

## **Script of Interview with Scott McPherson via zoom**

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8 November 2021

***Welcome everyone today. Today I have Chris McPherson ... Scott McPherson – I am so sorry I called him Chris.***

***Scott and his husband, Chris, own Omaka Lodge which is a boutique B&B Lodge ...***

Chris has got his gardening clothes on so we don't need him in the picture. Though I don't mind.

***Chris is responsible for the beautiful tree behind you which is a Kalmia.***

Correct.

***They are based in Taumarunui on the Forgotten World Highway which is an absolutely stunning part of the country. They brought the house in 2017, which was part of a sheep and beef station. Did you buy the whole lot?***

No, 10 Acres. The bulk of the land went to the son and daughter in law but they didn't want their parent's house because they live in the original villa elsewhere on the farm.

***Since then they have created Omaka Lodge and it is what they do full time, which is great -***

And scary!

***Scott, why did you think that it would be a great place for B&Bing?***

Here in Taumarunui, we were attracted here by what was on offer in the area, particularly the rail carts, the Forgotten World Highway, you've got Mt Ruapehu, you've got the Whanganui River. We came here to do some of the touristy things at the started in 2017 Saw there was this huge lack in the market here for any form of decent accommodation. The accommodation in Taumarunui itself was pretty dire. And there are a couple of reasonable motels but they are stuck in the 70s and 80s and we thought we would like to have stayed somewhere nice, the place we stayed in was appalling. We thought let's try and find somewhere beautiful where we can actually offer people a beautiful experience where they can come and enjoy what we've got on offer.

***Because that Forgotten World Highway is stunning, it is a stunning, stunning piece of the country and quite underrated I think.***

It is. I think a lot of people are a little afraid of it because it has 12 km of gravel in the middle. However, they commenced sealing that today. They will have a large part of that sealed within the next six weeks and then they will be doing the rest over the coming year as weather and time permits. Eventually within 18 months the whole lot will be sealed one end to another which will be great from a tourist perspective.

***Yeah, kind of, it's great that they are going to seal it but it kind of also loses a little bit of kiwi style too, don't you think?***

Yes, I agree. I have no problems driving on gravel roads. Having said that international tourists particularly don't enjoy driving on gravel roads and we have found some of their rental car agreements actually don't allow them to drive on a 12 km stretch of a gravel road. A lot of them do anyway, but from that perspective it will actually open the country up to people who would otherwise be put off seeing it. The road isn't going to be particularly wide, it is still a narrow tight twisting road but it will be sealed for the peace of mind for those who are terribly afraid on gravel.

***You've been there since 2017 – five years?***

Four and a half years

***What's the achievement you are most proud of?***

Probably the achievement we're most proud of is having created this from nothing. It started off as a family home with one bathroom and we've turned it into a beautiful boutique home with four rooms and four private bathrooms. We're really proud that we created this from nothing and that we came from different backgrounds. Chris' background is in interior design. My background is entirely in sales and marketing. And we're particularly proud of the fact that we could choose a whole new area for both of us, although Chris has had hospitality experience years ago, but we have chosen this whole new area and we've actually been able to do it successfully. We had no choice. This was a make or break as so many people would say. It had to pay because we threw our jobs in and when you throw your jobs in you've got to do the best you absolutely can and we are so proud that people have actually really enjoyed what we've created. The feedback we get from guests, it's absolutely, we just so humbled by it and I think that is probably the greatest achievement that so many people think what we do is so nice.

***That's fantastic. When you receive guest feedback like that it really encourages you to keep going and to see what you can do?***

Absolutely, it reinforces to us that we did actually achieve our aim which was to create beautiful accommodation in the Taumarunui area to attract people who wouldn't otherwise want to come here. And I think, particularly last summer, when we just had New Zealand guests, some many of our New Zealand guests said to us we would never have come to Taumarunui, it's the last place in the world we wanted to come to. We are so surprised to find somewhere nice to stay that we thought we'd give it a try. I think that's great.

***What is your house and garden style? How have you redecorated it? I'm assuming it was a 1970s style house was it?***

The house was built in 1978. The previous owners always keep it very up to date. It was in House and Garden about 10 years ago. So they'd always kept it very modern, very up to date and very stylish. Our taste is classical elegance, particularly, Chris' taste, so although we've completely redecorated and rejigged the bedroom wing we took out virtually most of the walls and reconfigured everything. We're really just gone with the theme that was already there which was this classic elegance. Being a 70s build it is almost entirely timber. It's Rimu which was all milled on the farm. So we've got beautiful soaring ceilings in a lot of the rooms. It suits Chris' particular style really well. Classical elegance. I think the other part of our style is that we like it to be authentic so a lot of the furnishings and little pieces we have around the place are actually family bits and pieces. We have Chris' late parent's dining suite. My late grandparents' china cabinet and their dinner set that they brought for their silver wedding anniversary. Chris' great grand parents' dinner set that we use for breakfast service in the morning. A lot of guests comment on that and say where did you get this and when we say this is actually a family piece and tell them the history they love the authenticity of it.

***You said your house was built from Rimu that was milled on the farm. Are there still native standings there or is it all been milled and gardened?***

There wouldn't be any native standings here on this part of the farm. Where the main station is in the next valley over. So the farm is in two adjoining valleys. In the main station in the next valley over there are still certainly stands of native timber there. One in is actually a scientific reserve for one of the stands of Totara trees which are particularly old and of note so there is still a lot of native timber there. The interior of house is Rimu, the exterior of the house is brick and Kihikitea which was also milled on the farm. Kihikitea being white pine of course. It hasn't lasted that well so we are in the process of replacing a lot of that with cedar. Kihitikea is a lovely timber but it warps and splits and cracks. It's just 43-44 years old now. That's actually pretty good but cedar should last a lot longer.

***I must admit we're in a 1970s house and when we brought it we showed our age a little and didn't think that 1970 was that old.***

Yes. I remember the 70s well I was there the first time round and I enjoyed them.

***Doesn't seem that long ago.***

Abba's bringing out a new album. You just think hey, it's the 70s all over again.

***No! No!. Why do you love the region so much? Why do you love Taumarunui so much?***

Two reasons one is the amount that is on offer as I said earlier, the amount of hidden attractions that people aren't necessarily aware of. The second main reason would be because of the people in the area. We found when we first came to Taumarunui before

even considering buying it and we were here for the touristy things, that is the first time that I've walked down the main street in a long time and everybody is happy and everybody is polite. Even the local mob would say g'day or kia ora. And to me that was quite unusual to have that feeling in a town. It reminded me of when I grew up in Putaruru, in the Waikato, back in the 70s, there's that lovely village feel here, even though Taumarunui has got a population of approximately 5,000 now. And although it is a very poor town which is quite obvious when you drive down the main street, very impoverished. Everybody's happy, everybody's positive. And that really struck home to us that we wanted to be somewhere where people were so happy so positive, so generous.

***Just moving away from your person reasons for living there and looking at what the Association has to face. What do you think the challenges are for the Association over the next two to three years?***

I think covid and the tail of covid are going to be a big challenge but I think that will be for the whole industry. I think for the B&B Association in particular, I think the biggest challenge will be relevance. Relevance and uniqueness, I suppose. How do we remain relevant in the growing changing times when there are so many other things out there? How do we remain relevant when the likes of Airbnb and Booking.com are trying to do their thing so strongly. I think we're very relevant but I think the key is how do we actually present that. I think that is probably the biggest challenge. Working out how to deal with the long term effect of Covid is certainly going to be another one as well. Remaining unique, once again I think we are quite unique, remaining unique because when the borders do open again there's going to be a flood of people, properties and businesses and organisations trying to muscle in on the marketplace so I think then the challenge will be how do make sure we still stand out and show what we have to offer.

***Chris, that's all we've got time for. I'm really looking forward to working with you over the next couple of years while you're on the Board and it's great to have your enthusiasm and experience with us. I think we're going to have a really good time going forward. Thank you.***

I hope so, I've got a lot of good ideas and I look forward to being part of the team as we move forward.

Scott McPherson, Board Member with Fiona Rollings, Association Secretary  
8 November 2021