



Essence Design-Winner of Wellington/Wairarapa Design Award

Cloe Willetts

Paraparaumu Beach architectural design specialist Robyn De La Haye of Essence Design has received an esteemed industry award, for the transformation of an old darkened warehouse into something out of pages of a glossy New York housing magazine. The Caretakers Apartment, an old 1950s warehouse and sewing factory located in Stokes Valley, won the Wellington /Wairarapa Regional award for Residential Alterations and Additions Architectural Design Award this month, as part of the Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ)/Resene Architectural Design Awards 2016.

The win is a first for Robyn, who opened Essence Design 12 years ago in Whitemans Valley, before moving the business to Woburn and eventually settling on the Kapiti Coast in 2009. Recognised for its uplifting design, which Robyn described as set with mood and drama, the Caretakers Apartment was built by Jamie Woodgate of the Kapiti Coast's Ultrabuild and painted by Mike Werry of Hutt City Decorators, with an overall project value of \$300,000.

The innovative space is now a permanent premise for Hutt City Decorators, who selected Robyn as their architect because of her 21 years industry experience and positioning as a professional member of ADNZ, with a Bachelor of Design. "The clients, builder

and I are absolutely thrilled," said Robyn, a mother of two, who also worked as an Interior and Architectural Designer in the UK during her travels. "The award was unexpected and against some very tough competition."

Having turned the heads of the judges for its "restrained palette", the design was described by the panel as a "celebration of the cross sectional volume and the industrial roots of the building". Robyn said upon first seeing the building, originally a lightweight structure, it seemed heavy and oppressive, notably lacking colour and orientation. "The brief required an open plan kitchen, dining, and living room, as well as one bedroom, office, two bathrooms and a laundry. "The original building was water stained, with dirty walls and dark painted concrete floors, creating a very inward-focussed space. Due to its South-East Facing aspect, it was cold and gloomy, with its large volume broken up with a steel structure of columns, girders and purlins. Now, the large amount of glazing allows the changing light of the day to filter into the apartment, creating atmosphere."

She said as part of the plan, the apartment needed to be fire separated from the warehouse storage facility and required a



separate entry from the rear, providing indoor-outdoor flow to the

proposed garden behind. Having discussed the issues of such a darkened space with her clients, Robyn noted the requirements of depth; including the enormous scale of the interior, large windows and dilapidated corrugated plastic to the gables. “We embraced the volume of the space from the outset and the idea was to have a stair leading up “Close to the southern boundary was an unappealing industrial building, so we made use of the southern wall for utility spaces and maximising insulation, with four skylights installed to transform the light quality of the apartment.”

Robyn, who works closely with clients and offers a full design service, has completed projects throughout the Greater Wellington and Wairarapa regions, including education work, commercial office fit outs, medical facilities and 72 completed house alteration projects and new housing. “It was an excellent feeling to be awarded for breathing life back into this dilapidated and forgotten building,” she said. “I’m passionate about quality design and love creating architecture that enriches my client’s lifestyle.”



Photos by Assett Imagery

