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A DECADE OF GREAT DESIGN

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East meets West in this highly praised wooden container for living – the result of a shared vision, and the dream first project for a young architect starting out on his own.





PREVIOUS SPREAD:
The interiors have a complex, detailed feel, and apparent in the decor is the fusion of the Oriental and Occidental cultures of the clients. **ABOVE LEFT:** The house overlooks a small but perfectly formed garden. **ABOVE CENTRE:** A Japanese aesthetic is created with the dark floors of ebony-stained pine. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The sophisticated wooden bunker reclines on the edge of a peaceful mangrove swamp.

A SOPHISTICATED WOODEN BUNKER reclines on the edge of a peaceful mangrove swamp in Auckland's western suburbs. Designed for film producer Owen Hughes and actress Yuri Kinugawa, the house is delightfully simple, as architect Andrew Lister explains. "I love boxes with a passion. But I wouldn't describe it as just a box – it's more of a container for living in. I like making houses that don't look like houses, something that's a little more abstract. And I think there's also something quite sculptural about this place."

There appears to have been a touch of providence in the immense success of this house – it has won both regional and national NZIA awards for residential architecture and has been featured in over a dozen international publications, including the upcoming Phaidon *Atlas of 21st Century World Architecture*. "Every time I see or visit the house I think about how lucky I was to have had that opportunity", Lister says. "It was the first house I ever designed. The client walked into my office on my first day in my own practice. It was the dream first day."

Being long-time friends worked in Hughes' and Lister's favour in the project, with an obvious alignment in their creative vision. Among other things, the two shared a love of modern architecture. "We always had the same books," Lister says. "West Coast American and European Modernism and then Japanese architecture." Both men had also recently spent time in Japan prior to designing the house, working on the film *Memory and Desire*, which was directed by Lister's partner, Niki Caro and starred Yuri Kinugawa. "Designing the house was a matter of combining the kinds of architecture we liked with Japanese style and the New Zealand lifestyle. The rather sophisticated form of Feng Shui that Yuri practices also came into it," Lister says. "I think we ended up with something unique that hadn't been seen before."

The overall design of the house is quite simple and it's this elegance that makes it such a standout. To this day Lister stands by it, saying, "If I were to design it today there is nothing about the concept, the building or the experience that I would change". He continues, "The box or container is an aesthetic I love. This house was designed as a Japanese jewel box; it is filled with exquisite treasures".

The atmosphere within the house is elegant, with a calming strength, yet the interiors have a complex, detailed feel, and the dual cultures of the owners are evident in the details. A Japanese aesthetic is created by elements such as the darkened floors of ebony-stained pine and a darker veneer in the kitchen. There are also various Japanese ornaments, pictures and wall hangings, which sit alongside Western artefacts and collectibles. An elevated futon sits in the master bedroom, which is decorated with Japanese paper on the walls.

Down the hallway sits an exquisite traditional Japanese bathroom, built mainly from Lawson's Cypress, with an open shower where users wash themselves first, then soak in the menthol-scented wooden tub.

The simple but elegant design of the house and its calming, soulful feel are assuredly the reasons for its continued success. Seven years down the track, the number of requests Lister still receives to publish the house exemplifies its timeless design. "This has become the blueprint for every subsequent job and the most rewarding aspect of my practice," says Lister. "It was a dream first house." **u**

RIGHT: The simple, elegant design of the house gives it a stoic presence against the softer natural elements it is surrounded by.



