



PROFILE

Tom ROWE of Rowe Baetens Architecture

Houses editor Justin Foote talks to architect and self-confessed 'architecture chaser' Tom Rowe about finding atmosphere in the built spaces around us.



JF: Have you always wanted to be an architect?

TR: I wanted to be an inventor. Ever since kindergarten I've been fascinated with putting things together and by innovation. At one point I'd also wanted to be an aeronautical engineer.

JF: So how did you go from inventing or aeronautics to architecture?

TR: I think architecture became a logical progression, one that encapsulated a philosophical bent that wasn't apparent within physics or engineering. I had a fascination with philosophy during high school – Asian philosophy in particular – and from that architecture naturally fell into place.

JF: Would you say you have a set philosophy when it comes to architecture?

TR: There are some rules that I have that would 'almost' be taboo and unbreakable in most circumstances, which is perhaps a definition of philosophy. I would hate to have a stylism and rather I have some core values that I want to preserve throughout my architectural career and to make architecture that inherently follows and includes those values – that architecture has a strong formative bearing on how we grow and how we perceive and how we occupy our worlds and consequently how we construct our inner worlds.

JF: How long have you been Rowe Baetens Architecture?

TR: Three-and-a-half years.

JF: And before that?

TR: I worked for Noel Lane for nine years. Also, Saskia [Baetens] worked for ASC, as well as in Belgium and for Hillery Priest.

JF: Do you maintain individual roles, or are you both involved across all facets?

TR: We've got two young children, so at the

moment mine is more an oversight and director sort of status while Saskia's involved in the ongoing review and assessment of all projects.

JF: And are you both fairly aligned, philosophically speaking?

TR: I think philosophically speaking we're very closely aligned as well as from an architectural perspective. We've both travelled intensely and deliberately in search of architectural buildings, to the point that it becomes an obsession. Like you see those people chasing storms, we're probably their equivalent, only we're chasing architectural monuments. We're fundamentally interested in good buildings and those that will be eternally good. We're both interested in art and the role of art and architecture in a wider cultural sense; it's implications for people and for thought and for expression and what that means in terms of the future.

JF: How do the two – art and architecture – feed each other or feed off each other?

TR: There's a huge amount of literature about where architecture starts and architecture stops and where art starts and art stops. My favourite analogy on the subject is that of Anish Kapoor, who says the difference is that art has no plumbing, which is quite good because you get these fantastic artists who work with light and space, the abstracts of architecture, and the fact that they do is hugely beneficial to architecture and to the potential of architecture; also, it can be highly frivolous and fun.

JF: You mentioned innovation earlier, how do you give someone innovation? Is it purely a physical, technological thing or can it be perceptible?

TR: For me, it's inherently not technologically based. The innovation that occurs between an architect and a client lies in taking the client somewhere they didn't expect to go but that satisfies their needs. It may be as

simple as doubling the height of a volume or changing the programme or the budget so it suits or expresses proportionately the value of the activity. It's innovation in terms of brief and construction, which may be technology in the strictest sense, however, I think the technological innovation that occurs in architecture isn't necessarily putting in the latest voice-activated light switch.

JF: How influenced by your travels is your own work. Sure, you're not likely to reinvent the colosseum but in terms of from where you draw inspiration, how does that influence work?

TR: I'm probably heavily influenced by what I've seen, as everyone is to a degree. You're right, you're not going to mimic the colosseum but in saying that, there're probably elements of buildings in Rome that do have a real bearing on what we do. It's probably more of a response to the tone of the architecture rather than the programmatic and functional requirements; more about the kind of felt meaning or felt inherent qualities of space. I think those things are really fundamental and the way that we build has a real consequence on the way we feel in different spaces. Alain de Botton wrote in *Architecture of Happiness* that "...even if we could spend the rest of our lives in the Villa Rotonda or the Glass House, we would still often be in a bad mood." But I think it's also important to consider the influence it has on our psychology, on our worldview and that sort of thing. We'll talk about the tone of a sound or the tone of a painting, or we'll talk about the emotional density of weather and its effect but we don't talk a lot about the atmosphere of architecture, of walking into a building and feeling one thing or the next but I think they are powerful sensations that we experience, whether we like it or not.

Read the full interview on architecturenow.co.nz.

2013

Grey Lynn HOUSE

• AUCKLAND •

A new two-storey family house in the centre of suburban Grey Lynn. The area is colonised with 100-year-old villas and bungalows sandwiched within narrow 12m sites. The form is balanced with dynamic interlocking double-storey voids and cantilevered balconies. A double-height central lounge area is straddled by a 9m bridge-cum-balcony, which provides circulation to private bedrooms on the upper level. The dwelling is grounded by the textured off-shutter concrete garage and cedar-clad box projecting out along two axes. Decks and walkways weave around landscaped courtyards opening to dining or seating areas.

The house relies on glazed double-height volumes to the north, supplemented by low-level picture windows to the south, to provide solar gain and cross ventilation. Bedrooms have a switch glass to the exterior that changes from opaque to transparent with the flick of a switch powered by an electric current. Rough, natural materials provide texture and relief to the facade. The house was originally built as a development project and is now a well lived in family home.



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03 Off-shutter concrete and cedar cladding provide visual interest to this contemporary home.

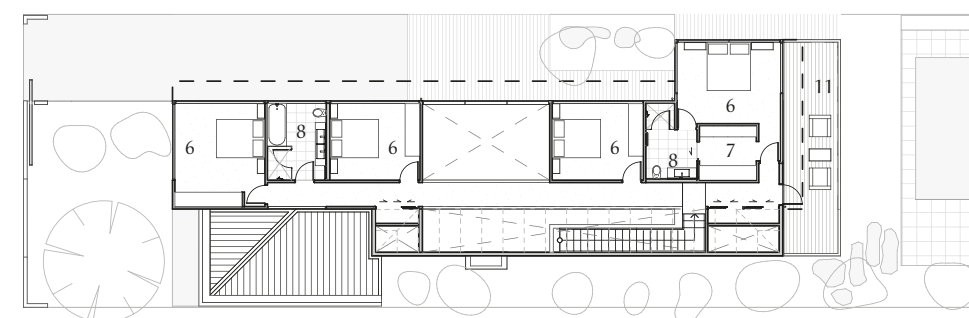
04 Glazed double-height volumes to the north provide solar gain and cross ventilation.

05 A 9m bridge-cum-balcony above the lounge provides circulation to the upper level bedrooms.

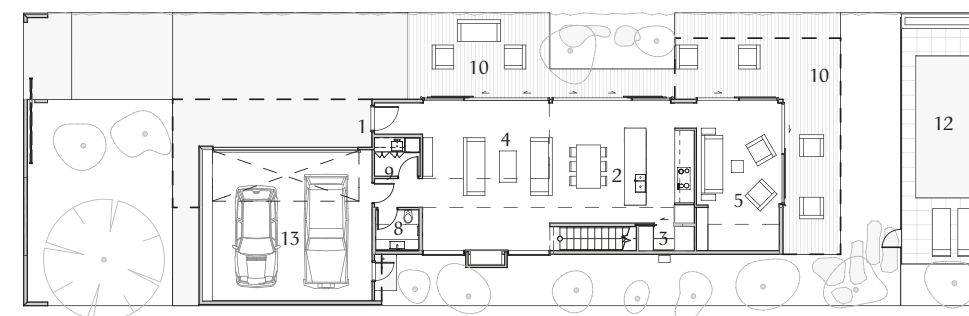
06 Cantilevered balconies are a counterpoint to the double-height volumes in the centre of the house.



06



First floor plan



Ground floor plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen/dining
- 3 Pantry
- 4 Living
- 5 Family
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Wardrobe
- 8 Bathroom/ensuite/WC
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Terrace
- 11 Balcony
- 12 Pool
- 13 Garage



07 Nestled within a small bay near Russell, this house continues a 20-year connection to the area for the owner.

08 The interior palette is deliberately subdued to give emphasis to the ever-changing external colour palette.



2012

Bay of Islands HOUSE

• NORTHLAND •

Anchored in a comfortable, commanding position over a small bay near Russell, this beach house has an integral relationship with the landscape. The client had occupied a bach on the site for more than 20 years and had an intimate understanding of and sensitivity to the bay.

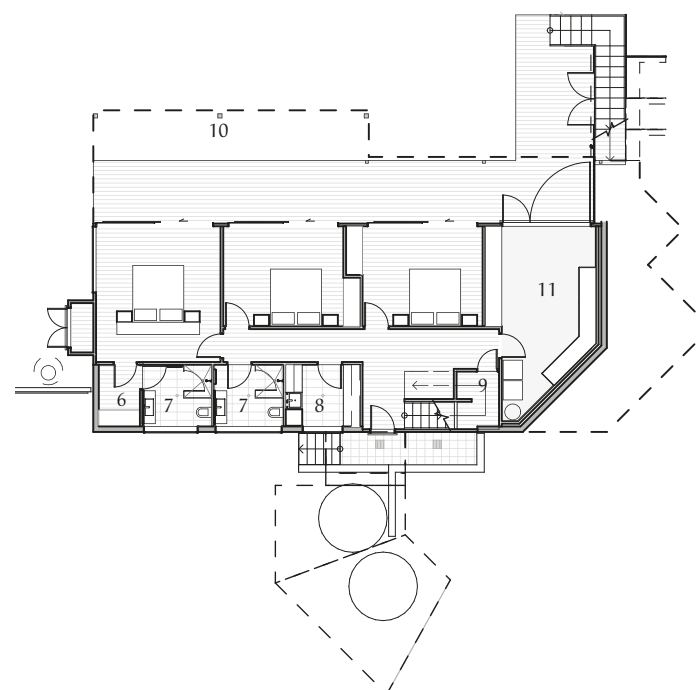
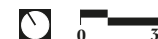
Part of the brief required modifications to the site, designed to accommodate the programmatic requirements of bedrooms, parking and manoeuvring, which had been previously difficult and precarious.

The house has texture and rigor with positive detailing and connections of a nautical influence, emphasising the methodology of construction. Beams are deliberately expressed and rafters are planted over v-grooved textured ceilings, as they turn down to align with wall battens and board textures similar to those found in traditional boat construction. Large fireplaces provide atmosphere and warmth and a focus for public areas of occupation. Colours are subdued and become a backdrop to the site and its inherent stillness.

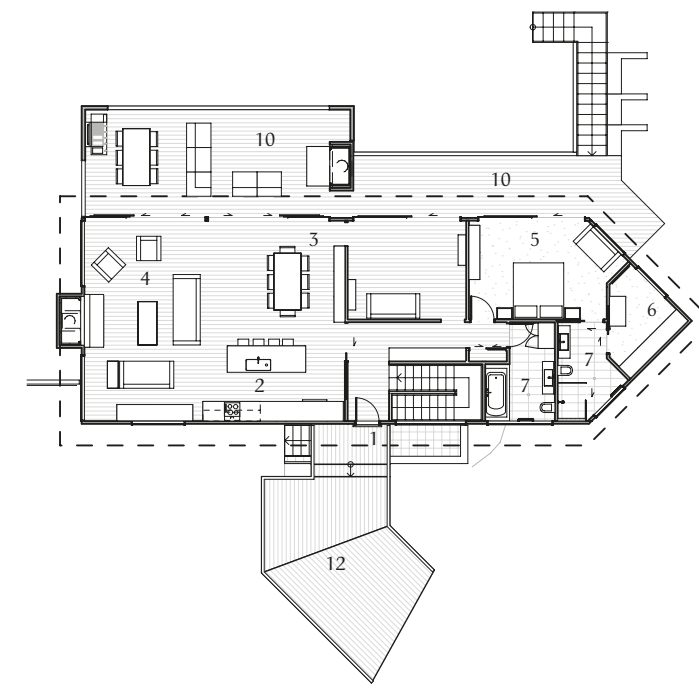


08

- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Dining
- 4 Living
- 5 Lounge
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Wardrobe
- 8 Bath/ensuite/WC
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Linen
- 11 Workshop
- 12 Entry court



Ground floor plan



First floor plan



2011
**Kaipara
HOUSE**
• NORTHLAND •

Noel Lane Architects,
senior architect Tom Rowe

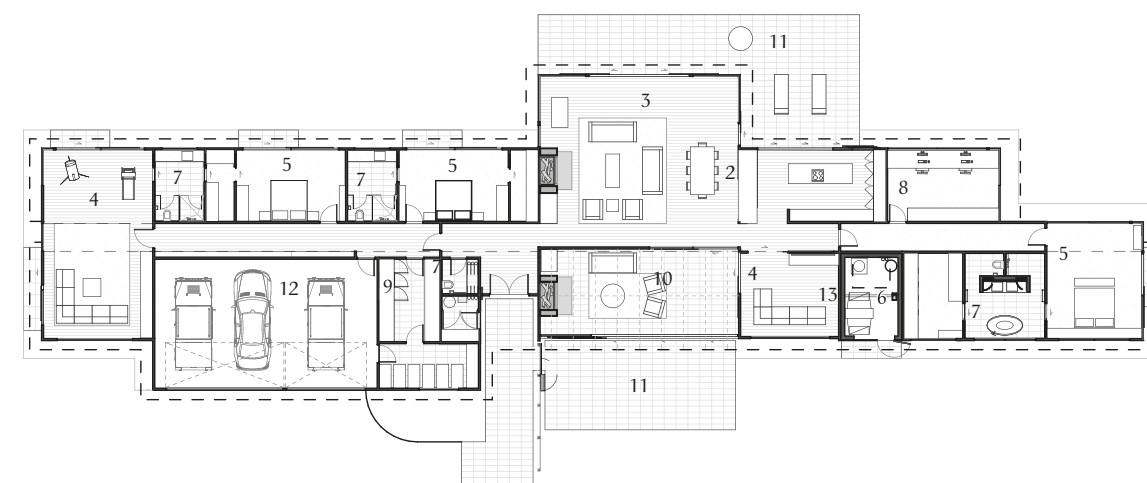
A long low coastal dwelling integrates within the landscape calmly positioned to take full advantage of a panoramic view of the extensive Kaipara harbour. The house emphasises the horizontal line as a collection of gabled roof forms parallel to one another containing the various planned zones of occupation. Hallways between the gables provide a logic and order to the planning and division between spaces. You enter into the centre of the house opening to a large lounge which divides the two private ends, north and south. The lounge is effectively a pavilion between the Kaipara, West and a glazed atrium, East for the extremes of storm and weather. The materiality of the exterior is rustic, including rough stone terraces, natural

stained cedar weatherboards, and hand hewn cedar shake roofing providing a weathered timeless finish to the variable gabled forms. Within the interior, similar to that of the Japanese construction, shadow, light, and movement become explicit quality and almost a material themselves. Rich natural materials, dark wide floorboards, dark stone bathrooms enhance the interplay of shadow and light from the variable patterns of weather and conditions of light. Window joinery is faced in timber and the house contains a high level automation

The house was designed by Architect Noel Lane with Tom Rowe as a senior architect involved with detail design, documentation through to construction and completion.

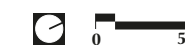


- 09 Integrated within its rural setting this house takes full advantage of the panoramic view.
- 10 The house emphasises the horizontal line.
- 11 Within the interior, shadow, light and movement take on an explicit quality.
- 12 A glazed atrium provides sheltered outdoor living, while the lounge links the two 'private' ends of the house.



Level 5 floor plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Dining/living
- 4 Family
- 5 Bedroom
- 6 Wardrobe
- 7 Bathroom/ensuite/WC
- 8 Office
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Atrium
- 11 Terrace
- 12 Garage
- 13 Plant





- 13 Nestled into bush and overlooking an 1880s-era house, this contemporary home marks the start of a new phase of occupation for the area.
- 14 The roof's inverted truss form, highlighted by the bandsawn pine ceiling treatment, allows for a low profile while maintaining inherent strength.
- 15 One of the drawcards for the owners was the magnificent view accessible from the site.



2012

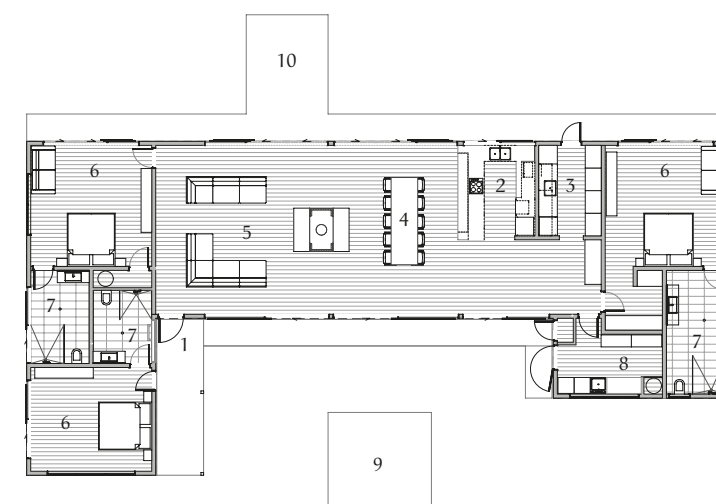
Kawau Island HOUSE

• AUCKLAND •

Sited on a natural plateau within a valley that focuses over a bay, this house is an asymmetric "C" in plan. The house is set out around a central living pavilion peeling off to private bedrooms and opening toward an inner courtyard to provide shelter from wind and weather. There was a requirement by local council for a high level of camouflage within the landscape. To achieve this, deep eaves were integrated to create shadow over the glass, limiting reflections of the glazing as well as enabling the house to nestle into the landscape and enjoy the associated passive solar benefits.

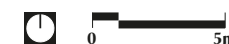
The lounge pavilion provides a frame for which to view the water in the distance and enjoy the shade and breeze from natural ventilation to the courtyard.

Economy was critically important when building on Kawau Island as materials had to be barged over, concrete in some instances had to be delivered by helicopter and the builders lived on site five days a week working



First floor plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Butler's pantry
- 4 Dining
- 5 Living
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Bathroom
- 8 Laundry
- 9 Courtyard
- 10 Deck



from early to dusk.

The roof profile is driven geometrically by an inverted truss roof, with flat ceiling areas occurring over the circulation and service zones, and the sloped ceilings opening to the exterior within living areas. The roof pitch slopes inward to the courtyard to maximize sun and light. Bathrooms open directly on to

Kanuka and Manuka forest.

Materials and finishes were deliberately selected to invoke the clients' vision of a rustic primitive hut. Roughed boards are used as the ceiling and skirting's and trims are band sawn and rough. The Bach has a relaxed, easy atmosphere with a unique identity nestled into the surrounding environment.



2011

Mahurangi STUDIO

• AUCKLAND •

Noel Lane Architects,
senior architect Tom Rowe

Located behind an existing house this project is a small studio space for painting and periodic accommodation. The studio is orientated south to take advantage of soft subtle natural lighting and high-level windows to the north provide daylight and levity to the roof. East-West windows capture views of the sea and evening light.

The studio design follows the language of the original dwelling. A roof drifts over a series of walls and hovers with a certain magnetism to the concrete terraces below.

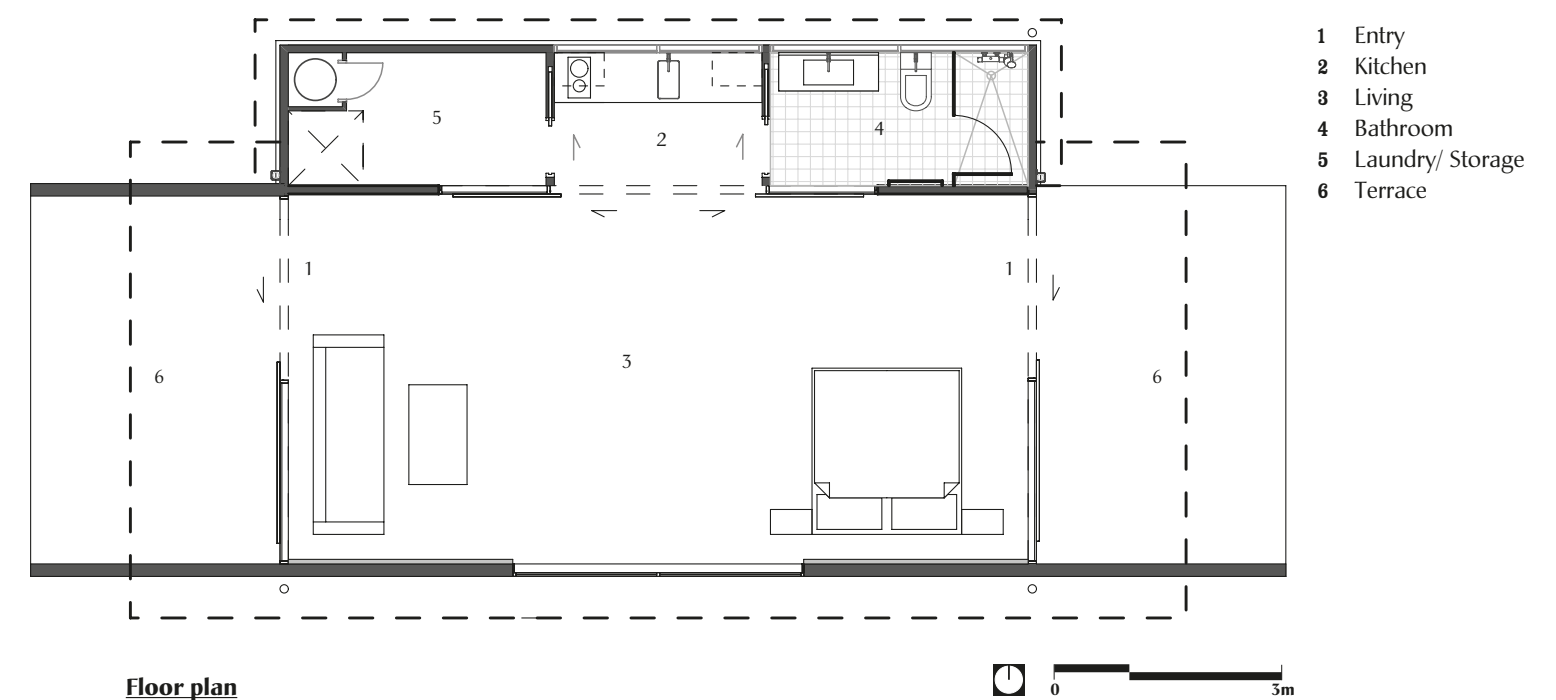
A lower dark cedar weatherboard box locks into the concrete and glass structure and the weatherboards return inside delineating the box in relation to the interior.

The studio was designed by Architect Noel Lane with Tom Rowe as a senior architect involved with detail documentation through to construction and completion.



16 Annexed to the main house, this studio space also doubles as guest accommodation.

17 A kitchen, bathroom and laundry area are inserted into a cedar-clad box, which is itself, inserted into the main structure.





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Projects

Mahurangi studio 2011
Kaipara house 2011
Kawau Island house 2012
Bay of Islands house 2012
Grey Lynn house 2013

Photography

Projects: Mahurangi studio, Grey Lynn house, Kaipara house, Bay of Islands house – Sam Hartnett; Kawau Island house – Simon Devitt

Portrait: Sam Hartnett