

THE LOCAL



Te Aro

NGĀ KARERE HAPORI O TE ARO

EARTHQUAKE LEGISLATION DISAPPOINTS INNER CITY



A group representing owners of apartment buildings in the inner city says changes being made by the Government to the legislation around earthquake prone buildings won't provide the help they need.

The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill was touted by the Government as a sensible response to the escalating costs of remedi-

ation and insurance facing apartment buildings from seismic standards that kept shifting. But Inner City Wellington's group of affected apartment owners says the changes won't do much to help them, as exemptions mainly apply to smaller buildings or those in other regions. The legislation will leave many in an "impossible" situation regarding compliance.

Read more on page 3. [▶](#)

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Earthquake legislation disappoints inner city

Owners of Wellington apartment buildings considered to be earthquake prone are feeling let down by proposed legislation changes that will do little to help them. Alex Brocklehurst reports.

A group of Wellington apartment owners says a new approach to regulate buildings' seismic resilience won't provide the relief they sorely need.

The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill was introduced to Parliament last year, aiming to reduce costs for owners.

Although the changes will be significant for some – for example, Auckland, Northland and the Chatham Islands would be removed from the regime entirely – there was little change for large multi-unit buildings in Wellington.

Residents' association Inner-City Wellington (ICW) told Select Committee that many of their members would see little to no difference in the costs and obligations they faced, and the treatment of apartment owners under the proposed changes continued to be “disproportionate, unfair and inequitable”.

ICW has estimated that at least 26 multi-owner buildings, with around 500 apartments and around 800 owners, are among the residential earthquake-prone buildings in Wellington.

ICW called on government to provide a package of funding options to cater for owners' different circumstances, such as suspensory loans, grants or buy-outs for buildings where remediation was deemed uneconomical.

“If this work is not done and reflected in the proposals, legislation will be passed knowing it will be impossible for many apartment owners to comply.”

But Chris Penk, Minister for Building and Construction, told *The Local* those options were not being considered in the current fiscal environment.

“However,” he said, “officials at MBIE have been working with stakeholders to identify practical ways to reduce costs and barriers, including for those in multi-unit developments. This includes options to streamline processes and make strengthening work simpler to deliver, for example considering whether certain façade securing work could be exempt from requiring a consent.”

The Wellington City Council anticipated that although the number of earthquake-prone residential buildings in the capital would be reduced by about half, the legislation as currently drafted wouldn't see an equivalent reduction in the number of affected households, because the buildings that remained in scope tended to be larger complexes containing multiple units.

Geraldine Murphy, ICW's spokesperson on earthquake-prone buildings, told *The Local* that the “mental stress” for apartment owners facing the prospect of losing their life savings, being unable to sell, finding it difficult to secure insurance, or threatened with enforcement action, had already taken its toll.

“They can't move on, they're trapped in this system and that translates into physical stress.”

Many apartment owners were retired or approaching retirement and saw their apartment as their ‘forever’ home. Some faced mortgage costs and body corporate fees, on top of increased cost of living pressures.

While the government had said it wouldn't provide taxpayer cash to assist private owners, Geraldine said this wasn't a tenable position.

“It is unreasonable to expect people to pay for remediation to get off a compliance list when it doesn't make economic sense. Commercial owners wouldn't do it, the Crown wouldn't do it.”

Giving evidence to Select Committee, Lambton Ward Councillor Afnan Al-Rubayee called for “meaningful central government support”.

She told *The Local* apartment owners “have worked their entire lives, paid tax, done the right thing, so why is it now the system can't support them?”

Wellington Central MP Tamatha Paul had also called for support to be included with the reforms. Writing to finance minister Nicola Willis and Mr Penk on April 8, she asked government to provide “clear and workable financial support pathways” for apartment owners in multi-unit buildings still required to complete remediation.

The Select Committee is due to report back by 16 June, before the Bill progresses to second reading. **TL**

“It is unreasonable to expect people to pay for remediation to get off a compliance list when it doesn't make economic sense. Commercial owners wouldn't do it, the Crown wouldn't do it.”

Seeing the wood for the trees

There's nothing a Kiwi loves more than external validation from foreigners.

It was welcome and flattering news to learn that a random company conducting a survey has decided Wellington ranks in the top 10 of places to live in world for 20-something year-olds to live – above iconic metropolises such as Tokyo and Amsterdam. You can read about this on the page opposite.

One might be skeptical, but actually the researchers have pretty much nailed it: our compact city, access to nature and relatively good range of career options means we have a quality of life that many other cities can only dream of, not just for Gen Z but for any age.

And while occasionally people will tell me that Wellington is not like it used to be and the characters aren't here any more, I'm not so sure. It is easy to beat ourselves up – we are undoubtedly going through a challenging patch, but it's still a wonderful city with great food, entertainment and people.

One of the things that can set Wellington apart

from other similar cities is its quiriness and embrace of those who don't fit the mainstream. People such as Jarrod Wood – AKA Tree – who dresses up as foliage and plays the saxophone on a regular basis, bringing a bit of lightheartedness to our day. You'll often see him on streets making music and bewildering tourists.

You have to appreciate people who are prepared to go out on a limb – excuse the pun – to bring a sense of joy to the city.

There are days when I have been walking home from work, full of the woes of the world, and I see Tree and my heart just lifts. I smile and laugh and somehow it resets my perspective and things don't seem quite so serious and grim. You can read more about the man behind the leaves on page 15.

Although I adore Tree, it's probably not that obvious – I'll just smile and continue on my way. Next time I'll wave out. Perhaps it's time for us all to be a bit more demonstrative with our appreciation – of

Tree and of all the things we love about this city, and make sure we don't just take them for granted. Because we sure as hell want them to stick around. **TL**



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Editor

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWS

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Wellington top 10 for Gen Z

Wellington has made it into the top 10 of places for Gen Z to move to in the world

The survey was dominated by Scandinavian and European cities – Copenhagen (Denmark), Bern (Switzerland), Groningen (Netherlands) – alongside a handful of American cities. Wellington was the only city in the southern hemisphere that made it into the top 20, ranking higher than Amsterdam, Boston, Tokyo and Munich.

The survey, carried out by Remitly scored cities based on nine categories “that actually matter when you’re young and starting out somewhere new”: rent affordability, youth unemployment rate, safety index, LGBTQ+ equality, broadband speed, affordability of a night out, quality of life index, average monthly net salary, and share of population aged 20–29.

The authors said Wellington’s score “might surprise a few people,” but “Wellington consistently punches above its weight”.

While average salaries were lower than Europe and North America, “Wellington offers something harder to quantify: a tight-knit community, stunning natural surroundings, and a quality of life score... that more than justifies its place on this list”. **TL**

Fashion event for City Gallery

A three-day fashion event in June has ambitions of becoming a major regular event for designers and creative practitioners.

Common Material (5–7 June) brings together four of Wellington’s most significant fashion labels for a three-day programme at City Gallery Wellington: leather goods label Yu Mei, independent fashion project JPALM, circular fashion brand Kowtow and long-running label twenty-seven names.

The initiators hope the event will become an on-going biennial that draws in furniture designers, typographers, architects, jewellers, ceramicists and other creative practitioners and eventually reflects the full breadth of Wellington’s design output.

The three-day programme will be the first public opening of City Gallery building in Te Ngākau Civic Square in over two years, ahead of its formal re-opening in October following strengthening and upgrades. **TL**



Iconic Te Aro buildings and meticulously restored workers’ cottages are among Te Aro heritage buildings that owners want to de-list.

Owners of heritage-listed buildings and buildings in heritage areas throughout the city were surveyed by the Wellington City Council in March to find out their attitudes towards their heritage status.

This followed a failed attempt by some councillors to remove buildings from the heritage schedule as part of the District Plan review.

Surveys were sent out to owners of 574 heritage buildings, 51 heritage structures and 777 sites within 43 heritage areas.

Owners of 61 schedule 1 heritage buildings – including around 20 in Te Aro – told surveyors they wanted to remove their heritage listing,

A further 37 properties with multiple owners had at least one owner that wanted the heritage listing removed, including around 15 in Te Aro.

Among the schedule 1 heritage buildings seeking de-listing were the Paramount Theatre on Courtenay Place and the Cambridge Hotel on Cambridge Terrace. Worker’s cottages at 5 and 7 Tonks Grove also requested de-listing. The 1880s cottages were moved out of the way of the Karo Drive bypass in the early 2000s and fully renovated by Transit New Zealand in 2010.

Of 564 total respondents 74.5% agreed or strongly agreed that heritage items contribute to Wellington’s unique identity, 14.7% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Councillors at the City Strategy and Delivery committee meeting in May noted the report and agreed that council should advocate for “a fair process and/or law changes within the new planning system that will provide owners of heritage listed properties a chance to challenge their categorisation”. **TL**

New broom for old laws

Wellington's Parliament is the place where laws are made – but what happens to laws that are no longer relevant?

Jane O'Loughlin reports.

The Wellington City Sanitation Loan Empowering Act 1892 allowed the council to raise a loan of £165,000 pounds in order to build “an efficient system of drainage for the city, whereby the sewage and drainage of the city will be conveyed and discharged direct into the sea in Cook Strait.”

Cynics might observe that due to recent events, our sewage treatment hasn't moved very far beyond that approach. Nevertheless, the Parliamentary Act allowing the Wellington City Council to raise this large loan is no longer necessary, and it's for the cull, along with a stack of other outdated laws.

The Parliamentary Counsel Office and the Department of Internal Affairs have been sifting through some of New Zealand's oldest laws, and are now attempting to get rid of those we no longer need.

Public consultation is currently underway regarding 51 Acts – asking whether they can be removed or whether anyone still wants them.

This is the second round of Acts undergoing public consultation as part of the Legislation Repeals Project, which involves the review of approximately 900 pieces of New Zealand's oldest legislation to determine whether the legislation is still required.

Among them is the Wellington City Milk Supply Act 1919 which gained some notoriety a few years ago when lawyer Tyrone Barugh attempted to use the law to get a milk licence in Wellington – and then attempted to take the Wellington City Council to the High Court when it refused.

He eventually withdrew his legal action when the council threatened to pursue costs.

Lizzie Dieckermann from the PCO says that particular case was “unusual” but in general spent legislation that is still in force can cause unnecessary costs and confusion to Councils and other users.

“For example, a Council may need to use legal resource to understand how it can use a specific



'Councillors and ex-councillors of the Milk Committee who successfully inaugurated the Municipal Milk Supply of Wellington N.Z.' Source: wellington.recollect.co.nz

piece of Council-owned land if there is a historical Act in force which provides that the land is held in trust for a specific purpose or can only be used in a certain way.”

So why do outdated acts remain on the books? The problem is one of scale, according to Lizzie. 7,614 principal Acts have been enacted in New Zealand's legislative history of which 5,756 have already been repealed.

“With the pressures of drafting legislation for present day issues, some older Acts can be overlooked or delayed for repeal.”

In some cases, this may be because an Act is very obscure or specific, for example the Hamerton Pension Act 1891 which granted an annual pension of 250 pounds to Wellingtonian Robert Chisenhall Hamerton for the term of his natural life.

In other cases authorities are waiting until there are further Acts to repeal so that House time can be used efficiently.

Lizzie says the current project should help remove the potential for confusion as the statute book grows – at a rate of around 2.5 percent each year.

“The weight of words is making harder for users to find and understand the law. The Legislation Repeals Project is one piece of the solution: by removing redundant legislation, we will have a hope of seeing the wood for the trees.” TL

Find out more about the laws proposed to be repealed here: pco.govt.nz/about-us/about-new-zealand-legislation/legislation-repeals-project

Puppy love: The art of the cuddle

On Wellington's waterfront, a parade of SPCA puppies is proving that the smallest things often make the biggest impact.
By **Indy Radcar.**

Cuddles" is a word Julia says a lot. Also, "puppy power". To hear Julia talk about her 'dog squad' – a group of volunteers with small puppies in tow – it becomes clear that puppy power is more than a catchphrase.

A gifted dog trainer, Julia has discovered a clever way to socialise puppies while promoting the work of the SPCA. The squad meets regularly to walk the SPCA's puppies along Wellington's waterfront, creating a spectacle of fluorescent vests and wagging tails. At the squad's approach, there's a momentary derailing, as everyone from toddlers to tourists simply melts.

The puppies, generally aged between 8 and 16 weeks, are at the perfect developmental window to begin socialising with people. For those puppies whose parvo vaccinations haven't yet kicked in, a willing cluster of volunteers ensures their paws never touch the soil, often carrying the prized cargo for an hour at a time.

"The aim is to get the puppies out, get them socialised, and learning basic manners," Julia says. "They see how lovely people are and how well they're treated. The experience produces fabulous puppies and makes them much easier to rehome."

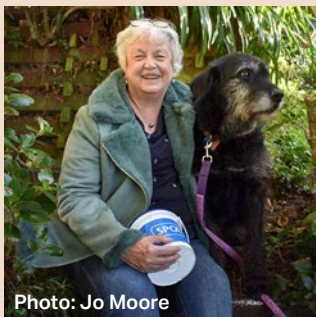


Photo: Jo Moore

The benefits, however, are not strictly canine. Julia has observed that what is good for puppies is good for people – an observation that took on profound weight in the aftermath of the Christchurch mosque attacks. Shortly



after that day, the squad had barely left the car park when people began approaching.

"For two hours we were pinned to the same spot," Julia recalls. "Everybody just wanted puppy cuddles. And of course, the only conversation that day was the tragedy. There were a lot of tears, but the reaction to the puppies was incredible – it was puppy power, it really was."

Since then, the puppies' therapeutic reach has extended beyond the waterfront. SPCA puppies are now an official part of Fire and Emergency New Zealand's resilience training in Wellington. Brought in at the end of intense sessions, the dogs provide a much-needed reset for first responders facing high-stress environments.

And you don't need to be human to benefit. Occasionally, the squad welcomes guest dogs like Attila the Hun, an Anatolian Shepherd of formidable size. Attie, as he is called for short, joined the group after years of professional training failed to curb his unruly behaviour, leaving his owners exasperated.

"For the first couple of sessions, I could hear Attie barking in the background, as he trailed behind the group," Julia says. "But then something happened. He started walking with the group and his job became looking after our puppies – he calmed down and became much more obedient."

Helping adults and dogs alike, Julia's simple idea proves that "socialisation" isn't a one-way street. The walks allow the puppies to learn from the world, and, for a brief moment, the world to forget. **TL**

Painting the people he knows

Kerry Meadows-Bonner looks at how Te Aro artist Clark Roworth is quietly turning everyday people into award-worthy portraits.

From a shared studio space in Te Aro to one of the country's most respected art stages, Clark Roworth has been named as finalist in the Adam Portraiture Award, selected from 429 entries and narrowed to just 43 artists by an international judge.

For Clark, it starts with the person.

"I tend to paint people I know quite well or closely," he said. "It's a lot about the subject themselves and then the idea comes kind of later, through talking with them and sitting with them."

That carried into 2026's nominated work – a portrait of tattoo artist, Zier Mantenga, an oil on canvas with a focus on Zier's tattoos.

This year's award introduced a requirement for artists to work from at least one live sitting, bringing a different kind of connection into the process.

His portraits are built around people he knows, often shaped by observation which leans toward realism and focuses on everyday people.

"It's also how certain people are viewed in normal society. How I'm trying to highlight normal people," he said.

Clark often has a list of ideas, sitting on them for months before committing to canvas. But when it comes time to paint, the process isn't always easy.

"I have people I want to paint right now... it could be up to a year in advance," he said. "But I go through a journey while I'm painting. It goes through an ugly

"It's a lot about the subject themselves and then the idea comes kind of later, through talking with them and sitting with them."

stage for me. It can be a rollercoaster, honestly."

Even so, self doubt still creeps in.

"I'll just change it up, change up my day. I've normally got multiple things on the go for that reason. You know, just to keep it interesting and keep that feeling like I can do it." he said.

As a fulltime young artist being named a finalist is special for Clark.

"It's just like a nice reminder that people see my artwork. And it was always a big goal of mine. Before I (was first nominated) it was quite a milestone for me. It's a nice validation." he said.

Looking ahead, his goals are simple: to keep painting, keep improving, and maintain the life he's built around his craft.

"Honestly, if I can just keep doing exactly what I'm doing now and just be comfortable. I have a great life and I just want to keep going." **TL**



Honey, I shrunk the apartment

Living large (enough) in small inner-city spaces. By **Jill Wilson, ICW.**

You put the kettle on, open the fridge, and sit on the couch. All without taking a step. Welcome to modern inner-city apartment living. Thanks to changing rules, apartments are getting smaller, smarter, and perhaps just a little bit ‘hobbyity’.

In this world, everything has a double life. The chair is also a wardrobe. The bed is a lounge, an office, and – if you’re feeling optimistic – a place to sleep. Every object must justify its existence. Even the toaster is on thin ice.

And Wellington adds fun elements. There’s always a damp jacket, or two, needing a home, or a mangled umbrella needing a place to rest. Laundry becomes an interior installation piece.

And then there’s the question of people. Hosting dinner requires choreography. “Pop over for a drink” becomes a timed event with strict capacity limits. Overnight guests are a logistics exercise.

Perhaps small spaces can make us inventive?

Mitre 10 in Tory Street sells collapsible buckets that fold neatly onto a shelf – perfect for tight storage. Handy too if you ever need to store water in a hurry should a city-wide emergency knock out the water system and the bathroom is suddenly off-limits!

So here’s the thing: small apartments don’t just change how we live day-to-day – they also change how we prepare for the unexpected.

Emergency advice tells us to store water, food, and basic supplies for 7–10 days. In a larger home, that’s a cupboard or the shed or garage. In a small apartment, that’s... where, exactly?

So we improvise. An emergency can become an exciting game of hide and seek – are the supplies under the bed, behind the couch, next to the shoes, on top of the wardrobe, in the fridge ... or?



As apartments shrink, our lives don’t necessarily follow. We’re working from home more. Collecting hobbies, bikes, pets – and occasionally other humans.

Life expands, even when the floor plan does not.

The direction of travel is becoming clearer. The aim is affordability. The effect is that “small” is no longer just design – it’s policy.

There’s so much to love about inner-city apartment living. You’re close to everything. You’re part of something bigger and energetic. So how can “live-able” and “affordable” meet in practice?

Is the answer clever storage and fold-away furniture? Proximity to cafés and waterfront walks? Or all of the above – along with enough space to function day to day?

As rules relax on minimum apartment sizes, we need to ensure that “small” doesn’t become “too small” to live safely and comfortably. We might be getting very good at living with less space – but we shouldn’t have to shrink our lives to fit it.

And if we are to live in smaller apartments, then let’s make sure new buildings include shared community spaces and places for storing things, to replace what’s been lost.

Because when private space shrinks, shared space starts to matter a lot more. **TL**



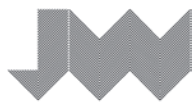
Mitre 10 in Tory Street sells collapsible buckets that fold neatly onto a shelf – perfect for tight storage.



COMMUNITY NOTICEBOARD

Do you have a regular or one-off event, class or service you would like to promote? Community notices are free for local groups and not-for-profits. Get in touch if you would like to include your listing in *The Local*.

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Probus Wellington Central



The next meeting of Probus Wellington Central is on May 15 at 10:00 am for coffee/tea and biscuits, and a 10:30 am start. The speaker will be Superintendent Penny Gifford, the new District Commander of the Wellington Police, who will discuss the positive changes and the challenges facing the police force in Wellington. Probus meets on the third Friday of the month (Feb to Nov) at Prefab Hall, Jessie St, 10:00 am to noon. Membership \$50 per annum. Stay for buffet lunch at Prefab \$25. More information: probussouthpacific.org/microsites/wellingtoncentral/

Free author talk with Vanessa Young: The Reluctant Homeopath

Wellington City Libraries, in association with The Cuba Press, brings you this conversation between science communicator turned homeopath, Vanessa Young, and author Kristen Phillips who will ask the questions. Please arrive early to ensure a seat. Thursday, 21 May 2026, 5:30–6:30pm. Community Room 1 Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui Central Library.

DCM Wellington

We work at the sharp end of things and are the leading social service working with people who are experiencing homelessness in Wellington. Our services range from free dentistry through to Housing First. If you know of someone rough sleeping who may need support, contact 04 499 4444. To learn more: dcm.org.nz

Leslie Adkin: Local History Discussion

Join us for a deep dive discussion on one of New Zealand's finest early photographers, Leslie Adkin. New Zealand history specialist Gábor Tóth will discuss the book *Leslie Adkin: Farmer Photographer* with author and Te Papa Curator of Photography Athol McCredie. This free talk will explore in detail the rich history of the Wellington region in the early 1900s, and the lives that Adkin captured in his remarkable photographs. Wednesday 20 May, 5:30–6:30pm. Ngā Pou Ruahine space, Level 2, Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui Central Library.

Women of diverse journeys: Leaders who shape our workplaces

In a conversation facilitated by award winning author, poet and librarian Khadro Mohamed (Somalia), organizational leaders Mumtaz Parker (South Africa), Dr Fahimeh McGregor (Iran), and Juping Zhou (China) will discuss their journeys across oceans and cultures and into leadership roles in New Zealand workplaces. Wednesday, 27 May 2026, 5:30–6:30pm. Location: Ngā Pou Ruahine space (Level 2), Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui Central Library.

Introduction to AI and ChatGPT: A workshop with Dr Fahimeh McGregor

Register and come along to this workshop led by Dr Fahimeh McGregor of the Massey University Business School, and learn how AI supports everyday office tasks. Registrations required. Full room details on registration. You will need to bring your own laptop. This is a free event. Thursday, 4 June 2026, 4–6pm. Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui Central Library.

Botanical Art and Illustration: Author Talk

This free event will deep dive into the history, significant figures and contemporary developments in botanical art and illustration. We'll explore the fascinating and stunning visual pages of *Flora: celebrating our botanical world* and *Groundwork: The Art and Writing of Emily Cumming Harris*, with authors Rebecca Rice and Catherine Field-Dodgson. Tuesday, 26 May 2026, 5:30–6:30pm. Ngā Pou Ruahine (Lvl 2) space at Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui Central Library.



Kia ora Te Aro!

Let's talk about our community.

Get in touch about any local issues or if you need support. I'm here to help and would love to hear from you!

Tamatha Paul
MP for Wellington Central


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Auth by Tamatha Paul, Green Party MP.
Parliament Buildings, Wellington. Funded by Parliamentary Services.



ULO ? Unidentified Local Object

Identify the mystery object – something in Te Aro – to win a \$20 book voucher.

Email your answers to us at editor@the-local.co.nz. If there's more than one correct answer, the winner will be selected at random. Congratulations to Jaime Baird who identified the April ULO as a mural on the Bethany building on Jessie Street. 



EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Kerry Meadows-Bonner looks at the must-see in Wellington's arts and entertainment scene through May and into June.

LIVE THEATRE, MUSIC & VISUAL ARTS

Eddie Izzard – The Remix: The First 35 Years

St James Theatre | May 24 | From \$79

Comedian Eddie Izzard brings *The Remix: The First 35 Years* to Wellington, revising some of their most iconic material from across a legendary career.

Rock Tenors – Anthems Reloaded

The Opera House | May 23 | From \$79.50

Kiwi ensemble Rock Tenors bring *Anthems Reloaded* to Wellington for a night of legendary rock hits across decades. Expect soaring vocals, harmonies and a full live band delivering legendary tracks from artists like Queen, Bon Jovi, AC/DC and Guns N' Roses.



VISUAL ARTS

NZ Art Show 2026

TSB Arena & Shed 6 | May 29–31 | From \$20

The NZ Art Show returns to Wellington for its annual show, bringing together more than 300 artists and around 4,000 original artworks across a three-day event on the waterfront. Painting, sculpture, photography and more, the show offers something for everyone – whether you're a seasoned collector or simply browsing. With artists on site and a mix of emerging and established talent, it's one of the country's biggest and most accessible contemporary art experiences.

THEATRE

Heathers – The Musical

The Opera House | May 28 – June 7 | From \$69.90

Heathers – The Musical arrives in Wellington for its New Zealand debut, bringing a high-energy mix of dark comedy, rock music and teenage drama to the stage. Set at Westerberg High, the story follows Veronica Sawyer as she navigates popularity, power and rebellion alongside the charismatic J.D.

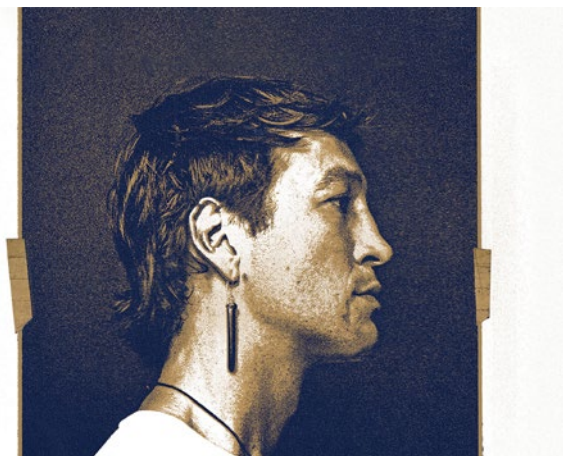


LIVE MUSIC

Marlon Williams – Tā te Manawa Tour

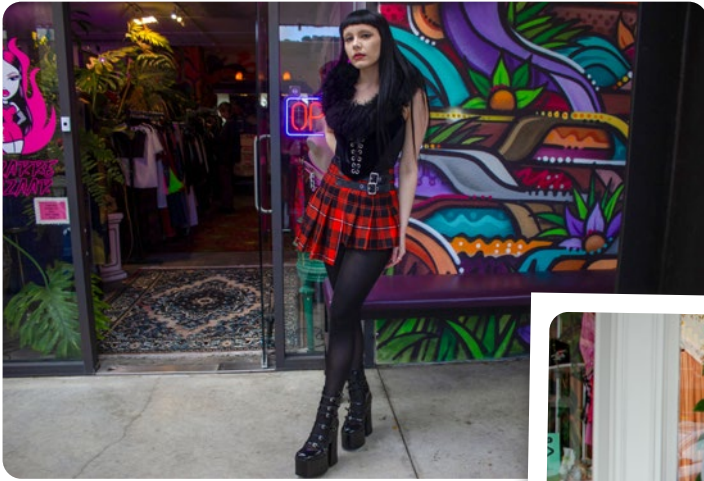
Michael Fowler Centre | May 23–29 | From \$79

Kiwi artist Marlon Williams returns to Wellington with *Tā te Manawa*, a special tour marking a pause after years of touring and recording. Joined by his band The Yarra Benders, Williams will perform a set covering his catalogue – from early work to his latest.





Felix Clarke surprised the owners of local fashion stores with a Friday fit check.



Jess (Bizarre Bazaar owner) represents alt-fashion with multiple interesting pieces – fur-collared corset, double-belted miniskirt, and super tall belted heels, all pulled together into a cohesive cabaret goth aesthetic.

Mikaela (Preloved Charlie's Owner) and staff, Lucy, Sophia, and Hannah, highlight their store with elegant, clean streetwear, and a love for boots. Not to mention Ellie, the angelic long-haired chihuahua.



Mel (Spacesuit Owner) and **Shay** (Manager) are outfitted in something more casual – loose fit jeans and comfortable shoes for shift work. Both jackets are off the racks of Spacesuit, highlighting the store's bridge between street and business-casual.

Kate (Ziggurat owner) embodies her store's aesthetic. Floral maxi dress colour matched with hair and a black silk neckerchief. Add a generous splash of mixed-metal jewelry, and you get the impression of a classy outsider, a restrained maximalist.



Have you got a story to tell? *My Night Out* is section where we feature contributions from readers about their interesting time out on the town. Published stories will get a \$50 book voucher. Find out more at tearo.the-local.co.nz/lifestyle



Ruth and Matt at the Thistle Hall Gallery. Photo: supplied

Opening night at Thistle Hall Gallery


Ruth Weatherall recounts a successful gallery opening.

I'm nervous. But the good kind of nervous. Jittery with excitement and buzzing with energy. Tonight is the opening of Matt's (my partner's) art show at Thistle Hall Gallery. All week Matt and I have been sitting in the art gallery – the red door wide open to the hum (and crash!) of the city – showcasing his work to the community. His artwork is mainly landscapes – fantastical ones – that take you to unknown places yet maintain a feeling of nostalgia.

Over the week of the show, we've become accustomed to the patterns of Upper Cuba Street: the to and from work rush, the daily dog-walks, the morning deliveries, the locals cheerily greeting one another. This evening, however, is special, the pinnacle of Matt's work. Tonight, we gather our friends and family from across Wellington and invite in the Te Aro community as we celebrate his thirteen years of artistic endeavour.

The Thistle Hall Gallery is a long room with creaky wooden floors. Upstairs is the hall itself – a room full of community, dance, improv, and music. Occasionally you can hear the thud of feet and the shout of voices as the activity gets more boisterous. As we set up for opening night, however, gentle music serenades us. Matt's artwork is accompanied by his own musical compositions (he's a multi-talented man, my partner!) and fills the otherwise quiet gallery space with waves of delicious sound. We lay out the glasses, fill the water jugs, chill the wine, and prepare for our guests.

At 5:30pm our guests start arriving. Quickly the space becomes vibrant, like a moving portrait. Our youngest patron is just two years old. His uncle carries him around and he passes swift judgement on each artwork – “Yes!” “Yes!” “No!” “Mmm...” He shrugs his shoulders then shakes his head emphatically. At this stage, it's mostly friends and family, but as the night goes on new faces join. Passersby are welcomed in with an enthusiastic wave and smile. Two young men, dressed in goth garb can't believe their luck. Art and a glass of wine? One of them throws his hands in the air: “I love Wellington! So much better than Auckland.”

Eventually, just Matt and I remain. It's late. We stand at the entrance of the gallery holding a box full of empty wine bottles and beer cans. Matt can't seem to stop smiling. My smile is tinged by exhaustion – hosting an event is hard work! – but I swell with pride to see him so happy and to have made so many new connections. As we lock the red door, I reflect. Tonight was an exceptional night out. But tomorrow will be a wonderfully ordinary day watching Te Aro come alive once more and enjoy the pleasures of art in Thistle Hall Gallery. 

Two young men, dressed in goth garb can't believe their luck. Art and a glass of wine? One of them throws his hands in the air: “I love Wellington! So much better than Auckland.”

Photo: Kerry Meadows-Bonner



Wellington Tree – and the man inside

Kerry Meadows-Bonner looks at the man behind one of Wellington’s most recognisable street buskers.

He’s hard to miss. A moving tree, saxophone in hand – part performance, part presence. Jarrod Wood, a musician and performer, has spent decades on his craft, and years building something personal on the streets of Wellington.

“I have been a professional saxophone and flute player for nearly four decades,” he said. “From 2005 I trained for 14 years in India under Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia, India’s most celebrated and all-time great flute player.”

But beneath the surface, it’s the Tree people meet.

“People interact with me in a different way than a regular busker on the street,” Jarrod said. “The thing I love about being a costume performer is that the costume removes my race, my age and my gender so people are only left with my tree look, energy, intentions and my musical abilities.”

For Jarrod, it became more than just a performance.

“From the very first week or so that I started performing Tree in the city I immediately saw people open up to me in very surprising ways,” he said.

“I remember one time a small child of about three was crying uncontrollably in Cuba St, when she saw me, she immediately stopped crying and started

“When you are smiling or feeling positive you cannot feel stressed at the same time.”

running towards me waving and smiling,” Jarrod said. “Her parents told me she loves Tree so much.”

For him, that’s where it all clicks.

“My energy and my intentions come across very strongly when it is combined with such a striking visual appearance,” he said.

He said the idea for Tree came from a need to shift the mood of the city.

“I had initially created Tree as a means of relieving tension from the people of the city post Covid,” Jarrod said. “When you are smiling or feeling positive you cannot feel stressed at the same time.”

The response from the public has mostly been positive, but he said the experience hasn’t always been easy.

“I don’t feel Wellington is a place that embraces the unconventional in my experience and observation,” he said.

Jarrod said he has had little formal support and has faced ongoing challenges while performing, from being dismissed to more serious incidents in public spaces.

“Every time I go out into the city as Tree there is a certain element of fear and not knowing if I will be safe or not,” he said.

Even so, he keeps showing up.

“Tree’s success in Wellington is down to my readiness to put myself in a place of vulnerability both physically and artistically,” Jarrod said.

That willingness to be seen and to connect keeps people coming back.

“There are about 60% of folks who do enjoy my performances immensely and who do know it’s real and it’s always been me,” he said.

And for many, especially younger Wellingtonians, Tree has become part of the city itself.

“I will continue to be here for a long time to come, particularly for the young ones who love me a lot and are growing up with tree as part of their normal daily life,” Jarrod said.

And for those who stop, even briefly, that’s often enough. **tl**



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