

[architectural eras]

New Zealand has an expansive range of architectural styles – most with international origins that have been adapted to become uniquely ours. Take a look at this whistle-stop tour of New Zealand building design through the years.

[GEORGIAN]

New Zealand's first architecturally designed houses were built pre-colonisation, during the 1820s and 1830s in the Georgian style. This architectural era, most notable for its symmetry and proportion, originated in Britain between 1714 - 1830 and was based upon the classical architecture of Greek and Roman times. The British structures were often of grand proportion in comparison to the NZ copies but possessed the same notable features including a rectangular footprint, hipped roofs with small eaves, symmetrical facades and regular windows. The NZ models usually added ground-floor verandahs and had a central hallway with rooms on either side. The Georgian style was quite restrained in appearance with only minor or no ornamental detailing on the exterior, and the interiors were mostly utilitarian due to small budgets and limited skillsets.



New Zealand's Georgian architecture is minimal as colonisation in 1840 coincided with the movement's fall from fashion in Britain. However there are still a number of excellent examples remaining including the Northland mission stations at Kerikeri (1822, New Zealand's oldest building), Te Waimate (1832) and Mangungu (1839), and the Treaty House at Waitangi (1834) pictured left.

[VICTORIAN]

The Victorian period (1837 – 1901) saw New Zealand architecture continue to follow British and European trends. It also saw a great variation in architectural styles from grand renaissance revivals to the most commonly recognised NZ villa.

Renaissance revival: This refers to the 19th-century European architectural style which was inspired by the Italian Renaissance and characterised by pilasters, rustication, and classical motifs. It was basically an eclectic blending of past styles, which the architect selected based on the desires of his client. These were grand homes and in New Zealand tended to be built only for people with status.

Examples of these buildings still remain nationwide. Among New Zealand's best renaissance revival houses is Auckland's Old Government House (1856) pictured right, designed by William Mason and constructed of timber fashioned to look like stone. It is now owned by Auckland University.





New Zealand Villa: The villa is one of this country's most distinctive housing types and predominated housing design from the 1870s through to WW1, being originally fairly simple in form but gaining more decorative features as time, and affluence, progressed. It became the favoured design for new houses in the first suburbs in the colonial towns and villages in the 1880s as urban populations dramatically increased – with over 85,000 being built nationwide.

Born during the Industrial Revolution, Victorian architects embraced new materials and technologies. Mass-production made ornamental parts more affordable and so they applied decoration liberally, combining features borrowed from many different eras with flourishes from their own imaginations. The popularity of the villa started to dwindle during WW1, but achieved a revival from the 1980s onwards when renovation became the new cool.

Gothic revival: Villas, as discussed above, took their lead from English Victorian architecture which emerged in the late 1830s and quickly spread throughout British colonies. It comprised a series of architectural revival styles in which past eras were plundered for inspiration – starting with Regency Classicism and Greek Revival and being overtaken by Gothic Revival from the 1850s onwards.

Gothic Revival was one of the most influential styles of the 19th Century and was based upon the designs of the European Middle Ages. It was a romantic period where architects were inspired by the Gothic buildings of the 12th to 16th Centuries. The fascination with churches and cathedrals was linked to philosophical ideals about tradition, conservatism and spirituality. The style embraced decorative embellishments, steeply sloping roofs, pointed and segmental arches, sculptures and motifs. Examples of New Zealand's best Gothic revival houses include Highwic, in Epsom, Auckland (1862) pictured right, and Oneida, near Whanganui (1870). Both feature timber construction, steeply pitched roofs, decorated bargeboards and finials.



Queen Anne: The Queen Anne style of architecture was popular in New Zealand between the 1880s and the early 1900s. It was thought to be the most eclectic style of the Victorian era and was based on a premise of decorative excess and variety. There was little attempt to stay true to any one particular architectural style, instead this style displayed a combination of various forms and stylistic features borrowed from the earlier parts of the Victorian and Romantic eras.



Queen Anne style had its roots in England but quickly became popular in the US and subsequently New Zealand, although to a much lesser degree. Regardless of country, it was extensively favoured by the Victorian elite who wished to display their wealth in a stylish and extravagant manner. In New Zealand the style is mostly seen in residential rather than public buildings, and often in grand manor houses such as Otahuna, Tai Tapu (1895) pictured left, which is now used as a luxury lodge.

[EDWARDIAN]

The short Edwardian era (1901-10) was thought to be a relaxed, romantic golden age sandwiched between the achievements of the Victorian period and the catastrophe of WW1. An increasing number of New Zealand architects became interested in the arts and crafts movement, led by English social reformer William Morris in the second half of the 19th century. Architect-designed houses of the Edwardian period were often grand in scale featuring elements of Elizabethan or Tudor architecture such as half-timbering. The interior started to gain more attention and wood panelling was used where practicable, particularly in entry foyers and grand stairwells. There was a distinctive shift away from the industrialisation of the Victorian period and emphasis placed on hand crafted detail. A number of these grand Edwardian homes remain such as Daresbury, Christchurch (1901) pictured right, Bushy Park, Whanganui (1906), and Maungaraupi Homestead, Marton (1906).



[WAR & INTER-WAR YEARS]

This was a difficult time in which building designs showed the practicality and restraint demanded by war time and the depression years of the 1930s. Throughout this period American influences were increasingly apparent.



Bungalow: The bungalow first appeared in New Zealand around the time of WW1, and was the dominant style throughout the 1920s. It is known that the word 'bungalow' is derived from Hindustani word 'bangla', however there is some dispute regarding the actual origins of the bungalow design in New Zealand. Some claim that the New Zealand's bungalow-style housing was directly inspired by bungalows from the west coast of the United States, whereas others believe that New Zealand's bungalow history is older than that of America – claiming that our bungalow style was derived from England and Australia from as early as 1910. Either way, architects adopted the style and made it distinctly New Zealand. Existing examples include 'Los Angeles' in Fendalton, Christchurch (1913) pictured right, which is one of New Zealand's first, and best, Californian bungalows; and Waiohika (1926) in Gisborne, which is a local variation on American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's 'prairie houses'.

Art Deco: The basis for the art deco style was the principle of being 'true' to the building – to reveal the building structure rather than disguise it. The style became popular in Europe following the great 'Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes' held in Paris in 1925, from which 'art deco' takes its name. The architects and designers of the time felt that building design should be functional and therefore it was characterised by smooth surfaces, large areas of glass, steel framing, chrome and cubic forms, with limited decoration. Art deco houses first made their appearance here towards the end of the depression in the early 1930s and lasted until after WW2. The American film industry helped to popularise the art deco style which was embraced more fully in public and commercial buildings, but also influenced domestic architecture in the 1930s. Good examples include Kerridge House, Gisborne (1935) pictured right and Anscombe Flats, Wellington (1937).





Modernism: At the same time modernism made its first appearance on the NZ architectural scene. This style had been developed by European architects in the 1920s but did not reach NZ until the late 1930s. The houses were more spacious, mostly with flat roofs, large expanses of glass and very little external decoration. For the first time we saw an open plan arrangement for living areas and greater connection between indoor and outdoor spaces. One of New Zealand's first modernist houses was architect Robin Simpson's own house in Auckland (1938) pictured left

Over the next couple of decades other architects of the time developed a more 'local' modern architecture, with the aim of producing well designed, efficient houses that were suited to the informal lifestyles of New Zealanders. This saw the introduction of mono-pitched roofs, creosoted weatherboard cladding, exposed beams and rafters and timber linings.

State Housing: Following the depression years of the early 1930s, New Zealand saw an acute housing shortage, so when the first Labour government came into power in the late 30s, one of their first steps was to establish a Department of Housing Construction. Their aim was to provide good quality workers' housing built to a high standard. A competition was held to design these houses and entries came from all around the country. The competition required that in every group of ten houses, each house should have a different floor plan, street elevation and materials to prevent a mass-produced appearance.

The first state houses were constructed in 1937. They were solid functional dwellings, mostly single storey detached structures with a rectangular footprint, hipped roof, simple multi-paned windows and little to no external decoration. Nearly half of all housing built in the late 30s was state housing, and over a quarter throughout the 40s. Their solid construction has meant that many state houses still exist today. During this time the government also built a number of large blocks of flats, most of which have remained in public ownership.



[POST WAR YEARS]

New Zealand's post war years have seen a flourish of international ideals, talented local designers and a dedicated shift to create an architectural style of our own.

1970s: New Zealand architecture underwent a major transition in the 1970s resulting in a plethora of styles and greater local individuality. Many established architects took on a concrete brutalist style, while young enthusiastic designers adopted a neo-colonial style. In Christchurch Miles Warren designed homes which were often broken down into two or three smaller pavilions with pitched roofs, tightly cropped eaves and exposed concrete-block walling. Internally you would find dark stained timber roof structures and brickwork. Meantime in Wellington Roger Walker was dispensing with the open plan idea and reintroducing multiple small spaces.

At the same time the Auckland region was embracing a multitude of styles. Considered to be two of the country's best houses of this period include the Chapple House on the North Shore which is a collection of small shed-like pavilions stranded on rocks; and the Brake House at Titirangi (1977) pictured above, which is comparatively austere and has the appearance of floating in the surrounding bush.

80s and 90s: Throughout the 1980s New Zealand architects embraced postmodern architecture, with its historical references, decoration and overall glamour and glitz. Existing examples include the Murphy House, Grey Lynn (1983), the Gibbs House in Parnell (1984) pictured right and the Vernon Town House in Herne Bay (1985).

The 1990s brought increased apartment building in the main centres. This started with the reuse of redundant warehousing then lead to new, purpose-built apartment buildings. This is apparent in Wellington in the reuse of the Hannahs Factory (1995–98) and the Dominion Building (1993–96), and purpose-built apartment buildings such as the Umbrella Park Apartments (1995–98) and the residential component of the Chews Lane Precinct (2004–9).



Recent trends: Over the past twenty years there has been a shift towards simpler design with clean lines, large areas of glass and minimalist detailing. Such as the Rawhiti House in the Bay of Islands (2000) pictured left.

Environmental sustainability has also become increasingly important and desirable for those designing homes. Today people possess a greater awareness of the practice of environmentally sustainable design and are keen for their homes to be designed to suit their environment rather than vice versa. Buildings such as this sustainable house on Great Barrier Island, pictured below, provide a functional and stylish yet responsible home.



It is built on stilts and elevated for flood protection which also makes a light impact on the site. The sun is used for passive heating, electricity and solar hot water heating, and the house opens up in summer to provide ventilation and indoor-outdoor living areas. A number of New Zealand companies and architectural firms now specialise in the design and production of eco-friendly and passive homes.

Check out some of our other articles on the website which discuss current popular building materials such as straw bale homes and container houses.

