



The state of play







Award-winning playground brings spirited colour and community to West Auckland reserve.

In a time where we need the connection and joy that play offers more than ever, a space designed to bring people of all ages together that celebrates colour is exactly what the doctor ordered. Enter Kopupaka Reserve Playground, a large-scale playground and park development set within a 26 hectare site in Auckland's Westgate neighbourhood. This reserve has got it all: a destination playground, two kick-a-ball areas, a picnic and BBQ area, a waterplay area, an adult fitness area and a free play area that connects to an open space network of walkways and extensive riparian and revegetation planting. The playspace itself sits at the heart of the development, and it's definitely not your run-of-the-mill slide meets monkey bars affair. The project has been turning heads across the country, taking home both the New Zealand Parks Playground of the Year Award as well as a Resene Total Colour Landscape Award.

Nina Rattray, Principal Architect at Auckland Council, says the project was initiated to fill a significant gap in the area's play network for the steadily growing Westgate community. "The space was designed to function as a 'big Kiwi backyard', catering to the whole community. This is particularly important as Auckland embraces urbanisation and higher density living, where houses and backyards are typically smaller than they were traditionally."

After a period of so much isolation, Nina says it was vital that the design be welcoming to people of ages and abilities and offer them a chance to participate in order to build that sense of community ownership. "Whether it be getting a morning workout on the fitness equipment, kicking a ball with mates, having a BBQ, picnic or birthday gathering at the park, simply taking a walk or taking the kids or grandkids to burn some energy on the playground, I believe this space provides something for everyone."

opposite: A bird's eye view of the award-winning Kopupaka Reserve Playspace in Auckland's Westgate neighbourhood shows how well it caters to a wide range of ages, abilities and activities. Resene Soft Apple, Resene Dingley, Resene Clover, Resene Sundown, Resene Roadster, Resene Pohutukawa, Resene Shark and Resene Waterborne Woodsman Banjul were used to colour the project.

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|  | Resene Soft Apple |  | Resene Sundown |
|  | Resene Dingley |  | Resene Roadster |
|  | Resene Clover |  | Resene Pohutukawa |



right: Benches, tables and pergolas offer sheltered space and different seating options for watching children play, interacting with neighbours or enjoying a picnic with friends and family. The paint colours tie in to other elements within the playspace, making them feel like a connected part of the cohesive whole. The design team wanted a gloss finish on the benches and tables, so they started with a base in Resene Armourcote 220 followed by colour coats in Resene Uracryl 403 tinted to Resene Soft Apple, Resene Dingley, Resene Clover, Resene Sundown, Resene Roadster and Resene Pohutukawa. The timber deck 'boxes' are in Resene Lumbersider Low Sheen tinted to Resene Sundown and Resene Roadster, the tree stakes are stained in Resene Waterborne Woodsman Banjul and the shade structure posts are in Resene Lumbersider Low Sheen tinted to Resene Shark. Resene Uracryl GraffitiShield protects a number of timber elements against graffiti and helps keep maintenance to a minimum.

Community consultation was carried out throughout the design process, including with mana whenua. During the pre-design phase, this even included consultation with children at a local school where they were asked what they would like to see in the playspace. Once the design was complete, a public exhibition was held at the local mall to gather further feedback in addition to comments sought online and through social media platforms to ensure the plan was reflective of the community's wants and needs.

Nina believes landscape architects involved in playground design must not only deliver a child's happy place but also honour the heritage of the site and the wishes of mana whenua – and colour is a critical element of that. "Colour has the power to welcome and evoke the promise of fun times and pure joy," she says. "The colour palette we used was inspired by the rural and horticultural history of the area – specifically, the site's historic use as strawberry fields and for food production. The red and green hues, Resene Soft Apple, Resene Dingley,



Resene Green Leaf, Resene Clover, Resene Sundown, Resene Roadster and Resene Pohutukawa, take their cues from the strawberry during its various stages of ripening and its foliage. These colours are woven throughout the playground, enlivening its bespoke structures and site furniture – including the metal picnic sets, which also feature laser-cut patterns of abstracted strawberry seeds.”

Further coloured accents can be found inside the play structure’s bespoke timber stacked ‘orchard crate’ tower, which features walls of different hues at each level, as well as the inside wall of the junior structure in the sandpit area. “The pink and red accents in Resene Sundown, Resene Roadster and Resene Pohutukawa also pop when set against the contrasting backdrop of lush green vegetation surrounding the playspace,” adds Nina.

The coloured elements and accents were balanced out by the naturally-weathered purpleheart and robinia timber that was used for the playground equipment while other playground equipment, such as the slide, spinner and fitness equipment, was restricted to a green colour palette. “The play equipment is set into a pale beige and green striped landscape, representing the formal gridded rows of strawberry fields. At one end of the playspace this is interrupted by a series of undulating darker green mounds representing ‘furrows’. Balancing ‘berry balls’ are set into these mounds to reinforce the red, pink and green colour palette, as well as providing opportunities for informal play,” Nina explains.

The environment was also a key consideration for the project. Materials were selected for their longevity, including the Forest Stewardship Council purpleheart timber used throughout the playground and for the site furniture. The shockpad layer of the playground surfacing upcycled approximately 6,480 scrap

right and above: Kopupaka Reserve Playspace brims with welcoming colours that tie into the site’s heritage and history. “The decision was made to incorporate colour into the site furniture as a playful element intended to evoke a sense of fun,” explains Nina Rattray, Principal Landscape Architect at Auckland Council. “Pulling the colour palette across from the playground to the furniture ties the wider space together to create a cohesive and holistic environment.” The picnic tables and benches are painted in Resene Uracryl 403 tinted to Resene Soft Apple, Resene Clover, Resene Sundown, Resene Roadster and Resene Pohutukawa. The feature wall in the play structure is painted in Resene Lumbersider Low Sheen tinted to Resene Dingley.

- Resene Green Leaf
- Resene Shark
- Resene Waterborne Woodsman Banjul



tyres which would have been otherwise destined for incineration. Amenity planting around the playspace includes a wide selection of edible or productive trees and herbs as groundcovers such as thyme, rosemary, grape, olive, wild strawberry, hazelnut and apple. Plus, a number of Environmental Choice-approved Resene products, such as Resene Lumbersider Low Sheen and Resene Waterborne Woodsman, were used to colour various surfaces.

“We used a combination of Resene paints and timber stains, and our product choices were based on the substrate and desired finish for each surface. A gloss finish - Resene Uracryl 403 - was used for the site furniture and picnic sets to provide maximum visual impact, longevity and ensure ease of cleaning whereas a low sheen finish - Resene Lumbersider Low Sheen - was selected for its recessive properties and used on surfaces like the shade structure posts,” says Nina. “The decision was also made to use Resene Uracryl GraffitiShield on the painted elements of timber within the playground along with the in situ concrete seating throughout the playground to enable easier maintenance of the space.”

For Jon Scanlan, Director of Walkspace, the colour palette was key in making the project such an overwhelming success. He says their company began working with the Auckland Council Landscape Architecture Team from a very early conceptual stage to develop and customise Walkspace’s public furniture suites, the large shade structure and other street furniture elements.

“I believe the storytelling and a strong design brief evident from our first early discussions with the project team was instrumental in providing a strong cohesive language that guided each aspect from design, to colour, to form,” says Jon. “The colour palette also adds a high level of interest. We so often work in shades of Resene Blast Grey 1, 2 or 3 so the incorporation of the bold colourways on this project adds a lot of fun. I also think the selected colours integrate into the natural environment successfully and the nesting of seating in the various colourways works really well, as does the supplied artwork which was incorporated into the seating throughout the park. Our accessible drink fountains and bike racks encourage alternative forms of transport to the site and extend the time people can stay. And the result is a successful urban space that can be utilised and enjoyed by a wide range of people that is different from any other public space we have worked on.

“We are really proud of our involvement on the project and the effectiveness of the colour aesthetically but also reinforcing the story of the site’s past,” adds Jon. “The greatest part of the project is seeing people utilise and enjoy the space.”



left: The colourful 'berry balls' are just one of many design elements that hark back to the site's former fruit production history and tie into the Resene paint and wood stain colours used across the project, including Resene Soft Apple, Resene Dingley, Resene Clover, Resene Sundown, Resene Roadster, Resene Pohutukawa, Resene Shark and Resene Waterborne Woodsman Banjul.



Playground People was another collaborator on the project who assisted in realising Auckland Council's vision for the space. Through a series of workshops, they made suggestions and fed back iterative rendered models of Nina's initial sketches to refine play elements to fit the theme, maximise the play value and comply with safety standards.

"During the design and engineering process, we always keep in mind the final design that could be realistically manufactured, installed and maintained to provide many years of fun and memories," says Kane McFadden of Playground People. "The core structures were all made in our South Auckland Factory. Each 'strawberry box' was constructed individually before being transported to site and then lifted into place."

"From start to finish this has been a very collaborative process with all parties aiming to deliver the same great outcome," adds Kane. "Nina and the Auckland Council team did a wonderful job of creating not just a children's playground, but a real

community focal point with a range of different elements for all ages and abilities. In modern urban villages with increasing density and housing intensification, often a mix of people are brought together to form brand new communities. Kopupaka is a wonderful community space that offers a range of facilities and provides a space to play, exercise, socialise and meet new neighbours that caters to all ages – not just children.

"The colour palette, inspired by the lifecycle of a ripening strawberry, was an interesting choice for a children's playspace – which usually rely more on the primary colours – but it works really well. It helps tie the space together with the cohesive colours used in the matting, furniture, EPDM balance balls and all the painted sections on the play equipment."

When asked about his favourite elements, Kane found it difficult to choose. "The playground has been a tremendous success and it gets a lot of use. I like to keep an eye on things and so I regularly head out there mid-week to see how particular elements are going.

I love nothing better than turning up on a normal Tuesday morning and seeing 20+ cars in the carpark and the playground full of pre-schoolers and their parents or grandparents. It's always very satisfying to see the playspace so well used with lots of happy memories being created." *BW*

architectural and colour specification

Auckland Council Landscape Architecture Team
build, painting, play equipment supply and design
 HEB Construction, www.heb.co.nz
 Playground People, www.playgrounds.co.nz
 Quality Build Limited, www.qualitybuild.co.nz
 Walkspace, www.walkspace.co.nz

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