
Tried and trussed traditions rekindled

Leeston | Canterbury





Hoping to spark a building renaissance of sorts, Ben Fearnley of Fearnley Construction has taken 'traditional' to a whole new level with his rural Leeston home.

Wanting to create a home with unmistakable character, Ben and his wife Bec chose, for their family home, a time-honoured building method that needs to be carbon dated to be truly appreciated.

From the outside, the Fearnley home is the traditional Kiwi-country weatherboard model, and no clues are given as to what lies inside. However, two small steps inside take you a giant leap back to the 'old world', with an unavoidable archway of spectacular hand-built macrocarpa trusses running through the spine of their living area.

"We wanted to build a home in a traditional style," Ben explains, understating how traditional his style really was. Using a practice dating back thousands of years, Ben has immersed himself in the timber frame joinery methodology since his apprenticeship. He underwent specialised training and buried himself in literature on the subject to upskill sufficiently. The old English practice of using wooden pegs to fasten, goes way back.

"Since Noah built the Ark," Ben says of the artform also known as mortise and tenon joinery. Using no glue, and no screws or nails, Ben crafted and assembled his trusses, reviving the time-tested and labourious process, over eight weeks. Unable to rustle

up the workforce of an English hamlet or village, Ben cheated somewhat, transporting the trusses 300 metres from their rented property using a farm tractor. After a crash course in Hiab use, Ben completed the placement of the trusses within one day, an achievement that was satisfyingly topped off with the tick of approval from the demanding engineers.

Not to be outdone by the impressive trusses, the rest of the home is full of quality contemporary fittings and features, and astute design, including 80 sqm of upstairs space created by implementing attic trusses. There's sentimental touches, and oak from Bec's family farm has been sacrificed to make the prominent dining table. Oak floors work perfectly with the natural colours chosen, all mingling to create a warm family-home feel.

After honing his 'old school' building skills to build this special property, Ben is now part of a rare breed. The majority of his clients to date have opted for more contemporary methods; he's definitely keen to work with 'anyone who would like to build this way'. 

NZCB Member / Ben & Bec Fearnley
www.fearnleyconstruction.co.nz