

Hand-crafted artisan salt from Opito Bay

If someone didn't already have dibs on the "100% Pure NZ" logo, then Opito Bay Salt Company could well be a worthy contender.

The fledgling company run by Perry Cornish and his partner, Erin Mone, has been in the business of making salt for around two years. But this is not your regular, common or garden variety of salt, produced on an industrial scale with chemicals added. This is hand-crafted artisan salt, sourced from the glittering, clean waters of the Coromandel, right outside Perry and Erin's door on Blackjack Road.

Only sunlight is used to evaporate off the water, leaving the purest of pure salt crystals - no additives, no chemicals. According to the couple, the only added ingredient other than sunshine is the 100 percent natural flavourings, offering unique tastes such as Coromandel kelp, smoked chili, porcini, locally grown rosemary, toasted fennel and thyme, and a pinot noir infusion, all sourced from the Coromandel wherever possible.

It is a very labour-intensive venture or as Perry prefers to call it, "a labour of love". Despite setting up just before the first lockdown last year, the pair say the business has significantly "exceeded expectations" and expansion plans are already underway.

Perry Cornish and Erin Mone are the proud owners Opito Bay Salt Company, a true artisan business in Opito Bay.



Both Perry and Erin had worked for years in corporate finance in Auckland, but longed to find a way to get back to Opito Bay, where Perry had bought a bach five years ago. "I have been coming here for 22 years," said Perry. "It's a place that you fall in love with very quickly - the views, the beach, the islands. Friends come down and they can't get enough of the place. It is pretty incredible, really."

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one of the most beautiful spots on the planet came when Erin bought some artisan salts in 2019 and the idea of making salt themselves slowly evolved. "We thought it was an interesting thing to do, so we started doing some research into who was making salt and how it was made," said Perry. "It turned out that no-one in New Zealand was making artisan salts."

Erin added that demand for these types of hand-made salts was growing around the globe. "We have been in touch with artisan salt

makers around the world," she said. "The idea of locally made salt is really taking off in a number of countries."

But before they could attempt to lay claim to a New Zealand first, they tried experimenting until they were sure they knew exactly what they were doing. Now they have five greenhouses which can hold 1,250l of clean Opito Bay seawater, which is fully filtered before being put into trays.

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evaporates off the water completely over a two-week period, leaving stunning white salt crystals, ready for packing in Perry and Erin's certified food-grade kitchen to be dispatched to the company's growing list of customers.

Erin said that using a solar evaporation process retained the goodness of the seawater. "Commercially made flake salts are boiled, so all the great minerals are boiled out, whereas when you solar evaporate, you can maintain all these beautiful trace elements and minerals," she said.

Perry added that the sea around the Coromandel produced its own distinctive taste compared to the commercially-produced alternatives. "Our salt tastes different because of the way we make it, using solar evaporation which retains the natural minerals from the Bay," he said.



He said people were really starting to notice the difference from commercial salt, produced on a huge scale with industrial cleaning and sanitising processes, as well as additives such as anti-caking agents and iodine.

"We are trying to make something unique and distinctive, and reflective of the Coromandel," said Perry. "When we give it to professional chefs, they appreciate the distinctive salty sweetness of the salt. It is all about the taste and the crystals just melt on your tongue."

Perry said Opito Bay salt was defined as a fine finishing salt, meaning it was ideally suited for sprinkling on a meal, but it was also excellent for cooking things like steaks.

The business was doing really well and the pair already had a presence in 15 retail outlets across the Coromandel as well as distribution into Auckland, no mean feat considering the various lockdowns. Over the winter lull in production, Perry and Erin had been focusing on their online sales and improving their website. "This summer we are expecting to expand into specialty food shops around New Zealand," said Perry. "We have got a lot of interest from specialty food chains about taking our product."

The couple were planning to erect more greenhouses, but would only be expanding the business to the level of their production capacity. "Once people try our salt, they end up wanting more and we don't want to let them down," said Perry.

Both Perry and Erin were proud that it was a very ecologically sustainable business that left no impact on the environment. They were also encouraged that the local community was behind them. "We are really enjoying the support of the locals who are buying and using the product, and our local Coromandel retailers who are very supportive," said Perry. "We have people lining up in Auckland to take our salt, which is really exciting. It shows that there is certainly a demand for artisan salt."



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