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FROM SPECIAL EFFECTS TO SPECIAL SPACES



Local designer's journey
from the movies to the rebuild

Nic Curragh's latest two projects – Springbank Downs House and Freemans Restaurant – are a little more on the traditional side for the local designer whose previous roles have included 14 years' designing and building special effects rigs and props for the motion picture industry in Vancouver, Canada.

But Nic's recent success through his local firm Objects Ltd proves his skill in the more traditional building industry is just as special, with the Springbank Downs House winning the Residential New Home between 150-300sqm Architectural Design Award and the Lyttelton restaurant taking out the Commercial Interior Architectural Design Award at this year's Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) Canterbury and Westland Architectural Design Awards.

SPRINGBANK DOWNS

Nic's Springbank Downs House is located in an expansive rural setting, which makes a big change for the owners – a young family whose Avonside house was red-zoned after the Canterbury quakes.

The clients, Graham Dawson and Kirsten Mackenzie-Smith, were good friends of Nic's "brother-in-law's sister Helaina Coote – so your typical Christchurch connection", he laughs.

"They had a reasonably concise brief with a tight budget, the latter being the key driver. They were looking for a compact house with all the modern spaces such as a media room, and scullery combined with heating conveniences such as hydronic underfloor, wetback and solar water heating.



"There was a lot – but we achieved it all within 198 square metres."

The "simple plan" comprises of two parallel pavilions, each containing the living/kitchen and bedroom/bathrooms, both linked by a gallery at the southern end which passes a media room and office/guest bedroom.

Formal approach to the house is via a long narrow deck that stretches to bring you in and increase anticipation of entry. Ground level south glazing on the gallery link provides the only transparency to what lays beyond.

Inside, floor-to-ceiling glass and large stacking sliders connect the main living areas with the sheltered courtyard. A boardwalk with pergola

above, parallel to the galleries, transitions the floor and ground levels and provides shade during summer.

There are vaulted ceilings in the dining room, generous spaces and a simple palette of materials with a lot of strong natural timber work within both the interior and exterior spaces.

Two large trapezoidal cedar window seats in the master bedroom and lounge are similar in appearance to those in a Halswell property for which Nic won the Residential New Home between 150m² and 300m² Architectural Design Award last year.

"I took the design of the Halswell windows and pushed the detail further, creating cantilever window seats," he says. "Geometrically they follow the pitch of the roof above and are angled 10° west from the gable. It's become a real feature of the house, but it gave the builders a few headaches," he laughs.

He has opted for a "pared back palette", sticking to just three materials within the building's exterior.

Judges described the design as having "exceptional details that lift it beyond the ordinary". "The offset pitches of the gables, the slanted and angled window

sets, the detailing of the balcony eave and the ceiling lights all contribute to a calm resolve and a wonderful sense of life."

Nic too is happy with what has been achieved. "It has come together really well. The home flows well, the light within the space works with the area how I wanted it to. I'm extremely pleased."



FREEMANS RESTAURANT

Located in the heart of Lyttelton's commercial district, Freemans Restaurant is a complex design, rich in detail, but with a restrained material palette which has resulted in a refined feel for the successful fine dining restaurant.

Freemans Restaurant survived the earthquakes, but was closed for more than 10 months before reopening on December 23, with the owners taking the opportunity to carry out alterations during the repair process, including expanding the kitchen.

Owners Nick and Sarah Freeman were close friends with Nic's sister Melanie Coote, and he was engaged to assist with the kitchen layout and restaurant fitout once the extensive building works were complete.

The project consisted of two phases of construction that worked around maintaining as much business continuity as was possible throughout the building process.

Phase 1 consisted of reconfiguring the

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Canterbury Rebuild, Canterbury

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dining area of the restaurant, which is organised to provide a series of differing sized eating arrangements (booth seating, table seating ranging from two to six settings). The key architectural feature for this phase is a bespoke and highly hand crafted operable cedar louvre wall.

Phase 2 involved extending, revising and maximising the bar layout, size and function to incorporate a small scale coffee roaster and bar leaner. This is set out in a subtle angular arrangement separated from the dining area by the cedar louvre. The folded plate steel bar surround and frontage forms the main structure for the entire bar.

"Both phases were time sensitive and had to be done quickly to minimise loss of business," Nic says.

At the bar, the client wanted greater capacity for patrons sitting at the bar, which was previously only able to operate as a servery.

"It was quite a tight space, so to actually achieve that was quite a challenge."

The cedar louvres were incorporated to break up the bar space and assist with acoustics, which can be opened or closed off to suit.

Judges described the finish as achieving a level of spatial intimacy despite the number of covers. "This is achieved through material, detail and successful planning that begins with the way the bar and restaurant are separated. Ordinary materials of a consistently high quality are detailed in such a way as to make them special."

While Objects Ltd mostly carries out residential work, Freemans Restaurant proves a talented hand is a talented hand, whatever the nature of the job.

"It's fabulous to be recognised at this level," Nic says.

"It really does validate the hard work I've been putting in since coming back from Canada, grafting away from my little home office. I was blown away by earning two awards last year, so I'm stunned to get another two this year.

"It's exciting to be playing a role in the rebuild. There's some fantastic work

happening, and over the next five or so years it's going to be a great city. It's a great time to be working in architecture in Christchurch."

Visit the website www.objects.co.nz
or www.instagram.com/objectsltd.

Sarah Rowlands Photography
www.sarah-rowlands.com

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