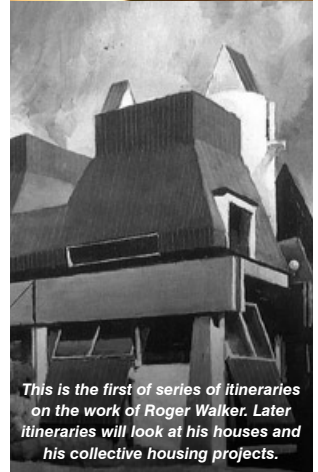
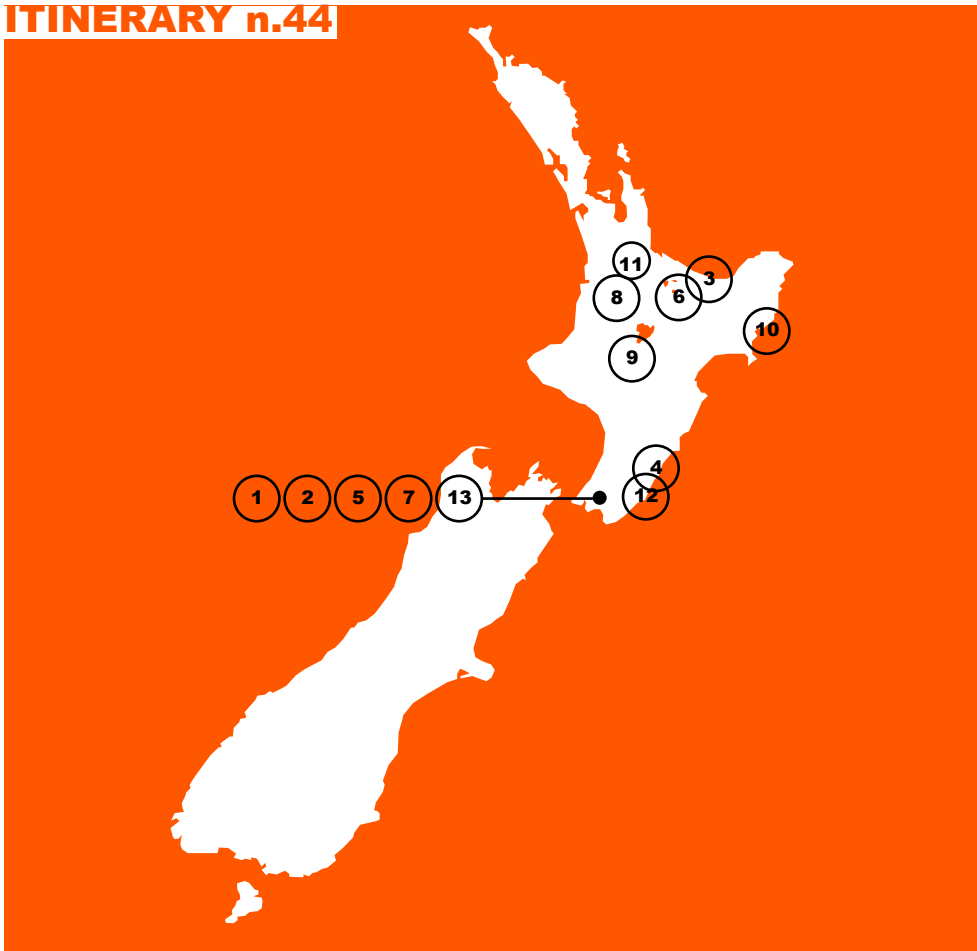


## ITINERARY n.44



## Roger Walker 1: Civic & Commercial

In the 1960s, New Zealand's most exciting architecture emerged from Christchurch – Miles Warren, Peter Beaven and a host of other talented architects turned the city into the architectural hothouse now referred to as The Christchurch School. However, in the early 1970's a series of shifts – the ebbing of confidence in modernist principles, and key Christchurch architects moving their focus to large commercial projects – the Christchurch School seemed to lose its urgency and Wellington took over as New Zealand's architectural laboratory. At the center of this scene were the young architects Ian Athfield and Roger Walker.

The best remembered 1970s work of both architects is their extroverted houses, but both were also active from their earliest days in the public and commercial realms. Walker had moved to Wellington to work under Calder, Fowler & Styles, his early contributions including the Link Span buildings and a church in Tauramanui, both indicating what was to come. With a few years he had completed The Wellington Club, a colorful cluster of low-rise forms that stood out among the high-rise offices of The Terrace. It created a sensation and became Walker's first claim to fame.

The building demonstrated a radical break with the sensible Christchurch modernism of Warren & Mahoney (although not with the romantic direction Beaven was by then pursuing). However, Walker's career emulated W&M's in several ways, the most startling being the extreme rapidity with which he was able to move from houses up to much larger buildings – he completed complex, high-profile projects such as Centrepont and Whakatane Airport within a few years of making the transition into independent practice.

His career also mirrored that of W&M in that the unique architectural vocabulary that would define his work for years appeared almost fully formed in his earliest projects. At The Wellington Club, a relatively simple palette of concrete block, in-situ concrete, and timber (oddly similar to that of W&M's early work) was formed into, as Gerald Melling wrote, "cylindrical towers, tall pyramids, truncated pyramids with mysterious attic rooms nestled behind dormer windows, nooks and crannies and secret corners, spiral staircases, [and] circular windows". This language was a mash-up of numerous influences – elements from local colonial and High Victorian architecture, aspects of New Brutalism, and ideas drawn from Japanese maestro Kenzo Tange and the Metabolists who developed under his influence. Walker's visit to Japan in 1970, particularly to the Osaka Expo, was particularly influential, giving him direct experience of robust way Tange expressed a building's internal functions externally. In the early 1980s, only a few shifts - the addition of trellis and polycarbonate to the material palette, a re-orientation from colonial towards classical references, slightly flatter and more graphic manipulation of façades – would bring Walker's work into alignment with the bold Postmodernism then emerging from Europe and the US.

Walker's exuberant architecture has provoked mixed reactions. Controversial buildings often become our most loved, but a number of Walker's buildings have met premature ends. Some, such as The Wellington Club and Centrepont, have succumbed to economic pressure, while others (Park Mews, THC Queenstown) suffered insensitive alterations. Even nature has been unkind to Walker, a fire destroying his Waitomo Caves complex. The future of the Whakatane Airport is also uncertain, with plans for the area requiring a much larger terminal. Rather than being discouraged in the face of conservatism, controversy, and destruction, Walker maintains, as Russell Walden put it, "the joy and creative rebellion of the free spirit." Long may it continue. *Andrew Barrie & Kirsten Zink*

## Biography:

Roger Neville Walker was born in Hamilton on 21 December 1942. Much has been made of his childhood construction efforts, particularly his wooden trucks and the Fort Nyte play hut constructed as a 10-year-old. Walker attended Hamilton Boys High School; he wanted to design cars but his high school career advisor suggested designing buildings instead. Walker studied architecture at the University of Auckland, and during his studies he had holiday jobs with Rodney Smith Architects in Hamilton, Warren & Mahoney in Christchurch, and the established Wellington firm of Calder Fowler & Styles. On graduating in 1964, he was recruited to work for CF&S, where he was handed design responsibility for a number of surprisingly high-profile projects such as The Wellington Club. He gradually transitioned from CF&S into independent practice in the early 1970s. His practice has had as many as six staff, but currently has two.

Walker has continued his fascination with cars, as evidenced by his large collection of cars and his sideline as presenter of local motoring TV program, the *AA Torque Show*.

1

1968-69

Link Span  
Taranaki Street Wharf  
Wellington



Designed by Walker during his time at CF&S, this building was originally a customs post for the port - the elevated viewpoint allows for easy surveillance of the area. The building has since been adapted for the Wellington Free Ambulance, and the amenities block that was built alongside it has been since removed. Both buildings pioneered Walker's use of concrete block and steep profiled steel roofs, which contrasted with the low gables of existing port sheds. Walker established popular usage of these elements throughout the 70's. The ground floor toilet is apparently Walker's first use of his signature porthole window.

2

1968-72

The Wellington Club  
88 The Terrace  
Wellington



Completed under the auspices of CF&S, this mix of historical and contemporary elements provided visual relief among the filing-cabinets that line The Terrace. The club had two buildings on either side of a central courtyard with a large pohutukawa tree marking the street entry. The low-rise design was controversial from the start, with many seeing it as a waste of valuable land. Despite being deliberately over-structured in hope that demolition would be too costly to justify re-development, the building was demolished in the mid-1980s to make way for a high-rise Warren & Mahoney scheme. See *Transition* Sept./Dec. 1981, *Arch. Review* Feb. 1981 and *NZ Architect* 4/1984 and 5/1985.

3

1971

Whakatane Airport  
Aerodrome Rd  
Whakatane



Walker's first commercial building completed in his own office, this project answered a request from the Whakatane Airport Authority for a building that would benefit local tourism and 'put Whakatane on the map'. Set on a flat, open plain, the expressive cluster of forms was designed to be viewed from all sides and to reflect the mounded form of Whale Island that is visible in the distance. This relatively small-scale terminal remains a refreshing change from the sterility typical of airports, but the future of the building is uncertain as predictions for increased usage are sparking plans for further development on the site. The project received an NZIA Enduring Architecture Award in 2003. See *Home & Building* April 1975.

4

1971

Centrepoint  
161 Queen Street  
Masterton



With this small town shopping development, property magnate Robert Jones gave Walker complete design freedom (requiring only the inclusion of a courtyard), the result being a marketplace marked by a 20m tower. The tower acted as both a landmark and a viewpoint from which to overlook the town. Just a few fragments of Walker's design now remain. After closing off the tower to prevent vandalism the building became, as Walker himself puts it, Centerpointless and was it largely demolished. Jones would later describe the project as "as heap of trouble all the way and a lesson against pioneering." See *Home & Building* June 1973 and Bob Jones, *Jones on Property: The Property Game for Fun & Profit* (Wellington: Fourth Estate Books, 1977).

5

1972

The Sandcastle Motel  
20 Paetawa Road  
PekaPeka



This small motel, tucked in just behind the dunes on the Pekapeka Beach waterfront, has just eight units. A low-cost construction project, the composition is vintage Walker - the cellular rooms are each topped by a steeply pitched roof with exposed internal structure, while concrete-walled circular bathrooms each have a skylight tube sprouting from the roof. See: [www.sandcastlehotel.co.nz](http://www.sandcastlehotel.co.nz) and *Architecture NZ*, Jan./Feb. 2004. This is an interesting neighborhood architecturally. Walking south along the beach from the Motel you might spot Architecture Workshop's Pekapeka House (2006) and Fritz Eisenhofer's own under-the-dunes dome house (1970s).

6

1975-1981

Rainbow Springs  
192 Fairy Springs Rd  
Rotorua



The Rainbow Springs Kiwi House (1976) was the first enclosure to display kiwis out of the wild. Walker paid close attention to achieving 'nocturnal' light, even designing an adjustable skylight that could replicate moon phases. He was later advised that the kiwis would never have noticed it due to extremely weak eyesight. Walker went on to design the souvenir shop and admin facilities (1977) and tearooms (1981). The buildings display Walker's typical eccentricities - porthole windows, primary colors, cylindrical towers and steep gables - but overall the design is more restrained. The project received an NZIA Waikato-BOP Branch Award in 1977. See *Home & Building* June 1977.

7

1979

Willis Street Village  
142-148 Willis Street  
Wellington



Conceived as a Wellington's answer to Auckland's Parnell Village, this complex brought colonial charm to central Willis Street. Walker's whimsical architecture accommodates a mix of boutique shops, cafes and housing over two levels. The combination of commercial with theatrical elements resulted in glazed shop frontages topped by pitched roofs, dormer windows, entrance arches, and elevated turrets. Surrounded by a humpbacked bridge, rounded tower and a collection of colorful stores, the central courtyard provides a delightful haven from the busy street. The intimate scale of the complex still creates a specifically pedestrian-friendly zone in an increasingly high-rise area.

8

1980

Waitomo Caves Reception Ctr  
39 Waitomo Caves Road  
Waitomo

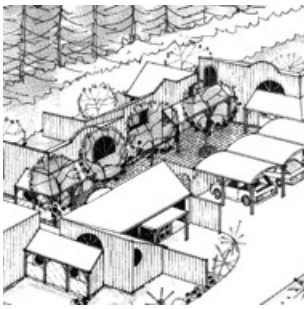


An increasingly popular tourist attraction, the Waitomo Caves required a reception area to welcome and hold tourists while they waited for guided tours of the caves. Walker situated public toilets, staff facilities and a souvenir shop along a meandering path that gently guided people to the reception building beyond. The strong, expressive forms of the various buildings were clad in timber shingle for walls and roofs, respecting the forest surrounds without needing to be invisible. The project won a Tourist & Publicity Department Award in 1982 and an NZIA Branch Award in 1983, but was destroyed by fire in 2005 - Architecture Workshop's elegant replacement was completed in 2010. See *NZ Architect* no.3 1984.

9

1982

THC Chateau Tongariro Housing  
State Highway 48  
Mt. Ruapehu

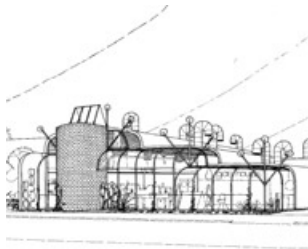


The THC wanted to improve the standard of staff facilities to encourage skilled workers from European and North American ski resorts to shift to this side of the world. Walker managed to work within the tight budget to provide five self-contained units clustered around a central courtyard. The stark contrast to the grandiose Georgian architecture of the nearby Chateau (1929) makes the design even more delightful. The staff housing at Chateau Tongariro was one of three developments Roger worked on for the Tourist Hotel Corporation – he also designed buildings for THC in Wairakei and Queenstown (see Other Addresses).

10

1982

Gas House  
426 Palmerston Road  
Gisborne



The Gas House was constructed when gas first arrived in Gisborne. A local plumber saw the potential of the energy source and asked Walker to design a signature building that would appeal to a new market. Walker's futuristic design proved that even industrial buildings could be attractive. The roof of the showroom and workshop cascades down in large rounded steps. The corrugated iron cladding was chosen for its industrial image and structural strength. The building won the 1984 Steel Awards, but is now a Guthrie Bowron paint store and (perhaps appropriately) has had its silver metalwork painted over in beige. See *Construction* July 84 and *New Zealand Architect* no.4 1983 and no.4 1984.

11

1992

Chesterman Building  
21 Rostrevor Street  
Hamilton



buildings in his hometown, the Chesterman Building sits on the banks of the Waikato River and has multiple balconies and a tower to allow appreciation of the view. The building received a NZIA Waikato & Bay of Plenty Branch Award in 1993, with the jury stating: "Demands attention through form and colour, expressing the vitality of the occupant's [advertising agency] business. Sited in an area of transition between commercial and residential, the building portrays the appropriate residential scale with commercial flair." The building was also a finalist for an NZIA National Award in 1994. See *Architecture NZ* March/April 1994.

12

1978/ 1995

Margrain Vinyard  
Cnr Ponatahi & Huangarua Rds  
Martinborough



Photo: Walker Architecture & Design

The Margrain Vineyard was planted in 1992. Recognising the success of wine-based tourism in the Martinborough region, the owners commissioned Walker to design various buildings for the vineyard. Fourteen villas were designed in 1995 to accommodate guests right by the vines with stunning views over the Tararua Ranges. Walker's edgy and colorful style makes the villas stand out in the landscape. He later designed the conference center (2001) and winery building (2005). Also in Martinborough is the Booth House (25 Ferry Rd), one of Walker's Vintage Homes.

13

1997/2004

Thorndon Primary School  
20 Turnbull Street, Thorndon,  
Wellington



Walker's work on this compressed inner city site involved two classrooms and an admin block (1997), with a further classroom added later (2004). The efficient layout makes the most of the site – the buildings fold around a sunny central courtyard, defining a safe and sheltered play area within a built-up urban environment. School-aged children are among the most appreciative clients of Walker's expressive and imaginative architecture, enjoying his free-flowing curves and splashes of color as much as the playground itself. The school received a NZIA Wellington Branch Award and Color Award in 2005. See *Architecture NZ* May/June 2001.

## Other Addresses:

**St. Patricks Church** (1968)  
**14 High Street, Taumaranui**

This was one of Walker's projects at CF&S. The diagonal plan and exposed timber interior acknowledge John Scott's famed churches. Walker's fondness for "Noddy" towers, crisp geometry and verticality are already apparent. While in Taumaranui, check out Walker's 1967 Wiles & Hayes Chemists (now Unichem) at 93 Hakiaha Street, apparently NZ's first glass verandah.

**Cream Can Outlets** (1974-76)

These bold ice cream stores were completed in Tauranga (1974, demolished), at 57 Ranolf St, Rotorua (1975), and in Hamilton (1976, demolished).

**James Cook Arcade** (1979)  
**294-296 Lambton Quay, Wellington**

Designed with Gus Watt. See *NZ Architect* no.3 1980.

**THC Wairakei Hotel (1980-81)**

**State Highway One, Taupo**  
Now Bayview Wairakei Resort, Walker's projects on the site include a laundry, spa, toilets, villas and a playground. See [www.wairakei.co.nz](http://www.wairakei.co.nz).

**Solitaire Lodge** (1982)

**16 Ronald Rd, Lake Tarawera**  
See [www.solitairelodge.com](http://www.solitairelodge.com).

**Centre City Shopping Center**  
**11 Gill St, New Plymouth ('86)**

This 50,000m<sup>2</sup> includes department stores, a supermarket, 50 shops, a large food court and 750 car parks. See *Architecture NZ* May/June 1989 and Jan./Feb. 1990.

**THC Queenstown Hotel** ('89)  
**Earl Street, Queenstown**

This complex won an NZIA National Award in 1988. It is now a Novotel - its recent top floor addition was not appreciated by Walker. See *Architecture NZ*, Nov/Dec 87, and Jul/Aug 1988.

**Thorndon New World (1997)**  
**41 Murphy St., Thorndon, Wellington**

Included surrounding developments. See *Architecture NZ*, Mar/Apr 1999. Walker also completed New World supermarkets at Lower Hutt (1999) and Wainuimata (2000).

**Il Cavallino Restaurant** (1997)  
**13 Pirie St., Wellington**  
Now the Hop Garden.

## Sources:

Except where noted, the photos are by Kirsten Zink or Andrew Barrie. Many thanks to Roger Walker for his generous help in preparing this guide.

The best source on Walker is Gerald Melling's exuberant monograph, *Positively Architecture: New Zealand's Roger Walker* (Dunedin: Square One Press, 1985). Key articles on Walker include Alastair Best's "The Architecture of Ebullience", *Architects Journal* 8 Nov. 1978 and Russell Walden's response to Best, "Walker's Double Code", *Architects Journal* Feb. 1979; Walden's "NZ Audacity: The Work of Roger Walker" *Architectural Review*, Feb. 1981; Walden's "The Romantic Rebellion of New Zealand's Roger Walker" *Transition* v2 n3/4 Sep/Dec 1981; and "Profile: Roger Walker", *Home & Building* Dec./Jan. 1986/87. See also Chris Brooke-White's interview, "A survival kit for small offices" *NZIA Journal* Oct. 1977, Roger Walker's "Voluntary Article for NZ Architect", *NZ Architect* n2, 1978, "New Zealand in America: Lectures 'Up from Down Under'", *NZ Architect* 1/1987, and Keith Stewart's "Bending the Rules" *Architecture New Zealand*, Nov. Dec. 1988.