



NEWSPAPER

IN RESIDENCE

# South specific

Inspired by Pacific Island culture, a modern home in monumental style is a hit in Herne Bay, Auckland

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**SET IN STONE**  
The house's façade was conceived as a piece of public sculpture and indulges the architects' love of 'the rawness of concrete'. Inside, the formal living area features a large Stephen Bambury painting and Danish wooden furniture

**CEILING IS BELIEVING**

Left, the sky lounge has an Isamu Noguchi rice-paper light and a 'Coconut' chair by George Nelson

Below left, the kitchen

Below, a timber screen divides the main bedroom from the bathroom



PHOTOGRAPHER: MARK SMITH

fluid. Each area is delineated by a change in level, marked by a couple of steps, and there are more timber screens to enclose rooms completely as desired. While the spaces are interconnected, they have a handcrafted quality, something the architects have become renowned for. The formal living area has exposed, honed concrete-block walls and the dining area is crafted with an angular plaster ceiling. Cultural motifs run throughout. 'Many of the patterns refer to the Pacific Island and Maori culture. Some of the carvings we've used on the timber screens were inspired by tapa cloth design,' says Gary Lawson, co-founder of the practice.

For the house's owners, skin specialist Dr Mark Gray and his partner Suzannah Kearns, the choice of architects was never in dispute. 'Our previous house was designed by Nick and Gary. We had confidence in what they'd achieve and gave them a relatively open brief,' says Gray. And they were right to have faith; the Herne Bay house, completed in 2005, received the New Zealand Institute of Architects' Supreme Award for Architecture, the country's highest honour. But the rigorous design has an important functional side, too, with the façade forming a protective shell to the street. 'It was conceived as a piece of public sculpture and was carved in a timber mould and sprayed with concrete,' explains Stevens. 'For us, it's the ultimate modernist abstraction.' ★

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**Y**ou could easily mistake this house for a public building – a library or a community centre, perhaps. With its glass-reinforced concrete façade, it could be the latest municipal monolith to touch down in Herne Bay, a harbour-side suburb of Auckland, New Zealand.

'Our clients wanted a sense of monumentality,' says architect Nicholas Stevens, partner at Stevens Lawson Architects, who designed it. 'The site suited a municipal-style building as it was quite exposed to the street.' Created for a couple with a teenage child, the two-storey property cascades down the narrow site, capturing harbour views. The first floor features the bedrooms, and the main one is linked to a 'sky lounge'. It has a hotel feel and timber screens can be pulled across it to partition the space.

The ground floor, divided into a formal living room, kitchen and informal living areas, is also