
[Selling Up and Moving On](#)

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Dave, a real estate agent, was just talking me through a "tasting session" a while back with a friend on his property near Ashburton in the days when he used to brew his own beer. He meticulously and lovingly described the equipment, methods, and technique for his "experimental" approach to beer design; It was half the fun. As for the outcome, well, each batch was an adventure. A broad grin and a glint in his eye shone through as he spoke of the time he and a contractor finished up work for the day. In a gesture of convivial blokeship Dave offered to share a few bottles of home brew, an offer enthusiastically accepted and with no further ado tasting commenced.

"I didn't wake up for two hours and when I did I couldn't move my arms. It was strong stuff."

Brew by brew sugar was added in different amounts at different stages. It was a constantly changing process in pursuit of the perfect pint. The blend refined, honed, and altered. At times the intoxicating results would be celebrated in blissful rapture at others stoically endured. Dave knew this batch would be fortified but didn't know by how much exactly. This time he boosted the alcohol content by adding sugar to the potent mix already in the bottle; after pouring, and before capping.

Depending on the way you calibrate success, I could hear by the chuckle and see by the far away look in his eyes it had been. The whole experience had left a deep impression on Dave, and me, as we laughed our way through the telling. We estimated he and his drinking buddy had drunk the equivalent of four pints of wine. They both gradually gravitated to the safety of the floor, succumbing to the bonhomie and beer. When Dave awoke he found his buddy gone, only a neat row of empty bottles and a glass to tell of his passing. Assessing the scene upon wakefulness he let his host snooze in peace on the floor, then no doubt took a wobbly path back from whence he came.

The conversation waxed and waned after that for a good part of the morning; about anything but the subject at hand; selling my property. The banks handing out cash like sweets to anyone who had a pulse, the madness that gripped the farm sales market only two years before, a high Kiwi dollar, the dairy farmers plight, and the increasing cost of staple foods.

Dave distractedly rubbed the bristles of his greying beard and said.

"I don't know how some people can afford to eat. The prices at the supermarket are ridiculous"

I had to agree, it brought to mind a recent visit to the New World store in Ashburton; a stack of food parcels to be distributed to the poor in Christchurch lay just inside the door. Each brown carrier bag filled with the basics telling its own story of poverty and hardship. This is not an image of "God's own" New Zealanders like to publicise, this aspect of Kiwi

life is dealt with quietly. The first auctions had begun for farmers who couldn't pay up their debts on the land, how many more? Farm sales had run down to a trickle, times had changed in the real estate market. The global financial crisis was wreaking havoc with just about everything; and as I learned, a little bit was coming my way.

Dave was leading me gently to the introduction of a realistic but low figure for the price of my property. This home, my home, my sanctuary, my refuge, bought as a wreck in 2002, lavished with so much care and attention. I knew what he was doing and he knew I knew, but this was his business and this was the procedure, we had both done our homework and he obviously felt that he should let me down gently. When the figure finally came it was a relief, he had done such a good job it felt like the bottom had fallen out of the market and into the abyss. Lower than my own estimate but not by too much, it looked like the sale might be on after all and the journey move from theoretical to the practical. As in very real.

After haggling for a bit over his fees he climbed in his car and left. I had promised to call him once I had made up my mind about a crucial question.

To rent or sell? To leave my Canterbury home for ever or perhaps to come back one day, for all days.

Max Crean (c) 2009