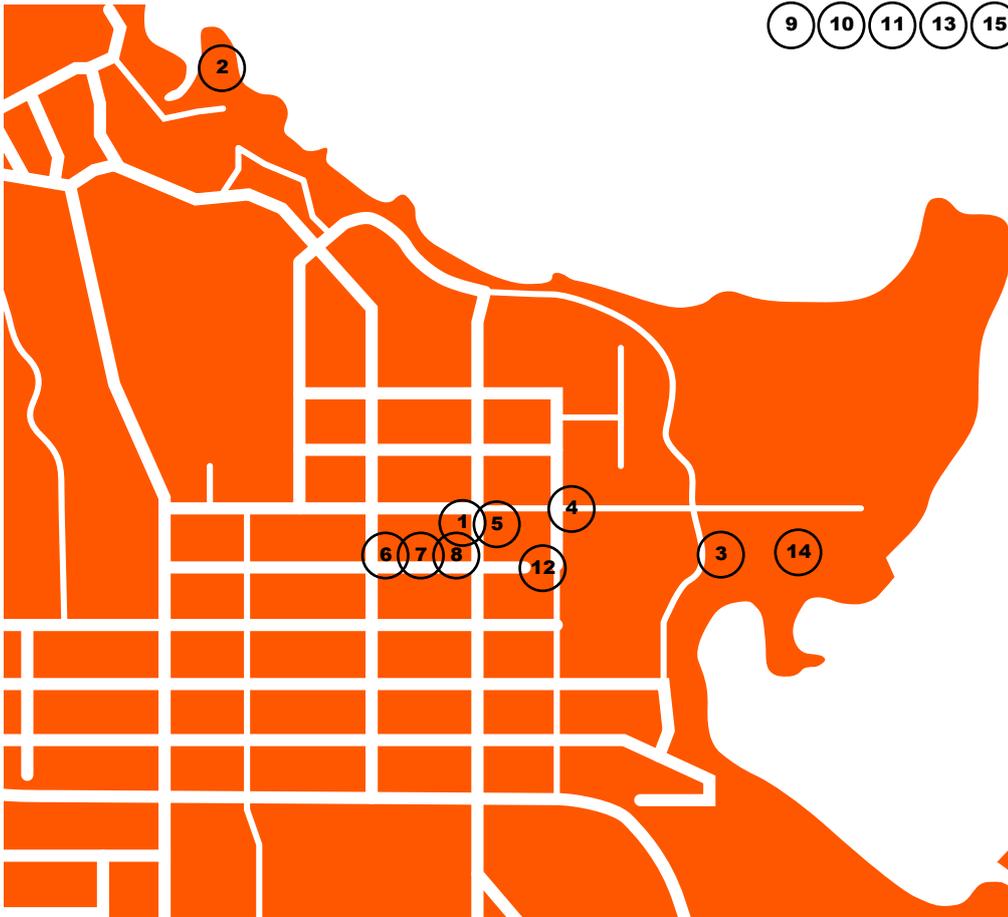


ITINERARY n.33

NOT ON MAP



The Blue Baths, 1933

City Guide: Rotorua

Architecture seems to be a big city activity. It is, of course, possible to think of exceptions - Mario Botta in the mountain resort town of Lugano, Peter Zumthor beavering away in the tiny Swiss village of Haldenstein, or more close at hand, John Scott seeming to pluck inspired designs from the coastal air of Haumoana - but almost every significant architect is associated with a particular metropolis, and much of what we assume is important about architectural culture seems to rely on metropolitan densities of wealth and sophistication.

Even here in decidedly un-metropolitan New Zealand, the big cities seem to predominate. A scan of the list of NZIA National Awards reveals the dominance of Christchurch, Wellington, and (particularly) Auckland; places like Gisborne, Russell, or Levin rarely make the list. It is hard to know whether this is because of a lack of architectural ambition among small town architects, or because their important opportunities are usually snaffled by big city design firms; Aucklanders often complain about Aussies jettling in to snatch plum commissions, but seem not to hesitate at getting on a plane to Queenstown or Paraparaumu to pick up projects.

Rotorua is one of the many provincial cities in New Zealand where civic architecture has largely been created by those that don't live there. In Rotorua, this was exaggerated by the peculiar role outside authorities, particularly the central government, have played in its development - it was unique in the Commonwealth in being a government-controlled town. Early European visitors encountered a geothermal and scenic wonderland - the spectacular Pink and White Terraces on Lake Tarawera, mud pools, geysers and hot springs with healing qualities. Sensing the area's potential as a tourist destination - the vision was for a spa resort in a grand European manner - the government acquired land adjacent to the Ngati Whakaeu village at Ohinemutu in the 1880s. Land in the new town was offered for lease to the public, and spa facilities were quickly developed in the Sanatorium Reserves (the area that is now the Government Gardens). The destruction of the Pink and White Terraces with the eruption of 1886 didn't dampen the tourist trade, and by 1907 there were at least 25 hotels and boarding houses in the area, with the grand, Tudor style Bath House opening the following year.

The vision didn't quite eventuate; the notion of the waters as a miraculous cure-all was officially debunked by the middle of the century, and the Bath House closed in 1966. Rotorua's waters, however, have continued to attract tourists for their recreational rather than curative benefits, and the region's cultural and natural amenities have ensured that the city remained a tourist hotspot.

In 1962, Rotorua reached a population of 20,000 and was declared a city. During the post-war years farming and forestry industries were developing significantly in the surrounding districts, and like many New Zealand cities, Rotorua experienced a building boom. The city was no longer government controlled, but it became a centre for government administration with numerous government departments establishing regional headquarters in high-modern office blocks.

Generating considerable architectural production, the two activities of tourism and administration set the architectural character of the city. Rotorua has been home to talented architects, the work of several of whom is included in this guide, but is an architectural paradox: a city that developed because of the unique natural assets of its particular location, but both its architecture and the architects that created it always seem to be looking to much bigger places elsewhere. *Andrew Barrie & Julia Gatley*

1

1901

Princes Arch Gateway
Arawa Street



Originally built in honour of the 1901 visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (who later became King George V and Queen Mary I), this totara structure was intended as a stylized representation of a Crown. The spectacle was enhanced by illumination with electric lights, electricity having only just become available in the city. Portions of the Gateway, now HPT Category 2 listed, were moved after the visit to its present location to serve as the entrance to the Government Gardens. Head across the road to take a look at the HPT-listed Princes Gate Hotel, originally built in 1897.

2

1918

St Faith's Church
1 Tunohupu St., Ohinemutu
Edward La Trobe Hill



Subject of a thousand postcards, the Anglican church of St. Faith's sits on the edge of the lake in the Maori village of Ohinemutu. The Edward La Trobe Hill-designed Tudor-style building replaced an earlier one built in 1885. Inside the church is richly decorated with carvings, tukutuku panels, and a window overlooking the lake showing a Maori Christ who seems to be walking on water. The adjacent Tamatekapua meeting house is worth a look – it reopened in 1943, but many of its carvings may be much older.

La Trobe Hill also designed the Rotorua Soldiers' Institute (1918) at 1133 Hinemaru Street, his own house (1927) at 1282 Hinemoa Street, and Glenholme, 63 Miller Street (1900).

3

1908

The Bath House
Government Gardens
W. J. Trigg & B. S. Corlett.



An early Government-sponsored tourism initiative, The Bath House opened in 1908. Designed to evoke the atmosphere of a European spa, the complex was built in an Elizabethan half-timbered style and is regarded by many as the most impressive Elizabethan Revival building in the country. The spa facilities have now moved elsewhere on the site (try the Polynesian Spa!), and the HPT Category 1-listed building now houses the Rotorua Museum of Art & History. The Government Gardens contain a number of other architectural treats: the Tea Pavilion (1903), the pagoda-roofed Croquet Pavilion (1907), and J.T. Mair's Spanish Mission-style Blue Baths (1933).

4

1914

Post Office
34 Arawa Street
John Campbell



Another favourite of postcard printers, the two floors and tower of this building are clad in rough cast cement plaster with decorative Tudor timberwork. It was designed by John Campbell, who is now best known as the winner of the 1911 competition for the design of Parliament Buildings in Wellington. Now occupied by the Department of Labour, the building is HPT Category 2 listed. Campbell also designed the Queen Anne-style Government Tourist Bureau (1903) at the other end of the block, the two buildings now being connected by the Tourism Information Centre erected in 1993 by Auckland firm Creative Spaces.

5

1940

Rotorua Civic Theatre
1170 Fenton Street
Edmund Ancombe & Assocs



At the time this building was produced, Ancombe was one of the county's leading architects, running offices in Dunedin, Wellington and the Hawkes Bay. He had produced such designs as the Classical-style Sarjeant Art Gallery in Wanganui and the moderne Centennial Exhibition in Wellington (1939-1940), but this project is an eclectic mixture of Stripped Classical and Spanish Mission elements. In addition to the theatre, concert chamber and supper room, the building originally housed the library, municipal offices and museum. It has now been significantly extended, creating some intriguing inside-outside inversions. The building is HPT Category 1 listed.

6

1940

Police Station
Cnr Haupapa & Tutaneaki Sts
Government Architect's Office



This building was produced by John T. Mair during his time as Government Architect. One of the building's most unusual features was the plaster-cast frieze of Maori motifs – this was locally made – that runs around the outside of the building. It's heavy-duty stuff – the reinforced concrete structure is clad in brick veneer to produce exterior walls that are 18 inches thick. The building served as police station until 1969, when the Police moved to a more purely modern edifice (by F G Sheppard, Government Architect) in Fenton Street – it is now the Pig & Whistle Pub (open 11.30am 'til late, seven days a week).

7

1958-1962

Government Building
1127 Haupapa Street
Government Architect's Office



Due to its importance as a tourist hub, Rotorua was administered directly by the central government for much of its early history, and a strong government presence remained. In the 1960s and 1970s, Rotorua was one of the fast developing parts of the country, as the economic power of the forestry and farming industries in the central North Island expanded. New facilities were developed in Rotorua to serve as a regional administrative centre for government agencies, the Government Building - designed during F. Gordon Wilson's reign as Government Architect - being the first. Now much altered.

8

1962

Gov't Life Insurance Building
1115 Haupapa Street
Porter & Martin



George Porter had served for a time in the Ministry of Works, and his Wellington-based firm of Porter & Martin was involved in a great many civic and town planning projects. As well as this, the firm produced at least four other Government Life buildings – New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Masterton, and Lower Hutt. Another significant building in the Government Precinct is the Maori Land Court (1963) at 1143 Haupapa Street - still in original condition (complete with James Turkington mural). It was produced by the Government Architect's Office, the project overseen by District Architect Frank Anderson.

9

1965

Timber Research Building
Sala Street
Ministry of Works (J. Newnham)



John Newnham is best known as the designer of the New Zealand Pavilion at Expo 70, Osaka. Common to the Japan and Rotorua buildings was the imperative to demonstrate the different ways in which both native and exotic timbers could be used. Here, timber posts and beams were given architectural expression. In addition, sixteen glue-laminated parabolic arches originally circled an entry rotunda, complemented internally by 'ornamental' wall linings and radiating floor boards. Unfortunately the rotunda has been demolished, and the best remaining element is a substantial spiral staircase.

10

1965-76

McKillop Girls College
Kahu Street
James Hackshaw



James Hackshaw was one of the key members of The Group, and so produced numerous innovative residential projects through the 1950s. Following his 1958 departure from the firm, much of his work came from the Catholic Church, and he produced numerous churches and schools, although these buildings closely followed the tectonic principles and loose, informal planning he had established in his residential work. Hackshaw masterplanned this school, and its most noteworthy element is the chapel designed in 1976. The school was amalgamated with the adjacent boys' school in 1987, and is now co-ed John Paul College.

11

1976-81

Rainbow Springs
Fairy Springs Road
Roger Walker



In the late 1970s Walker worked on two high-profile tourist facilities - at Waitomo Caves (now destroyed) and here at Rainbow Springs. After designing the Kiwi House in 1976, he completed the souvenir shop and offices (1977) and the tearooms and restaurant (1981). Walker fans might also head over to Whakatane Airport (1974), one of his best (and best preserved) designs for a public building and winner of an NZIA Local Enduring Architecture Award in 2003. Walker also designed Solitaire Lodge on Lake Tarawera.

12

1985

Rotorua Civic Centre
1061 Haupapa Street
Warren & Mahoney



Warren & Mahoney received this commission as the result of a competition in which, according to Sir Miles, one of his spectacular (and detailed) watercolours may have been the clinching factor. Internally, all of the Council functions have been arranged around an elongated, skylit, triple-height atrium, intended to create legibility and develop a sense of the Council as an integrated whole. The project won an NZIA National Award in 1986. See *NZ Local Govt. March 1986*.

13

2006

Te Puia
Hemo Road
Creative Spaces



This tourist facility won an NZIA Regional Award in 2007. The citation read: "A new interpretation on Maori heritage and the experiential learning of visitors to Rotorua, Te Puia is a stunning journey through cultural and architectural forms. Te Puia is a taonga for the present and future, and demonstrates e kitea iho an atea haere o nga take mai ra ano ki tenei wa, a, tae noa ki te wa kei te heke mai. (visible evidence of the continuity between past, present and future.) It is an inspired cultural complex, well executed and presented, sensitive to place, time and those who work in and who pass through this experience. ... Words can not describe this special place - it has to be experienced."

14

2007

Energy Events Centre
Government Gardens
Boon Goldsmith Bhaskar



The project, which sits behind the 1908 Baths building on the lake shore, received an NZIA Local Award and a Resene Colour Award in 2008. The citation read: "Respecting the sensitive site and multiple cultural issues, this complex provides well organised large event spaces with a high degree of flexibility and appropriate scale. A mixture of contemporary and traditional cultural images are interwoven with a rich texture of modern building materials that humanise the extensive spaces. ... The use of Maori symbolism throughout the building is offset against a colour palette that is carefully blended by a very competent team."

15

2008

Lockwood Gullwing
55 Fairy Springs Road
Strachan Group Architects



In a very 21st century attempt at the modernist dream of making high-quality design available to the masses, SGA produced a series of designs that make environmental and sustainable design readily accessible. The Gullwing show home is the first from this EcoSmart Series to be built. Its design adapts Lockwood's solid wood construction while incorporating classic SGA elements such as carefully positioned thermal mass, the outdoor room, and the planted entry courtyard. See *Home NZ Aug./Sept. 2008*. The house stands in Lockwood's national show home village, open 10am to 4pm, 7 days a week. The village also includes Pete Bossley's dynamic Canopy show home.

Other addresses:

Westpac Bank (1937)
1251 Tutanekai Street
Charles Towle

Towle is known to Aucklanders as the architect of the competition-winning but never-finished Holy Trinity Cathedral in Parnell.

South British Insurance Building (1958)
1272 Fenton Street
M. K. Draffin

Now occupied by Family Start. The sunshades are not original.

Lee Brothers Building (1958)
1181 Eruera Street
Alleman Land Newnham & Verrall
See *Home & Building* Oct. 1960.

NZI Building (1964)
1246-1250 Fenton Street
Gummer Ford Hoadley Budge & Gummer
Somewhat altered. Gummer et al also designed the State Insurance Offices (1963) at 1192 Hinemoa Street.

St James Theatre (1965)
1126-1138 Tutanekai Street
Rigby, Mullan & Associates
Now occupied by Destiny Church.

St Lukes Church (1974-75, 1981)
1223 Amohia Street
Deacon Stock Architects

Sources:

All photographs are by Andrew Barrie or Julia Gatley.

The most comprehensive source on Rotorua's civic architecture is the *Rotorua Central Area Built Heritage Study* prepared in 2007 for the Rotorua District Council by Matthews and Matthews Architects. Many of Rotorua's key buildings, particularly those in the Government Gardens, have been listed by the Historic Places Trust - information on these buildings is available on the HPT's online register: www.historic.org.nz. Many of these buildings are also part of the city's very well developed tourist trail, and so are well described in the tourist literature - try to pick up a copy of the RDC's *Cultural Heritage Trail* pamphlet from the Tourist Information Office. The buildings in the Government Precinct are included in Julia Gatley's *Long Live the Modern* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008).



Maori Land Court, 1963