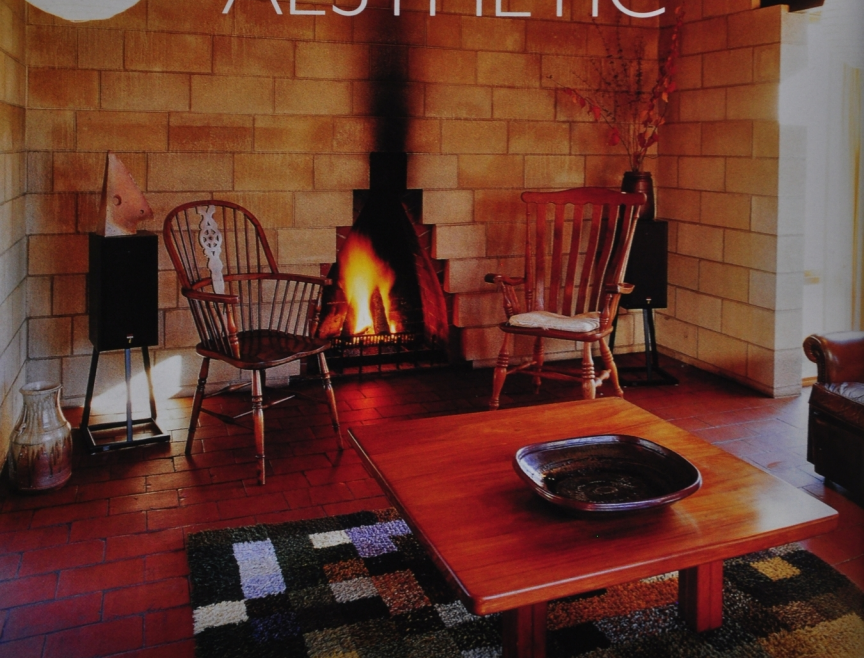
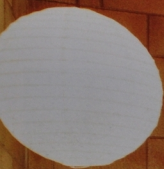
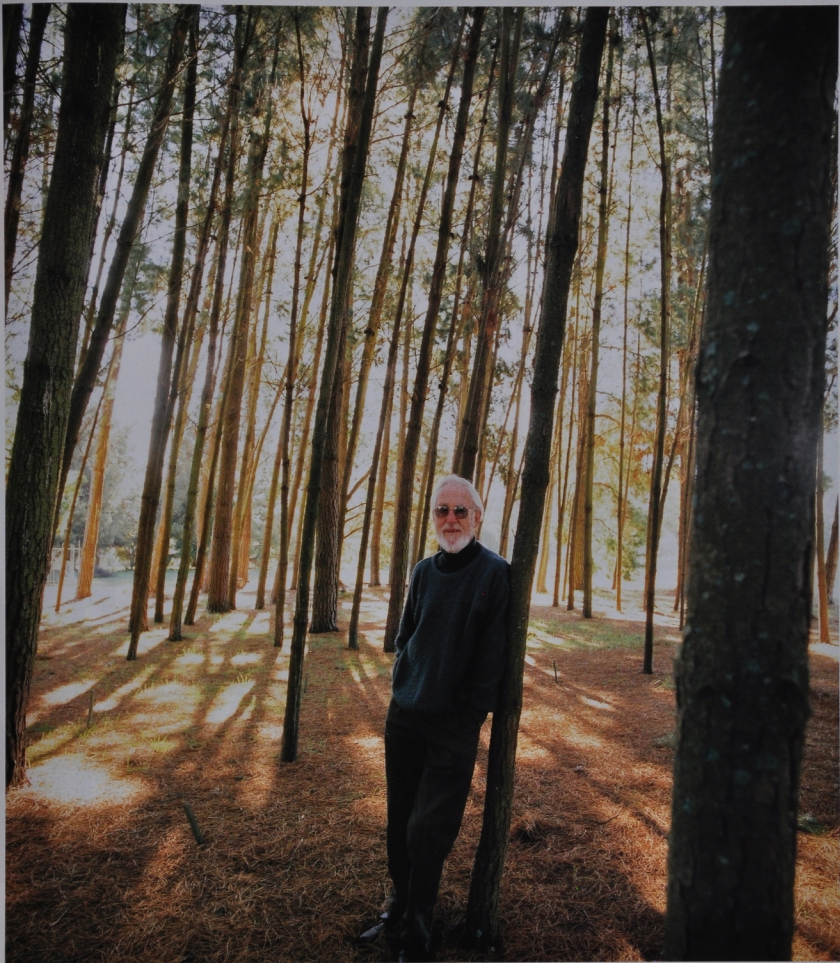


# A SHARED AESTHETIC



THE JOHN SCOTT-DESIGNED HOME OF BRUCE AND ESTELLE MARTIN IS IMBUED WITH AN AUSTERE BEAUTY BEFITTING A LOVE OF ALL THINGS JAPANESE

TEXT by Peter Shaw PHOTOGRAPHY by Paul McCredie



**[FACING PAGE]** The sitting room features a woollen rug by Gidde Møller, beneath a table by Peter Smeele, upon which rests a Len Castle platter. The speaker on the left holds a ploughshare by Bruce Martin, a pot by Estelle Martin is beside it on the floor.

**(ABOVE)** Potter Bruce Martin, amid trees planted to give "a feeling of randomness".

In the late 60s potters Bruce and Estelle Martin bought a 10-acre block at Ngatarawa, south-west of Hastings. There they established the Kamaka Pottery, eventually devoting themselves to the production of ceramics based on traditional Japanese techniques, using *anagama* wood-fired kilns. Between 1969 and 1970 the architect John Scott designed them a house and workshop that today strike visitors as having a profound sense of place rarely found in New Zealand.

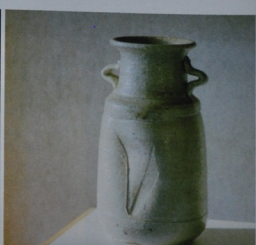
Estelle died in 2001 but Bruce continues to live in the house and to sell the pottery they made during their long and fruitful collaboration. Although their two *anagama* kilns ceased operation in 1995 when most of their pottery equipment was sold, many of the works the couple made remain for sale and the

**[THIS PHOTO]**

Furniture in the dining area was designed by Peter Smeete, while the papered bamboo lamp above the table was bought in Kyoto. The wooden latticed window screen is based on a Japanese design and is a later addition, after the Martins discovered the need for shading devices to moderate the Hawke's Bay sunlight.



THE SIMPLICITY OF THE PROCESSES INVOLVED SO ATTRACTED BRUCE AND ESTELLE THAT THEY DETERMINED TO BUILD THEIR OWN ANAGAMA KILN





kilns are available for inspection by interested visitors.

Pottery began for Bruce and Estelle Martin in the late 50s when, tired of the omnipresent white swan vases people invariably used for flower arrangements, the couple decided that the only way to make something they liked was to do it themselves. Pottery classes and clay modelling followed and the pair were hobbyists for about five years.

Then, early in 1965, the great Japanese potter Shoji Hamada demonstrated his unique skills to a Napier audience. Already acquainted with those indispensable volumes, Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book* and Soetsu Yanagi's *The Unknown Craftsman*, Bruce and Estelle took a greater interest in things Japanese. Estelle had taken classes in *ikebana* flower arranging and admired the pottery containers that her Napier teacher, Lou Theakstone, had brought back from a visit to Japan. The couple began making similar objects in an oil-fired kiln.

Later in 1965 Bruce and Estelle made the decision to set up a partnership in Hastings as potters – full-time. During the following years the Martins made readily saleable, glazed domesticware, as did many other New Zealand potters.

Inevitably, Bruce and Estelle were drawn to see Japan and in 1978 visited many potters' workshops there. They were especially interested in the work of Sanyo Fujii at Kodera in Hyogo prefecture. Fujii was using *anagama* kilns to produce wholly unglazed pottery, with soft, subtle colours and textures that were produced solely by the action of flames and the fall of ash on the clay surfaces. The austerity and simplicity of the shapes and the process involved so attracted Bruce and Estelle that they determined to return to New Zealand and build their own *anagama* kiln. They first fired it in 1982 then went back to Japan to learn more. Sanyo Fujii came to New Zealand and stayed with the couple for seven months, encouraging them to produce vessels associated with the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Exhibitions in New Zealand and Japan followed; so too did successes in the Fletcher Brownbuilt and Fletcher Challenge Ceramic Awards.

Following the purchase of their block of land in Valentine Road, Bruce and Estelle decided upon John Scott as their architect. They had



**(THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)** When looking from the kitchen to the dining room and outside through open shelving displaying pottery, the post-and-beam structure is clearly visible; the dining table boasts a Bruce Martin unglazed *anagama*-fired cube vase, made for *ikebana* arrangements. Bruce and Estelle Martin in their Ngatarawa workshop. The Japanese *anagama* kiln is at the rear.

**(FACING PAGE, BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT)** A slab-built "holy" bottle by Bruce Martin, this in the dining room was inserted after Bruce and Estelle, thinking the high wall plain, suggested to architect John Scott that a round window would help. One of his associates made this design, a precarious thing to cut: a Japanese *hanaire* vase by Estelle Martin, for holding tea ceremony flowers.



**[THIS PHOTO]** The house, designed by John Scott from 1969 to 1970, is set well back on the property and the clients specified that no driveways nor paths lead to the home.

**[BELOW]** Looking back through the covered walkway, the warm yellow paint John Scott chose for its ceiling is visible. The posts sit in shaped concrete pads in emulation of the traditional Japanese method of using stones for the same purpose.

"JOHN SCOTT EDUCATED US, SO WE STOPPED THINKING OF A HOUSE AS A SINGLE, BOX-LIKE THING – HE TAUGHT US ABOUT SPACE"



met him socially, already knew another house of his at Waipawa and admired his Futuna Chapel at Karori, Wellington.

"We didn't tell him what we wanted at all," recalls Bruce, "only what we did not want – carpet, Venetian blinds, wallpaper. Originally the house was designed in clinker brick, because we were potters, but that was going to be too expensive. John spent a lot of time getting to know who we were and what we were about. He'd drop in for lunch to see how we lived. He saw that we didn't entertain much, so something fairly compact would be appropriate." The couple were never shown any sketch plans, just little isometric drawings. However, the builders were provided with beautifully detailed drawings.

"We'd think about these drawings he left with us – sometimes we were a bit horrified but then came round to what he was suggesting. Then we'd contact him and he'd say that we could forget that because he'd come up with something much better in the meantime! He educated us really so that we stopped thinking of a house as a kind of a single box-like

thing and came to understand open-planning. He taught us about space."

"We were very flexible. Our idea was that he was the artist and that we should not dictate what we wanted. We knew about that already from the difficulty we'd had with commissioned pottery. You can't impose. It's said that John could take five years to come up with plans but that's probably because the clients niggled at him. He made them wait until they came around to his way of thinking."

Bruce recalls that John Scott was not particularly interested in his clients' awareness of Japanese aesthetic ideas. "While he was designing for us he received a Churchill Fellowship that took him to Japan. When he came back he assured us that he wasn't influenced by the forms of traditional Japanese architecture as such – but what had really interested him was the method of joining angles and corners."

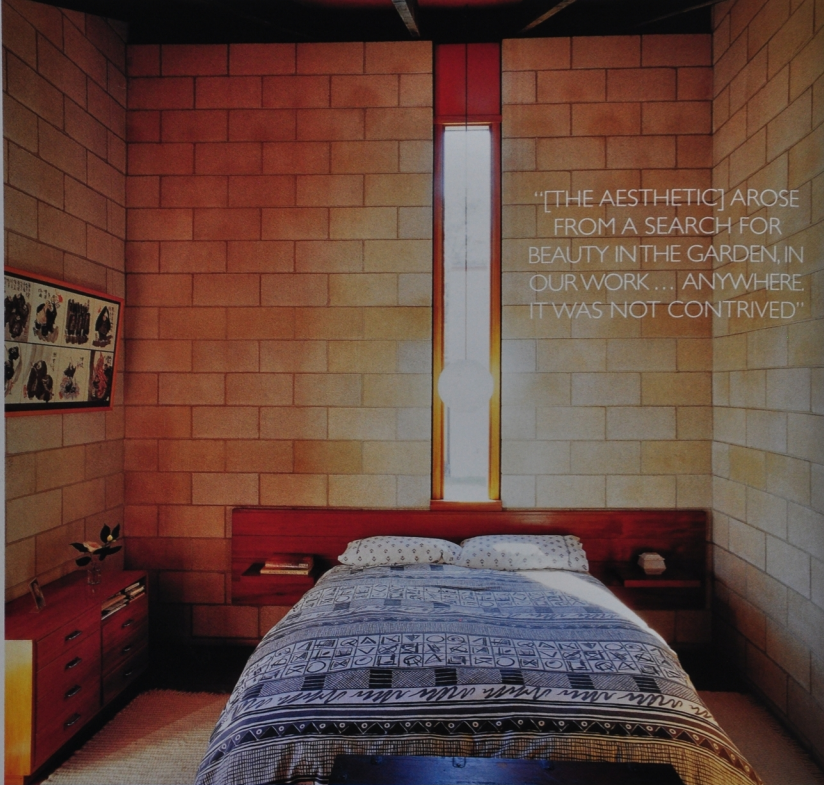
Although the basic principle of the Martin house is the Japanese post-and-beam structural system of support, it is the joining of elements that immediately draws one's attention. Junctures between concrete block and timber are not abutted or covered by a batten but left open to create a shadow – negative detailing. The virtuosity of the architect's treatment of multiple timber rebating is evident everywhere. "The carpenters who worked here called it the 'house of many corners,'" recalls Bruce.

The home consists of two zones separated by a covered way. The larger of the two comprises a largely open-plan dining, kitchen and sitting room, as well as a double bedroom and bathroom. The smaller area provided accommodation for the Martins' three sons, each of whom had a small bedroom with a large sitting room and a bathroom area. So, it was possible for parents and children to be entirely separate whenever each wished.



**[THIS PAGE]** The home's roofline is capped with a bright red barge-rolled metal sheet that forms a flashing under the edge of concrete tiles and also creates a dramatic line. Waterproofing required that the concrete blocks should be painted. The wooden Japanese-style screens along the walkway, which connects the two zones of the house, were added later.

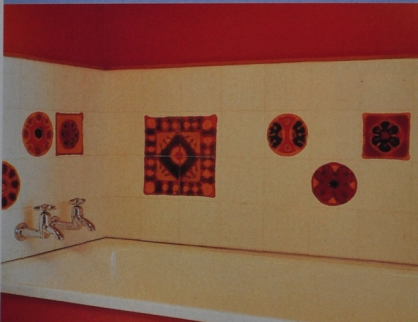




"[THE AESTHETIC] AROSE FROM A SEARCH FOR BEAUTY IN THE GARDEN, IN OUR WORK ... ANYWHERE. IT WAS NOT CONTRIVED"

**(ABOVE)** A floating bedhead in the main bedroom adds to the lightness of touch inherent in this home. A Japanese note is introduced by the room's artwork.

**(BELOW)** The bathroom's orange tiles were designed by Kenneth Clark, a New Zealand potter living in London, who visited the house while it was under construction. Clark made the tiles, designed a layout and sent them on to New Zealand.



The house was placed well back on the large section, with the workshop closer to the road. Estelle Martin was determined that there would be no driveways leading to either structure. Nor were there to be any paths. Trees were planted to give a feeling of randomness and to provide long vistas into the distance.

Bruce Martin says today of the couple's shared aesthetic: "It arose from a search for beauty in the garden, in our work ... anywhere. Above all, it was not contrived."

In their 1994 book *The Crane and the Kotuku: Artistic Bridges Between New Zealand and Japan*, Peter and Dianne Beatson quoted Estelle Martin's words when answering their question about the attraction of Japan to herself and Bruce: "Our closeness to Japan and the reasons we were drawn there all stem from the love of simplicity, beauty in austerity and naturalness that is to be seen in Japanese craft, in particular, pottery. The aesthetics of *Iga*, *Shigaraki* and *Bizen* pots and the tea ceremony have had a long-standing interest for us. The tea ceremony, the architecture of the tea house, the gardens, the type of pottery generally used, the flower arrangements, the scrolls and other items, all point to a reverence for nature and a sensitivity to which we ourselves are naturally attuned."