



## within limits

*Two tight inner-city sites, and budgets to match, posed challenges for Collective Architecture, a new Auckland practice.*

**T**wo contemporary houses from the office of Collective Architecture show how the increasingly restrictive regulations and constraints of tight sub-urban sites can still be interpreted and worked with to produce innovative and enjoyable living environments. The contributing factors and constraints the following two houses share are small, unspectacular, sub-urban sites, and construction budgets of around \$250,000. They were both designed to house young, growing families and to incorporate some flexibility of future changing function and use.

### Point Chevalier House by Carolyn Smith

The context for the design in Pt Chevalier was a 400m<sup>2</sup> rear, subdivided res. 6A site, completely bound on all sides by a very eclectic mix of suburban housing. What was

challenging about this site was the long and relatively skinny shape of the land, the unavoidable entry from the north-east corner of the site, the potential views of sea and reserve across and between neighbours' back yards, and a beautiful old weeping elm tree which was to be retained.

The brief required a spatially stimulating house which would provide comfort, light, privacy, outlook, connection with nature, thermal efficiency, a variety of sheltered outdoor areas, flexibility for future uses including space for creative play, music practice and possible home office/nanny or grandparent accommodation. A sense of character and subtle reference to the favoured future occupant pastimes of sailing and travel was desirable.

The design of the house introduces two dark-stained plywood-clad boxes which are linked by a narrow two-level steel-and-glass

TEXT CAROLINE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICK REYNOLDS



LEGEND

- 1 GARAGE
- 2 BREAKFAST
- 3 WEST COURTYARD
- 4 BREZZEWAY
- 5 EXISTING ELM TREE
- 6 NORTH COURTYARD
- 7 ENTRY
- 8 BEDROOM 2
- 9 BEDROOM 1
- 10 LAUNDRY
- 11 BATHROOM
- 12 KITCHEN
- 13 STAIRS
- 14 CELLAR HATCH
- 15 TERRACE
- 16 LIVING
- 17 DINING
- 18 HERB GARDEN
- 19 MUSIC/PLAY ROOM
- 20 STORAGE
- 21 BALCONY
- 22 ENSUITE
- 23 GALLERY
- 24 MAIN BEDROOM
- 25 DRESSING



walkway (brezeway) with a tension membrane structure providing shelter overhead. The positioning of the boxes and walkway creates a series of sheltered gardens or courtyards enabling a place in the sun (or shade) to be found at any time of the day. Large sliding cedar doors open on both sides of the walkway to allow the sunshine and breeze to pass through and create a larger outdoor space as required.

To maximise the amount of space and minimise the dent on the budget, relatively inexpensive materials were selected for the various surfaces required. Polished concrete was selected as the material for the entire ground floor, enlivened with pieces of blue glass and white marble to add sparkle and hint at seaside beach scenes. Gas-heated water pipes run through the floor to heat the house to a regulated level of comfort.

Stained grooved plywood was the chosen as the cladding providing extra bracing capacity given the high wind zone and relatively high level of glazing to the north and east. Zincalume was chosen for the roofing for reasons of appearance, economy and the versatility, including the ability to drape over shallow curves without the added expense of preforming.

Conceptually the house is about movement and the dynamics of spatial experience as one moves through and between the various activities and spaces. The aim of the design is to provide balance and harmony between the continuity of the overall theme and a playful sense of variety within the house and garden. As one moves through the house, the quality and character changes by way of shifts in detail, material, volume and colour.

The roof at the centre of the site over the stairwell lifts up not only to let in light from all directions down into the centre of the house, but also to provide a sense of spaciousness and volume not afforded anywhere else on the site due to the height constraints. During the summer months the bank of louvers at the highest level of the stairwell, remain open to create an effective updraught and constant flow of air to keep the house cool. The service







keep the entire house on one level. The obvious advantage of this was the ability to lift up the roof of the central living space, affording a generous sense of spaciousness and light not often experienced in the more typical cross-leased rear lot townhouses.

On such a small site the aim was to create as large a space as possible by an industrial-like approach combining as many functions into one space as possible. The large central space contains the living, dining, kitchen and entry functions. This main space is anchored at each end by fair-faced concrete block walls, punctuated to the west with a large fireplace and floating hearth, and to the east by two large oak cavity sliders. One door glides open to reveal the entertainment centre; the other opens up the passage through to the rest of the house. High-level glazing to three sides facilitates a continual play of light, in addition to glimpses of tree-top vistas borrowed from neighbouring properties.

The kitchen is located on the internal wall of the main space, forming the nucleus to the surrounding activities. The more reflective sleeping and bathing activities wrap around this main core with a lower roof structure adhering to the height to boundary restrictions. Each bedroom leads out onto an outdoor court/deck, thus enhancing both the physical size and nature of these rooms. Currently the deck beside Bedrooms 2 and 3 (children's rooms) forms an enclosed, sheltered and safe external playroom, with a large canvas canopy addition for shade in summer.

Both bathrooms are provided with abundant natural light through skylights, the main one borrowing the view of the trees from the adjoining property, emphasising an indoor/outdoor feeling in an uncluttered internal environment. The smaller bathroom has a translucent glass internal wall providing a lantern-like effect to the hallway while maintaining visual privacy. Solid plastered walls,

polished concrete floors and large expanses of overhead glazing give these bathrooms a confident clean feeling of volume that again defies the actual plan area of these rooms. Light and airy, the resulting environments are, at the same time, secure and private.

The colour scheme was again designed to enhance the character of specific areas while maintaining continuity of theme through the house. The exterior, reflecting the industrial nature of its neighbours, demanded a strong presence: the two tones of purple selected create a dialogue with the local industrial building types while also providing a complementary backdrop for planting and vegetation on a more domestic scale.

A mixture of smoky purple and green winds through the house picking out feature walls and recesses and further connecting through to the children's outdoor court. Children's bedrooms are fun and unpredictable, which provides an element of surprise and