

# Award-winning *coastal haven*

Words: Adrienne Matthews | © Simon Devitt

The Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects represents over four thousand members, including ninety per cent of the country's registered architects. It plays a vital role in promoting quality architectural design while also increasing awareness of how well-designed buildings and public spaces enhance the life of communities. Each year, the organisation celebrates the best in architectural design and innovation through its annual awards. Entries in a range of categories first compete in each region, and the best are then put forward for the national awards.

To receive a local award is high praise indeed. Projects entered include residential homes, commercial premises, public buildings and landscape architecture. Every entry is evaluated by a panel of jurors, including esteemed architects and industry professionals. They carefully consider the quality of design, level of innovation, sustainability, and how well the project responds to its context — and, in the case of public spaces, how well it meets the community's needs.

Judges noted that this year's entries featured some truly remarkable local buildings, and the winning projects demonstrated how thoughtful design can create comfortable, functional, and aesthetically pleasing living spaces.

Taking out the award for the Housing category at the Nelson/Marlborough branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects Awards, the Marlborough coastal house was praised for its clever response to a challenging site. Designed by Arthouse Architects, the home blends sympathetically into its environment, with judges impressed by how it embraces sweeping coastal views while remaining grounded in the landscape.

From the outset, the brief was clear. The homeowners wanted to enjoy their living, dining, kitchen, and primary bedroom spaces upstairs, while making the most of the sweeping coastal outlook. "The site just called for it," says Arthouse director Jorgen Andersen. "The ocean is right there, and this was a wonderful opportunity to design the house around it."







That decision flipped the typical layout on its head, requiring thoughtful solutions to tie outdoor living spaces to the upstairs zones while keeping the ground floor functional and grounded. Concrete walls, cleverly veiled in a soft-toned brick veneer from Canterbury Clay Bricks, anchor the home, helping to support the elevated top floor and offer shelter from coastal breezes. “We played with orientation,” Jorgen explains. “Some walls are parallel to the sea, others perpendicular, so there’s always a protected spot outdoors, no matter what the wind direction.”

The bricks are a warm and tactile feature, which appear again on the detached studio room nearby. These small touches ensure consistency across the cluster of buildings that make up the home’s footprint.

Above, the top floor is clad in Alaskan Yellow Cedar, chosen for its exceptional durability and low maintenance in harsh coastal conditions. Inserted metal panels offer another subtle texture that complements the timber finish. The colour palette blends into the environment, giving the feeling that the house has grown out of the ground it sits on.

The upstairs layout contains a central upstairs corridor down the spine of the build, allowing both indoor and outdoor spaces to branch off. The design invites movement, encourages flow, and creates outdoor areas that are both sheltered and accessible year-round. The main deck is offset, semi-enclosed, yet still open to views in multiple directions. “You can be protected from southerlies but still catch a glimpse of the northern horizon,” says architect





Rebecca Bannan. “It’s about always having a place to be outside, no matter the weather.”

From a sustainability perspective, the house is well-considered. Solar panels on the garage roof generate a significant portion of the home’s energy. Passive heating and cooling techniques are embedded throughout the design and include cross-ventilation along with a white roof to reflect heat away. Large east-facing windows capture the morning sun while a ducted heat pump system upstairs and hydronic underfloor heating downstairs keep living toasty and comfortable through the winter months.

The finishes on the interior echo the natural world outside. The flooring upstairs is a rich Pergo Gotland Castle Brown Oak, selected for its depth of colour and rich tone. Timber-lined ceilings in the living area give a relaxed, beachy vibe. “It just belongs,” says Rebecca. “It feels right.”

At the heart of the home sits the centrally placed kitchen. Designed by the Arthouse team, it is connected to every other space including the outdoor areas, dining room, the living space, and the views beyond. The benchtop, in sleek Caesarstone Empira Black, strikes a balance between elegance and everyday functionality. “It’s not trying to be a showpiece,” explains Rebecca. “It’s just beautiful and easy to live in like the rest of the home.”

Downstairs is a spare bedroom and ensuite. There is an internal staircase as well as an exterior one on the northern end, leading from the main outdoor entertaining space to the ground below.

Lighting was carefully considered. At night, the home glows gently from within, with downlighting and soft uplighting drawing attention to the structure’s most beautiful elements. “We were mindful of what to highlight and what not to,” Jorgen says. “It’s all about softness, not showiness.”







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The home’s cluster of three buildings – including the main house, the studio room, and a garage workshop – are arranged to enhance both privacy and practicality. A grove of Himalayan birches in the centre of the driveway form a perfect turning circle. The lawn on the coastal side is immaculately manicured but not overly formal, blending seamlessly into the surrounding tussocks and dunes.

There is a lot to love about this house. It is beautifully and artfully designed, but also deeply functional while being sympathetic to its environment. It is a place to live, to gather, to retreat. (M)

