

Best Books for Christmas

Our selection of new food, home, leisure and children's books for someone you care about this Christmas. Edited by Sarah Lang.



HOME & GARDEN

Native by Design: Landscape Design with New Zealand Plants

Edited by Ian Spellerberg & Michele Frey (Canterbury University Press, \$45)



This is not a “how to” book, so don't expect to find out what's pummelling your puka – but there are native planting tips aplenty in this collection of essays from top New Zealand landscape designers. Spanning private gardens to mega-hectare commercial and public landscaping projects, the book is also a reminder of how natives have been gradually re-greening our highways and reserves.

Auckland's once ubiquitous agapanthus are disappearing from public spaces, for instance; motorway berms and urban streetscapes now heave with flaxes, cabbage trees and coprosma. It's a native uprising, and welcome. **VL**

The Kiwi Man Cave

Steve Hale with Matt Elliott (HarperCollins, \$39.99)

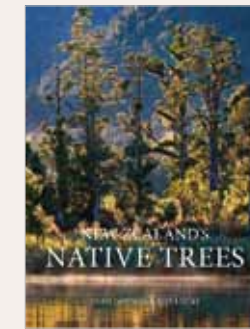
Forget your neighbour's ox or wife – it's a man cave that every Kiwi bloke covets, openly or secretly. Or so says Steve Hale, our tour guide of 30 “mantuaries” countrywide, from a hunter's basement full of mounted heads and Barry Crump books to a

private pool-table pad called “Statler's and Waldorf's” after the grumpy geezers on *The Muppet Show*. Interwoven are amusing musings on the man cave's history, types, art, psychological role, and ingredients (primarily, dust). Ladies, this is excellent voyeurism and the perfect present, but be warned: it may just encourage him to take over the garage. **SL**

New Zealand's Native Trees

John Dawson & Rob Lucas (Craig Potton, \$120)

Tree lovers, landscapers and all those passionate about New Zealand's natural heritage will snap up this landmark publication. Botanist John Dawson and plant



photographer Rob Lucas have devoted seven years to producing a taxonomic directory which also serves as a romantic paean to the 320 species, subspecies and varieties of our ancient tree flora – and a prayer for their preservation. Superbly written and divided into sections – conifers, tree ferns, flowering trees – the tome covers habitat, eco-status, and co-dependence with birds and insects. Alongside, 2300 dazzling photographs capture everything from landscapes blushing red with rata to the intimate beauty of leaves, flowers and fruits. The trailer to this truck is *Trees of New Zealand: Stories of Beauty and Character* by Peter Janssen and Mike Hollman (Hachette, \$69.99), a pleasurable collection of pictures and stories about native and non-native specimens countrywide. **JC**

Green Urban Living

Janet Luke (New Holland, \$45)

Want to live a green life in the city but don't have much space and don't know where to start? Then this is the book for you. Step-by-step lessons cover everything from growing veges and herbs through to cooking up compost and keeping chickens and bees, giving you the practical knowhow to turn your hankerings into reality. Hawkes Bay gardener-



turned-author Janet Luke reckons green urban living (aka “gurbing”) isn't just for those with big backyards. Indeed, my wee apartment's now home to herbs, greens and a worm farm – helping save the planet and saving me paying \$4 for fresh mint. **SL**

Also recommended:

If you've followed Justin Newcombe's backyard-DIY projects in the *Weekend Herald* but procrastinated about following his lead, those newspaper clippings going missing is no longer an excuse. **The Kiwi Backyard Handbook** (Penguin, \$45) details 25 projects such as building fences, storage shelves and raised vege beds, with plenty of photographs for inspiration.

Seasons: A Journey Through The New Zealand Garden (Penguin, \$55) is both eye-candy for gardeners and a real tribute to photographer Sally Tagg's talent for capturing the enchantment of flowers' form and turning it into art, with good explanatory captions by Jack Hobbs.

A great green-fingered gift is one or all of **The Tui NZ Flower Garden** by Rachel Vogan (Penguin, \$50), **The Tui NZ Vegetable Garden** by Sally Cameron (Penguin, \$50), and **Yates Vegetable Garden** (HarperCollins, \$45). Anything you need to know will be in these manuals. And if it's greens you're after, your go-to guide is Dennis Greville's compact-sized **Salads Year Round: A Planting Guide** (New Holland, \$24.99).



FOOD & WINE

A Visual Feast

You know our appetite for recipes rages unsated when a publisher – in this case, Random House – has not one but five sumptuous local cookbooks on offer for Christmas. Among them are **The Molten Cookbook** by Michael Van de Elzen (\$65), **The Soul Cookbook** by Judith Tabron and Gareth Stewart (\$60) and **Masterchef New Zealand: The Cookbook Volume Two** (\$55). This trio is aimed at the more adventurous home cook, especially the *Masterchef* volume (anyone who wants to try Season Two runner-up Jax's ruinous macaron tower can now recreate the disaster in their own kitchen), but a gratifying number of the recipes aren't formidably off-putting. The Molten and Soul cookbooks celebrate the signature recipes which have made the eateries such revered



institutions in Auckland. Each is lavishly illustrated, although the number of non-food shots in the Soul volume – think Viaduct scenery and random guests – seems excessive. A welcome addition to a keen foodie's Christmas stocking. **DC**

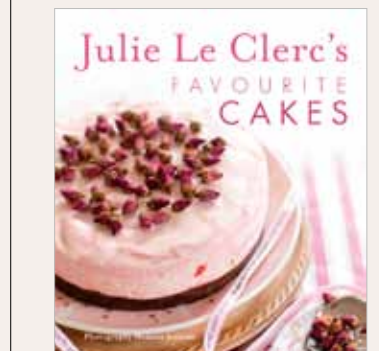
Stoked: Cooking with Fire

Al Brown (Random House, \$70)

If you like smoky, chargrilled food eaten straight from the wild, you'll love Al Brown's latest. *Stoked* takes the barbecue into exciting new territory, exploring outdoor-fire cooking techniques with culinary savvy. While the recipes are simple, the flavours are a mouth-watering mix of local and international, with fantastic accompanying dishes, rubs and marinades offering heady contrasting tastes that are both interesting and perfectly balanced. This book is the whole package, combining down-to-earth, Kiwi-style hunting and gathering with excellent photography and production. **BQ**

Sweet Treats

Do we really need another Kiwi baking book? Well, yes, when it's **Julie Le Clerc's Favourite Cakes** (Penguin, \$50), as the former cafe owner shares her innovative, easy-as creations – some copied



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by cafes nationwide, as she keeps pointing out. Chapters champion chocolate cakes, syrup cakes, cheesecakes, special-occasion cakes and “everyday” cakes (why not?). Hazelnut and Raspberry Ice Cream Cake, Vanilla Sugar Mango Tarts with Caramel Sauce... salivating yet? Meanwhile, Julie Biuso’s **Sweet Feast** (New Holland, \$45), a collection of her recipes from *Taste* magazine, will have you ditching dinner for dessert. Step-by-step pointers steer you through any tricky bits. Tweenies with a Junior Masterchef bent will enjoy **Party Food for Girls** (New Holland, \$29.99) by Alessandra Zecchini and Arantxa Zecchini Dowling. The Auckland mother-daughter team serves up easy-to-assemble savouries and sweets that look far too pretty to eat. **SA**

Country Calendar Cookbook with Allyson Gofton

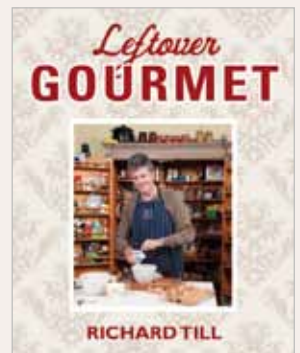
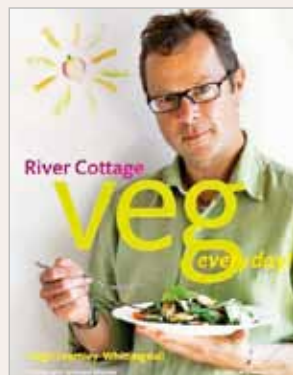
Allyson Gofton (Penguin, \$50)

Cookbook queen Allyson Gofton was watching TV’s *Country Calendar* one evening when she wondered: has anyone asked the characters featured if/how they cook what they farm, catch and grow? Nope. So she took a road trip countrywide to coax 20 sets of farmers, fisherman, fruit-growers and other food producers to share their signature simple recipes. While Gofton helped cook ‘em up, a tag-along journalist and a photographer captured the stories and environs of everyone from an ex-Army honey producer to a prison inmate-turned-organic gardener. This heartfelt tribute to hard-yakka Kiwis is much more than just a fab, fuss-free cookbook. **SL**

River Cottage Veg Everyday

By Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (Bloomsbury, \$69.99)

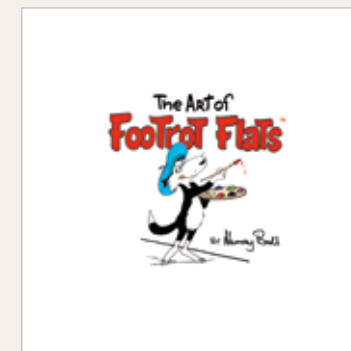
Some 200 recipes so cheap, easy and delicious you’ll forget they’re vegetarian. Fearnley-Whittingstall excels at unpretentious crowd pleasers that look and taste divine, such as the (sheer genius!) pie made with a handful of frozen peas, and the spring onion galette so easy a monkey could make it. **JN**



Also recommended

If you’d rather spend Christmas scoffing and savouring than slaving, equip yourself with Kim McCosker’s **4 Ingredients Christmas** (Random House, \$39.99). Minimum effort for maximum impact is the mantra of the “4 Ingredients” cookbook phenomenon, and this yuletide edition’s chocka with delectable delights spanning brunch, nibbles, dinner, dessert, drinks – even Christmas Eve treats for Santa. Who’d pay \$13 for either an out-of-season eggplant or a lacklustre kilo of tomatoes? Not Laura Faire, an Auckland gardener, food writer and *Good Morning* TV chef who’s turned her seasonal-eating ethos into cookbook **Now Is the Season** (New Holland, \$45), full of gorgeous photographs and garden-to-table tips. Seasonal, locally sourced produce is also the core of Bevan Smith’s beaut book **Riverstone Kitchen: Recipes from a Chef’s Garden** (HarperCollins, \$45), named after his award-winning restaurant near Oamaru. **Annabel Langbein: Free**

Range in the City (Annabel Langbein Books, \$59.99) seems a bit light on recipes and rather too laden with photographs of the lovely, perfectly groomed Annabel and her musings on family, community and sustainable living. The recipes at least remain easy to follow and the ingredients within reach of less-immaculate home-kitchen cooks. Fridge full of scraps, and pantry full of packets and jars, but there’s nothing to make for dinner? That’s where Donna Hay’s **Simple Dinners** (HarperCollins, \$44.99) and Richard Till’s latest, **Leftover Gourmet** (HarperCollins, \$39.99), can help out, though it’s all too easy to imagine the booming voice of TV’s “Smart Shopper” segments shouting the instructions at you. And, if what vino to choose proves a head-scratcher for you or someone you know, look no further than these wine bibles by leading oenophile Michael Cooper: **100 Must-Try New Zealand Wines** (Hachette, \$34.99) and his 20th annual **Buyer’s Guide to New Zealand Wines** (Hachette, \$39.99).



ART & CULTURE

The Art of Footrot Flats
Murray Ball (Hachette, \$99.99)

This sumptuous coffee-table edition of colour *Footrot Flats* illustrations would be thought laughably posh by sheep farmer Wal, his sarcastic pooch “Dog” and scary cat “Horse”. Theirs is a world of broken fences, horrible weather, corrugated-iron water-tanks, sheep that need drenching or shearing or burying, and terrifyingly serious footy practice. Leave the yuppie sensibilities at the door, mate: jokes about big bazookas, manure and guts are there in spades. On Valentine’s Day, for example, Dog presents his girlfriend Jess with a bloody heart, nicked from a dumbfounded Wal’s freshly-skinned bullock carcass. Funny, in a lovably blokey, familiar kind of way. **JN**

Linda McCartney: Life in Photographs

Edited by Alison Castle (Taschen/ New Holland, \$150)

Wonderful picture editing and superb reproduction raise this ravishing retrospective of Linda McCartney’s photographs far above the rest of the coffee-table mob. The “Swinging Sixties” ride again in these pages: images so fresh, they could have

been taken yesterday. This is rock’n’roll before Photoshop made stars into strange, poreless gods. The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, the Who, the Doors, and the Grateful Dead loll across these creamy pages in youthful insouciance, while Paul McCartney gazes with nervous interest through the lens at his future wife. The images from their years raising four children are some of the most beautiful. **JN**

Artists’ Impressions of New Zealand

Compiled by Denis Robinson (New Holland, \$55)

This “tour of New Zealand by paintings” is unpretentious, almost to a fault. It’s a great idea: nearly 60 artists get their work and contact details published, and we get excellent reproductions of landscapes from Whangaroa Harbour to Southland’s Fortrose Estuary. Though art sophisticates may find the paintings conventional and crammed together like bric-a-brac on a mantelpiece, there’s much to admire technically. From Richard Smith’s silky ocean in *Summer – Pilot Bay* to the brilliant brushwork of Alison Gilmour and Sam Foley, we discover fine artists skilled in the tricky business of capturing the world in watercolour, acrylic and oil. **JN**

New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History

Edited by Diane Pivac, Frank Stark & Lawrence McDonald (Te Papa Press, \$85)

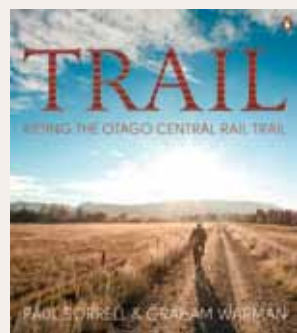
New Zealand feature films get a good seeing-to in this illustrated collection of 25 essays that canvas more than a century of local film-making, as our nation struggled towards a distinctive cinematic identity free of cultural cringe. There’s still a strong tension between highly commercial (say, Peter Jackson) and non-commercial (but culturally relevant) films, but both camps have had plenty of successes. A handsome, absorbing volume, jam-packed with intelligent opinions and excellent illustrations. **GA**

Also recommended:

Fiona Pardington: The Pressure of Sunlight Falling (Otago University Press, \$120) is a handsome foil for Pardington’s



travelling exhibition of enormous photographs of 19th-century casts of Oceanic faces from Mozambique to the Marianas. The bust-like plaster heads with closed eyes, made by an early 1800s French phrenologist, include those of three Ngai Tahu Maori. Pardington’s far from technically brilliant, but the images are spine-tingling, and she’s served well by the book’s production and accompanying essays. **Modern Art 1870-2000** (Taschen/New Holland, \$120) by Hans Werner Holzwarth is a typically lavish, yet unpretentious two-volume behemoth from Taschen. Full page works from Degas to Neo Rauch, photographs of every artist, essays and a 30-page biographical appendix will appeal to everyone tired of art arranged by theme rather than chronologically. The mind boggles at the sheer size of the galleries which house the Louvre’s gargantuan collection of 2954 paintings of the utmost quality and beauty. **The Louvre: All the Paintings** (Black Dog & Leventhal/Bookreps, \$129.99) is a fascinating, informative reference work. One caveat: you’ll need a magnifying glass to see most of the paintings (or the CD-Rom reproductions) clearly, so it’ll only whet your appetite. Can’t afford Paris? Work your way through **Art Galleries to Visit in New Zealand** (New Holland, \$29.99) by Denis Robinson and Gaye Ingold. **Art Toi: New Zealand Art at Auckland Art Gallery** (Auckland Art Gallery, \$59.95) is a chunky collection of the work of 181 NZ artists published to coincide with the stunning new gallery’s reopening. The large, easy-to-read text is clear and knowledgeable, though its caption-like placement under each painting tends to dominate the art. And film writer/art critic Jürgen Müller’s pick of 140 must-see films since the turn of the millennium, **Movies of the 2000s** (Taschen/New Holland, \$89.99), will send cinephiles off to the DVD store.



SPORT, LEISURE & TECHNOLOGY

Trail: Riding the Otago Central Rail Trail

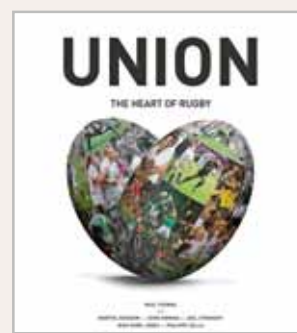
Paul Sorrell & Graham Warman (Penguin, \$50)

Who'd have believed it a decade ago? In 2010-2011, around 35,000 people cycled the Otago Central Rail Trail. So writer Paul Sorrell and photographer Graham Warman spent some sweet saddle time trail-side to discover the appeal. *Trail* feels a bit like an extended *National Geographic* article – a warmly written journal sharing the panoramas, history, personalities, weather and refreshments encountered by the pair, alongside excellent, often huge photos. The freedom this book captures is not just of Otago, but of cycling itself. Meanwhile, *Mountain Biking North: 34 Great Rides in NZ's North Island* (Craig Potton, \$44.99) is for the more serious rider. Author/photographer Dave Mitchell capably describes 34 rides, minus cafe stops. I would have liked fewer big maps and more inspiring big photos. **JR**

Union: The Heart of Rugby

Paul Thomas (Penguin, \$60)

Among the predictable glut of rugby books released around the World Cup, a handful are

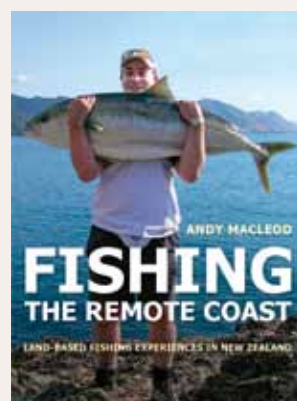


worthy additions to sport-lovers' bookshelves. *Union* is one. A finely produced collection of photos shows the passion and the pain while Paul Thomas's accompanying commentary, full of anecdote and humour, makes a good read even for those without a background in the game. A book that will remain relevant for decades. **MW**

Fishing the Remote Coast: Land-based Fishing Experiences in New Zealand

Andy MacLeod (David Bateman, \$29.95)

The title's no lie: MacLeod really has explored the furthest corners of Aotearoa, including the little-fished, spectacular Chatham Islands, the sheer cliffs around Dunedin, the open sands of Taranaki and the bluewater outcrops of the Far North. There he's accumulated an impressive catch of A-listers like big kingfish, as well as often overlooked but

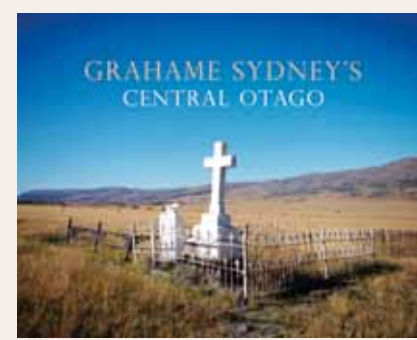


delicious, relatively accessible fish including blue moki and spotted smooth-hounds. The competitive sport-fisher also recounts his quest for the holy grail of LBG (Land-Based Gamefishing), a marlin. A great collection of angling yarns for anyone who casts a line from rocks, rivermouth or beach. **TL**

Also recommended:

Hotrodding isn't just a hobby, it's a way of life, says devotee Steve Holmes, who pokes around garages, inspects rebuild projects and drools over automobile collections in **The Kiwi Hotrodder's Guide to Life** (HarperCollins, \$39.99). Those who prefer their vehicles a bit newer will like **Cars Now! The Definitive Directory of All the Cars Made in the World Today** (Taschen/New Holland, \$89.99, by Daniel Alexander Ross), with its focus on sexy, cutting-edge cars. And 41 years after the late motorsport great's death comes **The Bruce McLaren Scrapbook: A Pictorial Celebration of a Kiwi Legend** (HarperCollins, \$59.99), by Richard Becht and Jan McLaren, Bruce's younger sister. The latest Awa Press "how to" book, **How to Play a Video Game** (\$26, by Pippin Barr), demystifies this couch sport for the uninitiated, while its interesting, often-amusing anecdotes will also appeal to seasoned gamers.

The New Zealand Good Beach Guide: North Island (Clean Media, \$50) by photographer/surfer Tim Rainger is a comprehensive, guide to the top spots to swim, sunbathe and wave-gaze, with an ecological focus. South Islanders get theirs in 2013. Don't motor off over summer without **The Great Kiwi Motorhome Guide: Exploring New Zealand by Campervan or Motorhome** (Random House, \$45), by writer Jill Malcolm and photographer husband Bill Savidan.



NATURE & PHOTOGRAPHY

Grahame Sydney's Central Otago

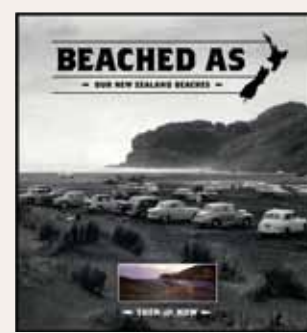
Grahame Sydney (Penguin, \$95)

This photographic ode to Central Otago from one of New Zealand's most famous living artists is produced with the unique eye Sydney has for the world around him. His ability with a camera as well as a brush was clear in the images of Antarctica he published in 2008, but this time he's focused on his home, the harsh and haunting Central Otago. As well as a collection of striking landscapes and portraits, this is an attempt to document a land under threat, a land where development is diluting its impact and beauty. **MW**

Beached As: Our New Zealand Beaches Then and Now

Craig Levers (Photo CPL Media, \$49.95)

Not just a coffee-table companion to 2009's *Beached As: Volume 1*, this superb follow-up visits 32 further favourite beaches and sheathes a heart-warming tale. In her old age, keen traveller Audrey Levers gave her wooden cigar boxes full of carefully labelled, foil-wrapped negatives to photographer nephew Craig, who found splendid snaps of beaches north and south.



Flip through them in all their black-and-white glory – an abandoned house-bus at East Cape's Papatea Bay here, Italian fishermen at Island Bay, Wellington there – alongside Craig's own present-day images, many shot from exactly the same spot. What a way to honour both his "surrogate granny" and our beautiful beaches. **SL**

New Zealand: The Essential Landscape

Rob Brown (Craig Potton, \$49.99)

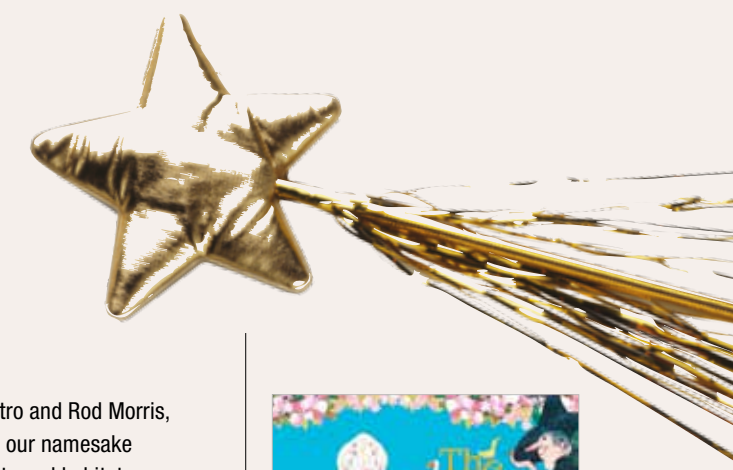
New Zealand's panoramas have been ceaselessly photographed since European arrival and you sometimes get the feeling you've seen it all. But Rob Brown doesn't stick to the cities and highways, instead ranging way off the traditional track. A tramping authority, he's photographed the country on countless trips, heavy camera gear in

As well as a collection of striking landscapes and portraits, this is an attempt to document a land under threat, a land where development is diluting its impact and beauty.

Grahame Sydney's Central Otago, reviewed by Mike White.

his pack, patience aplenty. The result is a book that's fresh and filled with many images that remind you how special New Zealand is. **MW**

Also recommended: Far from being "clapped out", our Skyhawks were in fact a testament to good old-fashioned Kiwi ingenuity. **Skyhawks: The History of the RNZAF Skyhawk** (Willson Scott Publishing, \$85, by Don Simms and Nick Lee-Frampton) is a photographic salute both to the aircraft and to those who flew and looked after them. Meanwhile, Gavin Conroy's **Precious Metal: Classic Fighters in New Zealand** (Craig Potton, \$59.99) specialises in close-up, plane-to-plane photography that captures the character and appeal of these extraordinary machines. Despite the pretentious text in need of a good edit, **10.98 Seconds of Wellington Artists** by photographer Lennart Maschmeyer (self-published, \$50) has some outstanding, unstaged portrait shots of the capital's copious artists and musos. A helpful addition to our national story is **Kiwi: A Natural History** (New Holland, \$30) by



Isabel Castro and Rod Morris, who detail our namesake bird's habits and habitat.

KIDS & TEENS

Picture books

A new generation can now discover 11 of the best-loved Margaret Mahy stories from the past 40 years in one very reasonably priced hardback anthology. **The Margaret Mahy Treasury** (Penguin, \$45) comes complete with delicious original illustrations, some by Quentin Blake. If the kids prefer the catchy rhymes and quirky characters of Dr Seuss, **The Bippolo Seed and Other Lost Stories** (HarperCollins, \$26.99) introduces seven stories that have never before appeared in book form. Machine-mad kids will love local efforts-turned-international hits **A Bigger Digger** and sequel **Stuck in the Muck** (Five Mile Press, both \$24.99, by Brett Avison, illustrated by Craig Smith), and Gavin Bishop's Christchurch-dedicated, recycled-paper book **Bruiser** (Random House, \$22) about



a digger that's inspired to swap demolition for building. Sticky, grabby fingers will soon sully the pop-ups of **The Splendid Spotted Snake** (Workman/Bookreps, \$27.99, by Betty Ann Schwartz and Alexander Wilensky), but it's great fun. For littlies learning their ABCs, there's **The Big Book of Words and Pictures** by Ole Könnecke (Gecko Press, \$29.99) or **The Kiwi Kid's ABC** (HarperCollins, \$19.99) by former Weta Workshop artist Rebekah Holguin, who also illustrates summery story **Beach Bag Boogie** (HarperCollins, \$19.99, by Lindsay Wood), which sees Jasper so enjoy beach camping that he gets "a jig-jiggling urge to get dancing". There's more jiggling in **Piggity-Wiggity Jiggity Jig and the Christmas Baby** (Scholastic, \$19.50), the fifth instalment of the series by Diana Neild and Philip Webb. What puts Piggity-Wiggity's snout out of joint during the family Christmas play? Lovely Lyn Krieglner illustrations balance out the serious premise of **Christmas in the Bush** (HarperCollins, \$19.99, by Lindy Kelly), as Josh finds





fun on his dad's new farm, minus Mum. Kudos to the 10 Kiwi celebs who each penned a chapter for Childfund NZ fundraiser **Mary's Christmas Yarn** (Penguin, \$25), which sees Mary discover why poverty-stricken kids overseas might want her pet lamb for Christmas. You'll find Kiwi twists on traditional tales (and free CDs) in **There's a Hole in My Bucket** (Scholastic, \$26, by Jenny Cooper, sung by the Topp Twins) and in monkey tale **All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth** (Scholastic, \$26, by Don Gardner/Katz Cowley). Other natty new takes on old-school stories are **There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Weta** (Scholastic, \$18.50, by P. Crumble/Errol McLeary) and **The Elves and the Cloakmaker** (Scholastic, \$18.50, by Chris Gurney/John Bennett), in which Maori "fairy folk", the patupaiarehe, finish sleepy Kahu's Christmas weaving. "Where's Wally" fans are spoilt for choice between Martin Handford's **Where's Wally? 25th Anniversary Edition** and travel-sized edition **Where's Wally? The Totally Essential Travel Collection** (both Walker Books, \$27.99), alongside spin-offs **Where's Santa?** (Scholastic, \$19, by Louis Shea) and **Where's the Meerkat?** (Michael O'Mara Books/Bookreps, \$14.99, by Jen Wainwright).

Junior fiction

Named New Zealand's 2012 IBBY NZ Honour Book for Writing (a coveted biennial award), Barbara Else's **The Travelling Restaurant** (Gecko Press, \$24.99) is an enchanting, illustrated seafaring fantasy that might just trick kids into eating dinner. There's more magic in Lee Murray's **Battle of the Birds** (Taramea, \$19.99) as an eagle flies homesick Annie, 11, back a thousand years and across the world to a moa-ridden New Zealand. Young adventurers will also enjoy Joy Cowley's 10-story collection about the wild West family, **Stories of the Wild West Gang** (Gecko Press, \$29.99), or Cowley's short tales **Just One More** (Gecko Press, HB\$32.99/PB\$22.99), illustrated by doyen Gavin Bishop. Another anthology to treasure is **The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm** (Taschen/New Holland, \$99.99), which features exquisite vintage illustrations.

Non-fiction

Want your kids to learn about the world they live in, minus the grumbles? Enter **Not For Parents - The Travel Book: Cool Stuff to Know About Every Country in the World** (Lonely Planet, \$30). **New Zealand Hall of Fame: 50 Remarkable Kiwis** (New Holland, \$34.99)

introduces children to luminaries past and present, with Bruce Potter's incredibly lifelike caricatures and Maria Gill's snacky titbits. Mark Kurlansky's **World Without Fish** (Workman/Bookreps, \$29.99) will teach them how to help stop the destruction of our oceans, while Maja Pitamic's **Art in Action** (Modern Books/New Holland, \$29.99) shares do-able art projects based on 21 masterpieces.

Young-adult fiction

After a year of earthquakes, oil spills and climate-change inaction, it's hardly surprising that post-apocalyptic sci-fi stalks our latest crop of young-adult novels. War divides a gated city in Jane Higgins' prize-winning adventure story **The Bridge** (Text, \$26), while **Sacrifice** by Joanna Orwin (HarperCollins, \$26.99) is set a few generations after natural disasters destroy the Pacific Rim. Both the wonderful Jack Lasenby's **Calling the Gods** (HarperCollins, \$24.99) and Anna MacKenzie's gripping trilogy finale **Finder's Shore** (Random House, \$19.99) centre on young heroines trying to build a worthwhile future from dystopian ruins. On a lighter note, Fleur Beale writes beautifully for car-mad kids in Holden-renovation tale **Dirt Bomb** (Random House, \$19.95).

STOCKING STUFFERS

Know someone interested in such trivia as the double amputee fitted with a mermaid tail? Then either the **Guinness World Records 2012** (Guinness World Records Ltd, \$59.99) or **Ripley's Believe It or Not: Strikingly True** (Ice Water Press, \$54.99) will be very welcome gifts. If there's an English geek in the house, try Max Cryer's **Preposterous Proverbs** (Exisle, \$29.99) or **What? Are These Really the Twenty Most Important Questions in Human History?** (Allen & Unwin, \$25): Mark Kurlansky's slim, clever philosophical tome written entirely in question form. Odds are the Scrabble set will surface this Christmas, especially if it rains, so to settle squabbles check the 250,000-plus permissible words in the latest **Collins Official Scrabble Words** (HarperCollins, \$44.99). Buying for a feisty lady? Provocative, no-holds-barred memoir **How to Be a Woman** (Random House, \$37.99) by British columnist Caitlin Moran puts the humour back into feminism. For hard-to-buy-for blokes, there's James May's **Man Lab** (Hachette, \$39.99), in which *Top Gear's* resident bogan amusingly relays his mission to shepherd "lost male souls" back to building, making and fixing things. +