



# SMALL HOME REVOLUTION

*They're cheaper, more environmentally friendly and increasingly popular.  
Dionne Christian gets inside some award-winning small homes*

Throughout New Zealand architectural designers are finding a growing number of clients want homes where the floor plan is less than 150m<sup>2</sup>. *Defign*, the annual publication of Architectural Designers New Zealand, features winning designs and entries from the ADNZ | Resene Architectural Design Awards which now includes a Residential Compact New Home up to 150m<sup>2</sup> category.

ADNZ CEO Astrid Andersen says smaller homes appeal to baby-boomers who, having raised families, want to downsize as well as to new homeowners who want to get a foothold in the property market.

David Maurice, of LTD Architectural, designed the winning entry in the Residential Compact New Home up to 150m<sup>2</sup> with the "Duncansby Road project" on Auckland's North Shore. It involved designing – on a steep site – a simple but elegant coastal family home with three bedrooms, a bathroom and ensuite, a study, living and kitchen area.

"If you want to reduce the costs of a build, floor area is the first place to start," says Mr Maurice. "Make it smaller and then you can spend more on better quality fixtures and fittings, often using more expensive sustainable materials. It means, in some respects, you actually get more for your money.

"It then comes down to thinking about the way you live and drawing up a hierarchy of priorities so home-

owners can determine what's really important to them to have in their home. Another thing to consider is making a home more open plan. Once you put up walls to create separate rooms, you're basically creating boxes."

A builder turned home designer, Mr Maurice says the need to fit a greater number of homes into existing urban space, particularly in Auckland, means more marginal land is often being built on. The costs involved with the groundwork needed to make a site suitable, coupled with reduced section size, means smaller homes make even more sense of those types of ground.

The steepness of the Duncansby Road site was challenging in terms of creating a suitable living platform and it was necessary to minimise piling because of difficult ground conditions. He wanted the subfloor structure to be as elegant as possible given it would be very visible. Steel portals and cable cross bracing was used to form a rigid frame which was then in-filled with structural timber framing. Views out to the Hauraki Gulf are framed between a projecting deck and canopy which also serve to create a truly viable outdoor living space.

"Site orientation is very important to make a more compact home work," he says. "This building sits lightly on the sloping site, suspended above the contour allowing sun and rain to reach

beneath the building platform. In time, vegetation will grow below and around the structure, res-stabilising the site and allowing good permeability. The living platform will be suspended above lush, green coastal vegetation with expansive views to the Gulf."

Fellow ADNZ member Sheryle Williams, of SAW Design, faced similar challenges with site suitability and size when she re-designed a Wellington home all but destroyed in a fire. The charred remains of the original working man's cottage were moved offsite so a new home could be built on the section, nestled at the base of the hills of Wellington and just 6.91 metre wide.

There were strict town-planning, health and safety, and heritage regulations while the client's brief included easy access to water and an accessible means of escape from the upstairs bedroom. Having survived the terrifying experience, the owner wanted to "move on" by building on the same site a new home which was light, airy and modern.

It became known as the Phoenix house and, says Ms Williams, proved

to be an exciting and unique project to work on. While the building's footprint, and the envelop of the building, had to be "like for like", she could rearrange and update the interior assisted by the owner who had a flair for design and used splashes of colour, artwork and



more funky fittings to add character.

Ms Williams stuck to white walls and light-coloured floor coverings, saying the quickest way to make a small space look cramped and dingy is to use dark colours with little light. An alcove, skylight, French doors and windows were used in the living area to make it more voluminous while the kitchen area, altered to be more streamlined and practical, included a bi-fold window opening out to a cute courtyard peppered with bright coloured potted plants.

Resource consent was successfully obtained to add a dormer window to the upstairs bedroom while the stairwell, originally in the centre of the home, was moved closer to the front door. Ms Williams even created enough space to install an upstairs ensuite.

A floor plan of 150m<sup>2</sup> is palatial compared to the size of the tiny homes being designed by those keen to move into the property market in incremental steps. Permaculturalist and keen environmentalist Bryce Langston and filmmaker/photographer Melissa Nickerson are building a 15m<sup>2</sup> home which will be on a purpose-designed trailer meaning they can move it from site to site.

They also produce the webseries Living Big in a Tiny House which features other New Zealanders maximising their lifestyles by reducing the size of their homes – and, along with that, their mortgages. Mr Langston says the couple have done extensive research into the best materials for New Zealand conditions and are now in the process of sourcing these and building their dream home.

It will still have a bathroom, kitchen, living room, space for entertaining and a bedroom as well as fixtures and

fittings – water collection facilities, tanks, fireplace, composting toilet, solar panels and water heater, wetback, charge controller and batteries – so it can be completely off-grid.

“I think we have to remember it was only in recent years that people wanted bigger houses and expectations grew so homes included more and more. Before, we all got along quite nicely in smaller spaces and it’s important to bear in mind, if you have a smaller mortgage then you can have a bigger life.”

**“Make it smaller and then you can spend more on better quality fixtures”**



*Above: The winning entry in the ADNZ/ Resene Design Awards Residential Compact New Home category is the Duncansby Road project. Pics courtesy Defign.*



***Above: The dining and kitchen area of the Duncansby Road project on Auckland's North Shore.***

***Right: The Phoenix House in Wellington was built on a section just 6.91 metres wide.***

***Below: The bathroom of The Phoenix House.***

