



Architect John Irving: Striving to Simplify

A ridgetop home on a rural Northland site gave Auckland architect John Irving the chance to relax and spread out without the press of boundaries and neighbours.

The house, which was built by Master Builder Rob Littlejohn, of Whangarei, and supplied by Altherm Aluminium Northland Ltd, featured APL Architectural Series joinery with corner sliders 2.5m high.

John is principal of Studio John Irving Ltd but was overseas when Altherm News contacted him recently, so the interview had to be carried out by email...

Q: *What were the main locality factors that shaped your design for this house?*

A: It was a fantastic and very simple site in that there was the possibility to really spread out and have the house relax, as it were. The flatness of the land added to its simplicity. The site has a very clear front and back so it was a matter of working with that. It was quite fun not having the usual restrictions.

Q: *What were the main factors in the way you approach architecture that helped shape the design and materials?*

A: I am always striving to simplify; life is complicated and cluttered enough. The client also wanted a warm and batchy home, so there is a lot of timber internally and the detailing is all fairly casual, plywood and finger pull handles. The house also didn't want to be too precious with four young kids tearing around so its all pretty bombproof. In



John Irving

terms of the forms, it was decided very early to articulate the house as three separate linked elements: sleeping, living and working. We pretty much built the first concept sketch, and we are proud of how it's come out.

Q: *Obviously the APL Architectural Series suite of products, especially the large sliders, were part of the design solution - any comments?*

A: Well, getting the sliders right was very very important and we looked at many options. The sliders are quite large, there are no corner posts and some of the panels slide externally over the walls. It was pretty tricky and we had to get it perfect. We rejected the more standard commercial stackers because I wasn't satisfied that we could get the waterproofing we needed. The APL Architectural Series three-track system worked really well in this case. The installers and builders did a great job and I am very pleased with how the sliders are performing.

Q: *You've spent a lot of your career overseas; do you bring to the drawing board any of the foreign influences that you've been exposed to?*

A: I spent almost 10 years working as an architect in Berlin and London, and conditions are very different in northern Europe. The temperatures are generally a lot more extreme. I designed a project in Moscow - triple glazing is standard and it's all about in situ concrete because labour is cheap. You are always making sense of, and adapting to, where you are. Regardless of that, you are always



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striving to find an idea that is beautiful and works.

Q: Right now you're globetrotting again - are you looking at architecture from any particular angle while you're overseas?

A: The best and worst thing about being an architect is that you live it, you don't turn it off after work. So you are always going to places to see buildings and spaces because photos just don't cut it, you have to experience it for yourself. This trip I am mixing business with pleasure. Last week I met and presented a design to a client on an absolutely stunning yacht in Monaco, that was a fun meeting! I try to get back to Europe as often as I can. It's a big part of me, it inspires me and recharges my batteries.

Photos: The surface finish for the Altherm windows and doors was bronze anodised.

Altherm residential joinery was used in other parts of the house, including glass louvres and awning windows with Sashvent trickle ventilators. Black Miro hardware was used in most of the house.

