

breathing it all in

Breaking a world record in the New York City marathon is nothing next to the challenge Allison Roe has set herself now.

Takapuna beach on Auckland's North Shore is a world away from where Allison won the Boston and New York marathons, but it's where she's preparing for a whole new campaign. Last time, it was a largely individual performance; this time, she is part of a much bigger team focused on making New Zealand a world leader in health.

The team, which includes medical professionals, a researcher, a strategist and passionate individuals like Allison, is lobbying for an integrative approach to health that considers the bigger picture and takes into account the role of nutrition and environment. Driving a shift in the country's current approach to health practice is a huge task, but Allison says a successful athletic career has put her in a unique position to be able to help.

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“People come to me about all sorts of health problems they're facing, like the fact they're breathing in the toxic sprays being released into their environment. It's not something one person can solve, but if I can deal with one small bite of the problem and perhaps raise the profile, then we're that much closer.”

Thinking back to how she won two of the world's most prestigious running events, Allison says it started with the realisation that all her competitors had the same credentials as her – two arms and two legs.

“There was no reason I couldn't do it.”

Now, she is just as matter-of-fact about creating a healthier place to live.



“We have every right to know what is going into our food and that the air we breathe is free of contaminants. These issues need to be addressed at a high level, but it starts with us and what we’re already aware of.

“With my running, I was fortunate enough to travel around the world. I visited third world countries and saw the horrific conditions people were living in, and I visited highly developed countries like the US, where I saw the seedier side of places like New York, with rats as big as cats and kids sniffing drugs in the street.

“When I came back, it made me really appreciate what we had here. However, since then, the health of this country has really spiralled downwards.”

It’s a desire to see that standard of living restored, and the belief that health is our most precious commodity, that’s behind Allison’s commitment to integrative medicine and projects like the annual Run to Heal fundraising series.

“It wasn’t until I had my first child that I realised how important health and wellness was. I hadn’t really considered mortality before or what it would mean not to have your health, but when my daughter was a baby she got a nasty chest infection and, probably like all new mothers, I worried that she might die.”

Allison now has two healthy teenagers – Jordan (16) who survived the chest infection and Elliot (13) – but the idea that health is everything is still at the heart of how she lives.

After 10 years in the country living in Coatesville, the family made the decision to move to the city to be closer to school and work, but they quickly ruled out apartment living.

“Clean air is dear to my heart and so is the ability to get outside and run around. Where we are now in Takapuna, we have access to the beach and we get the sea breezes. It’s a luxury to get that beach living and still be in the middle of a very busy city.”

Set one house back from the beach, Allison describes her home as having a casual elegance that makes it easy

to live in. With a fairly neutral colour palette of creams contrasted against dark wooden floors, and an abundance of natural light from large windows, it has another quality that Allison loves – a spacious, uncluttered feel.

To date, the house is largely unchanged from how it was when they bought it. They’ve simply added small touches to make it their own.

“I love my artworks and I always have fresh flowers in the house. Even when you’re in a new house and you haven’t quite figured out where things should go, a couple of bunches of flowers always make it look like a home.”

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Despite finding the good life in the midst of a busy city, Allison hasn’t quite relinquished country living. Every weekend, following Saturday morning sport, the family escapes to a second home, 50 minutes north of Auckland and surrounded by 130 lemon trees.

Up north is where the family keeps its ‘comfy furniture’, its toys and gear, and an endless supply of bedrooms to house the friends and family that regularly come to stay. It’s also where Allison indulges her love of antiques. Moving from a high-studded house to a more modern home meant she had to curb her collector’s eye, but she has shifted her favourites into the Point Wells house, including a French Louis XIV chest with a marble top, and an antique hallstand.

Christmas holidays and special occasions are also spent up north and you get the impression that this is the real family home – a great place to recharge mind, body and soul for the challenges that lie ahead. **H**

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