



## HOME WIN FOR ASTON VILLA

REFERENCE, NOT IMITATION, WAS THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN THE DESIGN OF A SURPRISING EXTENSION TO AN OLD COTTAGE IN CENTRAL OTAGO. MARK GARDEN COMMENTS ON A PROJECT BY NEW WORK STUDIO; PHOTOGRAPHS BY GILBERT VAN REENAN.





### ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

**This project is a family house in the Lower Shotover River Valley between Queenstown and Arrowtown. Behind an existing historic stone cottage we have placed a large extension, transforming a holiday house into a permanent home. The brief was to create a contemporary building which nestled into the landscape, and which referred to but did not imitate the original stone and timber building. The new house stands behind as a contemporary reflection of the cottage, to which it is linked through two low passageways. The two dominant materials — textured concrete and cedar timber — refer back to the stone and timber of the cottage.**

The new wing contains family living, dining and kitchen space, and children's bedrooms on the ground floor, adults' bedroom, bathroom and study on the first floor. Additional living areas — a children's TV space and a winter living area with open fire — have been retained in the old cottage. Entry is through the cottage with a renovated lobby area; a visitor's experience of the whole house is mediated by interaction with the old and the history of the site before the new.

The main structure is concrete tilt slab panels with a rough exterior texture, combined with timber frame including a fitch beam timber portal structure, cedar timber and painted sheet claddings. The materials blend in with the site, and harmonise with the materials of the old cottage. However, the form of the building is radically different, showing itself to be a contemporary structure without mimicking the old.

For a visitor, the discovery of this contemporary addition, however, comes as a surprise. The building stays in the background, barely noticeable from the road. Glimpses can just be seen, behind the oak tree and old cottage. It slowly reveals itself as you come up the drive, first seeing the two storey structure then realising, as you move around the house, the full extent of the new building. *Tim Nees*

### COMMENT

The discovery of gold in Central Otago in the 1860s caused a sudden influx of prospectors to the Wakatipu basin, to join the hardy settlers already farming the high country. Those early pioneers established a simple vernacular style of building, based on the limited human and material resources

available in the region. Local schist stone was used to construct shelters and simple cottages that provided minimal comfort in an extreme environment. The traditional forms and hand-hewn materials complemented the colours and textures of the land.

Today a new influx of people and a seemingly relentless surge of construction activity are sweeping the Wakatipu area. The character of the built environment has been transformed by international exposure. The prevalence of manicured luxury homes is in marked contrast to the naive simplicity of the cottages and cribs that preceded them. The once barren landscape is increasingly peppered with substantial dwellings, tourist accommodations and vineyards.

This is an environment of opportunity. The mountainous backdrop, the crisp air, and the golden colours of the landscape sharpen the senses and lift the spirit. There is a risk that the stunning landscape will be spoiled by unchecked and inappropriate development.

Fortunately, some recent building projects display an empathy with the unique Queenstown environment. The recent addition to the house, on the Lower Shotover Road, known as Aston Villa (a reference to the classic car sold to finance the property, and a nod to the English soccer team), is a pre-eminent example. The old stone cottage on the site, which takes center-stage in a rural cluster of buildings, is a picturesque reminder of the region's history.

The cottage, constructed originally as a stable, languished for many years prior to its purchase in 1990 by present owners Jeff Williams and Nicky Martin. They embarked

on a painstaking process restoring and adapting the historic cottage for use as a holiday home. Subsequently, they decided to base themselves in the South, and extensions were required to make the cottage a permanent family home. The latest, NZIA Award-winning addition designed by Tim Nees of New Work Studio builds on the strengths of the existing dwelling but offers a fresh new perspective on contextual response. The clients, who had previously commissioned Nees to design two projects in Wellington, were keen to achieve a distinctly local feel, responsive to the Otago setting.

On arrival at the redeveloped property, it's apparent the old stone cottage has pride of place. The building presents a reassuringly familiar and romantic image, and that has not been compromised by the new addition. The architect has carefully located the new wing behind, and separated at arms-length by link-bridges, from the existing dwelling. The impression from the street is that the new portion is recessed respectfully from its older counterpart.

The rich autumnal colours of the Central Otago landscape are clearly reflected in the palette of materials used in old and new construction. The complementary hues of stone, timber, concrete and slate set in the tree-framed alpine context create a picture-postcard composition. As one approaches the front door, the new two-storied addition is revealed strikingly, apparently peering over the shoulder of its historic forebear. The new building flirts with the historic dwelling, providing a contemporary foil to the traditional gabled form of the cottage.

The layers of the project endow it with depth and lend it intrigue. The new addition



OPENING SPREAD: NORTH AND EAST FACES OF THE HOUSE IN THE LOWER SHOTOVER RIVER VALLEY. LEFT: THE NEW WING REVEALS ITSELF SLOWLY. BELOW: THE EXTENSION, LOOKING NORTH.



## PROJECT CREDITS

**ARCHITECT** NEW WORK STUDIO

**PROJECT TEAM** TIM NEES (PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT); RAFE MACLEAN, JUSTIN WRIGHT (ASSISTANT ARCHITECTS) **BUILDER** KERRY SMITH

RIGHT: NEW INTERIOR AREA. BELOW: THE JUNCTION OF THE ORIGINAL STONE COTTAGE AND THE NEW EXTENSION.



sits as a second layer behind the old cottage. Timber slat screen-wall cladding, punctuated by slotted window apertures, forms a second layer of skin on the outside of the new structure. The slatted wall distorts the conventional distinction between roof and wall, with the timber screen appearing to be folded back across the roof plane. Below the horizontal banded timber cladding, a rough textured off-form concrete base — a reference to the stacked stone of the cottage — visually anchors the addition to the ground.

The new building form is stretched wide and narrow across the site. On one side is the dining area, on the other a bedroom wing. The new dining-kitchen area is the core of the new addition. The room is set into the contour of the land at the rear, and fully glazed to the north, creating a classic “cave-pavilion” space. The glass wall to the north slides open to provide an open living environment that connects seamlessly to the external environment. The roof cantilevers out beyond the edge of the

room, hovering over the wall aperture. The kitchen floor is constructed of polished concrete paving slabs. The exposed aggregate is (fortuitously) a local gravel mix, contributing subtly to contextual integrity. The pattern is extended to the adjacent outdoor court, where textured concrete pavers of similar composition are employed.

From the dining space, a corridor, likened by the owner to an ‘air-lock’, links the new wing to the old cottage. The transition is delightfully handled. A timber floor, made from oak felled on site, bridges between the polished concrete floor tiles of the kitchen and terracotta quarry tiles of the family area. A display case brimming with model Aston Martins is neatly inserted within the link wall. Screening elements have been used inside the house, continuing a theme expressed on the exterior. An innovative slatted screen divider wall provides a distinctive quality of filtered light into cellular bedrooms for the children.

The bedrooms are tightly configured to

provide integrated sleeping, working, storage modules. Democratically, each is of matching area and layout. These small recessive, multifunctional personal spaces open onto a light and airy corridor that doubles as a shared play-space.

The master bedroom perches tree-hut-like atop the ground storey. A quirky alternative means of access is provided via an elevated private deck at the rear of the building. The master bedroom is a cocoon-cosy space, which rewards its occupants with an elevated and unique perspective of the alpine countryside beyond.

Passage through the interior of the building reveals an integration of the historic and contemporary that celebrates the distinctive attributes of the old and the new, whilst at the same time avoiding disjointedness. There is a ‘tardis-like’ quality to this dwelling where its interior volumes of space appear to exceed outside perceptions. Spaces of quite divergent character flow into each other with ease. The interior is richly textured and infused

with a delight in details and juxtaposition of materials. The controlled and deliberate placement of materials and textures evokes a Scandinavian-like discipline in the design.

The house succeeds on two fronts: as a piece of highly textural sculpture in the landscape, and secondly as an eminently livable family home. The building is satisfying and uplifting on an artistic level, but at the same time the architect has not lost sight of the pragmatic requirement to create a comfortable and functional living environment for an active family. Although stylishly articulated, this house retains a reassuringly relaxed composure. There has evidently been a positive collaboration between architect and client. A shared enthusiasm for the project, and the architect’s creative response, have produced a winning outcome.

This considered addition to the Wakatipu landscape, illustrates the opportunity for sensitively designed new development to complement and enrich the special character of the region. *Mark Garden*

