



Alex and Iryna Kirichuk

KEN DOWNE

## PUHOI POTIONS

Ukrainian couple Alex and Iryna Kirichuk make a potent combination.

**I**n their native Ukraine, Alex Kirichuk was a nuclear power engineer and Iryna, his wife, a paediatric cardiologist with a talent for concocting herbal medicine.

Indeed, Iryna's talent for tonics was so powerful, the Soviet Union Olympic sailing team adopted her as their secret weapon and she was their physician for 10 years.

"I tell you about Iryna," Alex says proudly. "She prescribed alcohol to sportsman, but not alcohol from the shop – alcohol infused with her herbal medicine. It tasted so good, they drink it with big pleasure and next day, they make medals."

The couple immigrated to New Zealand in 2002 – "to change hard life for good life", says Alex. "But I can't be nuclear power engineer here, and Iryna does not want to start her medical career from scratch so, what to do for us?"

Happily, that's when Puhoi, a small hamlet 50km north of Auckland, pointed them in the right direction. The couple bought land there and founded the Puhoi Organic Distillery, where they now work side by side, producing Iryana's Medica Bohemica herbal tonics and dietary supplements, as well as boutique spirits made from one of the apothecary's by-products – alcohol. Limited-edition releases include gin, vodka, schnapps, plum wine, brandy and even a clear whiskey they call Naked Blonde ([www.spirits.net.nz](http://www.spirits.net.nz)).

"Finding Puhoi was a stroke of luck," Alex says. "We travelled all New Zealand by car and when we

come to Puhoi Museum, we find it is a Bohemian settlement, and because the science of herb tonics was born in Bohemia, we saw this as a sign."

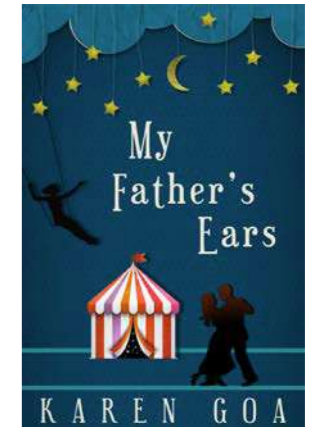
In his role as a government inspector of nuclear power stations, Alex visited Chernobyl three times following the catastrophic accident there in 1986. But he never fell ill, after Iryna created a special formula for him, using her knowledge of sports medicine and adaptogens – herbs said to relieve stress and boost the immune system.

"You think I should die very soon, like my colleagues," he says. "But Iryna doesn't like this idea. Every day, I drink 100ml of what we call 'church wine' and I am healthy man. No GP, no tablets. Just Iryna."

The Kirichuks describe their distillery as producing "new generation" spirits – and have a breathalyser on hand to back up their claims that its alcohol content leaves the body much faster than with standard liquor. Drink their spirits with the right foods – and don't over indulge – and apparently you're almost guaranteed not to wake up with a hangover.

"Only dogs eat caviar without vodka," Alex proclaims, while simultaneously topping a square of dark German bread with sour cream and lashings of homemade caviar.

At the end of a lively evening, he produces his breathalyser one last time. "Before you go, let us be sure you are safe to drive home." I blow in the bag, get the green light – and I'm good to go. **ELISABETH EASTHER**



## IT'S ALL GOA

"It's like cramming an elephant into a tea cup." So says writer Karen Goa about the process of adapting a book for radio.

*My Father's Ears* is Goa's first novel. And like her two travel books and several of her short stories, it's to be broadcast on Radio New Zealand. "I'm a huge fan of radio," she says. "To have my words take a different life is quite special."

Goa, who's Canadian, swapped her pharmacist lab coat to pursue a career in medical journalism in New Zealand more than 20 years ago. Now a freelance travel, health and food writer, she temporarily gave all that up to write the novel, which was published last year.

*My Father's Ears* follows the story of the Sanzari family, who live in Canada. When Lou Sanzari, an Italian-Canadian, discovers he has a son in New Zealand, he wants to meet him – but his daughter, Sophie, has her suspicions about the truth of his claims.

[needs a quote in here from Karen about the book – what inspired it, fact v fiction, particularly why the Italian theme... Also, who's going to voice it??]

So maybe after the quote, it could end with...

Voiced by xxxx, *My Father's Ears* will be aired on RNZ [any idea which programme slot?] over the next few months.

• *My Father's Ears* will be broadcast on RNZ sometime over the coming months, but the final dates are yet to be finalised.

**BECKIE WILSON**