

# THE DAILY NEWS GARDEN lifestyle



The creeping industrialisation of Ngamotu has come at an aesthetic cost, but Westgate Transport, owner of Port Taranaki, is making a real effort to beautify the area. Writer VIRGINIA WINDER and photographer REBECCA SCOTT investigate

## Park at the Port

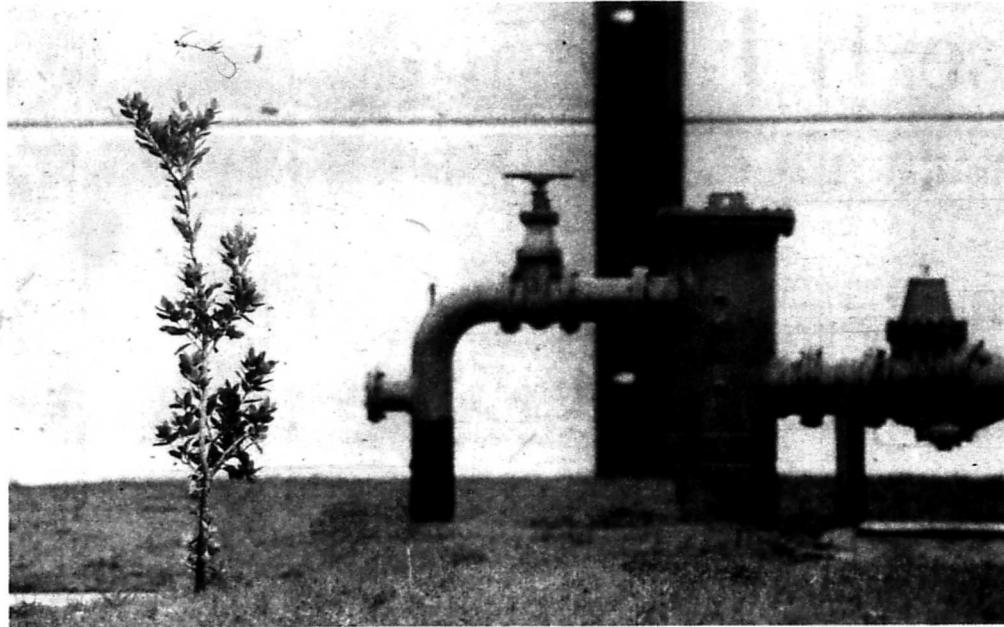
To spice up an industrial landscape on the coast, two men have had to dig into land seasoned with salt and peppered with history.

Today, the land is sprinkled with misty rain as Tse Taranaki architect Gary Brown and landscape architect Richard Bain reveal their recipe for beautifying Port Taranaki.

"Basically, the idea has been to create a port in the park concept," says Gary, a white-haired gentleman in a suit. "With the development works that Westgate (Transport) are doing, they wanted to make sure that we beautify everything and make it as environmentally friendly as possible."

Gary's the man who designed the 18,000m<sup>2</sup> dry goods store at the bottom of Pioneer Rd. The building, which is dug deep into a bank, holds 24,000 tonnes of milk powder product. The double-arched roof is meant to reflect the sea theme and, indeed, from high up on Ngamotu Rd, the building is often difficult to distinguish from the ocean.

We're much closer today, standing on



INDUSTREE: A healthy sapling promises a better-looking future in the industrial landscape at Port Taranaki.



PARK PLANNERS: Tse Taranaki architect Gary Brown (left) and landscape architect Richard Bain, the brains behind the beautification of Port Taranaki.

a make-believe bow of a ship in the new Pioneer Park. The boat is actually a lookout over the port, the drystore looming to our left. The nearly-completed park is being created on land with stories to tell about New Plymouth's forebears, Maori and European. Just read the rocks.

Bronze plaques on six boulders say the park has been established on part of an old pa site. The Otaka pa and fishing kainga (village) Mataipu were attacked by a force of invading Waikato in 1832.

After a prolonged siege, Waikato were defeated by the local hapu, Ngati Te Whiti, under paramount chief Poharama Te Whiti and Te Wharepouri and several Te Atiawa chieftains. Three cannons belonging to pakeha traders, led by John Love and Dicky Barrett, were critical to the outcome.

Out of this battle came a champion of peace - future Maori leader Te Whiti o Rongomai, of Parihaka fame, was born during the siege. And Poharama lies in the urupa (gravesite) alongside the park.

This is where the design got a bit tricky. Along the seaside of the park is a natural wood picket fence, which turns into a Maori palisade that dips down in front of the urupa.

"We dropped the level of the palisade because, from the urupa site, there must be a clear view of the sea," says Gary, explaining Maori protocol.

Back to the boulders. The plaques also tell about the Moturoa oilfield, the history of the port, the Ngamotu Mission, the traders and whalers, and the Plymouth Company.

In 1841, on the beach that existed below the park, the first settlers of "New" Plymouth landed. The recently-moved pioneer monument stands in memory of the first European arrivals.

There is also another story about the rocks.

"I went out and personally selected the rocks at the Waiwakaiho quarry," says Gary.

"We had to send them to Auckland to have the rock faces cut. That's not just a piece of cake."

The icing was the vandal-proof plaques, to be lit at night to allow people to read them on summer evening strolls and provide security for the area.

There is one downside to this new area, one the public may feel put out about. It's about access to the beach - there is none.

"We looked hard at whether we could achieve it, but it got put in the too-hard basket," says Gary.

Down below is the road that leads to the drystore, which immediately posed a conflict between danger and desire.

"Big trucks carrying dairy products are not compatible with little kiddies

running around on the beach," says Gary. "We have to say 'I'm sorry', which has probably frustrated a lot of people because they have used this track probably since the start of the century."

Even now as we look over the fence, there is a freshly trodden track through the planting.

"There is a method to it all," says Richard Bain, as he attempts to lead us down the garden path.

To do this, we head back to the car for a drive-by garden tour.

Continued on next page

## WIN

The Daily News' Garden & Lifestyle section this week offers you a chance to win a \$50 voucher courtesy of London Bookshops, Shop 9, Centre City, New Plymouth.

To enter the competition, simply dial the infoline number (06) 759 4636, then dial ext 2800 for this week's question.

What name was the name of the pa at Ngamotu?

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# Ngamotu — where the port meets the park

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Peering through foggy windows, the sodden landscape gliding by, Richard explains: "We are trying to create a sense of place — the coast should look like the coast, not like an inland park."

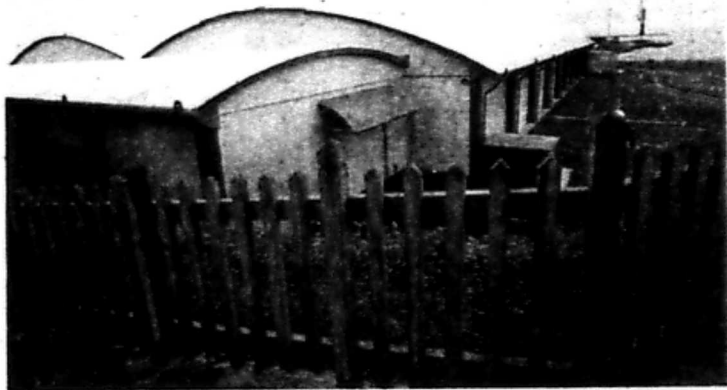
The backbone of the seashore design is the specimen trees — pohutukawa and Norfolk pines. Richard has planted them in avenues from the Blyde Terminal development right down to the lee breakwater. The pohutukawa thrive on the coast, and provide screens to block out the hard lines of industry. The pines, in Richard's mind, are sculptural masterpieces. They provide a sense of scale, as they reach for the sky above the pohutukawa.

"They (Norfolk pines) are very open plants, so they don't block any views, which is important down here." Even so, a few have lost their tops. "One problem we have down here, and I don't mind saying so, is getting the tops of Norfolk pines pinched out."

"New Plymouth people are very protective of their sea view and the issue of trees is always there." Richard reckons the pines are so see-through, local folk needn't worry, and anyway, the dramatic trees will recover from their bad haircuts.

Other plants, attacked by salt spray, haven't been so lucky.

"There's no middle ground with the planting down here at the coast," says Richard. "It can be dramatic and traumatic." The hardest hit part is what Westgate calls the Eastern Reclamation. This is at the city end of Ngamotu Beach, where land spills out into the harbour, with boulders used to hold the sea at bay.



**ROOF CREST:** The curved roof of Westgate's new drystore (above) was designed to reflect the theme of the sea.

**HISTORY LESSONS:** Plaques on six boulders in Pioneer Park (right) tell some of the story of the Ngamotu area.

"We have had two goes at it," says Richard. "We had some failures to do with the salt and also due to the fact it's fill, which is very stony, sandy soil." The survivors were tracked down and more of the same planted to plug the gaps where the victims fell. Hebes, Indian hawthorn, olearia, flax, Pseudopanax laetus (five finger), pohutukawa, cabbage trees, grey-leaved Brachyglottis laxifolia and glossy green Griselinia lucida have flourished under the coastal assault.

Down the rocks, creeping towards the sea, is a grey, fleshy



creature. There can be few tougher plants than the iceplant, its bright pink flowers laughing in the face of the sea. Hebe speciosa (napuka) are also worth their weight in salt. Richard uses Blue Gem, Elliptica (blue), Champagne and Townsonii (both white) to throw colour among the greens. Indian hawthorn, which hints of daphne, also has white flowers, along with a ground-cover daisy. Yellow frothy daisies and yellow, orange and crimson gazanias brighten a winter's day.

Renga renga (arthropodium) lilies planted en masse add to the tropical theme. "Everything looks lush, luxuriant, with a wild look to it," says Richard.

Flax is another winner. All along the bank below Whiteley St, where once there were sand dunes long

ago, crouch huge shaggy beasts of flax topped with tall seedpod horns. Sitting behind them are soft-green ngaio bushes, which race upwards. "They grow while your back's turned," says Richard.

With the help of some school children and a dedicated teacher at nearby Moturoa School, a propagating unit has been provided by Westgate and New Plymouth West Rotary.

This is one of those win-win situations, says Peter Atkinson, the port company's technical services manager. "We had a planting programme, and they (the school) wanted to produce plants. We wanted to buy plants, and it was a nice way to help the school at the same time."

Westgate Transport took over the port operation in 1990 and since then has been cleaning up the property, which included a controversial demolition job on a row of holiday baches opposite the children's playground.

Peter won't be drawn into comment on this, except to say the land was needed to improve the overall port layout and the landscaping recognised the importance of continually improving the port environment for all who use it.

Where families used to live, puka trees shelter along a fence line, and a swathe of miniature flax, called Phormium Green Dwarf, festoons the earth.

Also planted in waves are miniature toitoi and carex. In some places this native grass is lush and green, while in others it looks like strawberry blonde hair. Escallonia, adorned with pink flowers, swathes of lavender and in summer, purple echiums, add a feminine flavour to the Westgate recipe.

Just to make sure he covers it all, Richard uses bark and shavings, shingle and plants to keep the weeds downtrodden. His favourite selection of natural mats are prostrate ngaio, Coprosma prostrata and the native shagpile, Rubus parvus. Even the beach-edge, where the grass meets the sand, looks authentic.

"We could have put a seawall in there," says Gary Brown. "But we wanted it to look like a New Zealand beach. We have added mounds here and there so people can lie in the sun and be protected from the westerly wind." Making a coastal landscape look like the real thing takes a lot of work.

Only the seaweed on the beach isn't there by design. □

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