

# ON THE WATERFRONT

ONCE A GRITTY INDUSTRIAL AREA, WYNYARD QUARTER IS NOW A VIBRANT PART OF AUCKLAND'S INNER-CITY LANDSCAPE. AND IT'S SET TO BECOME A THRIVING COMMUNITY WHEN THE FIRST STAGE OF A MAJOR NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, WYNYARD CENTRAL, OPENS NEXT YEAR. BY ROBERT TIGHE.



If you haven't already taken a leisurely stroll along Auckland's North Wharf starting at Silo Park - once known as the Tank Farm - and finishing at the Viaduct, you're missing out on one of the best walks in Auckland.

The view of the city from Wynyard Crossing (the bridge that links the Viaduct and Wynyard Quarter) is simply breathtaking. It's little wonder that Chinese property developers Fu Wah International Group have stumped up \$200 million to build a Park Hyatt hotel on the site of the old Team New Zealand headquarters. It looks set to be a landmark building for the city and for New Zealand.

It's hard to believe Wynyard Quarter, as we know it today, is only five years old. It feels like it's been part of the fabric of Auckland city life for a lot longer. Yet it was 6 August 2011, just a few weeks out from the start of the Rugby World Cup, when the official opening of the precinct was marked with a family event that attracted huge crowds.

"Sporting events can be great catalysts for legacy projects," says John Dalzell, interim CEO of Panuku Development Auckland, the city council body with responsibility for improving the quality of urban living across Auckland. "We had contractors working in wetsuits in the early hours of the morning to get things finished before the World Cup. On the morning of the opening we had a powhiri and five waka came into the harbour. At two o'clock that afternoon people were still streaming across the Wynyard Crossing bridge. The public really embraced it from the start."

It has taken over 20 years of protracted negotiations and wrangling between different stakeholders, including Auckland Council, Auckland Regional Council and the various business interests on the waterfront, to make the vision a reality.

"We had to overcome a lot of objections," says Dalzell. "People said, 'Who the hell is going to come to Wynyard Quarter? It's too far from the CBD.' But we provided access to the water's edge in a way that was different to anything else in Auckland. We kept some of the character buildings because we wanted to celebrate the industrial and cultural past of the waterfront, but the key factor was the vision.

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"It wasn't just about property development, it was about city building. At that time there was dissatisfaction generally with the quality of a number of apartment developments in the city that were average at best. There was a clear desire to intervene, to raise the bar and to establish a part of the city that we could all be proud of."

New Zealand company Willis Bond & Co saw off competition from more than 30 international and local property developers and investors to become Panuku's residential development partner at Wynyard Quarter.

"We were very, very keen on the Wynyard project before it even came to the market," says Willis Bond's Mark McGuinness. "We thought it was an amazing location and saw it as an opportunity to redefine how people saw Auckland as a city.

Whilst there have been some good inner-city developments, there have also been far too many false starts."

"We've done a lot of waterfront developments in Wellington so we know what works and what doesn't. One of the big advantages of Wynyard over other waterfront developments around the world is that often sites are slightly removed from the CBD. The proximity to the CBD makes Wynyard Quarter a great place for people to live, work, play and visit. If you get a whole bunch of people walking to and from work it creates a sense of life and vibrancy. And, of course, a residential development makes other businesses like cafés, restaurants and dry cleaners viable."

That sense of community was one of the things that helped the Willis Bond bid stand out from the crowd, says Dalzell.

"It goes back to the concept of city building," he says. "City building starts at a neighbourhood level. Not a lot of developers get that, but Willis Bond does. Typically, from a development perspective, developers work on the basis of the least engagement with the community the

OPPOSITE PAGE: An artist's impression of the Wynyard Quarter lifestyle, and interiors of residences in Wynyard Central, designed by Architectus.





Waterfront living, 132 Halsey style, an exclusive community of 51 residences, designed by Athfield Architects.



better, but community connection and participation through the design and development stage is a vital part of city building.”

The residential precinct in Wynyard Quarter comprises five sites. There’s a waterfront site on the corner of Halsey and Madden Streets, opposite the new ASB Waterfront Theatre, that is known as 132 Halsey. Construction began on 132 Halsey in November last year and is expected to be complete by mid-2018. The other four sites are bound by Daldy, Beaumont, Madden and Pakenham Streets and the first of the four being developed is Wynyard Central. Currently under construction, the first Wynyard Central residents are expected to move in from late 2017.

Wynyard Central is an intimate community of 113 residences connected to the surrounding waterfront neighbourhood by a series of laneways and green spaces. It includes eight modern townhouses; three five-storey pavilions comprising 32 premium apartments, as well as a moderately scaled and state-of-the-art apartment building. Eighty per cent of the apartments and townhouses at Wynyard Central and 132 Halsey have already sold, the majority of them to local owner-occupiers.

“We deliberately targeted owner-occupiers rather than investors,” explains McGuinness. “How? By making the apartments a bit bigger than standard apartments so they are more comparable with traditional homes. That comes back to

the community emphasis. You would have a far more transient community if you targeted investors. We wanted to build a real neighbourhood.”

Creating a strong neighbourhood also means having places for communities to grow. The apartment buildings will include spaces for new cafés, eateries, boutiques and services. “The level of convenience on offer is second to none, but equally important is instilling a sense of pride and belonging among residents,” says McGuinness. “The ground floor and connecting laneways will be vibrant places where neighbours, workers and visitors come together.”

John Dalzell is excited about the impact the new residential

developments will have on the look and feel of Wynyard Quarter. “We have to be true to the vision for Wynyard Quarter and at the same time be adaptive and responsive to changing market conditions. You can’t follow a prescriptive plan, it’s much more of an art than a science, creating new communities.”

“Once people see the sense of community develop around Wynyard Central and other residential developments in the pipeline I think it will have a bigger impact than the opening we had for the Rugby World Cup. We’ve also got the Park Hyatt Hotel to look forward to and Auckland Theatre Company’s new ASB Waterfront Theatre opening in October. Wynyard Quarter is going to be a dramatically different place in a couple of years.” **W**

# BETTING ON WYNYARD

SOME OF THE PRESENT AND UPCOMING ENTERPRISES ADDING TO WYNYARD QUARTER'S GROWING APPEAL FOR LOCALS AND VISITORS ALIKE.



## JACK TAR

A key focus for the redevelopment of Wynyard Quarter was to retain the character and heritage of a working waterfront. Jo Williams and Peter Parkin, co-owners of Jack Tar, are proud their gastro-pub is housed in the last original goods shed on the Auckland waterfront.

"The building has a lot of inherent character," says Williams. "It was just a draughty shed before the major redevelopment of North Wharf in 2011. Before it opened, many Aucklanders had doubts as to whether North Wharf would prove a popular destination. But the area has worked and I think this initially surprised many people.

"Sunny weekends bring droves of people down to the Auckland waterfront to enjoy both exercise and socialising. The bridge built between the Wynyard Quarter with the Viaduct Basin is key to connecting these two inner-city hospitality precincts. There are not many venues in Auckland right on the water, which seems absurd considering the city is built on a harbour.

"We enjoy an extremely diverse customer base. We have many corporate customers, including ASB and Fonterra, who have relocated their main offices to the Wynyard Quarter. It is common for us to host a table of customers in suits right next to a table of construction workers working on the hotels and apartments being built in the area. We host many people after their morning cycle, walk or run and, of course, there is a playground at the end of the wharf that draws many families to the area. North Wharf is also a popular destination for tourists, with over 100 cruise ships in port last summer. It has become an Auckland destination. It's a real mix, but it works."



## AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY

While Wynyard Quarter has been well served by bars, restaurants and cafés since it opened in 2011, what it's lacked is a cultural heartbeat. That's about to change with the opening of the ASB Waterfront Theatre that will be home to the Auckland Theatre Company.

"The Auckland Theatre Company had been looking for a home for a long time," says general manager Lester McGrath. "Around 2010 we identified the Wynyard Quarter as an up-and-coming area in the city in terms of being a fantastic place to live and work and play. We started talking with ASB, one of our foundation partners and Panuku Development about the site as a permanent home for theatre and dance in the city. That was the start of it. We saw the potential of that site."

"In terms of the building, we wanted to reinvent the theatre-going experience as a contemporary, welcoming experience in the same way that galleries and museums did at the end of the last century. We wanted to create a space where people feel comfortable and connected and that was a core driver for us throughout the project. It's a mid-size venue capable of seating 660 people and we think it will add significantly to the appeal of the Wynyard Quarter.

"I think what's happened with the Wynyard Quarter was long overdue and it signifies a coming of age for Auckland as a cultural city. The theatre delivers to the waterfront a cultural heart and it's great for Auckland as a destination and an international city... We're really excited about the opening show in October and being part of something special at Wynyard Quarter."



## PARK HYATT HOTEL

John Dalzell, of Panuku Development Auckland, describes the Park Hyatt Hotel, which is slated for completion in late 2018, as one of the most significant wins for the Wynyard Quarter.

The 195-room five-star hotel is planned to include new bars and eateries, gallery and event spaces, and a spa, fitness centre and swimming pool, cementing the area's status as a world-class inner-city neighbourhood and bringing new vibrancy to the water's edge.

"The quality of the location was a big selling point," says Richard Aitken, general manager of Fu Wah. "It will be the first genuine five-star hotel in Auckland and I think it's a reflection of how Auckland has matured as a city. It will add to the cachet of Auckland as an international destination. There are some people who won't travel to countries or cities without a particular hotel brand and Park Hyatt will be a very positive addition to the Auckland hotel market."

The hotel's design is a collaboration between local firm Bossley Architects, Singapore-based AR+D and world-renowned interior designers Conran and Partners.

"I hope it's a building that everyone will be proud of," says Aitken. "It's going to be very special and, certainly in the hotel space, something we haven't seen in Auckland before."