

WATERFRONT

FIT FOR A *Cup*

AUCKLAND'S HARBOURSIDE HAS TRANSFORMED INTO AN INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL, RESIDENTIAL AND RECREATIONAL HUB SINCE THE HISTORIC AMERICA'S CUP WIN IN 1995

IT WAS 1995 IN SAN DIEGO and victory was sweet. Team New Zealand, led by Sir Peter Blake, had taken out the America's Cup. That historic win against Team Dennis Connor across the ocean led to more than parades and national pride back home - it also kickstarted the transformation of Auckland's waterfront.

The late Sir Peter Blake was a champion in the redevelopment of the Viaduct Harbour, wanting Auckland's then port and industrial landscape to become a fitting stage for the 2000 defence of the cup. The subsequent campaign brought another victory, this time against Prada, and also superyachts to the harbour on a scale and luxury not seen before.

With Auckland set to host the upcoming 36th America's Cup it's fitting the waterfront is now an international hub of commercial, innovation, retail and residential.

All along Quay Street from Britomart, through Commercial Bay and along to vibrant Wynyard Quarter, the area is host to a mix of fine dining, diverse shopping, a who's who of local and global big name companies, superyacht berths and facilities, top notch hotels and award-winning high-end apartments.

It is so sought-after office occupiers have followed a global trend and steadily migrated down Queen Street towards the water. Occupiers already at Wynyard Quarter or coming include Fortune 100 companies, NZX or ASX listed tenants and more - everyone from the ASB, KPMG, Auckland Transport, Fonterra, Genesis Energy, Kiwibank, HP, Microsoft, Apple, IBM, Amazon, Datacom and Air

New Zealand want to be there.

And more will come. Panuku Development Auckland says as Wynyard Quarter evolves it will be home to around 3,000 residents and 20,000 workers.

Angela Bull, CEO of Tramco, which includes Viaduct Harbour Holdings in its portfolio of landholdings, says the master planning of the waterfront has been a focus for the last 20 years. "Viaduct Harbour Holdings owns the land of the Viaduct Harbour Precinct - a vibrant mix of restaurants and bars, hotels, residential and commercial office, all next to what has to be one of the most beautiful harbours in the world. We are incredibly lucky to have this on our doorstep."

What has been achieved has been outstanding, Bull says, thanks to the vision and commitment of the talented building owners, developers and residents, who put a lot of thought and care into what would be the right mix for the Viaduct.

"In many ways I think the Viaduct was ahead of its time in its master planning of the precinct and getting that real mix of uses and amenity - you can see those results with the design and quality of the Viaduct Harbour Precinct."

All that and you can still buy a lifejacket and get your boat serviced in the marine industry down near the Harbour Bridge.

Viaduct Harbour Holdings has been thrilled with the international companies flocking to or already at the waterfront, and also important and exciting New Zealand companies like Fonterra, Datacom, and Bayleys, Bull says.



Photo credit: Viaduct Harbour Holdings



“We’ve got absolutely world-class hospitality offers as well with iconic restaurants and bars.”

The Viaduct Harbour waterfront is also an incredible destination for the public. “You can walk all the way along the waterfront through our part of the precinct. That connection to the waterfront is just a cool part of what Auckland is about.”

Precinct Properties’ significant investment in Auckland is centred at One Queen Street and Wynyard Quarter and the company says with Auckland Council’s big investment the City Rail Link, ferry terminal and North Shore bus terminal upgrades will connect the waterfront to other parts of the city.

This ease of accessibility is part of the plan to restore Commercial Bay back to Auckland’s primary area for trade and commerce with Precinct’s CEO, Scott Pritchard, saying historically the city centre ran north to south but over the last decade there has been a reversal to east to west with corporate occupiers relocating closer to the waterfront.

Willis Bond CEO Mark McGuinness, whose company has pumped many hundreds of millions of dollars into apartment builds at Wynyard Quarter, says the city has a lot to thank Sir Peter Blake for.

“I think I would also acknowledge the early visionaries and an entity called Sea and City, and Waterfront Auckland, who had a vision the council bought into. People like Adrienne Young-Cooper and others around her. Bob Harvey. People who basically had the vision and stuck to it and empowered people to do it.”

McGuinness hails these folk as “the silent warriors” who helped get the waterfront to where it is today, describing Wynyard Quarter as one of the most exciting developments Willis Bond has been involved in.

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MARK MCGUINNESS,
WILLIS BOND CEO

“We took part in a process going back to 2012/2013 where proposals were invited from around the world for redeveloping it. We’ve done a lot of waterfront development in Wellington and I saw Wynyard as an incredible opportunity to help reinvent the inner city. Historically, the inner-city was a ghost town at weekends and, frankly, it’s too good for that.”

The planning and execution by the council and the various development partners has been exceptional, he says.

“I’ve visited waterfront developments around the world; Barcelona, Canary Wharf, Manhattan, you name it, ranging from quite big ones like Hudson Yards to quite small ones and there are a number of key characteristics that really make them work.”

One of those characteristics is courage at the top with landowners who are willing to invest and be patient, and also to have that strong vision and to stick with it.

“That’s why Auckland has been delivered a fantastic waterfront. There’s offices, there’s residential, there’s

hospitality, retail. All the amenity is there. If you wanted to take the family out at the weekend, what a cool place to go. It’s just great and Auckland didn’t have that. It was all walled off behind gates. It was a working port and with containerisation all this land was freed up.”

Waterfronts are being treated with a new respect and a key to their success is mixed use, says McGuinness.

“What those big companies deliver is customers at lunch time for the cafes and restaurants and all of that, and in the weekend the people arrive. That mix, along with the apartment residents, keep those businesses flourishing. It’s a really great model. If you just have apartments it doesn’t generate the same amount of income for hospitality or retail.”

People also want to live by the water and residential sales at Wynyard Quarter are among the highest in the land on a square meterage rate.

“We’ve sold literally hundreds of apartments now and at very good values.”

Willis Bond has already delivered on buildings in Wynyard Central and the three buildings which make up Number 132 Halsey, with the first stage of 30 Madden due to finish at the end of this year. Stage two is under way and the company has two further development blocks.

“By the time we’re finished it will be about 600 apartments over about 13 buildings.”

McGuinness says research shows you can add about two years to your life if you live in a walkable environment, and residents lucky enough to live on the waterfront get a holiday feel with the benefits of the big city. “For Aucklanders, here’s a radical thing. You can walk to work or you can walk to the shopping centre or the supermarket. It’s a 21st Century way of living your life.”

Auckland mayor Phil Goff describes Wynyard Quarter as one of the largest and most successful urban regeneration projects in the country. Over the longer term the area will be further rejuvenated with a “fantastic” headland park, a linear park and a maritime precinct, all creating a focal point for Aucklanders and visitors to enjoy world-class views, eating and entertainment.

The development will integrate with other work along Auckland’s waterfront. “The Downtown Public Space, the new square outside the old Post Office and the waterfront park adjacent to the Ferry Building will totally transform this area as a very special part of our city. It will reconnect people to our shoreline and beautiful Waitematā Harbour, help rejuvenate our central city, and create people-friendly, attractive places for all to enjoy.”

Ryan Johnson, Bayleys’ national director of commercial and industrial, says it all began with that 1995 America’s Cup win. Back then, Auckland’s waterfront wasn’t a patch on Wellington’s but the revival has led developers like Kiwi Property to build the award-winning ASB headquarters and for companies like Goodman NZ to develop the VXV Precinct commercial hub, partnering with the Singaporean Government, GIC.

“That America’s Cup event reshaped the Auckland waterfront and brought huge international capital, too. If you’ve got the Singaporean Government helping develop with Goodman, that’s world class,” says Johnson.

There’s an exciting range of offerings, from Orams’ marine precinct development to Fu Wah’s Park Hyatt hotel (Fu Wah has resource consent for some 412 more units) to more from Precinct Properties which built the Innovation Centre to facilitate creativity and innovation.

“There’s still a huge amount of commercial, residential and retail to be developed over the next 10 years, which will further enhance the vibrancy of the waterfront” says Johnson.

And with the next America’s Cup coming soon, it’s all go. Bayleys leasing broker Brendan Graves, who spearheads the Auckland corporate leasing team, says Orams’ \$140m development of Site 18 next to Silo Park will feature the biggest traveller winch system in the southern hemisphere to haul multimillion dollar superyachts out of the water, and the marine company also has plans for office and residential.

“They’ve got a queue of boats trying to get in the country to get worked on so they’re boxing on more on the marine side and the office component, unfortunately with COVID, has been put a little bit on ice,” says Graves.

“AUCKLAND IS NEW ZEALAND’S ONLY GLOBAL CITY AND THE ENGINE ROOM OF OUR NATIONAL ECONOMY. WE NEED TO CONTINUE MAKING IT A WORLD-CLASS PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND DO BUSINESS SO ONCE OUR BORDERS HAVE RE-OPENED WE CAN ATTRACT SKILLED PEOPLE, ENTREPRENEURS AND INVESTMENT FROM NEW ZEALAND AND AROUND THE WORLD.”

PHILL GOFF, AUCKLAND MAYOR

The office development will happen, though, and the residential component will get the best views of Auckland, he says.

Orams has been a presence on the waterfront for some decades and CEO Neven Barbour recently said he couldn’t think of anywhere else in the world you can moor a superyacht at a world class facility and still be an easy 10-minute stroll into the centre of the country’s largest city.

Graves says superyacht owners can arrive, moor their huge boats, and get their crew straight off and into the best hotels, bars and restaurants in the city: “It’s quite unique from that perspective.”

And when the Orams’ office component does come it will add a quirky, cool flair to that end of the waterfront and likely attract creatives.

“You’ll have some guy in his overalls in there that’s come in off the boats that’s grabbing a coffee and a croissant at the ground floor café and you’ll have some people sitting down eating eggs bene in their suits. It will be quite a diverse crowd in that ‘hood.”

Property trends globally show a lot of big cities are trying to embrace the all-encompassing precinct model, a model which is working great in Auckland. “When you’ve got these big international guys coming down here and choosing to be here others think ‘well, maybe we should be getting down there, too.’”

While the 1995 America’s Cup win might have kicked the transformation off, the likes of Mark McGuinness say the waterfront can stand on its own feet now.

“I think that sort of thing is the icing on the cake. If there was no America’s Cup it would still be a fabulous place to live, work or recreate.”

Fiona Knox, Panuku’s acting priority location director for the waterfront and city, says the future vision is to build on the success of Wynyard Quarter and to seed new thinking.

“Our future planning is looking to how we can respond to opportunities in the next stage of development. Major themes will be development of the Headland Park, how to use the new legacy created for the America’s Cup events, how to provide a diversity of buildings to accommodate different uses that may change over time and how our development can respond to climate change.”

The Wynyard Quarter Masterplan Discussion document will be released later this year and this will give an opportunity for the public, stakeholders and politicians to have input. Once finalised, the masterplan will form the basis of a plan change to enable development to occur, Knox says.

Phil Goff says the importance of Auckland’s waterfront to the city and the country can’t be understated and even with the borders closed international eyes will still be on Auckland for the America’s Cup.

“Auckland is New Zealand’s only global city and the engine room of our national economy. We need to continue making it a world-class place to live, work and do business so once our borders have re-opened we can attract skilled people, entrepreneurs and investment from New Zealand and around the world.”

