



CORE VALUES

Surprises are in store when Lucy Barker visits Hamilton; photographs by Kevin Emirali.

Modern Italian. Modular. Industrial. These elements – and the flat canvas of a paddock in the Waikato countryside – were the starting points for architectural designer Noel Jessop when commissioned to create this Hamilton home. In his own words, Jessop “ran with the industrial” and pulled it all together with a flair that wouldn’t be out of place on the Continent.

A silver box of aluminium weatherboard at the heart of the house serves both as a structural reference for the other modules of the building, and as the functional centre of the home, housing the main living and dining area. While Jessop has stayed faithful to the modular aspect of the brief, the structure works as a coherent whole. Falling away from their silver axis point, the different modules of the house are united in their use of industrial materials – aluminium, plywood, concrete – and by their attention to linearity. The horizontal lines of the aluminium, the grid work of the concrete block wall and the silver lattice overlayed onto black plywood carry over onto the flooring, where large concrete slabs form little modules of their own. Boxes, grids, lines vertical, straight and intersecting give the house direction and levity, and none of the predictable weight and form that you would expect from a building of its size. In fact, it is not until you take a walk around the house that you get an idea of its actual dimensions.

This is a modular home that not only ties together aesthetically, but shows you its structural backbone. At the main entrance, four





pillars or “reeds” introduce the concrete block wall that pins the different sections of the house together along its north axis. The interior of the house, too, keeps in touch with its core. The block concrete wall guides the main corridor, which runs from the entrance way to the north end of the house.

“It’s a home full of light and glass,” says Jessop. Nowhere are these two features more evident than in the kitchen, living and dining space – the engine room of this industrial-inspired home. Massive glass doors form double-height walls at either end of the main living area, allowing the family to literally take in the view over the warmer months. The house was designed to capture the sun at all times of the day, while staying sheltered from the prevailing Waikato westerly, making for many a long summer evening in the kitchen courtyard.

The interior palette is grey, black and white – with a flash of red. A bank of white cupboards at the dining end of the living area disguises a well-appointed kitchen, boasting a red glass splashback. For a foodie family, Jessop’s design has allowed them to make the kitchen a feature without destroying the clean lines of the rest of the space. The kitchen island, too, has an element of surprise. Constructed of a milky glass, the island is underlit to illuminate night time diners.

While the owners wanted a large communal living space for family and friends to gravitate towards, they also wanted to make sure that

children and guests had the ability to peel off and do their own thing without disturbing others. Areas are divided up but still connected, to balance the need for private space without a sense of isolation. The stairwell to the master bedroom carries the owners up to their own personal area, but still allows them to look down on the kitchen and courtyard from a high vantage point. In the dormitory wing, family and guest bedrooms branch off a central aisle, linked by sight to the communal living space through generous windows. Different levels and ceiling heights delineate the separate areas of the house, from the soaring loftiness of the main family area down to the more intimately-proportioned “cognac room” at the northern end of the house, with its wood-burning fire.

Glass is not only used to mediate between interior and exterior environments, but also structurally, to play with the volume of the building. A section of the roof is held up by a band of windows, giving the impression from the front of the house that the roof is levitating.

At night, too, the house takes on another dimension. Strip lighting lining the arrival point to the house bathes the entranceway in a blue, ethereal glow. Uplights scattered strategically around the perimeter call attention to unexpected angles and aspects. Windows of all shapes and sizes, which during the day frame vignettes of the countryside, come into their own after dark. Long, thin windows in



the entrance hall throw fingers of light up against the central silver box, flaunting the different textures of the exterior. Set down a long driveway on a semi-rural road, "you catch flashes of the house through the trees" as you make your night time approach, says Jessop.

Despite its industrial emphasis, the house is clearly a family home, and is filled with touches that are generous to those living within. The downstairs shower has an entire tiled "room" to itself – just close the door behind you for a shower under the elements, thanks to a glass ceiling. The guest bedroom at the end of the dormitory wing has walls almost entirely of glass to soak in the view of the rolling countryside, Mt Pirongia and the Raglan hills to the west. Informal touches throughout the house, such as paintings by the owners' daughter, help to personalise the space. But it is amazing just how much personality the texture and subtle colour variation of the concrete block can contribute.

The owners take a real delight in their home – "Noel is a very clever man" is a common refrain. And they're not the only ones who think so. In the recent ADNZ Origin Regional Design Awards the house won the Kitchen and Interior sections, and picked up a Highly Commended in the Residential Section.



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Noel Jessop

CONFESSIONS OF AN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

"I don't really believe in dropping in a feature and building the house around it. I think that the whole house should be the feature." A novel approach when compared with the catalogue architecture of ever-expanding Hamilton. "A lot of these new subdivisions are being designed around a big feature, like a grand entranceway – something to make them look good from the roadside. But there is not a lot of consideration going on about designing for the site. I remember driving through one of these mass suburban sprawls and seeing a guy sitting in his garage with a beer, because that was the best place to catch the sun on a summer's day."

Noel Jessop likes his buildings to speak for themselves, something he has had to fight for in the more conservative Hamilton climate. His commercial clients have taken some convincing as well. "For the Winger Subaru building we had to contend with a rival car yard across the road, which had huge light box-style branding. We had to convince the clients that our design for their car yard would do all the branding for them. We wanted to create a building known as the Winger Subaru building, rather than simply slapping a sign on it."

Coming from a draughting background means Jessop has "a good structural knowledge, and the confidence to come up with innovative ideas and know that we will be able to make them a reality. I think it is better to show the client a design that you can follow through with, rather than having to back-pedal because your designs are not going to stand up. We want to present ideas that will work."

