



Aotearoa Retreat Centre Project Update 2022-23



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Steve Lee finally gets his hands in the Onekaka soil
- July 2021



Nau mai haere mai ki te ARC whakahou 2023

Yuan Gong practice on the retreat centre site - January 2022

Welcome to our first ever official update for the Aotearoa Retreat Centre Project!

Whilst we have been sharing many of the important events and newsworthy snippets of the last 3-4 years of the project, we felt now was a good time to bring some of the most important aspects of our shared journey together into one document - both for ourselves, and for everyone who might have an interest in ARC. As we have come to the end of the year in 2023, it feels like we've come to the end of an important phase in the project, which is worthy of our reflection and celebration.

This update has been written by several different people, all with different perspectives, opinions, thoughts and feelings about ARC, but all deeply involved in the project in some way. In bringing all these contributions together, we've resisted the temptation to "standardise" the text

too much. So you may find duplications as we've tried to articulate the same thing in different ways. Some sections may even feel a little unpolished. This is deliberate; we hope it sheds some light on the diversity within our organising team, and indeed within the increasing number of people contributing their time and heartfelt effort to this project.

So, read on and enjoy! We hope to see all of you at some point in the near future on the land in Mohua, Golden Bay.

Ngā mihi mahana 'with gratitude'

The ARC Steering Group

Cat, Kirsty, Steve C, Marie-Laure, Rainer, Jackie, Steve L, Trina, and Ollie

James Lee & Renford removing flooring in the Villa lounge - November 2023



Steve & Dieter planting fruit trees - August 2023



Bonfire fun - Summer Camp 2022



Report from Yuan Tze - November 2023

More than 20 years ago, I saw the need for a path that could effectively help people deal with the root causes of their problems and uplift their lives, and I believed this was the way to steer humanity towards true civilisation. Ren Xue was created out of this intention and has been used for this purpose since I came to New Zealand in 2002.

As the number of people practising Ren Xue grew steadily, so did the dream of having a physical home for Ren Xue. I dreamed of a place where people could live the Ren Xue way and manifest its fruit. A place where people could come to learn Ren Xue together and grow together. A place to realise the ultimate goal of Ren Xue – living in harmony with others and nature from the place of inner harmony. Although for many years there was no sight of such a place, I had no doubt that the universe would make it happen when the time was right.

When Cat approached us with the offer to help out in August 2019, I knew the universe was responding. I was deeply touched by her trust in me and Ren Xue. Then James found the place. It felt like a very good start, although I also had a strong feeling that this was going to be a journey full of challenges. This was no surprise, because what we had started was something that was not only huge but also very special.

I fell in love with the land at the first sight of it. It was such a beauty with a fresh and vibrant Qifield. I envisioned doing deep work on life with many people there. I visualised the place filled with shining hearts radiating bright light to the world. When I built the Qifield there, I felt that the universe would soon gather the right people for us. And it did.

On our second visit, I slept in a tent on the land for the centre. I wanted to feel the land and make a connection with it to know how it felt about our intention of building a centre there. The response I received was more than positive. It was a warm welcome and I felt a lot of trust and love in my heart. I felt a huge sense of responsibility to take care of the land and make sure it is used in the way that will benefit all.

The third visit, the ceremony for taking “ownership” of the land, to me, was the affirmation of this welcoming message and the formal pledge to take up this responsibility. I was deeply moved by the crowd from all over New Zealand. This event was one to remember – celebrating the fruit of the hard work the key people involved had done and sharing it all with the community. So much love was felt! I saw a very bright future!

I was not thinking the road ahead would be all smooth though. While this meaningful project has got many people excited and drawn those who are interested in, when it comes to doing the real work to move things forward, it is far from the ideal happy pictures we imagine in our heads. There are bound to be challenges. No one has the experience of building such a big centre. The sheer complexity and amount of work involved can be extremely daunting. Seeing how all the tasks are completed and challenges overcome one by one, I cannot help feeling admiration for what has been achieved. It's truly amazing!

Another challenge I knew was bound to arise was relationships. Gathering at a retreat and practicing Yuan Gong together is one thing - working together on a serious project is another. Our patterns would not be able to stay quiet; they can jump out and launch attacks at any time. This can cause difficulties of all sorts, even conflicts. Thankfully, my message to “use this opportunity to learn and grow” was well-received. I have seen how Ren Xue teachings have been relied upon to overcome such challenges, especially the effort to look inward and work on patterns. This is the meaning of this work. The Ren Xue centre is not just a physical facility, its soul is people, especially those who work there. Their growth is the foundation for the project and for the growth of people who are going to use the facility. I cannot be happier to see how this message has been very well understood and adhered to, and most importantly, the growth they have experienced.

To conclude, I would say things could not have been more perfect. Everything that has happened was meant to be. The universe has shown its unconditional love for us, to which I am eternally grateful. There is no other way but to continue to do our best to follow its wisdom, with our trust and love.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Cat and James for their generosity and initiative, and to everyone who has been making contributions to this project through the work they do for it, day in and day out. Walking forward together, the road ahead will become smoother.

*Yuan Tze
On behalf of Yuan Tze and Melissa*



Melissa & Yuan Tze at summer camp 2022

Life Cultivation, Land and People

If you can imagine how it might be to sculpt a piece of living clay whilst being both soil and sculptor, that's kind of what it's like as a Ren Xue practitioner and teacher, living and working in the project. Ren Xue itself, and the global Ren Xue community which support this endeavour, give the project a wonderful heart, and a strong well weathered foundation for growth - and then the growth is ours to do (or not).

We know that we need to lead this work from a true place of our own internal transformation, and this is often funny, not easy, and can be (quite/very) challenging, but over the few years since the project started, we have all grown enormously. People involved have experienced real beneficial change in their understanding, realisation and wisdom which in turn supports our project beacon of sharing what we learn with the world.

We are invited to offer our learnings in a range of discussion groups within various communities, and are teaching Ren Xue now in many different ways from a foundation of support and love for all. So our growth is becoming more actively manifest in the world too.

Particularly deep work happens in the pattern area of Avoiding and Hiding, as we all count here, in the discussion, working together, and in the doing. Our combined efforts rise and fall on the harmony and inclusiveness, the teamwork and the open, robust discussion and forgiveness of the group process.

We as a group have shifted both unconsciously and consciously away from patterns of self/ family group oriented decision making towards our beacon of benefit

for all, whether this is about caring for the waterways here on the land with planting, fencing, working with local organisations to create fish ladders through culverts, stopping farm rubbish from entering the waterways, or supporting one of us to take some time for deep practice or wellbeing recharge. There is always plenty more learning to enable lives which are beneficial to all, and we humbly acknowledge our areas of ignorance and ongoing learning with gratitude for those who are walking the path with us.

Wellbeing has been a recurring theme over the last couple of years as we learn to pace ourselves in a more natural way, listening for the timing with our hearts and moving in harmony with the universe. There are numerous opportunities for growth in this alone, as we work on our prevailing patterns which are of course grounded in our own self-centred version of reality and rhythm, and we are sometimes beating very different times on our drums. Harmony arising from integration and unification is very sweet.

Learning to respect and give each other space to work in our different ways, appreciating everyone's skills and tackling things with a group perspective, are areas which are developing apace. Doing the work while doing the work, is something rare and wonderful.

Thank you Ren Xue teachings and practice, Ren Xue Global, Onekaka and Golden Bay local community, Yuan Tze and Melissa and Cat and James for this wonderful, amazing and life-changing opportunity.

Jackie Blunt



Natalie, Cat, Leslie & Trina - aka the "midwives". This group nurtured the first flickers of enthusiasm for a Retreat Centre in Golden Bay in 2019 & 2020, & brought it forwards towards a reality.



Meret Weiss & the kids from Collingwood Area School tree planting on the farm - September 2022

Project Overview

2023 began with a fun-filled, relaxed community summer camp in Golden Bay in January followed by a wonderful in-person gathering of the Steering Group. There, we discussed the work of the newly formed Strategy group made up of Cat, Ollie, Jackie, Steve Lee and facilitated by Leslie Van Gelder. Together we set three priorities for the year:

1. Focus on wellbeing and pacing - we all finish the year feeling well nourished - not depleted.
2. Systems and processes - we work on building a solid foundation for the work to come, looking at our current structures and roles.
3. Decision making - how do we do this work, and make decisions together efficiently and effectively, as a collaborative group using a consensus model?

Having those clear shared priorities, in addition to our beacons, has brought cohesion and focus. Giving ourselves permission to focus on our own personal growth and wellbeing has been key to building a structure which nurtures growth - we uplift ourselves so we can help others do the same. In essence, the core of Ren Xue. To assist in this, the He Tangata fund was established to provide financial assistance for anyone involved in the

project who would like support for their wellbeing. In addition to the Yuan Tze workshops we have all attended, some of us have enjoyed learning about collaborative decision making and teamwork, and all of us have taken part in governance skills training which has brought great benefits in our effectiveness as a group. Steve Campbell has written more about this below in his "Working Together as One" section.

In April 2023 we celebrated the success of having our resource consent application approved by Tasman District Council for our plans to build a Retreat Centre and ten dwellings on the farm. An amazing achievement! Until this point we had been working on the possibility that we might not be able to achieve our purpose on this land - this changed things hugely as we could now focus with certainty that the plan is going ahead!

At our mid-year in-person gathering in Golden Bay, this meant that we could set some strategic goals for the next few years towards building community, developing the farm and building the Retreat Centre. These three aspects of the project are like the three wheels of a vehicle; the Retreat Centre wheel turning at the front and providing the focus, heart and momentum for the other two wheels

which produce the power and drive - the farm and community. They are integral to each other in providing stability and structure in a mutually beneficial way.

Our strategy requires the identification of specific roles within our team and we began by seeking an overall Project Manager to drive the project to completion. We hope to appoint this position by the end of the year and look forward to the drive this will bring to the project. While we celebrate the creation of new roles and the additions to our team, we also sadly farewell our Project Coordinator Ollie Clifton who has been with us for three years and has played a vital role in our work so far - we could not have come this far without him. As a group, we identified that the project would benefit from someone local in this role and therefore Ollie, based in Christchurch, is stepping back to create space for this. Huge gratitude to Ollie for his foresight, hard work and dedication.

We are also pleased to announce the appointment of Cat Alker as Chairperson and welcome her stepping forward into this role.

The farm has been a hive of activity and it has been wonderful to see the new trees planted and hear the plans for more diversification in the year ahead. We also have enjoyed the presence of Lulu Jordan on farm with her PhD project on pasture crops and look forward to hearing how that develops. The farm working group has also expanded and we welcome Lulu and Findal Proebst in addition to Steve Lee, Ollie Clifton, Pip Beaumont, Kath Flight and James Alker. The group has developed a horticulture plan in collaboration with Dieter Proebst and plans for next year include a food forest and further planting. Work has also been done on mapping the whole farm and collating information on soil and weeds which will allow us to see the effect of any changes we make.

We also saw the set up of the first social enterprise on the farm with local plant grower Meret Weiss who runs OK Grow, a local native plant nursery. She moved into the old dairy shed and together worked with Steve and Kirsty to set up the structures required- both physical and on paper! It required a lot of hard work and patience and we are so happy to see her there! In future we hope to work with more social enterprise models based on our learnings here and offer more job opportunities and community involvement. For more details on the farm activities, see below for the interview of our Farm Manager Steve Lee.

Our Ren Xue community in Golden Bay is growing steadily, and this year we are so happy to welcome Ren Xue teachers Verena and Kiri and Dave to their new homes in the Bay. Step by step the community is strengthening and local teachers, Marie-Laure, Vincent, Cat, Jackie, Grace, Derek, Manfred and Ana have been working together and providing a variety of offerings both in Golden Bay and online for people to learn about and practice Ren Xue.

At our last winter hui, the project team as a whole developed the theme of "Deepening Transformation" for the Retreat Centre and project experience. From there we have been exploring ways to do this where people can come and experience deeper health, happiness, wellbeing, growth, realisation and wisdom. Following on from this a local team created what turned out to be a wonderful and profound 9-day retreat at Shambala, a retreat centre right next to the farm. Over the course of Yuan Tze's 9-day November online retreat those of us there experienced profound change and insight in an environment of laughter, song and support.

We invite you all to join us in April 2024 for an in person experience of the Wonder Valley USA online Yuan Tze event. All welcome! We will even have our wonderful French chef Marie-Laure nourishing us from her kitchen garden on the land here.

In addition, a team of locals, Ren Xue practitioners and Ren Xue family embarked on stage 1 of the Old Villa renovation in November - the stage that starts with soot and sledgehammers! We are working towards a space for workshops, gatherings and accommodation for everyone interested in coming to see and be part of this project. This is the oldest building on the farm with its wonderful history of being a family home, a post office for the schooners sailing up to the local wharf to drop mail for Onekaka folks, and latter a library for the Onekeka community, and so we want to restore it as part of the area's heritage. Past, present and future are bright!

And so... we are on our way! The boat is sailing - we hope you will join us for the journey in 2024!

*With heartfelt best wishes,
Cat Alker*

Introducing the Steering Group

Cat Alker



I have gained so much over the years that I have been learning and practising REN XUE. It began as a way of relaxing and becoming more calm in a weekly Yuan Gong class and slowly changed into a daily routine and way of life. It took me a while to find my path in life so I wandered around a lot in my twenties - travelling and trying different jobs and studies until I realised my desire to help other people. I started working in healthcare and became a physiotherapist but since having my 3 children I have focused on family and completing the Yuan Gong/ Yuan Ming teacher training programme. I now homeschool our 3 boys, teach Yuan Gong whenever I get the opportunity, and am learning about self-sufficiency and compost making in our new home in Golden Bay. I have recently taken up the role of Chairperson with the Steering Group, and hence look forward to helping lead the project into the exciting times ahead.

Kirsty Abrahams



I am the Coordinator for Ren Xue Australasia, am a qualified Level 4 Ren Xue teacher and am currently working through Level 5. I am so grateful for all that Ren Xue has given me so when the opportunity to give back came, I jumped at it. Part of my role within the Steering Group is to help manage the finances and ensure that we comply with the laws that govern us as a Charitable Trust. It is so inspiring to see all the hard work that has been put in so far and the support of each other as opportunities are met and worked through together. I am really looking forward to the year ahead.

Steve Campbell



I do love being involved in Ren Xue and especially involved with this special project, it means a lot to me as it has given me so much in life and I would love to give something back. I teach the Yuan Gong system and love sharing the philosophy of Ren Xue to anyone that is willing to listen. I also have my own business in building design and have a passion for making buildings feel like they belong in their environment. When people walk into a building or its surrounding environment they can feel welcomed, comfortable and nourished by what they experience from being there. I hope to contribute some of my skills and ideas into this project as we move forward together.



Steve Lee

I have a passion for farming and understanding people's relationship to the land and the food and the fibre that we all need. I've worked in farming, marketing agricultural products, R&D, and advisory roles throughout my career. Much of my career has been in international livestock development. I specialise in farm systems and information management for smallholders. I've worked in Asia, the Pacific and Africa in a variety of roles from pasture agronomy to project design and team leadership.

A key reason for my involvement is that I am committed to participating in the development of future farm systems which not only meet the needs of a growing world population but do it in a more environmentally sustainable way. We have an exciting opportunity at Onekaka to be part of exploring new ways of living with and on the land, integrating Ren Xue values, that can then be shared more widely.



Jackie Blunt

Living here on the Ren Xue land and centre project is the most wonderful opportunity to develop life and to create beneficial possibilities for all. This is a place which nourishes the work of Ren Xue deeply, where the space of personal transformation is so supported, and I am relishing becoming a natural, happy and true human being as love and wisdom become more and more core in the life I experience.

I'm married to Steve Lee who manages the farm, and enjoy being the farm assistant when needed, teaching Ren Xue online and in person, and developing Ren Xue, Yuan Gong and Yuan Ming practice in my role of Ren Xue Practitioner Development manager. I coordinate the Ren Xue MHA (mental health advisory), and am part of the Ren Xue Norms and Ethics Council. My professional background is in health, and I love expanding the possibilities of what a healthy life can really be, helping myself and others to develop that life in harmony and in more supportive ways with this planet, our home.



Ollie Clifton

The ARC project has been a really nice combination of different strands of my life, and happily brought together pretty much all the things I love to do! As I now hand over the reins for others to coordinate the project, it is very satisfying to see how we've come as a group, and how much we still have to do and grow. The possibilities are almost infinite!

For me this Retreat Centre has the potential to be a leading light, a safe haven for humanity even, where rapid healing and deep life changes can happen. Having the opportunity to help coordinate the initial stages of the Retreat Centre project has been very special, and I look forward to being involved again in some way in the future.



Marie-Laure Darricarrere

My husband Vincent & I are a French couple currently living in Onekaka, Golden Bay, New Zealand. We are both Ren Xue teachers.

Vincent is an osteopath and acupuncturist. He has been practising and teaching Qigong since 2004. I am a Pilates, Qigong and pain relief therapist, and has been practising and teaching Qigong since 2011. We opened our clinics in Motueka and Takaka and we offer some regular Qigong workshops.

Together, we helped create the affiliate organisation Ren Xue France in 2012 and have been helping many people improve their lives. It is dear to our hearts to continue to grow, contribute to the creation of a community that has a low impact on the environment, and create an uplifting life for ourselves and others. We live on the coastal land with the Alker family. We are now a big family!

I, Marie-Laure, am not only a therapist but also a farm assistant who loves to plant trees and contribute to the project. To be on the farm helps me to connect with the project and the Qifield here. With Vincent we dream of having a healing centre here and Marie-Laure and Jackie work to set up a Yuan Ming practice in Golden Bay. It's very exciting to see how it flows naturally supported by a nourishing Qifield here.



Rainer Hoffman

Rainer Hofmann, Ren Xue practitioner and professor in plant science, based in Christchurch, New Zealand. Greetings, I've been practising Ren Xue since 2020 and have found profound inspiration in its teachings and values. Since 2021, I've actively participated in the Ren Xue Golden Bay farm project, and since 2022, I've been a member of the Aotearoa Retreat Centre Steering Group.

My professional journey began in the environmental NGO sector overseas, eventually leading me to a fulfilling university career in plant science spanning three decades. My love for nature has driven my involvement in numerous projects related to sustainable agriculture and ecology in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands region.

To engage harmoniously with the land, grounded in a deep respect for the diversity and abundance of life, aligns seamlessly with the principles of Ren Xue and the planned Retreat Centre. I am grateful to bring to the Steering Group my energy and experience to help realise the vision of a Centre that embodies Ren Xue teaching and research for healthy and sustainable living and growth.



Trina King

I have been a student of Yuan Tze and Ren Xue for many years. Having learnt & received so much I am dedicated to giving back and helping others in a way which is both meaningful and uplifting. Having worked in the non-profit sector for many years I feel privileged to be able to bring my expertise to a cause which I deeply believe in. I am currently the Executive Director for Ren Xue International, based in Wellington, and have a very close connection with this project.

The Big Picture

The overall vision for the ARC project is to create a home for Ren Xue - a place where we can live in harmony with ourselves, with our family, with our community, and with nature. This is no small undertaking! The different aspects of this vision seek to speak to all the different aspects of our lives - in the same way that Ren Xue aims to uplift life on all levels, the ARC project aims to work on all these levels too. The process of gradually building the project to be able to support the development of people's lives in this way starts with ourselves, as outlined so beautifully in Jackie's "Life Cultivation, Land and People" section above.

The other aspect of this vision which shines really brightly for me, is creating a home. In the same way that we all need a home to return to each day to refresh and revitalise, a place of refuge and security where we feel truly nourished - Ren Xue too needs a home. This is a very special undertaking, which for those of us closely involved in the project thus far, is truly a wonderful privilege. We invite you all to join the fun!

Another integral part of our ARC strategic thinking is our beacons - our leading lights, our core values which will hold us true and steady when the storms arrive. As a Steering Group, we asked ourselves pretty much this exact question in June 2021 - how would we navigate through the challenges of the project? When faced with

difficult and perhaps conflicting decisions, what could we look to for assistance? We put ourselves in the shoes of navigators of old, looking to the stars to guide them at night...what would our stars, bright lights or beacons be? Four key beacons emerged from this discussion, and continue to guide us in the project:

We live from the Heart
We see life as a Totality
We see Humans and Nature are one
We embrace Inclusiveness and Openness

This update has been written by many different authors, each with their own connection to and understanding of these beacons. We all express them differently, and our contributions to the project reflect this. As you read through this update we invite you to reflect for yourself on what the ARC project might look like when these beacons are really present, fully manifested even. What would be different, and how would we get there? We welcome your feedback on this!

For a full list of the ARC beacons, see the ARC website

Ollie Clifton



2022-23 work programme

Farm

Interview with Steve Lee, Farm Manager by Ollie Clifton, Project Coordinator:

O: Tell me about the farm Steve - when did you start being involved?

S: It was a long time before we actually shifted in - maybe March 2020? Back in the days of covid lockdowns!

O: So, how did it feel when you made the commitment to shift to Golden Bay to be on the farm?

S: It seemed very easy...it was like things were lining up. Kids having left home - that was a big one. We'd always liked Golden Bay, so coming here was always in the back of our minds anyway. It seemed to be a good decision that worked for kids, it worked for me - I've always wanted to farm. And for Jackie, backing out of GPing and getting involved in this whole Ren Xue adventure - it worked too.

O: Sounds like it ticked all the right boxes at just the right time

S: Yeh it did - we looked at it and thought "yep we could do that".



Steve Lee - obviously happy to see new seedlings on the farm

O: OK so I'm remembering some of the details now - we signed you up as Farm Manager in December 2021, just before Christmas - there was a bit of a rush to get that done as we wanted to give you some certainty heading into the new year. And then things gradually ramped up as we got closer to the move in date in June 2022.

S: Yes, and there was the Productivity Report I wrote for the Resource Consent application - that was actually a really useful exercise for me. Imagining myself being on the farm, and assessing the farm, without actually being there - it kind of prepared me for moving in.

O: OK so you arrived on the farm in June 2022 - you'd been here before, but I imagine it's different when you arrived to live on the farm. How was that? What were your first reactions during that first week when you got here?

S: I was lost for words trying to take it all in! Ya know, in order to run a farm you really need to know it... understand not just where everything is, but how it all behaves in different situations. That takes a long time - I'm still learning heaps every day. At the beginning it was like, wow there's an awful lot about this farm I don't know! Plus getting to know local contacts and all that sort of thing - it was a lot. It was a lot of getting things started and going, teeing up cattle etc - it was a steep learning curve. Learning new things, and learning the farm.

O: There was also quite an interesting phase there - from roughly June 2021 to June 2022 - when there was a sense amongst the group of "oh, we're going to be on this land soon - we better have a really good plan". What's our plan for what we're actually gonna do with the farm? I really appreciated your take on this, which was more along the lines of "we've got enough of a plan, we need to go there and learn...and this learning will inform how we develop the plan". I'm not sure if I'm paraphrasing you correctly there?

S: Yeh that's pretty much where I was coming fro.

O: It was actually a really useful philosophy for the project as a whole - I can see now how it started with your ideas of how the farm should be planned, how Ren Xue farming should take shape I guess, which then spread its tentacles out into all aspects of the project. It's given us a freedom as a group to move forwards with a clear intent, but without too much detailed planning, and allow ourselves to learn and adapt as we go.

S: Yes this kind of approach involves making lots of decisions, which isn't too difficult so long as you know



Planting avocado trees - November 2023

what your values and boundaries around those decisions are. You can go left and right, flowing like a stream, but always flowing to the sea.

O: Nice analogy! So when you look back on your first year and a bit on the farm, what are your farm highlights? And what are your personal highlights? Maybe they're the same...

S: Well, you'd probably split them into the main thematic areas of farming - the cattle that we've had, they've been lovely and we've loved them. The people whose cattle we've had appreciate the way we farm - they get cattle back which are in good condition, and they're calm and quiet because they've been treated really nicely. Environmentally, we've made a good start. We've got the water quality monitoring going with Grace, that's a long term game but we've started doing it on a quarterly basis, and we'll just keep at it. We've started planting natives and doing riparian planting - and we'll continue to do that. We've got Meret and her tree nursery on the farm now, which is not only great for biodiversity here and in the Bay - it's a pretty cool partnership and social business enterprise. That's something we can feel really good about. Seeing the transformation of the dairy shed area since Meret has moved in has been really special too - you can see nikau palms growing in the bottom of the milking pit, and it almost feels like a damp bush gully or something!

Building our farming diversity is really amazing - with our farm group, and having others involved like Dieter who comes from a permaculture point of view. I look out my window here and can see all these little fruit trees - we've planted several hundred trees recently. Seeing our farming system evolve is really special. And the other thing is people - it's really awesome having people on the farm. Yesterday we had a combo of Ren Xue people and Golden Bay locals helping with the planting. It was wonderful taking people from the Shambhala retreat for a tour around the farm last week - that was nice and really helped build people's involvement with the farm, so it becomes an important part of the Ren Xue world. I hope people will build a deeper, spiritual connection to this place by being here. Working with someone like Dieter is also important in terms of his legacy too - he is an outstanding horticulturist and permaculturist of NZ standing. So the work he is doing here will form part of his legacy, which I think is in itself something quite special.

O: So, when you look to the future and the year ahead, what are you most looking forward to?

S: Well, some things will get completed and consolidated, whilst at the same time we need to work out what some of the next steps are. Consolidating Meret's place on the farm will be good, whilst on the horticultural side we've

done lots but there's a lot more to do - pipfruit, the food forest in the kanuka area, general care of the avocados and mixed orchard. The kanuka area is an ideal place to grow some frost tender fruit trees, whilst also being close to the avocado area so it can share some infrastructure. We'll probably make some kind of loop track in this area, and then drop some subtropical fruit trees in there - we've even got four coffee plants ordered! The idea is just to try a few different things. We'll definitely try growing bananas in there - plenty of people growing bananas in Golden Bay these days.

O: So when you think of next steps then with livestock, do you see a status quo with cattle etc?

S: In the short term I think the total number of cattle won't change much. I think we'll carry less cattle next winter, and maybe tweak our buying and selling programme to match the season a bit better. Last winter we had 275 cattle on the farm, and some of them quite big - next winter I'd like to see us closer to 220 cattle, with smaller animals. Just make it a bit less challenging, less feeding out, etc

O: Yes, more of a life for you too!

S: Yep, that's all part of sustainability. Some important tweaks there to make, some good learning. People on the

farm is also important - succession is something we'll be thinking about next year. How we bring people onto the farm and make it all work is a priority - it's undeniable that all these trees we're now planting will generate more work for people. The farm needs to wash its own face financially, and then some more.

We need to think about how we might have a role for a dedicated horticultural worker in the future, someone with a strong horticulture and permaculture interest to take it all on. What other enterprises might we have which would complement this - for instance, chickens. It may be that we need to structure things such that the person who manages the horticulture also manages something like chickens - working across disciplines could be beneficial.

O: Wow lots to look forward to!

S: Yes indeed - watch this space! It's changing all the time now. It was really amazing yesterday, getting some plants like the hazelnut trees, which we're planting in the same area as the avocados to create a windbreak. Just seeing these plants where before there was just pasture was great.

Steve Lee, Ollie Clifton

Grow little trees grow! Avocados in the ground - November 2023



Lulu & team at the first soil sampling dig - April 2022

Community

In this community of Ren Xue, nature, land, and people, we are a tiny space in the totality of existence of life here, and at the same time we have an effect on, and are affected by everything. There are so many different ways that being in community has deepened over the time of this project.

We have been humbled by our welcome and inclusion into the local community. People are really interested in what we are doing here, and we are really interested in everything that this community is doing, exploring and experimenting with new ways of living, and taking what works out into the world.

We have had young people walk up our farm driveway looking for work and new opportunities who we have never met before. People direct them here and they feel safe and welcome. Golden Bay is a place where people come to make dreams happen, it is full of people doing their thing, and so we feel this is a great community for Ren Xue to be part of.

We have been invited to be part of so many beneficial initiatives. In the short time that the project has been underway, we have had the lead removed from all buildings on the farm by the Kea Conservation Trust, who look after and decrease environmental toxicity for kea, our native and endangered mountain parrots. The cliff-top community where Cat and James' family and Marie-Laure and Vincent live is called Kea Rua, which means "two kea", as they had an early visit from two curious green and red birds, as did Steve and family up at the farm soon after they arrived.

The Land nestles between the mountains and the sea, from Kahurangi National Park to the great sweep of Golden Bay, and we embrace our guardianship role for the flora and fauna of this area.

The local freshwater fish group has been busy in our streams researching the great variety of species there and letting us know how to create spawning sites with old hay bales for the whitebait. The Otere river running through the farm and down to the estuary has some of the highest variety of freshwater species of any stream in New Zealand.

Another local trust of keen and active ecologists, the "Deviners" have given their free labour over several days to remove invasive species of non native vines from the farm, its bush and rivers. We are incredibly grateful to all these people for their love and hard work and support for nature.

Education and connection are key values for us, and so most Mondays there will be a team of homeschooled lads learning Ren Xue farming with Steve, and ably assisting in various farming endeavours. Steve is very interested in what Ren Xue farming could be, and anyone keen on developing concepts of Ren Xue farming in harmony with nature is welcome to get in touch with him.

Our relationships with the natural and human community have seen one large local primary school coming onto the land with Meret, our talented native tree grower, planting stream banks which they will take care of, learn from, watch and grow. The importance of the farm work fencing





off areas beside these streams for water and freshwater species protection, and projects like these with younger generations, cannot be underestimated. Even the bees support us through our deeply caring on-farm beekeeper. The farm offers a place for his hives, and he keeps the community here in honey, a win-win all round!

right on our doorstep - literally! On a warm summer's night we can be treated to an evening of music right here on our farmhouse balcony, or nip along for locals' hour on a Friday at 4pm, or get right in there on quiz or open mic night. It's such a great community to be part of!

One of the things that makes a community flourish is a focal point, and we have the world-famous Mussel Inn

In the meantime our Ren Xue community here is also loving the increasing connectedness we feel with each other and the deepening Qifield. Longtime teachers Ana,



Manfred and Ella have been quietly growing plants on their own farms for the Ren Xue farm gardens and food forests, and we can feel their presence here in the Figs, Pepinos and Grapes, Alyssum, Dahlias, Apricots and Macadamia trees they have donated, to name but a few.

As a group we meet monthly for full moon practices at a time when the natural energy of earth is strengthened by sun and moon. As we are part of nature, it's a great time to connect and work on our inner growth, and to create a balance of our various teaching offerings to coordinate well for the benefit of others. Marie-Laure and Vincent are busy in their clinic during the week, so they run a monthly beginners workshop at weekends. This gives people a bridge to the regular classes which Cat, Manfred and Ana run, and Grace and Jackie teach blocks of classes and step in when any of the other teachers aren't available in their regular classes, so everyone feels supported. In a combined effort from the team, Grace is now teaching high school students in our local youth hub as well, and we are planning our end of year celebration in the playground by the library as an outdoor practice for the community to see what we do and be part of if they would like to.

In an exciting new development, Yuan Ming practice is now emerging here too. Jackie, Marie-Laure and Vincent

have all been practising Yuan Ming in different ways, and are now coordinating their efforts to create a Yuan Ming practice both in-person and online which is linked to and financially supports the project, themselves and our communities - benefiting all. We invite any Yuan Ming practitioners who are using the tools and practices of Ren Xue to help others and who would like to be part of this initiative, to get in touch with us.

And now to our volunteers. We feel huge and heartfelt gratitude to the many volunteers who have contributed their time, energy and talents in all sorts of ways. They have helped build paths, plant trees, do bird counts, connect us with experts, cook for the farm when winter has been exceptionally busy and the deputy farm manager is in sole charge, clean up rubbish, clear weeds, build portable toilets, mind the farm... to name but a few activities where the love and hard work of the community have made a wonderful contribution.

We are so grateful for our community from the bees to the birds to the people expressing and living kotahitanga, unity and living as one. Without this heart and Ren Xue, we would not be here. Come join us any time!

Jackie Blunt

Tim in action at the recent Villa demolition workparty - November 2023



Events

We love holding events on the land. Every time we do this, we feel the connection with the land and the momentum of the project growing. It's such a wonderful way to celebrate the milestones along the way, it gives us all the opportunity to connect, share wisdom and have fun together, to deepen our practice and learn anew.

Some key events have been:

- Farm celebration June 2022 when we celebrated the purchase of the farm by Ren Xue Australasia with Yuan Tze, Melissa and many of the local community.
- November 2022 visitors - folks came to visit from all over the world after the retreat, and explored the farm and project, while contributing by planting trees, clearing weeds, fixing holes in tracks, painting sheds and gates, practising together and continually strengthening the Qi and information of the land and project.

- We have enjoyed many different visitors of all nationalities since then - our farm orchard was planted by a combined New Zealand, German, Swedish and Dutch team in 2023.
- Global Awakening Day 2022 and 2023 - special gatherings and practise together of our wider area group, setting intentions for the year ahead.
- In-person Steering Group gatherings and tree plantings.
- Opening of memorial seats and path connecting the retreat centre site and the cliff-top community.
- Summer camps in 2022 and 2023.
- Monthly full moon gatherings

See a selection of photos from these events below

Jackie Blunt



Memorial seat installation - November 2023



Steering Group team, happy as pigs in mud after an afternoon planting trees on the farm - Steve (Campbell), Trina, Cat, Steve (Lee), Ollie, Marie-Laure & Vincent June 2023



Tree planting - farm celebration, June 2022



"This is just like being back at kindy!" - Ollie getting his hands, and most of his clothes, very dirty indeed. June 2023

Media

When we first started this project, none of us expected to be in the media! And yet, we now look back on a successful documentary series on Ren Xue TV which has inspired the maker, Alex Emmerich, to follow on with a longer documentary in the future. All the Everland episodes can be found on the ARC website home page.

We have also featured in two local newspapers and on Stuff website with the story of our successful resource

consent application. Our website has been growing slowly and now provides a source of information on all project related happenings via our blog. Next year we hope to be moving towards putting out regular newsletters and improving our communication so more people can hear about what's happening and get involved.

Cat Alker



Alex taking a break from the doco making & getting his hands dirty on the farm - November 2022

Retreat Centre

The Retreat Centre is the heart and soul of the project, the main reason for buying the land, and building a Ren Xue community here. This will be a place for people to deepen their understanding of Ren Xue and support them with their practice of manifesting realisation and wisdom. This will be the first ever Ren Xue Retreat Centre and it is to accommodate space for up to 200 people. The Centre will include a separate main practice hall, a dining hall, commercial kitchen, treatment rooms, meeting spaces, library, office and a variety of accommodation buildings.

We have chosen our preferred site location for the Centre which is a lovely welcoming flat area on the sea side of the farm, with a perimeter of trees and shrubs surrounding and protecting the open space, and beautiful bay and mountain views.

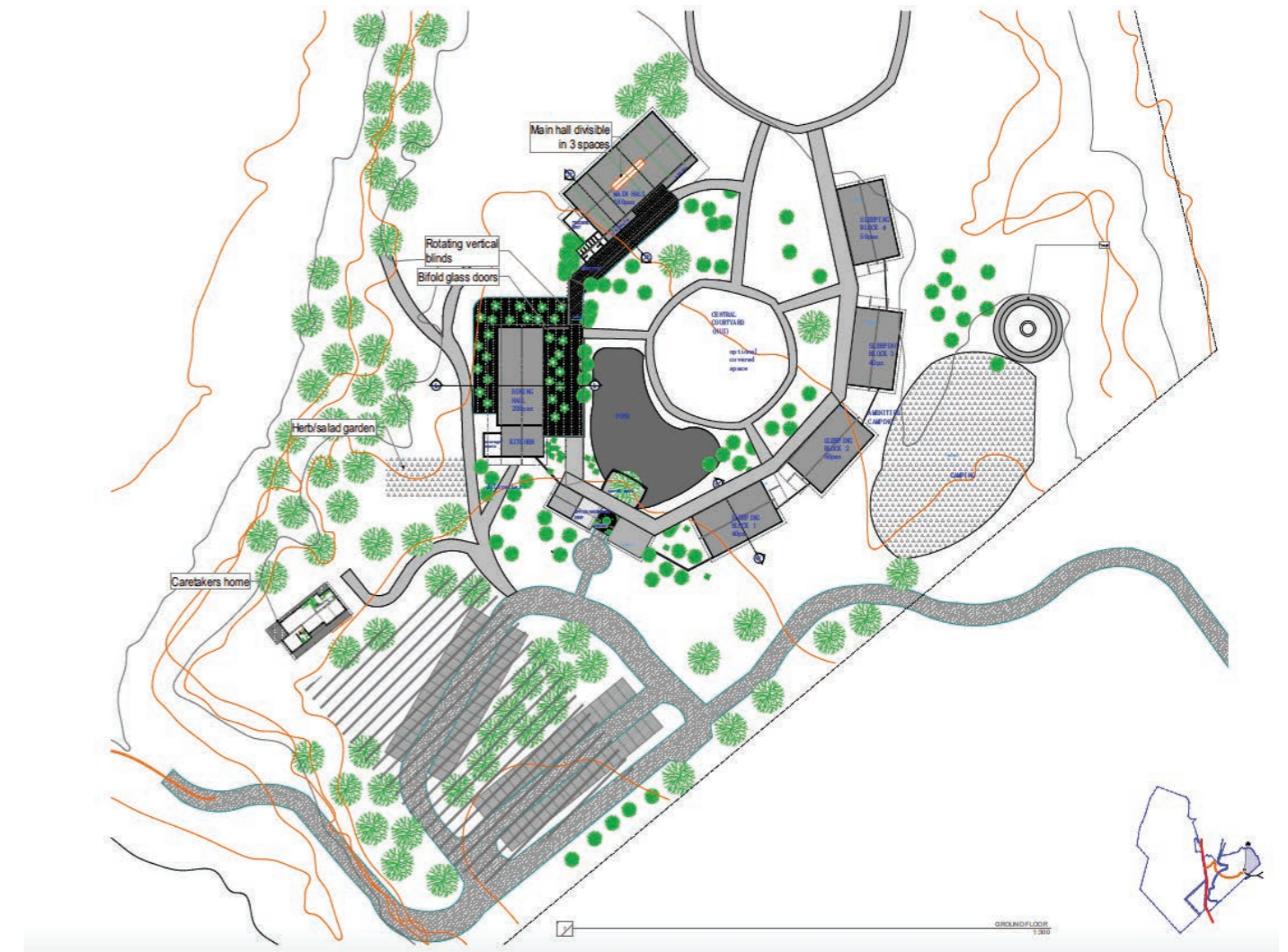
The main theme of the design and the feel that we were looking for, was to have a strong connection with the land and its location right next to the bay, and to embrace everyone and everything that comes to the Centre. We want to create a homely/welcoming feel that will help

people to relax and focus on their practice and internal transformation while there. This will in turn help build a strong healthy community that shares the guiding principles of Ren Xue.

There has been a lot of thought, love and hard work invested into the layout of the Retreat Centre, with a global design team of Stephan Meijer (NZ), Isabella Ferre (Portugal), Simon Sangmeister (Germany), Ollie Clifton (NZ), Jill Corson (NZ) and Steve Campbell (Australia) all working together to come up with the best possible outcome for the Ren Xue community!

Much of the original design was actually done before we owned the land, so access was understandably restricted at that time and hence getting a good knowledge and feel of the place was not possible.

Now that we are at home on the land and have had a few successful and enjoyable gatherings and events like summer camps, in -person retreats, local gatherings and Global Awakening Day celebrations, it has been





Views from the retreat centre site looking north - timeless and priceless :-)

interesting to see how people use the site. We have quietly observed where they actually gather there, where they like to practise, and what is attractive for them about the land. We have been developing our understanding of the totality of this place, with aspects of weather, season, natural environment, human, and local community all being essential to understand and work with, and inform how we move forward on this exciting project.

Some work has already started on the site with the first project being the beach path that connects the Retreat Centre site to the little community living on the coastline and down towards the beach itself. The path has been

beautifully built by James Alker and his three boys and there are many wonderful surprises along the path - even including a pizza oven! Also very recently we have had two beautiful locally made wooden bench seats donated and installed on site. A new road to more easily access the Retreat Centre site is next on the agenda.

So, good strong foundations and lots of work, planning and Qifield building have been put in place now and we are very excited to take the project onto the next phase of planning and develop Stage 1.

Steve Campbell

Resource Consent

Gaining resource consent for the project was a significant milestone which we achieved in April 2023. All of those involved are owed a huge thank you, for contributing to what turned out to be a very smooth and harmonious process. So, in no particular order we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the following people:

- Hayden Taylor at Planscapes for consistent, reliable, top-notch planning advice.
- Stephan Meijer, Steve Campbell and the entire global design team (as noted above) for their inspiring work on the Retreat Centre design.
- Lance Roozenburg and the team at Kumanu for their wonderful landscape design work.
- Ray Edwards at PlanCreative for his traffic engineering design work.

- Mitchell Hutchings at WSP, and the team at Waka Kotahi for helping us navigate the complex world of traffic impacts on a state highway!
- Bill Harrington at Property Group, working as a consultant for Tasman District Council, for calmly and efficiently processing our consent application.
- Our local team in Onekaka - Steve, Jackie, James, Cat, Forest, Teal, Enzo, Marie-Laure, and Vincent. Thank you all for being so patient.
- Last but not least - our Onekaka neighbours. Without your ongoing support this venture would never have gotten this far - so huge thanks to James and Rosie Cartwright, John Clere, and Chris Castle and Linda Sanders.

Ollie Clifton

Trees, trees, trees - getting ready for a new home



Working Together as One

A group of like-minded people (The Steering Group) have been working together on this amazing project for over 3 years now. Creating a productive and harmonious workplace can take some time, and a lot of effort and commitment from everyone involved needs to happen. From what I have experienced it is well worth the effort!

One of the main things that we needed to implement as a group was good communication and building strong connections, with everyone involved both in the physical form and non-physical. By that I mean that everyone understood what a financial report is, how the budget is managed, what requirements are needed to run an organisation this size, what is an agenda, what is a brief etc. etc. Most important was managing everyone's wellbeing by making sure that we are taking care of each other, and our health and wellbeing is the number one priority.

Making everyone feel connected with the project and that they are contributing their own skills and passion is very important in creating a harmonious environment. This was made even harder at the beginning because it was

also the start of the 'Zooming Era'. Reflecting back on this now, we were very lucky to keep our connection going month after month, and slowly build our relationships and communication skills together, without some of us actually even meeting in-person for many years.

Every meeting is started with creating an environment that is nourishing and supportive with a feeling of being relaxed, calm and at peace with ourselves and that we are all connected with our hearts, pure intention and with the help of greater wisdom from the universe.

Tools and strategies that we have learnt and implemented into our workplace/meetings have been so important in helping us work together as a team, and to understand that there will be differences within the group - and that these can really add to the strength and perspective of the project. They also need to be resolved in the best possible way so that all feel that their contribution is seen and valued, and that we can agree with the final outcome - even if we don't agree personally.



Trina, Leslie & Steve en route to Golden Bay for our June planning hui, 2023.



Jackie, Cathy, Simon and Taz enjoying a farm tour in the Tuatara - our electric side-by-side vehicle, one of the farm capital investments we have made. The Tuatara is practical, fun to drive (as you can see!), and a reflection of our environmental ethics on the farm.

Something we had to learn quickly was good decision making, which can be challenging when you have 6-8 people involved, all of whom have different and necessary perspectives, and it all needs to be resolved in a unified way at the point when the decision is made. New creative ideas have been applied with great success so everyone can feel comfortable with knowing how to best be involved in all matters.

We have all now completed a Certificate 3 Governance Course for non-profit organisations to again help us understand the responsibilities that we hold as a group, and how best to manage that. This helps us serve the community in the best possible way in keeping them informed and involved in the project, and also by following legal requirements that are necessary for running a project like this.

Having everyone in the group knowing the importance of working together smoothly and efficiently by understanding things like time management, cultural

sensitivity, communication, resilience, conflict of interest, adaptive learning, empathy, conflict resolving, delegation and organisational skills has taken time to learn and put in place.

All of this has laid a very strong foundation for moving forward into the future, especially as we are planning 100 years ahead and not just a few. Laying this foundation has been very important as many people will come and go from the steering group and each transition and road bump can be smoother and more efficient moving forward into the future.

Having harmony, open-mindedness, collaborative skills, good governance and joy in the workplace is something that makes going to meetings more enjoyable and helps create a sense of achievement. They are not looked at as a task that we have to do but one we want to do!

Steve Campbell

Donors

It is with heartfelt thanks that we acknowledge everybody who made a donation to the project in 2023 and all those who have contributed to our progress. Donations take the form of time, money, energy - they are like flowing pure, nourishing water through the project when a donation is given from the heart, no matter how small - it nourishes and benefits all.

We share some special memories in the photos below which show the placement of memorial seats donated by Annie Currie.

Cat Alker



Natalie, Cat, Chris, and Kirsty gathered for the memorial seat installation - November 2023

Natalie enjoying the view - November 2023



Chris Turton installing the plaque on a new memorial seat - November 2023

Photos courtesy of Julia Seager

Finances

Finances are quite literally the lifeblood of the project - for many years we have as a Ren Xue community dreamt about creating a home and a Centre for Ren Xue. This was useful Qifield building, however there was never any money attached to these aspirations. This all changed in 2019 when a significant donation was made to get this dream underway. Suddenly, we had a project!

The vast majority of the funds required for this project have come from donations, and with an operational farm running we have a steady source of income as well. The purpose of this section is to paint a broad picture of how the finances have been since we took possession of the farm in May 2022.

The table below shows the overall financial picture for the 14 month period from 1 May 2022 to 30 June 2023:

Farm income	\$224,519
Farm expenses	\$364,564
Farm capital expenses	\$122,560
Farm diversification	\$24,673
Other general expenses	\$115,952

Some extra notes are useful here, to explain some of these numbers for the 14 month period:

Farm income - is principally made up of livestock sales (buying and selling cows) and grazing income (grazing cows which other farmers own).

Farm expenses - these expenses are much larger than income for this 14 month period, largely due to the timing of livestock sales. The farm currently owns approximately \$200,000 worth of cattle. During this period we also incurred 2 insurance bills, effectively an additional \$12,000. Hence when this income is added back in, and the expense deducted, the farm made a net surplus of just over \$70,000 excluding capital expenses and other investments.

Farm capital expenses - tractors are expensive! We spent \$80,000 on a decent second-hand tractor, and also put almost \$30,000 into improving the fencing on the farm. Both of these expenses are part and parcel of taking over a farm operation.

Farm diversification - we have big plans for the farm (as outlined so well by Steve Lee - see his interview above) which require good planning. Hence we have mapped the farm well, completed thorough soil assessments, and engaged local experts to guide us in adopting some permaculture principles which will see the farm operation steadily diversify in the next few years.

Other general expenses - the ARC project doesn't just run itself these days! Paid staff are a necessity now, and this need will only grow as the project grows, alongside our essential volunteer contributions.

We had significant resource consent expenses, totalling just over \$70,000. The resource consent process, spread over several financial years, incurred expenses of just under \$250,000.

As we now look ahead to our goals and aspirations for the project in the next 2-3 years, fundraising will become a priority.

At the same time as detailing our finances, we would like to acknowledge all the time and effort so many people contribute to the project, in many different ways. A special thankyou is owed to Kirsty Abrahams, our RXAA Coordinator, who has brought her financial nous and skills into the project, and helped streamline a multitude of things to help the project run more smoothly and professionally. Without Kirsty's assistance, and the wonderful relationship we have with RXAA as our umbrella organisation for the project, our waka would be floundering in the open ocean with no paddles!

Ollie Clifton

Ending

We hope you've enjoyed reading this update as much as we've enjoyed putting it together! The process of reflecting back on the project over the last couple of years has been very affirming for all of us. Thank you so much Isaya for making this report beautiful. We hope to see you all on the land in Onekaka. If you feel

inspired to contribute anything at all towards the project (and we hope you do!) please don't hesitate to get in touch (all our details are on the ARC website).

The ARC Steering Group
Cat, Kirsty, Steve C, Marie-Laure, Rainer, Jackie, Steve L,



A home for Ren Xue - Old Villa, June 2022

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