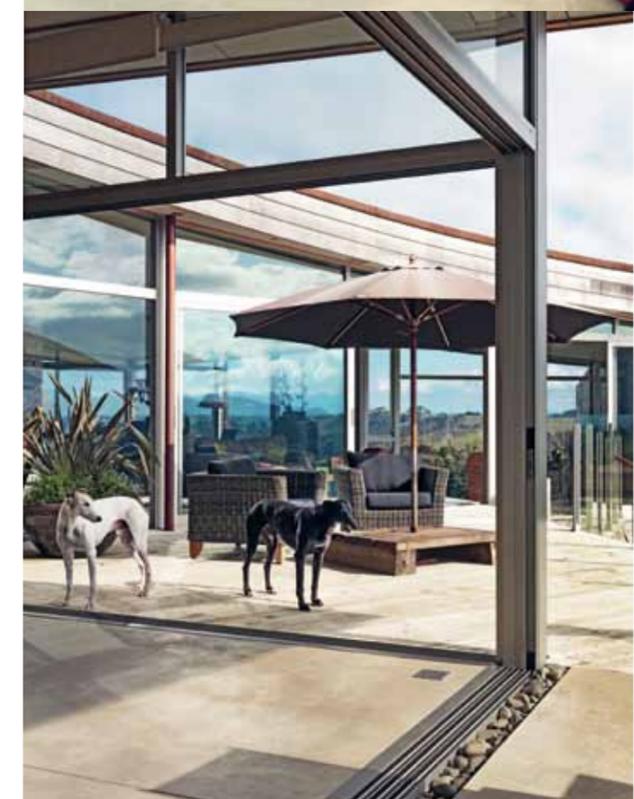


scene that catered for all levels of the market. Lindsay decided to enter the fray at the lower end, thinking it was better to start at the bottom and work up. The lower end wasn't impressed; big cats and the butt ends of elephants weren't its scene at all.

A little startled but undeterred, Lindsay decided to try again, this time from the top end of the market. Coming at it from both ends, she reckoned she must surely find some level to settle at. She didn't need to settle for anything, it turned out, because the top end of the market was enchanted and Lindsay's career as an artist was launched.

By the time she appeared on Brian's Californian doorstep she was fairly sure she could give up biology and make a living from art. By the time she and Brian returned from the Caribbean she was making a living but knew she had to take another step if she was to keep doing so. It was more than just a step; it was an almost-1800-kilometre leap of faith across two states to an art show near Seattle attended by collectors from all over the country. Brian and Lindsay rented a U-Haul trailer, stacked it with artwork, camping gear, firewood and mountain bikes, loaded themselves and Sheila the golden retriever into the Jeep and set off.

The gamble paid off; lots of Lindsay's art was sold and many orders taken. That success was the beginning of 25 years of pounding the pavements of the US, the UK and France in particular, from show to show and gallery to gallery. Her art began to gain recognition. She was invited to be the featured artist at the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition in Charleston, South Carolina, the biggest wildlife art show in the world. It was the first time a woman had been asked to be the featured artist and the first time any US show had embraced African art. ▶





ON SAFARI

For 27 years Brian and Lindsay have also run photographic safaris to Africa at the luxury end of the market. There's something about Africa, muses Lindsay: "Perhaps because it is generally accepted that Africa is the cradle of civilization. People of all races and backgrounds go on safari for all sorts of reasons, but what is common to all is that they quickly develop a very deep connection with the continent. I've seen it happen over and over again." Antarctica, where Lindsay has been three times, is now on their horizon as well.

Two cheetahs in oils and a bobcat in pencil... the joy of mastering oils and the success she has had with the medium has not detracted Lindsay from her first love: pencil and paper.

As Brian and Lindsay taxied in from the airport, she was astonished to see posters of her work everywhere: on billboards, on hoardings and on walls advertising her status as featured artist. Charleston had taken on an African theme, right down to a lingerie shop that sported in its window a huge black-and-white striped bra labelled Z-bra.

There was a group show in prestigious New York in an even more prominent gallery. This was very exciting and not a little nerve-racking, for New York is a make-or-break city. Lindsay needn't have worried. Walking in on opening night she was astounded to see that all her pictures already sported red dots, sold-out during preview showings to influential clients.

Success in the United States was exhilarating and a bit disconcerting. It is a trait among some American art patrons to invite the creators of their latest purchases to dinner and so Lindsay and Brian found themselves shoulder to shoulder with the glitterati – pop stars, movie stars, media stars, political stars on the rise and on the wane. It was flattering; it was a little giddy. It was good to be able to catch each other's eye across the table so as not to get too swept away with it all.

And that is how Lindsay Scott – now being squeezed out of her chair by one of her three rescued greyhounds in a house overlooking the bays of the Tawharanui Peninsula north of Auckland – came to be known as the best female wildlife painter in the Western world at least.

Brian had always loved this part of New Zealand's coast. He surfed here a lot and over the years he and Lindsay had often visited. On one visit, just a few days before they were due to leave again, they mused aloud how great it would be to own land in the district. They really should have known better, given their track

record of serendipitous events because, of course, one of their local friends within earshot was a real estate agent and he reckoned he had just the thing. Just 20 minutes later they were the owners of a block of land.

It wasn't until they were on the plane heading back to California that they thought perhaps they shouldn't have been so hasty. They could hear their voices echoing in the hugely empty cavern that used to be their savings account and all they had to explain the withdrawal was a photograph of a field at the bottom of the world. But the next year they brought the children down to camp on it all summer and within a couple of days, perhaps only hours, they knew they had made one of the best purchases of their lives.

Later they had the chance to extend their property portfolio almost right next door and after a six-year project they now have their house. It is a long, lean house of many, many windows that bring the outside in. Despite their creative successes in jewellery, drawing and painting, this house is perhaps Brian and Lindsay's greatest creation.

With help from architect Graham Sawell of Pyramydz Design, they pulled it from the ground. They camped in it room by room as it was built, sleeping in chambers with glassless windows and tarpaulin roofs, cooking on a barbecue and using the shower stall as a kitchen. By the time the house was finished it included a frame-making workshop for Brian and a studio for Lindsay that has the sort of wall space needed for someone who paints pictures bigger than herself.

The house is koru-shaped, an apt design for a couple whose life has been the embodiment of what the koru stands for – new beginnings, harmony and growth. It should be on the McPhun/Scott family crest.

