

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AOTEAROA

<https://www.landscapearchitecture.nz/landscape-architecture-aotearoa/2019/4/1/50w7i6phfeouoi7icpeh1ilbi381wz>

[LANDSCAPESPEOPLEOPINIONARTICLES](#)

CUE Haven - A nature retreat for the community, by the community

The generosity of a “young” landscape architect has helped an Auckland couple realise their dream of transforming a dairy farm into native forest for the public. Mahrukh Stazyk is effusive in her praise of Jeremy Parlane, who offered his services to them free of charge.

“He really got the ball rolling by designing a viewing platform for the site,” she says. “We were delighted when he contacted us out of the blue, saying he’d found our project on the DOC website and how could he help.”



Jeremy Parlane on-site at CUE Haven

The project was CUE Haven - a 24 hectare former dairy farm bought by Mahrukh and her husband Thomas in 2003.

“CUE stands for Cultivating Understanding and Enlightenment and it is our hope that the CUE Haven Community Native Forest Reserve will be a place where people can explore nature, disconnect from technology, relax, share ideas and cultivate an understanding about themselves, other people and the universe.”

Their original plan was to create a retreat at the Araparera property, which is two kilometres inland from Kaipara Harbour, an hour north of Auckland. However, concerned about the effect of grazing on the water quality, and the lack of public native forest reserves in a rapidly growing Auckland, they decided instead to restore the farm into native forest reserve - a sanctum for plant and bird life, as well as for the community to use and enjoy into perpetuity. In 2017 the property was gifted to the CUE Haven Community Trust, which is working with the QEII Trust to protect the restored property with a QEII covenant.



CUE Haven in 2010

When Parlane originally volunteered his services, he was interested in helping create the walking tracks. But once Mahrukh discovered he was a landscape architect she had other plans for him. “I said ‘oh my God Jeremy I hope you don’t mind but we would much rather use your skills.. we’ve got such spectacular views of the harbour and there’s no viewing platform looking out to the Kaipara Harbour.’

“We are across from Alan Gibbs’ (sculpture) farm. Once the viewing platform’s finished you’ll be able to see most of his sculptures from the platform.”



The same spot five years later in 2015

Parlane's original concept design has changed because of geotechnical requirements, but his contribution to the project continued. Mahrukh and Thomas both come from financial backgrounds; they know nothing about plants or building structures. "He gave us lots of advice and helped us to get a survey done. His friend works for Ascension Surveyors Ltd, they came and did nearly three thousand dollars worth of work. A week later a bill arrived stamped 'paid in full'. Can you believe it? Just such generous people."

"It's really lovely because the community to us, that's the best thing about the project, meeting amazing people all working together."

meeting amazing people all working together.”



Four kilometres of walking tracks and boardwalk have been constructed by the 4,500 volunteers

Since 2008 volunteers have planted over 167,000 native trees. A Department of Conservation biodiversity advice fund paid for an ecologist, Rodney Straka, to prepare a comprehensive planting plan. Straka has provided help and advice well in excess of that funding, and is still involved today. Pioneer tree planting of mainly Manuka, Kanuka and Karamu is finished, and infill planting with the likes of Kauri, Totara and Pohutukawa well underway. That'll probably continue for another four or five years before the site is opened permanently to the public.

Another notable contributor to the project is Masters in Architecture student at Unitec, Gemma Campbell, who has expanded on Parlane's initial concept and is doing the architectural design work as her Masters thesis. Beca Ltd is providing geotechnical and structural engineering services pro bono. The local hapu, Ngāti Rango of Ngāti Whatua, are providing cultural advice and support.



Gemma Campbell's revised viewing platform design

Technical drawings are being finalised for the platform and a pavilion now. Mahrukh's hopeful that building work will begin at the end of April and be finished by the end of May.

CUE Haven isn't yet open to the public but groups can get specific approval to use it. And volunteers are always allowed to visit. Schools use it as an outdoor classroom, and people can get special permission to plant memorial and celebration trees.

Parlane is modest about his contribution, saying "I just wanted to do some volunteer work, I'm a big believer in preserving our native environment. And what they were doing is really cool."

When I ask Mahrukh for a photo of her and Thomas for this article she says "no". "We really want to showcase all these amazing volunteers. And really, if it wasn't for Jeremy contacting us in the first place and coming up with this amazing design.. well it encouraged other people to get involved. Use a photo of Jeremy instead."