

When things don't always go to plan

Few visitors, driving through the sleepy, leafy little goldfields village of Bealiba realise it is home to an enterprise that is quietly gaining interest from around the globe.

It all started back in the 90s, when, dreaming of a studio in which to paint, artist Rory Stainton decided to whip up a few mud bricks from the Bealiba clay.

A nice mud brick art studio was what he had in mind, but things didn't quite go according to plan.

Instead of a studio Rory ended up with a booming enterprise that today sells its unique eco-friendly, sun-dried bricks to leading architects in Australia's metropolitan capitals for use in largescale commercial projects.

"I wanted to make a studio so I made a few hundred bricks and people kept calling in off the street interested in them," the Bealiba resident of 19 years recalls how the business, Geobrick, began.

"Then somebody made me an offer for those first few bricks and I sold them for about 80 cents a brick.

"So then I made a few more and somebody else called in and said 'do you want to sell them?'"

"That's when I thought; hang on something's happening here."

Rory had unearthed not only demand for natural sun-dried bricks but had also dug up the fact that the Kaolin clay around Bealiba was perfect to make them with.

"I realised the clay around here was the el-supremo of clay; the best I've ever seen. It's got the perfect properties, exactly the right mix of sand, silt, gravel and clay.

"You couldn't mix it better in a

24 Carat Living

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— Rory Stainton, Bealiba

test-tube and it's unique to the goldfields," Rory said.

"I've never looked at a paint brush since."

Operating from the heart of Bealiba, Geobrick is now a thriving business involving Rory, his wife Sharon; daughter, Alison; son, Brody and business partner, André Farley.

They quarry the clay from the immediate area and run a brick press capable of pressing up to 10,000 bricks a day.

"We get calls from India, China, Botswana, America, all wanting to know our secrets and whether we can move over there," Rory says.

Geobrick sells mainly to commercial architects in Australia's capital cities, for use large-scale projects, although Rory says they are also happy to deal with individuals working on small-scale, private projects.

"At the moment we've probably got orders for 400,000 bricks," he says.

"We mainly deal with commercial architects in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. We are targeting commercial architects. We love architects and architects love us."

Geobrick's bricks are un-fired, sun-dried and use far less concrete as a stabiliser than a



ECO FRIENDLY: Rory Stainton and son Brody Stainton, of thriving Bealiba business, Geobrick.

conventional kiln-fired building brick.

"The object of the exercise is to make a difference in the carbon dioxide emissions," Rory says.

"Technically you'd call them a rammed-earth brick but they are water repellent and when they are dried and you hit them they ring like a fired brick and they look like a kiln-fired brick so they can compete into the kiln fired brick market.

"They are unique," Sharon says.

"With a 15 square house made from conventional kiln fired bricks you are throwing about 3.5 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions into the air through producing the bricks but with these, the emissions for the same sized house is virtually nil."

Geobrick's bricks have a cement content which ranges from two percent up to 16 percent.

Rory says their Geo2 bricks, which have a cement content of two percent cement, are strong enough to use in construction of a "four or five storey" building.

"Normal (kiln-fired) house bricks produce about 6.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per every 10,000 bricks," he says.

"We recently conducted a life cycle analysis using a grant from

Sustainability Victoria which shows that our Geo2 bricks produce just .07 of a tonne of CO2 emissions per every 10,000 bricks, a saving of about six tonnes of emissions per every 10,000 bricks.

"We use absolutely minimal amounts of cement and our bricks are not fired. There is huge energy in kiln-fired bricks and they are about 200 times stronger than they need to be.

"Our bricks are water repellent so you can just lay and forget and they are superior as far as thermal mass goes because natural earth takes two and a half times longer to heat up or cool down."

Rory says that as awareness of the need to reduce humanity's carbon footprint grows, demand for the Bealiba bricks is also growing such that he expects to purchase a second brick press in several months.

"Because of the carbon tax the natural earth brick will come back," he says.

"I thought I'd be where I am now, five years ago but \$2 million and 20 years later and we've finally cracked it. We're not messing around here."

As to his former painting life: "This is my art now," Rory says.

At a glance . . . BEALIBA

Location: Forty kilometres north-west of Maryborough.

Population: 150 approx

- The small community of Bealiba is a surprise package; with diverse businesses and a strong community spirit and passionate community members. The town boasts a large number of recreational clubs, and community clubs and associations.

- At the foot of Mt Bealiba, the township is a delightful rural retreat. Bealiba has a multitude of major agricultural and cottage industries.

- Population leisure activities in Bealiba and surrounds include fishing, bushwalking, photography, bird watching, horse and bike riding.

- The town is rich in history, with the main street lined with verandahs and buildings of days gone by.



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