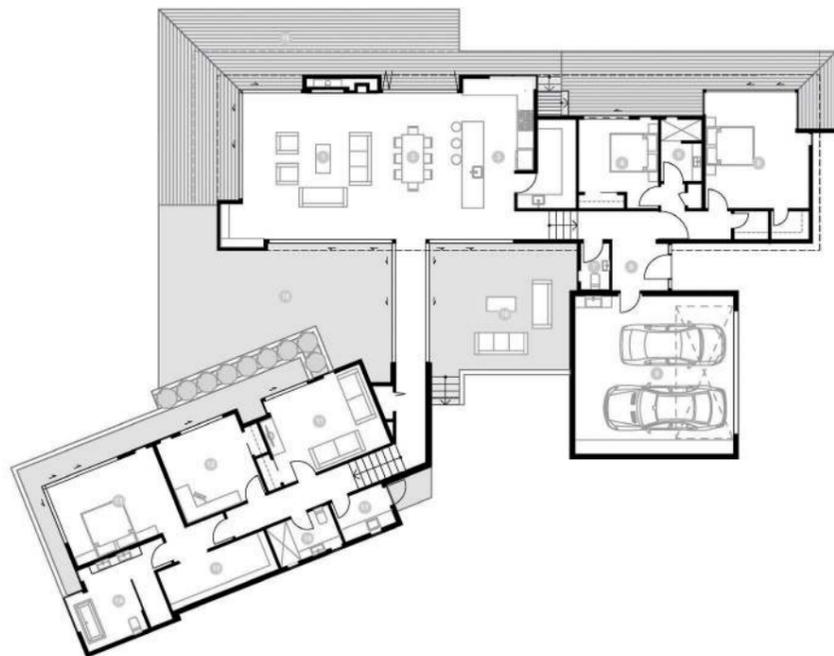




# Architect of the month learning journey

The sweeping landscapes of New Zealand act as a muse for Barry Condon of Condon Scott Architects when creating sustainable homes with a simple, clean aesthetic

Photography Simon Devitt and Simon Larkin





When you think of New Zealand you think of space – vast, untainted landscapes that exhale tranquility in abundance. A small footprint therefore, is rarely a consideration for the architects who are lucky enough to have such a dramatic backdrop to play with. So it is interesting that Barry Condon and Sarah Scott of Condon Scott Architects have won multiple awards for, amongst other things, a tiny 30 sq. m home. It is by examining this and their broader portfolio that you can unpick their methodology. In this bijou space they have neatly fitted an uncompromising kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living space. Indeed by opening up into the simple gable from within, this honest little house appears positively lofty. And as it is also built to Passive House standards, the extremities of the New Zealand weather are no match for its eco-credentials – almost no energy is needed to keep it cool in summer and warm in the harsh winters. The forward-looking owner wanted to create a home without the usual clutter, pared back to only the things you need when travelling. But the restrictions set by the client did nothing but whet the creative appetite of the team at Condon Scott. Client, site and sustainability blend happily with each unique home – and it appears that after fifteen years working together there is still joy and energy in the evolution of every project.

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**What does sustainability in architecture mean to you?**

*Often simple design considerations can have the most impact from a sustainability perspective. Wanaka has extreme seasons, cold in winter and very hot in summer with off-shore lake winds. I develop the house design in response to climatic conditions, like orientating the house to the sun correctly, considering shading, high levels of insulation and incorporating heat sinks for passive solar gain.*

**Do you prefer working on commercial or residential projects?**

*I like both but I am most familiar with residential as this makes up the majority of our projects. Wanaka is a small, alpine town with a beautiful lake and incredible panoramic views of the surrounding mountain ranges. Many of our residential clients purchase land here to build their dream home that capitalises on the stunning location – it's an amazing process to be involved in.*

**How did your partnership form?**

*I relocated to Wanaka in 2005 to join Sarah Scott Architects. We*

*became firm colleagues and friends, and went into partnership together in 2012 to form Condon Scott Architects.*

**How does the New Zealand landscape inspire you?**

*We are lucky to have such a beautiful backdrop for the homes we design. The landscape here is rugged and raw – simply breathtaking, even for us locals that are privy to it daily. The view itself is inspiring as this is always a huge factor in the design of the home, casting the eye to the mountains beyond.*

**What are your greatest influences?**

*Many years ago I discovered an old book that documented the construction of the chapel at Ronchamp by LeCorbusier. The photographs featured in the book captured the construction of the building. To see the rawness of the concrete behind the facade and the genuine simplicity of the construction was very inspirational for me. I consider it one of the masterpieces of the 20th century. I liken seeing these photos to looking behind a stage curtain. It was a real insight into the logic and methodology of how this beautiful building was constructed.*



**In what way does this influence manifest itself in your work?**

*The chapel taught me to consider how we construct complex forms and shapes using simple methodologies. If I don't know how the design is constructed from a practical perspective, it is hardly fair for me to ask that of the builder.*

**How old were you when you decided to become an architect?**

*In my mid-teens. I was interested in engineering but also enjoyed art and drawing, so architecture seemed a logical way to combine both interests. It wasn't an immediate success for me; I found the first few years of architecture school challenging. It took a few more years to find my voice and discover a way of designing that was personal to me. Once I did, I was hooked and the rest is history.*

**How do you approach a project?**

*Meet the client, visit the site and listen carefully to the brief. Listening is the key to understanding what the client is trying to achieve. I usually mull over the project for several weeks before starting the design and often revisit the site on several occasions to review design parameters. Once this has percolated for several weeks, I get out the sketch pad and start putting ideas down on paper.*

**What technical innovations support your work?**

*Virtual reality (VR) and AR. We use VR technology to show our clients around their home design as part of the development process. This is a hugely popular tool for our clients as it gives them a deeper insight into their design.*

**If you lost inspiration, where would you go to find ideas?**

*I look everywhere for inspiration, from furniture design to industrial and automotive design, sculptures, paintings, and of course the landscape. I keep notes of things that might come in handy – occasionally an idea will spark from a note I've made years previously.*

**What is most important about the architect client relationship?**

*Communication and managing clients expectations. I'm a firm believer in having the more challenging conversations (budgets and construction costs) early on in the project. Our design must align with our clients financial expectations.*

**What is your favourite building?**

*Without doubt, the Sydney Opera House; every time I visit, it simply blows my mind. This project was Jorn Utzon at his finest. Unfortunately, he left the project under a cloud, midway through construction, and never returned to Australia. He died in 2008 and never saw the completed building, despite the numerous accolades the project received.*

**What will homes be like in 50 years?**

*I like the idea that architects could 3D print larger scale custom components to incorporate into their designs.*

**What is your proudest achievement?**

*Getting married to my wonderful wife in a church we designed. For this, the project holds a very special place in my heart.*

**FAVOURITE BOOK?**  
*Dark Fire by CJ Sansom and Pillars of the Earth by Ken Follet – an epic tale documenting the construction of a cathedral over several decades.*

**FAVOURITE FILM?**  
*Empire Strikes Back*

**FAVOURITE EATERY?**  
*My favourite spot is Kai Whakapai, a café here in Wanaka, NZ*

**FAVOURITE CITY?**  
*Dublin & Melbourne*

**FAVOURITE MUSIC?**  
*Electronica in all its form*

**YOUR FAVOURITE ARCHITECTS?**  
*Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, Alvaar Aalto, Oscar Niemeyer and John Wardle.*

**FAVOURITE ARTIST?**  
*Lebbeus Woods for his architectural fantasies and Banksy for his political commentary*



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