

prefabs come of age



Prefab homes used to be cheap and plain. But with designer input and improved technologies, these homes are a solution for now and the future.

When Georgina Pearce's bungalow in the Christchurch suburb of Burwood was written off after the Canterbury earthquakes, she didn't want to move elsewhere in the city. But it would be months before she could even get site consent to build a new home on her own property let alone construct a house using conventional methods.

Her son Alan had a brain wave. He suggested buying a prefabricated home with pre-approved building consent that could be built off-site and so save time. At a cost of just \$163,000 from Laing Properties, the 95sq m Mamaku house fitted her needs and budget exactly.

Building consent was issued for the foundations in late July 2012 and construction began in August. By this time, the house was already under construction in Laing's yard. Says Grant Laing: "With a conventional house, you can't begin construction of the new home until the site consent is obtained. Compared to building a conventional house, Georgina saved at least three months in construction time."

She is thrilled with her new home. With interiors painted in various strengths of Resene Tea, "it's sunny, bright and so warm compared with my old house, thanks to double glazing and it's very well-finished."



This type of quick-build, pre-built home is perfect for people on Christchurch's TC3 zoned sections where houses have been written off and lighter-weight structures are recommended.

Laing Properties was one of several firms promoting quality pre-fabrication techniques and high speed construction at the Christchurch Hive project, launched by PrefabNZ in April 2012. The project was inspired by the desperate need for new homes that are lightweight, quick to build, strong and affordable to cater for those affected by the earthquakes that have ravaged the region since September 2010.

CEO of PrefabNZ Pamela Bell said Hive showed house hunters a range of different styles. Catering to savvy, eco-conscious buyers, they also demonstrated a clear designer edge.

In the past, explains Liz O'Neill of Laing Properties: "Quick build homes were relatively basic, because that was all that was required by customers. The majority of prefab clients were after basic quick-build houses for fast accommodation. Now, however, clients want more of a 'wow' factor in their home, even if it is prefab. The prefab industry has evolved to incorporate a more modern architecturally designed look to keep up with the trends of the day."

Architect Andre Hodgskin of Architex teamed up with Keith Hay Homes to produce the beautifully crafted Park Terrace home at Hive. He says the association resulted from mutual philosophies. "They build excellent buildings. And we enjoy designing them. So we decided to explore that synergy. Park Terrace is a generous home which contains many design elements often used in our bespoke commissions."

He believes there are universal issues at stake. "Key concerns are cost-effective building methods and materials. We tend to live more in >

Opposite One of Box Living's designs, finished in Resene Bokara Grey using Resene CoolColour paint.

Top The Rakaia Cube developed by Falcon Construction is made from a precast concrete system using 8 x 4m structures connected vertically or horizontally. The sides are finished in Resene Taupe Grey, the weatherboards are Resene Half Fuscous Grey and the soffits are Resene Quarter Taupe Grey.

Above Bachkit belies the idea that prefabricated homes are basic in either materials or design.

- Resene Half Emerge
- Resene Taupe Grey
- Resene Half Fuscous Grey
- Resene Quarter Taupe Grey
- Resene Bokara Grey

the now than plan for the future. Fuelled by the rapid advance in technologies along with ecological concerns, we have an opportunity to lead the world by example, treading lightly on the earth and leaving a small but meaningful footprint.”

Andre says we need to find more appropriate ways of building in response to our evolving attitude towards the way in which we live. “We should explore lighter buildings with tighter spaces in increased densities – shared community spaces and facilities as opposed to individual indulgences which create urban sprawl.”

Andre also created the award-winning low-impact, modular Bachkit in 1999 which could be constructed in just 16 weeks. Grant McKenzie bought the Bachkit business and has sold the homes internationally.

The design may be clean-lined but it’s not basic. And today’s designer prefabricated homes aren’t necessarily cheap. Grant points to the level of prefabrication which is becoming more sophisticated and complex: “Components by their very nature are expensive... It’s very much a quality home and it’s hard to cut costs,” he says.

Box Living is another successful company working in this arena, established with the promise of quality spaces, cost certainty and good value. Around half of Box Living homes have been bought as holiday homes and the company has tackled many difficult sites.

Box Living’s Dan Heyworth believes prefabs are the way of the future. “We need to see more standardisation in materials and material sizes, more ‘systems’ comprising pre-built components assembled on site.”

In line with the design’s modernist influences, Box Living homes are painted in dark Resene colours using Resene CoolColour paint, which not only gives them a designer look, but helps them to blend into natural environments and withstand strong sunlight.


Prefab building is a theme being increasingly explored: Puke Ariki Museum in New Plymouth has hosted a summer-long exhibition called *Kiwi Prefab, Cottage to Cutting Edge*.


This often overlooked sector looks as if it has a big future ahead. H



Top Georgina Pearce’s new home, finished in varying strengths of Resene Tea.

Above Architect Andre Hodgskin of Architex teamed up with Keith Hay Homes to produce the beautifully crafted Park Terrace home at the Hive initiative in Christchurch. Inside, Resene Zylone Sheen Low VOC paint has been tinted to Resene Alabaster.


Resene Tea 

Resene Alabaster 

words Vicki Holder



words and pictures
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 Resene Black

container comfort

Built from three shipping containers that cost \$2500 each, this Rarotonga home is the epitome of a quick-build, low-cost, recycled home. Owned by Susan and Neil Hall, and designed by Nigel Rees from RDA Design and Susan, the containers were bought in New Zealand and transported to the Cook Islands in 2010.

Surrounded by 100sq m of kwila decking, a high-pitched floating roof of square profile, long-run Colorsteel protects the containers. Laid in an L shape, the master bedroom, dressing room and bathroom are located in the foot while the living area is in the longer space.

Door and window openings were cut into the containers with the bedroom and living areas all opening onto the back deck. Slatted pine roller doors were made on-site and fitted with internal insect screens concealed in the walls. Resene CoolColour paint tinted to Resene Black has been used on the exterior.