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THE SPRING ISSUE

SPRING FASHION 2016

Check out our 22 page feature
on local fashion PG.102

JUDDGING ANDREW

New Plymouth's mayor talks about
his decision to step down PG.10

GOING FOR THE BLOCK

Cat and Jeremy reflect on a year
of DIY TV fame PG.52

NURTURED BY NATURE

The Powerco Taranaki Garden
Spectacular brings Paradise
to Taradise PG.74

LIVE DRIVE: FULL THROTTLE GALLOP — test-driving the new Mustang PG.60

THE HOUSE WITH THE HERO VIEW PG.86



PEPPER CONSTRUCTION

Building a Community

At the base of ancient Whakawhitiwhiti Pa, on the Marfell-Hurdon boundary, a new community is forming. It's a community based on the shared values of respect for the land and its people.

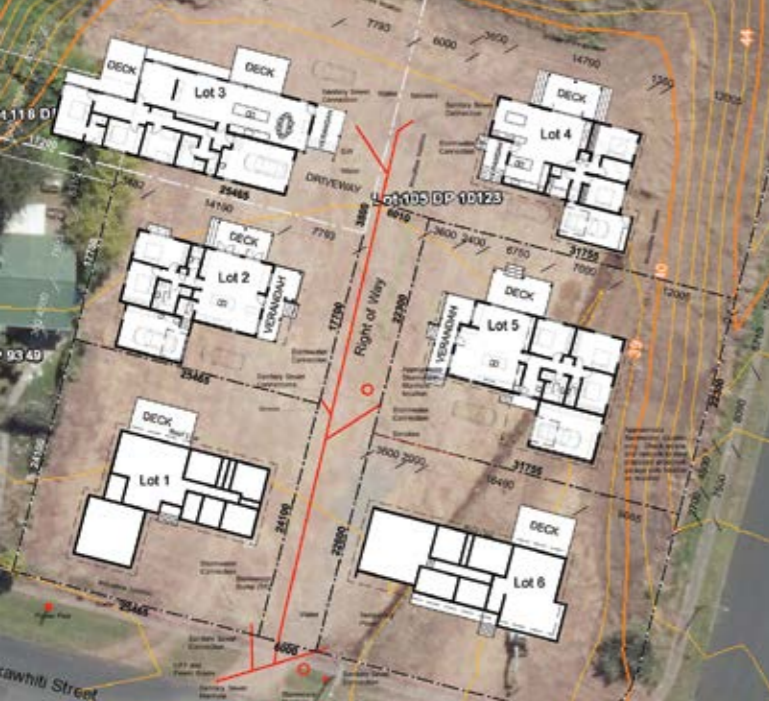
Pepper Construction have applied their own ethos of quality chattels, value for money and conservation of the environment to a complex build of six houses. It's on a shared driveway off Whakawhiti Street.

They've called the enclave John Mana Way in honour of their highly-esteemed past employee, who died in 2014.

Words Helen Mays Photos Roger Richardson



At the new pocket neighbourhood being developed off Whakawhiti St are Pepper Construction's Nigel Davis, (Business Development Manager), Andrew Pepper (Managing Director) and Mike Drew (Site Foreman).



Built in consultation with Imagine Building Design and Greenbridge (who specialise in the design and implementation of regenerative landscapes, homes and communities), the John Mana Way concept reflects a more sustainable and supportive living style. Together with Pepper Construction they've conceived a style of living with less chemicals and higher insulation or R-values. They've used local contractors and sourced their building materials locally, building on the goodwill Pepper Construction are known for.

One of the crucial parts of a successful pocket neighbourhood design, is managing the transition from shared community spaces to private spaces, in order to provide both the opportunity for community engagement, but also the ability to retreat to private spaces when wanted.

This can be seen in the design of the homes which include a semi-public verandah, view shafts from the living spaces to the shared space, private gardens and decks, with bedrooms located away from the shared space.

Pepper Construction have also purposely chosen a range of house and section sizes in order to attract a diverse community.

The potted housing cluster is crafted in warmly familiar macrocarpa, beech and cedar based on structurally stronger frames and deeply driven piles. These are customised house designs bordered by slatted pine fencing for separation and privacy.

Greenbridge advised on native plantings and rain gardens to provide low maintenance greenery including an attractive shared space for fruit trees, barbecues and edible gardens.

They also worked to integrate various environmental and community enhancement features such as a people-focussed





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right of way that has reduced width, and slows down cars. Shared lawns, 50% edible plantings, a linking footpath, rain gardens for onsite stormwater, and a shared letterbox area are all aspects that Greenbridge have incorporated into the landscape.

It's that longed-for sense of community that has proved the guiding light for John Mana Way, a light that has already attracted like-minded people to the development. Two of the John Mana Way houses quickly sold.

Returning local man Darin Ramsay bought one of the middle units without hesitation when he realised it provided something he was missing. Darin had experienced sharing a common driveway in Wellington and he appreciates what it meant to himself and his immediate neighbours.

"It was only a shared driveway but it gave us all a sense of connection. It caused us to interact and recognise each other, to say hello," Darin reflects. He says he had considered that sense of community almost a lost art, making John Mana Way all the more precious now he has rediscovered it. Darin wanted to invest in New Plymouth. He says he liked Pepper Construction's point of difference, their concept and style. He also liked that the natural fibre carpets, curtains and landscaped gardens were all included in the price.

"I never thought I'd live in a new home," Darin reflects. "But this was affordable. I don't like big houses or a lot of swank." Darin prefers a classic style that won't date. He has chosen colours and furnishings accordingly. Darin appreciates the quietness and centrality John Mana Way offers including so many good walks close by. "There's the George Cowling Kauri Plantation, Ratapihipi Bush Reserve and Back Beach to explore for a start."



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Pepper Construction's intention in designing John Mana Way wasn't just to sell houses, but to provide a more connected and fulfilling lifestyle. Each house has its own personality, and is designed to minimise the building footprint while still feeling generous; have good inbuilt storage; high energy performance; and balance community interaction with personal privacy.

Warm and well-connected kitchens meet open plan dining and living rooms, accessed through sliding or stacked double-glazed doors to extensive decking.

Special consideration has been given to kitchen and pantry storage when entertaining family and friends.

Forever practical, Managing Director, Andrew Pepper says they've created very accessible properties on a traffic-controlled driveway. They've also accommodated many extra family requirements in the build. "When is a garage not a garage? When there's no car in it!"

"We've made the garages multi-purpose by carpeting the floor and adding an insulated garage door," Andrew demonstrates. The touch of a button converts the garage to a hobbies room or home gym. "It's a dance floor, private bar or sewing room just by backing the car out."

Getting in quickly has allowed new residents, Chris and Dave Brown, to weave their own dreams into a brand new home. "We were really taken with the site when we first saw it," explains Chris. "It's a well-planned position with plenty of sun and the workmanship is fantastic."

They've bought one of the rear houses on the enclave. They were thrilled to watch the finishing touches being added to what they imagine as a very nice Air BnB destination, perhaps providing private and secure accommodation for a guest.



GREENBRIDGE DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

In early 2014, New Plymouth based design firm GreenBridge approached Andrew from Pepper Construction to talk about the possibility of doing a project together.

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"I was aware of Andrew's passion around creating community in Marfell and his interest in sustainability, so I thought it was worth seeing what we could do together. In one of those early meetings, I remember looking at what he had planned for the John Mana Way site and saying 'we can come up with something better for you', to which Andrew replied 'show me' and the rest as they say, is history."

The GreenBridge design team started out by producing a basic 3D computer model of the site, that demonstrated the need to move one of the planned houses south several metres, or it would be in shadow for 2-3 months of the year.

"We went on to introduce the idea of 'pocket neighbourhoods', which Andrew was really keen on, as it provided a format for enhancing the connectedness between houses and building community.

"As the first house was already under construction and the second had plans at council for consent prior to our involvement, we had to compromise the usual Pocket Neighbourhood model that keeps cars out of the shared space. So we developed an overall plan that created a shared central space and developed the four remaining house plans to work in with and enhance the community concept."

Two of the houses that GreenBridge designed have already sold (prior to them being marketed), and Dan believes this is a testament to what GreenBridge have created with Andrew and his team.

"Andrew has already engaged us to design another 3-lot development on the corner of Oranga St and Omata Rd, so watch this space and get in quick if you're looking to buy."

GreenBridge believes that buildings and landscapes which are healthy, that support community, and that are energy and water efficient should be accessible... without having to compromise on aesthetics or be more costly."

Their in-house design team has a broad and complimentary cross-section of skills & experience, with their holistic approach allowing them to effectively collaborate with a wide cross section of other businesses in order to uphold the values of a project and meet a clients' desired outcomes.

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It could provide an additional income for Chris and Dave's retirement years and an excellent introduction to Taranaki for travellers both national and international. The Brown's wide and very hospitable deck is in a sheltered position facing the communal area. Neighbourhood barbecues could be held on a late summer's evening and guests introduced to an extended welcoming committee.

The artfully-crafted staircase on the hill behind the Brown's house provides a bird's eye view over the valley and access to a tiered garden area in the future.

"We never thought we would own a brand new house but Pepper Construction has made it desirable and affordable," Chris says gratefully. Chris and Dave visited the site several times during the build and noted it was always clean and tidy. "The workmen were extremely polite and pleasant to deal with." They're proud to say they've shared the journey with a construction company that holds similar values to their own regarding caring for the environment. They chose bamboo flooring and are especially appreciative of the solar panels on their new roof.

Looking after the land for future generations is an active principle at John Mana Way.

Pepper Construction has chosen natural building materials and pure wool carpets throughout.

"Pep (Andrew) is a visionary," Chris concludes. "He's done more than just build houses; he's designed a community for us to be part of."

The Pepper Construction team are as curious as their new residents to see who else favours their progressive thinking. If you're curious too, pop on down to their "Parade of Homes" from 11am on Saturday 15 October 2016!





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