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WAITANGI GATEWAY

“Staff at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds now have the space and facilities to welcome and engage with every visitor individually,” commented Waitangi National Trust CEO Jeanette Richardson following the official opening on Waitangi Day 2010 of the new ‘Gateway’ Reception Centre.

This ‘space’ was designed to reflect the historic significance of the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, for both Maori and Pakeha, with the combination of steel and timber in the construction representing the blend of the two cultures. It is literally a gateway to the historical and cultural journey through the grounds, a portal from the carpark through which visitors are drawn into the surrounding bush beyond.

Early in the design programme it was agreed that the building would have significant timber content, as this was the material most commonly used by pre-European Maori and since European settlement.

HB Architecture worked with the Waitangi National Trust to establish this welcoming point of entry for visitors to the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. A significant feature of the building is the slated timber ‘whare’ form which is suspended under the main roof. With its large gable roof covering a front porch area and an open plan internal space, the structure reflects the traditional form of Te Whare Runanga.

Architect Grant Harris explains his design concept: “The need for shelter from the hot summer sun was paramount – for the visitor, and also the person welcoming visitors on the start of their journey through the Treaty Grounds. Because the building is essentially a gateway – where people can be informed and made ready for the next step in the journey – finishes have been



kept deliberately simple. The walls are glass, creating a sense of enclosure, while still connecting strongly with the surrounding bush. This structure serves the present while also establishing a conduit between the past and future.”

While timber is the dominant finishing material, the COLORSTEEL® roof is supported on an exposed steel structural frame with macrocarpa inserts, providing strength and durability with flexibility and warmth. Ceilings are Fijian Kauri-finished plywood; walls are generally glass with some painted blockwork and the floor is finished with tiles and carpet. Oiled macrocarpa features in the portal frames, the ex-



posed timber screen and in inserts to the structural frame. The timber has aged naturally and is picking up the natural colours of the surrounding bush.

The form of the new building respects the existing Visitor Centre designed by architect John Scott: the roof is at 22.5 degrees, matching that of the Centre; it is approximately the same height; and it is orientated along the existing path – in the direction of pedestrian flow.

“Scott’s original design concept encouraged the notion of ‘curiosity’. This was reinforced through the use of a curving path, creating a sense of connection and anticipation,”

said Grant Harris. “We made every effort to reinforce this idea. The ‘gateway’ connects the open space of the existing parking area with the track, and acts as a switch, leading to the enclosed bush path which then opens to the Visitor Centre courtyard.”

HB Architecture

The primary goal of Harris Butt Architecture is to produce elegant architecture that utilises a combination of proven building approaches and the best technological advances available today.

The Directors of HB Architecture strongly believe that the form of a building must first of all offer protection against the elements - wind, rain, heat and cold - and that the beauty and design of a building is as important as its usability and function. Only beautifully made buildings contribute to our built environment in a sustainable way - ultimately it is only these buildings that will be considered worthy of preservation.

The challenge is to integrate function and aesthetic value into an enduring architecture that cooperates with nature and works in concert with ecological principles.

HB Architecture will continue to provide creative design solutions backed by excellent communications technology and rigorous delivery controls.

Architect: Grant Harris
Harris Butt Architecture Ltd
HB Architecture
Whangarei
www.hbarchitecture.co.nz
email: info@hbarchitecture.co.nz
Telephone: (09) 438 9545

Roofing Manufacturer:
Steel and Tube Roofing Products
Whangarei
Telephone: 09 438 4600

Profile: Hi Rib 500
COLORSTEEL® Maxx®
Thunder Grey

Builder - Henwood Builders
Telephone: 09 4010789
mobile: 021 795 206
www.henwoodbuilders.co.nz

Roofing installer:
Bay of Islands Roofing
Telephone: 09-407 9288
Kerikeri
Email: bayroof@xtra.co.nz
www.bayofislandsroofing.co.nz