

Making it happen

We New Zealanders often rate ourselves as having a “can do” attitude . . . but as our country slips down the OECD rankings for productivity growth, our infrastructure strains and ambitious national projects are shelved, it seems we should perhaps talk of the Kiwi “won’t do” attitude. But there are striking examples of individuals thumbing their nose at this negative psyche. **DIANA DOBSON** talked to three of our “can do” citizens, Pultron chairman Bronwen Holdsworth, illustrator and author Ben Galbraith and winery owner Kirsten Searle.



Businesswoman and arts patron Bronwen Holdsworth.

BALANCE between work, life and leisure is tricky for most of us to master. Often the most successful are the last to dim the candle in the wee hours and first up with the rays of the new day to continue working. They are the “can do” people of the world Bronwen Holdsworth has her life well in tune, and credits her son Jasper with much of that. His entry into the family business as general manager has allowed her to take a back seat, enjoy her grandchildren and manage a wider range of interests. She also credits family for encouraging her to step up to any challenge. “I come from a long line of hard-working, community-minded people who always regarded it as important to educate their daughters as well as their sons — that wasn’t the norm back then.” Holdsworth is chairman of Pultron Composites and a group of about half a dozen family companies that include farming, forestry and manufacturing interests, and has won national acclaim for her management. She has also been hugely influential in the Tairāwhiti arts scene. But she says success is something that doesn’t just happen

to adults . . . rather it is started in a child. “It helps to come from a strong, hard-working, committed and caring family. Those family values and upbringing are hugely important as to how people develop and operate later in life.” As a youngster, she says she was always encouraged to be independent. The importance of contributing to the community was also stressed. Her family enjoys many a spirited debate around the table. “We discuss, argue and debate — partly because it is fun but also because of the practicality of it if you are trying to find the optimum solution for a situation.” Their company Pultron, started by Bronwen and husband Peter, was “distilled” in a large farm workshop after the birth of their fourth child. “Peter had always invented and developed engineering and technical things, and he had an idea for a product using pultrusions, so the day after our fourth child was born he disappeared into the workshop and stayed there for nine months . . . he came out with a pultrusion machine.” From humble beginnings, Pultron is now a leading New Zealand manufacturer, sending about 80 percent of its product offshore.

When it comes to seeking advice, Holdsworth says she likes to gather around her people who are bright, motivated and from all walks of life.

“You need people you can trust and discuss things with. Those networks are important.”

And she reads ferociously — absolutely everything in front of her.

She never saw herself heading up a successful exporting company, imagining herself as a “world-famous concert pianist” instead.

“I don’t think I had a particular role in mind, but I did want to be busy, involved, achieving and feeling that I was playing a part and making a difference . . . and of course I wanted a family. My family are my greatest achievement.”

Holdsworth doesn’t take no for an answer easily.

“If there is a road block, that implies there is a road on the other side.”

She is a big supporter of all that is Gisborne.

“Gisborne is a place where there are a huge number of entrepreneurial and innovative people — that kind of atmosphere breeds more. If you are surrounded by positive, involved, hard-working, interesting and challenging people, that can become self-perpetuating. The secret is to find the critical mass. I don’t know if we have reached that in Gisborne, but I do know it is an interesting and stimulating place.”

Adding to the exciting pot-pourri of the district is talented young author and illustrator Ben Galbraith.

His first book, *The Three Fishing Brothers Gruff*, was picked up by Hodder Stoughton in the United Kingdom and is now sold in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Korea.

Hodder did a first print run of 20,000, which is high for an unknown author . . . but perhaps it is a taste of things to come.

Galbraith is a surfer from Makorori. The son of Linda and the late Warren, he is one of two boys who inherited a love of art from their parents.

“The walls of our lounge are lined with paintings, so I grew up with art all around me.”

At school he knew he wanted to do something with art, but he went to design school with quite an open mind.

Galbraith’s break in publishing stemmed from a book he created for an exhibition at the end of his arts degree.

He had put plenty of effort into the book — a story set in Poverty Bay with an environmental message and fabulous illustrations.

“It was an expensive little exercise that paid off I guess,” he says. “I had it printed and bound.”

The feedback was good, so he sent it to a few New Zealand publishers. While they loved it, they couldn’t justify publishing it for the New Zealand market because with peep holes cut



Ben Galbraith looks over his award-winning book *The Three Fishing Brothers Gruff*.

From page 9

in the pages, it was an expensive book to print. Then out of the blue came an e-mail from Britain. A graphic designer who had visited the exhibition before moving to the UK was now tasked with finding new talent for the Hodder children's books division. "That was probably the most exciting thing for me." After all sorts of acquisition meetings and debates, they finally offered him a contract, and are so pleased they are hounding him for another. But Galbraith still doesn't call himself an author. He works full-time as a graphic designer at New Wave, so coming home at night to apply himself to more creative work can be tough sometimes. "It's hard when all my mates are going out surfing and having fun. It would be easy to be hung over every weekend, but that's not something I can afford to do." He is working on two more books — one he has written and is now on to the illustrations, and the other he is illustrating for another writer. Galbraith has won awards already for *The Three Fishing Brothers Gruff* and is nominated for the Kate Greenaway Medal in the UK and next year's New Zealand Post Children's Books Awards. "I don't think I can afford to stop work and do books full-time just yet — eventually I would like to, though. It seems daunting to have that many ideas and that amount of books. I would have to do two a year." Always the illustrator at heart, Galbraith says writing the story and other critical preparation is tedious for him. "Like page layouts and descriptions . . . I was just amping to get started on the illustrations. It is easy to put all that aside and start on them, but it's so important to plan first." He doesn't feel the need to surround himself with people on a similar path to himself.

"When I was at uni and working on the Gruff story, there were a lot of others around me doing their own thing, which was inspiring. Here in Gisborne, I am not quite so immersed." He is quick to add that his rough and edgy style is what makes him successful and different within the industry. His success has surprised him — he even received a letter from Prime Minister Helen Clark — but he is revelling in it. "There is something about a book that is so tactile — especially a hard-covered one. I love books and it is so cool to have one of my own." Another who likes to hold the story of her own success in her hands is Aussie import Kirsten Searle. The mother of two under-tuos manages and markets Brunton Road, a rapidly-emerging Gisborne wine label she owns with husband Richard, who also runs his own finance company. They started their label in 2004. The couple didn't listen to the naysayers who said Gisborne wasn't the place to grow grapes for red wine, and have reaped the rewards because of that decision. Brunton Road quickly gained national recognition, silver medals and stars for their 2004 merlot and 2005 chardonnay. Searle's polished exterior hides a gritty and savvy business-woman who pays more than your usual attention to every detail. She oversees every facet of the business. "There is this romantic notion out there that those with wine labels are the ones stomping the grapes and putting each label on by hand . . . it doesn't happen." They use only grapes grown at their vineyard and sell everything they produce, but it still only accounts for 15 percent of their crop — most of the rest is sold to Kim Crawford. Next year they are doubling their production.

Searle doesn't come from a wine background but has a business degree and had her first taste of the wine industry when she worked for Villa Maria in Auckland. Unbeknown to her, husband-to-be Richard was also tentatively testing the wine industry . . . but at a more grass-roots level, buying a vineyard. The couple are a tight unit and work closely together. "This seems to be the right thing for us to be doing together. It wouldn't be the same if one of us was doing it on our own." And they balance each other beautifully. "I don't stop, really, and am a real go-getter, whereas Richard is the calming influence." Searle says she never envisaged herself as a career person. "I like the challenge of seeing something run successfully. I'm a bit of a perfectionist — things don't just fall into your lap, you have to work hard at them." It fascinates people to be chatting to Searle in a fine wine shop while tasting wines, to discover she is one of the owners of the label and actually lives on the vineyard. "I guess we are relatively young to have our own label." She is always on the lookout for new ideas and interested to see what others are doing, but most of their marketing comes from her own inspiration at the oddest of hours. "Usually when I'm meant to be sleeping." She listens to the advice of others but likes to weigh up all the options. "If I believe in it, it will happen." Searle says she has seen Gisborne change in her four years here. "There are a lot of people out there achieving some good things — the dynamics of the city are changing." She admits life at the moment is a juggling act, but she is grateful for excellent family support and says she wouldn't have it any other way.



Kirsten Searle with Henry and Jack.

What makes a 'can do' person . . .

ARE "can do" people made or born? It's a bit of a burning question when you look at those who actually make a difference to the world. In a nutshell, those "can do" people are the ones who explore, create, inspire, invent and achieve their potential through making their dreams and goals come to life. It may be something little, but usually it is those who rise to the top of a community who come to the attention of all. Everyone would like to leave some sort of a mark on the

world — but the "can do" people are those who put that desire into practice. Gisborne has more than its fair share of people who chase their dreams and, no matter how big the challenges are along the way, they strive to achieve what they set out to do. These are the big-picture people of our city. They are the ones who think outside the square — often working backwards from their goal to make the seemingly insurmountable achievable.