



# Rethinking urban design

**JAMES BAKER**

As the housing crisis deepens and families struggle to find a home, developer Charles Ma thinks it's time to change the way we build.

The 28-year-old is the chief executive of MADE and the managing director of the Auranga development, a subdivision set on the outskirts of Drury West, set to bring 2650 new homes to the area in its first stage.

However Auranga is a little bit different from your typical subdivision.

While some of the housing options available at the moment are reasonably spacious, ranging up to 260 square metres, it will set you back \$1.2 million to purchase that extra leg room.

So for many young buyers the smallest option priced at \$590,000 is more realistic.

However, that also means living and possibly raising a family in a building measuring 90 square metres, roughly one-third the size of a tennis court.

But that's not a problem, says Ma.

"My generation doesn't need a huge yard in the back they need to maintain, they'd rather go out there, have a picnic, say hello to the neighbours.

"But a lot of people don't understand this fundamental principal."

To Ma, Auckland's housing crisis isn't about land, it's about design.

Because while some houses in the Auranga development have small footprints, with parks, coastal walkways and community gardens nearby there's

plenty of space to throw a ball - just not on your own lawn.

"It's about encouraging people out to get out."

The result allows residents to live in high density, while also keeping a sense of space.

"It's a different way of living."

This philosophy of 'shared space' can also be seen in Auranga's road design.

Pedestrians and bikes take priority over vehicles. Footpaths are wide but roads are narrow, bikes have their own lane, while raised crossing platforms are forming quasi speed-bumps.

"People have asked me 'why did you make it so narrow? It's not very convenient for the cars'.

"I've said 'well it's not actually about the cars here mate'."

Ma says the approach has already been remarkably effective when used well.

"We took inspiration from Hobsonville, it was outperforming the market far more in sales volume and price points.

"People said they could only do that because it was [Auckland Council], we wanted to go beyond that, and take it to the private sector."

Ma believes the use of 'shared space' and other innovative concepts can provide a solution to many of our housing issues, but it will also require a change in the way we approach subdivision development.

"This is so different from how we've always done things, which has always been very reactive, not proactive."

He says Auranga's unconventional design has caused him to repeatedly butt heads with Auckland

Transport and Auckland Council about everything from the position of the cycling lanes, to the type of concrete used in the sidewalk.

"It was a nightmare. We had to redesign Bremner Rd seven times, and each redesign takes three months.

"There's a conflict right now, there are groups of people who feel things need to be done in a particular way.

"That needs to change."



**At 90 square metres, Auranga's cheapest option might be considered cramped by Kiwi standards.**

SUPPLIED



**Charles Ma, 28, chief executive of MADE, says it's time to rethink how we build.**

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