

Close to the land

LEAD THE WAY

PERHAPS ANDREW FROGGATT SHOULD BE KNOWN AS A 'PEOPLE WHISPERER. THE METHODS HE USES TO TAME HORSES WORK JUST AS WELL ON CORPORATE BUSINESSMEN AND TROUBLED CHILDREN

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WHEN ANDREW FROGGATT was 10 years old, he spent as much time as possible at his grandparents' farm on the outskirts of Wellington. If his mother refused to take him, or decided the weather wasn't suitable, he would simply take off and walk the 12-kilometre route over farmland to get there. So stubborn was his nature that, even if she arrived at the farm to pick him up, he would refuse the offer and instead trek the 12 kilometres home again.

His grandfather kept racehorses and Andrew would spend hours brushing, feeding and talking to the animals; he had a natural affinity with them. His first pony was a little 13.2-hand-high skewbald called Bobby. He taught himself to ride – no saddle or bridle – clumsily bounding over the farm bareback and following his natural instincts when it came to training. But whenever he asked his grandfather for things to help Bobby – to put him in the paddock where grass was a bit more plentiful or a cover when winter came – the answer was always no. And that didn't sit right with Andrew.

Such is the depth of emotion tied up with Bobby that even now it takes some time for Andrew to mention him. But it's a critical part of the story. And it's hard to watch him tell it, as he speaks of coming home from school one day to be told that Bobby had had an 'accident' and fallen down a gully. Even as a child, Andrew suspected that his beloved horse had probably been shot. ▶

OPPOSITE: Bobby the puppy gives Andrew a hand to lead his horse, Rock. According to Andrew, one of the reasons using horses works so well in the leadership courses is that leadership is about following through, not about size. You can't physically push a horse around so you have to use other methods to make them listen. THIS PAGE: Andrew uses Bow, his demonstration horse, to address clients on one of his leadership courses.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Bobby the puppy was named after Andrew's beloved childhood pony who was the catalyst for his life-long association with horses; the homestead in the shadow of The Remarkables where the couple runs their business; Sam and Andrew take a tea break in the garden room. Not one to slow down, Sam was still working within the business until her 39th week of pregnancy. Baby Tilly was born a week after this photo was taken.

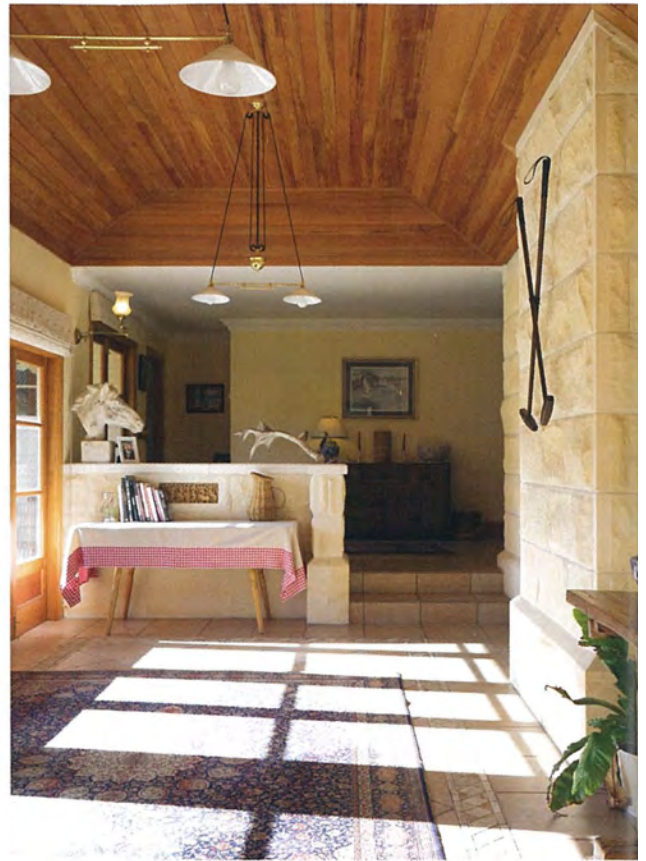
It seems Bobby has never been far from Andrew's mind over the years and was the catalyst for his life-long mission to find a kinder way to treat horses. As that small child he vowed never to let another horse not have the best. "I felt like I didn't look after him as well as I could have." He promised himself he wouldn't be like the rough-and-ready horse breakers he had seen with the racehorses. He had an instinct that there was a better, quieter way to connect.

Over a lifetime of following those instincts he also had another revelation. Horses connected instinctively because there was no verbal element but their leadership and communication were strong. They had a lot to teach humans and in particular the leaders and motivators amongst us.

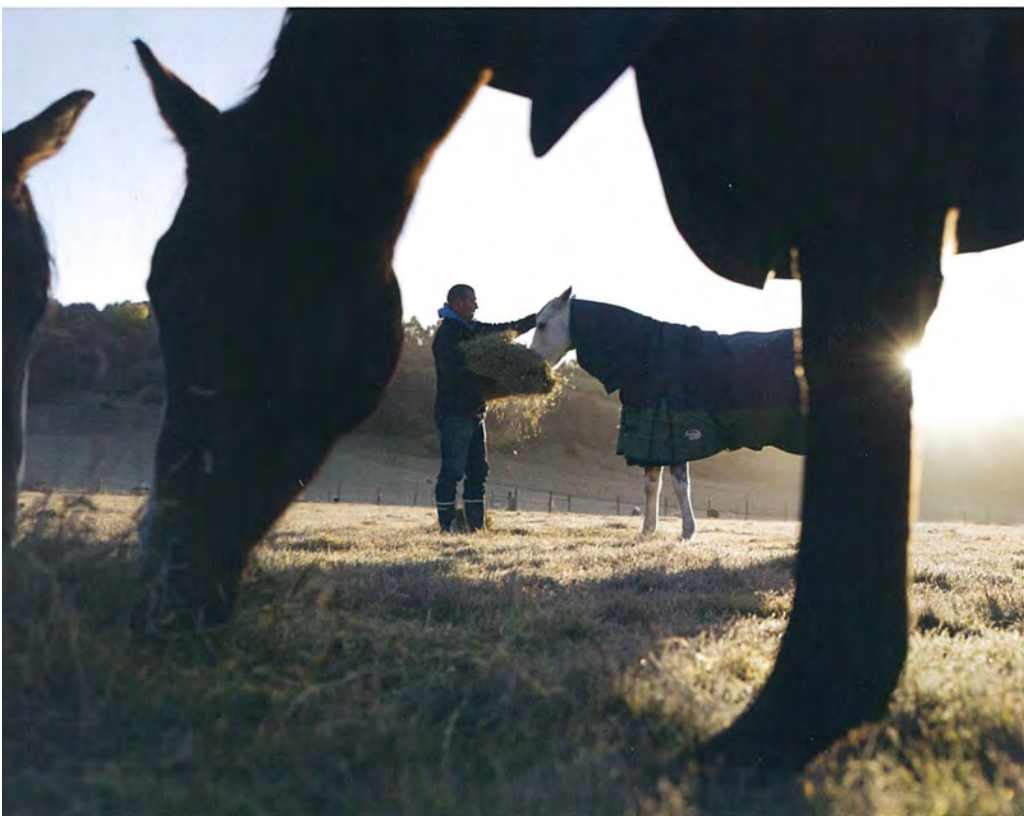
Andrew became renowned as a 'horse whisperer', a man who could fix any problem horse, from racehorses that wouldn't stand in the gates to show-jumpers that reared and bolted or wouldn't float. In his 20s he was training pony club mounts and taming wild horses from some of New Zealand's most remote properties. In one month at Mt Nicholas Station, on the edge of Lake Wakatipu, he broke in 12 wild horses. "We'd break them in, teach them to jump and then sell them on."

It developed further one day while he was working with a client and the girl's father came out to the arena to watch. "He said to me, 'Everything you're doing with that horse, I'm trying to teach corporate businessmen.'" From there a business was born and in 2001 Andrew started Talking Horses near Wellington with ex-partner Janine Sudbury, taking desk-bound corporates and showing them how to communicate more effectively by copying equine behaviour. After his relationship with Janine broke down he relocated to Queenstown about two years ago and launched Lead the Way with current partner Sam Glazebrook. ▶





The homestead's traditional style provides the backdrop to the corporate leadership courses run by Andrew and Sam. His work has taken Andrew all over the world, including stints training horses in Hong Kong and Tonga.



What is a horse whisperer?

The term 'horse whisperer' is used to describe people who train horses using natural methods, paying attention to the horses' instinctive herd behaviour and the premise that horses use body language to communicate and survive. The 1998 movie *The Horse Whisperer*, starring Robert Redford and based on the novel by Nicholas Evans, helped propel the term into mainstream media and natural horsemanship has gained traction in recent years as an alternative to traditional breaking methods. Andrew's training system has been refined from a mixture of these methods as well as his own instincts and he boasts a 100 percent strike rate. "We all have an agenda. It's about giving the horse time to get used to things," he says. "I'm very, very confident that I can get a result – it doesn't matter if it takes 30 minutes or four hours."



CLOCKWISE: Andrew loves the look of stacked firewood and multiple piles are arranged around various walls of the homestead; Sam's nine-year-old daughter Gwynie Fisk trains her Welsh mountain pony Boo using Andrew's techniques; marketing and administration have become a substantial part of the business and the couple are working on expanding into other areas such as sourcing and training horses for movies and commercials; Sam has tea in the garden with her daughters Gwynie and seven-year-old Alie (front).



Watching Andrew work, it is easy to see where the 'horse whisperer' tag comes from. It is simultaneously magical and confronting when he allows Bow, his 10-year-old demonstration horse, loose in the arena. Bow tears around like an oversized puppy, twisting and turning on his heels before careering straight towards Andrew, stopping millimetres from his face. Horses are mirrors of our emotions, Andrew says. If you're a high-energy person, the horse takes on that energy. If you're calm and considered, the horse will respond in kind. You can't dupe a horse – their instincts are refined over years of herd survival – and they know you better than you do.

In Andrew's courses, a CEO who is perceived to be a bit of a pushover will be paired with a stubborn horse with which he will need to be more assertive to make it listen. Or a bolshie businessman will be paired with a pushy horse, one he can't walk all over, and will have to lower his energy levels to make the horse respond. Businessmen used to talking their way through situations find this method falls flat with horses, as their body language instantly gives them away.

The same lessons apply to anyone, and the course has been lauded by some of our country's top sportsmen and coaches. All Blacks coach Steve Hansen and Black Caps coach Mike Hesson are among former participants who sing its praises, as well as top-tier management from some of New Zealand's biggest corporate companies including KiwiRail and New Zealand Post and the New Zealand Army.

Part of the Lead the Way course involves videoing participants; most are surprised at how they think they communicate compared to how they actually appear. There was the corporate manager who was highly motivated and determined but never once thought to praise, a reflection of his management style. In the horse world, without praise the animal eventually stops responding.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Andrew and Bow show off their skills in the main arena; growing up in England, Sam was given her first pony at 12 and was hooked. Now she gives lessons to local pony riders like Jessa Bodie; Andrew and Sam relax with course participants after a day of training. Many say they learn more in three hours than in three days in a classroom; the bond between Andrew and his horses is the result of years of patience and gentle methods.



Another company sent a manager who had been with them for 17 years and reported that after the course he was effectively managing for the very first time. Andrew's strengths lie not only in solving the horses' issues but being able to communicate that in a way that people can understand and learn from. "It cuts through a lot of bullshit and quickly creates self-awareness and how participants view themselves," he says.

Today the business is run from a property on the outskirts of Queenstown. Sam, a talented horsewoman, met Andrew at one of his clinics where she had enrolled in a last-ditch effort to solve the problem of a mare that wouldn't stop rearing. And while Andrew is the calm, quietly-spoken front man for the corporate courses, Sam is working just as diligently behind the scenes and has helped to expand the business into sourcing and handling horses for movie sets.

The business has also worked with troubled kids through the Queenstown-based Jigsaw organization, connecting with young people who have experienced domestic-violence situations. The horses help them learn to communicate without anger or violence, and to gain trust through touch, before they learn to trust humans again. A similar programme for autistic children has been equally successful. One 16-year-old autistic boy who had never spoken talked for the first time after a single half-hour session. "All he did was pat the horse and lead it round," Andrew says. The theory has been used in America for years, with some prisons running horse-breaking courses for inmates, teaching them communication and respect through the same methods.

"It's not about the horses," Sam says. "It's about what horses are showing us about ourselves and how we relate to other people. It's about increasing people's self-awareness and how they come across."

