



NATURAL HABITATS
LANDSCAPES

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New Design Direction in Children's Playgrounds

Natural Habitats has again taken design to a new level with its innovative and cutting edge children's play area in Manukau's Botany Down Town Centre which officially opens on Friday 5 December 2008.

When given the brief by Botany Downs Shopping Mall owner AMP, award winning designer at Natural Habitats, Mark Read, wanted to design an area for children distinctly different from most playgrounds by creating a stimulating story-book-themed play area that enabled young children to use their brains.

The design which includes a 'little earth' (a take on Middle earth with Hobbit House, giant mushrooms and rocks), leading into other areas - a giant Lizard and Snakes game with spinning wheel as a dice and a fun maze. All components of the Natural Habitats design have a distinctively New Zealand feel with native plants and the use of lizards instead of snakes and a koru design in the maze.

Before the creation of the mythological garden, Garden Lane's middle section was an underutilised part of the shopping precinct. Botany Town Centre wanted the vicinity to become a destination by integrating a children's play area into the landscaped gardens and covering three walkways. This allows for a flow-on effect of increased sales for the lane's neighbouring retail stores.

Natural Habitats have always looked outside the square in all their landscape design projects and this is no exception. The children have been captivated, as to with the adults, "The play area is critiquable for adults but believable for children" says designer Mark. "There is a certain curiosity towards the play area and this draws the children in. In particular, the real life hobbit house built with smoke billowing from its chimney has been mesmerising".

The design has six different entry areas including a grand entrance to make children feel they are walking into a fairy-tale world. The design intended to be partly mysterious so that children were stimulated and used their imagination. The area has designed to be artistically in proportion and at child-scale which has enabled viewing from store level.

Jennifer Manning, Senior Centre Manager at Botany Town Centre, said her team was thrilled with the results and looked forward to opening the Children's Garden and play area to the public. "There's a lot more greenery and activities that will appeal to families. It gives children somewhere to play and explore and, in the middle of a busy city, it's a green, spacious place for people to come and relax or spend time outdoors with loved ones."

Natural Habitats have been observing children using the play area and have noticed an interesting comparison to other generic play areas. "It is much calmer than you typically see

in this environment. The interactive area is certainly far quieter than most playgrounds because children are thinking as opposed to doing,” says designer Mark. The length of time spent at the play area was also noted as being quite long, because the children found it stimulating.

Natural Habitats Landscape Team, who also constructed the play area from Mark’s design, has been very pleased with the result. They have said that as the planting grows the play area will start to become an even more mysterious and interesting area for the children.

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