



Where fun meets function

Architect Max Warren's unique approach to design balances playfulness and practicality.

Growing up on a 10-acre lifestyle block in Ohoka, a rural community in North Canterbury, surrounded by the rhythm of nature and busy hands puttering away, it was perhaps inevitable that architect Max Warren would pursue a creative life. Through the beauty of the land coupled with the freedom to roam and explore, his deep understanding of the connection between space and emotion took root in those formative years. Looking back today, it's easy to see the parallels between his upbringing and the life he's built now.

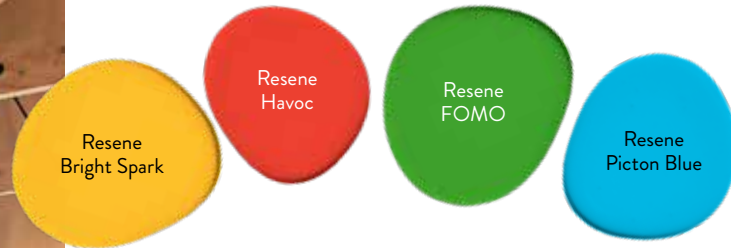
"My dad was always designing and building things at home, which I helped with, and that's what got me into architecture in the first place. I also had the privilege of occasionally visiting Sir Miles Warren at Ōhinetahi – which was pretty special. He's a relative on my dad's side," Max recalls.

Ripples from his early career are still evident in his work, too. Max first began studying architecture at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology – now known as the Ara Institute – before transferring to Unitec in Auckland for the final two years of his Master of Architecture (Prof) programme. After landing a job at Sheppard and Rout Architects, he returned to Christchurch. But on his second day of work as a Graduate Architect, the unthinkable happened.

"I was in central Christchurch when the 2011 earthquake hit, which was a pretty horrifying experience," says Max. "I was thankful to retain my job despite having only worked one day, as the industry here was turned on its head almost instantly. I've always appreciated lightweight timber construction and the earthquake reiterated the need for alternatives to the older heavyweight steel and concrete design methodology we saw fail during the earthquakes."

below and opposite: Max's favourite project to date was designing the home where he and his family reside in North Canterbury, which was recognised with a Resene Total Colour Residential Interior Colour Maestro Award and a Canterbury NZIA Award. The playful colour palette that characterises the home fosters a fun and exciting place where his young, growing family can play and create. Max selected the colours from his Resene Multi-finish range fandecks, which is his preferred place to start when choosing a colour scheme for his projects. "I like using the physical cards and being able to take the colour and consider it in the space it's proposed," he says. Radiata pine walls stained in Resene Colorwood Rock Salt and finished in Resene Aquaclear satin, truss plates in Resene Super Gloss tinted to Resene Bright Spark, Resene Havoc, Resene FOMO and Resene Picton Blue and garage floor in Resene Uracryl 403 tinted to Resene Bright Spark. Build by McKenzie Builders Ltd, www.mckenziebuilders.co.nz. Painting by Shamrock Painting Ltd. Images by Christopher Collie, www.christophercollie.com.





Despite a traumatic start, Max stayed on for 12 years at Sheppard and Rout Architects, where his career flourished. “It was a great place to work as a junior because the type of work was so varied,” he says. “The work I enjoyed the most was residential projects and the odd larger public project. The standouts would be the award-winning ones: Ōpuke Thermal Pools, Quarry Hill House in Queenstown, Moncks Spur House in Redcliffs and a small timber bach we did in Hanmer Springs.”

After achieving his registration, Max had been working on a few design concepts for friends and family in his spare time. As you might expect, coming home from a busy day of design work only to resume working on side projects in the evening became draining. Rather than keep burning the candle at both ends, Max decided to go all in and founded his own practice, Max Warren Architect (MWA).

“I’d always wanted to make my own calls and decisions and I was motivated to make it work,” he says. “The benefits, aside from design and ‘big picture’ project decisions, are being able to surf whenever there are good waves, the flexibility to design and build things around the home and seeing my daughters when they get home from school. The big challenge, especially in the current industry climate, is getting enough work to sustain a solo practice. I feel there is never a ‘perfect’ time to go out on your own, so you just have to hustle to make it work.”

For many architects, being your own client can be the trickiest job you ever tackle. When Max decided to design a home that would fit the needs of his young, growing family, he approached it as an exercise in multi-functional space-efficient living and cost-effective materiality confined to a small footprint and a tight budget – but he had more than just his own family in mind. Max viewed it as an experiment in the big-picture viability of offering a similar type of housing stock as an accessible, compact yet functional alternative to typical ‘standard’ housing.

“I believe there is a sense of general public opinion that architects are only really accessible to the well-off. However, it’s my belief that through good design practice, an architecturally-designed home which responds to its specific site and environment should and could be accessible to everyone.

Situated on an open and exposed corner site, the modest three-bedroom home is split into two stepped levels, mimicking the contours of the sandhill it sits on. The structure’s offset gable forms are reminiscent of historic baches that can be found in the area, complete with coastally-appropriate monolithic cladding and a subdued beachy colour palette. An oversized hall runs through the centre of the dwelling, allowing efficient access to each room, space to display artwork and a visual and auditory connection from the living area through to the children’s bedroom level. Finely finished radiata pine plywood stained in Resene Colorwood Rock Salt and finished in Resene Aquaclear satin lends a sophisticated air that standard plywood simply can’t compare with.



more about Max

His dream designer dinner dates

“I’ve always appreciated the work of Australian architect Peter Stutchbury. Throw in Le Corbusier too (his colours were on point), and to make it a party, having Kanye West in attendance would be fun. West may be a bit of a unique individual in certain ways, but he pushes the boundaries in many forms of design. It wouldn’t be a dull dinner.”

A dream project to design

“Probably a well-resourced brief for a sustainable coastal beach house or surf retreat in the northern West Coast bush, with trusting and adventurous clients. I’d love the opportunity to bring some ideas into reality in an environment I enjoy so much.

His best career advice

“To take pride in a set of drawings, regardless of the scale of project. A well-documented and detailed building on paper is always going to result in a more refined building in reality, rather than one left up to chance.”

His favourite Resene colour

“Resene Bright Spark. Love a good yellow to brighten up your day. It’s the colour we used for our garage floor slab and the laundry walls, ceiling and doors.”

Resene Colorwood
Rock Salt



While the home is both beautiful and functional, what sets it apart is the opportunities Max seized to infuse the home with joyful details. A hidden ladder access leads to Max's private home office in the loft, which is also accessible via a climbing wall and suspended net in the living space. The yellow laundry in Resene Bright Spark livens up an otherwise dull space, as does the purple alcove in Resene Ferris Wheel that marks the entry to the girls' rooms. Vibrantly coloured truss plates in the main living area, painted in Resene Bright Spark, Resene Havoc, Resene FOMO and Resene Picton Blue, add another dimension of fun while the bright yellow garage floor in Resene Bright Spark brings excitement to a space usually destined for services and storage.

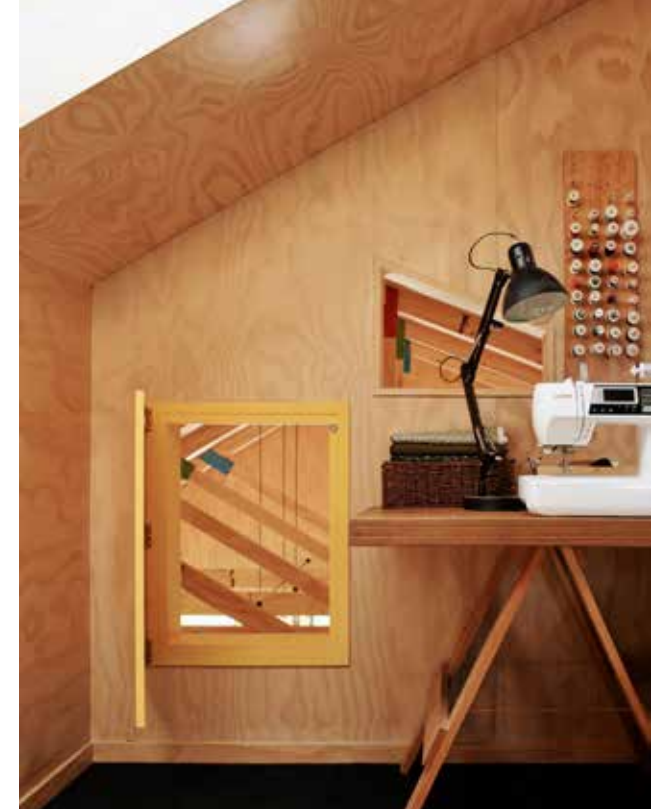
This thoughtful attention to adding moments of joy is a signature of Max's work. "There is definitely a place for whites and neutrals, but at the same time, a pop of colour can add a lot of interest to otherwise ordinary spaces. Our bright yellow laundry space, for example, cheers you up while you're undertaking a pretty mundane task. I think that's what the use of colour is about – adding some fun and playfulness to everyday life."

Max says that selecting Resene products to colour and protect his project's surfaces was an easy choice. "I have specified Resene paints throughout my entire professional career. The performance of the products alongside the technical support provided meant the specification of Resene products for my own house was a straight-forward decision. The vast colour options over the varying ranges are great. Also, the support Resene provide architects at a technical level is extremely helpful – especially the specification support they provide."

If he were to start the project over again, Max says there isn't much he would do differently. "I underestimated how much we would use the loft space. Whilst it's only accessible by ladder or the climbing wall, we use it all the time as a second living area and home office. So in hindsight, I would have put in more skylights to lighten the space up. I think the house will stand up well to the test of a growing family; the spaces may be on the smaller side, but through the use of built-in joinery and flexibility we get the most out of each area. Having said that, I'd love to extend and create an additional indoor/outdoor space to escape to when it's the girls' turn to select the tunes.

"It was a lot of fun designing it with complete freedom, apart from financial constraints. I enjoyed the challenge of creating something fresh and fun on a tight budget, and now that it's completed, being able to demonstrate it was achievable." **BW**

To see more of Max's work, visit www.mwa.nz.



above and left: Cost-effective, sustainable and efficient building techniques were a fundamental part of Max's approach to his home's design. While the tight budget did not allow for pricier features like triple glazing, his design uses passive ventilation and materials with low quantities of embodied carbon. The house features no structural steel and only two small mixer loads of concrete were required for foundations thanks to his clever subfloor and foundation design. Passive airflow is provided from a roof window in the loft, and the space itself can be opened and closed from the living area via an access hatch to the suspended reading net and through the 'conversation window'. Radiata pine walls stained in Eco Choice approved Resene Colorwood Rock Salt and finished in Resene Aquaclear Satin, hallway painted in Resene Zylone Sheen waterborne low sheen tinted to Resene Black White, door in Resene Lustacryl semi-gloss waterborne enamel tinted to Resene Black White, truss plate in Resene Super Gloss tinted to Resene Bright Spark and conversation window in Resene Lustacryl tinted to Resene Bright Spark.

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|---|----------------------------|---|--------------------|
|  | Resene Black White |  | Resene Havoc |
|  | Resene Colorwood Rock Salt |  | Resene Picton Blue |
|  | Resene Bright Spark |  | Resene FOMO |

