

Expanded Treaty Grounds building reopens

By Peter de Graaf

12:00 PM Thursday Oct 27, 2016

A Waitangi Treaty Grounds building designed by acclaimed Maori architect John Scott but never finished has been expanded and re-opened.

Scott's (1924–92) winning design for a visitors centre at Waitangi was opened by Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1983.

However, Waitangi National Trust chief executive Greg McManus said Scott's vision of a two-storey whare-style building was never realised because the trust ran out of money, and over the years many "funny little additions" had been tacked on. The centre was also too small to handle growing visitor numbers.

The expansion carried on the whare-style roof through to the back of the building, allowing a much larger shop and a bigger theatre. A small cafe had been converted into a Maori arts workshop employing two fulltime carvers.

Mr McManus told the crowd gathered for the October 20 opening that the entirely Northland project was designed by Grant Harris of HB Architecture in Whangarei and built by Henwood Builders of Kaikohe.

The building was not listed by Heritage NZ but was protected under the council's District Plan. The trust had worked closely with Heritage NZ on the design and materials, for example by continuing Scott's use of white concrete blocks, native timber and black wooden posts. Rimu sarking from the old theatre had been re-used throughout the building.

Client rep Larry Jacobson, of Paihia, said ensuring the expansion complemented Scott's original design was a priority.

"Hopefully he'd be happy with what we've done if he was still alive today," Mr Jacobson said.

The project had been completed in a tight timeframe and under budget, which was a credit to the builders.

HB Architecture and Henwood Builders also worked together on the new Museum of Waitangi, the Treaty Grounds gateway and an award-winning toilet block. The visitors centre expansion cost about \$1.7m.

The next project planned at the Treaty Grounds was a re-interpretation of the Treaty House itself. Work is expected to start in February and take a year to complete.

Last month the Waitangi National Trust took out the Maori cultural tourism title in the New Zealand Tourism Awards.

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Inside the extended visitors' centre at Waitangi Treaty Grounds, designed by John Scott and originally opened in 1983. Photo / Peter de Graaf

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Why has the Government not paid for this. If the Government can pay for weird little buildings, statues and other absurdities as homage to themselves, they should have paid for "Our Heritage" to be housed and preserved.

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