

The *Sweet* spot

A refreshed exterior colour scheme puts some sugar on an unassuming office building.



Chelsea Estate has been an important landmark in the heart of Auckland since the Chelsea Sugar Factory was first constructed in 1883. In late 2018, NZ Sugar launched an exciting new visitor experience centre known as Chelsea Bay. This new facility serves as the starting point for factory tours and includes a café, a state-of-the-art baking school and an interactive education zone that sympathetically infuses contemporary elements within the historical context of the existing structures on the Birkenhead site.

The approach the company has taken to architectural stewardship of its assets throughout its history is commendable, and it's a key reason why the site has retained its iconic status. For years, Beca Ltd has been a crucial partner in NZ Sugar's conscientious maintenance and development at Chelsea Estate. While Beca's work on the Chelsea Bay Visitor Centre was among the most perceptible changes made in recent years, there has been much work done across the entire site over the past decade to ensure the buildings are properly preserved and meet the evolving needs of the company. Although much of this important work may not be especially evident to visitors, one of the site's most recent updates is immediately palpable.

The architecture that houses the company's administration was the vision of Sir Michael Fowler, who was not only a renowned architect and former mayor of Wellington but also served as NZ Sugar Managing Director. Although the project may not be the most lauded or recognisable work of his prestigious architectural career, the unpretentious building serves an important purpose on the site. Like many of the buildings at Chelsea Estate, the exterior featured the instantly recognisable colour that has been used across the site since the early 90s. This distinct peachy-pink hue, which is easily spottable on the banks of Waitematā Harbour, often referred to as 'Chelsea Pink' is Resene Red Damask.

Across the site, exterior surfaces are painted in Resene Red Damask complemented with fascia, barges and soffits in Resene Grey Nurse, window sashes in Resene White and external structures, columns and window frames in Resene Cove Grey. Before this consistent colour scheme was implemented in the 1990s – which was Fowler's idea – each of the factory's buildings were painted in different shades to give the impression of a village. And now, the Administration Building has been given a vibrant new colour scheme that sets it apart.

The main objective of the update was to replace the roof and futureproof the building with seismic upgrades, but since the Administration Building is actually comprised of two interconnected components – the main 1950s structure and



opposite, above and right: While paying homage to the iconic colour scheme that has graced the buildings at Chelsea Estate since the 1990s, the exterior makeover of the Administration Building incorporates a joyful, rainbow-like installation that has quickly become a focal point for the building's visitors and employees. Designed to spark a sense of wonder and delight, the installation serves as an inviting welcome to office workers arriving each day while also brightening the spirits of children playing in the adjacent playground. With this project, Beca has created more than just a building facelift – they've transformed the area into a vibrant, dynamic environment that fosters connection, creativity and joy for all who encounter it. Their successful efforts were recognised with a Resene Total Colour Master Nightingale Award as well as a Resene Total Colour Commercial Exterior Award. North façade painted in Resene Red Damask and Resene Foundry with timber decking and screen stained in Resene Woodsman Oregon, west façade in Resene Red Damask, Resene Foundry and Resene Outrageous, east façade in Resene Red Damask, Resene Foundry and Resene Illusion, south façade in Resene Red Damask, Resene Foundry, Resene Supernova, Resene Yellow Sea, Resene Outrageous, Resene Simply Red, Resene Scrumptious and Resene Illusion and roof, fascia and soffits in Resene Titania.



	Resene Titania
	Resene Illusion
	Resene Scrumptious
	Resene Simply Red
	Resene Supernova
	Resene Yellow Sea
	Resene Red Damask
	Resene Outrageous
	Resene Woodsman Oregon
	Resene Foundry



a wing built in the 1990s – the project presented some unique challenges. Although the historic colour scheme somewhat unified these two parts, their architectural styles were distinctly different, so a new scheme was developed to celebrate their uniqueness while honouring their colour legacy. Other improvements that were made to enhance the design included the removal of redundant sunshades on the 1990s building and simplifying the façades, while the addition of a green wall helps screen the office from the visitor carpark – giving a sense of privacy for the administrative staff and a lush and inviting welcome for visitors to Chelsea Bay as they arrive.

“The Administration Building was last repainted as part of our multi-stage site painting campaign in 2008. The existing paint was in reasonable condition and was frequently washed, but the roof replacement works were a good opportunity to utilise the scaffolding surrounding the building for another refresh,” says NZ Sugar Capital Project Engineer Jarrad Chin, who served as Project Manager on the client side.

Beca relied on the colour prowess of two representatives from their interior design team to assist with the exterior colour selections, Eleanor Eugster and Alison Gwerder. “To distinguish the two buildings, we opted to maintain Resene Red Damask on the older structure, preserving its connection to the building’s heritage. A rich, dark grey, Resene Foundry, was selected to aid in the modernisation and renewal of the newer building – which was chosen for its ability to complement the terracotta tone of Resene Red Damask while providing a contemporary touch,” explains Eleanor.

Since the Administration Building overlooks the Visitor’s Centre and children’s playground, the south-facing wall of the 1990s building was the ideal opportunity to inject some colour to create an atmosphere of fun and playfulness against the dark, sophisticated grey that envelops the remaining walls. In collaboration with Chelsea Sugar’s Marketing Manager, colours were chosen to reflect the brand colours of Edmonds and Chelsea Sugar. “To maintain visual continuity across adjacent façades, one colour from the mural was extended on each side – Resene Illusion on the east façade and Resene Outrageous on the west façade. These colour extensions helped to create a striking contrast against the depth of Resene Foundry,” Eleanor says.

The design team made multiple site visits to get their Resene colour selections just right. “While still wanting to be respectful of the historical palette, we aimed to infuse a fresh perspective, adding vibrancy to the façade overlooking the public green space,” Alison explains. “We initially used the colours from the

above and opposite: During the Administration Building’s exterior refurbishment, which also included a roof replacement and seismic upgrades, the design team sought to honour the legacy of the site and client while introducing a vibrant new look. At the core of this transformation is a carefully curated Resene colour palette, which blends the beloved brand’s heritage tones with fresh hues that infuse the space with vitality and warmth. North façade painted in Resene Red Damask and Resene Foundry with timber decking and screen stained in Resene Woodsman Oregon, west façade in Resene Red Damask, Resene Foundry and Resene Outrageous, east façade in Resene Red Damask, Resene Foundry and Resene Illusion, south façade in Resene Red Damask, Resene Foundry, Resene Supernova, Resene Yellow Sea, Resene Outrageous, Resene Simply Red, Resene Scrumptious and Resene Illusion and roof, fascia and soffits in Resene Titania.



- Resene Illusion
- Resene Supernova
- Resene Juicy
- Resene Red Damask
- Resene Foundry



Chelsea Bay Visitor Centre interior fit-out as a starting point to align with the feel of the Visitor Centre and the Chelsea Sugar brand colours. We then selected complementary colours from the Resene Colour Library online (www.resene.com/colour) and ordered drawdown paint swatches to check the physical colours before finalising the specifications.”

“Our initial proposal featured toned-down hues that complemented the Chelsea Sugar and Edmonds palette. However,

after consulting with NZ Sugar and their Senior Brand Manager, we adjusted the colours to more closely match the Chelsea Sugar and Edmonds brand colours, resulting in a much more vibrant and dynamic palette. We discovered two of the originally specified colours, Resene Yellow Sea and Resene Juicy, were too similar once tested on site. Visiting the site with drawdown paint swatches, we opted for a darker orange, Resene Outrageous, to enhance definition between the two colours,” Alison adds.

For visitors and staff, the new mural has had a striking effect on the overall experience of the space – particularly for users of the adjacent play area, where the atmosphere is even more joyful than before. This effect wasn’t lost on the judges of the Resene Total Colour Awards, who rewarded the success of the repainted façade with both a Resene Total Colour Master Nightingale Award and a Resene Total Colour Commercial Exterior Award. They commended the adventurous colour palette and how it was used. “The diagonal placement gives the building and hues an extra burst of energy and excitement. The colours feel like they belong so well, it’s hard to imagine this project without them. Each hue cleverly plays off one another, contrasting and accentuating the next. It’s quite simply delicious,” they said in their comments.

“My favourite element is definitely the feature wall,” says Eleanor. “It feels fun and playful – perfect for the playground area. It’s been lots of fun to develop and even better to see it brought to life in person. My favourite colours are the pinks on the feature wall, Resene Scrumptious and Resene Illusion. I especially love the contrast between the lighter pink and the Resene Foundry grey.”

It was the talented team of painters at APS that completed the painting work. “The painting component of the project was part of a large multi-trade endeavour that included roofing, internal guttering and seismic strengthening,” APS Project Manager Buks Kruger explains. “With that in mind, the biggest challenge for our team was ensuring that all the materials required for the project were delivered against a carefully structured timeline. However, one of the most rewarding challenges was ensuring that the creative masking, which created the colour effect, lined up correctly while working under the shrink wrap. Seeing the result was hugely satisfying and we are very proud of our team’s work.”

Buks says that APS was glad to be using Resene paints for the project. “Their team was incredibly helpful and we had no downtime waiting for paint orders. As always, our Resene representative was fantastic to deal with and we feel very lucky to have him as our account manager.”

“NZ Sugar is a key client of APS, and we are always grateful to work with them in any capacity, but to complete a project that can bring everyone so much joy with its visual impact is particularly special. Huge credit to the Beca team for their design work and comprehensive design documentation,” Buks adds.

Now that the exterior repainting, roof replacement and seismic reinforcement are all sorted, Beca and NZ Sugar have begun collaborating on the Administration Building’s interior fit-out. “This has involved working with NZ Sugar to develop a workplace strategy that facilitates their transition to a more agile work environment. We have just recently completed the concept design and will soon be moving into the detailed design phase,” Alison says.

While the site continues to evolve, visitors can take in the refreshing new look that the Administration Building’s exterior offers as this exciting new chapter of NZ Sugar’s history continues to unfold. **BW**

To learn more about the long and fascinating history of the Chelsea Sugar Factory and Chelsea Estate, visit www.chelsea.co.nz.

architectural and colour specification Beca Ltd, www.becca.com

painting APS Ltd, www.apsltd.co.nz

images Eleanor Eugster

Alison's top tips

Resene
Titania

- “Never go off online colour swatches only. Always use Resene drawdown paint swatches or testpots so that you can see the true colour.”
- “Testing colours on site is crucial, as they can appear differently depending on lighting, sun orientation, time of day and scale – a lesson we were reminded of on this project.”
- “Develop a narrative or inspiration to guide your colour choices. This approach not only justifies your selections but will also help create a cohesive scheme that resonates with the surroundings and those engaging with it.”