



# Brooks no peer

TREE CHANGERS BEFORE THE EXPRESSION WAS INVENTED, MARTIN AND PAM BROOK EXCHANGED LIFE IN MELBOURNE FOR A FARM ON THE NSW NORTH COAST. ALONG THE WAY THEY'VE REGENERATED REMNANT RAINFOREST, RESTORED THE LAND AND CREATED AUSTRALIA'S MOST DELICIOUS MUESLI.

*By Kirsty McKenzie, photography Ken Brass*



**So if it's not a rude question, what precisely are Martin and Pam Brook, a former film company executive and a dentist, doing owning a macadamia farm? Well, pursuing their passion for good food to start with. And enjoying a more balanced lifestyle. Not to mention doing their bit to save the planet.**

It all goes back to 1988, when the Melbourne-based Brooks bought a 40ha former dairy farm in the hills behind Byron Bay. A hobby farm, if you like, but one they hoped to turn into a business. The rich volcanic soil, high rainfall and warm sub-tropical climate meant it was ideal for growing macadamias, which are native to the area. Martin and Pam's farm, however, was seriously degraded and largely overrun by camphor laurels and lantana. It did have a small pocket of remnant rainforest, though.

They've spent the best part of the next decade planting and nurturing 4500 macadamia trees and beginning a massive land restoration program that has involved planting more than 30,000 subtropical rainforest and eucalypt trees. In the process, they have created a haven for birds and a habitat for all manner of wildlife, including koalas, echidnas and platypus. And they have built Brookfarm into an internationally recognised and accoladed food producer.

"It takes 10 years for a macadamia tree to mature," Pam explains. "So we always knew developing the orchard was going to be a long-term plan. In the early days we imagined we were going to set the world alight with our macadamia oil mayonnaise. But we just couldn't achieve the consistency of quality we wanted, so we looked to developing macadamia oils and other macadamia products."

The decision to move into muesli and macadamia-based trekking mixes was inspired by Pam's late father, Mick Hull, one of Australia's pioneers of downhill skiing. Mick skied until he was 84 and at the age of 79 came second in the world over-70s Giant Slalom championships in Austria. Mick loved muesli and never went into the bush without a packet of trail mix, or scroggin as he called it, in his pocket. So the Brookfarm label now boasts a full range of toasted and natural mueslis and the Walkabout range of trekking mixes, all based in the highest-quality nuts, grains, fruit and Belgian chocolate.

Brookfarm now has a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility on the outskirts of Byron Bay and its products are now sold all over Australia and exported to destinations as diverse as the US, UK, Sweden, Germany, Japan, Canada, Hong Kong, India and the Maldives, as well as boasting the breakfast cereal of choice on Qantas flights. ➤

**CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE:** The Brooks have planted more than 4500 macadamia trees on their farm, which they are in the process of converting to organic production; Pam and Martin at home in the Byron hinterland; their low-slung homestead was designed with environmental sustainability in mind by celebrated architect James Grose.

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:** The macadamia orchard is being converted to more natural, chemical-free farming practices; waterways are also beneficiaries; Martin inspects the orchard.



"The whole thing about being Australians on the land is that we believe we have a responsibility to nurture our land for the future."



"Our driving force has always been quality ingredients," Pam explains. "While we can control the quality of our macadamias, we're constantly searching out the best suppliers of raw materials. Depending on the season, our oats and barley come from central NSW, SA or WA, apples from Tasmania, dried fruits from the Riverina, native honey from Queensland and bush ingredients such as lemon myrtle and bush pepper from local growers. We go direct to the farmers as we are passionate about giving people real jobs and real futures."

Environmental sustainability is at the core of the Brookfarm business plan and the Brooks underwent an environmental audit to help them reduce waste, increase recycling and minimise the footprint of their farm and factory, which is a purpose-built facility designed by architect James Grose.

Martin and Pam are generous in their praise for farm manager Peter Barton, who has done a complete about-turn from his old farming practices of solving every problem with chemicals to becoming the driving force behind a three-year program to turn the farm into a registered organic business.

"The rainforest regeneration goes hand in hand with making the farm function better," Martin explains. "Six years ago, we would lose 7–8 per cent of our macadamia crop to rats and we used baits to control the problem. By planting the rainforest, the floor is now clear and there's nowhere for the rats to hide. Several pairs of breeding owls have now made their homes in our forest and it's estimated that a pair will consume up to 1500 rats and mice a year. We've now stopped all baiting and the wastage to rats is now down to 0.3 per cent per annum."

The integrated pest management program also ➤





Reed beds filter their grey water to make it suitable for watering the garden.

includes the introduction of a wasp to neuter the eggs of the damaging nut borer and similar programs to take care of other pests, such as the spotted bug. Beneficial insects important for pollination are also part of the big picture and the Brooks are monitoring the introduction of several hives of native bees. By the end of next year, Brookfarm will have eliminated the use of chemicals, pesticides and artificial fertilisers and Martin and Pam are hopeful that the entire business will also be carbon-neutral. The business also supports Rainforest Rescue with a proportion of profits going to regenerating the Daintree rainforest of far north Queensland.

At home on the farm the Brooks practise what they preach with their environmentally sensitive homestead, also designed by James Grose, whose mantra is to leave a thumbprint rather than a footprint on the landscape. Good orientation, cross-ventilation, overhangs and insulation mean the Brooks live without air-conditioning. Their expansive roof captures enough water to make them self-sufficient and reed beds filter their grey water to make it suitable for watering the garden. They have solar hot water and are in the process of investigating wind turbines.

“We just love putting things in the ground and watching them grow,” Martin says. “The whole thing about being Australians on the land is that we believe we have a responsibility to nurture our land. Of course, we have to earn a living and the business is important, but if we leave the land in a healthier state than when we took it over, we will have achieved our dreams.”

For more information visit [www.brookfarm.com.au](http://www.brookfarm.com.au). 

**CLOCKWISE FROM**

**RIGHT:** The Brookfarm homestead enjoys sweeping views over the Byron hinterland; land care work on the farm has included restoration of waterways and planting more than 30,000 trees; Pam remains hands-on as far as recipe development is concerned and is constantly testing new combinations as well as quality ingredients.

