



DRAWING ROOM

FOR A DECADE AND A HALF PIP CHESHIRE HAS BEEN CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH JASMAX; HE HAS JUST STARTED SOMETHING NEW — A SMALL PRACTICE FOCUSED ON A BIG PROJECT.

As anyone who's ever dropped in on a wave will tell you, there comes a time to cut out. After nearly 15 years with Jasmax, the last five as Managing Director, Pip Cheshire has left New Zealand's largest architecture practice. And started its newest one. A short time ago, Cheshire was responsible for a business employing 160 people, spread over several floors in an office with the usual corporate accoutrements of reception area, meeting rooms and parking spaces. Now he supervises a practice a thirtieth of the size in one open-plan room in a small WWII-vintage building that's currently a construction site.

Like swapping a Tararua-defying rucksack for a walk-in-the-park daypack such radical downsizing is bound to induce a sense of levity. There's also the exhilaration of the fresh start, and the rush that comes with a back-to-basics focus on craft, not logistics. Cheshire's new venture, in short, seems to be the realisation of that typical mid-career fantasy: the boutique business. But, as with the like-named cat, there's more to Cheshire Architects than meets the eye. The practice might be small in size, but it's hardly modest in scope.

Britomart is Cheshire's bailiwick. His new core job — he and his practice will still be undertaking residential and other work — is that of master architect for the scheme proposed by the Bluewater Consortium, winner of Auckland City's Britomart development competition. Jasmax, with Mario Madayag, designed the new railway station which anchors the western end of Britomart, and Jasmax has been involved with Bluewater's scheme. It's more than likely that Cheshire will find himself sitting across the table from his old Jasmax colleagues.

The Britomart scheme comprises 17 heritage buildings — the first to be refurbished will be the Northern Steamship building, just over the road from Cheshire's office — and at least three or four proposed new buildings. "At the moment," Cheshire says, "the [new] buildings are just blobs on the plans." It's probable, he says, that his practice "will turn one of the blobs into a building".

From his office Cheshire can look back into the Britomart precinct; he's practically working on site. To the front the generous windows in the Quay Street office, which is upstairs in a small Moderne block built around 1945-46, offer a great Auckland view: a stretch of the harbour, framed by wharves and the working port. The building, which is presently in rehab (it was worked over, not very sympathetically, in the early

THE STAFF OF CHESHIRE ARCHITECTS, IN THEIR QUAY STREET OFFICE. FROM LEFT: NGAIRE WALLEN (FINANCE MANAGER); JUAN MOLINA; PIP CHESHIRE (DIRECTOR); ANNA TONG; STEPHEN RENDELL. PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON DEVITT.

1960s) has been a favourite of the city's architects. Cheshire says it housed the practice of Gordon Moller when he first came to Auckland, and David Gibbs also had an office there.

Cheshire has brought some of his own history to the building. Part of Cheshire Architect's office is occupied by architect Barbara Draper, with whom Cheshire first shared a working space in the early 1980s (along with Pete Bossley and Amanda Reynolds, among others). That was shortly after Cheshire graduated from the Auckland School, an older student in a hurry to get cracking. While at the School, he says, "I was desperately doing work outside". Twenty years later, Cheshire is a distinguished member of his profession (that's official — Auckland University has conferred "Distinguished Alumnus" status upon him), one with a new lease on his architectural life. *JW*