



GIB®

# TE HONONGA: THE JOINING OF CULTURES

A small town in Taitokerau/Northland has been unified through a unique building project inspired by Austrian artist Fredrick Hundertwasser and local iwi, Ngāti Hine.

Te Hononga Hundertwasser Memorial Park in Kawakawa was officially opened by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in October last year, the combined vision of the Kawakawa Hundertwasser Memorial Park Charitable Trust (KHMPCT) and Ngāti Hine artists and crafts people.

The vibrant community centre - complete with public library, community workshop, interpretive centre and toilets and showers for freedom campers – pays homage to Hundertwasser (who spent his final years in Kawakawa), and is a celebration of his friendship with the local community. Not only that, but it symbolises the connection of tangata whenua (people of the land), and the values of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and manaakitanga (hospitality).

Lead architectural designer Pip Bolton (Avail Pacific) has just scooped three awards for the project at the 2021 ADNZ Resene Architectural Design Awards, but she says Te Hononga (the joining of cultures) is very much a community effort.

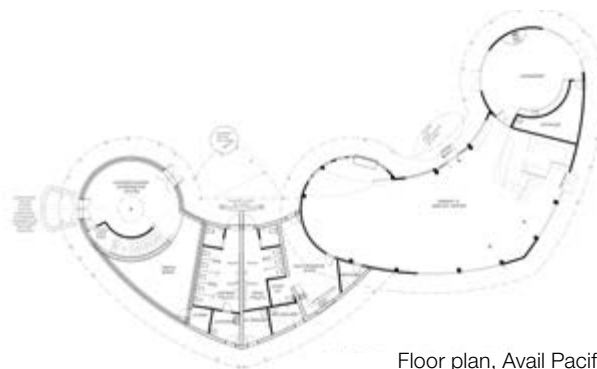
“We designed the building as a symbolic 3D canvas which reflects the brief ‘Te Hononga’, and worked alongside Ngāti Hine and the community, bringing the building to life,” says Pip, who took out the Regional Commercial Interiors Award (sponsored by ADNZ partner Winstone Wallboards/GIB®) and was highly commended in the Commercial/Industrial and Resene Colour in Design categories.

“Laur’ell Pratt project coordinator and Ngāti Hine artists, led by Maude Cook-Davies, developed the cultural narrative that is told throughout the building and have woven the kaupapa (principles) of Hundertwasser and their iwi into its rich tapestry. These awards shine the spotlight on

the amazing and incredibly talented, diverse Kawakawa community, and how everyone worked together to stay true to their vision.”

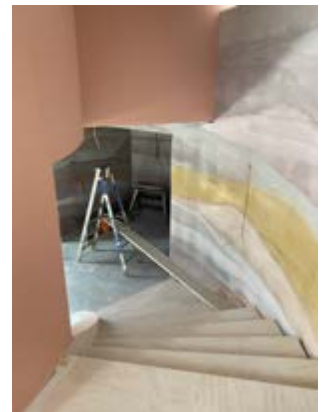
Pip’s award-winning design features two interlocking heart-shaped buildings – one crafted from rammed earth, and the other from timber.

“The hearts are symbolic of the joining together of the Kawakawa community and Hundertwasser, Māori and Pakeha, visitors and residents, our past and future, east and west, man and the environment,” she explains.



Floor plan, Avail Pacific Ltd

Built on land gifted by Maihi Parone Kawiti, the design was inspired by the tokotoko (walking stick) presented to Hundertwasser by Ngāti Hine elder Kevin Prime at the opening of the famed Hundertwasser toilets 22 years ago. As it has turned out, Te Hononga does not just reflect the final product, but embodies the journey of the entire project, which has brought together all facets of the community through a shared vision – from the incredibly talented Northland construction firm, Harnett Builders, through to the 20 local youth who were trained by SIREWALL to craft



Curved GIB® plasterboard walls, (images by Avail Pacific Ltd)

the rammed earth structure, and the numerous local artists such as Pat and Steve George who created the native bird mosaics and Lorraine King who designed the tear drop symbols on the doors and windows.

“Lorraine said that ‘we all needed to trust each other, trust each other’s abilities, and trust the process’, and I couldn’t agree with her more,” says Pip.

“We had a diverse group of people with different abilities all working very closely together, but we remained steadfast. That’s what made this project so incredibly special and unique. It’s not often you get to design a building with purpose and meaning, and work alongside a diverse range of people who really care about this stuff. For me, it was a dream come true really.”

**Te Hononga Hundertwasser Memorial Park was not without its challenges though.**

“As well as working with a diverse group, and on a constrained budget, there were many technical challenges. Building heavy rammed earth walls over the soft ground of an old riverbed was extremely difficult, and until we discovered Canadian rammed earth company SIREWALL it didn’t look like we’d be able to do it.

“Building the other heart-shaped building out of timber also proved challenging, as we had to find materials that could work in with the tight curves. GIB® plasterboard provided a great solution for the five metre circular wall in the upper gallery and was also used in the ceiling of the gallery and workshop. Not only is the product environmentally friendly, but its clean white finish is perfect to exhibit artworks and showcase the exposed totara beams.”

However nothing that’s worthwhile is ever easy, and the end result is one the local iwi and Kawakawa community

are extremely proud of. Not only has Te Hononga brought people together in ways never previously imagined, but its impact will continue for future generations, drawing tourists to the local area, providing jobs and inspiring fresh opportunities.

“This project has made the community really proud – the feelings of companionship and unity have exceeded expectations. We actually have a much wider vision though. Yes, the building itself is complete, but we’re looking for sponsorship so we can bring the rest of the project to fruition. This includes a grass roof over the rammed earth heart, a veranda made from recycled car bonnets, a sculpture park, landscaping, and atea (formal welcoming space) and ticketing office.”

But while these aspects of the build are still in the pipeline, there are several other community-focused projects bubbling away in Kawakawa. This project has inspired wider work in the community, such as plans to work together to upgrade the streetscapes and create employment opportunities for locals.

“The journey of building Te Hononga has had a powerful impact – it has reminded me that you don’t just build a building, you build a community. In the old days, everyone in a community would help each other build their family homes. At some stage though, life became about living in silos and building fences around our properties. This very special project has shown me that the process of building a building is actually about building trust and relationships.”

It is a unique collaboration that would have made Hundertwasser proud, and is perhaps best summed up by his favourite Helder Camara quote - *“If one person dreams alone it is only a dream. When many people dream together it is the beginning of a new reality.”*