



An eye on the future

The Sustainable Retailing category for Auckland's Top Shop® Retail Excellence Awards was won late last year by Freemans Bay's **ecostore**. Sustainable retailing is a new category in these awards and the competition for it was lively – with more than 30 local retailers vying for the award.

The creation of the sustainable retailing category in the New Zealand Retailers Association awards is a clear indication of the sea change that's taking place throughout the industry and recognises the pioneering leadership of retailers in this new field.

The high calibre of entrants was reflected in the judge's comments: 'It was gratifying to see so many entries from such a broad range of businesses. It's clear that many retailers are coming to grips with sustainability in their business practice, and taking the time and making the effort to think about how to contribute – both as a store and to their customers'.

No newcomer to sustainability, the ecostore shop in Freemans Bay is the flagship store for a growing company that's set its sights on making a difference to the health and well-being of both people and the environment.

ecostore was started more than 18 years ago by Malcolm and Melanie Rands from an organically-based eco-village in Northland. While their goals aim high, their sustainably-focused, locally manufactured products are very practical and down-to-earth. The ecostore shop is a dynamic

and practical demonstration that the company is very solutions-based and focused on satisfying the everyday needs of those who want to live a healthier, more eco-friendly lifestyle.

ecostore CEO and founder Malcolm Rands says, "It's time to get creative; business-as-usual is no longer possible in the face of climate change – and that doesn't need to be seen as a bad thing. Businesses need to re-evaluate the impact of their existence on the environment and step-up to the challenge of sustainability in innovative and effective ways.

"ecostore is a good example of the kind of shift in thinking about sustainability that is required; sustainability is not something we've added-on to our business, it's why we're *in* business."

The ecostore shop opened its Auckland premises more than twelve years ago – prior to that, its products were available exclusively by mail order. Early days for the small family business were tough; the internet was still in its infancy and the lifestyle of 'voluntary simplicity' that the Rands' had chosen meant that they had to rely on loans from family and favours from suppliers to get started. But, once people started using the products and found that they

worked just as well – but with no unnecessary chemicals – things quickly picked up.

Dedicated followers

The move to its Auckland premises was unconventional in many ways. There were no other retailers close by which meant that the shop was very much an isolated 'destination' for a select group of dedicated followers. These were mainly eco-conscious people who already knew about the existence of ecostore products through the company's early mail-order catalogues.

This reflects the sustainability focus of the knowledgeable team who, while they may not offer you a virgin paper bag or a petrochemically-sourced plastic one, will willingly help you to your vehicle with your goods.

As many readers will know, the floor space in any retail environment is valuable real estate and the general response to this is to 'stack them high and watch them fly'. Not so at the ecostore shop where a good chunk of floor space has been dedicated to a comfortable resource area with a couch and

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The shop itself is a unique retail space located in the historic building that was once the original Freemans Bay boatshed. As such there are no big display windows, no bright lights or dedicated car park.

Customers may even find themselves having to ask for (paper) shopping bags as they are not automatically provided.

table that's covered with eco-related books and magazines.

The shop is not only a retail outlet; it is also doubles as a dispatch centre for the thriving on-line store www.ecostoredirect.co.nz. On-line shopping has proved itself to be especially good for those who live in rural areas, and also proved handy for those who live just minutes away

but are time-poor. Such locals tend to treat the service as cost-effective home delivery.

As well as the full range of ecostore products – including bulk sizes and refill options – the store features products from other like-minded companies that meet their strict eco-criteria, such as useful items like reusable SIGG water bottles, modern cloth nappies and vegan shoes. The store also offers practical options for keeping food waste out of our landfills; everything from bokashi bins to worm farms. In fact, there is a working worm farm in the store which is often used to demonstrate to customers the process of successful maintenance.

Fairground foundation

ecostore also has a not-for-profit arm called the Fairground Foundation. Fairground is funded by ecostore to create a healthier, more sustainable world through courageous leadership and ‘on-the-ground’ action. It is the initiative of the founder, Malcolm Rands. Its purpose is to create projects that make a difference in people’s lives and to the communities we live in – particularly in the areas of health, culture and sustainability.

Companies such as ecostore have already shown that business can inspire positive change in the world. Over the last 18 years, ecostore has become a successful manufacturer and distributor of high-quality, accessible and affordable eco products – but, that’s only half the challenge. The store was also created to give back to the community in other ways. For that reason, ecostore donates a percentage of its profits to the social entrepreneurial foundation, Fairground.

Those people who are familiar with the area might have seen the billboards on the side of the ecostore shop. These are a

Fairground initiative. Unusually, the majority of the time the billboard is not used to sell goods but to promote art and artists in the community.

The billboard shown here was in place until last month and features the work of Auckland-based photographer Mark Smith. Mark and his sister Deborah have a long history with ecostore that began when he was working for the *NZ Herald* and was assigned to photograph the new eco-venture in Freemans Bay. Since then, the two of them have taken all of the black-and-white photographs featured on the ecostore product labels that help

to make them so distinctive.

About winning the Top Shop® award, retail manager Annabelle Pottinger says, “It was such an honour for the team to be recognised for the work we do to help raise people’s awareness of sustainability by giving them a different retail experience. But, of course, this award doesn’t just belong to the ecostore retail team, it’s been earned by the whole company and we never forget to thank our wonderful, loyal customers.

But the final word belongs to the Top Shop® judges. ‘ecostore was the clear winner in this region. The business is founded

on finding better solutions for common household products and is leading the way, both in product design and lowering its operational footprint’.

The billboard space was also used to promote the month-long pre-GST sale in the store, with an up-cycled billboard that was completely made from old billboard skins. The message was carefully generic so it could be used again. ■

□ NZRetail will feature each of the regional winners of the Sustainable Retailing category of the Top Shop® Awards during this year.



Above left The billboard space was used to promote a month-long, pre-GST sale in the store. The up-cycled billboard – made completely from old billboard skins – carried a message carefully generically worded so it could be used again.

Above right and previous page Auckland-based photographers Mark Smith and sister Deborah have a long history with ecostore and the two of them have taken all of the black-and-white photographs featured on the ecostore product labels that help to make them so distinctive.

Right The flagship ecostore shop in Freemans Bay.

