SMALL HOUSE LIVING

DESIGN-CONSCIOUS NEW ZEALAND HOMES OF 90M^2 OR LESS

CATHERINE FOSTER

TE MODULAR 87M²

MEDLANDS BEACH, GREAT BARRIER

HERBST ARCHITECTS

Photography by Jackie Meiring

All holiday homes offer locations to escape from the everyday world. Sometimes they are easily accessed, sometimes less so. Being on Great Barrier Island, 100 kilometres from Auckland across the Hauraki Gulf, this Herbst Architects-designed Te Modular bach falls into the second category. As islands go, Great Barrier's physical contact with the mainland is not too bad. But what the island does lack is centralised utilities, and every building must therefore be self-sufficient for all electricity, water and sewerage needs.

Some years ago, in the midst of the global financial crisis, architects Nicola and Lance Herbst found themselves with time to work on a project that had long been of interest to them. Knowing how expensive bespoke architecture can be, while also understanding that the lure of the lightly connected lifestyle was never going to go away, they applied their temporarily underused skills to a concept and blueprint they christened Te Modular. While the name playfully references legendary architect Le Corbusier's Le Modular anthropomorphic system for building design, Te Modulor itself is anything but playful. Rather it consists of a solid and workable plan to keep costs in check through the simple expediency of standardising the processes around design, specifications and council-required documentation. By removing the bespoke element — while still allowing individuality through the placement of the modules — it is architectural design on a budget.

Te Modular consists of three freestanding modules totalling 87m², although the third, the sleeping pod, is optional. The main unit is approximately 60m² in total, but only half of this, the 6m by 5m core, is fully enclosed. This central pod contains a simple kitchen, an adjacent eating area and a living area with a pull-out-bed-cum-seating bench. The construction is recognisably light, but what at first glance passes as a 'raw' finish is in fact a deceptive simplicity. Oiled macrocarpa instead of plywood lines the walls (although Gaboon plywood is used on the ceilings), hidden storage is concealed under furniture, and a Warmington Studio wood-burner is there for instant warmth on the coldest night.

Beyond glazed sliding doors lies the attached covered deck, which comprises the other half of the footprint. This, compared with the solidity of the central core, is only lightly enclosed by a pair of sliding shutters — one per side. This arrangement allows the flexibility to respond to whatever direction the weather is coming from, a consideration that should not be underestimated

PAGES 144–145 The central living pod contains space for the essentials for living – cooking, eating and sleeping. Walls are lined with oiled macrocarpa and storage is hidden under built-in furniture.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Gaboon plywood storage cupboards are usually concealed under squabs; Comfortable sleeping for two is allowed by 'unfolding' built-in seating and storage areas; Slatted sliding doors on both sides of the covered living deck provide shelter if required and security when unoccupied; A Warmington Studio wood-burner is used both for heating and cooking.

in spectacular but exposed locations such as this one. Another fireplace, located at the far end of the covered deck, is both a secondary focal point and an additional facility for cooking. With its sarked mono-pitched roof and lightweight construction, this area is as near to a tent as solid building materials can provide.

Nearby, on what in this instance is a sloping site, is the bathroom in what looks like an oversize corrugated-iron water tank. It is indeed corrugated iron, but specifically rolled to a length large enough to enclose a fully functioning wet room as lightly rural as wished for in surroundings like this, but as serviceable as any bathroom back in the city. The two-bedroom sleeping module is close, but again connected only by boardwalks and stairs. Sewerage is a septic tank with drainage fields, rainwater is collected off the roof, and electricity comes via solar panel. Bottled gas is available for heating water and cooking.

What its owner describes as this 'very, very functional space' might be only minimally connected with the wider world, but, as a holiday home that honours its close proximity to a national park with the lightest of footprints, it does everything they imagined. The grounds are still tent city over summer, and then, as much as in the depths of winter with the walls wrapped tightly around them, its owners do not ask for more. 'No matter what time of year, it's magical.'

Design notes

Herbst Architects provide a package containing detailed drawings and specifications for a set price. Site consultation and the processing of consents are additional.

There are three modules. No. 1 contains a living, cooking, eating and studio sleeping arrangement, with a combination of indoor and outdoor spaces. No. 2 is a wet-room bathroom in a corrugated-iron 'tank'. No. 3 is a two-bedroom pod. All are freestanding and can be placed to best suit the contours of a particular site. Decks, boardwalks and staircases can be added to connect all three.

The flexibility provided by the sliding shutters across both sides of the outdoor living area controls wind and rain from all directions. A modification by the owners — top-hung clerestory shutters mounted below the high side of the mono-pitched roof — prevent wind-blown rain from the north entering the covered deck.

OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM In this configuration of the Te Modular system the corrugated iron–clad bathroom is situated adjacent to the sleeping quarters; Connections between the three pods on the sloping site are achieved via staircases and walkways.

PAGE 150 From the outside, the bathroom resembles a water tank. Artwork on interior wall is *Tiki* by Ana Reid.

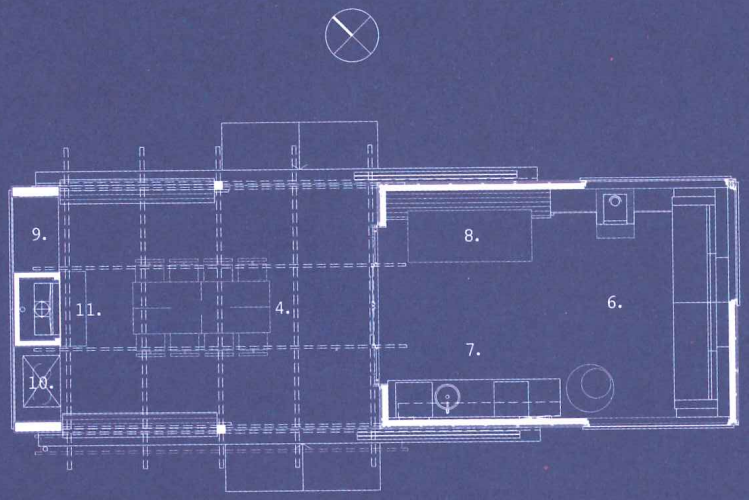
PAGE 151 The fully enclosable covered living deck is warmed in winter by a fireplace. This can be used for cooking when numbers require more cooking space than the compact kitchen allows.

PAGE 153 Constructed from corrugated iron to resemble the water tanks so common in baches of an earlier era, the bathroom pod contains a fully functioning wet room.

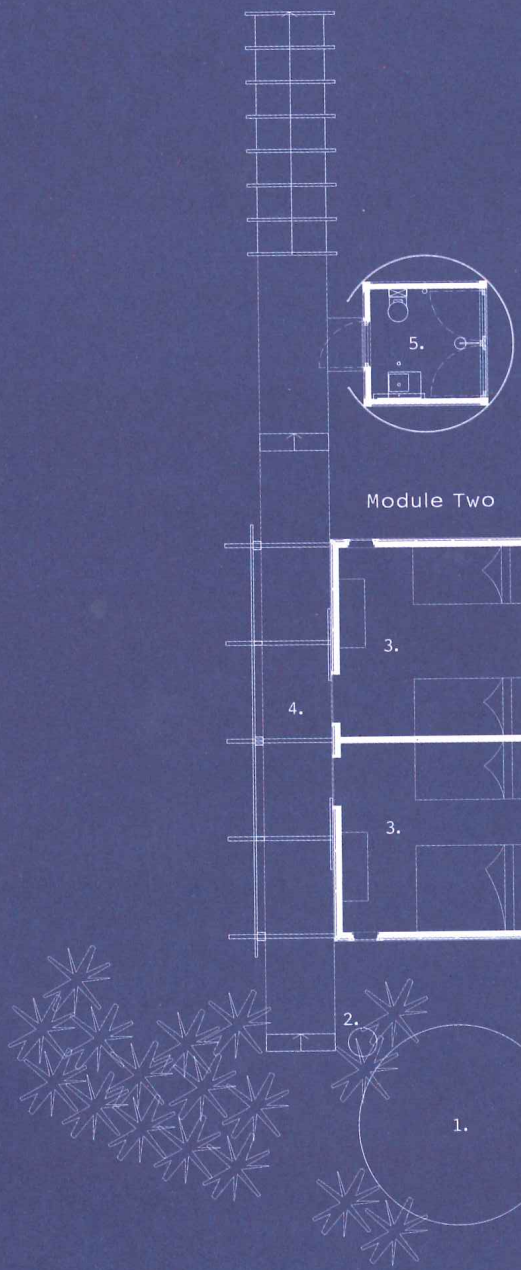
TE MODULAR 87M²

MEDLANDS BEACH, GREAT BARRIER
HERBST ARCHITECTS

1. Water tank
2. Water pump
3. Bedroom
4. Covered deck
5. Bathroom
6. Living
7. Kitchen
8. Dining
9. Servery
10. Barbecue
11. Fireplace



Module One



Module Two