

PROFILE

David WALLACE and Jorgen ANDERSEN of Arthouse Architecture

Justin Foote talks to Arthouse Architecture founding member David Wallace and director Jorgen Andersen about their shared passion for architecture.





01 Designed to maximise the beachside locale, this house comprises three linked pavilions

02 David Wallace (left) and Jorgen Andersen of Arthouse Architecture.

Were both of you born and raised in Nelson?

DW: No I was born and raised in Hamilton.

JA: I'm a Christchurch lad. Born and raised down there.

What prompted the move to Nelson?

DW: After studying in Auckland and a brief stint in Palmerston North I travelled around the US and Europe and then worked in London for a couple of years in the early 80s, before coming to Nelson after the OE.

JA: It was after I finished architecture school in Wellington. I was ready for a change of scale really after spending five years in the city and was lucky enough to get a job in Nelson for another architect. Thought I'd spend a year here doing that before moving on; that was eight or nine years ago.

David, how was it being a Kiwi kid working in London in the 80s?

It was a fantastic experience; bigger projects on an entirely different scale and much larger office of course too. I haven't been back to London since but I'd love to because there have been some amazing buildings built since then.

Was it a bit of an anticlimax moving from London to Nelson?

Not at all. When I came back to New Zealand I didn't feel the need to be in a big city and I

was looking for more of a lifestyle fit, probably the same reason why a lot of people come to Nelson. My partner was on a course down here and there happened to be a job going with Dukker and West and I got it and stayed.

Did you know from an early age that you wanted to be an architect?

DW: Yes, I decided in my early teens that I wanted to be an architect. I loved drawing plans and designing houses. I don't think I understood what an architect was at that stage, but yes, it was an early decision.

JA: I didn't. I was always interested but I actually did a lot of design and photography at school and I originally applied to the Christchurch Polytech to do a Bachelor of Design and Visual Communications but I didn't get in. Architecture was next on my list. Looking back now, I'm pretty well suited to it, so it worked out well.

Jorgen, what's the best thing about working with David and being a part of the Arthouse Architecture team?

David and I come from different generations obviously and we've got quite different ways of doing things. I think that's really been part of the key to our success. Obviously David has a wealth of experience to draw from, which has been very valuable for me and everyone else in the practice and he's a great resource for bouncing ideas and problems off. We're

lucky enough to have a good team that we can match the best people to the best projects.

So David, how would you characterise your personal architectural philosophy?

Fundamentally, I think it's about relationships. It's about developing a relationship with the client to ensure the design actually meets their needs and aspirations. It's ensuring the design has a relationship with the land; It's very important to me that it responds to the site and with the environment through the use of natural materials and by minimising the overall impact of the building. Then, lastly, it's very much about the relationship within the office, as well as the wider group of consultants and the building team.

And is that a philosophy that you instil company-wide?

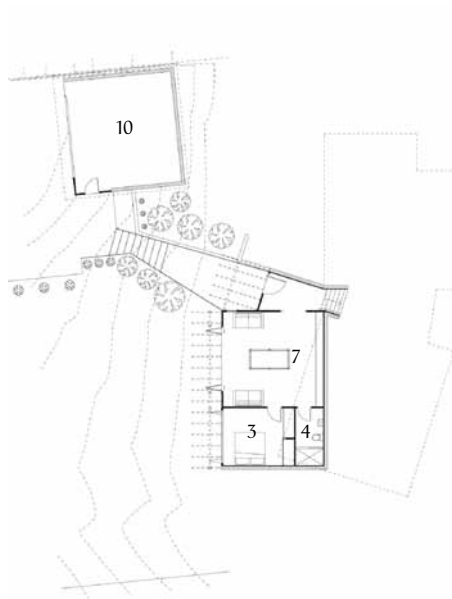
Yes, it is an integral part of the Arthouse philosophy but I also think that we've got a really experienced team of architects at Arthouse Architecture and so everyone probably responds to that philosophy slightly differently, which I think is a good and healthy thing really. We're definitely not a practice where there's just one design architect and everyone follows along, so there would be different interpretations of that philosophy amongst the practice but there is that underlying attitude through it of relationships. ►

Wallace Marshall HOUSE

• NELSON •

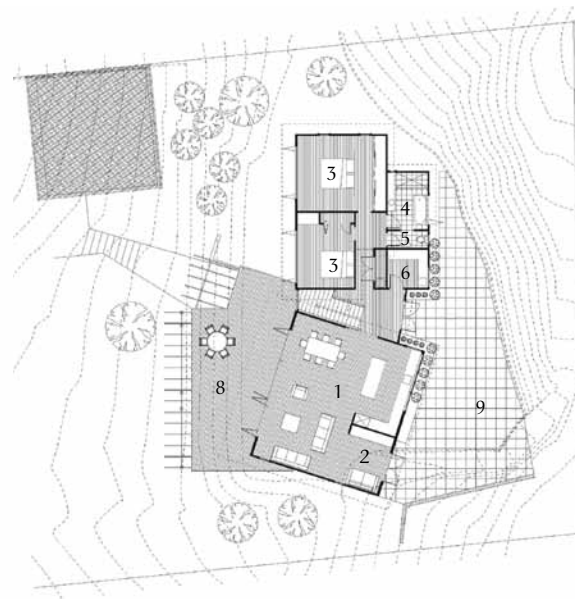
This house is about living at the beach. Sited on the hillside across the road from Tahunanui Beach it is comprised of three separate elements – a lower level self-contained space, an open-plan living area opening on to a large deck and a bedroom wing. The entry and stairway link the three elements and provide an entry journey, reminiscent of clambering up between rocks, to a viewing platform above. A kink in the plan creates a tension between the dominant single pitched living area and the lower slung bedroom wing. The consequent off-square deck, with its fantastic view of the beach, bay and beyond, adds to the sense of informality typical of life at the beach.

The house is designed to maximise winter solar gain with high levels of insulation while deep overhangs control summer sun. Dark stained weatherboards and generous openings carry the beach theme through from concept to detail.

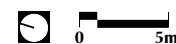


Ground floor plan

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 Kitchen/dining/living | 4 Bathroom | 8 Deck |
| 2 Library/TV | 5 WC | 9 Courtyard |
| 3 Bedroom | 6 Laundry | 10 Garage |
| | 7 Games room | |



Upper floor plan



The concept of lifestyle is central to our shared experience as a nation. At the moment though there's a lot in the media about high-density living being our future reality, essentially doing away with the quarter-acre dream. How as an architect would you sell that concept to the New Zealand public who may not, in the first instance, be open to that concept.

JA: Firstly, I don't know if I entirely agree that it's the total way of the future. I agree that urban intensification does help contribute to maintaining and developing vibrancy in city centres as well as providing an option for people to live in those locations who might not ordinarily be able to; which I think is of great benefit but I also think there will always be people that want their quarter-acre section or their lifestyle block. I think there will always be a place for that as well.

Does that mean we can still have the best of both worlds?

JA: I believe so but it's going to require some more thoughtful planning and discussion amongst a variety of sectors that are involved in making the decisions.

Do you see the architectural fraternity being a bigger part of that?

JA: I do. I think poorly designed intense urban structures don't add anything to that vibrancy and that sense of community I was talking about before. So while it's all very well to say yes we need to intensify and to do things differently and use land better, I think there's a good way to do it and I think there's a bad way to do it. Ultimately, I think the more design professionals you can get sitting around a table discussing how to do that, the better.

And do you, David, think that as a collective, or even individually, architects are in a position to speak to some of the issues surrounding these societal changes?

Absolutely and I would like to see us do that more. I'm quite involved in the local branch here and it's a discussion we have had. I think we could do a lot more speaking out locally about issues but we all get so involved in our own projects and we're all of us busy in our own lives and so don't do it enough.

Jorgen, as a Christchurch lad the effect of the earthquakes must be something near and dear to your heart. Putting aside the tragedy of that situation, are we faced with the architectural opportunity of a lifetime to do something really outstanding with Christchurch, in a modern context?

Absolutely, I think it's an amazing architectural opportunity. There's been a bit in the local media regarding the public backlash against the speedy, box-type solutions of some of the buildings that have been going up. I think there's definitely an opportunity to get creative people around a table and come up with a variety of solutions. It's a very complex problem and obviously there isn't an easy solution but I think people across the board need to be aware that what's being created now is going to help determine the success, or otherwise, of the city in the future. So yes, it's an amazing opportunity and, I think, one for which its importance cannot be overstated.

You mentioned a public backlash to the attempted speedy resolution of some issues; does that mean we're likely to see a sacrifice of form for function?

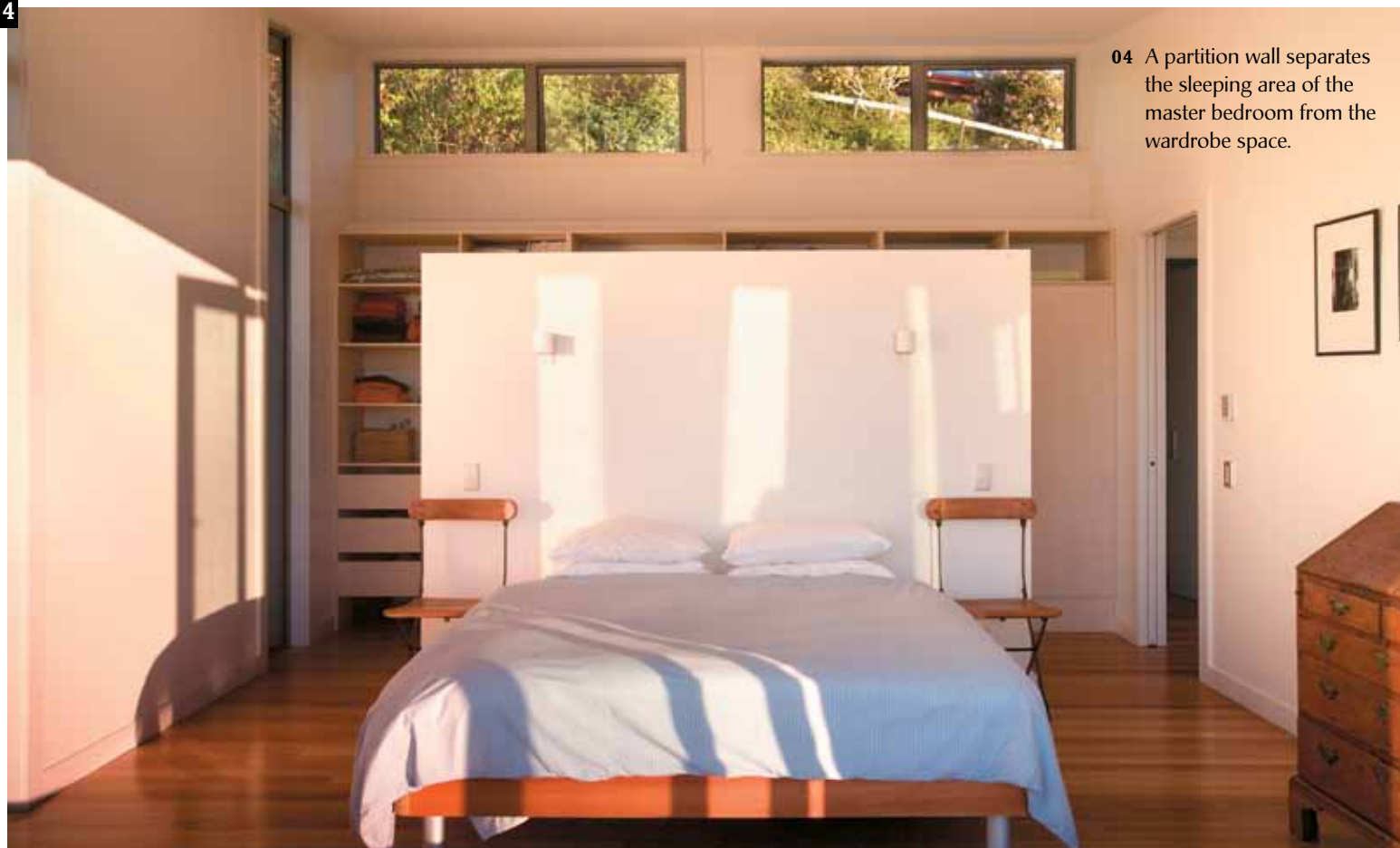
To a certain extent, yes. It's inevitable that there are going to be some things that have to be built quickly and cheaply and there's always going to be a place for that but I don't think it's a sweeping solution for everything in Christchurch. I think you can still build quickly and cheaply and have character in something. It doesn't have to be quite so brutally planned. It doesn't take a lot just to add a layer to a building to create street-level interest. ►

03



03 Deep overhangs on the north-facing facade help mitigate solar gain during the summer months.

04



04 A partition wall separates the sleeping area of the master bedroom from the wardrobe space.

05



06



05 Thermomass insulated concrete panels feature on the northern facade.

06 The mix of external materials helps break up the mass of the structure.

07 Ample glazing on the east and west facades admits plenty of natural light.

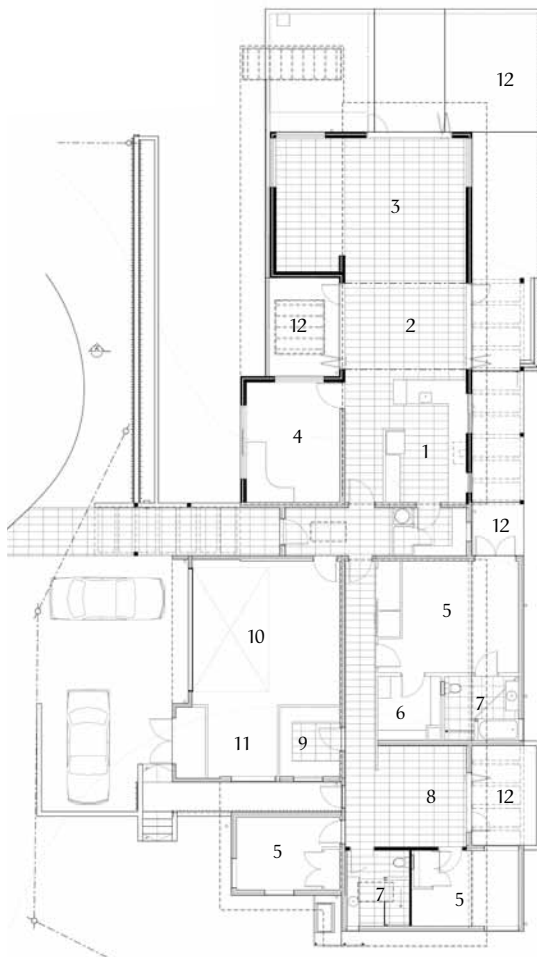
2009

Lobank HOUSE

• RICHMOND •

The clients wanted a house to retire to that would meet their needs for the next thirty years. A solid, warm, sunny, private and secure house was desired that would allow enjoyment of the adjacent garden. The house and surrounds also needed to be fully accessible to cope with the constant use of crutches and wheelchairs in and around it.

The design incorporates an in-ground rain water collection tank, solar water heating, in-floor heating divided into zones, and thermostatically controlled, full home automation including control of TV, radio, windows, alarms and garden sprinklers. Solid pre-cast concrete panels that are insulated, strapped and lined on the inside at the rear of the house will keep heat in. Insulated Thermomass panels at the northern end in conjunction with well positioned glazing will create a warm, light comfortable environment and allow connection from the living areas to private courtyards, terraces and the garden beyond.



Floor plan



- | | | |
|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 1 Kitchen | 5 Bedroom | 9 Laundry |
| 2 Dining | 6 Wardrobe | 10 Garage |
| 3 Living | 7 Bathroom | 11 Workshop |
| 4 Study | 8 TV | 12 Terrace |



So then, what are your feelings, either personally or professionally speaking, about the 'Cardboard Cathedral' as it's being termed?

I think it's fantastic. I studied Shigeru Ban at architecture school and am aware of a lot of the projects that he's carried out around the world. The cathedral is a great example, a classic opportunity to do something different and it's something that I think people will come to Christchurch to see and that's what we should be promoting.

If you were to design a building for Christchurch, would you do something civic or residential? How would you like your architectural input to take form?

I suppose, because I grew up in suburban Christchurch that's what I identify with and having been involved in master planning and urban design that's what I would look to do. I think a lot of what people coming from affected properties are going to lose is that sense of community. To be able to work at a macro level to create new neighbourhoods, as well as at a micro level coming up with individual solutions for properties, to create strong and safe communities again, that would be pretty amazing.

Okay, let's take a step back from the heavy topics and focus a bit more on some personal insight. David, do you still have fond memories of your first project?

Thinking about what I'd term my first real project, where I felt I had the control of things, yes. It was when I was working with Dukker and West and we built our own house; I certainly have very fond memories of that house. It was a great learning experience that every young architect should go through I think, designing and building their own house.

So you would definitely recommend having yourself for a client?

Yes. It's a great process to go through – a very levelling or grounding process to sort through some of those issues for your own house. Also, it's fun to experiment and push it further than you would with another client.

In that case, with the hindsight of 20-plus years of experience, do you think you would produce a better design for that first house today?

Yes I do. Architecture is a complex and multi-layered process and you're constantly learning as you mature as an architect. Don't get me wrong, I really enjoyed that house and while we don't live in it any longer, we had an ►



08 The house enjoys views out over the water from its elevated position.

09 A palette of natural materials has been employed on the interior.

2009

Spring Creek HOUSE

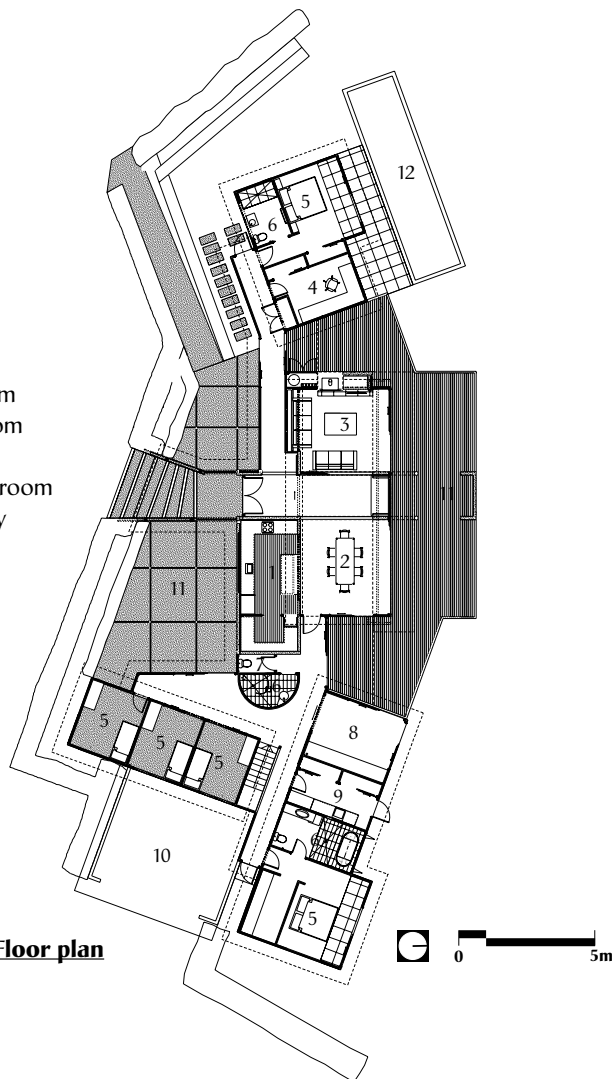
• MARLBOROUGH •

The site is a Marlborough vineyard bounded on the north by Spring Creek, a lovely body of gently flowing water. The clients wanted a house that would respond to the creek, the vineyard and the rigors of a young family in a farm type environment. They wanted the house to feel natural and modern, dynamic yet unobtrusive.

The concept takes cues from traditional Japanese architecture with interconnecting wings or pavilions set upon a rock base. The rock base, built up to the level of the Spring Creek stop bank, visually anchors the house to the site and allows for generous views over the water to the north and the vineyard to the south. The wings fan out to create a low lying form, unimposing on the wide landscape.

The spaces between the main pavilions create sheltered areas externally and playful connecting spaces internally. Large sliding external glass doors allow the main living pavilion to be completely opened to outside, while large sliding oak doors allow for flexible use of the internal space. The materials include exposed concrete floors and walls with cedar, oak and plywood. These materials have been left natural wherever possible. The concrete is heated by both direct sun through expansive northern glazing and from an array of solar hot water panels.

- 1 Kitchen
- 2 Dining
- 3 Living
- 4 Office
- 5 Bedroom
- 6 Bathroom
- 7 WC
- 8 Games room
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Garage
- 11 Terrace
- 11 Pool



Floor plan





10 Concrete floors act as a heat sink, helping to keep the interior temperature constant.

11 Three small structures are artfully woven together within a stand of totara.

12 Extensive decking allows for outdoor living and links the three structures.





2010

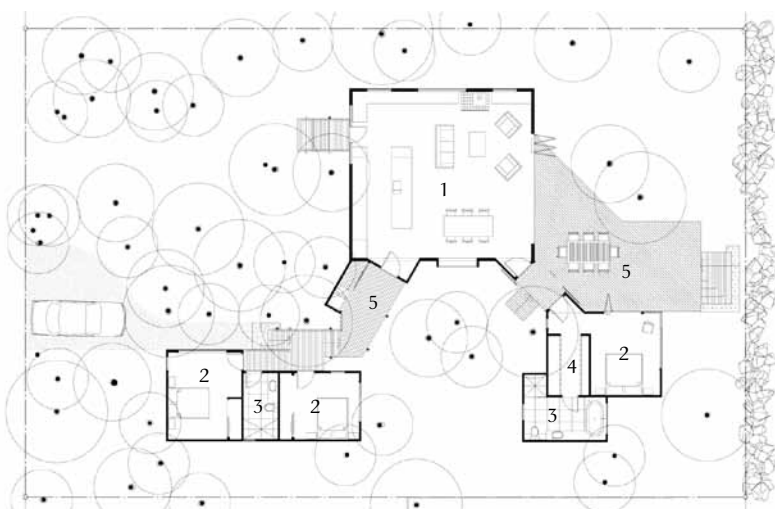
House in the TREES

• GOLDEN BAY •

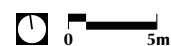
Protecting a rare stand of totara on a small coastal property, while providing a comfortable space for people within it, were the major design drivers for this modest holiday house. Lifted above the forest floor and tucked under the canopy, three small buildings linked by open but sheltered walkways step lightly through gaps in the trees, ending at the beach. The light and sun that penetrate the canopy reach deep into the rooms via high level glazing, and each module has two aspects: an exterior face looking out to views and sun, and an interior focused on trees and forest.

Clad in corrugated colorsteel, vertical board and weatherboard respectively, the buildings provide linked yet separate areas for shared and private living like three little baches hidden in the trees, sitting peacefully in the understory as the forest continues to re-establish itself.

- 1 Kitchen/
dining/living
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Bathroom
- 4 Wardrobe
- 5 Deck



Ground floor plan



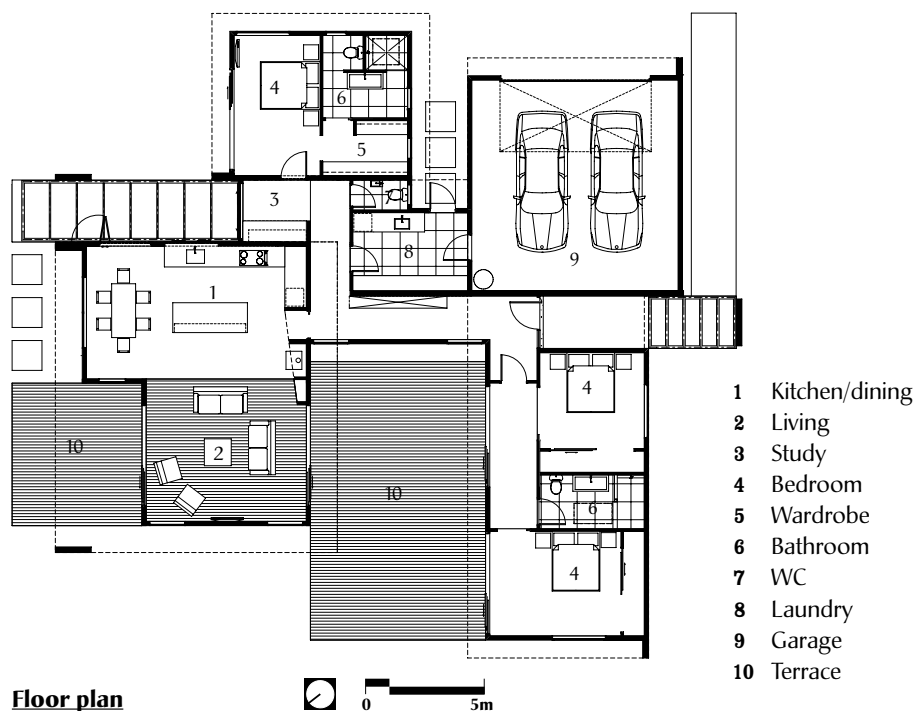
2011

Byrne HOUSE

• TAKAKA •

This new house on an elevated flat site is situated on a private section just outside Takaka. The contemporary house is understated with a subtle palette of natural materials including polished concrete, vertical shiplap Cedar, timber flooring and plywood ceilings. Designed as a series of three interconnecting modules (living, sleeping and guest) the house can easily be lived in by one person or a family of five.

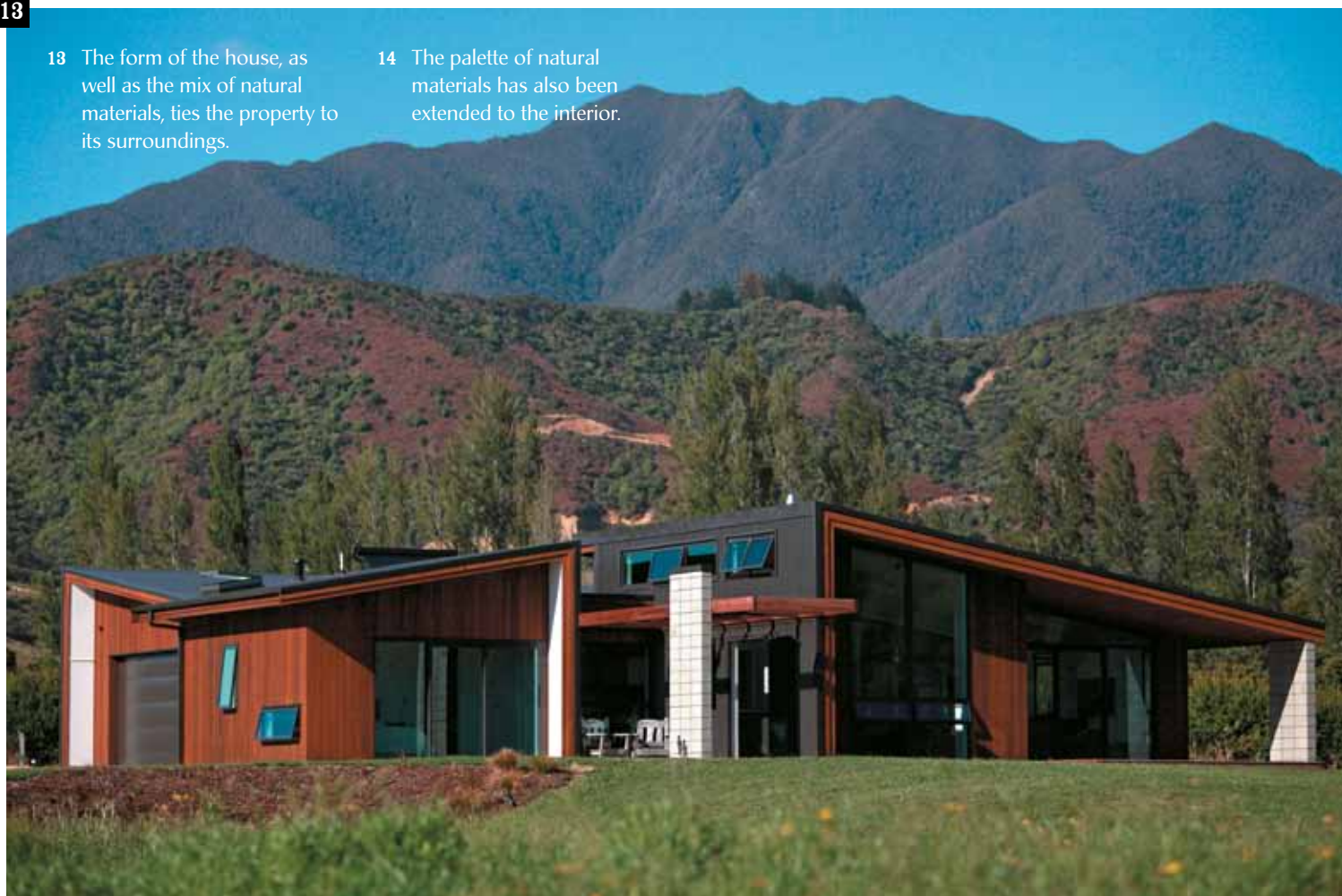
High ceilings that lead out to covered deck and terrace areas provide options for outdoor living all year round. Hot water in-floor heating coils powered by a low energy heat-pump in conjunction with a centrally located log burner in the living space will help maintain a constant temperature year round. The polished concrete floor and feature concrete block gallery wall provide a high thermal mass and high levels of insulation will keep running costs down. A mix of halogen and low energy LED lights, solar hot water heating and thoughtful orientation of windows and rooms all contribute to the sustainability credentials of this house.



13

The form of the house, as well as the mix of natural materials, ties the property to its surroundings.

The palette of natural materials has also been extended to the interior.





opportunity to go back last year and it was lovely to go into it again. It's a small house that is very modest in lots of ways but yes, I would do things differently now. In fact, we designed and built another house perhaps seven or eight years ago and that, I would say, reflects my development as an architect over that time.

Jorgen, is there something fundamental in architecture that you've learnt only since you finished university?

That there's a lot they don't teach you at architecture school (laughs). I guess probably something I've picked up from Dave that didn't get taught at architecture school is that a lot of it is built around relationships. You need to be good at your job, you need to be good at what you do but it's actually how you communicate with people and build relationships with your clients and other professionals in related fields that makes you a better architect.

Do you think there is a 'New Zealand architecture' or are we, as a young country, still borrowing ideas from other people?

DW: I feel really strongly – particularly in the last 20 years, or so – that we've developed our own sense of New Zealand architecture, in housing especially, with more of a Pacific influence. There's an increased level of interest in the design of houses, a lot of which has been driven by design magazines, however it's still that thing where we probably only design 5 or 7% of houses anyway, so it's only a certain market that we design for unfortunately.

JA: In a sense I suppose there is. I think it more relates to our role to take each project and design

it on its merits of site and climate and surroundings and brief and people. In Nelson, for example, we use a lot of natural materials and design for the sun and outdoor living, so in response a relaxed, natural aesthetic has developed, which is quite different to designing in Christchurch where it's a bit more modernist and clipped. I guess there is a Nelson vernacular inasmuch as I think it's quite relaxed but that could also be applied to other places with a similar climate and lifestyle.

So, what is it about really good architecture that gets your blood racing?

DW: I think it's when you walk into a building and the combination of space and light and feeling within hits you. It's something Pip Cheshire has talked about. It's that feeling you get, that's not present in the glossy magazine photo, but only when you actually walk into the building and you can experience it; it has an emotional impact on you – that's when it's fantastic.

With that in mind, if you could have designed any building, past or present, which would it be and why?

DW: Well the one that comes to mind is the Ronchamp Chapel by Le Corbusier, that had a huge impact. That feeling I got when I walked into that building – It was just such an emotional response.

JA: It's a close call between two but Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House is always one that appealed to me. Mainly just the way that he embraced new technology and new materials and managed to create a space that presented the personal expression inside within quite a structured and ordered framework of steel and glass. **H**

Arthouse Architecture

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Selected awards

2012: NZIA Nelson Marlborough Architecture Award 2012 – Sustainable Architecture; Victory Primary School redevelopment
2012: NZIA Nelson Marlborough Architecture Award 2012 – Public Architecture; Saxton Pavilion
2012: NZIA Nelson Marlborough Architecture Award 2012 – Housing; House in the Trees
2010: NZIA Nelson Marlborough Architecture Award 2010 – Residential; Spring Creek House
2009: ITM/Wild Tomato Architecture Awards 2009: Winner Best Home Over \$1 Million & Winner Best Eco Home; Lobank House
2007: NZIA Resene Local Awards for Architecture 2007; Windle House
2007: NZIA Resene Local Award for Architecture – Commercial/Industrial 2007; Woollaston Estate Wineries
2005: NZIA Resene Local Award for Architecture 2005 & NZIA Resene Colour Award 2005; Wallace Marshall House
2004: PlaceMakers Renovation Award over \$500,000; Eichbaum House

Projects

Wallace Marshall house 2005
Lobank house 2009
Spring Creek house 2009
House in the Trees 2010
Byrne House 2011

Photography

Portrait: John-Paul Pochin

Projects: Lobank house, Spring Creek house and Wallace Marshall house: Simon Devitt; Byrne house: John-Paul Pochin; House in the Trees: John-Paul Pochin & Paul McCredie