

LIFE AQUATIC

A Northland pool designed to be taken in day-long doses.

TEXT — Jeremy Hansen

PHOTOGRAPHY — Samuel Hartnett



Above The pool's fencing is cleverly managed, with a wall of local stone rising to a gate next to the small pavilion.

Below The pool faces north, backed by a well-planted hill and with views to the sea.

Pool fencing requirements often make you wonder if it's worth even bothering with a pool, given that the need to make a body of water safe will also render it unsightly. But, given the right amount of space and design smarts, anything is possible, as this Northland pool proves. It was designed by Noel Lane Architects in association with Rowe Baetens Architects. Located on a large getaway property, it feels less like an intrusion on the landscape, and more like a nature-based escape.

The architects were asked by their clients to design a simple shelter that enhanced enjoyment of its lovely coastal site. The ideal image of a great swimming pool evokes a sense of freedom in nature, which presented a challenge for the architects: as well as the requisite fencing, pools also come with an array of pumps and filtration equipment that must be carefully concealed.

For inspiration, the architects looked to the writing of the German architect Gottfried Semper, whose 1851 book *The Four Elements of Architecture* advocated an almost primitivist approach to the creation of shelter. They channelled Semper's belief in the importance of elemental gathering places into the use of natural materials such as stone walls and a timber shelter. The pool's thoughtful placement also reflects some of Semper's beliefs: the hill behind provides a sense of security, while the

elevated north-facing position allows for a protected outlook to the sea shore. "We were mindful of distilling the architecture down to its very simplistic elements," says Tom Rowe of Rowe Baetens. "We did things with care and fineness of detail and a sense of craft. The complexity was in hiding all the services – pumps, pool covers and that kind of thing. Pools have all these components, and our job was to make them look like they didn't really exist."

The fencing is beautifully managed. The pool is built on a platform and surrounded by a wall of local stone. Behind the wall is a planted trench, allowing a clear view from the pool area to the shore. This fence rises on the entry side of the pool to a gate attached to the cedar-clad pavilion. (As well as a mechanical kit for the pool, the 20-square-metre pavilion contains a changing room, toilet and kitchenette, and has a built-in Louvretec shade over the outdoor seating area.) The wall continues around the back of the pool, where it is carefully concealed with new planting. "There's no glass, there's nothing shiny about it," Rowe says. "Everything is patinated, and will continue to do so over time. There's a quality in terms of tactility and endurance."

The 20-metre-long pool is lined not in glossy blue, but in black tiles, which not only absorb heat from the sun, but help create the sense of this being a natural place to take a plunge.





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Above The pavilion is built on a platform surrounded by a stone wall, an elegant solution to potentially unsightly fencing.

Below Built-in Louvretec aluminium louvres allow sunlight to be modulated on the outdoor seating area adjacent to the pavilion.

