

Mothers NATURE

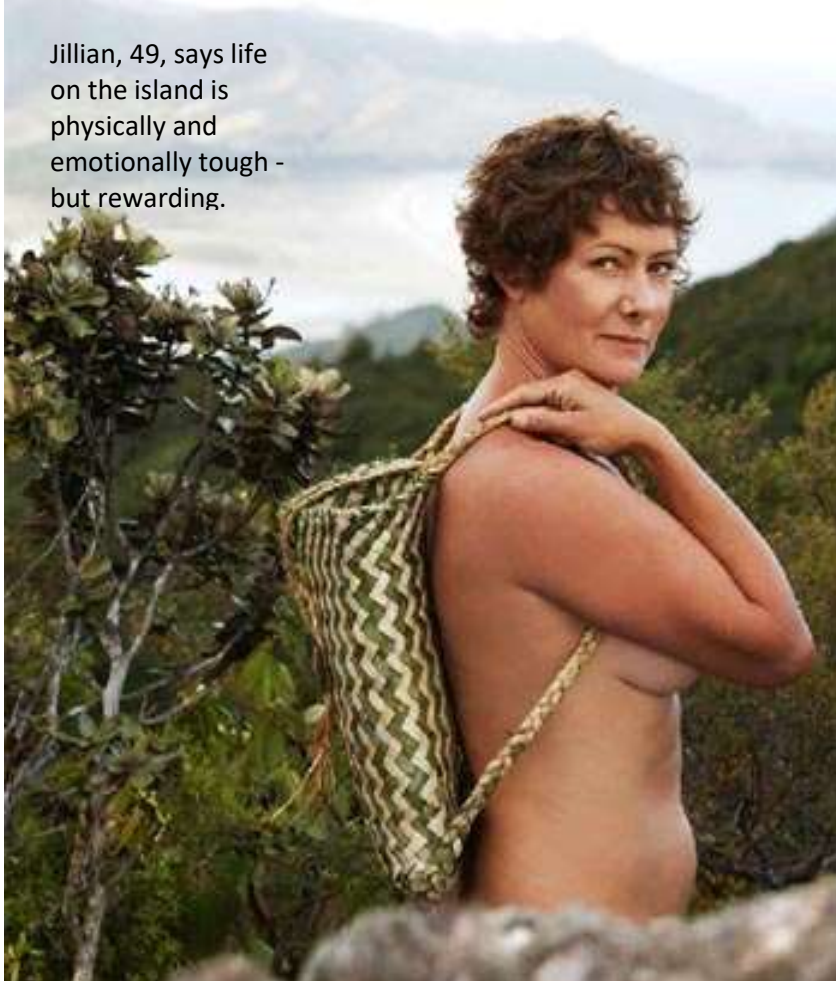
Community spirit is alive and well on Great Barrier Island, and has brought its women together to disrobe for a worthy cause. Alexia Santamaria meets the feisty dames

PHOTOGRAPHS JACKIE MEIRING

Great Barrier Island is the same size as Malta and is three hours from Auckland by boat (30 minutes by plane). It's wild and picturesque and has an indescribable welcoming warmth that it showers abundantly over everyone who visits. With a population of around 850 there are no traffic jams, no pollution and no problems parking, just beautiful beaches for miles and miles. It's an oasis of peace and calm in a fast-paced, stressed-out world.

Women We Love

Jillian, 49, says life on the island is physically and emotionally tough - but rewarding.



Living in these idyllic surrounds more than compensates for the challenges of things like transport, groceries, power and isolation, but to cope with the really tough times it takes a special breed of woman.

These ladies don't cause an international incident if they have to wait more than five minutes for their latte on the way to a meeting. They live a life true to their values and with a strong connection to the community and environment. They are practical types who don't talk about making things happen. They just get in there and do it. So it's not surprising that when the



local Playcentre needed a \$50,000 renovation, these women got stuck in. Something bigger than a cake stall was needed and Playcentre mums Karin Thurig and Rachael Crawford came up with just the ticket.

Women on another island had done a *Calendar Girls* style calendar, inspired by the 2003 film. Over a glass of wine, Rachael said to Karin, what do you think?" And with a cheeky wink, the *Barrier Unhooked* calendar was born.

As luck would have it, well-known fashion photographer Jackie Meiring and Nick Worthington, the creative director of advertising agency Colenso BBDO, have connections to the island and were only too keen to help.

Jackie, 45, has a bach on the Barrier, and jumped at the chance to give something back, meet some of the wonderful local women and shoot in the place she loves. "It was unlike anything I'd ever done," she says.

"Women with no photographic experience, undressed and outdoors, trusting me with their image. I felt so privileged – it's no small deal for a woman over 45 to bare all for a photo shoot that will become public. I felt really inspired to empower them by capturing their strength, beauty and personality."

Jackie couldn't have put it better. The images in the calendar reveal strong, beautiful, pioneering women.

"One of them hadn't worn makeup in 40 years, and many were understandably quite nervous," she says. "But they blew me away by how they were willing to make themselves so vulnerable and put aside their own fears for the sake of raising money for their community."

Karin, 42, says the Playcentre is a lifeline for local mothers. "There are no childcare centres here so we rely heavily on it, not only for our kids' social interaction and development, but for us as mums. Parenting young children is eternally challenging and support is essential for anyone, especially in a remote community. We can't just pop out to Mainly Music or head out with girlfriends to the mall.

"It's our place to meet and support each other. It's a very special part of our lives. Everyone helps each other out and it really helps reduce any feelings of loneliness. Many of the women who posed for the calendar were ex-Playcentre mums and some are the grandmothers of Playcentre kids so it was very dear to their hearts."

There were some hilarious moments during the two-day shoot. Hurriedly covering up as fishing boats docked; unwelcome sandflies, trekking up hills with heavy gear for shots high in the mountains. One photo shows a woman strategically draped in a fishing net.

"The net was massive and it was a mission to drape," Jackie laughs. "It took several of us and a lot of laughs to get it right!"

Jillian Allison, 49, says the camaraderie on the shoot was amazing. "Being in the presence of these women was fantastic. Despite being so vastly different they all essentially have the same values. They are independent, resourceful and real do-ers," she says.

"It's a very physical life and you have to be strong in body as well as mind. You have to really plan things well, like the fact the grocery boat only comes in once a week (they order online) and for some it's quite a process to get those groceries up to their houses by road, boat and climbing hills."

Sue Reusser, 61, knows all about that. Her house has sea access only and, having raised four kids on the island, she has become very good at planning.



Mussel farmer Sue, 61, loves the island's sense of belonging. Inset: Photographer Jackie, 45, also got in front of the lens: "If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for me."

“Our access is governed by the tides, so for example if I need to leave by 7am, we have to put the boat out in the bay the night before so it’s in the right place for the tide in the morning. We have to leave early if it’s low tide and walk across the river and mudflats to get out into the harbour.” For some this might sound like torture but Sue never complains. “You don’t come out here to live if you’re not a person who likes being part of your environment,” she says. “Yes, sometimes it’s a bit of a trudge but the compensation is seeing dolphins or the birds working or the mist rising over the forest. To be able to bring kids up in this paradise, eat sustainably from the sea and the land, be part of a caring community and not get caught up in all the stress of modern life is well worth it.”

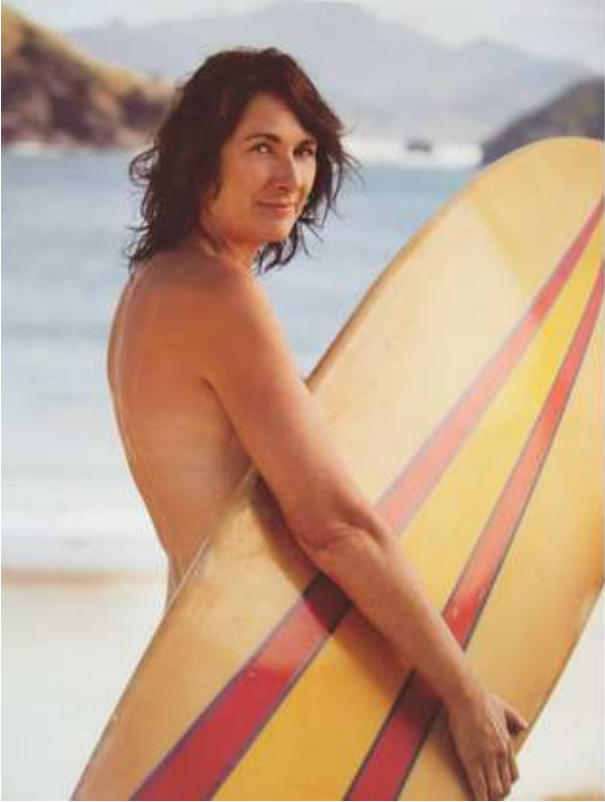
Sue has been on the island since 1972 and is a mussel farmer with her husband; she has a skipper’s ticket to operate a mussel barge and loves being on the water in all weathers. She is a skilled potter and, while no longer making a living from it, has a continuing interest in crafts, especially quilt making.

“One of the things I like about living here is the sense of belonging; we do have time to see our friends and people will help you out if you’re in trouble.”

Sue tells a great story about a woman who came to the Barrier in the 1950s. She arrived on the boat from Auckland in her lovely frilly white dress with three cases of similarly frilly outfits, so you can imagine her horror when she saw the local women, largely un-coiffed and waiting for the supplies boat in their Swandris and gumboots. She cried for a week.

That same woman ended up living her entire life on the island and falling in love with it. After the initial shock, she realised that priorities on the Barrier are different.





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PROFILE

GREAT BARRIER ISLAND CALENDAR

A composite answer
from the gorgeous
Great Barrier Island
Calendar girls.

**In one or two
sentences introduce
yourselves...**



December 2010

We are a group of Mothers and Grandmothers who live on Great Barrier Island in New Zealand who took up the challenge to become the first Great Barrier Island calendar girls, to raise money to upgrade and save the local Playcentre.

What's your biggest project going on now?

Helping sell the calendars! \$20 each. We need to raise \$50,000 in total so please buy one!

What do you spend your days doing?

Amongst us all there are those who work, those who fight to save the environment, Local Board members, those who surf/fish/hunt and gather, yoga lovers, movie buffs, and those who participate in all of the above!

Where's your favourite place in NZ?

Beautiful Great Barrier Island, it's a privilege to wake up in paradise

What's your favourite tippie?

While we don't shy away from spirits, nothing beats a chilled glass of one's favourite white wine and not necessarily with dinner!

Who inspired/or continues to inspire you most in your life?

Mother – be it one's own mother or Mother Nature herself

What's the latest thing downloaded to your iPod?

If there was a Great Barrier Island compilation it would have a strong female artist theme running throughout – from Dusty Springfield to Florence and the Machine...

What are you reading?

...and our Great Barrier Island reading list would be just as eclectic covering Janet Evanovich, Tim Winton, Justin Cronin to the Reflexology Bible and a rock star autobiography or two thrown in for good measure.

What's your biggest weakness?

Chocolate – women are the same the world over.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Friends and family, fun and laughter, music and dancing, meal and drinks, all against a beautiful Great Barrier Island sunset backdrop.

If you weren't doing what you are doing now you'd...

...be mad! Right here, right now with the gift of life is all that matters

Twelve Great Barrier Island women, all 45plus, are redefining the natural assets and raw beauty the island is renowned for. They are taking off their clothes to become the island's very own calendar girls in a major initiative to aid the local Playcentre upgrade its facility and meet compliance requirements for an early childhood centre.

"We badly need more space to function and when the estimate to do this properly came in at \$50,000, we knew the usual sausage sizzle approach wasn't going to cut it." said Great Barrier Playcentre Coordinator Karin Thurig. So, to raise the stakes, she called out to the backbone of the community – feisty and resourceful Great Barrier women. Enlisting the help of top fashion photographer Jackie Meiring, who is a Great Barrier Island holiday home owner, the calendar boasts twelve memorable images of the women that celebrate both the spirit and beauty of the island.

Recently elected to the Great Barrier Island District Board, Sue Daley poses mermaid like with strategically placed scallop shells to become the calendar's Miss March. "While the island has a disproportionately large number of pre-school children, options for early childhood education are severely limited over here. Most of the



calendar girls are ex-Playcentre mums or grandmothers who know Playcentre is a vital link in our small and geographically spread community” commented Ms Daly, herself a mother of five. The project began to take on a momentum of its own when word spread amongst other holiday home owners and visitors. “At every turn another offer of top professional help materialised which kept production values high and the costs to an absolute minimum. Not only did we have Jackie taking the shots but we had professional hair and make-up artists with connections to the island join the team. And to top it off another bach owner is the Creative Director of



ad agency Colenso BBDO Ltd, so the graphic design is just beautiful” enthused Thurig.

The photo shoot took two days and the backdrop for each scene was selected for its significance to each of the women. While it took a few minutes during each shot for nerves to settle, the experience has been described by one of the Calendar girls as “a privilege”.

Launch date for the calendar was Saturday 23rd October with calendars selling at \$20.00. The goal was to sell 2,000 calendars to help meet the \$50,000 challenge.

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The Max Foundation

Max loves New Zealand women. Not only do we employ over 300 throughout the country, every day we also get to meet hundreds in our stores.

In the spirit of believing every woman should have the opportunity to be the best they can be, we've created a charitable trust called the Max Foundation for New Zealand Women. The aim is to support women (or groups of women) whose actions enhance the wellbeing and advancement of New Zealand women.