

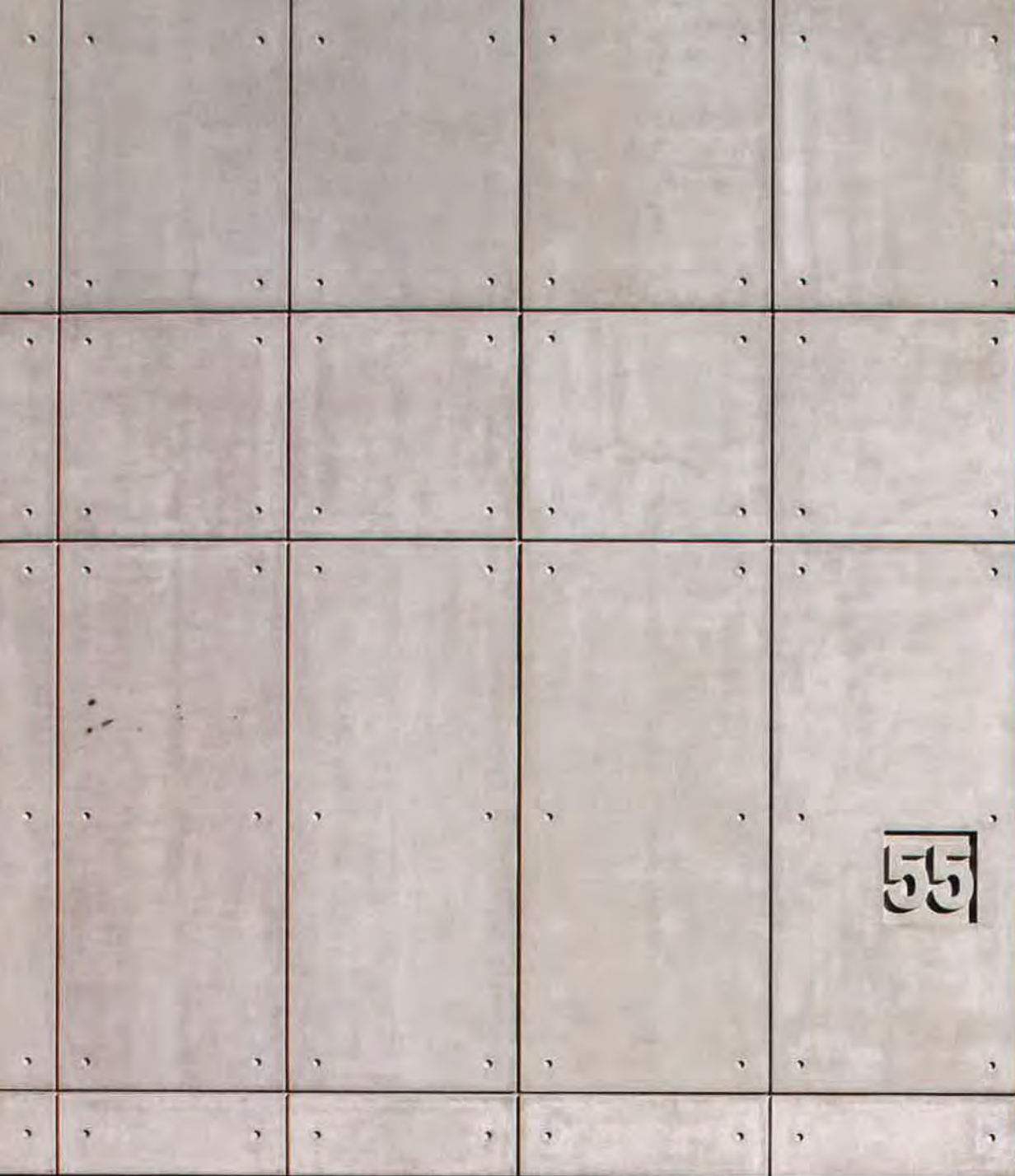
BIG HOUSE SMALL HOUSE

NEW HOMES BY NEW ZEALAND ARCHITECTS



NEWTON HOUSE AUCKLAND





Previous pages North elevation of the Newton House designed by David Howell of DHD Architecture and Design.

This page East elevation; the building's layout is reminiscent of much earlier models of urban houses, which combined street level commerce with upper level accommodation.

Facing page The house on its corner site, in lock-down mode.

Overleaf Level 3 living area.



WE ARE SEEING A NEW kind of large house emerge on the CBD fringes of the country's biggest cities. Often converted from commercial buildings, these houses are more like the metropolitan townhouse of a century ago, or the Italian palazzo, or even the upper-class family house in ancient Rome, than contemporary warehouses, lofts or apartments. This house in Newton, an Auckland inner-city suburb assailed for half a century by roading engineers, has been designed by New York-based architect David Howell for clients who themselves are rather urbane. Hence, surely, the house's bold form and civic sophistication.

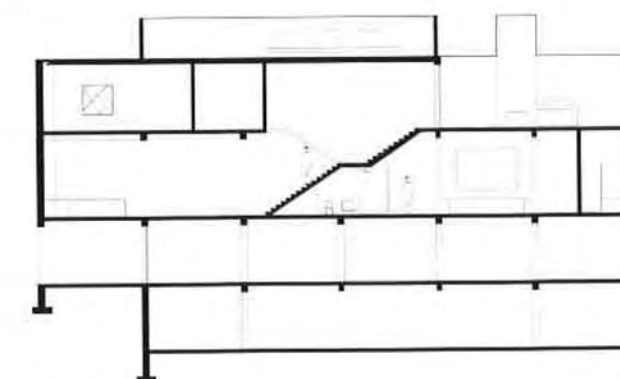
Auckland city is a cacophony of cross-town traffic, and many experiments in inner-city living have not risen to the challenge of dealing with this. New forms such as this house represent attempts to devise solutions that can withstand a town-planning regime focused on zoning

and roading rather than urban design.

The building is more than a renovation. It inherited the existing floor plate of its unremarkable two-storey predecessor, as well as some of the stairs and concrete structure, but the new design hasn't used the original building as the base for a conventional house. Balconies and decks, and even such apparently essential elements as windows and doors, have been eschewed.

The large, blank, glass-reinforced concrete (GRC) panels all round the building may seem severe, but on a tough stretch of street in a gritty mixed-use enclave, they reiterate and enhance the building's urban character. And, even better, they enhance the experience of the interior within, which is part treasure box and part urban tree house.

As with most palazzi, the ground floor is given over to commerce, in this case a design shop and café operated by the



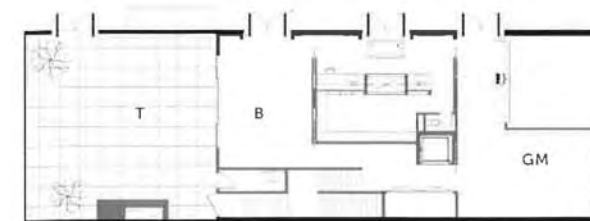
SECTION





Above Looking along level 3, with an art wall on the right and living area on left.

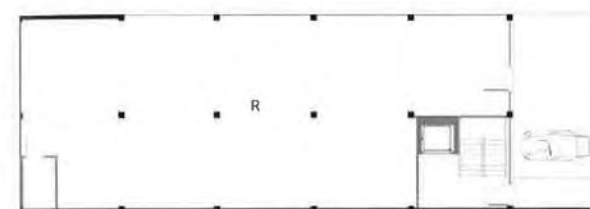
Right The rooftop terrace.



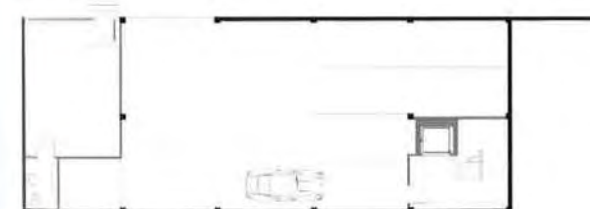
LEVEL TWO



LEVEL ONE



GROUND LEVEL



BASEMENT

building's owners. The family's abode starts on the first floor, the historic *piano nobile* of the house. This floor gets you above the shops and stables (or cars, in this case) and away from the noise of the street, up to the views, and into the clearer air. It really is a noble level, this floor; what unfolds to a visitor, who, having been admitted to the house through the retiring front door and then quickly whisked up a plain set of stairs, is a rich interior world of fine art and fantastic furniture. The family and children's rooms occupy this floor: a double-height space over the dining table opens to the upper level, where study and den spaces, and the main bedroom and its bathroom, are located.

With a classically symmetrical plan and wide hallways that stretch along an east-west axis, this is a generous dwelling, commodious enough to host large gatherings in several spaces. The sense of luxury partially derives from the

fine finishes and furnishings on show, but is primarily due to the surprising space and light of the place, quite different from the mean little flats above shops and the cramped apartments that are more familiar urban living environments.

The exterior serves as both armour and filter. Many of the big GRC panels open like giant shutters to let in sunlight while also acting as baffles, controlling the light and blinking views of the prosaic neighbouring buildings. Opal glass is used extensively to the same effect.

The site, on the northern corner of its block, makes sunlight available all day long, but the place to be at sundown is the roof terrace on the west end of the building. With its lush garden and views out to the Waitakere Ranges, the terrace is an oasis of tranquillity — the sensual secret of a building that presents a stoic face to the world.

BILL MCKAY



Top Upper level bedroom.



Above Looking through the GRC shutters on level 3.