It's not easy putting architecture into words, but that's what entrants into the 2015 Warren Trust Awards for Architectural Writing were asked to do. They wrote about buildings and places that meant something to them. As this selection of ten of the best essays shows, inspiration came from a wide variety of sites: houses built by the writers' parents in Hokitika, Marlborough and Warkworth; a sports stadium in Christchurch and a food emporium in Wellington; a studio on a hillside in Lyttelton and a cottage in the grounds of hospital in Auckland; a war memorial in Berlin and an apartment building in Tokyo; and a grungy bathroom, somewhere in a New Zealand suburb.

New Zealand
Institute of Architects
Incorporated

10 stories: writing about architecture

2015

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Introduction

Architectural publishing in New Zealand is in a better state now than a decade ago, so far as books are concerned, and in particular books about houses. But, still, there aren't many people writing about architecture in a critical way, or even in a meaningful descriptive way. There isn't much of a tradition in this country of specialist architectural journalism, and more than ever newspapers treat architectural happenings as real-estate stories. Architecture, especially residential architecture, is regarded as a commodity and, unsurprisingly in these neo-liberal times, it's the financial dimension of architectural projects that arouses the media. That, and a good controversy about proposed development in affluent suburbia.

The paucity of informed architectural comment might be a legacy issue for the New Zealand media, but it is also suggestive of current media priorities. Serious consideration of anything is now a challenge. A focus on celebrity and trivia is aided and abetted by the merging of print, broadcast and online newsrooms: so much space to fill, so little time to think about what's filling it. However, even allowing for the absence of critical precedent and the increasing prevalence of tabloid values, it is surprising that the media by and large ignores architectural subjects, because the public seems to have an increasing appetite for them. How do we know? One indication is that politicians talk a lot these days about the quality of the built environment and about ways to improve it. Politicians don't discuss issues if no one cares.

The New Zealand Institute of Architects, the professional body that represents most of the country's registered architects as well as hundreds of architecture graduates and students naturally has an interest in commentary about architects' work. That is, the Institute would like there to be some commentary. Recognising it's not much use just bemoaning a situation, the Institute decided to do something to get people writing about architecture.

With the support of the Warren Architects' Education Charitable Trust ('The Warren Trust') the Institute in 2015 launched an architectural

essay-writing competition, soliciting entries from the public – including architects, academics, and tertiary students (the Open category) – and from high-school students. The set word lengths were 1500 and 1000 respectively. This may seem a lot of words in the age of Twitter, and that's also the point of the competition: it encourages writing that takes some time to tell a story, set a mood, and develop an argument. In short (well, in long), the competition seeks to promote the craft of writing, as well as the art of architecture.

Writers were asked to address the topic: 'Select a building or urban space you have enjoyed being in. What do you like about the building or place, for example, its design or layout, the way it relates to its setting, and the materials it is made from? Why do you think the building or space works so well?' Intentionally, the topic invited a personal response (which any of us can make), rather than a technical appreciation (which not all of us are equipped to provide). More than eighty essays were considered by the competition judges: architect Pip Cheshire, President of the New Zealand Institute of Architects; Julia Gatley, senior lecturer in the University of Auckland's School of Architecture; Jeremy Hansen, editor of *Home NZ* magazine; and John Walsh, Communications Manager of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.

Ten of the essays, including the Award winners in both the Open and Secondary School categories, are published in this book. Some are stories about buildings the writers know intimately, some deal with places the writers enjoyed at a particular time in their lives, and a couple record visits to sites that left a strong impression. As befits an elastic genre, the writing approaches and styles of these essays are all different, but what they all exhibit is a readiness to get to grips with the not-so-easy business of writing something that's not just meaningful for the writer but also enjoyable for the reader. 'Essay' is also a verb, meaning to try or attempt, and the writers of these pieces, and all the entrants in the Warren Trust Awards competition, showed a commendable willingness to test themselves. We hope they'll have another go at architectural writing next year, and that other writers will, too.

John Walsh
New Zealand Institute of Architects

Bush House, Hokitika

Craig Martin

In summer the neighbour's pigs drove my parents crazy and they dreamed of an escape from the flies and the stink. They had fallen in love with the West Coast on a South Island tour a few years before and acquired a madly cheap ten acres of cut-over bush south of Hokitika. They commissioned architect John Scott, who had designed their home and pottery/workshop in Hawkes Bay, to design a small cottage they could build themselves as a getaway.

My mother Estelle had boundless ideas and my father Bruce's usual role was to moderate and then implement them. They were a good team and achieved remarkable things through this combination. The Hokitika House is one of them.

I had been on the first South Island trip, my last holiday with my parents, when I was fourteen or fifteen. We visited some wonderful places: Punakaiki, Okarito, Gillespies Beach, the glaciers further south. When I returned a year or so later to prepare a building site in the newly acquired section I thought they were mad. The large trees had been milled forty-odd years earlier and the bush was slowly regenerating, but it was also riddled with gorse, as were the paddocks for miles around. Anywhere you cleared or scratched the surface new gorse would sprout. To my adolescent eye it looked like a mess and hard, thankless work.

John Scott designed a simple, two-storey cottage, with extra detailing for inexperienced builders. Bruce made a balsa-wood model of the studs, joists, beams and rafters to get an idea of how it all fitted together. He also bought an old Bedford truck to cart

our gear from Ngatarawa near Hastings in the North Island, to the section by Mirror Creek near Lake Mahinapua in the South. We drove in convoy in the family car and the truck, with a new coil required for the Bedford in Levin. The further south we drove the less traffic there was and the friendlier the waves from the locals.

Great architects should design small buildings because there they can show best why architecture matters, why design matters, why ideas matter. The bush house is shaped like many barns or farm sheds up and down the West Coast, with a pitched roof and no real eaves and added windows, but it is full of great design, of beautiful spaces, of textures and contrasts, light and colour – full of the essence of good architecture.

Most of the materials were sourced locally. The timber was from a small mill at Ruatapu a few kilometres around the road. The cladding is corrugated iron, which remained shiny and unpainted for almost decade. The windows, stairs and kitchen joinery were made by a joiner in Hokitika.

I was seventeen and between school and teachers' college. The 1974 Commonwealth Games were about to start in Christchurch. The weather on the West Coast was exceptional that summer with rain only once or twice in six weeks. We lived in a tent and had a long-drop in the bush and an outdoor shower. Power was connected to a builder's pole on the driveway but we had limited power tools: a Skilsaw with a cross-cut attachment, a drill and an electric jug.

We laid out the foundations before Christmas, finding the levels with an ancient dumpy level, and poured the concrete slab on Christmas Eve.

A surprising number of people called by for a look and to lend a hand. Fellow potter Peter Stichbury came while we were nailing in dwangs and renamed them noggins. More qualified friends helped sort the plumbing and wiring. School friends of mine came past in a hippie van and Estelle put a pottery-for-sale sign out on the road and sold the odd pot to passing motorists.

Bruce did most of the building with support from Estelle and me and, later, my brothers. Estelle also cooked, painted and provided safety advice while we climbed ladders or pushed up walls. I fetched and carried and held and nailed. I enjoyed working with my father; we are good problem solvers together.

After six weeks of living in a tent with my parents I had had enough. The roof was on, building paper wrapped the framing and the windows were about to go in. I flew out through Christchurch the day the Games started and back to my friends in Hawkes Bay. My older brothers helped get the house watertight and the interior was completed over the next year or so.

We notice our mistakes more than our successes in things we make. Some regrets take years to get over, like the lack of an electric plane to even up the house's floor joists before the floor was laid. But the quality of the build is much better than amateur and the building has warmed and softened over time. There are no architraves or scotias; the plywood lining fits almost up to the window edge or the end-rafters with a small gap of timber showing. This is a regular John Scott detail and gives the interior a simple but elegant finish. It also requires a degree of care and craftsmanship by the person cutting and fitting the ply because you have nothing to cover over the gaps.

John Scott's detailing and joinery add quality to the bach. By today's standards John was extravagant with native timber and much of the joinery is rimu and generously proportioned. Downstairs the floor is brick tiles with electric underfloor heating, and upstairs it is matai tongue 'n' groove.

Upstairs is a simple rectangular space with a living area at one end and a bedroom at the other, with a kitchen bench in the middle. Over the bench are open shelves and a glimpse of the stairs and the tall window below. The roof is gabled with exposed rafters and the ceiling is matai sarking. I remember nailing it on six metres above the ground using a chisel banged in the rafter to lever it tight.

The stairwell is behind the bench and the bathroom is on the landing halfway between the floors. Dividing the living area and the bedroom is a wall that extends from the landing to the roof. This wall is perfectly proportioned and is the work of an architect paying attention.

In my teens I built models of John Scott houses: my parents' house in Hawkes Bay, this house, the Brown house in Napier. I found it difficult to imagine the buildings in three dimensions until I made the model. I found it remarkable that Scott was able to imagine the spaces he was designing, the volume, the proportions. This is what makes an architect, of course, and it is what John Scott gets right in his buildings: space, proportion and size.

The bush house is compact and clever. The stairs at the lower level provide volume to the bedroom above, and the tall window at the bottom of the stairs is a delight, a favourite. The windows out to the bush are almost square and are generous. At tree height the birds come and visit, bellbirds and tui and a kereru that does acrobatics to strip the last of the kowhai flowers before starting on the new leaves.

John Scott suggested the colours of beech leaves in a stream for the cottage and so the bedroom curtains are red and primary yellow in the lounge. Yellow, orange and green trim is also used on the outside sills and flashings. There are other touches of colour, with hand-decorated tiles by Charles Holmes in the bathroom and an orange vinyl sink bench downstairs.

The house is a perfect getaway: it has everything you need for a holiday with added pleasure from the aesthetics. It is a place to read and write, to eat and drink, to listen to the rain or the distant sea polishing the rocks on the beach at Ross. After forty years the architecture is still fresh, the ideas and solutions still delightful; the wood has mellowed and the house is settled in the bush.

Kiwi-too Park

Geordie Shaw

In 1994 there was only one place any self-respecting East Christchurch kid wanted to celebrate their fifth birthday – and that was at QEII Park. We did not care why it was built (for the 1974 Commonwealth Games), who it was named after (local pronunciation rendered it to us as 'Kiwi-too'), or who the architect was* (or even what an architect was). What we did know was that this special place was a vast, otherworldly destination of unadulterated joy.

Tumbling out of Dad's van we'd race up the steep concrete promenade, past the curving stadium grandstand and into the shade of the pool's looming superstructure. Enormous red and orange ventilation shafts shot out of the ground and over the pool roof; ignorant of the need for building services we hypothesised that these tubes formed the adult hydroslides. Smaller green, blue and yellow pipes snaked along the corridor ceiling; we followed them past the big kids' pool until we burst into the party room. Chlorine hit our noses like a wave, soon to be mixed with the scent of cheerios and tomato sauce. We downed 7Up in white plastic cups while parents in brown plastic pool chairs watched on. Murals of sea creatures floated around the concrete block walls that enclosed the pool. Our shrieks and laughter echoed off the walls into a crescendo.

Later on the park would become our refuge from boredom during the school holidays. A gold dollar for the Red Bus to drop us off on New Brighton Road, and a few more coins from Mum in our pockets. These bought her peace and quiet at home, and hydroslide passes for my brother and me. Ascending the dripping flights of rubber-treaded stairs we would survey the swimmers in

the lap pool below. From the relative safety of the powder-coated steel balustrades we could just see through the foggy glazing to the green fields surrounding the complex. Foam mats clutched in our hands, we would launch into the hydroslides. Fearful of splinters from the thinning fibreglass shell, we stayed within the four corners of the mat. We'd urge the water to speed us along, chanting 'faster, faster' as we hurtled down the rattling pipeline. Tumbling around the corners, light strobed into the translucent tubes like the psychedelic tunnel scene from *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. The exit approached and I'd be spat out in a stream of water, body suspended mid-air, in weightless flight for several moments of ecstasy – enough to supply my legs with the energy to scale the tower of stairs back to the top once again.

Secondary school brought with it a further reading of QEII Park. It was now to be our amphitheatre for Athletics Day. We would arrive in droves, pack mentality to the fore, singular uniform exchanged for the primary colours of our respective Houses. On approach, the superstructure of the park seemed less colossal than it once was. A low-slung corrugate canopy was pulled upwards by steel threads stretching up to the pool roof boundary truss. The trusses swept across to the grandstand, projecting over the peeling wooden pews lining the running track. Here we'd assemble to watch our classmates emulate the past greats of school, country and Commonwealth. Track and field surfaces functioned as a palimpsest momentarily recording our gladiatorial feats, only for them to be superseded or forgotten by next summer.

By fifth form the isolation induced by an insular single-sex school meant I readily accepted an invitation from classmates to join their canoe polo team. Of course I had no interest in canoes or polo, and certainly not the two combined. However, the news that they had befriended a girls' team playing the same night at QEII each week was lure enough. Sauntering up the path with the team, we were greeted by a new white box. It protruded from

the side of the old pool complex, sutured perpendicularly to the repeating threadlike concrete columns. Gone was the foyer which carried the echoes of activities beyond; the entrance was now a mirage of ceiling panels and warning signs punctuated with vending machines. The dive pool, however, remained intact, its mirrored surface ready to be sliced by canoe and broken with paddle.

Alongside us was an imagined new Atlantis-like world for children to play in. Trompe-l'oeil shipwrecks and faux-aged columns abounded, all lacking the slowly acquired and wearied grace that was imbued in the old architecture of QEII. Irony sunk into my adolescent mind: on the exterior they had added an unimaginative box and on the interior an over-imagined, fully realised world, neither of which left space for an explorative imagination. At least the girls' canoe polo team proved interesting. Our newly formed group of friends conversed in the spa pool, the one addition I did welcome. Warm water jetted my spine as I assured myself I would never wield dull tactics and cosmetic pastiches against such a treasured architectural volume of memories. Long live the labyrinthine pipes and the theatrical spaces that led us in to the playground of my childhood.

*The late, great Peter Beaven, of course.

Heavens' Embroidered Cloths

Tessa Forde

It had a way of leaving its mark on you, the house at Lyttelton, holding on tight to the hillside (in case of a quake), somehow wild still against the rugged backdrop. If the idea of *home* was measured in sunrises, we hadn't seen many there but it felt like enough, like we were a part of the place, like our early-morning ventures to the top of the hill or our frequent trips to the local bars could justify our sense of belonging. And it welcomed a sense of belonging, it was *home* for a lot of people.

We found ways to leave our marks on it, too.

Michael found his way into all of it. The zig-zagging mahogany ceilings, the model shelf (paused in its falling), the brown carpet which didn't seem to make much sense until the sun started to sink and spill its gold light everywhere. I was in it, too. My mark was the scar on Michael's hand where the nail gun slipped and drew blood. I was in his crucifixion to the place, his blood on the framework.

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In Nepal, the sky feels small.

The Buddhist word for sky translates to *The Emptiness* (the fifth element of the universe, Nirvana, the letting go of all the world's accumulated suffering). Maybe it's the buildings, leaning in to the streets, like lovers do if they're sharing a quiet secret, or maybe it's the mountains, the Himalayas, stitched to the sky as if they were holding the world together, or maybe it was all the beautiful

suffering that made the sky shrink. All the beauty that comes with pain, and all the pain that comes with beauty, filling it up so it couldn't stretch anymore.

I was there in January. I wonder if it feels even smaller now.

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In Christchurch, the sky feels big and vast and empty. Like it's falling over the edge of the world. Lyttelton catches it like a bowl. From in the living room we were on the edge of that bowl, the view framed by the triangles of steel supports holding on to the roof, the ceiling dipping to meet them. Above the couch, butting up against the top of the wall, is a long thin window. It mounts the ridgeline behind like a painting.

The hills across the water always held a certain allure. (If you look at something long enough it starts to beckon to you.) The tallest, Mt Evans, was like someone we used to love, and could love again, if only we could get close enough. At night we would watch her silhouetted against a darkening sky, like the curve of a hip, or a shoulder turned away.

We climbed her one morning, after putting out our almost-declaration-of-love. The house looked small from the other side. The big piles and the black roof gave it the look of an insect, clinging to the tussock grass and dark stains of gorse.

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The guest house I stayed at in Pokhara wasn't finished. This was a common trend – the bases of the buildings were filled with people, and shops selling dusty bottles of Pepsi or bags of nuts or cigarettes or baggy pants. Above would be a construction site, the next floor up supported by hundreds of lengths of bamboo, with young shirtless men swinging out over the edges. In Nepal it seemed that a lot of the architecture happened by accident.

It was an eclectic mix of every form I had ever imagined. These painted pastel colours, lime green and pale pink, circles cut out of the framework, bricks shaped into small triangle holes. In the villages, narrow four-storey buildings stood lonely amongst the green, their balcony roofs held up by tree trunks painted orange.

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The bedrooms at Lyttelton are painted Le Corbusier colours. The back walls are pale yellow, pink and green (the blue is in the kitchen). The other two walls are oak and the room is closed off by a heavy tartan curtain. Closed, the room is like a cave, with two single beds and blond pine shelves for books and trinkets. Open, the room aligns with the window seat, the narrow wooden opening next to the window, the deep green hills, the land slipping away into the valley.

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My parents were in Vanuatu a few months before the storm.
Sometimes I worry that suffering followed us.

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I've only felt one earthquake in Christchurch. It was while the house was still being finished. We were sleeping on mattresses on the floor. It was summer but we'd had the fire going, using the top plate of the fireplace to make hot chocolate, drinking wine around it while the sky shrunk to black behind us. Lyttelton Port glittered. The house rolled with the earth. It seemed that we might just roll right down the hill and into the water. My uncle had described the bedrooms as being like cabins of a ship and it was at that moment that it made sense: the house was like a boat, swaying with the thick motions of tides and times.

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The majority of Nepalese people practise Hinduism. When someone dies they take the body to be burned at the river, laying it on the bank, wrapped in the richest of orange, bringing water to the mouth and toes. The family gather like white roses. They will wear white for a year, the colour of sorrow, and then allow colour (like little pieces of happiness) to slip back into their lives.

I imagine there will be a lot of white over the next few years, stark against the dusty streets. I wonder if there will be enough river to carry all the ashes, if the thick haze of smoke will be seen from space, tracing the water like a wall.

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The CBD in Christchurch is empty most of the time. The white chairs of the memorial still sit in their quiet rows, trying to remember. The big hollow sky could swallow you.

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I spent four weeks in Nepal, trekking, building, learning and becoming acquainted with some of the kindest, most hospitable people I have ever met. This essay is an attempt to weave the fabric of my summer together: Nepal and living in Lyttelton, in Michael O'Sullivan's house on the hill. The house became a home quickly, even more so coming back to it after Nepal, readjusting to the luxuries of a flushing toilet, tap water, the bathtub in the middle of the bathroom that looks out through the blinds and down the valley.

Nepal and Christchurch have since become connected in their own way. I felt uneasy in Kathmandu; I could guess at the damage even the smallest earthquake could do. I was used to looking out for it.

I was right.

I still haven't watched any footage from the Nepalese earthquakes. I can't bring myself to watch the place I loved crumble. When I heard the news I wanted to be at home, in Lyttelton, listening to the sounds of the port, lying on the carpet, watching the world keep going.

Michael had an inscription placed over the back door of his house (almost double-height, opening to a small deck with a low table). The words, taken from W.B. Yeats' poem 'Cloths of Heaven', read:

Spéartha Bróidnithe Éadach

Heavens' Embroidered Cloths.

He had built his dreams on the hill there. (We tread softly on his dreams.)

If the hills of Lyttelton are a laying down of Heavens' Embroidered Cloths, then the Himalayas are the stitching that holds the worlds together.

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Sometimes, night falls on you, quick and hard, but in Lyttelton it arrives slowly. It slips behind Banks Peninsula. The sleepers out the front of the house look like the back of a hand in the moonlight, holding onto its walls, holding onto us (the people who call it *home*). Nowhere can I feel the mark of Nepal more than in that house, watching the sea shift and change, watching the hills like old lovers. Sometimes you hold onto a place, and sometimes a place holds onto you.

It had a way of leaving its mark on me, that summer.

THIS ESSAY WAS THE WINNER IN THE OPEN CATEGORY.

Of the earth: A Portrait of Graeme North's House

Heidi North-Bailey

When I first saw our new house my heart didn't just sink, it capsized. *This* was to be our new home? Shipwrecked in the middle of a muddy paddock was a run-down, turn-of-the-twentieth-century farmhouse. Bare boards trailed the ghosts of once-white paint. Wind rippled under the peg-legged foundations. The house was placed oddly on the land, looking like an imposter even after almost a century of doing battle with the elements. Outside, a rotary clothesline stood jaunty, permanently buckled under the weight of years' worth of washing.

We picked our way over the cattle-ruined ground to the front door. The hallway loomed dark before us. Though well past the age when this was cool (I was eleven, my sister nine), we instinctively linked hands to enter.

The house was around ninety years old, Dad told us, as if that was supposed to make it any better. It had history, he said; people had lived, loved and died here.

So? we asked. We were deeply unimpressed, as only pre-teens can be.

'We've moved,' we told extended family. 'To Warkworth. It's muddy here. The house is down the end of a gravel road. There isn't anything here.'

We unpacked our rooms ('So spacious – and look at that kauri skirting, those kauri ceilings and doors!' Dad gushed) and went about the daily business of hating the house with great relish.

Quietly, with the patience that comes from being a solo father with two girls, our father went about rebuilding the house and

repairing the property. He sluiced out clay to make a duck pond and rerouted the guttering so the water no longer thundered down our bedroom windows. He sliced walls open and inserted large windows and skylights. He crawled under the floor to fix the rotten floorboards under the bath before we fell through.

Outside, mysterious piles of recycled 'building material', ferreted from here and there, grew under tarps buttoned down against the elements. Dad threaded poplar trees along the fence-line to shelter us from the driving wind. He installed an enormous wood-burning fire in the living room. And he built a ferro-cement composting toilet right down the back of the section, to give himself some peace.

Over the next few years he chipped away at the house and property. He would lock himself in the small front room to design aesthetically pleasing and interesting houses for other people, while around us the walls – with occasional help from his chainsaw – fell down. We spent time at dinner picking at the layers of wallpaper accumulated over the house's many years, taking turns to guess what colour might be underneath, what era it might be from.

'This isn't what I imagined when I said I'd move in with an architect,' our stepmother muttered when she moved in a year later, while pulling an undercooked and over-charred roast out of the ancient kitchen oven in which a previous tenant had tried, unsuccessfully, to fire ceramics.

My father is a passionate owner-builder architect. He was eco-friendly before eco-friendliness was a thing. He believes in being so connected to your particular place in the ecosystem, to your small patch of earth and its unique environment, that you should sculpt your dwelling out of the very ground itself. Dad has made earth houses in all their forms: rammed, mudbrick, cob, light earth, strawbale, in-situ adobe and earth plasters. He has received many accolades; an NZIA/Resene Research Award for New Zealand Earth Building Standards, a Commemoration Medal presented

by the Queen for services to New Zealand, a Winston Churchill Fellowship. And there's more, but, *ahem,* why were *we* living in the middle of a badly designed, oddly altered farmhouse? The bathroom was literally in the middle of the hallway. You had to go through it from the bedrooms to get to the kitchen. Having a shower – let alone a leisurely bath – was never a casual pleasure. We'd pick our side of the house and stay there till the person using the bathroom was done.

Perhaps this, along with poor shower pressure, was part of Dad's plan for dealing with two teenage girls in a one-bathroomed house. But, really, why were we living in this old farmhouse, run-down and resolutely facing west?

Money, that's why. Most people – Dad included – can't afford what they want straightaway. This house and property was seriously cheap. This is a skilled architect's gift: they can see something in nothing. In this broken-down property, Dad saw something no one else could see: he saw a home for us. He saw the rich, deep earth and the colour of the bricks which that earth would become. He saw the creek snaking around the edge of the property feeding a pond, with ducks skimming its surface. He saw the way the light could come through fruit trees, with plum blossoms glowing in the dusk. He saw the way the cattle-ruined ground could rise up to become gardens studded with old coloured bottles. And he imagined it all before anyone else could. He spent the seasons with his hands dipped in clay, building everything up from nothing.

Ten years passed. The hallway was an oasis of light; mud from the duck pond smothered the walls in ochre plaster. Vegetable gardens flourished. Matai floorboards were smooth under our feet. The oven was new.

Twenty years passed. Next to the old house, not replacing but complementing it, stood a new house, curved around the old one like a protective hand. Its French doors opened to windows opening to plants, trees, birds. Over the years, and in the course

of Dad's workshops for people keen to learn the craft of earth building, the clay from the duck pond had been sculpted into mudbricks to form an open-plan kitchen/living/dining area with a bedroom and bathroom tucked behind ornate doors discovered during a trip to Bali. Earth walls held old leadlight and art-deco tavern doors. Mud bricks propped up the wooden kitchen counter that Dad had rescued from being discarded as firewood. Branches from those very first shelterbelt trees became rafters holding up the draped-earth plaster ceiling. Like the beams in a wharenui they formed the house's smooth skeleton. Inside gardens grew pineapples, coffee.

And at the centre of it all, in a soft patch of late afternoon light, sits my father, in his lush garden. Feet resting on the warm, packed-earth floor – 'Dancers won't dance on concrete, but they will dance on this'. People who visit, and there are many now, making the pilgrimage to see this place, cannot believe how temperate the house is in winter, ringed as it is in curtain-less windows, or how cool it is in the Northland summer.

'It's earth,' Dad always says. 'It'll do everything you need. If you let it.'

People visit this house for its many technical accomplishments and quirks, but they love being in it because it is not just a house. It is the architectural history of my father, fashioned from the very earth he rests so lightly upon.

THIS ESSAY WAS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IN THE OPEN CATEGORY.

Slow Metabolism

Stuart Taylor

Commodity, firmness, delight. So go Vitruvius's commonly quoted standards for understanding and evaluating a work of architecture. From Palladian palaces to the contemporary Koolhaasian house, those three qualities are the ubiquitous and unerring indicators of good architecture. From time to time one term or another might be substituted out for a trendier synonym, but the equation remains as robust as ever. Meet these three criteria and you will have yourself an *architecture*; miss one, and you won't.

But can it really be that reductively simple to distinguish the good from the bad from the ugly? Call me blasphemous, but I have to disagree. Otherwise, measured against the ancient axioms, one of my favourite buildings is positively a dunger.

On a recent trip to Japan, I found myself in the unsociable hours of the morning staring out across a suspended concrete walkway, eleven storeys up, in the midst of a torrential downpour. Grinning like an idiot, and not wholly because of Japanese beer, I was on top of the world. The bridge connected the two towers of a unique example of post-war poptimist architecture – the Nakagin Capsule Tower, a gloriously eccentric conglomeration of vertically stacked cubic micro-apartments, resembling a low-resolution space station. A building that, due to its failings against the abovementioned criteria, is now dilapidated, practically vacant, and unnervingly close to demolition.

A few years earlier (in similar weather) I had been eleven storeys below, on an elevated walkway, capturing jaunty and angular student photographs of the tower's exterior. The building was notoriously difficult to access thanks to privacy concerns arising from behaviour such as mine, and was protected by an over-

zealous security guard who could bark ‘no photo’ and ‘get out’ in at least ten languages. I left excited but unsatisfied.

In the intervening years, the democratic wonders of Airbnb had upgraded my aspirations and I was now giddily drinking in a building that has fascinated me since my first year at architecture school when its image flashed across the screen in an otherwise wretchedly dull architectural history lecture.

In 1972 the young Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa completed an exceptionally ambitious residential tower in the affluent Tokyo district of Shimbashi. Kurokawa was a founding member of the radical Metabolist movement, which had sought to re-cast the built environment as a living, dynamic and ever-changing entity. Having been approached by a real-estate magnate who had seen his work at the 1970 Osaka Expo, Kurokawa set about designing the scheme that would become one of the only built examples of the Metabolists’ work. He presented a collection of cantilevering modular capsules, efficiently planned and interchangeable, that suggested a solution to the shortage of space in the city and to the rapid and cyclical nature of technological growth, which provided a means to respond to context in a novel and dynamic way.

Originally intended as an inner-city crash pad for the Japanese salary-man (who had more permanent lodgings in the vast and distant suburbs), the building realised a vision of the space-age future. Consisting of two concrete circulation towers from which 140 rectangular capsules cantilever in a rigidly randomised pattern, the building has the outward appearance of a giant Jenga set. Futuristic, state-of-the-art, striking and dynamic, the apartments were quickly snapped up by enthusiastic would-be residents excited at the prospect of owning an ultramodern unit that would be upgraded, updated and upcycled every generation. In line with the Metabolist narrative of growth and renewal, each capsule would be replaced every twenty-five years to ensure its hi-tech trappings never fell too far toward obsolescence.

What the residents got instead was a time-capsule.

A prohibitively expensive refurbishment process, sky-rocketing land values and a general lack of basic maintenance have pushed the Nakagin Capsule Tower to the precipice of demolition. Now, the building appears like a dilapidated, crumbling and tired fragment from a mid-twentieth-century imagining of what the future might look like. From the outside the large, dark circular portholes (one to each capsule) lack any sense of habitation, or are so crammed with discarded junk that the case for *commodity* (on the grounds of the building being functional) is a tough proposition. The smog-streaked elevations, weeping steel connections and sagging, asbestos-addled insulation suggest *firmness* might be out of the question, too. As for the elusive *delight* – although I was darting around like a kid in a candy shop, I felt I would be hard pressed to make the case that this tired anachronism is anything near to beautiful.

And yet... While the tower may not pay heed to more traditional architectural yardsticks, and despite its sorry condition, there exists the intangible sense that this building is really very special. Under the hi-tech tangles of electric spaghetti and the dank, mouldy façade is a smart piece of design that, but for the cruel imperatives of bottom-line economic drivers and an outmoded aesthetic, could well have provided an alternative vision for the twenty-first-century city.

The design is audacious. Deceptively simple, the capsules, in their scale, proportions and ordering, demand a clever working of overlapping domestic rituals. Slightly smaller than a twenty-foot shipping container, the interior includes a bathroom barely larger than an aircraft loo. Along one side a shallow cabinetry wall stretches the length of the capsule, containing day-to-day possessions as well as a rather dinky series of fold up, down and sideways hatches and a stunningly obsolete reel-to-reel tapedeck. A round porthole window dominates the remainder of the space, below which is the bed, the only soft surface in the space. The

almost ascetic result, while stark, projects that satisfyingly Japanese simplicity that masks the tortuously complex dance of concession and compromise required to make a condensed living space functional. For all the vogue of the tiny-house movement, the Nakagin is a master-class.

To me the most attractive feature of the tower lies in its temporality. The transitory nature of the occupants, or 'homo-movens' (as Kurokawa dubbed them), the cycles for the replacement and reconfiguration of the capsules, and the terminal status the tower currently holds project an almost biological quality to the observer. The building's growth, decay and impending death transgress against the core quality of firmness, or durability, and in doing so suggest a human sense. Its 'for-a-limited-time-only' condition, brought on by the threat of demolition, amplifies the tower's appeal and experience, as those lucky enough to 'see it in the flesh' are made to observe and appreciate it as a fragile and fleeting moment in the life of a larger built environment.

Oddly, the tower's demolition is perfectly natural, in the Metabolist sense that all buildings are subject to decay and eventual death. That is perhaps precisely why the Nakagin is so compelling. The controversy surrounding its impending demise imbues the structure with an intangible energy – a great gravitational pull. The suspended but imminent death sentence generates complicated emotions of longing, regret and excitement. To visit and experience a space before it is irrevocably committed to the annals of built history is motivation to better understand it.

Like many celebrated buildings (that coincidentally also fail the standard Vitruvian classification), the capsule tower attains its significance through the realisation of a far-reaching ideal. The tower stands as a reminder of directions not followed, and the potential of radically different environments generated by contrasting values and agendas. At the ripe age of forty-three,

and despite outlasting many other local buildings, the Nagakin tower is too young to be considered a candidate for a heritage listing that would ensure its survival.

I admire the Nagakin Capsule Tower precisely because it fails to tick the empirical boxes that would enable a more tangible reading of what makes a building good or bad architecture. It resists easy categorisation and keeps alive that magical, unknown quality that we constantly and hopelessly strive for.

Solid, useful, beautiful? Hardly. Crumbling, obsolete, ugly? Absolutely. And a bloody good building to boot.

THIS ESSAY WAS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IN THE OPEN CATEGORY.

Pilgrimage to the Past: The Treptower Soviet War Memorial

Ellen Ashenden

City of memory

Berlin: a capital city of destruction. Of layering and relayering, of memory, of reinvention. On arrival, the history smacks you in the face. Through the ritual procession of museums and memorials – the touristic 'must-sees' – you begin to disentangle its complexity, and tap into the rhythm of stories told in the urban landscape. It's a process all new Berliners go through – a baptism in situ and in knowledge. By understanding the destruction of the urban fabric and of society, you can appreciate the resulting simplicity of open space and liberalism. Partially released from history's shackles, you're now free to tune in to the city's paradoxically laid-back vibe.

If you're looking for big-name architecture, you'll find it in the role of facilitator of this baptismal process. Unwieldy history requires resolute architecture.

The convulsing form of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, its façade clawed away, represents the attempted shredding of the Jewish culture. The building's programme includes a room where you tread on ten thousand metal faces, and panic when the clunk of a steel door encloses you in a tower of eternal entrapment. In David Chipperfield's renovation of the Neues Museum, you visit not only to see the bust of Queen Nefertiti, but to run your fingers over the bullet holes left in the walls, a triumph of detailing. At the Holocaust Memorial, Peter Eisenman chose to bury the

areas of information below ground. Above lie row upon row of undulating abstracted coffin blocks, upon and through which, controversially, children run and play.

If you stay a little longer in Berlin, head away from the tourist trail. You'll find other intriguing places, the hidden gems – the kind you learn about from a seasoned expat over a Pilsner in a corner bar. And where we're heading for today is not on the typical itinerary. On TripAdvisor's list of 'Top Things to Do in Berlin', the Soviet War Memorial is number 20.

The pilgrimage

We head a little out of the town, about eight kilometres southeast to Treptower, a large, leafy park. In a city of three and a half million residents, we are deserting the crowds. The park entry is difficult to find, with no obvious signage. This is not a place that you could luckily stumble upon.

We pass through the weighty entry arch, sensing an appropriate time to step off our bikes. Walking through a long tunnel of shady trees allows time to shed thoughts of the city, and begin the immersive experience of the memorial. Two English tourists are alongside; one whispers to the other, 'This is the most sacred place for Russians, outside of Russia.'

The arch has twin entries off a parallel road, and both open out into a large circular plaza. At the centre, a huge statue of Mother Russia bows to the east, weeping for her lost sons. As in a church, we are forced to turn from these rear entrance doors, and face up the aisle. A wide ramp leads slowly up a gradual incline, past a line of willows, also weeping.

Next, a colossal gate, formed by two gigantic stylised flags, flying at half-mast. The gate is engineered from granite – Russian Red, smooth, reflecting the sky and the walls of trees around. Two soldiers, one young, one old, kneel down, supported by their automatic rifles. The monumental scale is more in kin with *The Lord of the Rings* than present-day Germany.

Enclosure and release. Atop the podium, we can now see across to our final destination: a bronze statue, eleven metres high, made even taller by its placement on a mausoleum at the top of a conical burial mound. This is Sergeant of Guards Nikolai Masalov, who apparently risked his life to rescue a German child caught in the crossfire. At this distance, it's hard to make out the details, but Masalov's head seems small and out of scale; the effect is odd and unsettling.

Before we can reach the soldier, we have to pass through a long low trench, larger than a rugby field. On either side are eight bulky white stone slabs, like stacks of coffins. (I wonder if Eisenman and Libeskind also came here? Or is a rectangular slab – the coffin – the universal abstraction of a human corpse?)

The sarcophagi each tell a story – war scenes are carved out in relief. We see air bombings, explosions and lines of soldiers in flat perspectives. A family makes its way through a forest, the father keeping watch while his wife clutches an automatic rifle, their young son ready with a grenade. On the front of the blocks are engraved letters in Russian and German, all forming quotes from one J. Stalin.

In the journey past the white slabs to the burial mound, my mind finds time to wander. I suddenly hear the sound of tens of thousands of leaves rustling past each other, glimmering, catching the light. I now notice the trees frame an almighty rectangular sky.

We arrive at the base of the circular hill. The stairs leading up to a mausoleum are narrower this time, and taller. From below-jaw view, the statue's head is now in proportion. Masalov clutches the child in one arm, a gigantic sword in the other; his left foot crushes a Nazi swastika.

From the anonymity of the previous expanse, we are rewarded with beautiful intimacy. The internal walls of the mausoleum are richly coloured and textured with small mosaic tiles: they illustrate mourners gathered for a funeral, at human scale. In the

centre of the room is a simple pedestal to hold a solitary wreath or candle.

Sitting at the top of the stairs, a guy in an NYC cap asks me, 'Why is it that whenever I try and photograph a statue in Berlin, the sun is always directly behind it?' Because the Masalov statue is set on an east–west axis, the sun rises behind the soldier from whence he came; sunset would glow red on his face.

On the way back to the entrance, we pause for reflection at one of the side benches. A group of girls have set up a fashion shoot in one corner of the trench. Two strangers have a polite yet determined discussion over one of Stalin's quotes containing the word 'Ukraine'. A teenager acts out a series of flirtatious poses in the foreground of the hero soldier – snaps no doubt destined for Instagram or a Facebook wall.

Architecture as narrative

Leaving the grounds, an information sign presents itself, offering the following facts: twenty-two thousand Soviet soldiers were killed in the Battle of Berlin, as the Red Army defeated Hitler's National Socialist regime in April and May 1945. Of those, seven thousand soldiers are buried here. During the whole war, more than twenty-five million people from the Soviet Union perished.

My understanding of World War II is formed by the retelling of ANZAC stories as a defining moment of my nation's identity, and by American movies and television series, leaving a void of this Soviet narrative. I realise that some visiting the site are on a pilgrimage, comparable to what a New Zealander might do on their travels through Europe: the beaches of Normandy, the poppy fields of Belgium, the cliffs at Gallipoli. Our war memorials seem somehow more humble, internalised, specific in name but forgetful in battle imagery.

The information sign declares that 'while the memorial's visual language seems overly dramatic in its symbolism by today's standards, it was the product of historical and artistic concepts

dominant in the Soviet Union under Josif W. Stalin'. Other references to Soviet times in Berlin have often been diluted or cleared away. Stalinallee, the pre-eminent avenue in East Berlin, has been renamed Karl-Marx-Allee. A nineteen-metre-high statue of Lenin was removed (although not by helicopter as depicted in *Good Bye, Lenin!*) and was buried, now apparently lost, in the forest outskirts. But at the Treptower memorial, while the German authorities are responsible for maintenance, they are not entitled to change meaning.

A memorial: a space to contain memory, so that we may be free from it in our everyday lives. In Treptower, what linger are the emotions of a former era: grief; adoration; gratitude; the sense of security imparted by forces bigger than oneself. Yet, with the benefit of retrospection, we can add reactions of unease, weariness, dominance. Should one scorn this blatant propaganda, or respect sacrifice on such grand scale? The Treptower memorial remains a fascinating entrapment of time, of political ideals played out in architecture, not yet repackaged for today's sensibilities.

At Treptower, the building blocks of architecture are not subtle and elusive, but instantly deducible by the untrained eye. Scale, sequence, form, light, materiality, texture, space, symmetry, rhythm, proportion, contrast, symbolism – the monumentality is overt and intended to overwhelm. I was left with a feeling of power, not so much in the might of the regime, but in the emotionally manipulative power of the architecture.

Beyond the Recipe

Sophie Hamer

We moved to Auckland in 2014 at the end of the autumn – the worst time to move to a new place, some would say, just in time to be trapped indoors. Better to wait for the spring. People think it's all excitement to leave home and live in another city, but in fact it is exhausting. Especially if you are an architect. Especially if you are an architect who likes to cook.

In Wellington, where I had lived for nearly all of the twenty-five years of my life, the weather takes pride in being bad, so the northern winter was a revelation to me. As the season grew deeper, we spent each weekend on our bicycles navigating our great new urban backyard, testing subtle brunch variations, sequencing our rest stops with public parks, and hunting out obscure houses in previously unheard-of suburbs. There was much to be seen, and the freshness of it all was exciting, but I remained unconvinced. When I ran into someone I knew, they would ask 'How do you like Auckland?' and then 'What do you miss most?' 'The waterfront,' I would reply quickly, and then, with greater conviction, 'Moore Wilson's.'

In this time of upheaval, I often thought back to 2011 when, having penned the last words of my master's thesis and finding myself one day with nothing further to write, and no job to go to, I walked across Lorne Street, through the car park and into Moore Wilson's Fresh. There, I stood beneath Dick Frizzell's billowing roadside-market-sign painting and bought fruit and vegetables I had rarely touched before: pomegranates; Jerusalem artichokes; celeriac. Seeing the world anew, I set about learning to cook.

Moore Wilson's had been part of my consciousness for some time – growing up in Lower Hutt I'd be taken along to the outlet

store there. Owned and run by the same family since its inception in 1918, Moore Wilson's is nothing short of an institution, even an empire. With humble beginnings as a bulk-food warehouse, the company now operates in four locations around Wellington, and there you'll find offerings from toys to fine wines to fresh produce. At the central Wellington location, new initiatives from rotisserie chicken trucks to instore cookery classes and a sushi hut are as imaginative as they are frequent.

In Auckland, the more I told people that I missed Moore Wilson's, the more obsessed I became with finding a replacement. Speaking, like drawing, is an action that has a strange way of ingraining beliefs in you, and if cooking had steadied me once, I wanted it to do it again. As the summer unfolded, I caught glimpses of the array of produce in certain parts of Auckland: in the carefully curated Nosh and Farro Fresh supermarkets and at the weekend morning markets. But the longer I searched for baby leeks and preserved lemons, the more I wondered whether it wasn't something more than just vegetables that I was missing.

In a country as young as New Zealand, it is rare that a building manages to be both iconic and a background to the commotions of daily life. Moore Wilson's is embedded in my mind as a microcosm of what it is to be urban – to be part of a community that is irrefutably linked to place.

Right now, the small part of central-city Wellington that Moore Wilson's reigns over is very, very good. To say it has been a slow process getting there would suggest a kind of aching that undermines the value of the layered processes of urban development. The Tory Street site has been reinvented through generations of ownership, and in response to changing patterns of use. In the spirit of continuity of relationships, it was only fitting that Athfield Architects was asked to reimagine the site some twenty-five years after the firm designed Moore Wilson's post-modern, earthquake-inspired façade. An instant icon, the block-work wall survives to this day, its great deep crack a

moment of mystery and respite among serious steel-and-glass neighbours. The iconic mural, which for a long time wrapped this corner with an array of typically New Zealand products, from Vegemite to Milo to the flag, quietly faded. Now, having been covered in a blood-red veil of paint, it has been archived in our collective memory.

On that post-thesis day in 2011 it was admittedly the proximity, rather than any iconic image, that drew me in. Occupying a corner site and spanning Lorne and College streets, the building, which is really three buildings over two levels interwoven with intricate vehicular passageways, seems to spurn any urban design rulebook. Rather than being carefully separated, cars, pedestrians, cyclists and delivery vehicles are placed in continual negotiation with one another. Ramps, bridges, lifts and stairs are required to navigate the site. Yet it is this series of urban design moves which connect ideas of openness, diversity and community to the physical realm.

The ensuing chaos spills out onto College Street which, heaving with traffic, has begun to capitalise on the energy of it all. At certain times, the dense smell of roasting coffee beans permeates everything. At others, it is difficult to move without bumping baskets with someone you know. The experience is one of an urban market, a town square after a community event. To further complicate the spatial arrangement, there is little distinction between front-of-house shops and back-of-house services. From ordering at the deli to parking alongside the Pandora bakery delivery van, the public brush up against the internal workings of the enterprise, trusted with its secrets.

When the reworked building was unveiled in 2009, it was clear that it was tough, but it was also generous. The low-slung steel frame permits sunlight to reach neighbouring cafés on the southern side of College Street throughout the day; the panelled roof cap projects out over the pavement to quietly announce its presence. On the ground level, a new informal covered laneway

invites the streetscape into the block and provides a clear meeting place. For a pedestrian in a city of largely impermeable blocks, this is always a relief.

Of course, the details of design don't often play on the mind of a shopper picking up a chicken to throw in the oven for dinner. For a demonstration of Wellington at its communal best, go to Moore Wilson's at 5pm on a weekday and stand against the wall alongside Paul Dibble's *Under the Harbour*. On the other side of the laneway, the floor-to-ceiling glazed interior is animated by shoppers with armfuls of fresh produce, families making their way around the central deli, young checkout operators nimbly keying item codes. To your left, people parade up and down the stairs, stopping to pat the dogs tied up at the base. Further around, where the carpark brushes up against the paving, aproned boys whisk trolley loads of goods from one place to another. And above you the space opens up to the volume of the second-floor covered carpark where women lean their bodies against the balustrades as they fill each other in on their week. Families meet, couples kiss, kids crash their scooters. If you stand there much longer, you'll forget why you came here.

I can only suppose that the designers of these spaces intended them to be so, or that they had so well learned the rules that they were confident in surpassing them, in mixing them in unexpected ways. To have a good palate certainly helps, but creativity, they say, is about going beyond the recipe. The joy, of course, lies in the irreducibility of the space. In Auckland, I have wondered whether perhaps a specialist supermarket in City Works Depot might emulate the Moore Wilson's experience. There are certainly shared genetics. But Moore Wilson's transcends being a brand. It is, firmly, a place, embedded in the urban consciousness. Beyond materials, entries and exits, and even beyond the quality of its produce, it creates its own atmosphere.

In summer, I went back to Moore Wilson's. It was more or less as I remembered it. I stood for a while by the Christmas lilies and

tried to separate the produce and the place in my mind. I bought a pomegranate and a freshly squeezed orange juice so I could hold on to the experience later.

Now, it is winter again, and in my memory, senses intertwine. The space is ripe; the familiar staff faces are like fresh loaves of bread. And as I think about making my way through the paved laneway, I can taste everything I have ever cooked.

Halcyon House

Steven Simpson

A building I enjoy is my home, Halcyon House. Referring to either a kingfisher or a time of happiness or tranquillity, this name expresses both a relationship with nature and the love my family share living in this building. My father, who had no previous experience of architecture or building with logs, has single-handedly designed, orchestrated and laboured on this amazing project. He is still completing much of the work himself, learning many new skills along the way.

The house is constructed out of Douglas fir trees. Each butt of the hand-peeled logs, which are approximately 350 millimetres in diameter, has been hand crafted and scribed to interlock, forming a shell of huge solidity. Although the logs were grown and pieced together in Geraldine, the plans and designs were entirely my dad's – he taught himself about log structures from scratch.

The northwest-facing Waikakaho Valley near Blenheim, where the house is built, ends in a striking, 432-metre-high hill. When I sit on our mezzanine, I can look through a large triangular window that has been orientated to centrally capture this view. I feel I'm looking for miles and miles across the landscape.

I love the cleverness of the design of our house, because it allows us to have large open rooms to be together in, while also creating quiet corners where we can each hide away. Even when we have guests, the layout means that everyone can still enjoy their own space. This seems to me to be the perfect balance; it suits the day-to-day routines of the household. The design is even more special on the outside. From everywhere I look all of the angles are different and they change when I move, like an optical illusion. Furthermore, in the future the house will have a 'floating

roof'. The gap between the ceiling and the upstairs truss windows will be glazed, creating a floating effect against the false purlins. At night, through these eight-metre-tall windows, you can see the not only the constellations but also the planets.

The roof structure is not ordinary. We have constructed it out of a 15-millimetre plywood base, followed by a layer of stronger roofing felt and then asphalt shingles. All combined, this creates a robust roof. Because of its forward-tilting prows and low eaves, the roof seems to be protecting us, providing a sense of enveloping. For all of the internal walls and ceiling, we have used standard four-by-two MSG8 pine with plasterboard. Also in the walls, hidden away, is a steel frame that interlocks the logs, enabling a central room with a tall ceiling.

My dad has been concerned throughout to create maximum insulation, using thick layers of Terra Lana sheep's wool. We used low-emissivity glazing, and another great feature of my house is that all of the main external doors lead into airlocks – little rooms designed to trap cold air and keep it out. This feature is something that a normal house does not have. Furthermore, because of the way the house is orientated, the northwest side is almost all covered in glass; there's not a single northwest facing wall without glass. Everywhere I look I can see a new view framed by the bifold windows and doors. When these are opened, the garden seems to be invited in.

In contrast, the south side of the house has no windows that reach ground level. The two wings of the house create a sheltered deck area, so that even when you imagine that it would be impossible to sit outside, you can, because the breezes that would usually be there are not. We can be outside almost all year round.

When we first saw this two-hectare block of land in this beautiful valley, we knew we could do something really special. It was always going to be so much more to us than a house. It would be a place in which we would feel secure and reassured, and where we could put down our foundations as a family, having

emigrated from the UK. I thought to myself that one day, when the house is finished, I am going to remind myself of all of the hard work and physical labour that has been put into my family's home over the years, because it all will have paid off in the end.

Most houses are just buildings, but our home has soul. This is not just because it is so photogenic, or because it looks so comfortable in its setting, but because it has been designed and built with love. In the future, I hope to become an architect myself. My dad has taught me to be bold in my thinking; and that anything is possible with hard work. I have watched our house start as an idea and then turn into a reality for my family to enjoy. I have seen the drawings, the foundations and the organic logs become a place where we can live together in a modern but natural home. I believe that architects can change lives through their ways of turning designs into buildings that connect to the people who use them. My family feels genuinely bonded with our log home. It has a character completely of its own.

THIS ESSAY WAS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORY.

White Gem

Matthew Connolly

In the midst of emotion, sickness, recovery and child rehabilitation is a tiny white gem. It sits at the bottom of the extensive gardens of the Wilson Home on Auckland's North Shore. This gem is a perfectly formed white summer house, located on the cliffs above the sweeping Takapuna beach. The purpose of the small building is to provide a retreat for families of sick children during their time of trauma as they navigate through rehabilitation and journey back to full health, often after a long and intensive illness.

In 1937 the Wilson family gifted their family home and thirteen acres of land to benefit the disabled children of Auckland, particularly polio sufferers, although these days the Wilson Home caters mostly for long-term injuries and illnesses. The property included the old homestead, amazing coastal gardens and the little white summer house. I recently experienced living in this summer house.

The Wilson Home's simple vision is to rehabilitate children. The Wilson Home Trust works for the greater good of the children in their bid for recovery – and it recognises that times can be turbulent for the families of the children as well. There are very few places for families to get a short break from the constant demands of the rehabilitation process. This is why the summer house is such a special part of the Wilson Home.

The summer house is located well away from the main buildings, within the heart of surrounding nature, with its pohutukawa trees, native birds and the roaring sea below. The building nestles snugly into a series of terraced gardens. As the approach path seamlessly rolls over the crest of the hill, the small structure arises out of the

landscape. The summer house is a small, white rectangular form with windows wrapping around each side of the building, which is capped by a beautifully balanced pitched roof. The repeating three-panelled casement windows create visually balanced exterior elevations. The building's purpose is as a retreat, and the perfect proportions visually calm any visitor. The simple white palette is immediately pleasing and relaxing as you walk down the shell path and enter through glazed double doors into this special space.

The one-room layout immediately evokes a feeling of lightness, brightness and simplicity – a feeling of summer. The room is furnished with cane chairs and a wraparound lounge suite that faces away from the rehabilitation centre above; instead it looks out towards the sea and Tiritiri Matangi Island to the north. When I was in this interior on a grey winter's morning, I experienced the way in which good architecture can influence your feelings and emotions as I was taken into a summer dream, well away from the action and emotion in the buildings above. There is a kitchen where you can make tea and coffee. All the elements of the building connect together to form an uplifting and positive experience in what is often a worrying and turbulent time for a family.

The summer house was built at the same time as the main homestead, in the 1930s. The summer house is simpler and does not include the neo-classical details and decorations of the original homestead. It appears instead as a simple weatherboard structure with a corrugated-iron roof. This architecture leads into the art-deco era in the 1930s and 1940s, which included repeating vertical details and simple square lines – the start of the journey to modernism in New Zealand.

My experience of the Wilson Home Trust's summer house has been captivating. It has had a profound effect on me personally. I'm very moved by the way such a small piece of New Zealand's historical architecture can take hold and send you on a journey,

leaving stress and trauma behind. The building is an example of architecture fulfilling its function perfectly while at the same time being a beautiful and balanced form. I believe that the impact of small, smart, clever design is much greater than large-scale development. As a budding designer and architect this is my goal: to design not just a building, but an experience, a way of living, a building to help the community.

This white gem is truly touching. It brings calm and peace to those in greatest need. You can sense all the good this little summer house has achieved over its long history.

THIS ESSAY WAS THE WINNER IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORY.

A View with a Room

Natalie Bradburn

A dusty slither of orange persists under the edge of my quietly mouldering curtain. It's the fourth time it's happened this week. A familiar charm disguises itself as an alarm, persistently vibrating on a stack of faded magazines. I am never prepared. I think that if I stay still long enough I might be able to hold the whole thing off, at least for another eight minutes. I think about the cold wooden floor, the distance from my bed to the door and how long it will take to make a cup of coffee. I should have left some socks nearby before I went to sleep. If only I didn't hate slippers so much. From my bed I can hear the faint sounds of the kitchen basin filling with water – Steven must be running late. I dissolve back into sleep. If only I had another hour.

Unwillingly, I sever myself from the sheets and tumble off the height of my bed. Surely that was only four minutes? I plant one foot before the other. It is just as I suspected; it is just like it was yesterday. Carefully I trace my way across the arctic landscape. Clothes from the night before map a route to the door, past a low-lying dresser, a shallow, peppermint-coloured cupboard and a white rimmed mirror. It is about eleven steps to the toilet from my bedroom, down the hallway, second on the right. It is a small house, and the laundry gets the best sun. There are three bedrooms, and one study which is only about the size of an office chair. We have a piano, two rugs and fourteen dinner plates. If you are in the lounge, you are in the kitchen. The sink is stainless steel and our cutlery doesn't match. I close the toilet door behind me.

I didn't see the bathroom before I moved in. As I walked down the street afterwards I thought how foolish that was. Surely

you can tell a house by its bathroom, by its most intimate and concealed acts. I would have turned around that afternoon if I hadn't already been interrupted by a second interviewee, bursting through the door with such certainty. She had golden hair, and sneakers that matched her tact: it was as if the room was hers, surely she had already moved in, she had lived there forever. I later found out that the bowl is brown, it's always been that way. Blistered enamel at the bottom, forever submerged in a shallow lagoon, is always the first thing you see. I've got used to it now, I barely even notice, and shrug when visitors do. There is a small cutout in the wall on the left-hand side with two and a half rolls of three-ply paper. There is a woven wastebasket just out of reach on the right, a small louvre window above the cistern and a determined plant resting on the sill, next to two novels.

The handbasin is in the room next door, about seven steps. An oval cutout, a rubbery plug and two stout taps frame the corner of the room. It is dark red and you can see the soapy specks of toothpaste on its surface. There is a window without a lock, a mirror the size of a wall and three small cupboard doors. Last time I checked the vanity there were a bunch of earbuds, a hairdryer and a collection of undersized glass jars. We have a small medical cabinet on the right, above the wooden towel rail and another wastebasket. The shower sits adjacent to the taps and is about a head taller than me. I turn on the small circular wall fan, and the plastic mixer tap. Everybody has left for work and I can hear the radio in the room across the way. There is a shallow pool of water in the stainless-steel base. That is always the worst bit, when you first step in.

We used to have a corner shelf inside the square shower, but one day it wasn't there anymore. I found it a few days after that, rotting on the deck. Maybe it was drying out, but I threw it out instead. No one has ever mentioned it. You have to be quite tall to have a shower at my place; we keep the soap and shampoo on the highest ledge. I would hate to see how dirty it is up there. There is

a navy blue mat at the foot of shower with wet imprints of those who got out of bed before I did. There is a small white hook on the left-hand side just past the shower curtain. It only works if you remember to put your towel there before you get wet, but I never do. I walk around four steps, to the back of the bathroom door. My towel hasn't dried since yesterday. I should put it in the laundry before I leave. The room has white walls, one light switch and two crooked shades. I open the medicine cabinet: a small collection of my things are placed on the top shelf. Two tubes of toothpaste, an old ream of floss and an outdated tub of face mask. It never seems to dry, this room, there is just not enough sun. There isn't much sun anywhere in this house, except the laundry.

You can't avoid looking in the mirror when you brush your teeth in my bathroom, even if you wanted to. Then I remember I haven't even made coffee yet. Coffee first, teeth second. I spit out the paste and run my face under the cold tap water. The room is dense, and it's hard to see. The steam has almost fully wrapped itself around me. I can hear the hum of the fan. It's how I start every day, except sometimes I remember to make coffee first. I spend about twenty-three minutes in total, not including the snooze. The handle to the door of the bathroom is chrome, it's slippery and sits higher than normal. At the time that I'm writing this I have lived in this house for a hundred and ninety-four days. I thought about how if I moved house again, I would check the bathroom first. I open the door and the steam flies out. There are seven steps back to my bedroom door.

About the Contributors

Natalie Bradburn is an architecture student at the University of Auckland, a student representative for the Student Architecture Network New Zealand (SANNZ) and a regular contributor to *Architecture NZ*. Natalie is about to undertake a thesis on the bathroom, with a particular research focus on the domestic toilet.

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Matthew Connolly is a Year 12 student at Sacred Heart College, Auckland. He studies design and painting, and is an aspiring architect.

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Ellen Ashenden holds a BAS and MArch(Prof) from the University of Auckland. She worked for several years as an architectural graduate and urban designer in New Zealand, and is now studying in Germany towards an MSc in urban development, focusing on themes such as densification and residential typologies, alternative housing development models, and the architect's role in the development process.

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Tessa Forde is in her final year of an MArch at the University of Auckland. Her thesis explores a new parliamentary architecture for Auckland city – a sincere proposition based on a satirical analysis of politics and media. A founding member of her high school writing group, 'The Rugby Club', Tessa wants to combine writing and architectural practice after graduating.

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Sophie Hamer is a practising architectural graduate, writer and architectural researcher based in Auckland. Alongside her role at Fearon Hay Architects, her personal work explores interdisciplinary intersections between architecture, urban spaces, art, literature and psychoanalysis.

Craig Martin is a teacher and former school principal who lives in Nelson. His parents, potters Bruce and Estelle Martin, built a John Scott-designed house in the late 1960s, and Craig has had a life-long interest in Scott's architecture. He is responsible for the website www.johnscott.net.nz.

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Heidi North-Bailey is currently enrolled in the University of Iowa distance writing programme. Her work has appeared in *Poetry NZ*, *Takahe* and the *4th Floor* literary journal, and she has recently published a book of poems, *Possibility of Flight*. In collaboration with her architect father, Graeme North, she is working on a book about natural material buildings in New Zealand.

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Geordie Shaw graduated with an MArch (Prof) from Victoria University of Wellington in 2012 and since then has been working at bbc architects in the capital. His spare time is spent with his wife and fellow architectural graduate Emma creating a radical renovation of their apartment inside a former chocolate factory.

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Steven Simpson is a Year 10 student at Marlborough Boys' College, Blenheim. He is very interested in architecture, and has been inspired by his father's construction of the family home in Marlborough.

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Stuart Taylor is an architectural graduate at Wellington practice Bevin + Slessor Architects and a design tutor at Victoria University of Wellington. A contributor to various design publications, he is currently working on online writing projects out of a Dixon Street shared studio space, and building a sauna in Central Otago.

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