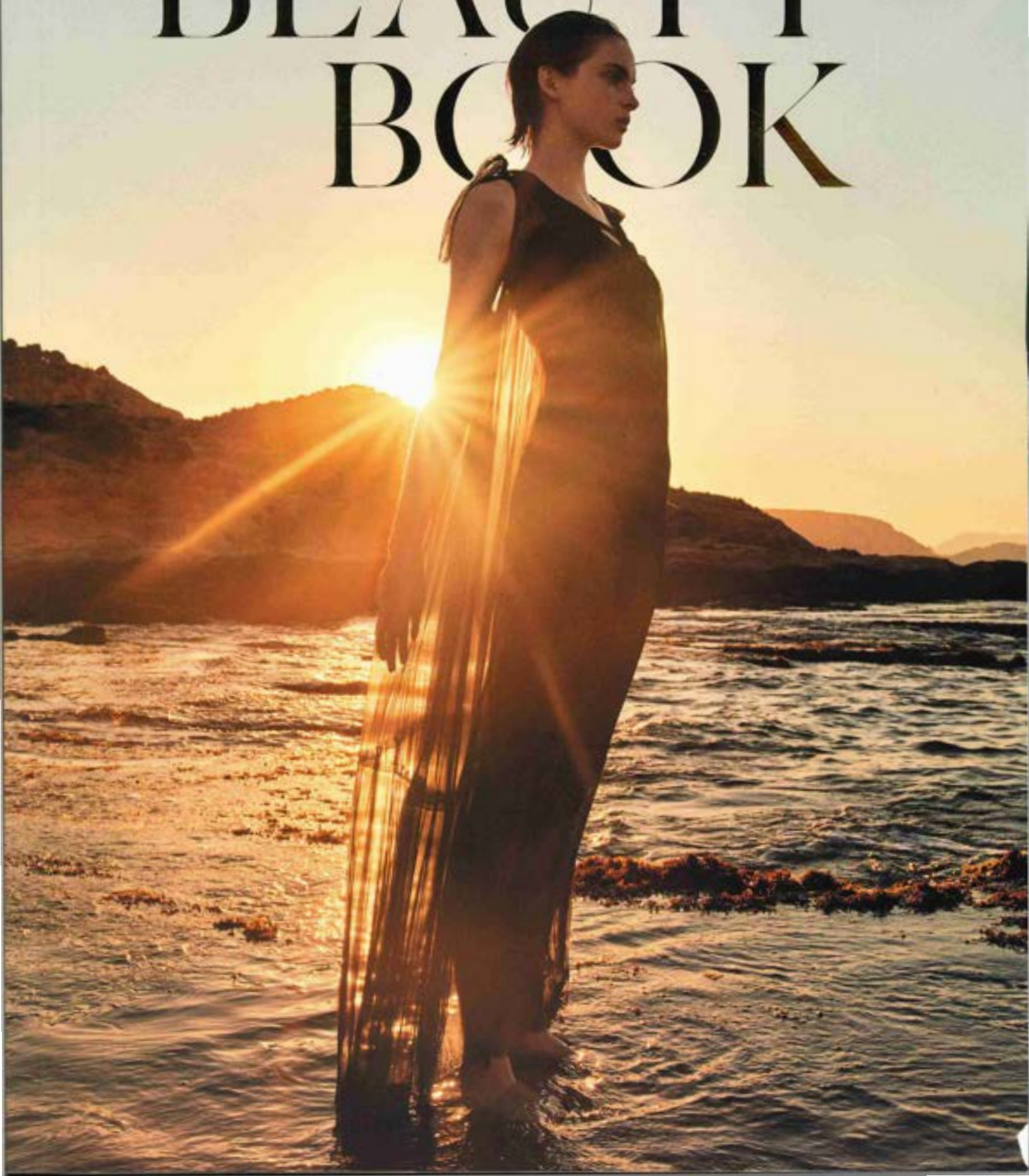


THE BEAUTY BOOK



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Changing the game, and lives

The Beauty Book Editor, Helene Ravlich spends time at award-winning Aro Hā in Queenstown, returning rejuvenated, relaxed and ready to reset.

Added to my vision board when it opened in beautiful Glenorchy near Queenstown almost eight years ago, Aro Hā retreat is now a multi-award winning wellness tour-de-force that was sorely needed in New Zealand. Oprah, Mindy Kaling and Reese Witherspoon – among other celebrities – have spent time here, but it wasn't until the current pandemic reared its ugly head that I too, decided to take the chance.

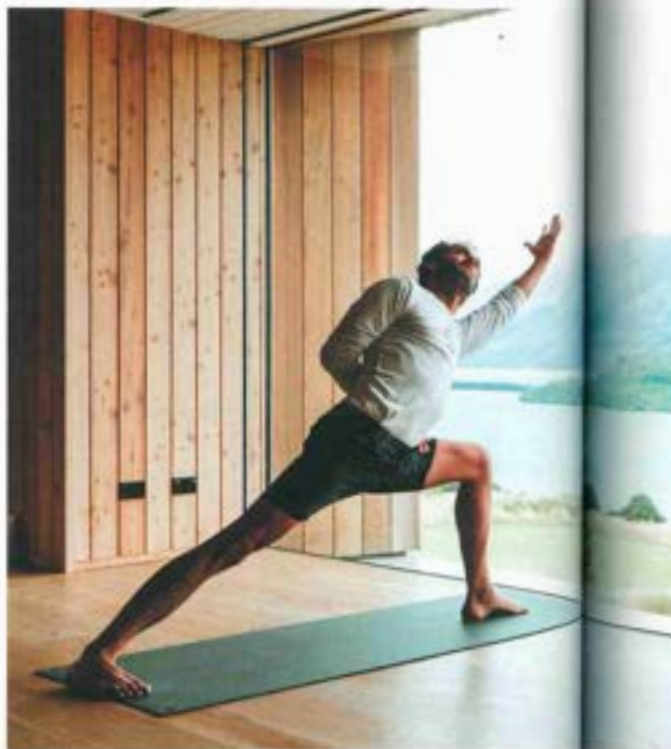
As a regular visitor to purpose built retreats internationally like the legendary Chiva-Som, Australia's Gwinganna and Golden Door, I'd long wished for New Zealand to have a similar facility with its own unique spin, but it took two US transplants to finally put that in place.

Aro Hā is the rather beautiful brainchild of two inspired and inspiring minds – Chris Madison, US hedge fund founder and the enigmatic Damian Chaparro, yoga guru from celebrity health retreat, The Ashram in California. About five years ago before Aro Hā came to fruition the two entrepreneurs reportedly met in Switzerland to discuss the possibility of going into the health retreat business together. They wanted to create a retreat that would encompass spiritual, physical and mental health and be spectacular in every way, and it's fair to say that their baby met the brief.

I had kept up visits to wellness centres off shore until COVID-19 called for our borders to slam shut, and then the announcement that



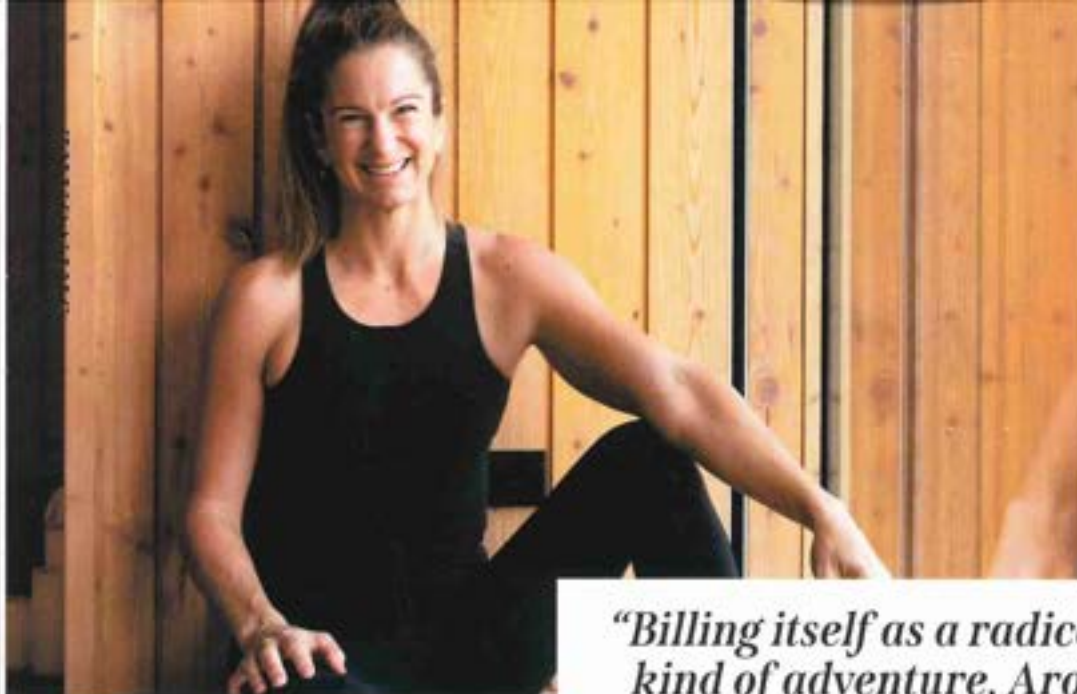
Top:
Accommodation
at Aro Hā.



Bottom left: the
ever-changing
view from the
yoga studio.

Bottom right:
Aro Hā's
Obsidian Spa.





"Billing itself as a radically different kind of adventure, Aro Hā is a mix of wellness traditions and luxury, and newly redesigned to exceed government standards for COVID-19,"

my favourite yoga teacher, Nikki Ralston of The Ralston Method and Urban Ashram fame, would be leading a retreat there meant that a trip to Aro Hā was a no-brainer. I just had to go.

Billing itself as a radically different kind of adventure, Aro Hā is a mix of wellness traditions and luxury, and newly redesigned to exceed government standards for COVID-19. It is a place to thrive together and retreat safely. From the moment you are collected from Queenstown airport by shuttle bus and driven past seemingly endless, breathtaking views on the road to Glenorchy, you know you are heading somewhere very special – and that you're in the best possible hands.

You often hear talk about the 'wow' factor of a destination, the surroundings that quite literally leave you speechless. At Aro Hā the 'wow factor' is everywhere you look, and doesn't leave you for the whole time you are there. Every building is very cleverly designed to maximise the views – even the sauna has a big window looking out onto the lake – and as for the yoga space that you see on every visitor's Instagram feed? Yep, it's that stunning. And ever changing, so it really does never get old.

Accommodation at the retreat is comprised of 16 eco-chic styled pavilions, each with two rooms side by side and a shared bathroom and tea station in the middle. Depending on how many guests are on your particular retreat you may have a duplex to yourselves, but either way, private space is guaranteed. Most rooms are identical, and decorated in minimal, earth-loving style. A soft cashmere blanket keeps you snug at night, while high quality sheets,

Top left and right: Nikki Ralston of The Ralston Method and Urban Ashram, photos by Tim Shultz.

Right: Images of the newly-opened Parahi Island Retreat.

fluffy white towels and organic, locally-sourced toiletries in the bathroom are a given.

All meals are enjoyed at a communal table so guests can interact with each other and with staff, of which there are many. Three guides accompany you on walks and take classes in modalities they are specialists in, while three massage therapists are on hand to carry out the daily kneading that every guest receives. This seems a little excessive on paper, but after daily hikes, yoga, fitness classes and more, they were much needed and very appreciated. I also booked in for an acupuncture session with local practitioner, Daisuke on my visit, and have recommended him to all in sundry ever since. To say he made me feel a million dollars would be an understatement!

Along with all of that you'll get to experience and explore – depending on your chosen program – are daily workshops in things like contrast therapy, how to use Benzonite clay, gut health and breathing techniques, as well as a cacao ceremony, fasting and more. The fasting during my retreat was combined with a full 24 hours of Noble Silence, which included 60 minutes of mindful walking. Walking in silence, without music, observing nature and your own body, your breathing, your heart beat is a real eye opener, and one I recommend everyone add to their day if it appeals. Needless to say Nikki's always-amazing yoga classes began and closed each day, for a wraparound feeling of trust, love and care like no other.

Overseas wellness retreats may still hold a certain allure, but Aro Hā has stolen my heart.
www.aro-ha.com



MEET PAROHE ISLAND RETREAT

New to the New Zealand wellness scene is Parohe Island Retreat, situated on Kawaitu Island, a jewel of the Hauraki Gulf. Parohe translates to a “relaxed, easy-going mood” and that’s exactly how their team want you to feel as you arrive at their island oasis.

Laid out across 20 hectares of land with dynamic flat open spaces contrasting against dense native bush alive with songbirds, Parohe is heaven for those who love to hike, with nature trails weaving through the landscape that are suitable for all fitness levels.

The connection to the land has led the team to adapt a blended approach combining organic, regenerative and sustainable practices into their own balanced way of living. Their gardens are spray free and lovingly tended by the retreat team, while even their vehicles and equipment are battery operated to minimise noise and our environmental footprint. Parohe also has a colourful microcosm of helpers including bees, chickens and alpacas on hand, and their fresh produce provides a broad spectrum of nutrients that support complete overall health. Menus are designed by an in-house naturopath and consultant chef, and not only does your food look delicious, it provides balanced macronutrients to ensure optimal nutrition.

Seasonal programmes are designed to restore balance throughout the year, with specialised programs which bring people together in a wholesome environment with a common purpose. And at Parohe, packages are inclusive so once you book, all you need to do is arrive.

www.parohe.co.nz

