

It's a particularly grim, grey, wet and wild spring day here. While the weather rages against the house I can sit at the dining room table with the wood burner lit and two of my favourite indulgencies from the UK. Yorkshire tea and 6Music. Mostly we have acclimatised to living here, I somehow think that we should embrace what is here rather than always harking back to what we used to have in the UK, I am fine with Vegemite and even found cereal and biscuits that satisfy however there is something comforting about tea brewed so strong it is bright orange, you could "stand a spoon in it" as Mum used to say. Hot liquid restoration for the soul. I do drink Bells or Dilmah but there is something special about Yorkshire Tea. Similarly radio, I have had even less success with trying to enjoy Kiwi radio and find myself streaming 6Music round the house most days, which does mean that sometimes I am more up to date with UK news than New Zealand.

I did say that we had plans for the new house, I'm afraid we have been a little house focussed over the winter but I guess one of the signs that



we are making progress is that I have enough time to sit down and write this. We started off by fixing up the garage doors and getting the electrics done so that we could make better use of all of our space including the garage. We even have a mesh Wi-Fi network so that the music can be streamed everywhere.

The next thing was the gate; if we could sort the gate out then Steph could drive from the street to the garage without getting wet, though it would involve two remote controls. We did get someone to give us a quote but he wanted to replace the whole gate and charge us more than 12,000 NZD. So we went a 'surfing and managed to source a heavy duty powered arm, solar panel and control system for 1,500 NZD . So



now all we had to do was fit it. We needed to completely rehang the gate and re-clad it as well. As it turned out it was quite time consuming but rewarding. Its funny, I guess if we had an infinite amount of cash would we just pay someone to do it? I mean we paid the electrician to put another 50 sockets in, I could have done that but it would have taken me ages, he was very quick and not that expensive. I guess for the days effort we put in on the gate we saved 10,000 NZD. Mind you maybe the question should be if time was infinite would I prefer to be able to out the sockets in myself. Anyway, now with everything setup we have a keypad in the drive to open the gate and Steph has a remote in her car for both the gate and the garage so it feels like success.

We have a local concert hall no less, and again we managed to find time to actually go to it. Its probably almost walkable but we drive and got to see an all-female jazz group that had made it up the coast from the Wellington



jazz festival. They were good and we were just happy to be able to go.

Finally we felt as though other things in our live could happen. We went on a road trip

across the country to Napier. Friends who I used to work with at Xero had returned to NZ from the US to look for a house, they were trying out loads of dif-



ferent areas and the latest place was in Napier and they were staying long enough to settle for a moment. We got to go and see them and play board games and get

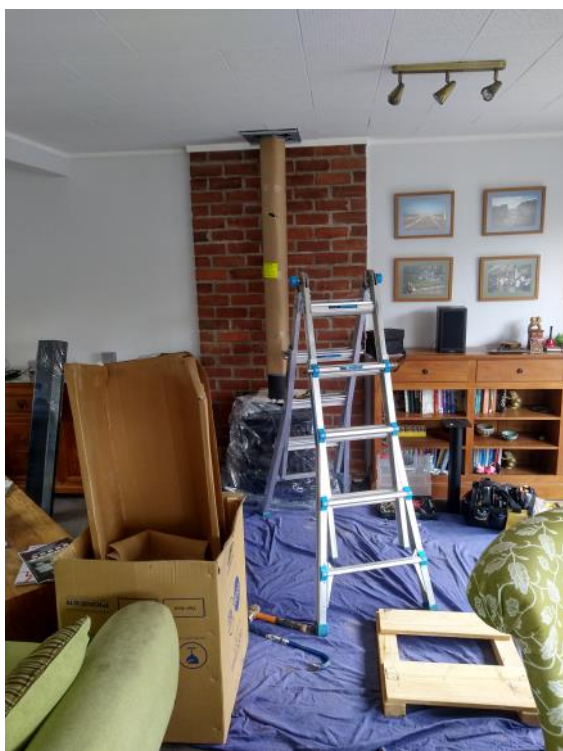
introduce to some good cooking, great pizzas and Ted Lasso.

While we were in Napier the weather was pretty foul, hence the huddling down to play games and eat. It turned out that actually the weather in Napier was better than the rest of the country. We arrived back home to find that the

coast had been battered with hurricane force winds and hosed with a month's worth of rain in a weekend. The good news was the roof stayed on, the bad was the gatepost didn't. It looked solid enough but it turned out it was only held on with six nails. So one step forward, one step back. We got some concrete and dug a hole to sink the post into and it all seems pretty solid now.



As I said I am sitting in front of a roaring wood burner. It's a thing over here, not so much with the open fires but the wood burners are very popular and very good. They are super-efficient, burning the wood to the extent that we only need to clean the ashes out every week or two, the chunks of wood almost completely incinerated. They are however, quite regulated, we need the equivalent of planning permission from the council to install it. The installers were very efficient and did all the paperwork for us



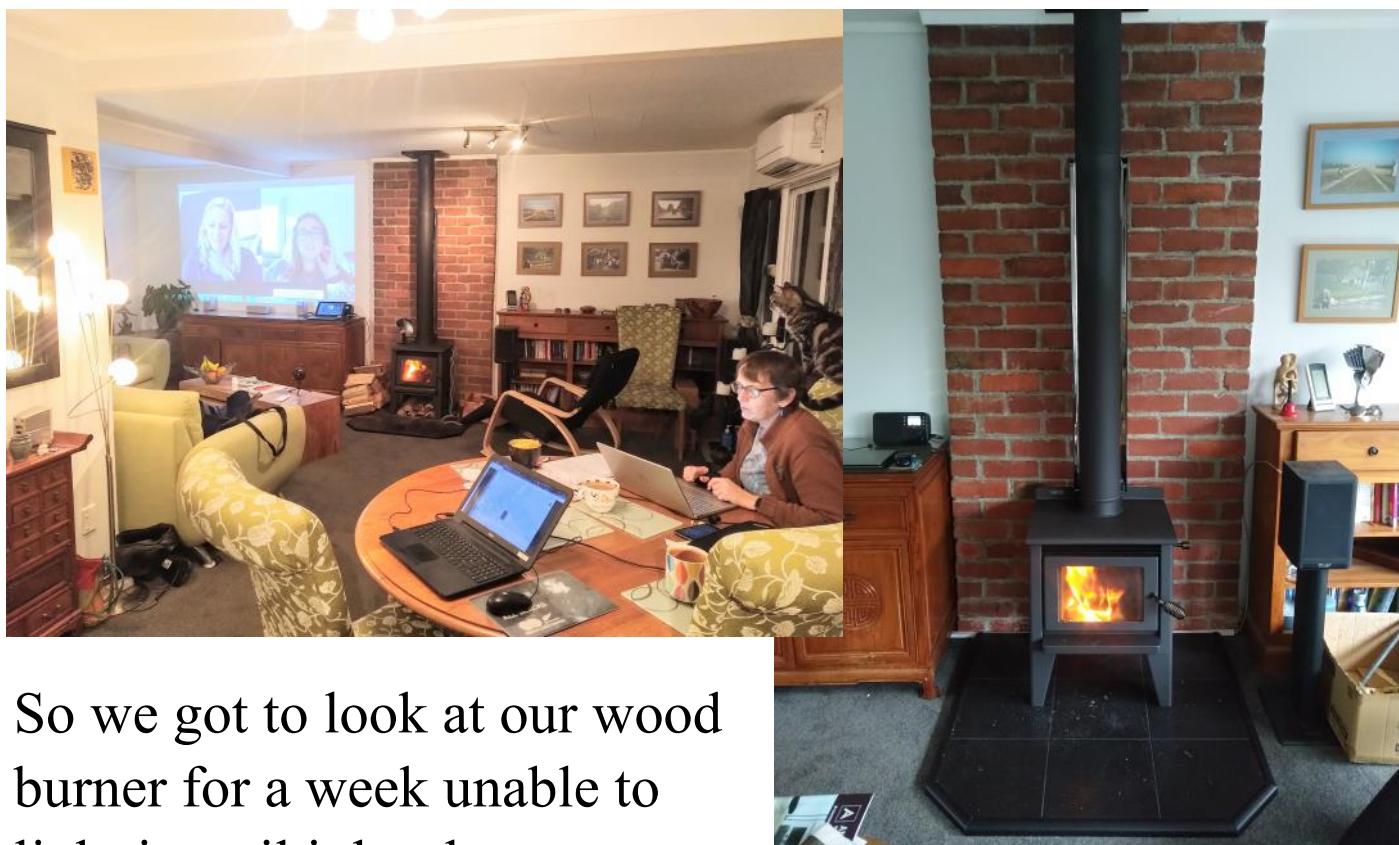
and turned up one Tuesday, cut a hole in the roof, and had the whole thing installed. Too efficient as it turned out as it needed to be inspected by the council and they could not turn up for another week.

It did give us time to buy wood, I had been warned that the delivery would be a wagon that would just dump the wood near the house and indeed this is what happened. As it turned out he was good enough to get it



near the garage, but there it was 3 cubic meters of kiln-dried wood on the drive and yes – it started to rain. I was on my own but managed to move the wood, largely it must be said by throwing it into the garage in 20 minutes flat. Steph built a wood store, by “renovating” pallets and repurposing the cladding from the gate and we were all set-up, well after we moved the wood for a second time.



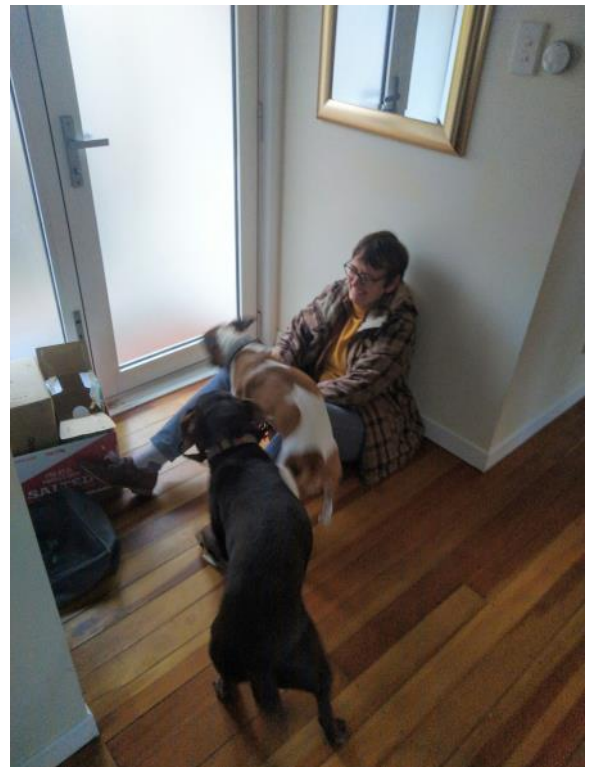


So we got to look at our wood burner for a week unable to light it until it has been

“coded”, it was only a week and well worth the wait one of Steph’s favourite things is to lie in front of the fire on a big pile of cushions, eat a picnic tea and watch a film. We also get to play remote cards in front of a fire.

When we bought the house the market was so mad that we didn’t have time to get a building report. We did say that we would get around to getting a proper report when we had settled in. Eventually we managed to get our very nice inspector, Campbell, around to have a look. I had some trepidations, I mean we can hardly take the house back. Campbell’s report was something of a relief as it turned out we had not bought a lemon but the house did need some TLC. It had been a rental and it showed, the exterior has been painted in haste, without any primer apparently. The roof needed some attention as well, and the planting

was too near the house and too high allowing water to splash onto the weatherboard. Well its good to have some projects. We could do the planting and painting but the roofing looked a little specialist. We did get a roofer to come around and have a look, he brought his six year old daughter with him and they both disappeared up the ladder onto the roof, only in New Zealand. Apparently he will return when he can get replacement valves for the hot water system, global supply chains permitting. It turned out that we had offered to look after a friend's two dogs and their teenager, I blame too much red wine. I had no real idea what to expect – this is not my usual weekend but in the end it was delightful. The weather was atrocious, but that just meant that we could hunker down in front of their wood burner and play games (The Crew) and take advantage of their streaming service to sample lots of things; Afterlife, Derry Girls, Star Trek Discovery and Loki. All very interesting but I guess our TV tastes mean that we



find enough to watch on free to air TV supplemented by Strictly Come Dancing at this time of year. Walking the dogs was an adventure but the most complex part was getting them to settle enough to actually get their harnesses on, the dogs excited and Steph laughing. Steph even had time to practice Lamingtons, an antipodean cake. The aussies and kiwis argue about who invented it, I try to not get involved.

And then a reality check as the delta variant arrived in the country. There was one case but looking at other countries had told us what might happen so we went into immediate complete lockdown. Just like it was in the beginning last year. I was not allowed to go to work or shop, Steph had to do both as she worked in residential facility and could drive to the shops, but even so she was stopped and check by the police as to why she was out. After a year of swanning around like we were back to normal, minus international travel, it was all a bit of a shock. It turns out it looks like it's the right thing to do and it looks like the numbers are starting to get down into single figures again. We have been incredibly lucky to be in a country that seems able to make quick and intelligent decisions, and have a government that seems to care about its people, our cumulative death toll to COVID stands at 27 which is nothing short of amazing. The vaccination program is in full swing, we are both double vaccinated, we were a little slow to start but seem to be catching the rest of the world up quickly.

When I fell and dislocated my knee last year the physio gave me an exercise plan designed to add strength to my joints. Apparently from the age of about 30 onwards muscles



start to weaken. I now do a 45 minute workout three times a week. The physio is a big fan of doing exercises with weights, which means that I don't do lots and lots of reps just a smaller number under load. To do this I need weights, but in the time of lockdown I am not the only one looking to get them. Lots of diligent looking on the web meant that I now had a gym setup in the garage just in time for lockdown. I do rather like doing the workout and listening to Radcliffe and Maconie on 6Music, especially as I can just pop out from work and do it.

We had booked a two week holiday for September, the bank is pretty keen on forcing people to take holiday, apparently it's a balance sheet thing, but what with lockdown they did offer to let me rebook the holiday for a time when we could actually go somewhere. I did think about it for a moment but it's been six months since our last break and we have a big list of things we want to do so we decided

to have a staycation. Like I said I listen to UK radio a bit and it turns out that the-



se days staycation means a holiday in the country you live in, I thought we already had a word for that – holiday. We were going to have a staycation in the traditional sense of the word in that we would be staying at home and doing all the jobs that we had added to our lists, well some of them at least.



We lay in bed on the first morning and came up with a grid plan that included weather, tasks, remote Canasta and tried to work out how much we could practically do. We prioritised moving plants from the raised bed by the house and then digging



out the bed so that it was now lower than the house. We could do this off and on, a couple of hours digging and move with the wheelbarrow and I was knackered, how do landscape gardeners do this all day?

In between we repaired the most vulnerable areas of the weatherboard on the house, the corners. We stripped the paint back to the wood, Steph now has four different types of power sander, and then filled it and gave it four coats of paint, two of primer and two of top coat. We are coastal we can hear the sea from the house even if we cannot see it. Then we boxed the corners in, with beautiful Christmas tree-like diagonally cut scribes.

https://www.bunnings.co.nz/pineclad-135-x-18mm-x-5-4m-h3-1-pre-primed-bevel-back-pro-scriber-with-103mm-cover_p0319423



Except that contrary to the photo on the DIY store they do not come pre-cut, we had to do it ourselves. This is probably a good thing as they need to be custom template,



each house would be different.

When I say we, lets

face it

Steph did

the cutting,

I did the

painting

and the

nailing.

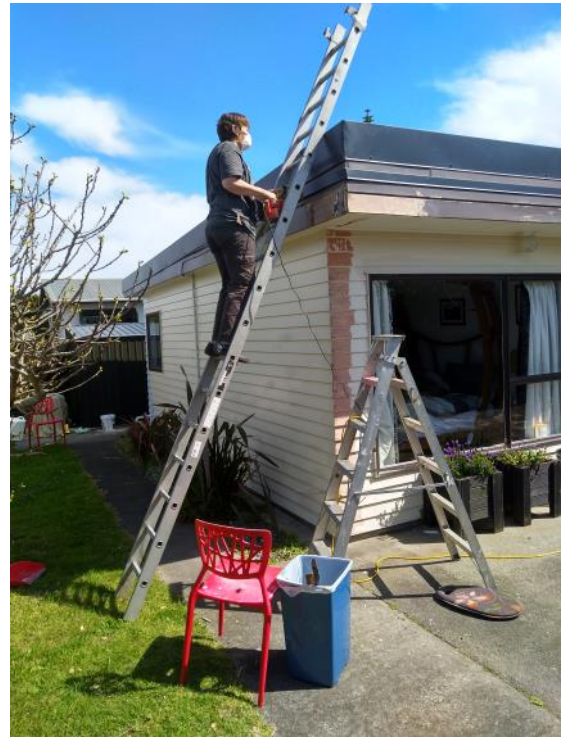
Then another four

coats of

paint on the

boxing and the corners are done.

It is spring here and the weather is a little unpredictable, when we could not get out because of rain and wind we stayed in the recovered the sofas. They looked so





much better. I also got to
bake my Christmas cake as

usual, it seems odd that for the first time in a decade I do
not need to find a cake mule to
carry some back to Mum.

It was not all hard graft, we did
get to do some of the things we
had been promising ourselves
since we moved in six months
ago. Lockdown has been re-
laxed a little, as long as we
wear masks outside the house
we can go out a little.

We walked down the beach for



coffee and chilli chips overlooking Kapiti island. We did the beautiful 8 KM cycle across the estuary to our local cinema and for some reason ended up watching two French films. “The Man in the Hat” and “Bye-bye Morons” they were very different but both good in their own way and the cycle was good for the soul. We also cycled in the other direction 15 KM across the local coastal park for a sushi picnic a coffee at the far side of the park.

And now we are back to work, but Christmas is coming.

