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FACE VALUE

WHO'S WHO IN BUSINESS \ WHANGAREI

MAGAZINE

The **people**
and **stories**
behind some
of Whangarei's
successful
businesses

ICONIC WORK

Trevor Griffiths on managing our award-winning bridge project P13

Unlock your potential

Sandra McKersey walks the talk and shares 5 keys to success P18

Journey of a trolley boy

Todd Leathem, proud grocer P21

Northpower Fibre

first, fast and in action P32

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Knoll Ridge Café
 "... architectural grace achieved under logistical pressure, in an extreme alpine environment." Extract from Judges' Commendation, NZ Architecture Award 2012

COOL DESIGNS

In today's digital world, where freehand drawing and face-to-face engagements are rapidly disappearing art forms, one Whangarei architecture firm, HB Architecture, is delivering award-winning success by continuing to embrace these 'old school' ways. By KATY BROWN.

Up until a decade ago, training architects were taught their craft using drawing pads and pencils. Nowadays, most architectural designs are created within the confines of computer software, producing linear, geometric designs without the flair, freedom or inspiration offered by a pencil and drawing pad.

Ian Butt and Grant Harris – partners in HB Architecture – take pride in staying true to their 'old school' training, and their award-winning designs are testament to the creative freedom that comes from starting the journey with a grand idea, an inspired client, and just pencil and paper.

Grant believes a creative vision is so much easier to distil through freehand drawing.

"You can throw your ideas on paper without being limited by the rules and systems that come from using a computer programme. The building grows in your mind as you go – you're not just envisioning the floor plan but the roof line, the materials and the inspiring features all at the same time."

Grant says it is this process that first drew him to architecture.

"The pinnacle for me has always been envisaging my own ideas and seeing them come to life. However, it is equally rewarding taking a client's dream or vision, building on their ideas, and bringing them together to make them work."

Ian and Grant have been responsible for designing several remarkable buildings since forming their partnership seven years ago, including the award-winning Knoll Ridge Café on Mount Ruapehu, the Waitangi Gateway and Amenities Buildings, and the Whangarei Town Basin Hub development.

Ian Butt is a well-known figure in Northland, having resided in Whangarei for most of his life. He established his own business in 1984, working on a range of high profile projects in the region, including the initial Whangarei Town Basin Development, Paihia Waterfront development, the Whangarei Mall redevelopment and various apartment buildings in Paihia.

In 2007 he partnered with Grant, who came from successful tenures at Christchurch-based Warren and Mahoney Architects, and Ignite Architects of Auckland. Grant shares Ian's philosophy for simple, uncomplicated design that remains respectful of its environment.

The pair also readily agree that in their industry strong client relationships are key.

"For a practice to be successful, it's about establishing trusting and lasting relationships with clients. Part of our role is to give clients the courage to follow through with their dreams. Whether it's a residential home or a multi-storey commercial building, it takes a huge amount of courage and commitment from the client, and our role is to support them to fulfil their dream," says Grant.

"You can throw your ideas on paper without being limited by the rules and systems that come from using a computer programme."

"This is where some building projects can fall apart, because there are so many people involved in the process that it dilutes the relationship between the architect and client. When you combine this with the social, economic and financial pressures of building, people can often lose touch with their initial vision."

Ian believes the essence of outstanding architecture is based on the 80/20 rule.

"Delivering on 80 per cent of the vision will give you something great. Delivering on the final 20 per cent provides the attention to detail that ensures the building will continue to capture the attention and imagination of those who interact with it.

Budget restraints often dictate that the attention to detail – the last 20 per cent – is dropped, but sadly



Photo: Simon Devitt

that is often the detailing that defines the building as something special."

Both Ian and Grant are excited about the future potential projects within Northland and further afield, with plans to open a base in Auckland.

Grant believes the HB Architecture Auckland office, due in the next 12 months, will open doors to new projects and opportunities.

"It gives us a presence in a much larger market, where we will continue to focus on the commercial and residential sectors."

The future also means remaining abreast of the constantly changing building regulations and legislation, and

being mindful of shifting trends in architecture.

Says Grant: "Sustainable building practices have been around for decades, and are something we have always been mindful of, but now they have a label, a brand for people to trade off, so there is now a stronger emphasis on design elements like energy efficiency and using sustainable materials.

"The face of architecture is constantly changing. I believe in the future we will only be limited by technology, cost, materials and our own imaginations.

"Technology is constantly creating new opportunities, with 3D modelling allowing for projects like the Waiarohia Footbridge that simply wouldn't have been possible several years ago, because of the complexity of the engineering design. The bridge looks simple, but it is actually a very complex piece of architecture."

The future of architecture is hard to predict, but one thing is a given – Grant Harris and Ian Butt will continue to honour their 'old school' practices and attention to detail that ensures the delivery of outstanding architectural design.

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Freehands
 Grant Harris, front, and Ian Butt apply 'old school' techniques to the new architectural age, in the award-winning Waitangi Amenities Building and Knoll Ridge Café



Photo: Simon Devitt