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Te Arai SLEEP-OUT by CAAHT Studio Architects

• MANGAWHAI, NORTHLAND •

An appropriately scaled shelter remains true to the spirit of summer encampment.

Words by [John Walsh](#)

Photography by [Patrick Reynolds](#)

North of Auckland, on a stretch of coast that was the site of seasonal settlements for hundreds of years before Pakeha turned up in Aotearoa, Chris Holmes of CAAHT Studio Architects has designed a small shelter that expresses the frugal sufficiency of the traditional New Zealand beach holiday. It is a delightful and also rather paradoxical little structure, in the way that architect-designed micro-buildings often are (minor project, major effort). More permanent than a tent – a type that Holmes wittily references in the fold-up ‘flaps’ and their supporting poles – and more artful than a bach, the building is a knowing take on a naïve genre.

The building really does remain true to the spirit of the summer encampment. Commissioned by the architect’s parents and sited on a flat piece of former farmland that sprouts Holmes family tents over Christmas, it was designed as a sleep-out, a precursor of the full-works house that will one day be built on the hill above. Plans have changed a bit since design started: The big house is some way off, and instead the sleep-out will get a sibling building, this time designed with Anna Tong, Holmes’s partner in life and practice.

The sleep-out reads as a simple, pine-slatted box. There’s more to it than that, of course. The building contains, in effect, two rooms, one the sleeping/living space, glazed on the north side and well insulated, and the other a lean-to designed to house a boat; the boat having been sold, the lea-side lean-to now serves as an outdoor room sheltered from onshore winds. Power comes from the grid; water comes from a gravity-fed tank connected to the neighbouring farmer’s bore; cooking is done on a barbeque; and there’s storage under the suspended timber floor. God has taken care of the view (over rolling farmland to the sea and Little Barrier Island); and the architect has attended to bespoke details such as the battens attached to steel angles and clear plastic sheeting on the ‘flaps’. In sum: a well-assembled and appropriately scaled riposte to current holiday home orthodoxies. 

01 CAAHT Studio Architects’ Te Arai sleep-out is located on a site that is a sublime combination of coast and countryside. In the distance: Little Barrier.



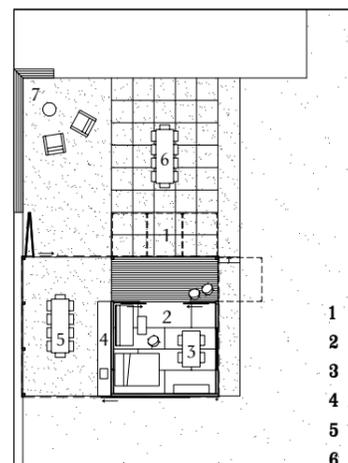


02 Erecting the tent: Architect Chris Holmes props up the sleep-out's fold-down shutters.

03 A terracotta-coloured concrete pad spreads out in front of the sleep-out.

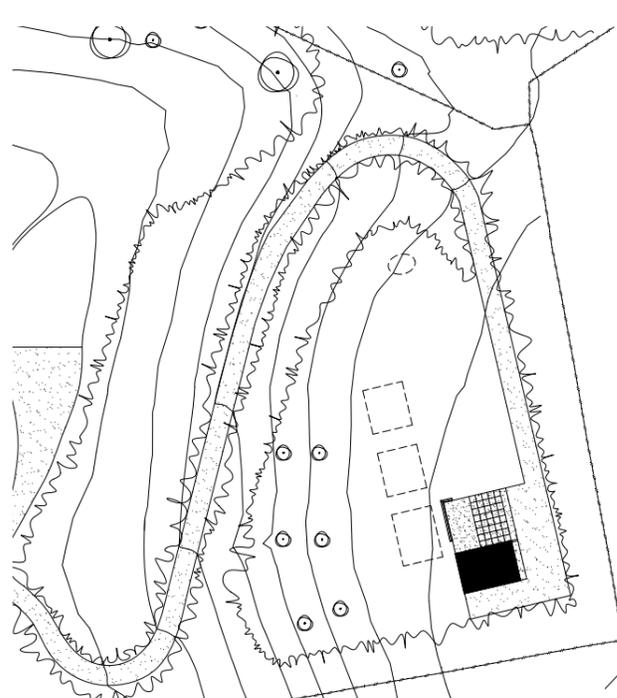
04 The 'lean-to' on the side of the sleeping/living room. Intended to house a boat, it now provides cooking, cleaning and dining space.



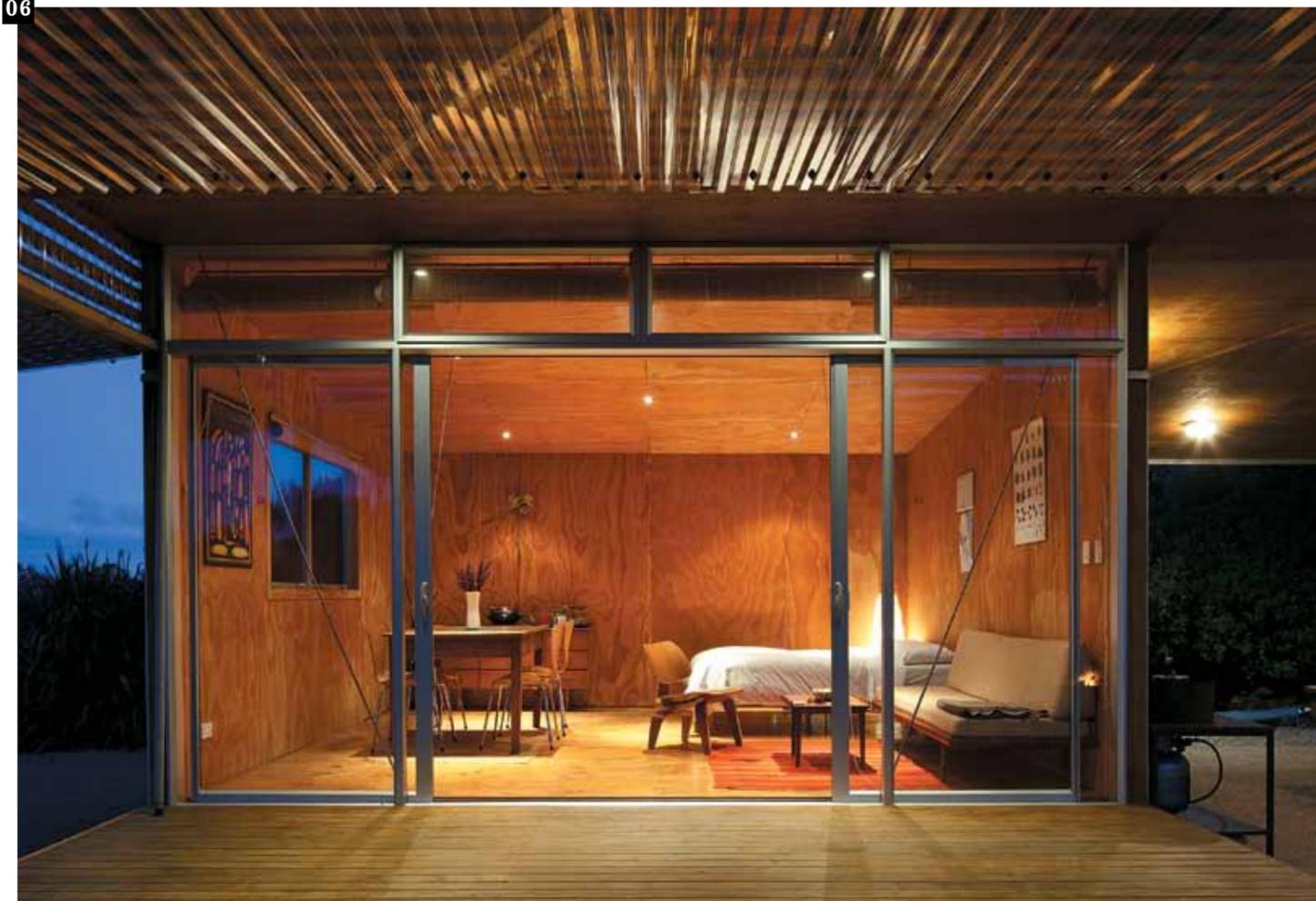


Floor plan

- 1 Verandah
- 2 Sleep-out
- 3 Winter dining
- 4 Camp kitchen
- 5 Summer dining - wet
- 6 Summer dining - dry
- 7 Bench seating



Site plan (Dashes indicate future buildings)



05 The screen that wraps around the building's north and west sides is made of pine battens and plastic sheeting attached to a steel frame.

06 By lining the sleep-out with ply on three sides, the architect has imparted a cocoon-like quality to what is a light and simple building.

Architect

CAAHT Studio Architects

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Practice profile

CAAHT Studio Architects is a young and energetic practice focused on providing creative solutions tailored to clients' needs across residential and small commercial projects.

Project team

Chris Holmes, Anna Tong

Consultants

Engineer: Blueprint Consulting

Builder

5Star Builders

Subcontractors

Earthworks: Mason Contractors

Planting: Nature Scapes

Products

Roofing: Steel & Tube
profiled metal roofing

External walls: Shadowclad
ply cladding; operable external
screens, pine battens; Laserlite
polycarbonate sheets; custom-
made steel frames

Internal walls: pine plywood

Aluminium joinery: Nebulite

Timber decking: pine, stain finish

Stain: Watty Forestwood Stain

Terrace: Exposed aggregate,
oxide-tinted concrete paving

Furniture: Dr Yes outdoor chairs,
Kartell

Time schedule

Design and planning: 6 months
(part time)

Construction: 18 months
(mainly weekends)

Project areas

Site size: 2 hectares

Building area: 55m² (including
verandah and covered patio)