

PROJECT TIMBER

2026

Showcasing timber innovation and excellence
in New Zealand architecture and building



Anchored in Nature

New Zealand's first floating sauna experience on Queenstown's Lake Whakatipu is a thoughtfully designed and built project centred around wellness and a deeper connection to nature.



PREMIUM ARCHITECTURAL
& BUILDING SOLUTIONS

ISSUE 01

Architect: CTRL Space
Design & Build: Makespace
Project Photography: WATERSHED



A Considered Response to Place

Set against the dramatic alpine landscape, WATERSHED is a design-led wellness experience founded in Queenstown, New Zealand. Positioned on Lake Whakatipu at St Omer Wharf, the project brings together traditional Finnish sauna culture with a design that is shaped by its unique setting.

Developed by WATERSHED, in collaboration with CTRL Space and Makespace, the structure houses two Finnish-style saunas set on a floating pontoon, offering a direct connection to the lake. Heat, cold, rest and repeat all while allowing the surrounding landscape to become an active part of the experience.

Constructed in Auckland and transported to the south island, the project reflects a high level of coordination between design, fabrication, and delivery. Its execution required careful consideration of both structure and material performance, responding to the challenges of a permanently water-adjacent environment.



WATERSHED

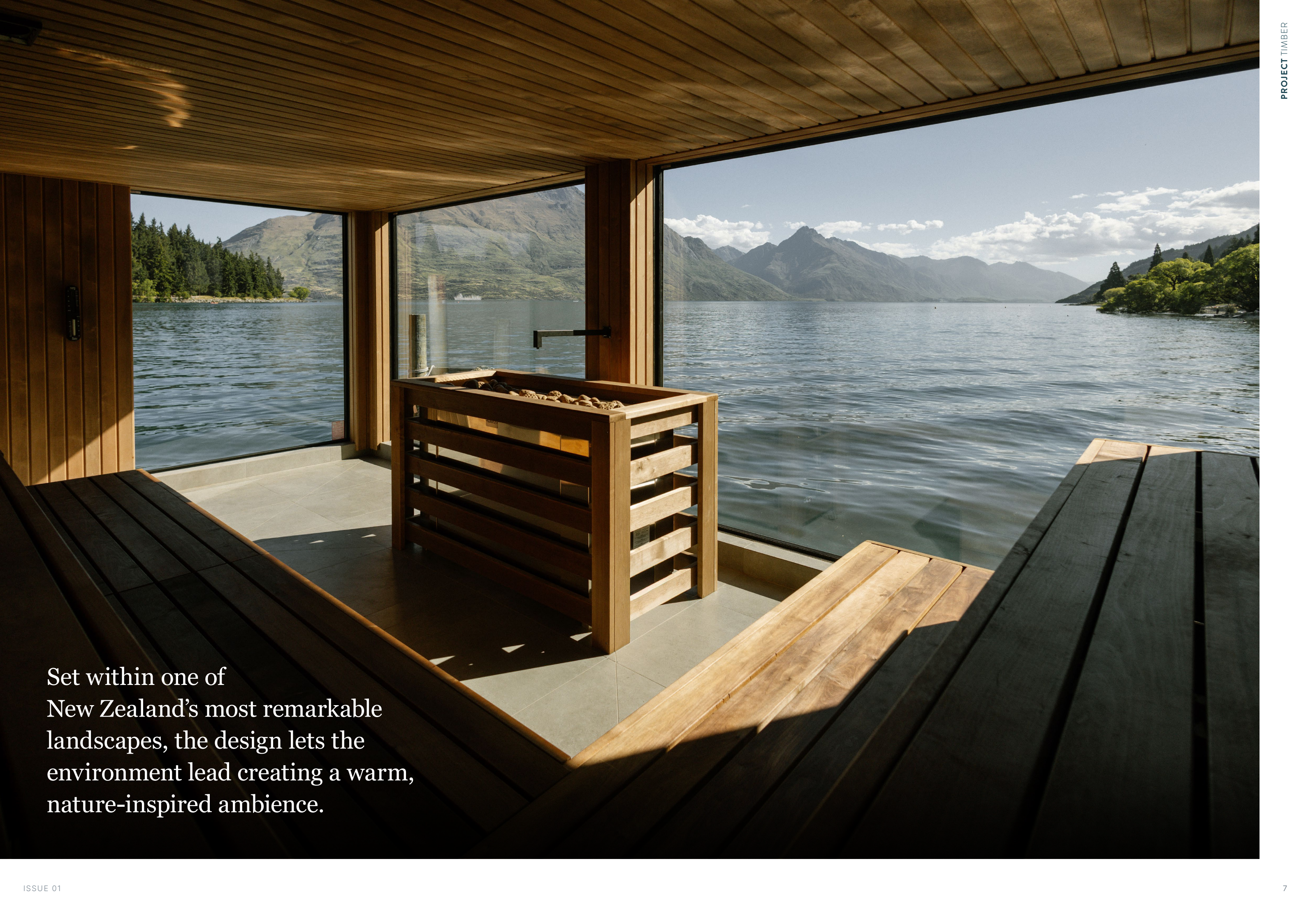


Designed to Sit Lightly Within the Landscape

Rather than competing with its surroundings, the design is deliberately restrained. A low-profile form and carefully balanced material palette allow the natural setting to remain the focal point, while the building itself recedes into its wider surroundings of lake and mountains.

Floor to ceiling windows offer uninterrupted views across the water, reinforcing a constant visual connection to the environment. Movement through the space is intuitive, guiding users between enclosed warmth and open exposure to the elements.

This interplay between shelter and landscape is central to the project's design, creating an experience that feels immersive without being intrusive.

A photograph of a modern wooden structure, likely a cabin or lounge, with large windows overlooking a lake and mountains. The interior features a wooden ceiling, a wooden bench, and a wooden table. The view outside shows a calm lake, green mountains, and a clear sky with some clouds. The structure is built with light-colored wood, and the floor is made of dark wood planks. The overall atmosphere is warm and nature-inspired.

Set within one of
New Zealand's most remarkable
landscapes, the design lets the
environment lead creating a warm,
nature-inspired ambience.

Vitex Decking

Material selection plays a critical role in anchoring the structure within its unique setting, while also supporting the functional demands of a high-use wellness environment.

JSC supplied sustainably sourced Vitex from the Solomon Islands, used for the sauna interior and the exterior pontoon. Selected to support the WATERSHED experience, Vitex is a durable hardwood, widely used for decking in New Zealand due to its ability to perform well in exposed, high-traffic environments.

The consistent pale yellow-tan to creamy-grey colour of Vitex provides a calm, natural base that sits comfortably within the surrounding landscape. Over time, the timber softens to a silver-grey, allowing the structure to settle further into its alpine lakeside position. Internally, the warmth of its tone complements the project's intent of bringing the outside in, creating a subtle connection between the enclosed sauna spaces and the environment beyond.

The lakeside location introduces constant exposure to moisture, temperature variation, and heavy public use. In this context, durability, stability, and low maintenance become essential considerations, with Vitex providing a robust and reliable solution.





TMT Amba

Inside the reception and lounge area, FSC® certified TMT Amba introduces a subtle tonal contrast. Its lighter, golden hues bring warmth and depth to the interior office space, enhancing the overall atmosphere without overwhelming the simplicity of the design. The more uniform, clear-grade appearance allows the material to sit quietly within the space, supporting the architecture rather than competing with it.

Within these transitional spaces, TMT Amba helps define a softer, more sheltered interior environment. The shift in tone from the exterior materials creates a clear yet understated transition, reinforcing the movement from open, exposed spaces into more enclosed and intimate settings.

The timber's consistent grain and refined finish contribute to a calm, ordered aesthetic, aligning with the project's broader focus on simplicity and restraint. Its presence adds a layer of visual warmth that balances the more minimal architectural elements, ensuring the space feels considered without becoming overly detailed.

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“We think it’s going to be amazing for the region really celebrating the incredible natural beauty in such a unique and playful way.”

— *Dominic Bowden*



A Grounded Experience On Water

Watershed sits within a broader shift towards more environmentally conscious design. As both a wellness destination and a considered architectural response, it highlights how material selection and design thinking shape not just the structure, but how it is used and experienced, while supporting growing expectations for transparency around sustainable and ethical practices.

In a region known for high-energy, adrenaline-driven tourism, the project introduces a slower, more reflective experience. It offers a space where architecture, material palette, and landscape work together to create a grounded and restorative environment.



Andrew Glenn and
Dominic Bowden
Founders, WATERSHED



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