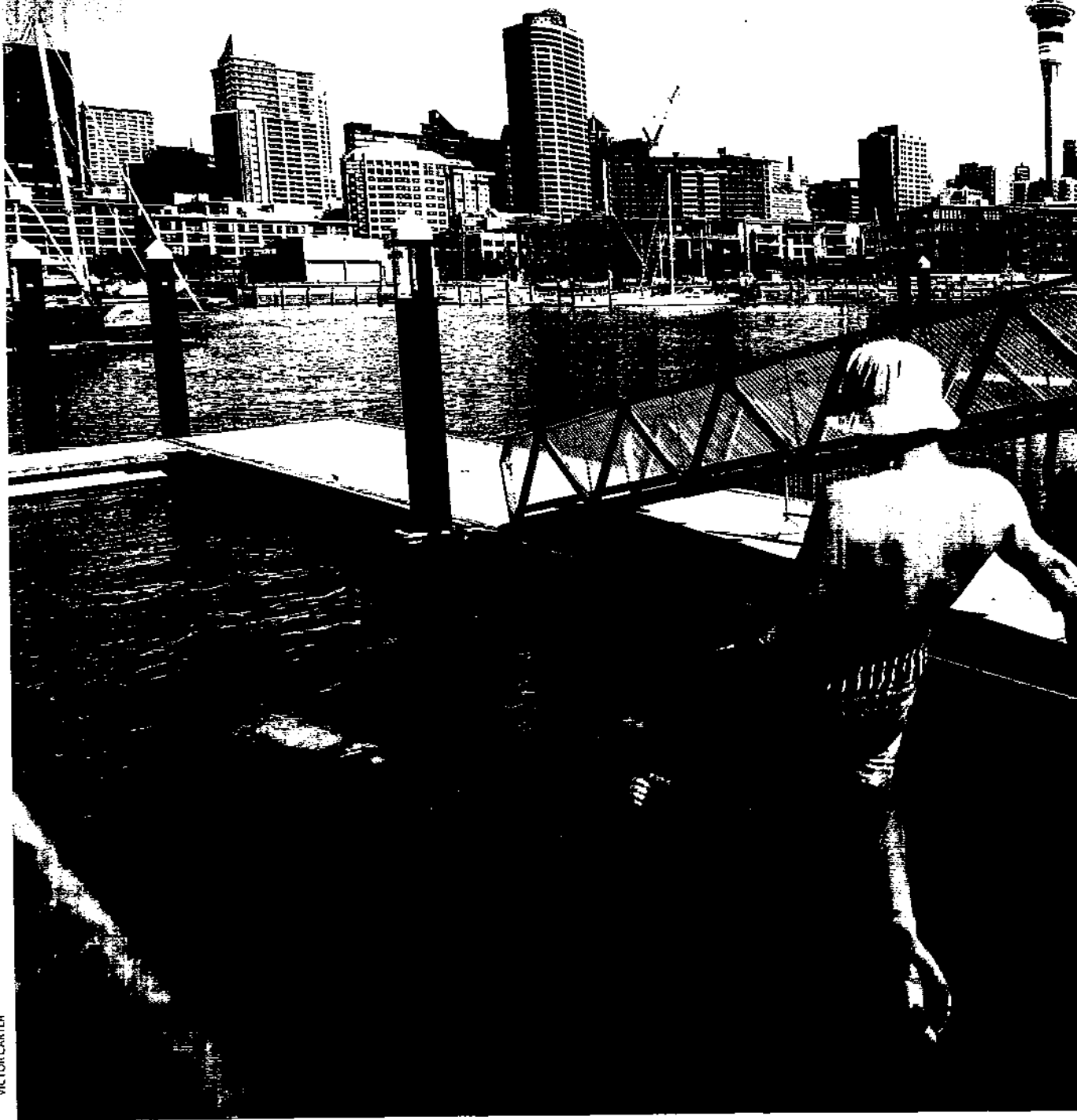


Lead us to water

As cities grow, many have lost touch with their towns' natural beauty. Ways to reconnect with their water. **by CHRIS BARTON**



VICTOR CARTER

The protests began on February 25, 2015. Another on March 22 included a flotilla of some 200 craft, a stirring sight not seen on the Waitemata since the anti-nuclear era of the late 1970s-early 1980s. May 3 saw a march along Auckland's Quay St. There were placards: "Make Love Not Wharves" and "If It's Len Brown Flush It Down". There were slogans: "Stop Stealing our Harbour". And big names, including Pete Montgomery and Chris Dickson of America's Cup fame, Sir Stephen Tindall and Sir Peter Blake's widow, Pippa. Politicians stood up: Auckland councillors Chris Darby and Christine Fletcher and Auckland MPs Nikki Kaye and Jacinda Ardern. There were even costumes – rats, on account of the dead one that deputy mayor Penny Hulse said she had to eat.

All this over a view. "That entire view out to the outer harbour, the bay, the islands will be gone," Urban Auckland chair Julie Stout told *3News*. Protester Stuart Smith, who spent his own money on a plane banner, captured the sentiment of many: "I am very angry that people can spoil my city and my harbour and I'm concerned about my grandchildren."

On June 19, Auckland High Court's Justice Geoffrey Venning found that Ports of Auckland's consents for its Bledisloe Wharf extensions were "flawed" and hence no longer valid. "This port extension issue should be a warning that the people of Auckland will no longer put up with being left out of these decisions," said Urban Auckland after the victory.

In her affidavit, Stout, an architect, spoke from the heart: "The Waitemata is city-defining and iconic. Aucklanders identify with the harbour. It is our 'City of Sails', part of our regional identity."

Focusing on the water rather than the land is a defining characteristic of Auckland. As Auckland School of Architecture professor Richard Toy pointed out in 1975, "a shift in perception is involved" – one that recognises "wateriness" and the harbours and their innumerable bays as the main living elements of the city.

Auckland may have been slow to recognise the potential of this watery focus, but while the blight of the Ports protectorate remains, elsewhere the city is making up for lost time. Aucklanders have marvelled at the design-led regeneration of the Wynyard Quarter – North Wharf, Jellicoe Harbour,

Silo Park, Daldy St – and the adjoining Westhaven Promenade, many of which have won international awards. And the transformation that is spreading to the Manukau Harbour at Onehunga.

IT ALL STARTED IN WELLINGTON

It's possible to say it all began with Te Papa. Although it's a hodgepodge of a building that has virtually no engagement with its waterfront and was pulled back from the harbour edge to make a track for a car race that ended up being ditched, Te Papa brought attention to the Wellington harbour littoral. To the east of Te Papa, one of the first new public spaces, Waitangi Park, was formed – the result of a competition won in 2002 by Athfield Architects and landscape architects Wraight and Associates.

It's notable for its tracing of the old Graving Dock and uncovering a lost city stream as a wetland with indigenous sedges and grasses – a pioneering example of cleaning the area's stormwater. To the west is Taranaki Wharf and lagoon with its waka ramps to the water and its link to the city

"The Waitemata is city-defining and iconic. Aucklanders identify with the harbour. It is our 'City of Sails'."

via the City-to-Sea bridge and Para Matchitt sculptures. The Cut-Out, which takes people out of the wind and exposes the underside of the wharf – a forest of piles, filtered light and reflections – is brilliant. Then there's the Taranaki Wharf jump platform, completed in 2013 – a twisting, turning, Escher-esque staircase that lets people jump from the wharf in various ways from different levels.

Further on is Kumutoto, designed by Isthmus and Studio Pacific Architecture, which pushes the city out and lets the sea in around the area of the tug wharf and working end of Wellington's harbour. It also opened the Kumutoto stream mouth to the sea again.

There's more to come in the redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park, which will reorient the space towards the harbour and realise Wellington's long-planned Chinese Garden.

The key to understanding how Wellington has achieved so much that is so good is largely down to the 1997 Lambton Harbour Public Spaces Master Plan, a collaboration of architects, urban designers and landscape

architects that has set the tone for what followed. Its key principles are to have a wide promenade around the edge linked with a choice of other pathways; a "necklace" of public spaces; and two "lines" around the shore – one that traces the archaeology of the waterfront and its history and the other that references Lambton Harbour's coastal ecology. As waterfront formulas go, it's hard to beat, and similar principles are now being applied to Auckland's Wynyard Quarter.

Then there's New Plymouth, which hunkered down and turned its back on its harsh west coast environment until 1995, when the Taranaki District Council commissioned its "Mountain to Sea" masterplan, which reversed the view. It also made safe ways for the people of the town to cross Molesworth St and the train tracks to engage with their coast via a series of finger piers. Led by Auckland landscape architects Isthmus, the design is dramatic, especially the platform that cantilevers 8m out to the Tasman Sea, dissipating its pounding might in a surge chamber beneath before spilling the surf back to the nearby Huatoki Stream.

Adding to the drama is Len Lye's 48m *Wind Wand* that bobs and nods, sometimes up to 20m in the ever-present winds. Along this elemental edge is 11km of defiant coastal path, sometimes concrete, sometimes timber planks atop a sloping sea wall of coastal boulders. It's a path that takes the setting sun, the wind and the spray; a path that says west coast and proud.

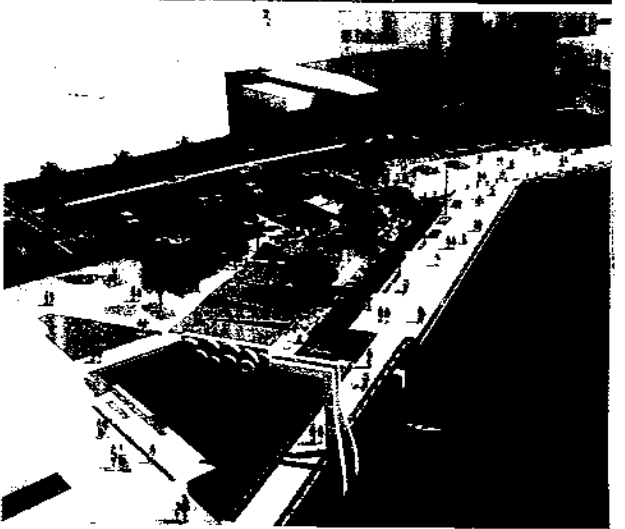
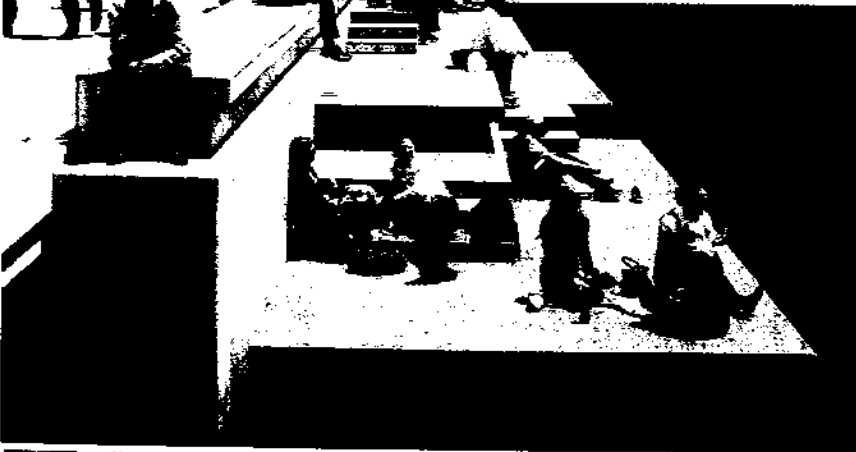
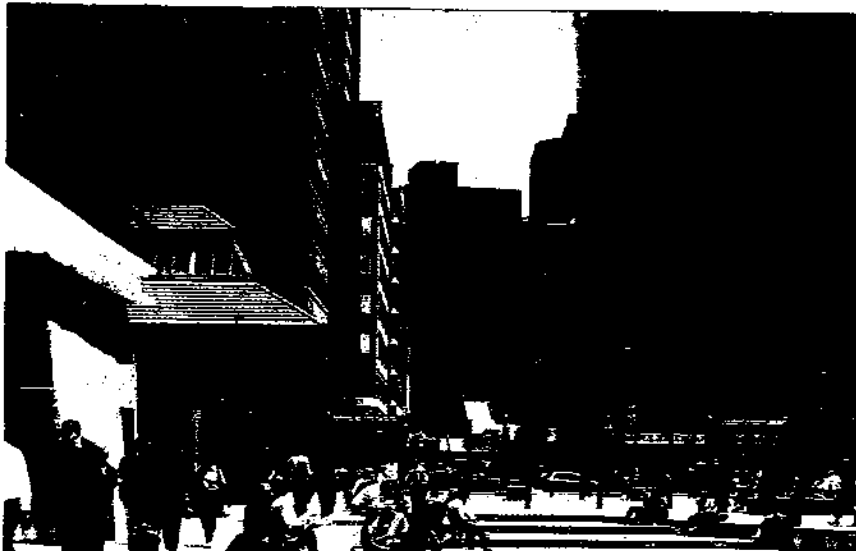
'BETTER FOR THE SOUL'

The success of projects such as New Plymouth's has towns all over the country realising what's possible by simply recognising and celebrating what they already have. The result is a spate of waterfront projects – Tauranga, Gisborne, Hamilton, to name a few – all wanting to reconnect with their water and engaging landscape architects to show them how.

"It's a sort of fundamental human drive to be by water," says Henry Crothers, who heads LandLab. For David Irwin, a founding director of Isthmus, it's about being at the edge where there's a diversity of ecology. "You're in an environment where you are taking in different things, different air. It's stimulating. It's better for the soul."

Landscape architects can wax lyrical, but

Scenes from Wellington's waterfront, where a collaboration of architects, urban designers and landscape architects has led to stylish redevelopment and people-friendly spaces.



5 ways to fix Auckland's waterfront

Auckland's Wynyard Quarter shows what's possible, but the rest of the city's waterfront is a mess – particularly the stretch along Quay St and the downtown fiasco of Queen Elizabeth Square and Queens Wharf. Here, a panel of landscape architects imagine what might be, each presenting five ideas that apply to waterfronts everywhere.

DAVID IRWIN, ISTHMUS

1 I love that last night I walked with a mate to the end of the Old Tank Farm and caught a decent snapper. I cooked it and shared it with my neighbours. Give me clean water.

2 I love that Auckland is now famous for its crimson Pohutukawa Pathway. It allows me to walk, run, cycle across the harbour bridge, along the Westhaven Promenade, through the city and out to the white sandy beaches of Orakei, Mission Bay, Kohimarama and St Heliers. It is great that it continues on past Achilles Point and through the open spaces of Churchill Park to the sandspit of Tahuna Torea, where the crazy dotterels live. Show me the crimson line of the Pohutukawa Pathway.

3 I love that I have my favourite place to shelter from the city. I often sit there alone at lunch and watch the city go by. Sometimes I share it with a special friend. It feels strangely familiar and comfortable considering I am in the middle of the city. Make a habitat just for me.

4 I love that my family drag me to the waterfront even when I just want to stay at home. We can always find some way to play together there, wherever we are. Surprise me with the unexpected and playful.

5 I love that I can still see the islands in the gulf from Auckland's main street, which is Queens Wharf. It reminds me that we are part of the Waitemata Harbour. I want to catch a ferry to one of those beautiful islands we have. Keep my distant harbour view.



David Irwin

MEGAN WRAIGHT, WRAIGHT AND ASSOCIATES

1 Urban waterfronts are rich in history ... often grimy and gritty. They can be developed to retain authentic qualities and nuances.

2 The water's edge is a diverse environment culturally and ecologically. Harness and celebrate the diversity.

3 Where the sea meets the land is a dynamic and ever-changing environment. There is a depth and thickness to this marginal and influential zone. The quality and character of urban waterfronts can influence and shape city character beyond the water's edge.

4 Bring the city across the quays and let the city dip its toes in the water. Embrace the urban waterfront.

5 The city and waterfronts are part of an ecological system. Waterfront redevelopments present great opportunities to rethink how we manage and build urban infrastructure.



Henry Crothers

HENRY CROTHERS, LANDLAB

1 Complete a city harbour loop linking Tamaki Drive, the city and Devonport via a walking and cycling path and new ferry link to St Heliers.

2 Transform Tamaki Drive into Auckland's (the Pacific's) Copacabana Promenade.

3 Light rail between the airport and Albany via a pedestrianised Queen St.

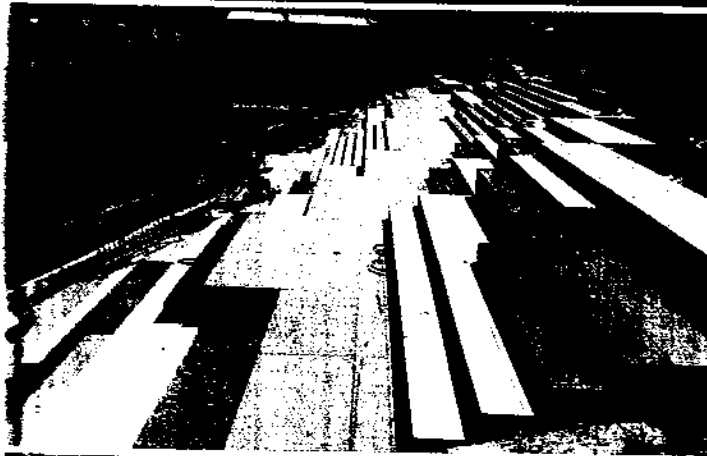
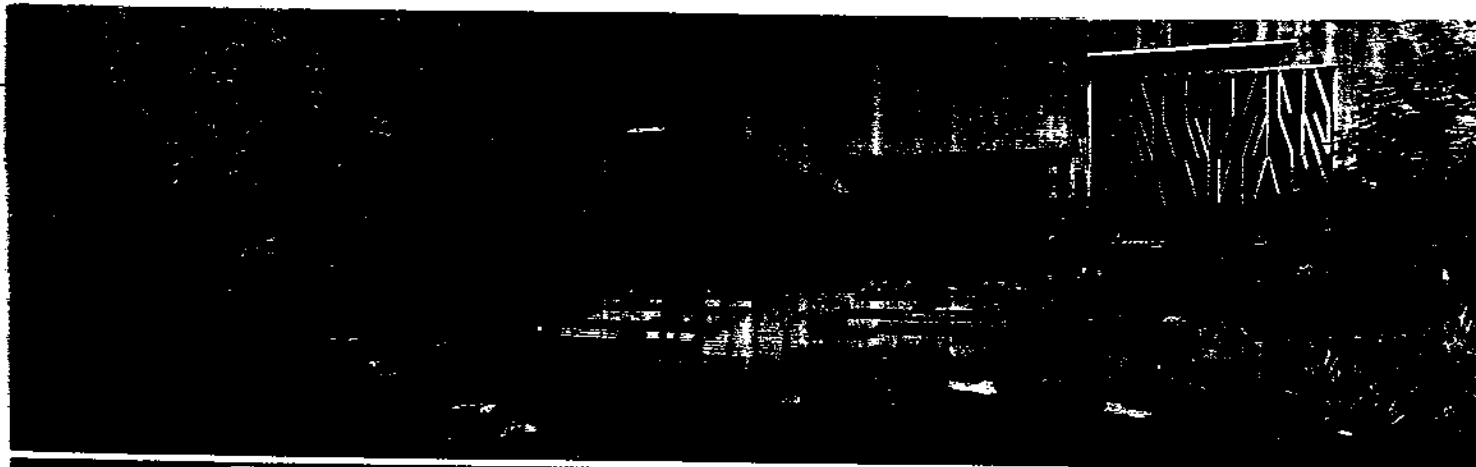
4 Build an internationally recognised Museum of the Pacific on the waterfront.

5 Put a five-year moratorium on building new roads until we sort out walking, cycling and public-transport infrastructure.



Megan Wraight

SIMON YOUNG; HAGEN HOPKINS



their role is largely misunderstood. “They think I do the planting around the edges,” say Megan Wraight of Wraight and Associates. Their work tends to happen in a realm between, or in collaboration with, the roles of architect, engineer and planner. They call their domain a “field” – an ecology of places, movement and infrastructure – where they like to make “moves”. Here, we look at some of the designs this award-winning trio have made to help us access waterfronts and waterways around the country.

GREAT MYSTERIES

One of the most extraordinary sights you’ll see in Auckland on sweltering days is a crowd of people sunbathing on the large paved steps of Karanga Plaza beside the Viaduct Basin. Some of them will also be swimming – yes, swimming. The shock is because of the water – a murky green that doesn’t look right, especially after a decent rain. But herein lies one the great mysteries of Auckland’s waterfront.

Until Karanga Plaza was built, there wasn’t

Top and centre left, Christchurch’s Avon Precinct and The Terraces. Above, New Plymouth’s waterfront plan, the city’s redeveloped coastline and its coastal path.

anywhere in the CBD where Aucklanders could get down to the water and touch it or paddle, let alone swim. “There was always this idea of it being a beach,” says Crothers, who was lead designer on the project when he was at Architectus. “The furniture in that space is big, over-scale deck chairs. We

always wanted people to be relaxed there. It's not a formal civic space."

The issues of safety with kids and water quality came up, but Crothers argued strongly for the steps. "You can't fall into the water. To get from the top of the stairs to the water, you've actually got to climb down all these stairs. That takes quite a long time."

There were other arguments, too, reflected in the name karanga (welcome) and that Auckland had lost a traditional ceremonial relationship with water. "When it opened and the waka came under the bridge and to the stairs and the paddlers hopped out and came up to the plaza, they did what they had never been able to do in the city since it became an industrialised port."

'ENGAGE WITH THE RIVER'

Crothers is employing the same idea at "The Terraces" in the Christchurch Avon River project. Although the river has always been there, the ability to engage with it, largely because it has been engineered to cope with flooding, has never been easy. The Terraces are located beside Oxford Terrace, which is where, before the earthquake, people congregated in bars and restaurants to sit in the afternoon sun and look over the river.

"You could sit there, but you still couldn't engage with the river," says Crothers.

"My experience of Christchurch had always been you drove into the city, you tended to park your car by the river and then you walked into the city."

The project aims to flip that around – to make the city edge and its relationship to the river as the defining experience of being in Christchurch.

"So, instead of having car parking and asphalt beside the river, you have a shared-space promenade and the ability to walk down and actually put your toes in the river."

There are also plans to make the place an amphitheatre for events created by performances on stepped terraces on the opposite bank. The idea is to provide many more places for punts to stop and take people on board, perhaps even provide a new means of getting around the city.

"This is about the city grid reaching into the river and replanting all the edges and seeing its native ecology returned."

And the water quality? The evidence suggests it's improving. Much of the design is helping – not just in desilting, but also in narrowing and deepening in places to get the sluggish water flowing again.

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

David Irwin, standing at the top of the newly formed hill that meets the bridge that spans the motorway and reconnects Onehunga with its lost coastline, says, "This is the biggest reclamation for a public amenity use in the history of New Zealand."

Here, something magic has happened – a 6.8ha coastal park with nine beaches has been created largely from what was dug out by Alice, Auckland's Waterview Connection tunnelling machine. Building land. For a landscape architect, it doesn't get much better than this.

This is a project of contradictions. It is reclamation, which – as Ports of Auckland has seen – is a dirty word. It's beside a six-lane motorway – State Highway 20, which in the 1960s sliced across Onehunga's foreshore, brutally severing the community from its beachfront. It has ugly power pylons running through it and the water, like much of the Manukau, is awful. Yet here

"This is about the city grid reaching into the river and seeing its native ecology returned."

are sandy beaches, the sand held in place by carefully constructed rocky headlands; dotterels are nesting, oystercatchers are doing their thing, boats are being launched from the new ramp and, yes, people can swim.

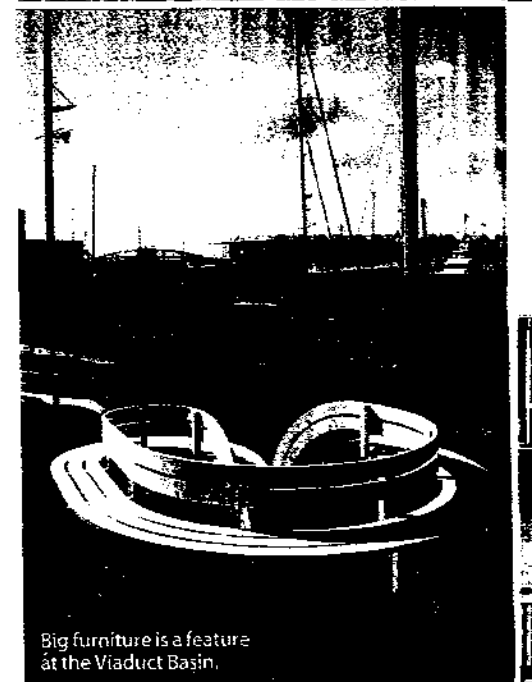
"Everyone went swimming on opening day," says Irwin, explaining how the council has gone to some effort to improve water quality by fixing sewage overflow and stormwater outlets in the area. As for the pylons, Irwin takes a pragmatic view.

"I don't want them there, either. This has improved the relationship between those pylons, people and the sea – so they are less of a big deal."

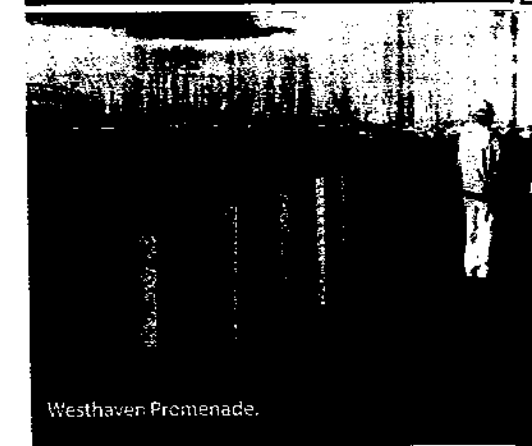
He took the same approach to crossing the motorway. Many had argued it would be much better to lower the motorway and cross it with a large tract of land that would better connect to the original Onehunga coast. But as he points out, the budget for such a scheme would have been prohibitive. This way – with a bridge firmly attached to mounded land

In Auckland, designers have introduced informal places and spaces where people can walk, relax, socialise and be near the sea.

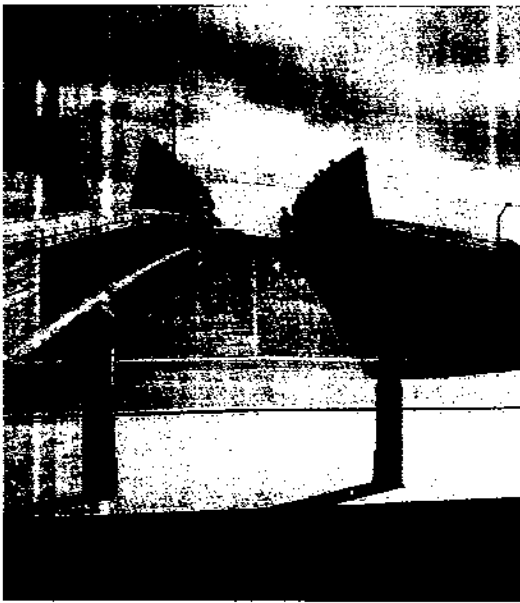
VICTOR CARTER



Big furniture is a feature at the Viaduct Basin.



Westhaven Promenade.



either side – the job would get done.

It's about finding ways to make the impossible possible. A similar mindset can be seen in the Westhaven Promenade by Landlab. There, the idea of a public walkway conflicted with the security of the marina, which was only concerned with gates and locks to protect the millions of dollars worth of boats moored there. The result, as Crothers puts it, was vast areas with "some of the most beautiful parking spaces in the world".

Marinas and the public just don't mix. Yet as the promenade shows, carefully weaving its way among the city of boats and sails, and telling some of the area's history, two seemingly impossible activities can co-exist.

EXPOSING LAYERS OF HISTORY

Possibly the strangest aspect of Auckland's surreal Silo Park is the gantry. What the hell is it? What's it for? The long narrow steel frame is a path to nowhere – you climb the stairs, walk along, climb down or take the lift at one end.

"It is a fascinating world up there," says Wraight, who designed it in collaboration with architects Taylor Cullity Lethlean.

"I call it gantry land, where you go up to the top and you see a completely different view of this place."

Indeed you do. There are the silos – the site was a cement depot. In the middle is the large singular Silo 7, now used to project movies onto. To the north, the rows of tanks still in use, the ship-building industry sheds, the fishing boats and the rusted rail-track tracks of North Wharf.

"These types of environment have layers and layers of history within them and I

believe people do connect to that," says Wraight. Instead of cleaning everything up and making the place shiny and new, it's a design that lets the history speak.

Wraight does the same with the planting, in the rain garden that treats the storm-water, especially necessary here because the ground is contaminated from its previous use storing oil and petrol. The garden gives a glimpse of the wetland that once existed around the numerous streams of Auckland's shores. She does the same in the line of trees along Jellicoe St – karaka, pohutukawa,

"The underlying issue was, 'If you're building the pathway, people will come.'"

puriri, taraire and nikau – to indicate the lush bush-like environment that once came down to Auckland's shores. "I guess I'm a bit of a romantic. It's always important for me to bring a bit of what that landscape might have been."

At the far end, as at Karanga Plaza, Wraight provides steps down to the water, except they're made of the site's found objects – coarsely textured interlocking blocks that were stacked in big bays to contain the sands and gravels of the former concrete yard. On North Wharf, the design allows the fishing industry to co-exist with the new uses of recreation, combined with cafes and restaurants. The stacked crab crate-like seating adds to the atmosphere and the long bench

Record reclamation: reconnecting Onehunga with the Manukau Harbour foreshore.

seats at the edge are designed to allow ice trucks to reverse and unload their cargo onto the fishing boats. "All the dirty fishing, a bit of smell, rusted ships: it's that combination. You are allowed to get in close to that."

Then there are the tecomanthe vines that have grown about a third of the way up the gantry structure. It's the idea of building an industrial landscape and setting it to ruin, says Wraight – so it will get taken over by nature, just like *muehlenbeckia* planted beside the fence at the edge of the park is starting to do. "So it's a real folly," she says. "It's a bit bent."

FRAUGHT WITH BATTLES

There's a similar sensibility at work in the 6km Beachlands-Maraetai walkway that connects Auckland's Spinnaker Bay subdivision across Te Puru Stream to Maraetai. Along the way are gentle nods to the Maori, fishing and farming history of the place, places to pause and take in the view, and a peaceful co-existence with the community's boating club activities. It sounds straightforward, but Irwin says it was fraught with battles with residents opposed to the idea.

"The underlying issue was, 'If you're building the pathway, people will come,'" says Irwin. "The erosion of character was their underlying concern, 'We are a quiet, sleepy place and we want to remain that way.'" How do you fight that?

"The argument is this is a beautiful environment for the rest of the city to use. It's not yours." ■

SIMON YOUNG