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SALVAGING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

Renovating a home, especially a listed heritage home, can be a long and costly process. **Brenda Webb** talks to some of the local experts about their special projects.

Renovating heritage homes is about bringing them back to their former glory while adding the benefits of modern technology, says architect Simon Hall, from Jerram Tocker Barron Architects.

"Essentially we are caretakers of these houses. We need to regard them as multi-generational. Restoring heritage houses is about bringing them into the 21st century, but also retaining their character and preserving them for the next generation."

Louise Laird, who runs Nelson specialist renovation company Renovate Me with her builder husband James, says there are pros and cons with renovating as opposed to building new.

While renovating can be costly, it is

often impossible to find the large sections older homes occupy, and the houses themselves are generally spacious with plenty of history and character.

Most people undertaking renovations of Nelson's heritage homes say they are attracted by the character and driven by a desire to recreate the past. Builder Matt Thomas, of You Build, is enthusiastic about renovating old homes and the challenges they present.

"You have to be switched on and be constantly problem-solving – 'Where do you find this? Where do you match that?'," he says. There is a lot of research involved."

Nelson architect Justin Fletcher, of

Redbox Architects, says renovating old buildings is often more expensive than building new because there are many unknowns that can't be identified or quantified before tackling the project.

"It's often a labour of love. It can be a difficult process and you need to be very committed to it."

Arthouse Architects director David Wallace says his team especially enjoys the challenge of renovating heritage houses, such as a recent project in Albert Road, and at the historic Te Puna Wai Lodge. "It's a process of carefully adapting them to meet the needs of a modern lifestyle and seamlessly merging additions to match the existing character of the house."



“It can be a difficult process and you need to be very committed to it.”
– JUSTIN FLETCHER, ARCHITECT

Te Puna Wai Lodge

Restoring the majestic Te Puna Wai Lodge in Britannia Heights to its former glory has been a 20-year project for Richard Hewetson, who fell in love with the 1850s homestead at first sight.

“I bought it in a heartbeat,” he says. “I was drawn to the quality architecture, the exterior detailing and the setting, which is perfect. It has a grand vista, with Haulashore Island being the centrepiece.”

Richard had the house totally gutted, reclad with new weatherboards, insulated, re-glazed, re-did ceilings and floors, replaced French doors and sash windows and even had new matai floorboards milled and dressed.

The restoration was sympathetic to the original character of the house while installing modern systems such as radiators throughout to ensure it is warm. Kitchens and bathrooms were also modernised but kept in character by clever use of fittings and hardware.

Arthouse Architects Ltd director David Wallace says it was a courageous project undertaken by Richard and James. “The old house was in serious disrepair and the lower level was effectively rebuilt beautifully by Graham Snaddon and his team. Bathrooms and ensuites were carefully inserted into the house without impacting on the exterior. It is wonderful to see such an important heritage house restored and continue to be a well-loved home.”

Richard describes the renovation as taxing. “It was a hugely expensive and frustrating exercise – absolutely

exhausting at times. I had lots of meltdowns as things were so out of control and the financial pressures were huge,” he says. “But in the end it was immensely satisfying.”

Richard’s partner James Taylor, who joined him in 2001, says many cans of worms were opened during the restoration, which was complicated because the couple wanted to remain sympathetic to the style and use materials that didn’t look out of place in old houses.

“It really has been a labour of love – it was very run-down when Richard bought it,” he says. “The initial restoration took seven years but work has been ongoing with repairs, refinements and additions.”

Richard says the 160-year-old house, with its colourful history, deserved to be brought back to life. “Now I am prepared to let it go and my hope is that it will carry on for another 160 years.”

Wakefield Quay

Architect Justin Fletcher first saw Nelson’s historic pilot’s house 15 years ago. The Wakefield Quay house, with its spectacular position right on the waterfront, caught his eye immediately.

“I really liked it when I first saw it, and when it came up for sale a few years ago I bought it,” he says.

Built in 1842, the weatherboard house was in a sad state of disrepair.

“My aim was to move in in the long-term but run it in the short-term as a rental property, so I had to get it to a liveable state,” he explains.

Given that the house had heritage status – it was the original pilot’s cottage for the port – funding was available to help move the project forward.

First up were basics such as foundations – which the house was lacking – and giving it structural integrity.

“That led to an extensive refurbishment from the ground up, including heating and glazing,” says Justin.

Preserving the quaint character of the cottage was paramount, particularly in the living and bedroom spaces.

“We retained the small size of them but increased the comfort level.” Justin is delighted with the finished result, especially from the perspective of being able to put a contemporary feel on an historic cottage yet retaining the heritage aspects.

He admits it takes a certain type of person to tackle such a project and says support from local councils and Heritage New Zealand helped him to maximise the potential.

“It’s a risk for anyone who moves forward with these projects, so people who consider tackling a heritage renovation need to be aware of that and be very committed,” he says.



Photos: Todd Starr





Photos: Jason Mann

Bronte St

Using modern technology and systems, sensitively integrating them into the historical fabric was key in the restoration of a house in Nelson's prime heritage area near the Girls' College.

Architect Simon Hall from Jerram Tocker Barron Architects, who drew up the plans, says restoring an old house is a romantic idea and those indulging in such a project need passion.

"When you have a 100-year-old house with a whole lot of character and history you can't think about whether it would be cheaper to knock it down and rebuild," he says. "You would lose so much by doing that. You could never replicate the old craftsmanship and character."

The native timbers used in many of Nelson's heritage houses are now unavailable, says Simon, and for that reason alone the heritage houses are worth preserving.

The house has an intriguing history, having once been owned by Nelson mayor Henry Baigent, who was also a forestry magnate, hence the widespread use of native timbers.

At one stage it was converted into four flats.

The current owners completed an extensive renovation "from the piles up" and are delighted with the result, saying it flows much better.

A new gas boiler system was installed and radiators throughout the house provide warmth.

Simon says the key to the restoration was enhancing its character and not detracting from it, while integrating modern systems such as heating.

"The house had been altered over time and not necessarily in a good way, so our brief was to bring it into the 21st century using modern technology such as heating, insulation and glazing without disturbing the character."

Dealing with an older house can present unique challenges and Simon says there is a huge sense of satisfaction in seeing such a house reinstated to its former glory.

"Dealing with an older house can present unique challenges, and there is a huge sense of satisfaction in seeing such a house reinstated to its former glory."

SIMON HALL, ARCHITECT



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Photos: Todd Starr



Princes Drive

One of Nelson's first modern mansions, with commanding views over Waimea Estuary and Rabbit Island, has undergone a dramatic renovation. The three-storeyed 'Colonel's House' on Princes Drive was built in the 1960s, with extensive use made of Takaka marble.

Louise Laird, of Renovate Me, says the landmark mansion stands on an acre of land with spectacular views.

"It's not a heritage home like the ones in the Rutherglen area but it was built in the colonial era, has a lot of history and is very well-known," she says.

The house was liveable, but in pretty bad condition when the renovation began.

While the character is retained, everything has been renewed or replaced, resulting in essentially a new house.

Restoration has been sympathetic, with any joinery being replaced with timber and brassware fittings in keeping with the house's original style.

Internally, walls were removed to open up living areas.

Original rimu floors were sanded and sealed. Eye-catching features have been retained, including the striking iron balustrade, which was removed, resprayed and reinstalled. Likewise, original chandeliers and brass lights were refurbished.

Kitchens and bathrooms were modernised, double-glazing installed, the walls were re-insulated and a new roof put on.

"Everything is brand new but it's not extravagant. It has all been done extremely sympathetically to the character of the house," says Louise.

The project has taken just over a year full-time, and such is the painstaking nature of the work that painters have been onsite for eight months. "There is just so much square metreage." As is the case with most old houses, there were problems. The drainage caused headaches – a machine eventually had to dig down four metres to fix it.

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Brown House

The rebuild of an inner-city Nelson heritage building proved another challenging but exciting project for Justin Fletcher of Redbox Architects.

“The building was in a state of disrepair, with a lot of the finishing timber damaged or removed,” he says. “The client wanted to maintain the heritage character of the building so we prepared a design retaining the front façade but fully upgrading the rest.”

Typical of many older Nelson inner-city homes, the Brown House was long and narrow, and at one stage had been fitted out as a retail space at the front and residential at the back. With few original materials and features left, the house required a total renovation.

“We took it back to the framing,” says Justin. “Harris Builders did the work. The client had previously worked with them on another project.”

The client had been looking for an inner-city living space for

some time, according to Justin.

“He finally found this, which is classified with the Nelson City Council.”

Such classification meant certain features had to remain, including the front façade, which today sports a crisp and contemporary look with chocolate weatherboards, white window surrounds and shutters and an eye-catching, hot-pink panelled front door. Retaining the building’s historic references where possible was important and was done by painting wooden panelling and doors to give it a contemporary feel.

“Sadly there was very little of value left internally. It was more in the terms of detailing, so we picked up on that and gave it a contemporary spin with the reference back to the historic nature of the building.”

The house opens up to a courtyard at the back, with modern bifold doors allowing plenty of light in.

Inside, new timber floors are a nod to the home’s traditional past but the renovation puts it firmly in the 21st century.

redbox and Brown House:
a colourful partnership

Photo by Kate MacPherson Photography

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Photos: David Chadwick

Albert Rd

Renovating high-end villas is a dream come true for Matt Thomas, of You Build.

“It’s every New Zealander’s dream to fix up an old villa,” he says, adding that he grew up with his father renovating their house around him. Matt and his team certainly lived the dream with his sympathetic renovation of a 1906 villa in Albert Rd, and says there was a “real hum” when the project came together.

“We are in awe of this project. It’s been pretty special and the quality of the workmanship and of the fittings and finishing is quite amazing.”

The renovation consisted of a full interior upgrade, including double-glazing, installing radiators, a new kitchen and bathrooms.

“We brought it into the 21st century,” he says. “The clients and Arthouse, the architects, are incredibly happy with the result.”

Like all renovations, the project hit a few hiccups. The foundations were rotten in areas and piles needed to be replaced.

However, one up-side was that the native timber flooring was in top condition and was complemented by recycled rimu from an earthquake-damaged Christchurch house that matched the existing floor.

Matt says the finished house has a real English feel to it, helped by the clients’ use of top-quality fittings throughout, including tapware and a butler’s sink.

The property’s location was key, with spectacular views over Haulashore Island.

“It was wonderful working here, looking out to the sea every day.”

Matt’s company tends to do more renovations than new-builds, despite the fact that they can be more complicated, costly and challenging.

“A new house is a lot more simple for sure, but we love villas and love renovating them.”

Arthouse Architects Ltd director David Wallace adds that



attention to detail in the project was superb and helped retain many heritage features. “Albert Road is a beautiful old house but it needed adapting to ensure it met the needs of a modern lifestyle. The kitchen was extended to enlarge the living areas, a new back door and laundry created, and a new ensuite fitted into an existing bedroom space.

“The kitchen has become an integral part of the living area, the joinery was carefully designed to match the character of the house and the additions have merged seamlessly into the existing house creating a very liveable house.” **WT**

BUSINESS PROFILE

Back row from left: Chris Overmeer, Reuben Cossey, Matt Thomas, Francis Wierzbicki, Caleb Madsen, Nathan Tonk, Paki Matangi
Front row from left: Samuel Marshall, Allister Grew, Mitch Heywood



Rebuilding our housing heritage

BY MAIKE VAN DER HEIDE
PHOTO ISHNA JACOBS

Bringing Nelson’s oldest character homes back to life is a passion rather than a job for a team of Nelson builders, who spend their days saving and preserving the region’s rich European history.

You Build was established a year ago by Nelson builder Matt Thomas, and has already completed a number of renovations on some of Nelson’s earliest buildings.

While You Build also completes quality high-end new builds, Matt says his team of 12, which includes five qualified builders, four apprentices, a labourer and an office worker, was handpicked specifically for their skills and experience with working on older homes.

“Our team has a really big passion for heritage homes. A couple of our staff members have their own villas as well so it’s not just a job, it’s a personal hobby for the guys.”

Matt, whose experience includes residential building and marine cabinetmaking on multi-million dollar superyachts, has fostered a love of

heritage buildings since childhood, when he watched his father renovate their family villa – a decade-long labour of love.

It’s a passion that becomes important when faced with the challenging nature of restoring older homes.

Matt says not only are the original building materials harder to source and match to the original profiles, but renovators learn to expect the unexpected, daily.

“You need builders who are really smart and can tackle problems all day long. You don’t know what you’re going to get, so having guys who are comfortable in that environment is key, they work in that element and have a love for it.”

With the local building industry currently booming, Matt says there are plenty of new home builders available but the skills required to work on homes from times gone by are becoming “a lost art”.

Yet because land is at a premium in Nelson, people are increasingly looking to renovate existing properties, he adds.

“People are seeing the value in

renovating properties and people are fixing up what they have – it’s a bit of a New Zealand dream.”

Modern building systems and solutions means older homes can now be brought up to current standards and be as warm and functional as any new home, he says.

“A lot of New Zealand homes are cold, wet and dark, and a lot of these villas are in that situation, so it’s good to improve the standard.”

Before work begins, a You Build team member will assess the home with a project manager and suggest a draftsman or architect.

“Then they’ll work together to refine their plans and dreams and come up with what they want. From that, we will work out a fixed price contract but, as with any old villa, we have to be really careful because there will always be variations. That is why we recommend putting in place a contingency of 10 to 20 per cent.”

Matt says the extra effort of preserving any old house is always worth it.

“We really want to look after these character homes – we don’t have a long history, so we have to look after what we have.” **WT**

Contact

www.youbuild.co.nz
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