



The Ahu Ahu Beach Villas

Story as told by David Marshall
Collated by Alana Grant (nee Marshall)
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Front and back cover photos by Rob Tucker

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This book is dedicated to a few special people...

My parents, Dawn and Bill, who had the vision to buy the land and give us the opportunity to succeed. To our good friend Louise Baines for her love and support. To our children Jess, Alana and Seth for being a part of it all. And a big thank you to my wife Nuala, for running with the dream and helping make it happen.

- David Marshall



Introduction

The moment you walk into the Ahu Ahu Beach Villas, you feel a sense of familiarity, of comfort. Stepping foot on the shell inlaid concrete, running your hands across the timber finishes or tilting your head up to see weathered, sturdy hardwood beams up above, the warmth and tranquility of the house greet you like an old friend. You become entranced by the panoramic view outside of the lattice windows, the striking contrast from lush green to black sand, to varying shades of blue in sea and sky. The heart and soul that is felt during a stay at Ahu Ahu Beach Villas is matched by the owners David and Nuala Marshall's hospitality and their genuine excitement to share this part of the world with you.

With David's vision, passion and determination and Nuala's support and guidance, the couple and many helping hands were able to bring the Ahu Ahu Beach Villas to life. In order to achieve the sense of ease and timelessness the villas exude, there couldn't be a run-of-the-mill design or story behind them. It had to fit the beautiful place it would inhabit and the people that would stay. This book is meant to give you a detailed look into David and his family's history with the land, the unconventional approach of collecting materials and then designing the buildings, and the hard work that allowed these villas to take shape and become the sustainable, architecturally unique dwellings that sit amongst the lush Taranaki landscape.

"...through six years of planning, collecting and constructing two beautiful solid-plaster villas, with heavy ceiling beams and stone floors, now they have somewhere authentic and solid to invite people, friends not yet met, to come stay." - Helen Mays, Manawatu Evening Standard, Oct. 2001





"Ahu Ahu is a retreat from the pressures of the outside world, a haven of calm and tranquility in which life can be enjoyed to the fullest." - Jim Tucker

Taranaki

Since the late 1990's, Taranaki has become both a national and international gem, although those who have been here have known of its marvel for much longer. The dormant volcano Mt. Taranaki is the center piece of the area, standing at 8,660 feet (2,518 metres) and surrounded by 75,000 acres of national park. When not veiled by clouds, Taranaki attires himself in many a different guise, each equally breathtaking. The coastline, which forms from the hem of Mt. Taranaki's apron, provides some of the best waves for surfing in New Zealand. The Volcanic loam-rich soil covering the land has brought wealth to many a farmer and joy to numerous gardeners. Taranaki is also the energy

capital of New Zealand, with large gas and oil fields found both onshore and off. It also attracts interesting and creative entrepreneurs who have chosen Taranaki to pursue their passion.

Being rich with natural beauty, a diverse community of artists thrive in this soul-inspiring area. Taranaki is celebrated for its natural wonder and chilled lifestyle: while surfing, hiking and mountain biking are some of the must-dos in the area, reflecting on the beauty that surrounds you is just as popular an activity.



"I've always known Taranaki would go off as a tourist destination. It's the lifestyle here, it's something we wanted to share because we knew people would love it and they do... I think our best sales pitch is just for people to come out here and have a look. Once people have seen it, they understand." - David Marshall, The Taranaki Daily News, March 2001



David's Story

David was born in Taranaki and spent his first nine years exploring the environs around his family home situated on the edge of the small rural town of Inglewood. Endless amounts of time were spent wandering alone through the dappled light beside his favorite stream, searching out eels and crawlers (fresh water lobster). Being there was everything. The Marshall family moved to New Plymouth where the children completed their schooling. Despite David being head boy at Spotswood College, he failed to find meaning in between the texts of his schoolwork. Rather than head to university, he swapped school lessons for those taught outside of the classroom, bought a van and spent his first year out of school travelling New Zealand's South Island. His time was spent surfing, skiing, and working on farms. The journey continued at age 19 during a 10-month European excursion. David and a friend were steeped in rural English culture while working in a Lincolnshire Village. Cars were cheap due to the fuel crisis at the time; David bought a 320 Jaguar, which was used less for driving and more for enjoying the interior and listening to the radio. From their base in Lincolnshire, they traveled through Europe and hitched rides on coastal boats as far north as the Arctic Circle in Norway. They then VW Kombi-ed down to Greece and took trains through Morocco, Spain, Italy and France.

While reveling in the European castles, cathedrals and culture, David learned family and close friends are what counts, so it was time to head home. The influences of Europe's architectural style would not be lost and remained an inspiration later on when designing the villas.

For David and his family, 1979 was a pivotal year: the beachfront farm at Ahu Ahu Road was bought by David's parents, Dawn and Bill Marshall. Bill was a stock agent auctioneer, he had leased land in the past and was interested in buying some land of his own. Knowing this property was up for sale, Bill took Dawn for a drive in the countryside. Slowing down at the property, Dawn exclaimed, "oh I could live here!"; soon after, the 66 acres of land and a ramshackle farmhouse was theirs.

Within the same year, David and a friend started the Down to Earth organic whole foods shop and the local Operatic Society was putting on a production of Jesus Christ Superstar, where David played the role of Jesus. David and friends were supplying bush honey before the buzz got out about it's health benefits; it would later be known as Manuka honey and sold for exorbitant prices. The fortuitous timing of getting into the whole foods business just before whole foods became a popular venture found David buying his friend's share, running the business for 10 years, and in 1988 selling the shop, which still operates today.



David Marshall, 1980. Post
Jesus Christ Superstar



Dawn & Bill with their Grand-
daughter Jess, 1985

that went into his business guided the planning and building of the villas, as did the valuable lessons David learned about peace, love and joy from playing Jesus.

In the summer of 1982 another fortuitous event occurred: David met Nuala at a mutual friend's hippie wedding at Pauanui beach. Upon first laying eyes on Nuala, David knew at once he would marry her. As it goes, Nuala needed a bit more persuading, but a little correspondence, dating and the idea of living in a cottage not far from the sea was convincing enough: the two got married in 1983. Around the same time David and Nuala bought 12.5 inland acres from Dawn and Bill, which was used for growing whole foods for his shop and raising a hundred calves each year.

On the land was small house, with a long drop toilet out the back, turning it into Nualas 'cottage by the sea' proved to be a fun architectural project that spurred their interest in creatively utilizing local materials. With a design from Paul Goldsmith gifted to David and Nuala for their wedding, the couple used self-milled timber from their front paddock to renovate the old fibralite box into the cozy, charming cottage. They would spend more than three decades living here and raising their three spirited children, Jessica, Alana and Seth. They ended up selling the cottage after David's father Bill

, passed in 2016 and moved to his house adjacent to the villas and the seaside cliff.

Nuala was finishing up her nursing studies in Tauranga when she met David, and moved down to Taranaki where she first worked at the Taranaki Base Hospital and then spent seven years as a well-respected, compassionate nurse at the local hospice in New Plymouth. Nuala managed to juggle nursing, helping David on the farm, and raising Jess, Alana and Seth. While David was the idea guy behind the project, collecting materials and dreaming up the villas, Nuala was and continues to be the overseer of daily operations, corresponding with guests and managing the lovely staff, allowing the dream of the villas to continue to thrive.

The children have fond memories: horse riding, surfing, fishing, raring pet lambs... At present, they still all live in close proximity to or on the land; their bond with both the place and each other allows Ahu Ahu property to remain a home base for them all. As a couple, David and Nuala enjoy receiving people into their home. While spending time at the beach they often meet travelers from all over the world. Chatting turns into coffee, coffee turns into a meal which turns into a night.. many friendships have been formed. It is this love of people combined with the picturesque land Bill and Dawn bought that inspired David and Nuala to start the hospitality business.

The original small house



Their renovated cottage by the sea



David and Nuala engagement party, 1982



Our children Alana, Jess and Seth. Raglan, 2011





The seaside property purchased from Bill and Dawn Marshall had no view: previous owners had planted *Macrocarpa* trees, a type of Cyprus, 40 years earlier. By cutting down the trees, the panoramic sea view was revealed as was additional building materials with the *Macrocarpa* timber.

Vision and Inspiration

With Dawn and Bills blessings as well as the required resource consent from the District Council, David and Nuala sold 12 acres of farmland in order to purchase the Ahu Ahu beachfront property to build the villas. In 1998, David, Nuala, Jess, Alana and Seth set off on a 4-month sojourn, first Canada then over to Europe and finally California. While traveling through Europe, they visited and stayed in beautifully timeless homes and historical buildings. Old cottages, villas, and log cabins in Tuscany, Spain, Wales and Provence left a lasting impression on David and Nuala. They particularly loved Gaudi's unique, flowing architectural style in Barcelona as well as the use of plaster, wood and ceramics as both decorative and structural elements on the Alhambra in Granada.

Nuala caught on to David's architectural vision of large, exposed timber beams and rough plastered walls being used for the villas. This would be a driving force in the design elements of the villas. A local inspiration was the work of New Zealand Architect James Chapman-Taylor's "Castle" located in North Taranaki, a place David and Nuala often stayed with family and friends. Chapman-Taylor's use of local materials plays well with the natural views provided by Mount Taranaki above and the Wai-ti

black sand beach below; his usage of heavy timber, sandstone and rata beams give a weathered yet timeless look to the cliff top castle.

Another inspiration came from the New Zealand "bach": a typical holiday home, otherwise known as a "crib" in the South Island. The homes are lovingly thrown together without much planning involved. A kitchen nook could appear, the walls of the interiors may not match, but somehow it all ends up creating a funky, cozy harmony. The hodge-podge effect creates a unique space and something special for those that take part and spend time in its creation. NZ bach's used to cover the Oakura coastline; even though the area has become more developed, the classic surf culture still thrives. The laid-back, classic Taranaki mindset and elements of New Zealand tradition is celebrated in the creation of the villas.



France



France



Spain



The Marshall family at an abandoned Italian villa, Umbria, 1998



Family and friends at the castle, 1994



The Castle, Taranaki

Collection and Sourcing of Materials

Channeling Chapman-Taylor's use of local materials, David decided to take an unconventional approach to the villas: first gather materials, then design. By upcycling pieces from old buildings and sites around New Zealand, a sort of reincarnation occurred: old and soon-to-be castoff building materials would take on a new form in a new place. As the collection grew, more and more chances arose to upcycle materials from far and wide. Timber was locally sourced from Taranaki, Nelson, and even cut from the property's cliff side and milled on site. The seemingly random assortment of materials would later take shape into something truly unique.

Early on in the collection of materials, David successfully tendered a number of hardwood timber wharf piles and wharf decking recovered from Port Taranaki as well as hardwood timber from the Port of Nelson in the South Island. David also pursued a tender for Koru Hall, an old community gathering place. The folks at Koru Hall knew of David's plans and wanted to see the materials kept in the district; although his tender was not the highest, the Hall was his. In honor of the building's history, they held a "Last Dance in the Koru

Hall" function: candlelight danced along the walls, a fire was lit in the supper room fireplace, an old-time pianist cranking out Honky Tonk tunes, and the pin-striped suited men and brightly-dressed ladies danced the night away.

David gathered materials from far and wide, but by far the most fruitful find for the external appearance and character of the villas was the old Stratford hospital, located on the opposite side of Mt. Taranaki. The hospital was due for demolition; David marked the pieces that interested him for the villas and took a team back to help out with gathering the materials. From this collection they brought home beautiful windows and doors, heaps of both native timber and American Oregon pine, copper spouting, decorative copper ventilation domes, cast iron rain heads and down pipes, door handles, taps and, to top it off, 13,000 French Marseille-styled clay roof tiles. The spirit of the hospital lives on in the villas, promoting health in the form of rest and relaxation.



"David was able to buy Koru Hall, an old community gathering place due for demolition. 'Before we pulled down the hall we staged 'the Last Dance in the Koru Hall' with an old-time pianist, songs and dancing. Everyone dressed up and we decorated the place with candles and lit a fire in the old fireplace.' - Mary Weaver, Grand Designs UK Magazine, Sept. 2004



Last dance and sing song at the Koru Hall



"Throwing themselves across the tall stud and over a mezzanine floor are huge ceiling beams covered in tiny veins. They are ex-wharf piles plucked from deep ooze at Port Taranaki." - Helen Mays, Manawatu Evening Standard, Oct. 2001





"The ex-hospital clay roof tiles dependably keep out the weather and add to the permanent appearance of the villas." - Helen Mays, Manawatu Evening Standard, Oct. 2001

Villas Design and Build

The materials and site were all set to go, now all they needed was a plan. Putting together a design for the villas was like doing a giant jigsaw puzzle. The unique approach of going from materials to design rather than the other way around proved to be a fun challenge for Boon Goldsmith Bhaskar Team Architecture. Nuala and David's friend, Paul Goldsmith, put architect Alan Reed on the job. Alan, having worked with upcycled materials in the past, was no stranger to this type of sustainable building, and worked closely with David to ensure the sketches lived up to the desired emphasis of the beams and structural elements. David and the team were able to come up with a design of timber framework atop a polished concrete base that satisfied David's vision, Alan's sketches and engineer Russell Nagel's assessment of the upcycled material's strength and durability. The plywood cladding was covered with netting and then with solid concrete plastered walls to give an aged yet timeless look.

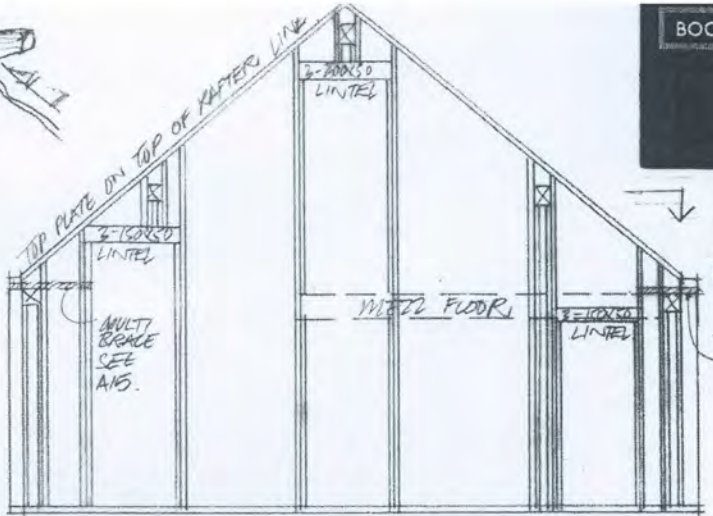
The wonderful lattice windows from the Stratford Hospital were positioned to look out over the Tasman Sea, and the 100-year-old French clay tiles, finials

and copper domes combined nicely with the old wharf timbers positioned overhead. Oregon timber from the ceilings of the hospital were used for framing and rimu were turned into stairs, tables, and kitchen joinery. Sheet copper was used to flash windows and doors, and the copper guttering sends rain water down cast iron rain heads and pipes. The weatherboards from the Koru Hall can be found on the mezzanine floors. Shells, driftwood and stones were inlaid into the polished concrete base.

Boon Goldsmith Bhaskar Team Architecture:
"When Paul Goldsmith and Alan Reed came into the picture the challenge was to basically assemble all these ideas, influences and elements in an appropriate manner on their wonderful coastal headland site overlooking Oakura. After an afternoon with Dave radiating his ideas, enthusiasm and energy Alan immediately put together rough sketches on how the units might go together.

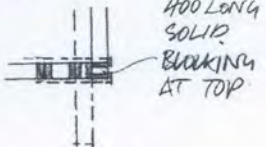
The units are open large volumes with heavy old wharf beams, so bracing was a big issue for the engineer. This involved labour intensive work

AHU AHU
 WEST ELEVATION
 UNIT 1 (UNIT 3 WEST SIDE)
 1:50 SCALE.

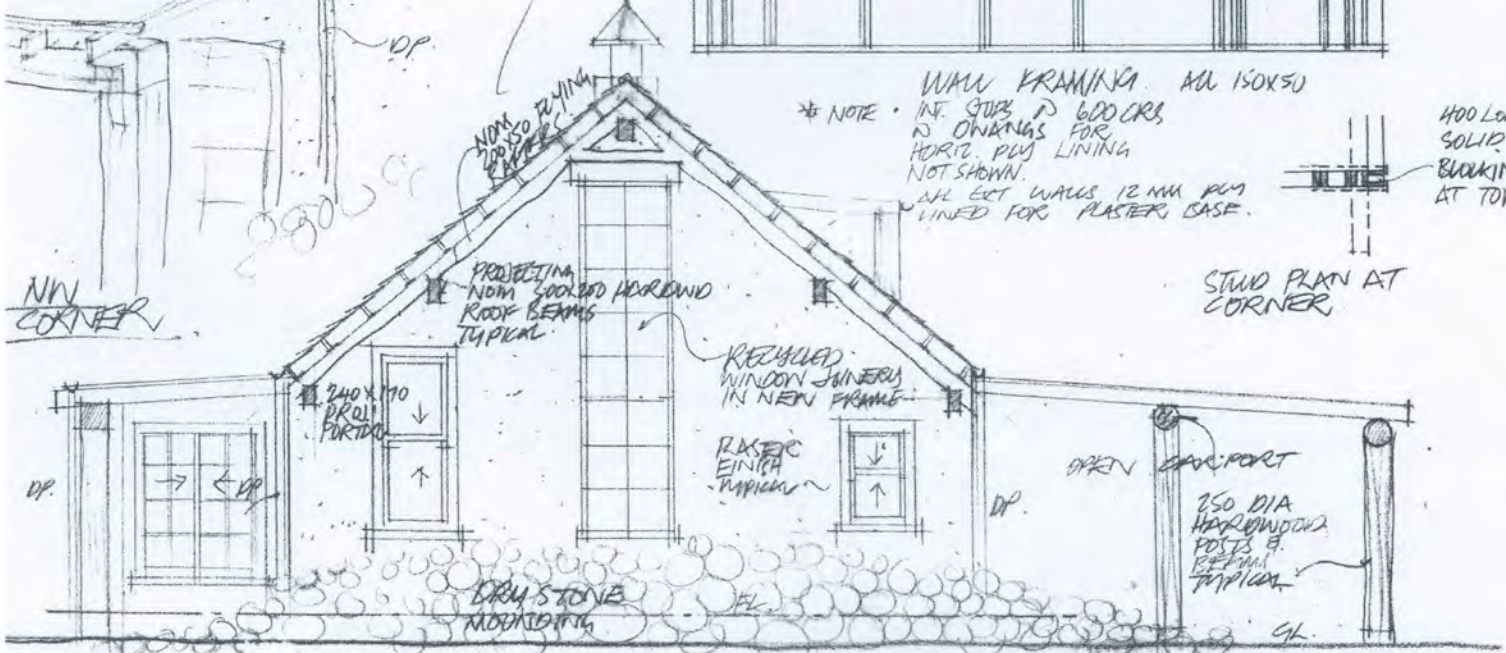
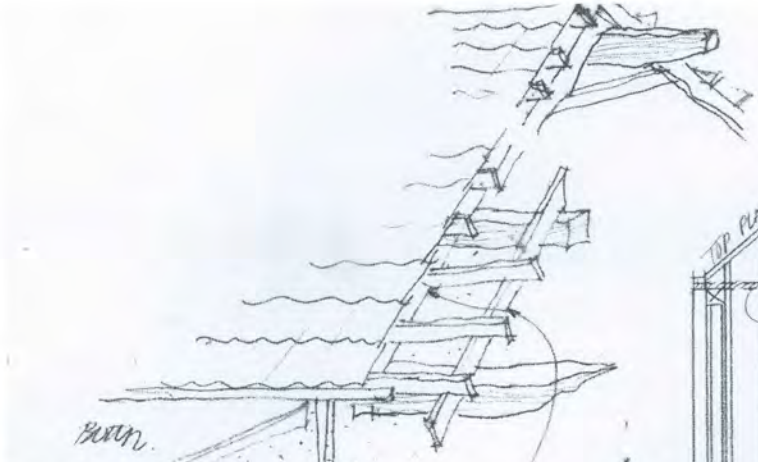


MULTI BRACE
 SEE A15.

* NOTE • WALL FRAMING ALL 150x50
 INF. STUDS IS 600 CRS
 IS DRAWINGS FOR
 HORIZ. PLY LINING
 NOT SHOWN.
 ALL EXT WALLS 12 MM PLY
 LINED FOR PLASTER CASE.



STUD PLAN AT CORNER



1800 (EX 3600)
 X 1940

970 X 3300

3045 X 950
 + 1000 APP X 950

1300 X 850 ~
 NOMINAL RECYCLED WINDOW 3128.

1.3972

A7
 20/10/99

Concept sketches by Alan Reed, 1999

with special propped and bolted connections between the beams and columns. There is an arts and craft feel to these joints; all of the joinery, finishing and furnishing has been created by the Marshalls themselves. They built the units themselves hiring tradespeople and labourers as necessary.

The end result is a balance of the more serious ordered solid materials, humorously contrasting to a loose beach feel perhaps best exemplified by the driftwood-like projecting beams and purlins. Weathered textures of wharf timbers with windows and other salvaged items remind us of things past but at the same time Ahu Ahu is full of fun and energy appropriate to today."

As far as the interior design, the idea was simple: keep the focus on the large beams and other architectural features and create a natural, comfortable, beach-inspired personality. When it came to building a small kitchen area beneath the stairs, they knew they could not go to a conventional kitchen manufacturer as modern day features would detract from the upcycled materials. Thus,utilizing leftover materials, wharf decking became the bench, power-pole cross arms made up the main structure, native rimu became drawers with carved box thorn for handles. In a fashion true to David's style,

rather than spending \$500 for curtain rails and tracks, a dozen beers were exchanged for a bunch of hardwood rake handles and a pleasant walk along the beach in the sunset provided right angled driftwood for brackets. Nuala and her artsy friends became more involved when it came time for interior colours and furnishings. They chose very comfortable slat beds for guests and went directly to manufacturers or distributors for top quality linen furniture and other soft furnishings.

The two structures are each split up into two villas, giving four separate, self-contained villas. Each one has an open floor plan equipped with a kitchen, dining area, comfortable beds, and seating areas. Three of the villas have a full mezzanine with two separate beds, and one has extra space specially designed with wheelchair access.



Sitting on site in the caravan discussing plans. Left to right: Architect Paul Goldsmith, Nuala Marshall, Architect Alan Reed.









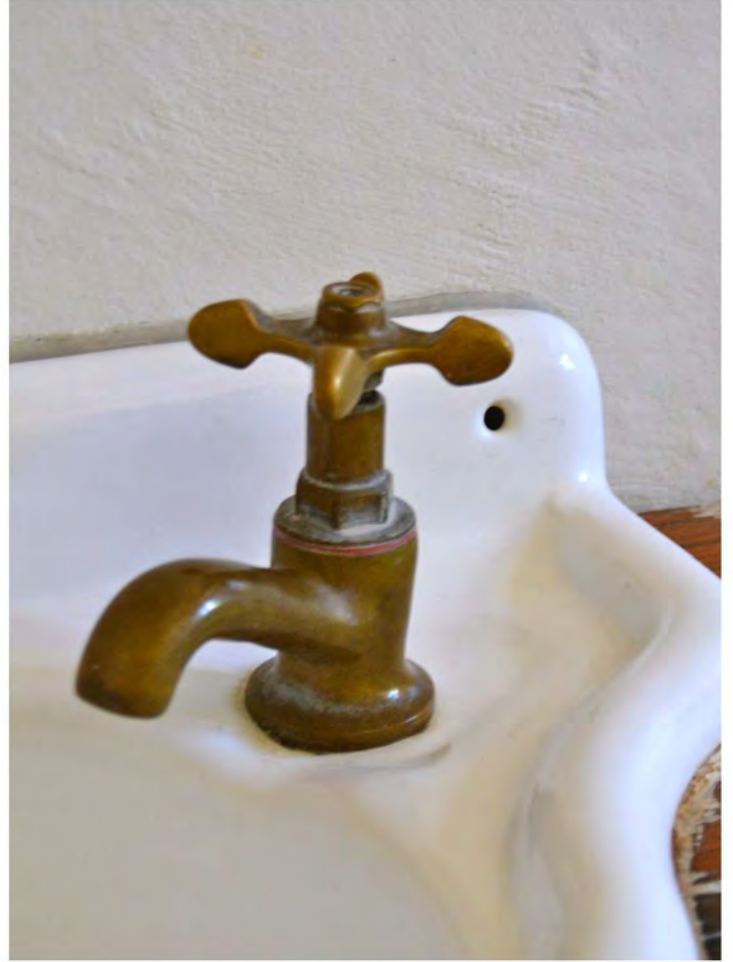


















Opening Day

After 14 months of construction, the villas were ready to greet their first guests. David and Nuala had taken bookings for Christmas Eve of 2000, so all hands were on deck to prepare the villas for their official opening. Later in March, a celebratory gathering was held to thank all the people that contributed to the building of the villas and celebrate the commencement of Nuala and David's new venture. It was incredibly special for Dawn Marshall to cut the ceremonial ribbon, she lost her battle with cancer and passed away just a few months later.



Oraukawa Lodge Build

The villas quickly gained popularity - local, national and international visitors alike were captivated by the setting, character and charm of both the buildings and the owners. Besides hosting smaller groups, it became apparent to Nuala and David that there was a need for an event venue for corporate meetings. The first solution to this was a pulley system in the studio unit of the villas: with rope from the operating fly floor and two antique ship pulleys, they created a system to lift one of the beds into a storage mezzanine in order to make room for various functions. While this proved to be a fantastic feat, an increasing amount of space was needed to accommodate larger groups. While the pulley remains in the villa, it acts as an interesting visual piece rather than a practical solution.

The idea emerged to create a space that emulated the character of the villas with a modern, functional twist. The challenge for the lodge was to not obscure the panoramic view that made the villas so special. Russell Nagel was again involved in the engineering behind the

lodge, while Alan Reed would again help out with the architectural elements. David and Russell took an engineering-focus to the design: by building down into the ground rather than up with a flat roof concept, they were able to not only conserve the villa's view but duplicate that same visual spectacle for those who utilized the lodge. They built a mainly concrete structure with a handful of recycled elements used for doors, bottle windows, tables and other furnishings. Alan and Helen Moller came up with the interior layout and architectural finishing touches. The project came to life in 2006 with Ray Haslip taking responsibility for the build. The lodge has proven to be a popular, multipurpose venue - with two separate bedrooms plus a large lounge, an industrial style kitchen, and ample courtyard space for large gatherings.



























People Involved

It comes as no surprise there were a multitude of hands pitching in when the time came to construct the Ahu Ahu Beach Villas and lodge. Some passing by, others staying from start to finish; no matter the involvement, it was a collaborative effort by locals and foreigners, family, friends and acquaintances that allowed the villas and lodge to take shape. The right people seemed to show up at the right time, and a fortuitous flow took place to construct both villas and lodge.

Amongst those to help, David Marshall, David's namesake, was the man for the shell inlaid concrete floors and framing. Mike from Christchurch, who had previously worked on Americas Cup boats and was staying down at the beach in his house truck, was in charge of customizing old windows and building new frames. Another Mike, Mike Browsers, who had just completed public toilets for renowned Austrian artist and architect Frederick Hundertwasser, helped out for four months with finishing touches. He was also responsible for explaining how to build 'bottle windows', which

Jess and David proceeded to make in the children's sandpit. David called up Ray, a friend from home, to see if he could help out with landscaping. Bad news: he wasn't home. Good news: he had showed up on site to see how the project was going! It was this type of serendipity that ended up being the driving force behind the villa and lodge building efforts.

Stuart, the recently retired policeman, worked alongside Lance, the dope-growing hippie. Rob the boss and his right-hand man Brian worked with the hardwood timbers, Jason the joiner turned rough looking old timbers into stairs, tables and kitchens. Claire the Scottish girl helped clean the tiles, Fred the Manxman and his Irish colleague fixed them to the roof. Pier from France, Krista and Kristina from Sweden and local Philipa helped Ray with the landscaping. As Mary Weaver put it in her Grand Designs article, "the list of workers and helpers passing through on their travels, or living locally, reads like a roll call of United Nations delegates." Then there was David's sister Jan, nephews Grant and Matt, friends Steve, Paul, Jim, Tom, Suzie, Neil, Ruth, Caz, Rob, Jim, Libby, Moon... the list goes on.

The villas and lodge are a testament to what hard work, tenacity and camaraderie can create; they continue to provide a slice of happiness and tranquility to those who helped with the builds as well as past and future guests.

"Many great people, both friends and craftsmen, worked on the project. From architects through to landscapers, the right people turned up at the right time and everyone left their mark." - David Marshall, The Taranaki Daily News, March 2001







Epic Moments

After 18 years in business, David and Nuala have been enriched by their interactions with many interesting people from far and wide. It's no surprise that with such a unique architecture and beautiful location, epic moments ensued. While Rob Tucker a friend of David and Nuala was showing Hollywood director Ed Zwick, cinematographer John Toll, and their team potential locations around Taranaki for the filming of The Last Samurai, David joked they could "drop in" to the Ahu Ahu Beach Villas for a coffee. To David's surprise and delight, the offer was taken: coffee turned into a full-blown, traditional Maori welcome, and in true Hollywood fashion, two black helicopters literally "dropped in", touching down on the Ahu Ahu property. A local caterer helped prepare the last minute banquet with sumptuous platters, fresh crayfish and fine New Zealand wine.

Another fun day was spent out in front of the villas setting the world record for most people standing on a surfboard and riding a wave. A friend, David Smithers aka 'Biggie' made a 7-meter scale model surfboard as a sign for his

shop; before erecting it outside his shop, it was used to hold up 13 people, including David and Nuala's mechanic, dentist, friends, and daughter Jess, while managing to ride a decent sized wave.

While all the people that have stayed have proven to be interesting in their own way, there are quite a few noteworthy people that have been turned down because of full-bookings and weddings: Santana, Fleetwood Mac, and Jack Johnson to name a few!

One year, when the remaining Beach Boys Mike Love and Bruce Johnston were in town for their concert, the boys stayed in the villas. After the concert, they came back to Ahu Ahu and passed around the guitar with the Marshall family, belting out songs until the wee hours of the morning.





Add caption

A final note

Just as David and Nuala had hoped, Ahu Ahu Beach Villas and Oraukawa Lodge has become a place for individuals and retreats to reassess, relax and recharge. Couples have enjoyed special times, they have seen a number of wedding proposals, honeymoons, anniversaries, and birthdays. Businesses and organizations have found Ahu Ahu a great place for retreats, team building and debriefing. Weddings have become more popular and many out of town guests had no idea Taranaki could supply such an outstanding venue. All of these groups are attracted by the same thing, to experience the combination of award winning architecture, private rural setting, spectacular sea views, and the friendly familiarity David and Nuala's hospitality provides.

David and Nuala would like to say a huge thank you to each person who has come to the villas, you make the lifestyle they enjoy possible and for this they will always be grateful.



Awards

2001 Taranaki Chamber of
Commerce: Emerging Business
Award

2002 New Zealand Institute of
Architecture: Sustainable
Architecture Award

2003 New Zealand Institute of
Architecture: National Award for
Hospitality

2003 Taranaki Chamber of
Commerce: Tourism Award

2007 New Zealand Institute of
Architecture: Hospitality and
Tourism Award







