



Between form and function

Like Russian Matryoshka dolls, kitchens and bathrooms are miniature projects within projects. And, with the trend to concealed pantries and cleverly hidden storage, the surprises just keep coming say **Tim Dorrington** and **Sam Atcheson** of Auckland's Dorrington Atcheson Architects. *Words Claire McCall.*

Top left. Tim Dorrington (left) and Sam Atcheson say the function must drive the form when it comes to creating workable kitchens and bathrooms.

Top right. In this Kawau Island holiday home, steel shelving on the splashback lifts items off the benchtop and allows quick access to utensils and everyday pantry items.

What is the hierarchy of form and function within these spaces?

DORRINGTON ATCHESON ARCHITECTS (DAA): Function has to take precedence. But there are also opportunities for design artistry. In kitchens, we like to tie the back wall in with the aesthetic and materiality of the overall concept. But the island bench can be far more exhibitionist. In one project, we created an island that has a deep-welled curvaceous, continuous surround in honed black granite and a timber face which makes it look like a sideboard. In another holiday home, the island has metal legs to mimic a table.

Bathrooms tend to have fewer functional stipulations, so can be made

up of quiet, elegant elements where the bath is presented as sculpture and lighting is not just plugged into the ceiling but thought of as another compositional object.

Bathrooms tend to be compact: how do you deal with this?

(DAA): We take one of two opposing approaches. Where we can, we'll open the room up by 'disappearing' one wall completely. Interior designer Debra Gardien has a house where the section drops away into an amazing stand of native bush. There were no issues with privacy, so a full-height, full-length glass wall projecting into this allows the powder room to be like a space in a forest.

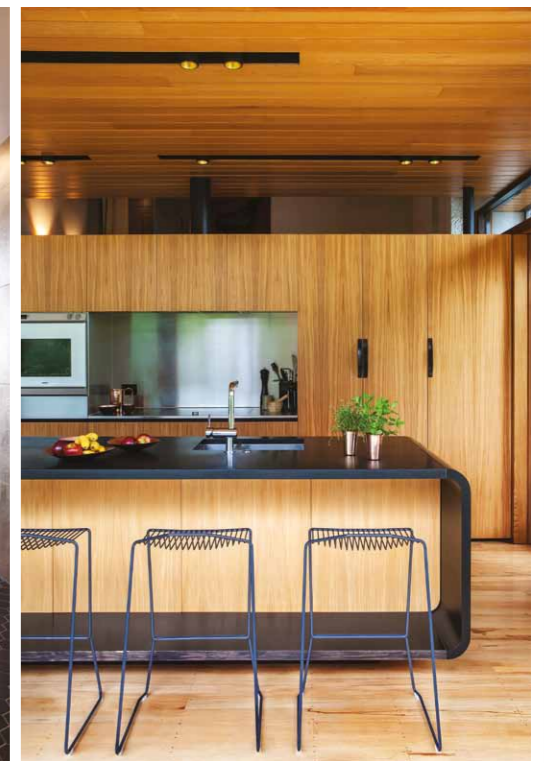
Alternatively, we intensify the experience with pattern, so it's not like walking into a cupboard. In a renovation in Whitford, the geometry of hexagonal wall tiles is a dramatic foil to a refined composition of circular mirrors and pendant lights. Rectangular or square tiles would simply not have made the same impression.

Any other tricks for getting the most out of a small space?

(DAA): When you run a continuous line the length of a room from wall to far wall, it makes the space feel bigger. In bathrooms, that's usually the vanity. Sometimes the vanity top will extend all the way into the shower as a shelf – another way to keep the eye moving into the distance. Wall-hung units and WCs allow a continuous expanse of flooring to complement this.

There's an explosion of new materials to use. Do you have any favourites?

(DAA): We tend not to follow trends but do love to explore unexpected ways of working with tried-and-tested products. In a Britomart apartment, we used raw-steel cabinetry, which suited the exposed concrete skeleton of the turn-of-the-century building.



A white-oxide concrete bench tied in with the industrial theme. Currently, we're experimenting with using Pirelli rubber flooring as a splashback.

How has the rise of small-space living affected the way you design kitchens?

(DAA): Islands double as spatial dividers, so shouldn't look too 'kitcheny', and benchtop surface areas are like 'gold' – incredibly precious. If there's room, a breakfast bay off to one side means the jug and toaster won't clutter the main bench. Otherwise, shelving on the splashback gets items in regular use up and out of the way. For a compact city unit, we once designed a pull-out bench on castors which slotted into the cabinetry on the main back wall and was brought out as and when needed.

What are some ways to gain optimum functionality in a bathroom?

(DAA): One trick is to create 'wet bays' where the shower is adjacent to the bath and does not read as a separate entity. Often it is divided from the room by a piece of frameless glass which is theoretically invisible.

What about the trend to outdoor kitchens?

(DAA): It really suits the way we live as Kiwis. Ideally the indoor kitchen bench would traverse the wall to the exterior. Every outdoor kitchen needs real fire. Cooking over embers is perilous for the amateur but a lot more authentic.

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This page. Functional design elements incorporated into DAA's kitchen and bathroom designs include glazed walls, hexagonal tiles, granite island bench surrounds, and space above kitchen cabinetry.

