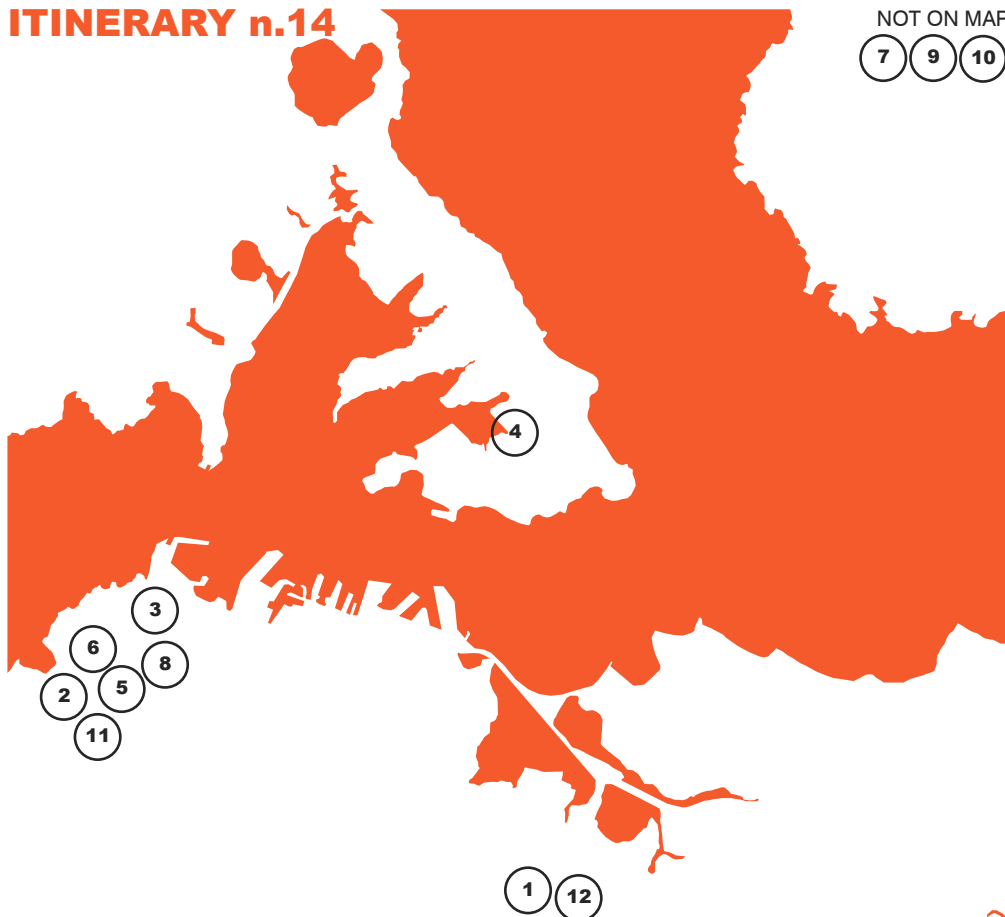
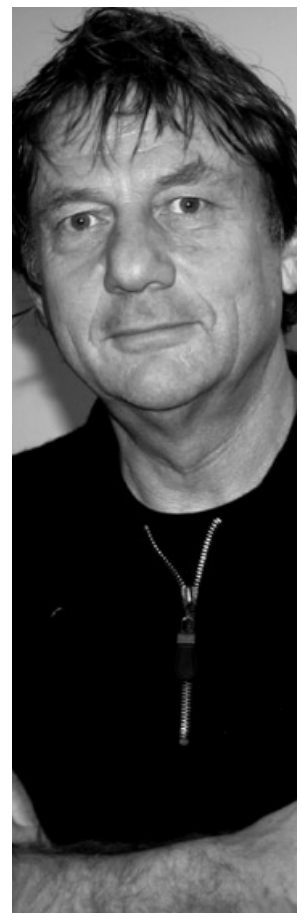


## ITINERARY n.14



NOT ON MAP  
7 9 10



## MALCOLM WALKER ARCHITECTS

I often detour past Malcom Walker's award winning Arapai and Urale House in Freemans Bay. I admire the building for its foreign character; for the way it stands outside the Bay's Victorian and Edwardian housing stock and raises questions of the neighbours. There are many reasons why the house is foreign. Firstly, there is no off-street parking. Walker says this was because there was no room, but neighbours with compact plots have found room, often at the expense of the elevation but with increased real estate values. The absence of parking indicates a concern for what a site can hold without being overburdened. It is a value statement that raises questions of neighbours. Secondly, the building form is an abstract and legible gable roof over a rectangular plan with a circulation lean-to alongside. This composition is a refined variation of the neighbouring forms and results from what Walker describes as a process of 'distillation;' a process he believes connects architecture and cartooning. In each project he aims to distil a potent and legible proposal. And the distilled form raises questions of the interior, for it lulls one into thinking that inside and outside align – an assumption that is often confounded. In Freemans Bay, a strange cut in the gable suggests the inside is not so straightforward. The house is full of questions.

With an interest in this foreign side, it was surprising to learn that most commentators celebrate the familiarity of Walker's work by aligning him with the familiar themes of Kiwi architecture. He is presented as a designer of good Kiwi stuff for keen clients with modest budgets (there is truth in this, says Walker, but he has on-the-boards larger houses that veer away from modesty). It is said that his architecture is unpretentious and never enters into self-indulgent details (though he admits to a fascination with eaves). Epitomising such familiar sentiments, the recent *Trenta Casa* exhibition catalogue asserts that in Walker's houses comfort is more important than fashion. Several commentators describe the window seat as Walker's signature gesture and thereby place him comfortably in humanist camp. "Everybody loves window seats," says Christopher Alexander, because they resolve the conflict of wanting to sit and be comfortable and wanting to be near the light. Alexander continues: "a room where you truly feel comfortable will always contain some kind of window place." But alongside these familiar sentiments, the window seat is related to an uneasiness with life outside, a theme explored by Adolf Loos with his carefully framed vista from seating positions and the use of window seats above entry doors. Together, the foreign and the familiar make Walker's buildings rich. His houses offer both a place to recline comfortably and somewhere to experience a foreign intrigue. Speaking generally, the foreign and familiar are often intertwined. The foreigner places or raises the first question and typically the first question is "who are you?". This is a question of the family; a familiar question. Indeed, it is the question raised whenever I see one of Patrick Reynold's photographs of a Walker interior, for Reynolds habitually includes people in Walker's buildings, but rarely in others. Walker definitely crafts beautiful comfortable spaces, but one must question the dominance of the familiar narrative because it overlooks the foreign side that makes his buildings rich. The familiar focus draws him to the centre of a profession that often finds itself on comfortable ideals. Indeed, one award citation proposed that Walker's work represented the majority of projects faced by the profession each day. However, the very fact that it was receiving an award - that it was singled out - indicates that the work is also foreign to the majority. So with this in mind, we must question the value of the familiar narrative. Why do we tend to portray a good architect in a way that potentially overlooks the richness of their work? And does the dominance of the familiar narrative do New Zealand architecture any favours? *Sean Flanagan*

## Biography

Malcolm Walker was born in 1950 and schooled in Hokitika. He studied science at Canterbury University and resided in College House – Sir Miles Warren's halls of residence. The building sparked a career change, so Walker transferred to Auckland to study architecture between 1971 and 76. Influential educators were John Goldwater, Vince Terreni, Mike Austin and David Mitchell. After graduating, he wrote a book on the history of the Westland County, before securing a 'ripper of a job' as a graduate with the railways in Wellington (with his own office and a draughtsman). In 1982 he joined a shop front practice in Jervois Road (the firm evolved from Buller-Walker to Malcolm Walker Architects). Walker is one a number of the 'usual suspects' of Ponsonby Road/Grey Lynn, an inner-city suburb that has supported a number of well-known architects. Malcolm Walker Architects has a staff of 4 and is run out of an office on Ponsonby Road. Walker has won a number of awards, mostly for residential work and has projects in Northland, Auckland, Christchurch, Rakino Island, and a Scout Hall in Hokitika.

1

1990

Alberto Garcia Alvarez Studio  
30 Aldred Road, Remuera

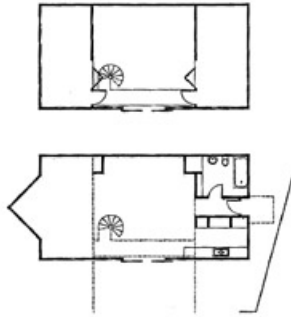


A Buller & Walker project, this studio was designed for a painter of large canvases and sought to achieve considerable space with economy, all in the context of a sloping garden. The architect received a specific brief determining the lighting requirements of the studio and many models were built to test the light conditions before construction. The studio was built by the client and is clad in white painted weatherboards with a blue fascia and includes an exposed roof structure that pitches up to a large clerestory window. This building introduces a theme in Walker's work of designing for tight spaces on the back of inner-city lots. Consequently the studio is not visible from the road. See *New Zealand Home and Building*, June/July 1990.

2

1991

Mark-Brown House  
91 Old Mill Road, Westmere



Awarded an NZIA Resene Award in 1992, this small house has a double-height central space with a perimeter gantry leading to mezzanine floors at both ends of the plan. The interior is enriched by a double-skinned corrugated iron vault; this being one of Walker's favourite materials. The tall arcing volume introduces a spaciousness in response to tight inner-city lots. Pip Cheshire described the crafting of the house's internal world as "a familiar response to cheek-by-jowl living using the height and light from above to suggest an entire suburban lot, backyard and all in one space; mowing and weeding unnecessary." See *Architecture NZ*, Nov/Dec 1991.

3

1996

Mark-Brown House  
11 St Francis De Sale St  
St Mary's Bay



Designed for the same client as at Old Mill Road (the son of architect Peter Mark-Brown), this house demonstrates Walker's convictions of designing from the inside out. In the *Houses NZ* interview, Walker commented "If I'm ever looking at anyone's plans – including my own – I always imagine myself walking through them. In my mind I go in the door and wander around, working out what's going on where." While evoking tradition, the house has a clear sense of modern spatial interpenetration. From the entry gate one can see through the living volume to the rear garden. This creates a strange experience of traditional building forms (suggesting cellular containment) marked by a modern interior openness. Note also the clear view from a 'window place' to the front gate. Obviously happy with the experience, the client is retraining to be an architect.

4

1998

McIntyre House and Studio  
51 Church Street, Devonport



These additions and alterations to two early Devonport houses received an NZIA NZ Award in 2001 and represents what Walker describes as a "happy mix of restitution and renovation." There were two existing buildings on the site – a four square villa and a cottage. The villa was relocated further to the front of the site and a new family room and kitchen were then inserted between the villa and the cottage. Via excavation, a new bedroom/ensuite was added to the rear of the cottage. The original cottage was also repaired and refounded, with care taken to retain and match the original wide Kauri flooring and lining. This engagement of existing buildings demonstrates Walkers interest in operating in the complex ground between preservation and demolition.

5

2000

Bolliwood Restaurant  
110 Ponsonby Road, Ponsonby



The winner of an NZIA Resene Colour Award in 2000, this Indian restaurant brought a vibrant glow to the top end of Ponsonby Rd when it opened, but has now been dulled down to a dire brown. Describing the original lighting scheme, Walker said "I have tried to show it up for what it is – even though it's knackered inside, it hasn't been destroyed." The design is a robust renovation with the first floor knocked through to produce a voluminous double-height interior, with mezzanine floor and bi-folds to the street. Walker stresses the importance of the connection with the street for the viability of the business and to the suggestion of some onlookers that it doesn't look like a restaurant he replies "I don't agree. It's got a cash register, a bar and a kitchen." See *Architecture NZ*, June/July 2000.

6

2003

Snowden Imrie Alterations  
29 Fife Street, Westmere



These extensive additions and alterations to a corner-site bungalow received an NZIA Resene Award in 2005. The shaping of the interior volumes demonstrates a concern for formalising previously casual relationships to the exterior. The strategy of the family areas opening onto the contained rear garden is repeated here. Note the vibrant red door frame – a gesture used on a number of other projects – to indicate the entry in conjunction with a protruding landscape wall and stone steps that fall to the footpath. These gestures draw visitors to the reconfigured entry, something important for a corner-site with multiple points of approach. There is currently a major landscaping project being undertaken to the rear of the site, perhaps to formalise the backyard movies that were a regular feature utilising the wall of the fortuitously placed neighbouring garage.

7

2004

Stokes House  
Millbrook Lane, Christchurch



One of Walker's most austere works, this masonry house received an NZIA Local Award. The two-storey house rises from within a site secured by tall boundary walls and this arrangement is a response to the sunny side of the house fronting a busy road. Walker says: "The house has a feeling of a solid private oasis in a busy city environment." The private quarters are on the first floor above the noise of the traffic. The masonry forms provide a solid ground for a lighter pergola and steel-framed roof structure to play over. A timber gate, louvered sunshade, and metal balustrade further enhance the play of the solid and light. The hard-paved courtyard behind the boundary walls indicates what Walker refers to as the client's 'un-Christchurch-like lawnphobia.'

8

2004

Arapai Urale House  
22 Ireland Street, Freemans Bay



Recipient of an NZIA Award and a Resene Colour Award in 2004. The clients, a TV producer and a poet, had historical connections with the Bay, as does the house, which responds to the area's special character requirements. The form references its Victorian neighbours and includes deep verandahs to acclimatise the solid container to the Pacific environment. In plan, an equivalence between the rooms plays down traditional hierarchies and ensures the small house accommodates a growing family and the large numbers of visitors that sometimes stay over. See *New Zealand Houses*, the *Trenta Casa* catalogue, *NZ Home and Entertaining*, Aug/Sep 2006, Lloyd Jenkins in "Shape of the New" in *The Listener*, Jan 15-21 2005.

Gilmore Bach  
Golden Heights, Rakino Island



Located on Rakino Island (northwest of Waiheke and reached by a 35min ferry ride from Auckland), this butterfly roof bach received an NZIA Local Award in 2005. The building conforms to stringent resource consent conditions requiring the dwelling to be no more than 50m<sup>2</sup>, but in this small space the beautifully crafted building provides for comfortable solitary living as well as berths for eight. A bathing area to the rear employs a polycarbonate-clad wall that can be propped open to let in light, the sea air and glimpses of plants outside. Walker enjoys a close working relationship with a core group of builders and in this case the Auckland-based builder lived on site for long periods of time. Being so close to the project arguably contributed to the high level of finish.

Vernon House  
Te Papatanu Rd, Aotea Harbour



Designed for Penny Vernon, an interior designer who has worked alongside Walker (Bolliwod, McNaughton Thornton House, Jamieson Houses), this house won a NZIA regional award in 2006 and was exhibited in the *Trenta Casa* exhibition alongside the Arapai Urale House. Walker admits to the final design being a challenge to his *modus operandi*. His initial reaction to the site was to hunker down with a dark painted form. Instead, the white zincalume building stands proudly on the coastal edge; a stance the architect is warming to. Twin gable-roof forms provide both sheltered outdoor spaces and an interior that confronts the weather. The main house contains one bedroom, while an adjacent butterfly roof sleep-out provides additional quarters. See *New Zealand Houses*, and the *Trenta Casa* catalogue, 2008.

McNaughton Thornton House  
33 Cockburn St, Grey Lynn



The recipient of an NZIA Local Award in 2006, this residence with its split-level cross section and a plan of interlocking volumes represents one of Walker's most complex designs. The complexity evolved from working with a tight inner-city site crossed by an old creek bed that required cunning engineering to keep the house above the flood plane. The clients came to Walker after having seen the Arapai Urale House and so it makes for an interesting comparison, particularly with the concern for clearly delineated rooms to separate the different family groups. A consistent theme, though, is the procession down a corridor, past the private areas to spill out into generous living areas that extend in to the rear garden with a covered terrace. See *NZ Home and Entertaining*, Aug/Sep 2006

Jamieson Houses  
222 Victoria Avenue, Remuera

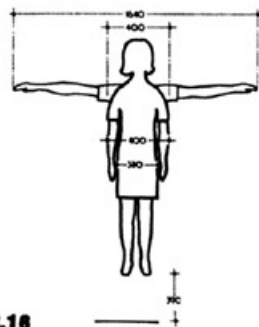


Two houses are being developed on a Remuera site with views over Parnell and towards Orakei Basin. One house is for the client and the other is for sale. Predominantly of plastered concrete block, the buildings have a solid presence befitting the neighbourhood. Walker is interested in shaping volumes and these larger houses with their many rooms and formal parti provide a great opportunity to exercise this interest, perhaps more so than his smaller dwellings. The plan responds to the garden and a large oak tree. Windows are set above a low-sill (resisting the temptation for full height glass) ensuring that rooms are contained. The opening of a sliding window then becomes a celebration of joining inside and outside. See *Houses NZ*, Issue 6.

### Cartooning



Walker has been drawing cartoons since his youth, and during his Auckland University years he was a cartoonist for *Craccum*. He has also been the *Sunday News* cartoonist for the past 30 years and was a finalist in the cartoon category at this year's Qantas Media Awards. Walker is the long serving cartoonist for *Architecture New Zealand*, wherein he variously humours the trials of being an architect and casts a satirical eye over the profession's pretensions and architects' obsessions with building fashion. A number of his cartoons are held in the New Zealand Cartoon Archive at the Alexander Turnbull Library.



8.18  
Space requirements for celebrating issue of resource consents

### Other Addresses:

- Bob and Elizabeth Ellis Studio (1995)  
23 Berne Place, Birkenhead:  
A new studio and alterations to a Gordon Smith house
- Halsey Street Properties (1996)  
31-37 Halsey Street, City
- Kraayvanger Alterations (1999)  
46 Pompellier Terrace,  
Ponsonby
- Sweetman House (2002)  
25 Nihinihi Ave, Raglan
- Baird Alterations (2004)  
8 Wallace Street, Herne Bay
- McHardy & Dixon Alterations (2006)  
6 Pember Reeves Street,  
Ponsonby
- Reynolds Alterations (2008)  
43 Livingstone Street,  
Westmere

### Sources:

Many thanks to Malcolm Walker for his assistance in preparing this guide.

A number of photographs are by Sean Flanagan (Mark-Brown House, Snowden Imrie House, Arapai Urale House, McNaughton Thornton House). All other images and drawings were supplied by Malcolm.

Aside from the references given above with each individual project, further information can be found in *Houses NZ* Issue 4 where there is an Malcolm Walker profile including an interview and commentary by the architect on a number of projects.



Malcolm Walker...



Bolliwod Restaurant, in its colourful heyday.