

# EL AMARILLO

*A Town's Rebirth*

**TOMPKINS**  
CONSERVATION  
CHILE





# EL AMARILLO

*A Town's Rebirth*

## Introduction

*Douglas Tompkins, conservationist, philanthropist, and great friend to Patagonia, died in a kayaking accident on General Carrera Lake in December 2015. His enormous legacy included the creation of seven national parks and the expansion of three existing parks. But for him, no other project was as meaningful as the transformation and beautification of this small community he loved dearly: El Amarillo. “Don Doug,” as the people here called him—using this formal Spanish title with a lot of respect and affection—was proud of this project and wanted to share the story with other Patagonian communities. Shortly before his death, he began this book’s design and drafting. The final version is faithful to his plan, vision, and voice, telling this inspirational story in his own words.*



*Sign translation:  
Welcome to El Amarillo  
"The Center of the World"*

Bienvenido  
a  
**EL AMARILLO**  
"El Centro del Mundo"

CHAITEN  
VEREDA EL AMARILLO



EL AMARILLO, *A Town’s Rebirth*  
*The Transformation of a*  
*Little Town in the Center of the World: A Story*

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| I   | A message from Douglas Tompkins  |
| II  | From disaster to opportunity<br><i>The 2008 Chaitén Volcano eruption</i>   |
| III | How to rebuild and restore a town<br><i>Painting, fences, chimibolos, landscaping;<br/>fixing up roads, sidewalks, and public spaces</i> |
| IV  | Individual projects<br><i>Before and after: houses, businesses, services,<br/>and new buildings</i>                                      |
| V   | Pasture and farm restoration<br><i>Agriculture on the outskirts of town</i>  |





## EL AMARILLO — *rebuilding for tourism\**

In 2007, we began a community revitalization project (our version of “urban renewal”) in the small village of El Amarillo, which is adjacent to Pumalín Park and has become the gateway community for the park’s southern sector. After the Chaitén Volcano erupted in 2008, the project gained new importance, becoming even more urgent.

The idea was simple: to build house pride by helping subsidize the exterior remodeling of many run-down and decaying houses. The Foundation thought that a facelift to the buildings and public spaces might revitalize community spirit, and instill in citizens this all-important pride in home. In turn, this pride would ripple out from individual households to the community, the region, and ultimately the nation itself, restoring dignity and fostering community spirit. This too, we hoped, would ultimately extend to concern for the broader environment as well, and conservation sensibilities would become part of the culture in Palena Province, a place of exceptional beauty and wondrous landscapes.

It is a pleasure to report that things have worked exactly as imagined, and eight years later, El Amarillo is the de facto “Center of the World,” just as the slogan invented by the townspeople says. And isn’t it the case for all of us that where we live is, really and truly, always the center of the world?

Now the town is as cute as can be, and tourists are stopping and staying, rather than zooming through the once depressed-looking little village. Prosperity comes with order and beauty, good maintenance, and a happy, good-looking face on one’s community. Combined with the neighboring Pumalín Park, it’s a winning combination by any standard, and a step toward a better future.

This book tells the project’s story.

— *Douglas Tompkins*





## In 2008 our world changed

The eruption of the Chaitén Volcano was a disaster that called for a rapid response. The entire area was smothered with ash. The rivers were blocked and redirected, their courses changed. Small and large towns like Chaitén and El Amarillo were nearly destroyed...





*It was a disaster of biblical proportions...*











## GETTING TO WORK

— *step one: an epic cleanup*

The top priority was cleaning out the tons of ash that had layered themselves over the farms, roads, homes, and public buildings. In Pumalín Park, too: campsites, prairies, trails, and bridges were suddenly unrecognizable, with everything under a thick gray blanket of volcanic ash.

As we cleaned, we also saw an opportunity for taking a look at our surroundings and asking what more we could do. What would we need to truly rebuild a town like El Amarillo and transform it into a place that was a pleasure for the people who lived there?

Our challenge was clear: restore and renovate each building with as much care and skill as possible. And in certain cases, build new infrastructure the town would need, such as a gas station and supply store. With this in mind, the planning process began as the townspeople continued cleaning up their own land and their neighbors'. It was slow and patient work.









*This is how the rebirth  
of our beautiful town,  
El Amarillo, and its magnificent  
neighbor, Pumalín Park,  
began*



## How do you restore and rebuild a town?

There's no secret formula for transforming a town. It takes time, work, and compromise—and, at certain points, financial support from local and regional governments, foundations, and external donors. The process has two main dimensions. First, there's the physical dimension, which includes building materials and craftsmanship to get the job done. Then there's the psychological dimension: a new way of looking at things, and the discovery that living in a beautiful house, in a beautiful town, makes life more beautiful, too.

Both dimensions are important. Painters and carpenters can do their part to fix up a house or a street. But after that, the people who call that renovated house or street home must take the time to keep it tidy, cared for, and attractive.



## Color

New paint is the simplest and most basic step. The house's natural surroundings are important, too: the grass, plants, and flowers. Everything has a role to play.

## Fences

Fences are equally important. Across the Chilean Patagonia, there's a tradition of putting a fence around a house or farm. But different fences send different messages. A chain-link or barbed wire fence, with crooked, aged posts says, "Stay out!" But an aesthetically pleasing wooden fence with an attractive geometric design, or a series of wooden planks—well-formed and well-spaced, painted in harmonizing colors—can truly add something to its surroundings. A fence like this says, "Welcome to our community."

## Finishing Touches

Behind the fence, small details can make a house all the more attractive. Various of these are worth mentioning. First, painted trim along the windows can look really stunning when it's a different color from the house's siding.

Second, a house's entryway is also a key element. A charming house needs a charming entrance: not just a simple door in a plain wall, but perhaps a porch that invites visitors in, or a little roof that protects from the rain, or a deck that keeps feet out of the mud. Throughout this book, you'll see pictures of the remodeled homes in El Amarillo and explore the finishing touches that help give these spaces their welcoming feeling.

## Walls

Not every house can or needs to be an architectural masterpiece. Nevertheless, a few details can make the difference between a house that feels unfinished and a house that's truly enchanting. In Patagonia, it's not uncommon to see exterior walls covered with sheets of corrugated zinc.

New siding made from wooden planks or shingles, paired with new trim along the exterior windows, can make a house look more attractive and feel more complete.

## Chirimbolos (Architectural Adornments)

These fantastical elements provide a luxurious—and traditional—touch that calls back to the history of the Chilean Patagonia. In many cases, the addition of decorative molding, often just beneath the roof line, serves as a sign that the owners really love and care for their home. Chirimbolos are non-functional details, born of the carpenter's imagination and whimsy. They can also show off a homeowner's personal style, helping distinguish one house from another.

## Public Spaces

Landscaping in public spaces goes beyond the efforts of individual home or business owners as they invest in the upkeep of their own property. Every city has public areas its inhabitants must share: a town square, sidewalks, the curbsides of streets and highways, and signage that points to shops, services, tourist attractions, and nearby towns. These public spaces deserve the same attention and care as any private home. They should be kept clean; litter should be thrown away. This can and should be another source of civic pride. Look at how we do things in El Amarillo! Or perhaps in your town, too...

All these factors, all these strategies for beautifying the homes, and ultimately, the entire town, are on display in the following pages. Pay special attention to the before-and-after photos, which show a series of steps that led to a new image for El Amarillo and a new way of looking at this beautiful town—transforming it, truly, into the Center of the World.





Color  
*The magic of painting...*







## Fences

*In every color and shape, more than a barrier, they're a gift to the street...*



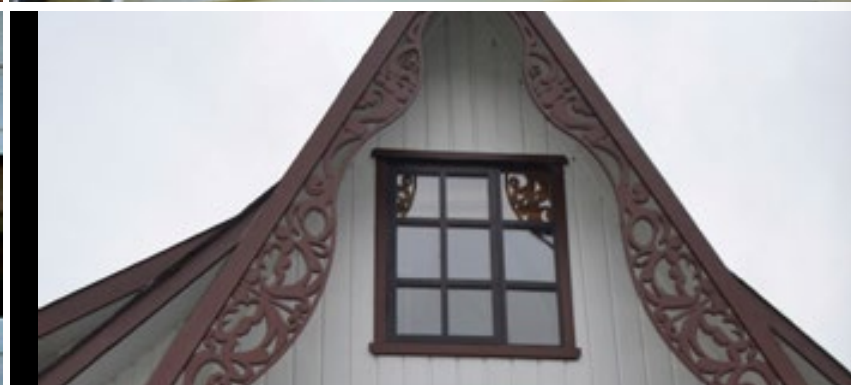




Entryways and Porches  
*A way of saying “Welcome” to our  
 visitors and walkways...*



Chirimbolos  
*A fantastical touch and a nod to  
Southern Chilean identity*







Landscaping in Public Spaces  
*The beautification of the  
 places we share*





Bus Stops  
*A distinctive style, down to the matching garbage bin*





Pathways and sidewalks





Landscaping alongside  
the roads





Signage





Business signs and street signs





Now let's explore the town, house by house.  
*Individual projects: before and after*





## “A” House

This house was built in 1998.  
The renovation project began in 2011.







## Ana's House

*"I've lived in El Amarillo for more than 40 years. In 2014, Mr. Tompkins said they would help me. First they fixed the entryway, the fence, and they built me a woodshed. My house became much more elegant; they really gave it cachet. How would I be anything but pleased? El Amarillo is so much more beautiful than before. In the future, I imagine the town as a paradise, even more pleasing to the eye. Don Doug treated the people here very well. He was humble, affectionate, always chatting with everyone.*

*No one else could do what he did."*

*—Ana Montecinos*







## Gloria Pezo's House

*"I was the first one to trust Don Doug. Twelve years ago, they painted my house, they added a porch, they added furniture and a storage space. They also planted trees and worked on the grass. This beautification project brought El Amarillo together. Before, everyone was off in their own world; it was sad. Now, we keep things beautiful and picked-up. Living in a clean environment helps for staying healthy. And a clean, beautiful place is a place where everybody wants to go."*

—Gloria Pezo







## Norma's House

Norma Ruiz and her brothers feel a deep attachment to this house, where they were raised. The renovation began in 2012.







## The River House

This house was built by its original owner, Don Amador Painepe. He sold it in 2009, and the restoration began in 2010. The updated house has a comfortable space for guests on the second floor.







## “Checho” Pezo’s House

Sergio “Checho” Pezo came to El Amarillo in 1997 and began to build his house. For several years, he was part of the efforts to create and open Pumalín Park. He began the beautification and restoration of his own house in 2014.







*“I benefitted from the beautification project because I didn’t have to invest my own money in these improvements. They added the porch, built a woodshed closer to the house, and upgraded the paint. This helped many people, and everything turned out beautiful and well-organized. With these changes, more people and tourists are going to visit.”*

—Marta Ibañez Chaura

## Panchito’s Supermarket

*“I’ve lived in El Amarillo for more than 12 years; before than I lived in Chaitén. The beautification project always seemed like a good idea to me. When Don Douglas arrived, the park opened. Perhaps without him, it never would have happened. In summer, more people come to the town. I sparked some change in this town with my business. My shop and restaurant were painted as part of the project, and they also added a porch. Don Doug helped me with my business, helped me gain capital. I appreciate him a lot—he was really thoughtful with us, even paying for my son’s education. He was a top-notch person. We’ll never forget him. He revived this town. As a professional, I always felt supported.”*

—José Gallardo







# Las Rosas Supermarket

*“I’ve lived for around 50 years in El Amarillo. When my husband passed away, I couldn’t do much of anything, so the house renovation really helped me, since everything was in such a bad state. This happened around 6 or 7 years ago. They fixed my roof, they made the walkway, the garden, they added stones to the path, they fixed up the entryway and demolished the old storage spaces. The beautification project was really wonderful and useful for everyone. We miss El Tata (Doug) a lot. He did what none of us could have done alone. Everything changes when you care for the environment.”*

—Gerarda Barril





## “Marcela” Lodging House

*“I’ve been here in El Amarillo for 30 years. I arrived to Chaitén by way of Palena, and bought some land in El Amarillo where I could raise my animals. I came with my wife and young daughter. The farm had a small country house, very old. We built a new house, a bit bigger—around 30 by 20 feet—and did a few additions over time, until the house was around 1300 square feet. Then Don Douglas Tompkins came and helped us finish the project. In 2003, Don Douglas offered to meet with all the El Amarillo neighbors. At that meeting, he proposed the idea of beautifying our gardens and fences. He wanted to extend this special kind of help to the area, since there weren’t a lot of jobs and people didn’t have any resources for fixing up their houses. He did this when he bought the El Triángulo Farm. He offered my daughter Marcela the job of interviewing all the townspeople from the airplane sector to the bridge, which marked the town’s borders. People accepted the idea, but were somewhat wary. I took him at face value. I knew from the beginning he wanted to help our community.”*

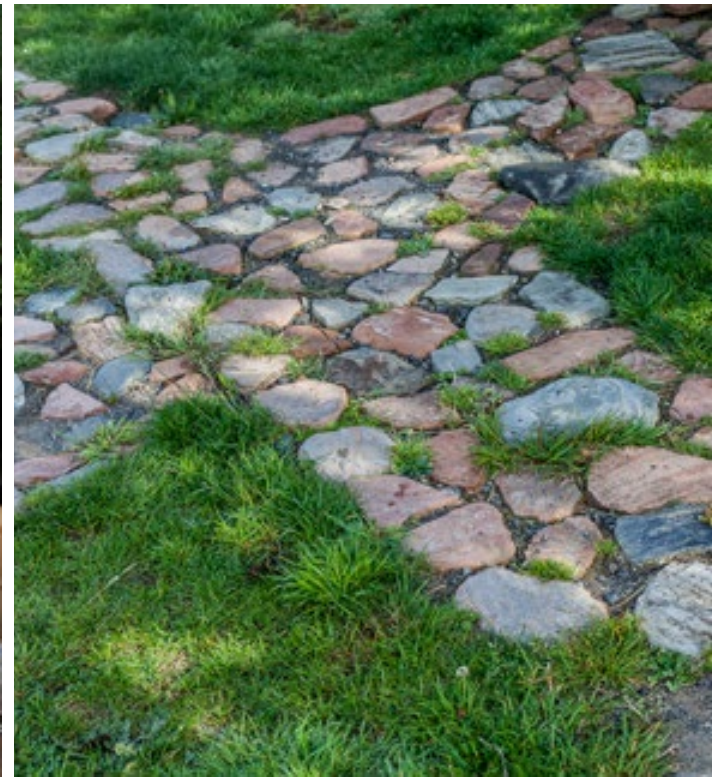


*“We were just starting with our lodging house and Don Doug sent us our first clients. Previously, there hadn’t been any place for his visiting workers to stay or eat. We worked for him for around 15 years. The house’s beautification was really important because it changed the first impression of the town. People, tourists, began to come more often. They saw that this place was changing. The project also helped us keep the town clean. In 2009, they put fences all around the house, they fixed the entryway, and they did a total paint job on the house’s exterior. They built two storage sheds and a garage, they put chirimbolos on the front of the house, and in 2016, they added a stone driveway. But when Don Doug passed away, it was like a piece of something was missing.”*

*“With this project, the town’s aesthetic changed completely. No one who passed through could believe what Douglas Tompkins had done, and all for free. No one will ever do something like what he did again. At the beginning, it was all like a dream, that with time, became something real. He did everything he said he would and more. The town has come so far, and what happens next depends on each of us, the people living here. Perhaps it will become a tourist destination.”*

—Maximiano Ojeda





## Shipping Container House

Also belongs to Don Maximiliano Ojeda







The Fontealba House





## The Asencio House

*“I arrived in 1976, coming from Michinmahuida with my mom and the whole flock of kids—9 of us. My mom came to El Amarillo to put us in school here, to domesticate us a bit. The beautification project has helped us a lot. It’s good for tourism, and everyone who visits is struck by the difference between Chaitén and El Amarillo. It’s also helped those of us who are from here. Everyone wants to do the same thing in their town, wants to have something just as beautiful.”*

*“They began fixing up my mom’s house in 2015. They did the paint job, added roof frames, they did the landscaping. They built a woodshed and a porch, and added a fence and shutters in the windows. In 2015, they also worked on my brother’s house, painting, adding roof frames and chirimbolos, building the porch and the fence. They fixed the woodshed and the driveway, too, and did the landscaping. They fixed my house in 2016, painting the walls, adding a porch and shutters. They did the landscaping as well.”*



*“We’re very grateful, because it was a tremendous help. Truly grateful, because they didn’t charge us anything, and to be helped like this is an enormous gift. We’re especially grateful to the man who offered us this helping hand. No one’s really used to getting this kind of help. The project was also a great lesson for people here. It’s not like before, when people littered, threw their trash wherever. It also marked an enormous change in the surroundings and atmosphere of this village. People see us differently now. People from other places come here to look, learn, and copy us. We’re an example. It’s a different world. It changed the mentality of the people here. Before, everyone lived in their little plot of land, and everything was more difficult, the resources scarcer. Paving the roads helped, too. Transporting things is cheaper now.”*

*“The environment is the most important—in other places, there’s not even vegetation anymore. It’s important for your health. Here, people live well, they don’t get sick. The trees here are native species, not invasive pines like in other places. And this is all important for nature itself, too. When there’s a bit of pollution, the forest can absorb it. Everything’s healthier—the earth, the water—because we take care of it. Hopefully, the mining companies won’t ever come to destroy and exploit this place.”*

—Pedro Asencio





Paula Chaura's House







## The Small Farmer's Association







## The Rabanal House

*“I think that Don Douglas Tompkins coming here is the best thing that could have ever happened to this area. I remember when the former mayor called me asking that I take down the ‘Pumalín Park’ sign that was on my property; I told him I wouldn’t remove it, because at that point people already knew El Amarillo more for the park than anything else. All of this has been an enormous push forward. We’d been on a road trip and had a small car accident passing through town. That was when I got excited about El Amarillo and about buying something here, taking advantage of the little mishap.”*

*—Juan Rabanal*







## Héctor Müller's House

*"I've lived in El Amarillo for 25 years; before that, I lived in Cochamó. I came here because the access to Puerto Montt was easier, and also I'd found a job—and I'd been dreaming of becoming successful ever since I was a little kid. The beautification project was wonderful; I think it should have kept going. It's a shame that Don Doug left us too soon. He really felt like a friend to me. He showed me his photos, and we always chatted. He would even come to my house for yerba mate. He made El Amarillo more beautiful and everyone here admired him. People come here, and they think they're in another country."*

*—Héctor Alfredo Müller*







## Zoilo's House

*"I've lived in El Amarillo for 34 years, though I was born in Chaitén. I came here because the place I lived before ran out of fresh water. I'd been living on Los Robles Island, near Pudú, and one winter the river got jammed up by stones and trees. We only had access to salt water, so I had to leave."*

*"They left my house impeccable. It was more comfortable, with a hallway where I could keep my firewood. This was in 2015, and they also added alerce shingles to the façade, fixed the bathroom, built a porch, and built a garage for the car. When they started the project, we never dreamed the finishings would be so beautiful. Mr. Tompkins asked them to redo anything that wasn't just as planned. Without this program, El Amarillo would have been a shantytown. The houses were old, some with no fences."*

—Zoilo Ampuero







## The Huenupán House

*“I’ve lived here for 27 years. Before that, I was in Chaitén and before that, in Puerto Montt. The beautification project in El Amarillo benefitted us greatly, because we have a more scenic environment now. Our way of life changed, too. Now people take better care of their yards and their homes. It’s been beneficial to me, because they helped me fix up my home. When you come from Chaitén, it’s really wonderful to live in El Amarillo—it makes you proud. We’re very content with the results.”*

*“In 2014, the program built us two garages with space for storage. They painted the house and added a chirimbolo to the garage. They’ve always helped us; whenever I’ve asked for it, they’re always there.”*

*“When they were going to begin construction, I felt like I was in good hands, because Don Douglas came to speak with me personally and asked for a sketch of what I wanted. I told him what I needed, and it was really a shared process.”*

*“I feel proud to live here. I feel privileged to be surrounded by so much beauty. When you come and go, you see this beauty all around you—when it rains, when it’s sunny, when it’s snowing. I’m very happy. We have great neighbors and a lot of peace.”*

*—Reinaldo Huenupán*







The Community Center







## The Evangelical Church

The building belongs to the Christian and Missionary Alliance.  
It was restored in 2014.







## The Catholic Church







## El Amarillo Rural School

*“I’m a teacher in El Amarillo and I’ve lived here for 7 years. The beautification project benefitted the school, with a great upgrade of our green spaces, the installation of a fence, and a paint job. They also fixed up the storage. They changed the organization of the grounds a bit, moving the parking lot to the space behind the school. This made a huge impact. They took out the invasive pines and planted native trees.”*

*“I think it was a fabulous project. It looks really good. I love El Amarillo. It’s always clean here, no litter in the street. There were many changes, especially in the landscaping, the upkeep of our green spaces, and adding garbage bins in different areas.”*

—Flor Jay







## New Buildings

In addition to the restoration of many houses and businesses that already existed in El Amarillo, it became clear that the town would need some new infrastructure. This called for new construction.

This was an opportunity to continue the program and set an example for excellent local craftsmanship, well-chosen color palettes, and a plan for taking care of the landscaping after the construction was finished. Above all, it was an opportunity to offer the services that were still missing in this charming town.

Number one on our list was a gas station or auto service center. Tompkins Conservation Chile took on this challenge, combining a gas station with a shop that would sell camping gear, books, and hand-crafted souvenirs. With this goal in mind, we built Puma Verde Market and the gas station.

In addition, we needed a large workshop for the carpenters who were building adornments and other architectural elements for the restored homes. Since there wasn't any suitable space available in the town, we built a two-story house, which could later be converted into a bed and breakfast or other place for tourists to stay.

The following pages show how these new buildings were designed to fit in perfectly with the existing landscape...







Puma Verde Market











## A Home for Future Tourism Entrepreneurship

We began construction on this building in 2010.

It was first used as a workshop and a storage space.

Now, there are plans to transform it into a tourism start-up to meet the demand for places to stay in El Amarillo.







## Prairie and Farm Restoration

As Doug always said, “Even at the Center of the World, people need to eat.”  
And in such a beautiful town, why not eat well?

Organic products were a priority. For this reason, we began by cleaning up the earth, removing tons of volcanic ash, planting new grass, and—little by little—restoring the health of nearby farms. It was hard but worthwhile work.

Two farms, in particular, had spectacular results: the Las Rosas Farm, south of town, and the Las Lomas Farm just north of town. The organic vegetables sold in El Amarillo are on par with the best of any in Chile.

The following photos offer a little taste of this success.





## Las Rosas Farm

This 517-acre farm, now completely restored, features a large berry production, a beautiful central house, and a vegetable garden. It's also home to sheep that produce very high-quality wool.





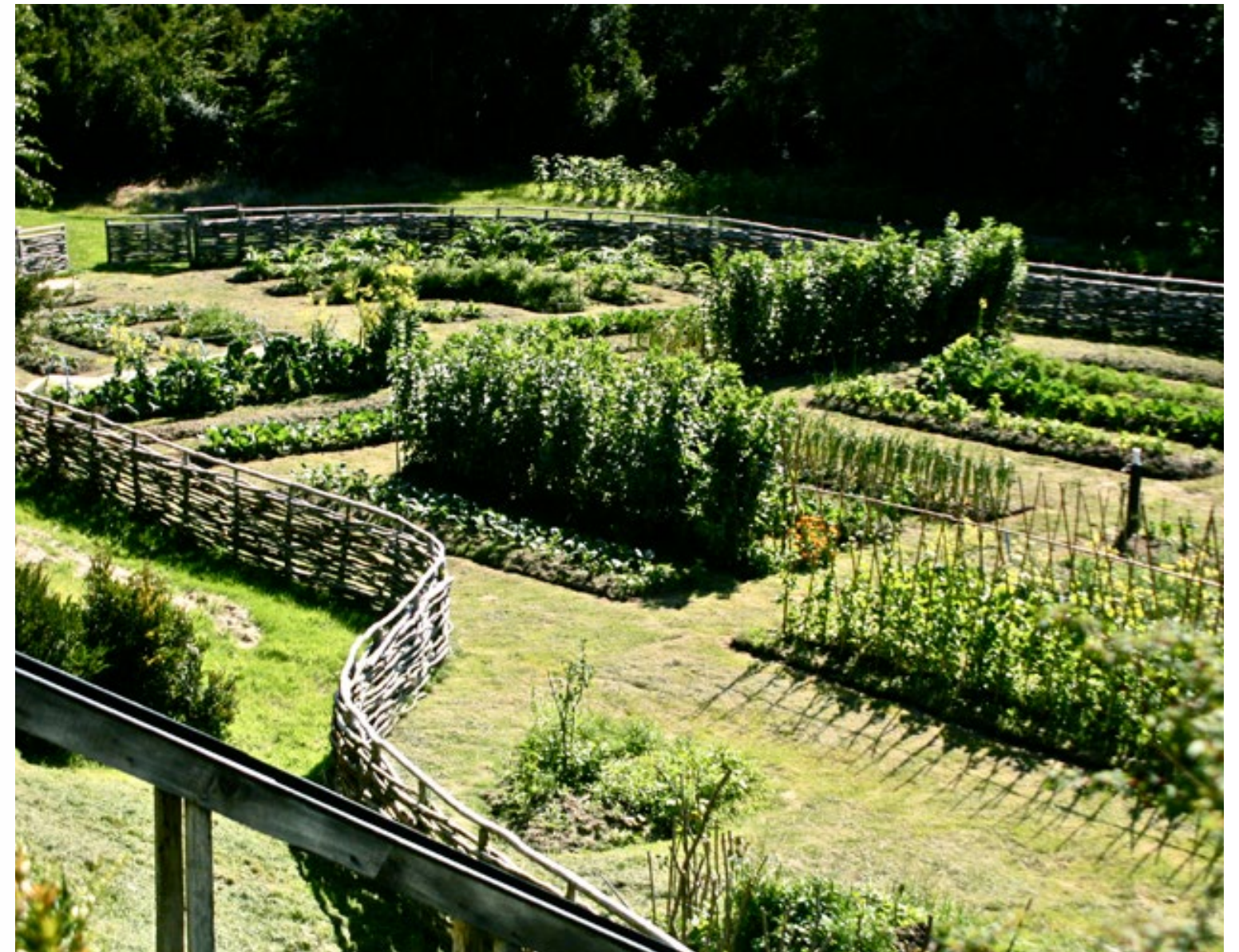






## Las Lomas Farm

This 234-acre farm has a beautiful vegetable garden that feeds the El Amarillo community and those staying in the various fishing lodges nearby.











# Río El Amarillo Farm

This 1,046-acre farm began its restoration process in 2003. Today, it's one of the farms with the largest number of top-quality prairies in the area, and plays a crucial role as a buffer zone between Pumalín National Park, the town of El Amarillo, and farms with more conventional production styles.







## Hans's Farm

Hans Shoepflin bought this 435-acre farm in 2013. The renovation process started in 2014, becoming a boon to the restoration of the river basin and another example of how farms could serve as a buffer zone with an ecologically sustainable approach.







*Pedro Asencio*



*Hector Müller*



*Myriam García*



*Zoilo Ampuero*

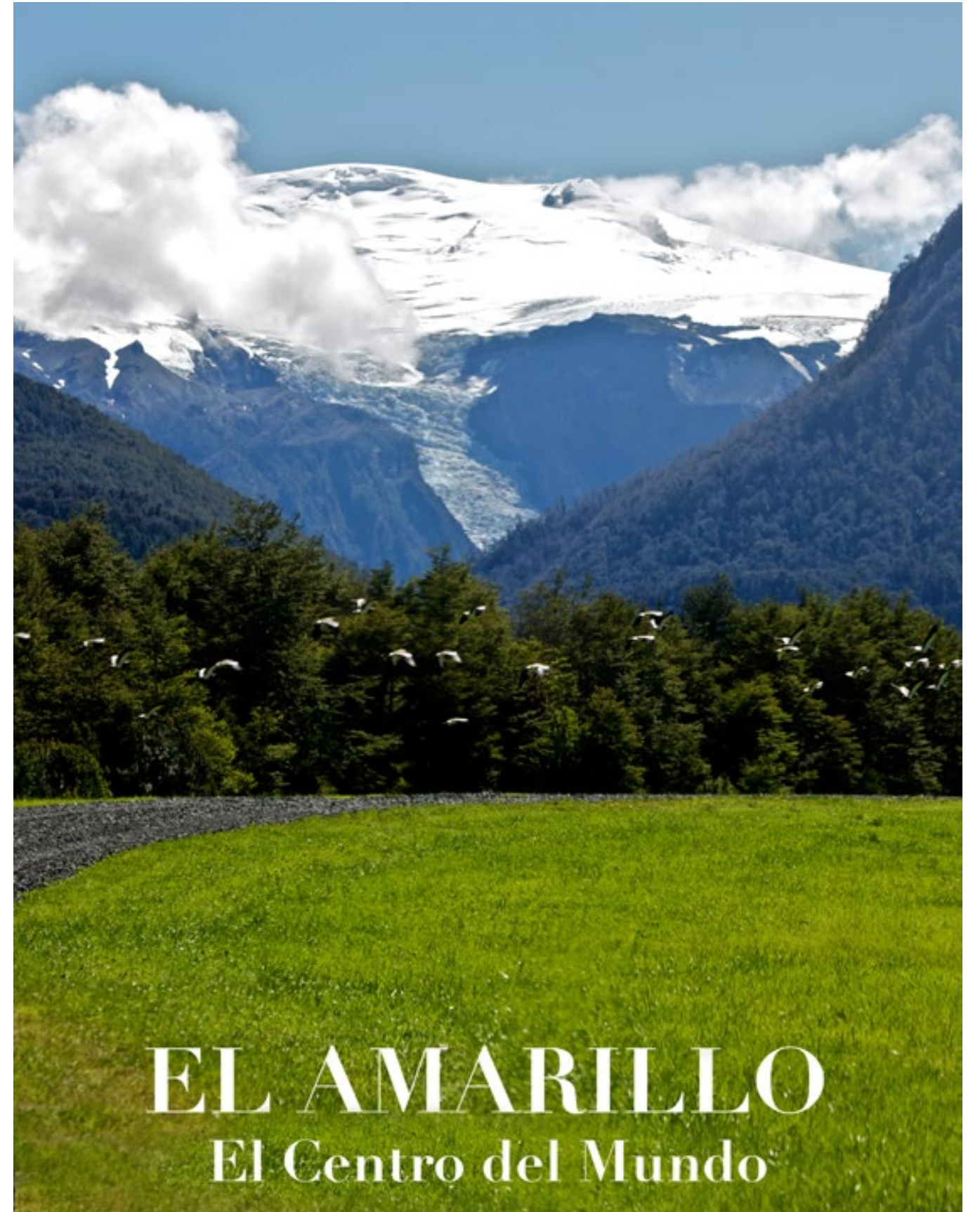


# EL AMARILLO

*A town just as beautiful as its surroundings.*

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**EL AMARILLO**  
El Centro del Mundo





*Thank you for visiting this charming town,  
the Center of the World!*

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