



Photographer: Simon Devitt

ART FOR TAURANGA'S SAKE

Much of New Zealand's national identity emanates from the success of its smaller centres. Tauranga, for example, relies on its summer holiday traffic and port as its primary raison d'être. These factors, along with the thriving kiwifruit business, keep Tauranga's economy going, but the community needs public spaces like the striking new art gallery to give it a unique identity and make it a desirable place to live.

Tauranga, 22 July – It might be a scenario out of a new Thomas Crown Affair screenplay – a 1960s bank, repurposed as an art gallery. But the story here doesn't involve a daring heist, but rather a daring piece of design, as architects Mitchell & Stout transformed an old BNZ building from the 1960s into a visually rich, contemporary art gallery.

Director of Mitchell & Stout, Julie Stout, says that it was one of the ubiquitous banks with the glass-curtain walls. *"It did have one redeeming feature though, which was an excellent double-height atrium space. The mezzanine floor had offices, which we removed to make wide-open public spaces. We had to re-sheath much of the building to get rid of the vast expanses of glass,"* she says.

The client brief was for a contemporary regional art gallery

– something for which, at least functionally, a precedent existed. Stout says that regional art galleries are usually multi-functional public spaces. *"The brief indicated that there should be a range of display spaces of varying sizes and formalities. A grand staircase was added to improve the visitor's experience, and the large central area on the ground floor can be used for things like book launches, poetry readings and music recitals. It is also an area that is easily visible from the road, and the touring corporate collections that are usually on show will attract passersby to the gallery,"* she says.

Making the gallery stand out from the road was one of the architects' main goals and is evident in their innovative cladding choice. The cladding is actually made from old cool store panels, which are polystyrene sheathed in metal. The Coloursteel finish gives the building the contemporary feel they were looking for and the cool store panels give the building better thermal and acoustic ratings for compliance.

About Mitchell & Stout

Mitchell & Stout Architects formed in 1990, with a strong commitment to both the art and the science of architecture. Since then, they have designed a wide range of projects from schools to art galleries, from State housing to some of the most special and grand contemporary houses in New Zealand.