

# Tuhoe lures film-maker

**Katee Shanks**

With the world premiere of *Ever The Land* just around the corner, the *Whakatane News* talked to film director Sarah Grohnert about falling in love with Tuhoe.

What started out as a documentary about architecture turned into something a lot more personal for the German-born film-maker.

In 1997, Ms Grohnert was an exchange student at Orewa Collage in Auckland. The year turned out to be a pivotal one in her life.

She fell in love with New Zealand and during an English class viewing of Jane Campion's film *An Angel at My Table*, she knew film-making was her destiny.

Ms Grohnert now calls New Zealand home and her first feature film, *Ever The Land*, will premiere at the New Zealand International Film Festival on July 18.

*Ever The Land* wrapped up being a gorgeous film that captures the bond between people and land as it follows the design and construction of Ngai Tuhoe's landmark architectural undertaking, Te Uru Taumatua.

Te Uru Taumatua is New Zealand's first living building designed and constructed to meet the world's most stringent green building programme, the Living Building Challenge.

"At the beginning I was interested in producing a documentary about sustainable architecture and put my feelers out," Ms Grohnert said.

"I was pointed toward Jasmx, a company designing sustainable



Sarah Grohnert says she fell in love with Tuhoe.

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spaces in New Zealand, and the team responsible for Te Uru Taumatua."

However, the documentary vision changed dramatically once Ms Grohnert found herself falling in love with Tuhoe.

"I was blessed in that I was welcomed into the community, was able to spend time in the valley and was shown amazing hospitality by locals.

"There is such a presence about the place and I saw and felt that instantly. I then had to work out how to capture that presence, and the spirit of the building, and make it part of the story."

Ms Grohnert said she laboured away for three years to produce

*Ever The Land* and she is both excited and nervous in the days before its release.

"I'm planning to attend the screenings in both Auckland and Wellington. I want to be there not only to gauge reaction, but also to be available to answer any questions anyone may have about the film."

While Ms Grohnert lives a simple life in a tiny hut at Karekare in Auckland's West Coast, she says she will be back and forth between her home and Tuhoe.

"I've made such great connections with the people and the place and it is part of me now. There's no way I'll be able to stay away."