

Master Class

Nelson couple “Hanshi Andy” and “Jun Shilan Jane” are among the highest-ranking karate masters in the world.



TIM CUFF



Top left: Seido karate master Andy Barber. Top right and above: An outdoor training session at Rabbit Island Beach. Opposite page: Barber and wife Jane at their Nelson dojo.

Observing the serenity in the eyes of Andy and Jane Barber, it's hard to believe they're two of the world's most formidable karate exponents.

Andy, 65, is an 8th Dan black belt (or shodan) – a level only achieved by three others worldwide – while Jane, who's 63, is a 6th Dan black belt and the highest-ranking female Seido karate practitioner outside the United States.

“It's been said that once you've been inside the doors of a true dojo, it never leaves you,” says Andy, who's addressed as “Hanshi” (master of masters) out of respect for his status.

At the couple's Seido Karate school in Nelson, students ranging from pre-schoolers to septuagenarians gain more than just an improvement in their fitness and ability to defend themselves; they're embraced into the fold of a



A picture on the wall shows Andy smashing through three 25cm-thick blocks of ice with a single blow of his hand.

When Andy first started in karate as a teenager back in the early 1960s – inspired by *The Avengers* and Bruce Lee – the emphasis was on sparring and proving strength. During intensive training in Tokyo in 1967, he was “used as a bit of a punch bag” and became disillusioned with the competitiveness of the old Kyokushinkai method.

Two years after opening the Nelson dojo, he embraced Seido karate, founded by Japanese-born Kaicho Grandmaster Tadashi Nakamura, the world's only 9th Dan.

“Seido karate is about developing confidence and self-esteem, empowering people to defend themselves,” says Jane, who started karate 38 years ago as one of Andy's students. She's also a talented artist – their cottage sits alongside the dojo and doubles as her gallery, where colourful works include a portrait of their youngest, Sophie, the only one of their four children who chose not to pursue karate.

The Barbers, who now have six grandchildren, are a philanthropic couple known for their support of good causes (Andy is also a Justice of the Peace). Now that goodwill is being returned, with their karate community joining forces to help raise the \$50,000 needed to earthquake-strengthen their dojo. **FIONA TERRY**

nurturing and spiritual community.

This winter marks the start of both Andy's 50th year in martial arts and the 40th year of his dojo, which is part of a network that now includes six satellite centres. Once an oily, disused factory, the school has been converted into an airy practice space with exposed rafters and polished wooden floors.

A gentle giant, Andy has twice acted as security for the Dalai Lama during his visits to New Zealand, and he captained the national team at the

1975 world karate championships. A picture on the wall shows him smashing through three 25cm-thick blocks of ice with a single blow of his hand.

Andy teaches every junior lesson personally, with “Jun Shilan Jane” – as his wife is known – helping with the busier ones. Anti-bullying is a strong focus. “I've always been a protector,” he says. “I was second youngest of five boys but always pretty strong and pounced on injustice. I liked to think I was a bit of a knight in white armour.”