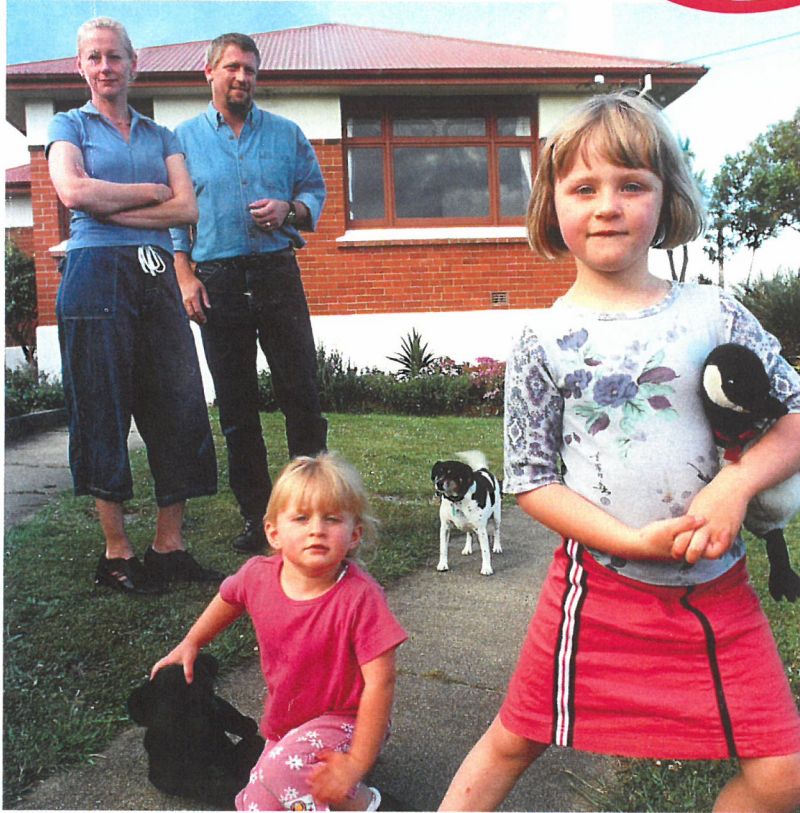


NORTH & SOUTH

THINKING NEW ZEALAND

MARCH 2003 \$6.20



What's A Nice
Middle Class
Family Doing
Struggling In
Auckland?
Is Life Much
Better In A
Smaller Town?

UNMASKED Jacob Rajan & Rob Waddell

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN Tomorrow's Super Talent

WATCHING THE DETECTIVES The Business Watchdogs



They're young. They're hungry.
They're smart, gifted and unashamedly ambitious.
They're passionate about their respective fields, determined to push themselves to new standards of excellence.
They're committed to New Zealand, even if for some that means turning down lucrative overseas offers.
They are seven of our best and brightest.

ALEX SPENCE meets

The Next Generation

Helen Danesh-Meyer

Auckland Ophthalmologist

Helen Danesh-Meyer is one of those people who appear to succeed at everything they attempt. She is sharp as a razor, articulate, impatient, hard to keep up with in a conversation. At 35, 10 years younger than most academics can expect to attain such a rank, she is associate professor of ophthalmology at the University of Auckland, specialising in research on the detection and prevention of glaucoma. She is also a director of the Eye Institute, a private Remuera clinic, and a founding trustee of Glaucoma New Zealand, a charitable trust. She has raised more than \$1 million in research funding, published numerous papers and won a slew of awards.

So when was the last time she failed at anything? Really, utterly, miserably failed? She laughs at this, has to stop and think, and can't come up with anything. "Ask me again later. I'm sure I can think of something."

Danesh-Meyer, whose parents are Iranian, was born in California but spent most of her "thinking years" in Dunedin, and considers herself "mentally a Kiwi". She met her husband Michael, a periodontist, in a chemistry lecture in their first year of medical school. They now have two daughters, Juliette, four, and Emily, two.

It's a Tuesday morning when *North & South* visits and Danesh-Meyer is working from her office in the plush, spacious Eye Institute on Remuera Road. She divides her time between here and an office at the Auckland University School of Medicine. Her week breaks roughly down to three days treating patients and performing surgery, two days doing research, and one day teaching.

Her speciality is glaucoma. "Glaucoma is a disease where pressure in the eye is too high, which results in damage to the

optic nerve at the back of the eye," she explains. "It slowly steals people's vision when they aren't aware they have the disease. It's usually picked up by an optometrist or a GP — just picked up incidentally. In New Zealand it's the most common preventable cause of blindness. Fifty per cent of people with glaucoma in New Zealand don't know they have it, so it's a significant health issue."

Danesh-Meyer's research is focused on improving the early detection of glaucoma. The condition can't be cured, but it can be treated if diagnosed early. Her aim is that by the end of her



SIMON YOUNG



SIMON YOUNG

Helen Danesh-Meyer:
“Fifty per cent of people with glaucoma in New Zealand don’t know they have it as it slowly steals their vision. It’s a significant health issue.”

ALEX SPENCE IS A
NORTH & SOUTH STAFF WRITER.

career people with glaucoma will be able to live with the condition without going blind.

Danesh-Meyer is a founding trustee of Glaucoma New Zealand, which was formally established in January. "In the UK and Australia they have organisations that, once a diagnosis is made, can offer support networks and education," she says, "but in New Zealand there was nothing like that." Already the trust has raised enough to establish an office, and Danesh-Meyer says it will attempt to raise more to provide public education and launch an annual Glaucoma Awareness Week.

She is obviously passionate about medicine — the challenges of research, the rewards of personal contact with patients — but in truth there was little chance of her pursuing another path. She's from a family of doctors. Her mother was a gynaecologist, her father a psychiatrist. (They emigrated from Iran to the United States in the late 60s.)

Danesh-Meyer was raised in San Francisco and moved to Dunedin aged 14 when her father accepted a research position at Otago University. She went to Logan Park High School, and at 17 enrolled in medicine at Otago. She graduated with distinction in 1992, and went to work as a house surgeon at Dunedin Hospital.

She began specialising in ophthalmology in 1993, first in Dunedin, then Christchurch, then Auckland, and in 1998 received a fellowship to study glaucoma at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. Michael gave up his practice to go with her. Their first daughter, Juliette, was only six weeks old when they left. "[The hospital] wanted us to stay, and I was offered some positions that were very hard to turn down," Danesh-Meyer says, but she and Michael — an Aucklander — decided they wanted their kids to be raised in New Zealand. (Second daughter Emily was born a few weeks before they left the US.)

Danesh-Meyer regularly gets offers from overseas universities which would double her salary, but she says she doesn't give them much thought. "I think we're here permanently," she says. "We're happy, and we want to stay." Why? "It's the people. Having lived in various parts of the world I can say New Zealanders are some of the most generous, kind, thoughtful people. That's what makes New Zealanders unique — they think about the world; they're not just centred on what happens in their own country. They're very natural as well. And we wanted our children to be surrounded by that natural, relaxed atmosphere."

Danesh-Meyer's daughters are "in a very creative phase at the moment", she says, "so every small activity is very exciting. Every small thing is a learning experience for them".

It's hard juggling family life with a flourishing medical career and it takes a concerted effort to set aside personal time, but she handles it with typical efficiency. "The weekends are completely my family's. I don't start any of my work or research until the kids are asleep. We do a lot of things together. My four-year-old daughter wanted to play the violin. She started that a few months ago. She came to a part that was quite difficult, and I was helping her practise. She said, 'Mummy, you do it.' I thought, 'Okay, that's a challenge.' So now I've got a violin and we're both learning the Suzuki method together, squeaking away at Twinkle, Twinkle [Little Star]."

After chatting for an hour, Danesh-Meyer has to return to her patients, but she emails the next day to say she's thought of something she can't do: "Singing. I recently tried karaoke, and was terrible. My kids won't even let me sing to them."

Sam Kebbell

Wellington Architect

Sam Kebbell wants to change the way you think about buildings. Flamboyant, lateral-minded, Kebbell is concerned with more than function and aesthetics — for him, a building has to do more than simply look good and fulfil its purpose; it must also stand for something. His former lecturers still talk admiringly about his final-year project as a student at Victoria University in which he proposed building a museum of, er, shadows. He'd read a novel in Rome, *Hardboiled Wonderland And The End Of The World*, about a small city in which every citizen had his shadow and soul removed, became obsessed with the idea of shadows, and wanted to create a building to emphasise them.

If that sounds a little fanciful, some of Kebbell's ideas do actually get turned into usable space. He designed a house for his parents at Te Horo, on the Kapiti Coast (right), while still a student, and it went on to win a regional award from the New Zealand Institute of Architects and was last year included in an Australian anthology, *100 Of The World's Best Houses*. In March 2002, after returning from studying in the US, he opened a small firm, Kebbell Daish, with one of his former teachers, John Daish, and is currently at work on their first commercial project: a fit-out of the Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency offices in Wellington.

Kebbell, 29, landed the plum project after publicity from a Dream Home exhibition in July at the Wellington City Gallery, where he was one of six young architects chosen to display their work. His design, a house with a strongly Egyptian theme, was adapted from an entry he submitted for an international competition for the new Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Kebbell talks with typical enthusiasm about the Saatchi project. His brief was to create a workspace without the usual mundane repetitions, so he suggested making each office mobile — when you get bored with where you're sitting, you simply move your office to another position. "It's about trying to keep everyone alive," he says, "to keep everyone thinking and moving."

It might sound logistically problematic, Kebbell acknowledges, but then again the greatest obstacles aren't usually structural or physical but getting other people to understand what he's trying to do. "The biggest constraints are when someone else in the project doesn't have the attitude, is too scared, or doesn't understand the ideas," he says. "They aren't trying hard enough, or aren't up to it."

Kebbell's a Wellingtonian by birth who boarded at Rathkeale College in Masterton and spent a couple of years "drifting" after that — studying tourism, commerce and viticulture at Lincoln University in Canterbury as well as spending a lot of time on the skifields of the Southern Alps — before moving back to Wellington to study architecture at Victoria University. There Kebbell discovered his true calling.

In 1997, his fourth year of architecture study, he spent six months on exchange at Pennsylvania State University, followed by six months studying in Rome. "It was outstanding stuff," he says. "I lived in this fantastic big old palazzo right behind the Pantheon. We had a studio in the middle of town. I walked past the Pantheon every morning to go to school."

Kebbell graduated from Victoria with first-class honours, then went to Harvard to do his masters, graduating with distinction. He spent a few months working in New York before returning to Wellington, opening his own practice and taking a part-time position lecturing at Victoria. He lives in Oriental Bay with his girlfriend Sarah. "You can have more impact here than in New