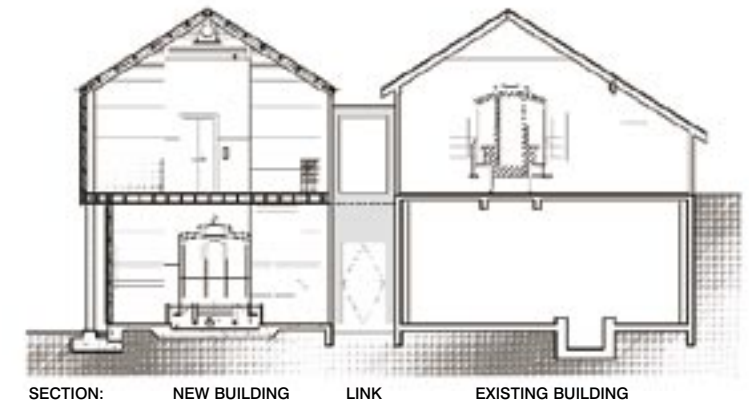


# Gripping yarn

Constricted by site and conservation requirements Bevin + Slessor Architects have crossed the shed with the glasshouse to produce an extension for Wellington's Cable Car Museum.

Text **Tommy Honey** Photographs **Simon Devitt**



01

Wellington's cable car, perhaps the country's most postcard attraction, has been depositing the good people of Kelburn in Lambton Quay for over a century. Two cars, joined by a cable, alternately rise and fall, each sustained by the other's gravity, and aided by electricity. Two buildings at the top of the run managed all this work: a maintenance shed atop a winding house sat alongside the original boilerhouse, until the latter's demise in 1930.

In 1998, the Wellington Museums Trust converted the surviving maintenance shed into a museum celebrating the capital's transport icon. Bevin + Slessor Architects were commissioned to undertake the work and in 2001 they were asked back to provide a home for Grip Car 3, one of the earliest cars to run on the track. The museum, although small, is the second most popular tourist attraction in Wellington (after Te Papa), with annual visitor numbers reaching 220,000 in recent years.

There were considerable constraints on the site, both architectural and environmental. Caught between the entrance to the Botanic Gardens, the edge of the Kelburn residential area and the cable car itself, there was little room to move. The early decision to use the site of the earlier boiler house meant negotiating space with a Botanic Gardens maintenance building. In addition, the existing museum had considerable historic value and had to be treated carefully.

Heritage consultant Ian Bowman determined that the new building should touch the existing museum as lightly as possible, allowing that a hole be punched through to join the two. Bevin + Slessor rose to this challenge with a

gabled building that emulates both the existing museum and the earlier boiler house. It is accessed at first floor level from the existing museum through the aforementioned punched hole across a bridge to a display space. The rusticated weatherboard of the museum is retained and it can be seen (along with a sliver of Kelburn) through glass that maintains the separation of the two buildings.

Although the original boiler house has been used as a trace for the new, there the similarity ends. The gabled form is clad in gapped cedar weatherboard but in critical areas strips away the walls to join the inside and the out. The first floor houses an AV area and a display space. A band of high windows runs around the north and east, revealing views of the gardens, the harbour, city and Mt Victoria.

The building continues its efforts to connect with the world outside through the circulation to the floor below with windows that wrap around a stair that in turn, wraps around the exposed lift. This transparency is maximised on the ground floor where floor-to-ceiling windows throw light on Grip Car 3 and also allow it to be viewed from the Botanic Gardens. Such a display strategy is a radical departure from traditional museum practice, which demands solid walls and full control of light. Careful design of the space and the relationship to the Gardens have opened up the museum and the view of the restored car.

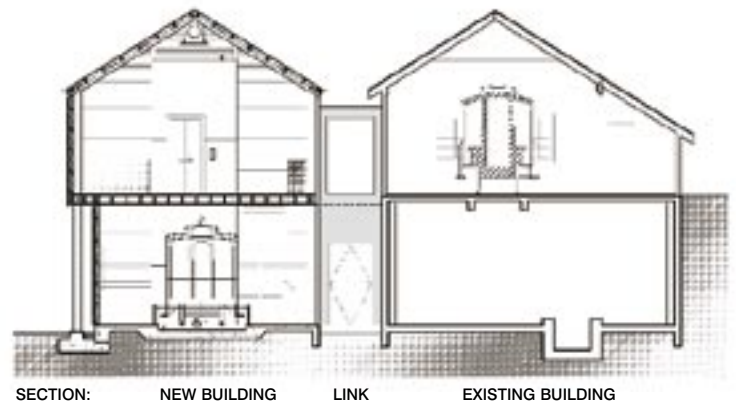
The museum extension manages to be many things at once: highly contemporary in materials and presence, yet traditional in form and intent; domestic in scale and texture, yet public in place and purpose. While there is much to be admired in this inclusive approach, it does have some less



02



03



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