



Kowhai Cabin showcases efficient design

Karen Phelps

The Puke-based architectural practice MnM Design has just won two awards in the Taranaki/Whanganui/ Manawatu ADNZ & Resene Architectural Design Awards for a home using Passive House principals.

Located in Ohakune the Kowhai Cabin is the personal holiday home and office space of MnM Design directors Maurice and Marije Regeer and won the Residential Compact New Home up to 150sqm and also the Residential Interiors Architectural Design Award.

Maurice says the main aim of the design was to produce an energy and space efficient three bedroom house.

The 112sqm Kowhai Cabin is airtight making for a snug, healthy home. Maurice says the orientation of the home on the site was important to capture sun, which passively heats the home via concrete slab flooring and concrete tilt panels.

The simple rectangular floor plan also invites light into the house. Stored heat during the day is released at night from the concrete. Roof overhangs and sliding doors protect from the harsh winds and temperature shifts, common in Alpine areas.

During warmer times of the year the cabin opens up and interacts with the outdoors.

Maurice says the cabin was built as an experiment to find out if heat can be retained and then slowly released by optimising orientation, materials, insulation and applying specific membranes and heated only by the sun. The results have been impressive with the home maintaining a constant temperature day and night.

The home utilises natural materials that fit in with the surrounding landscape such as untreated Siberian larch cladding combined with charred larch in feature areas.

Clever features such as bi-fold screens cornering off the entry area when the house is unoccupied can be transformed into a lockable storage area or a carport to change spaces as desired.

Maurice says the home is a good example of MnM Design's focus on creating smaller smarter homes, something that clients are increasingly interested in.

Although MnM Design has built houses using

passive house principals the Kowhai Cabin has gone the farthest. For example the stud saver method was utilised so internal and external corners could be insulated. Maurice says he is convinced energy efficient housing is the way of the future and that New Zealand is experiencing a paradigm shift in this direction. "We have to stop thinking about just the initial construction cost of a home and think about the whole life cost of a home. It's not only about what it costs to build but what it costs to run," he says.

He points out that in Europe, from where he and Marije hail, homes come with a rating as to their energy efficiency, levels of insulation etc, which influence the value of the home. He'd like to see the same thing in New Zealand.

Both Maurice and Marije studied in The Netherlands and gained work experience at leading architectural offices. Before opening MnM Design Ltd in 2009, they both worked in a New Zealand practice to gain the necessary skills to open their own business. Their practice has previously won a number of regional ADNZ Design Awards and made it to the national finals several times.

MnM Design takes on projects throughout New Zealand and is currently working on homes for clients in Te Puke, Wanaka and Ohakune, that will incorporate Passive House design principals.

"Winning the awards was a huge recognition and we value it highly. It really showcases what is possible when it comes to energy and space-efficient design."



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