

# Small yet perfectly formed

By  
**Style**

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Mitchell Coll and Amy Douglas have always loved inner-city living. Before the earthquakes they were in Latimer Square and returned to Durham Street in 2013 while hunting for a central-city site to build on.

“We wanted to move back in to support the revitalisation of the central city and are really excited about what it is becoming,” says Mitchell, an architectural designer with a passion for building warmer, drier and more energy-efficient homes that will endure well into the future. “We liked the smaller sites on offer which meant we could afford to build something smaller, but of higher quality, while being close to everything that the central city provides.”

Their ideal was realised last year with the completion of two adjoining townhouses designed by Mitchell and built by Feutz and Goldsmith Builders, each a mere 74sqm, on a 300sqm Madras Street site. The couple live in the front unit. So cleverly executed are the townhouses, they took out the ADNZ Supreme Award for Architecture 2017, as well as the People’s Choice Award.

The minimalist Madras St elevation features a high gabled screen of rusted Corten steel punctuated with small, square windows that is inspired by New Zealand’s alpine huts, as well as the Brutalist and Christchurch Modern buildings of the 1960s and ’70s. Corten steel is designed to protectively rust as it ages, changing from orange to brown over time. “It’s

a maintenance-free material that wears in, not out,” says Mitchell. ‘New Denim Blue’ Colorsteel tray roofing clads the side of the house and was chosen to both complement the Corten shades and to match a popular choice in the 1990s-built townhouses around the neighbourhood.



Interior materials are equally robust and chosen for their sustainability and thermal performance to keep heating bills down. New Zealand pine cross-laminated timber (CLT) panels form the floor and ceilings and the walls are lined in pine ply. All that timber is alleviated with high skillion ceilings, flush-fitted LED strip lighting and an eggshell blue island bench with black exposed edges. Amy loves the subtle black accents throughout the house, from negative detailing on the wall linings, to tapware, navy tiles in the spa-like bathroom, and the balustrade on the stairs to the two upstairs bedrooms. Mitchell’s favourite design feature is the hidden flashings which allow steel to meet glass at the windows and the crisp line where Corten steel meets the sky.

The downstairs dining and kitchen level opens to large verandahs shielded by cantilevered roofs flowing to the landscaped garden. The section includes a large storage shed and two car spaces for each townhouse. Designed to maximise energy efficiency, sustainability and durability, the two-bedroom townhouses are aimed specifically at young professionals. Mitchell and Amy enjoy the easy access to work and the ability to easily explore what the central city provides. "Our smaller home means less maintenance, which frees up time to do the things we love," says Mitchell. Mitchell also wanted to futureproof the townhouses. The foundations are built in such a way the homes can also be relevelled up to 120mm by one person in less than a few hours, or units can be detached and relocated separately or easily reconfigured to create a four-bedroom home. "When building a high-quality building it only make sense to future-proof it against damage and allow it to be adapted to suit changing needs, as we hope that because it is of higher quality it will be around for a significant amount of time."