

*"When I was a child I actually believed that the purpose of **church steeples** was to **attract lightning**. I thought they must be meant to **protect** all the other **houses** and **buildings**, and that seemed very gallant to me"*

*John Ames.*



Antanas Procuta  
**ARCHITECTS**

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**07.12**

# Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Commentary by Denise Irvine

ALTERING A CITY LANDMARK calls for **good listening skills**, as much as good design. And in the case of Hamilton's Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it also called for a team effort involving the parish and Antanas Procuta Architects, commissioned to design an enlargement of this much-loved church.

For Antanas Procuta and Mathias Nill, who have worked on the design, there was a **strong need to get to know the church and its people**, to learn what was important to accommodate a growing congregation but retain the building's many treasured aspects.

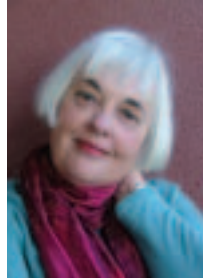
THE BRICK CATHEDRAL, BUILT IN 1975, sits proudly on a knoll in Hamilton East, facing towards the Waikato River. Yet there is an anomaly here in that the Cathedral was designed without front doors and windows opening to a view of the river, and the city it serves.

CONT'D OVERLEAF

NOTE *Images depicted are Concept Design drawings*

*"It's a lovely place.  
it has a warmth about it;  
it is a very much-loved church"*

Father Frank Eggleton



*The font will sit in a graceful, light-filled space*



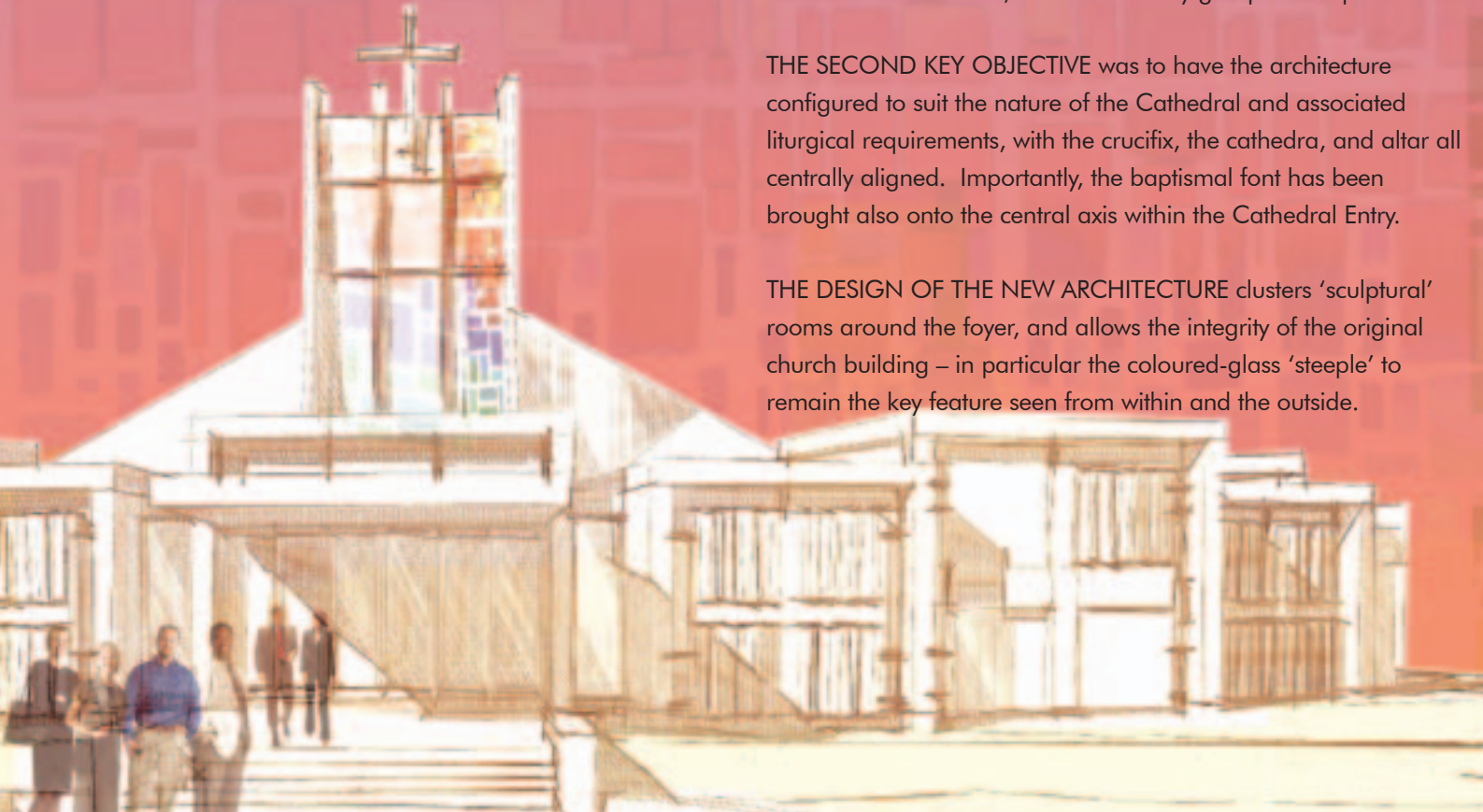
*Project architects Mathias Nill and Antanas Procuta  
with Cathedral parish priest Father Frank Eggleton.*

IN EARLY 2006, Antanas Procuta Architects was commissioned to design a proposed major extension of the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary, one of Hamilton's few landmark buildings.

ONE OF TWO IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES was the creation of an architecture that enables flexibility in the cathedral to suit different celebrations and congregations – from overflowing large Easter and Christmas masses, to smaller family groups for baptisms.

THE SECOND KEY OBJECTIVE was to have the architecture configured to suit the nature of the Cathedral and associated liturgical requirements, with the crucifix, the cathedra, and altar all centrally aligned. Importantly, the baptismal font has been brought also onto the central axis within the Cathedral Entry.

THE DESIGN OF THE NEW ARCHITECTURE clusters 'sculptural' rooms around the foyer, and allows the integrity of the original church building – in particular the coloured-glass 'steeple' to remain the key feature seen from within and the outside.



# growing & enhancing connections

Sanctuary Area enlarged to allow all the Priests of the Diocese to celebrate Mass together.

CHOIR / MUSIC GROUPS AREA

Baptism is the way that Catholics enter the church, & this is celebrated by placing the baptismal font at the entry.



BAPTISMAL FONT

The entrance has been designed to open the Cathedral to the city, and to welcome all.

to grey Street

BISHOP'S CHAIR

The Cathedral is raised and located on the Entry axis of the Cathedral & altar in order to emphasize the Cathedral as being the 'home' of the Bishop within the Diocese

ENTRY

KITCHEN.

FLEXIBLE SEATING

Every Cathedral has to comfortably accommodate the smallest to the largest of congregations, from small services to the over-flowing celebrations at Easter & Christmas. Sets of folding glazed screens allow the Cathedral seating to be configured for a variety of uses.

Lady Chapel Enlarged.

transformation

## COMMENTARY CONT'D

MAKING THIS CONNECTION to river and people is a key part of the sympathetic and stunning development designed by the architects. **Their work retains the warmth and charm of the original plan**, with new features to surprise and delight parishioners as they enter the building.

A PEDESTRIAN ENTRANCE WILL LEAD FROM GREY ST UP TO a piazza, then to a generous front door and substantially enlarged foyer, with a series of small rooms radiating off it. Windows in the foyer will offer glimpses through to the body of the Cathedral; as people enter they will walk past a fine new limestone baptismal font designed by painter and sculptor Michael Pervan. The font - incorporating gently flowing water - will sit in a **graceful, light-filled space**, a symbol of entrance to the church through baptism. **Flexible seating** near the font will enable the area to be used for smaller services.

THE CATHEDRAL'S SOARING, iconic stained glass window, containing the Resurrection scene from the earlier church on the Hamilton East site, will remain in its dominant position, still **boldly visible** from Grey St, and still a strong focus of the interior.



*View towards the cathedral altar*



It will be further enhanced by the effect of a new skylight.

*"THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS we are not touching,"* says parish priest Father Frank Eggleton. And, needless to say, the magnificent window is among these, as is the altar, and the tabernacle area with its four beautiful stained glass windows.

THE CURRENT CHILDREN'S ROOMS will be transformed to accommodate the choir and, directly opposite, the intimate Our Lady's Chapel is also to be extended. A major change will be made to the sanctuary; this will be enlarged to accommodate more people, and provide **greater flexibility for the liturgical needs** of the Cathedral. The Bishop's Chair will sit on a raised area, with the building's distinctive pitched ceiling sweeping upwards at this point, accommodating the **sanctuary expansion** and clearly featuring the chair.

AS FATHER FRANK DESCRIBES the changes, he looks around the Cathedral's **precious artefacts** and spaces, and says:

*"It's a lovely place. It has a warmth about it; it is a very much-loved church."*

#### FOOTNOTE

Antanas Procuta Architects' design was developed with assistance from the Cathedral building committee, **Bishop Denis Browne**, **Father Frank Eggleton**, parish project manager **Peter Egan**, the congregation, and the Holmes Consulting Group. Chibnall Swan Architects alongside other consultants have been contracted to produce the working drawings. Building is to begin in the New Year.



*The Cathedral's distinctive pitched ceiling*

## xmas hours

WE WILL BE CLOSING for the  
Xmas break on **Friday 21**

**December** and will re-open on  
**Monday 07 January 2008.**

*our very best wishes for  
a happy holiday season*

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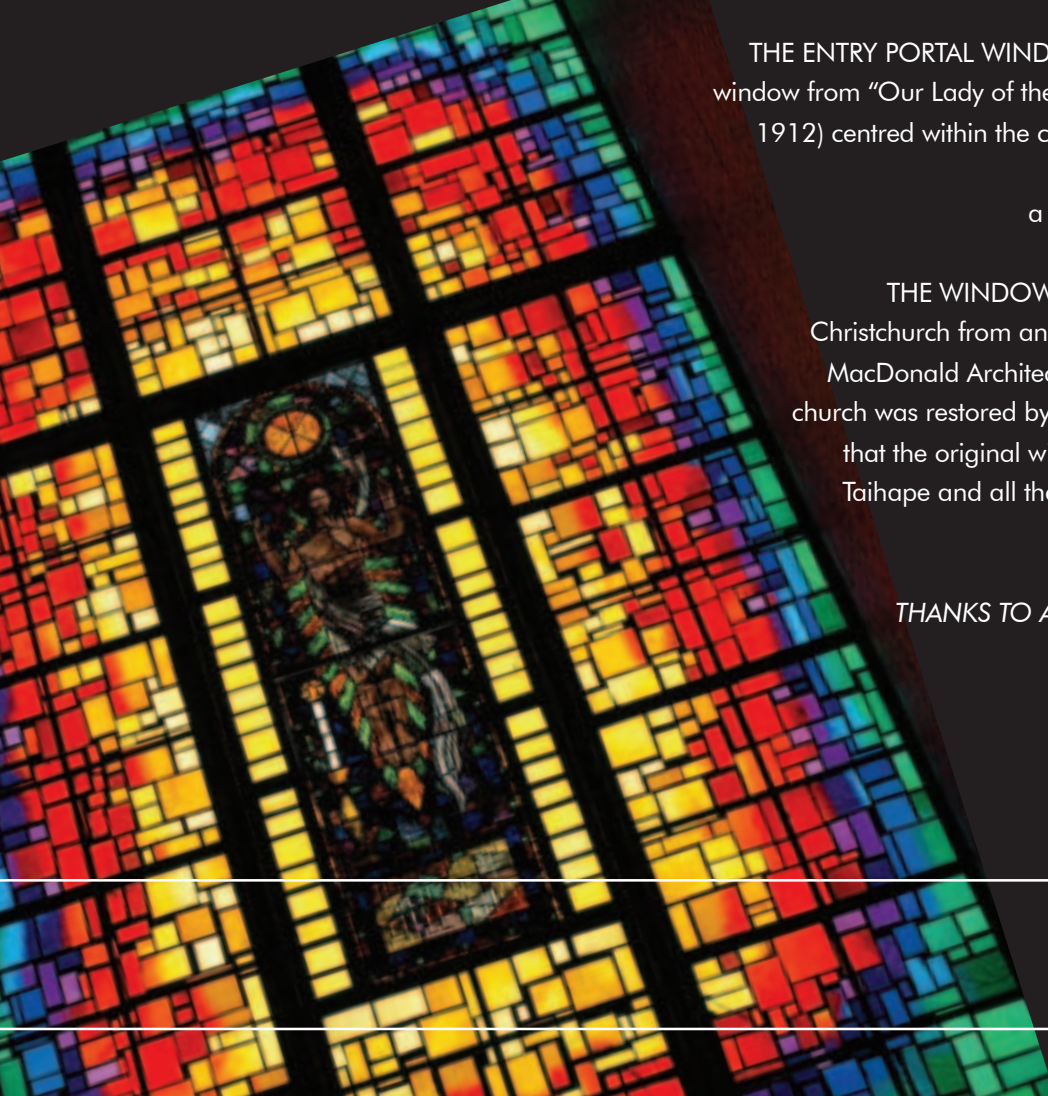
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THE ENTRY PORTAL WINDOW comprises the Resurrection stained glass window from “Our Lady of the Rosary” (the original church at this site, built 1912) centred within the coloured epoxy resin ‘leadlight’ window which became a key feature of the new Church, built in 1975.

THE WINDOW WAS CRAFTED BY HAMPTONS STUDIOS in Christchurch from an original concept designed by White, White & MacDonald Architects. The old Resurrection window from the old church was restored by stained glass artist in Hamilton. It is believed that the original windows were made by a stained glass artist in Taihape and all the stained glass windows were incorporated in the present church.

*THANKS TO Architect Alan MacDonald (now of Takapuna).*

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