



CASE STUDY

By

B the Light Consulting

Brenna St. Onge

Rancho Margot

(NEAR) LA FORTUNA, COSTA RICA



Why? We are living in a time of system breakdown. The structures we have depended on for generations are changing rapidly and we can no longer rely on them for stability (food, healthcare, government, infrastructure etc.). As the polycrisis (multiple crises that fuel each other) intensifies, how we organize locally to strengthen community fibers will determine our experience and well-being in the years to come.

What? Regenerative Living represents a way of living in deep connection with self, each other and the natural world. It is a paradigm shift beyond extraction, and consumption that represents a way of being, acting, governing, and living in deep harmony with nature. It is the fullest expression of self-sufficiency and resilient community design. Rather than simply mitigating future climate impacts, regenerative living seeks to enhance the vitality, abundance, and long-term health of social, economic, and ecological systems; creating the conditions for all life to thrive through holistic management.

How? The systems break down we are living through was human generated and we can recode the systems to create shared prosperity on a healthy planet. This way of living is alive all over the world, it is just not evenly distributed or widely known.

The Regenerative World Quest (Quest) is an immersive research project to study and uplift communities all over the world that are living in a regenerative way. We will explore the systems, successes, challenges, and insights to create a database of scalable solutions. How can we redesign human systems that are healthier, more resilient and holistically managed? By honoring indigenous wisdom, and modern innovations, the Quest seeks to uplift and replicate best practices to craft a blueprint for shared prosperity on a healthy planet.

Who? The project was founded by Brenna St. Onge and is fiscally sponsored by Savory International, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. This case study is part of a series of ten projects researched in Costa Rica as part of the Regenerative World Quest's 2025 fieldwork. There are three phases to the Regenerative World Quest: 1- immersive, international research, 2- content creation and awareness building and 3- local implementation.





Rancho Margot

(NEAR) LA FORA, COSTA RICA

Founder:

Juan Sostheim

Website:

<https://www.ranchomargot.com/>

SHORT YOU TUBE VIDEO:

@ Regenerative World Quest "Rancho Margot"



Rancho Margot, is a leading example of how to create and operate a carbon-negative, eco-lodge and regenerative community. They operate with a focus on closed looped systems and self-sufficient living. Nestled at the entrance to Monteverde, and near the Children's Eternal Forest, it lies within the largest ecological preserve in the country.



The entire project is powered by solar or hydroelectric generators (the picture featured to the left, not damning the water but letting it flow while harvesting the energy). The layout of the community is based on circular flows of resources designed to minimize if not eliminate waste and create robust systems to cycle nutrients from one system to another. For example, the solid manure (pictured on the left) gets turned into compost and the liquid manure is brewed into a compost tea that is sprayed on the fields.



The eco-lodge also features an on-site apothecary that produces healing tinctures and cosmetics, and they manufacture their own soap (soap molds featured in the picture on the left), furniture, and green roofs for buildings.



Rancho Margot

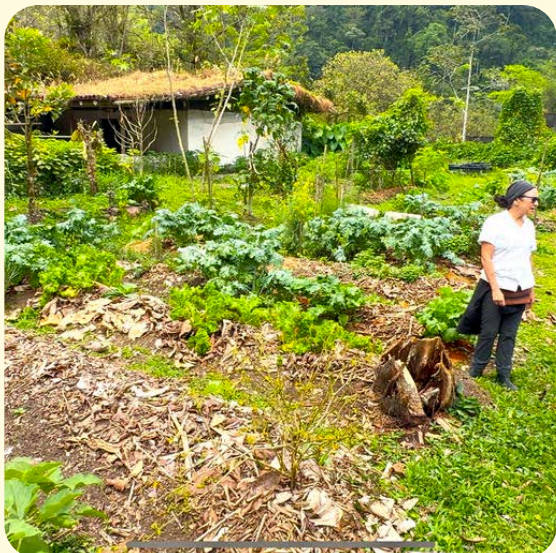
(NEAR) LA FORA, COSTA RICA



Rancho Margot grows over 80% of their food. This includes produce, dairy, eggs, and livestock, serving farm-to-table meals to guests and the community three times a day. Any food not grown on site is sourced entirely from local farmers. Additionally, Rancho Margot practices the internationally renowned Savory method of holistic grazing and integrated livestock stewardship. They serve as a living-learning laboratory, nurturing education about regenerative living to youth and adults.



Certified carbon neutral since 2012, Rancho Margot has been operating as an eco-lodge since its founding and is expanding into a full regenerative living community. The climate is an ideal 50-98 degrees F. all year long and is surrounded by lush rainforest on all sides.



Rancho Margot has deep ties to the local community with a focus on worker equity. More than one-third of its staff has been with the organization for over 12 years, and the first employee is still working there today. When it comes to regenerative living and learning, **Rancho Margot is the gold standard!**

“THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I HAVE COME BACK TO RANCHO MARGOT. I HAVE TRAVELED ALL OVER SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA IN SEARCH OF REGENERATIVE MODELS AND THIS ONE IS THE BEST I HAVE FOUND. IT KEEPS CALLING ME BACK.”

-FATIMA, PICTURED TO THE LEFT GIVING A TOUR OF THE RANCH

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS:

- Located in the 'buffer zone' of Arenal Volcano National Park which prioritizes conservation and controlled development.
- The ranch is 167 hectares (400 acres).
- There are 40 lodge units, employee housing, with 30 residential units in construction.
- Over 60% of the land is designated green space.

SHARED AMENITIES:

- Two natural river-fed swimming pools
- Yoga Chalet with complementary yoga classes
- Guided farm tours
- Soap-making workshops
- Horseback riding
- Volunteer opportunities
- Educational workshops in seed banking, permaculture, animal care, and holistic wellness
- Hiking trails
- Fishing ponds
- Soccer field
- Three farm-to-table meals daily
- On-site bar



SOCIAL STRUCTURES, GOVERNANCE, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY:

Rancho Margot nurtures a self-sufficient community deeply rooted in regenerative living. Worker equity and integration with the local community are guiding values. Governance at Rancho Margot operates through a mix of traditional leadership and grassroots involvement. There is strong participation from long-term staff who are central to its operations. The lodge and community engage in continuous educational programming for both residents and guests, including regenerative farming practices, holistic wellness, and environmental stewardship. Rancho Margot is deeply committed to the local community. A significant portion of staff is from the neighboring area, many of whom have been employed for over a decade. This long-term commitment fosters strong ties, a sense of family, and shared ownership for the project's success. Their sustainable model includes ongoing collaboration with local farmers and artisans, reinforcing their support of the regional economy.



LAND REGENERATION EFFORTS AND MEASUREMENTS:

- Originally a degraded cattle ranch with low biodiversity, the land has been transformed into a flourishing eco-lodge surrounded by a thriving secondary rainforest.
- A key initiative in this transformation was the extensive reforestation project undertaken in 2004, during which 100 hectares of forest were replanted, now covering 60% of their total 167-hectare property.
- This large-scale effort has dramatically increased the availability of habitat for native flora and fauna.
- Regeneration efforts are guided by permaculture principles, prioritizing tropical species with symbiotic relationships that support ecological resilience.
- Anecdotal observations suggest the successful return of native wildlife, including deer, birds, and fish, to restored habitats.



FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY:

- Produces 75%-90% of the food consumed by their guests, residents, and workers.
- Grows a diverse range of fruits and vegetables and raises chickens, pigs, dairy cows, and cattle—entirely without synthetic chemicals.
- Implements the Savory method of holistic management.
- Developing gluten-free flour from locally sourced, chemical-free tubers.
- Sources 100% of remaining food and supplies from local producers to support the regional economy and reduce transport emissions.

WATER MANAGEMENT:

- The ranch is powered by two on-site hydroelectric generators fed by a nearby river, which allows the river to flow freely (they are not dams).
- Direct river access provides renewable energy and water for daily use, reducing reliance on municipal systems and increasing resilience to shortages.
- Land design slows and disperses water to enhance absorption and reduce runoff.
- Flood mitigation systems protect infrastructure during heavy rainfall.
- Watershed-based planning strengthens year-round water security.
(Below is the overflow from the river-feed, natural swimming pools.)



RESOURCE FLOWS AND CIRCULARITY:

- The entire project was designed on the concept of resource circularity.
- Used cooking oil is recycled into artisanal soaps and natural cleaning agents.
- Biodigesters turn liquid animal waste into methane for cooking and heating.
- Furniture is handcrafted by local carpenters using mostly on-site wood.
- Living roofs insulate buildings, reduce heat, and support biodiversity.
- A multi-tiered compost system turns food, plant, and animal waste into rich fertilizer.
- Fermented microbes control livestock pests and odors, avoiding synthetic chemicals.
- Kitchen scraps feed pigs, closing the food-livestock loop.
- Livestock manure is used to heat water for showers naturally.

ENERGY:

- Rancho Margot achieves full self-sufficiency through a combination of renewable energy sources.
- Their primary power source consists of two on-site hydroelectric generators.
- Recognizing the importance of diversifying their energy portfolio, they also have existing solar capabilities with plans for future expansion.
- Additionally, three on-site biodigesters play a vital role by converting liquid animal waste into methane gas, fueling cooking and heating needs.



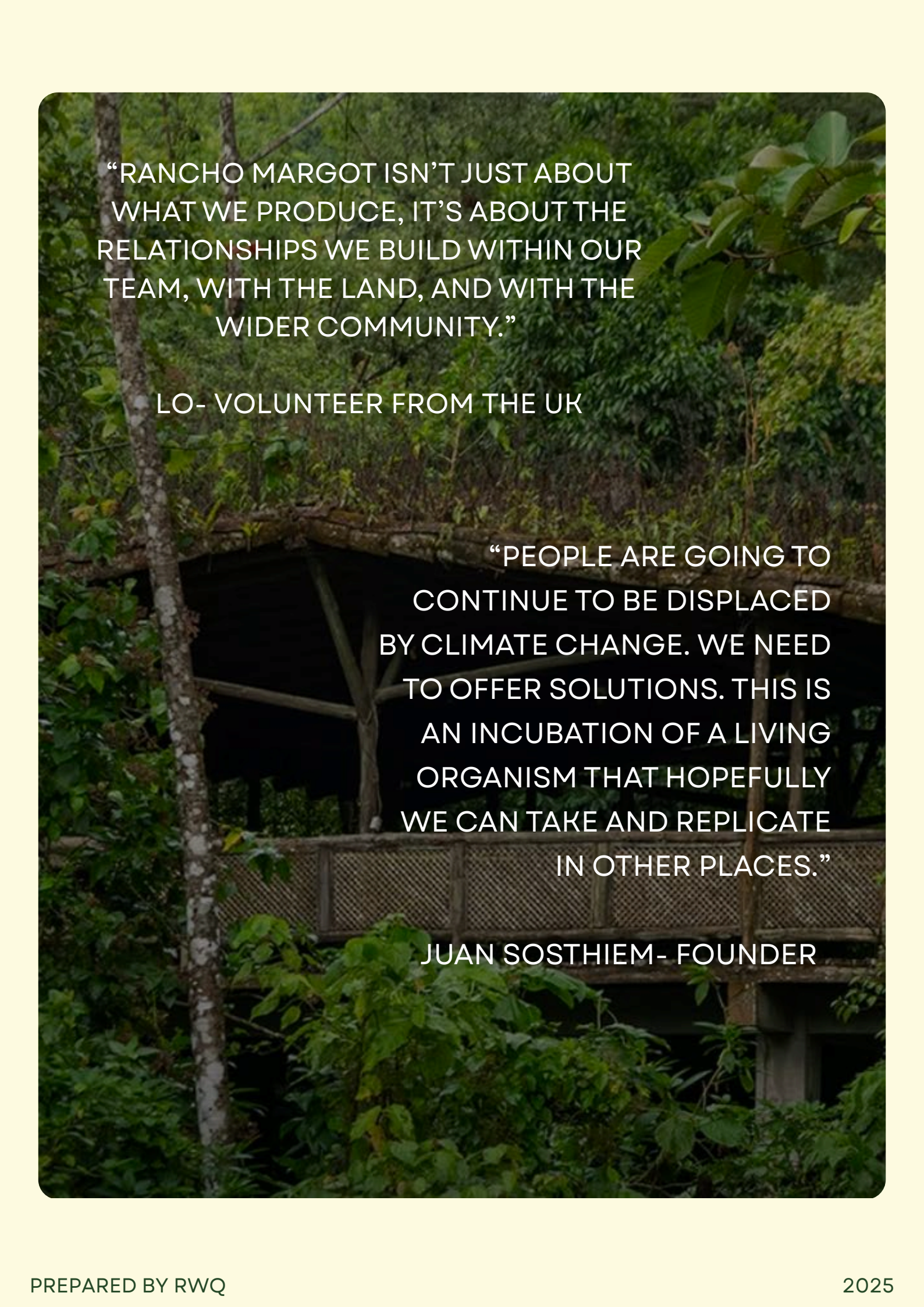
CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION: MEASUREMENT:

- Rancho Margot is the first carbon-negative company in Costa Rica, certified in 2012, verified by Carbon Clear.

SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION:

- Rancho Margo prioritizes the employment of individuals from the local community and pays them some of the highest wages in the region.
- The project also actively supports the nearby village of El Castillo through a range of educational, technical, and economic opportunities.
- To further minimize their environmental impact, Rancho Margot collaborates with neighboring businesses to consolidate transportation and reduce carbon emissions from supply chains.
- Rancho Margot hosts community enrichment and eco-awareness events, offering live performance space to local artists and promoting education on key environmental issues.
- The volunteer program attracts individuals with diverse skills and backgrounds who contribute to various aspects of the ranch's operations.





“RANCHO MARGOT ISN’T JUST ABOUT WHAT WE PRODUCE, IT’S ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIPS WE BUILD WITHIN OUR TEAM, WITH THE LAND, AND WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY.”

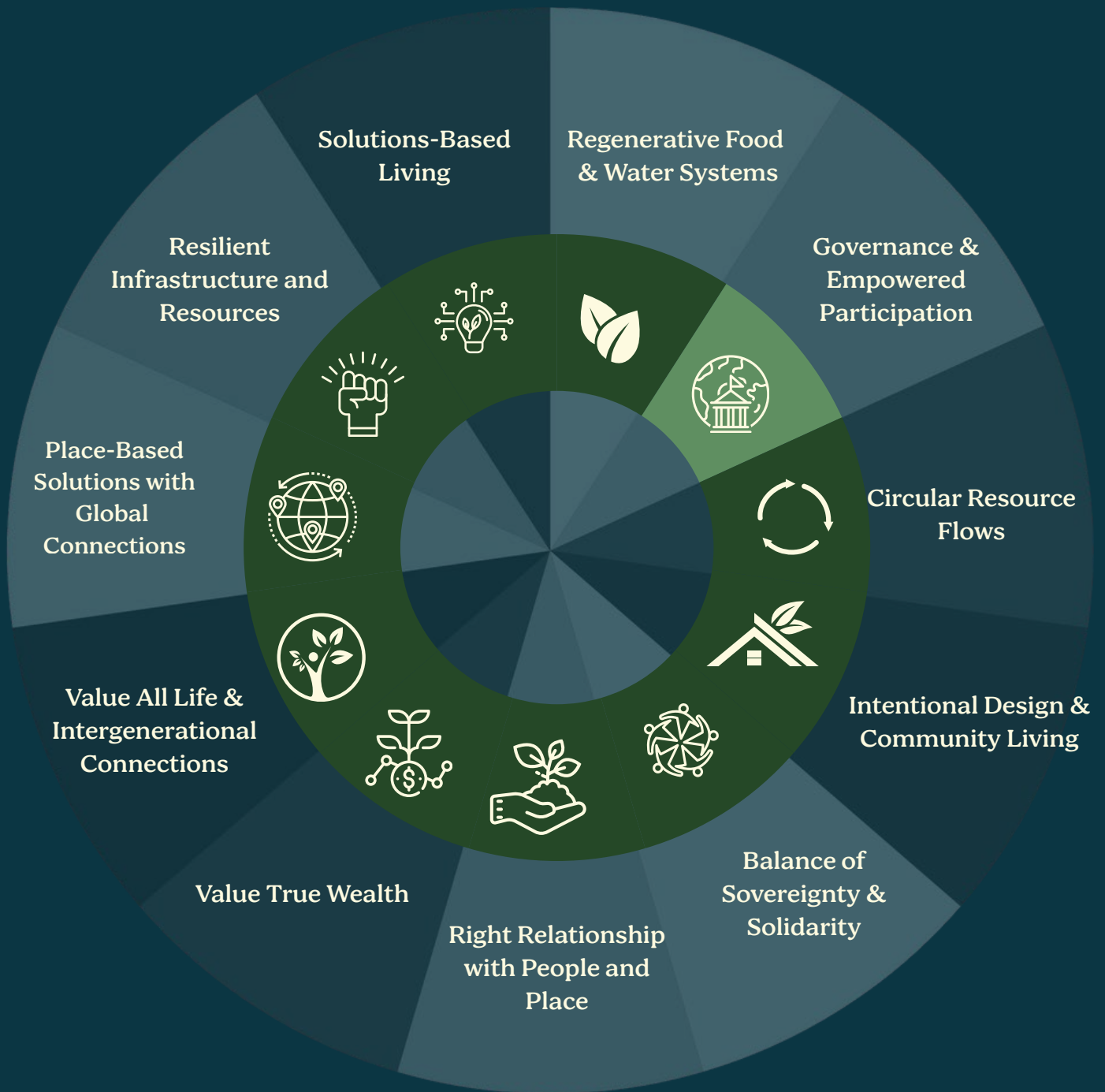
LO- VOLUNTEER FROM THE UK

“PEOPLE ARE GOING TO CONTINUE TO BE DISPLACED BY CLIMATE CHANGE. WE NEED TO OFFER SOLUTIONS. THIS IS AN INCUBATION OF A LIVING ORGANISM THAT HOPEFULLY WE CAN TAKE AND REPLICATE IN OTHER PLACES.”

JUAN SOSTHIEM- FOUNDER

Rancho Margot

REGENERATIVE ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT



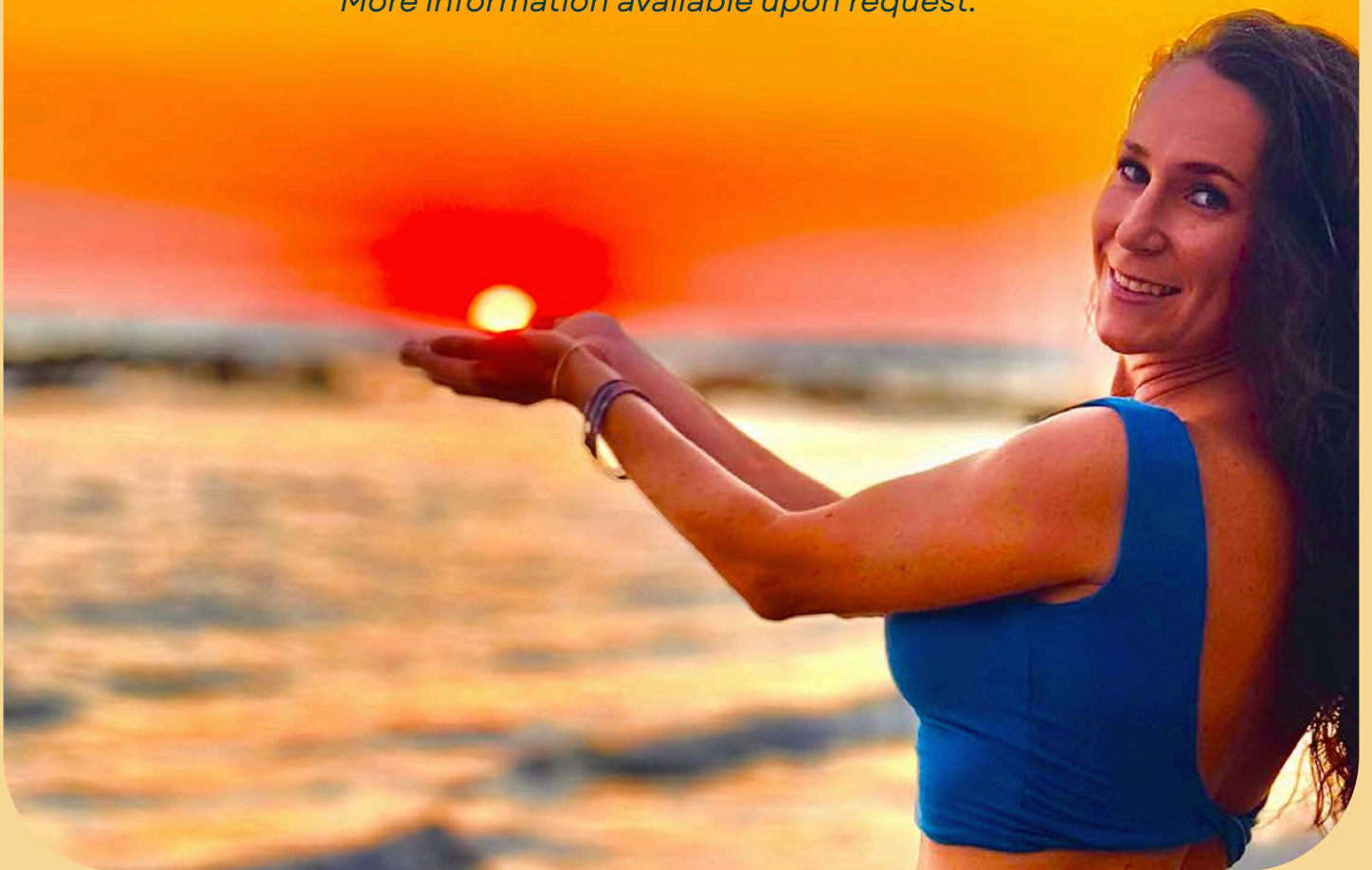
Key

- Not Present
- Early Stage
- Operational
- Thriving

A NOTE ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT:

There are many ways to assess communities. Each person must identify their own best use case. This assessment was created by studying leading regenerative frameworks and mapping them to regenerative living (defined on page one) and holistic management. The community's ability to maintain a thriving lifestyle if/when global supply chains are interrupted is a key element in all areas. Aspects of community life and culture are essential parts of resiliency, as well as food, water, education, healthcare and infrastructure systems etc. The Quest has a weighted numerical scale to assess each project which provides the qualitative and quantitative data behind the assessment.

More information available upon request.



REGENERATIVE ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

DEFINITIONS AND SCORING



Regenerative Food and Water Systems: farming as a service to restore landscapes, connect people with nature and provide a healthy and holistic diet in a way that restores the carbon cycle, builds soil, heals watersheds and ecosystems. Healthy soils=healthy communities.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they produce 75%–90% of their food on-site using regenerative methods (fruits, veggies, dairy, meats, grains etc.) All livestock is holistically managed using the Savory method. All remaining food needs are sourced 100% locally. The project has worked to heal and nourish the surrounding watershed.



Communal structures for **Governance** that enable **empowered participation** by all in the ecosystem through transparent and just decision making, holistic management, distributed authority with clear delineation of duties and responsibilities.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they integrate long-standing staff into decision-making processes and fosters grassroots involvement. While formal governance frameworks are less defined, trust-based and value-driven leadership guides the community.



Circular Resource Flows (energy, water, trash, recycling, compost, information etc.) where there is no waste, no extraction and all elements from one system can be inputs into another system. Communities are designed to not just minimize but neutralize and heal any negative impact to the land and surrounding areas, while flourishing economically.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they are a living example of closed-loop systems. Waste-to-resource innovations include bio-digesters converting waste into methane, compost cycles, fermented microbes for pest control, and reused cooking oil for soap to name just a few. The entire project is built on the premise of circular systems (compost tea sprayer -livestock urine- pictured below).





Intentional Design and Community Living by which individuals in the community can share living, working and communal space that honors place and people while holding appropriate boundaries for the unique needs of each individual and the community through holistic management.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as the intentional design blends aesthetics and ecology. Buildings feature green roofs, passive cooling, and materials harvested on-site. Shared spaces include natural pools, yoga chalet, and performance areas. Folks can visit as tourists or stay as residents with several options for engagement, volunteerism, employment and community living.



Balance of Sovereignty and Solidarity where the good of the community does not come at the cost of an individual and the good of the individual does not impair the community at large.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they emphasizes long-term employment, empowerment of staff, and diverse volunteer integration. Staff longevity supports a culture of mutual respect and shared ownership. As the community now takes shape around the ecolodge this balance will be key moving forward.



Right Relationship to Place and People by honoring the natural ecosystem where the community is (healing the land through human stewardship) and by being in an intentional relationship with indigenous wisdom and locals (healing the community and human relationships), living with love of place, honoring its history and all life it supports.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they have transformed a degraded cattle ranch into a thriving ecosystem, reforesting 100 hectares. Its educational offerings and collaborations reflect deep ecological reverence. There is deep and authentic care and relationship with locals and the ecolodge intentionally pays some of the highest wages around. Honoring people and place are shared and living values.



Valuing True Wealth where money and finance are not the end goals. Wealth is defined as quality of life, a sense of belonging, purpose and meaning and all resources are holistically managed.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they offer a purpose-driven lifestyle that centers health, connection, and meaning. While the project has a strong financial foundation, daily shared meals, wellness offerings, and nature immersion reflect their non-monetary wealth model.



Value all life and the contributions to the larger ecosystem where communities treat both the youth and the elderly with respect and intentionally create cross-generational connections. The value of ecosystem services are revered and service roles (teaching, health care, youth and elderly care etc.) are respected and valued.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they embraces multigenerational engagement, community employment, and youth education. The community is full of people of all ages from babies to elders. Some come to volunteer, others for employment, others to visit and live. Wisdom of all ages is incorporated and honored.



Resilient Infrastructure and Resources The necessary skills, resources and infrastructure to sustain life are within the community, from growing food to energy production, to building shelters and water systems, education, health care, community economic systems, arts, and entertainment etc. Focus on sourcing locally with little to no reliance on global supply chains.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* due to their demonstrated commitment to resiliency and self-sufficiency starting with food and energy and expanding to medicine, infrastructure, education, construction, water, circular systems and zero waste etc.



Place-Based Solutions with Global Connections While knowledge, connections, and sharing are connected globally; solutions, actions and projects are nuanced for local culture and climate, led by people from the area and living in the community.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving* as they are a world-renowned model that hosts global volunteers, travelers, and students while investing heavily in the surrounding region. Rancho Margot's circular resources designs and resilient living strategies are well suited for global replication.



Solutions Based Living whereby the simple act of HOW the community lives is a solution to climate change, inequality, injustice, violence and greed. It is not about telling others how to live, rather living the solutions in day to day lives as a model.

Rancho Margot's score here is *Thriving*. Everything at Rancho Margot—food production, energy generation, and hospitality—is an active expression of solutions-based living.





THANK YOU

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