

Travel

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INSIDE

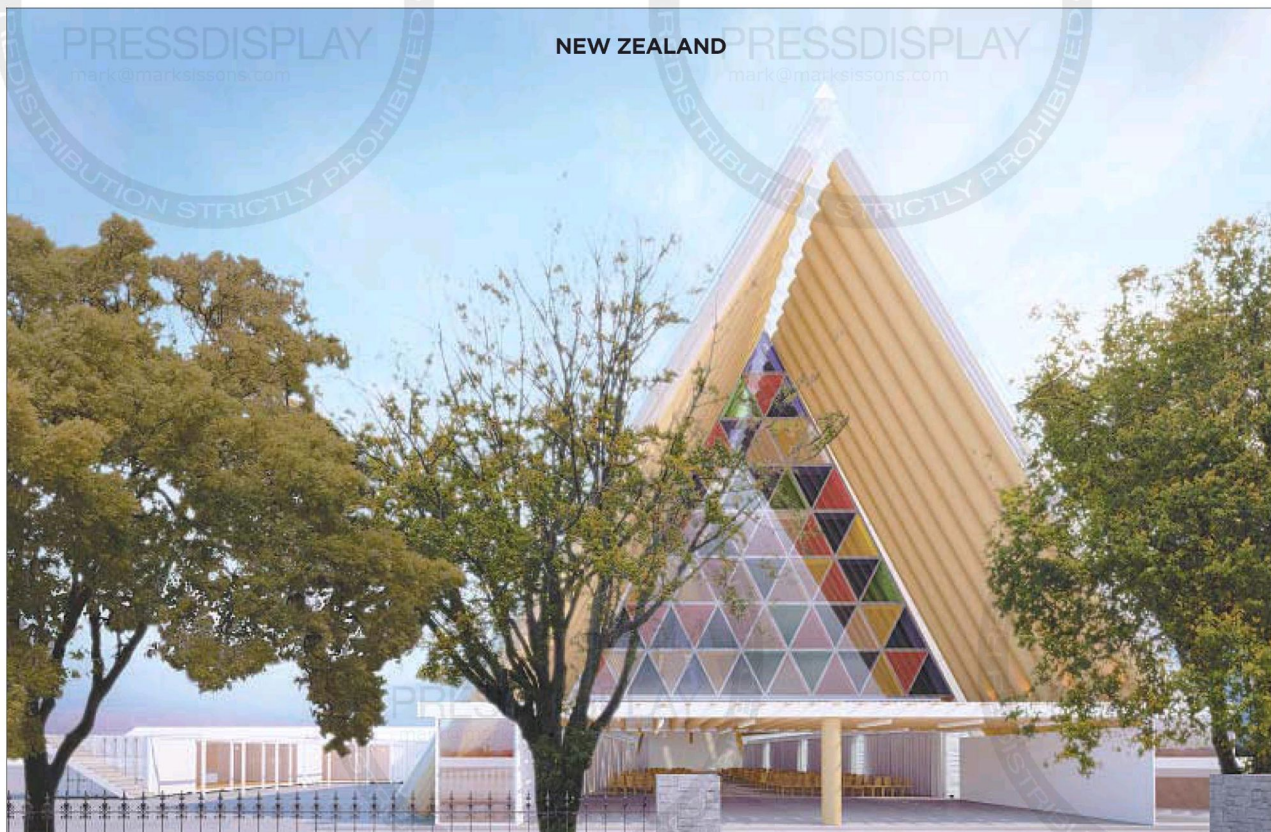
FAMILY TRAVEL: This year's travel trends **2K**

TOM PARSONS: Spring break airfare strategies **2K**

ALL ABOARD: Grand Central station at 100 **4K**

VOLKYLAND: Bug-lovers' paradise **6K**

NEW ZEALAND



Mark Sissons/Special Contributor

Upon its completion this spring, Christchurch's "Cardboard Cathedral" will house 700 worshippers in a semipermanent structure that's built of wood, steel and cardboard.

Movable feats

'Transitional' architecture is transforming
earthquake-ravaged Christchurch

By MARK SISSONS
Special Contributor

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand — A paper house of worship that seats 700. A pop-up shopping mall consisting of brightly painted shipping containers and pop-up bars with funky names such as King of Snake and Smash Palace.

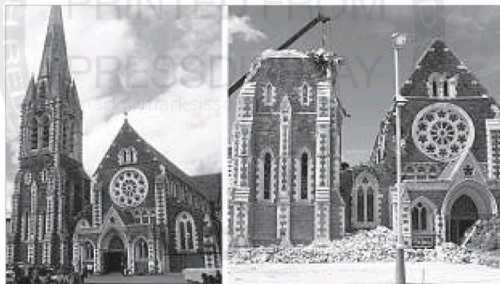
Sounds like something you'd encounter in design-mad Japan or über-chic Berlin. Not in conservative Christchurch.

Before the massive earthquake that hit on Feb. 22, 2011, killing 182 and destroying much of the downtown, New Zealand's second-largest city was an architectural byword for traditional, not trendy.

Not anymore.

See **TRANSITIONAL** Page 5K

Transitional buildings change city's look



File/Agence France-Presse

Before-and-after photos show the irreparable damage to Christchurch Cathedral in the February 2011 earthquake.

Continued from Page 1K

In the wake of the disaster, impermanent structures designed to kick-start urban life, including a temporary rugby stadium mounted on steel tubes, are popping up all over town. Most inspiring is the five-story-high "Cardboard Cathedral" that's soon set to replace iconic Christchurch Cathedral, irreparably damaged in the quake.

"The Cardboard Cathedral will be open to all denominations and stand as a universal symbol of the city's recovery," says Anglican church spokesman Craig Dixon. The hope is that the church will be a vital element in the city's long journey toward recovery.

It will also be a place where people can come to enjoy edgy architecture. A lifelong design buff, Dixon says he

got the radical idea from an article he read that featured the work of Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, who specializes in emergency architecture — designing temporary structures in disaster zones around the world. Ban created a similar structure for the people of Kobe after a massive earthquake devastated their city in 1995.

'A crazy idea'

"When I approached church staff about putting up a temporary structure and inviting this Japanese guy to come and design it, they thought it was a crazy idea. But eventually they said sure, get in touch," recalls Dixon. Ban agreed to come to New Zealand for discussions, and soon the project was born.

Construction began in July 2012 on a foundation of 60-foot-long tubes



Marty Melville/Agence France-Presse

Architect Shigeru Ban's design for a temporary cathedral uses cardboard tubing to support the structure.



Mark Sissons/Special Contributor

A temporary outdoor retail area in downtown Christchurch called Re:START uses sturdy, easily transportable shipping containers to house shops and cafes.

protected by a polycarbonate roof and solid concrete flooring, with added support from lumber beams. Initial concerns that worshippers might meet their soggy ends in a collapsing house of cards proved unfounded, as did aftershock worries: Paper buildings are very earthquake resistant.

As are shipping containers, which is partially why they were used in Re:START, a splashy temporary outdoor retail space in downtown Christchurch.

Opened in October 2011, Re:START now includes approximately 40 shops, a number of food caravans and a popular market on the weekend.

"The idea was to give these businesses an opportunity to recover, and to have something safe that people would want to come back to," explains guide David Hiatt as we tour this colorful collection of high-end clothing outlets, memorabilia shops, banks and trendy cafes. Easily relocated, they're all stacked and scattered like so many giant Lego pieces within easy walk of some of the city's accommodations, its art gallery and the Avon River.

"We didn't have a shop in Christ-

church before, but because of the short leases on these containers it made it more attractive," says Helen Morrish, manager of the Mini Cooper Clothing Co., which occupies one of the containers. "People don't know what to expect, so they are always surprised by how nice it is."

A hit with locals

Built with a mind to attract tourists, this kaleidoscopic retail mix is also a hit with the locals.

"It's just a wonderful area with a really funky look," says Christchurch retiree Helen Martin. "At first, all I wanted to do was sit in the middle of them and just look. They literally popped up out of nowhere."

Christchurch's embrace of such unusual architecture, whether religious or retail oriented, is a testament to the ability to create beauty amid bereavement.

"The Cardboard Cathedral will be a real symbol of hope for our recovery and a creative statement that will encourage others to get out there and do something unique, too," says Dixon.

Mark Sissons is a freelance writer in Canada.

When you go

Getting there

Air New Zealand offers daily nonstop service to Auckland from Los Angeles and San Francisco, with connections to Christchurch. airnewzealand.com

Hotels

■ The George is a boutique luxury hotel offering five-star accommodations situated in the heart of Christchurch, just steps from the city's cultural precinct and key attractions. thegeorge.com

■ Otahuna Lodge is a historic 30-acre Relais & Châteaux luxury estate located a 25-minute drive from Christchurch International Airport. otahuna.co.nz

Dining and nightlife

New cafes, restaurants and shops are popping up frequently. Check out popupcity.co.nz for the latest dining and nightlife options.

Out and about

Within two hours of Christchurch you can ski, play golf and bungee jump; go whitewater rafting, mountain biking, wind surfing or whale watching; and visit world-class vineyards and gardens. Canterbury Guiding Co. offers private guided tours within Christchurch and the Canterbury region. canterburyguides.com
For more info, visit newzealand.com.