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Project
Wellington Fireplace

Location
Wellington

Architect
John Mills Architects

ROARING SUCCESS

A new fireplace can be a fun yet practical feature that invites you to linger and enjoy the dancing flames – a playful spirit embodied in this eclectic retail space

These and following pages The complete refit of a cavernous space has created a whimsical, yet informative product showcase for Wellington Fireplace. Architect John Mills has organised the space as a series of vignettes that display the fires in an evocative manner. There are several playful references to New Zealand's outdoor culture, including a mussel-shaped reception desk and oil drums repurposed for lighting that throws patterns on the showroom walls.

You know your next architectural project will be outside the square when your client specifically requests a new showroom that doesn't look like a showroom at all.

This was the rather open brief given to architect John Mills when he was asked to design the new display spaces for Wellington Fireplace. So rather than placing the wood or gas fires in static settings, the concept was to create light-hearted slices of New Zealand home life, says Mills.

"We wanted to create theatrical vignettes and other more abstract associations that would amuse, and evoke home settings, and how a fireplace would work in them."

To start with, the concrete floors were refinished, windows and doors replaced and the walls rebuilt, making the project quite close to a new build.

John Mills often plays with the expectations of indoor-outdoor and this is evident from arrival at the new fireplace display space.

"Upon entering the building you first come to a staged outdoor area, complete with open-air fire, stacked timber, decking and the worn weather-board cladding of a classic Kiwi bach – all evoking the look of a fireplace in a casual backyard space

"The bach has a playfully contrasting plush interior, with fires in situ. This area is also a gateway to the central space, known as the Courtyard."

Because the premises is essentially one large volume, Mills designed a bright, multicoloured lighting element, called the Cloud, to help anchor and organise the space. This floats above the reception desk, signalling where visitors can find information, and bringing an air of intimacy to this area.





"The reception desk comprises two overlapping wood elements shaped to represent the sections of an opened mussel shell – a favourite food at backyard barbecues. Another cultural nod is seen in the suspended lighting elements. These reinvented oil drums make an oblique reference to their traditional use as rough-and-ready backyard incinerators."

The reception is positioned so that staff can take in all areas of the showroom at a glance. To the right is the entrance; straight ahead a row of more understated showrooms displaying various fires; and to the left there is a living room and kitchen space with a fire. Each vignette has different wall hues, trims and fascias, all helping to evoke

personal home settings. Even the meeting rooms at the end of the space have differing window and door treatments.

This project uses recycled and repurposed materials at every opportunity, from the preloved weatherboards to the suspended oil drums. And some spaces have a secondary purpose – a weatherboard element in the Courtyard leads the eye up through the volume and also conceals storage. The display kitchen is used by staff to make afternoon tea, or as a relaxed, informal workstation.

To view images and a video online go to trendsideas.com/nz2906p100



Location Wellington Fireplace, Wellington
Architect and interior designer John Mills FNZIA, John Mills Architects (Wellington)
Project manager Axiom
Construction Spice Building Solutions; Martin Goulden Builders
Flooring Concrete, existing, refurbished and polished; recycled rimu by James Henry; carpet by Floorstore
Cladding Weatherboard, new cedar and recycled
Reception counter Custom, by John Mills Architects
Lighting Reception light fitting, custom by John Mills; recycled oil drums; other lighting by ECC

Wall and ceiling treatments Plaster moulds
Fireplaces Stovax, Heat & Glo, Warmington, Metro Fires, Escea, Gazco, Jetmaster, Pyroclassic, Living Flame
Joinery Goldmark Joinery
Paint Resene
Guttering Copper by Capital Continuous Spouting
Additional furniture BoConcept

Awards NZIA Local Award, Wellington, 2012

Story by Charles Moxham
Photography by Paul McCredie

Below left A fully realised living room and approximated kitchen space provide evocative settings to help visitors imagine the fires in their own homes. The kitchen also doubles as a coffee station and casual work space.

Facing page Inside the building is the front door of a Kiwi bach, with an outdoor scene of fire and stacked timber alongside. However, the bach interior is more like a living room, with finished walls and indoor fires.

