



# INTO THE WILD

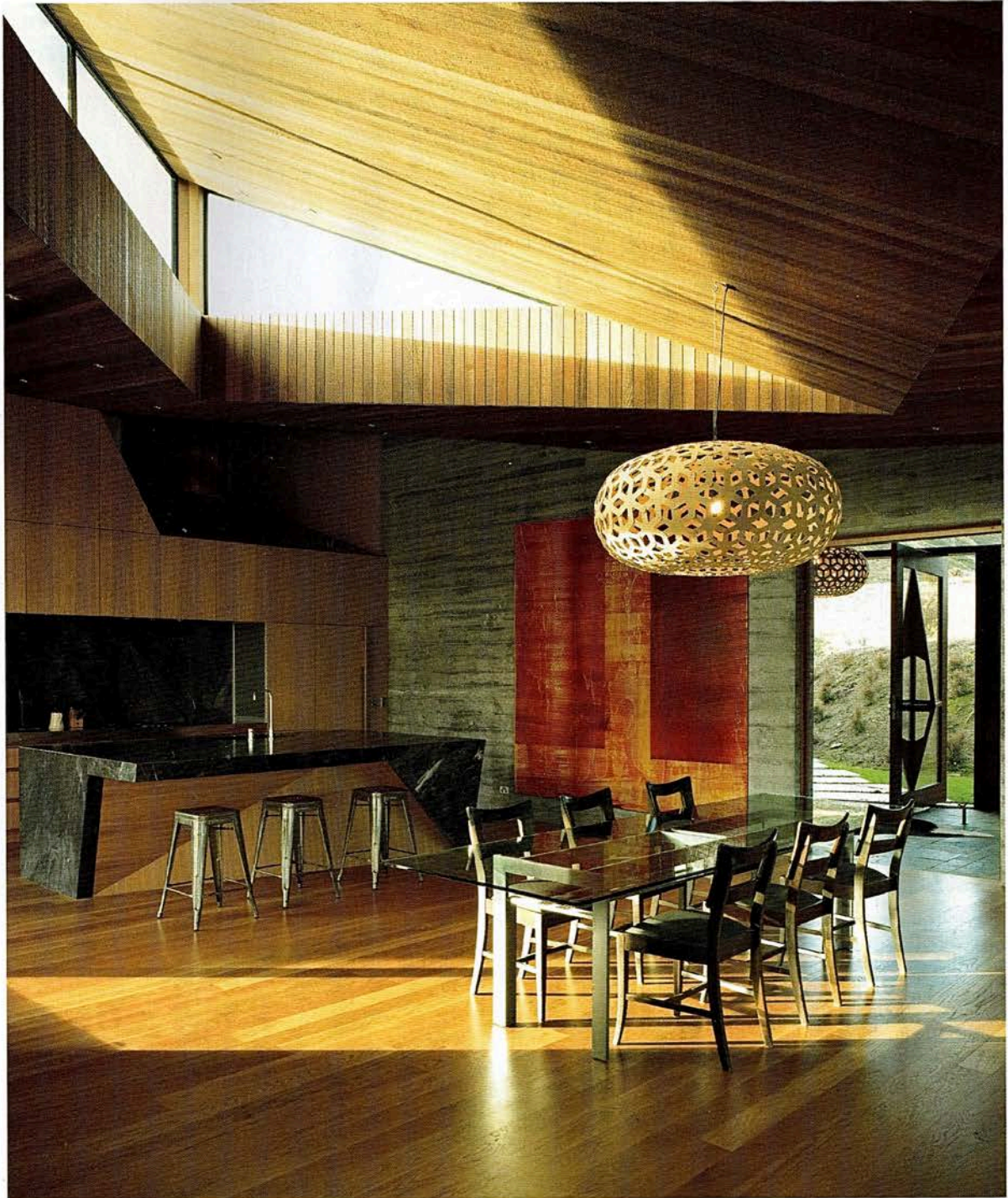
*With contemporary good looks and weather-proof designs, two New Zealand houses by Auckland-based architects Stevens Lawson are perfectly in tune with their surroundings*

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK SMITH WRITER: STEPHEN CRAFTI



**TE KAITAKA HOUSE**

The generous open-plan kitchen and dining area is a key element of this 'sociable' house. 'The kitchen island is the drawcard for friends and family,' says architect Nicholas Stevens, who designed the marble unit to appear as if it had been carved from one of the rocky outcrops on the site



**R**esponding to New Zealand's regional landscapes is a hallmark of award-winning practice Stevens Lawson Architects. Whether set on Lake Wanaka, on the edge of the Southern Alps, or in Hawke's Bay, on the east coast of North Island, all its buildings respect their surroundings. 'We want our architecture to sit sensitively in the landscape; something that is harmonious, but also challenging. It is usually treading a fine line between the two,' says Nicholas Stevens, who founded the Auckland-based practice with Gary Lawson in 2002.

Te Kaitaka, Maori for 'The Cloak', is a house overlooking Lake Wanaka on New Zealand's South Island. The concrete

house is literally 'cloaked' with cedar, naturally oiled to allow it to weather the same colour as the tussock-covered hills on which it stands. 'We could have exposed the concrete, but we were keen to evoke the textures of the region,' says Stevens, who adds that 'the fragrances were just as important', referring to the smell of the oiled cedar ceilings found throughout the home.

Situated on 20 hectares of undulating countryside, Te Kaitaka was designed for a couple with two teenage children. As Stevens Lawson had already built a home for the owners in Auckland, the brief was fairly open. 'Our clients just mentioned they wanted a sociable house, where they

could entertain,' says Stevens. Placed on a steeply inclined site, the house is spread across two levels. 'The design responds to the uneven topography,' explains Stevens.

Visitors are greeted by a large door with a sculptural handle, which opens onto a lobby with an equally sculptural staircase made of cantilevered concrete treads and cedar balustrades. There's a sense of the boldness of 1970s-era design here, particularly with the slate-covered floor. Two sunken living areas are arranged on either side of a large open-plan kitchen and dining area, which in turn leads to a large deck. The architects have added texture with raked cedar ceilings, rough boarded >>



stained cedar  
is inspired  
wool sheds  
reflections

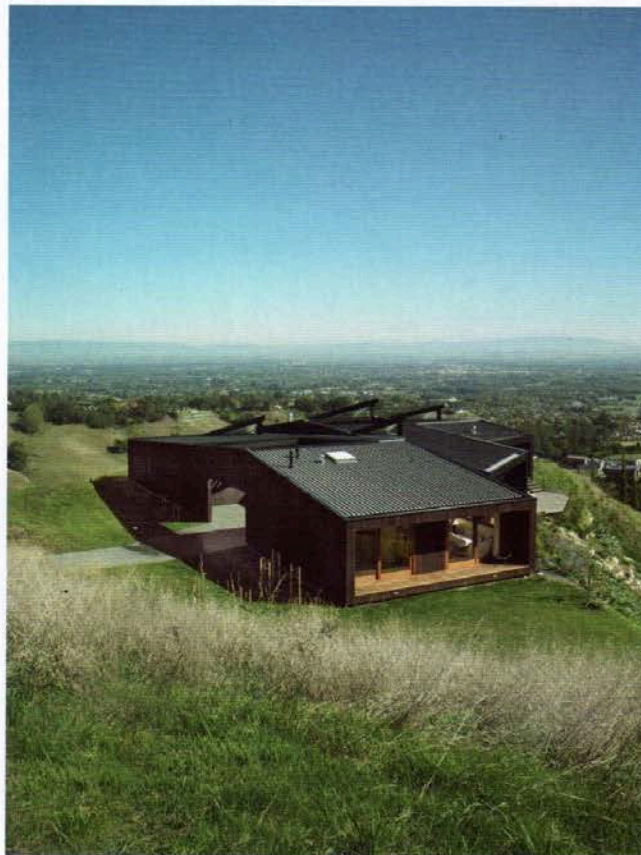


formwork used for the concrete walls, and origami-like concrete fireplaces.

Although there is some of the generous glazing you might expect, Te Kaitaka also features a series of thoughtfully placed smaller windows. 'We wanted to capture this site through more detailed studies of some of the unique aspects,' says Stevens. 'It was also important to create a protected environment. There's snow for three months each year and the summer winds can be fairly hostile. Like a cloak, the house has to protect from the climate.'

On the other side of the country, in Hawke's Bay, is the Te Mata House. Framed by the dramatic Te Mata Peak and inspired by local wool sheds, the low-slung residence is clad in black-stained cedar. 'There is a tradition of black buildings in the region. Houses were often painted in a mix of diesel and tar, particularly in the early 20th century,' Stevens explains. To connect the house to the ochre-coloured earth, its courtyard walls are finished in Corten steel.

Designed for a couple who once ran a sheep farm, the 450 sq m Te Mata House is an extraordinary fusion of earthiness and fine art. The owners, who collect art, glass and sculpture, as well as vintage tin toys, wanted both a gallery-style home and a robust building. 'The exterior is quite raw, but the interiors have a domesticity to them,' says Lawson.



Punctuated by triangular skylights, ceiling forms are a subtle reference to craggy local mountains.

Te Mata is conceived as three pavilions housing bright living areas with white walls and ceilings, spliced by two 20m-long galleries – darker spaces with concrete floors and stained black walls. The first pavilion comprises a courtyard with a guest room on one side and a garage, an office and the 'collection room, for the clients' model cars, or other. The central pavilion includes the main bedroom suite and a formal living room. A central courtyard, planted with New Zealand palms, is a sheltered oasis. 'Summer temperatures can get extremely high. We wanted to create some respite from the heat, as well as from the prevailing winds,' says Lawson. The third pavilion features the kitchen, dining and living areas, flanked by decks on either side.

Rather than create three rectilinear forms, separated by orthogonal galleries, the architects skewed the angles slightly. 'Skewing the galleries sharpens the perspective at either end,' says Lawson, explaining how the architects created a journey through the house. 'We've been interested in revealing the one heroic image. It is much more interesting to create vignettes as you enter deep into the house.' ★

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Wallpaper\*

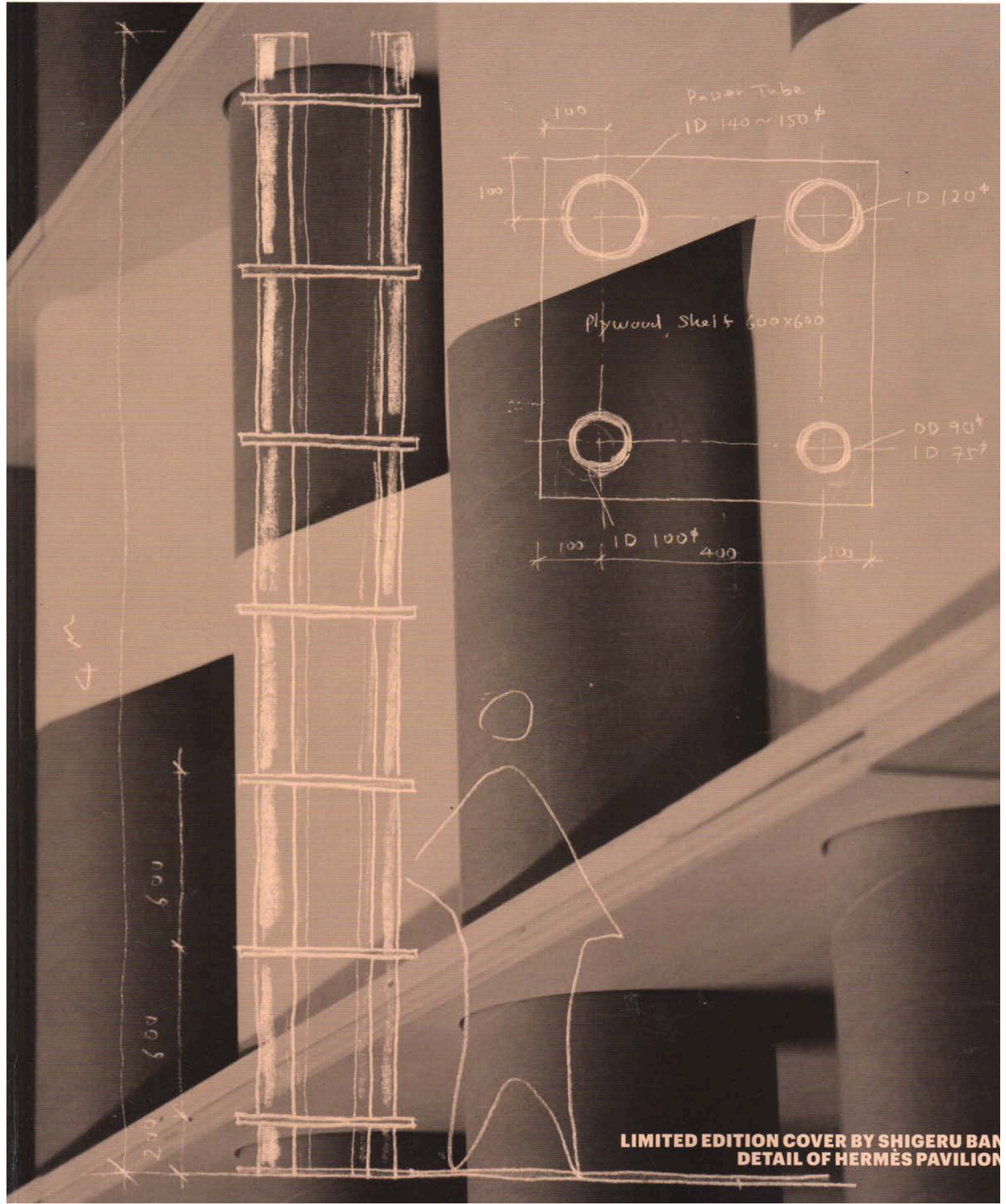


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