



THE CASE STUDY

PROJECT DETAILS

Location
Burswood, Auckland

Project Type
Medium-density terraced housing

Architect/Developer
Jason Zou, Square Tomato
www.squaretomato.co.nz

FEATURED PRODUCTS

- Axon™ Panel Grooved Grained 133mm

This three-home terraced development demonstrates how thoughtful design decisions and quality materials can elevate medium-density terrace housing.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

One of New Zealand's youngest architects, Jason Zou took on his Burswood development as both architect and developer - a dual role that gave him complete control over every design decision and the freedom to prioritise quality over maximum yield.

"The vision was simple," explains Jason. "To create homes that feel good to live in, are filled with natural light, connected to the environment and designed with the same care and attention we'd want for our own homes. We believe

terrace homes can be very desirable when they're well-designed."

Jason's vision shaped every decision throughout the project, starting with one of the most fundamental choices: how many homes to build. While the site could accommodate four units – a decision many developers would make to maximise returns – Jason deliberately limited the development to three terraced homes.

"There was the opportunity to design four units if I turn the design in another direction, but it would compromise the internal space and the north-facing space of each unit, so I decided to build only three to maintain each unit's liveability".

The site's greatest asset – a picturesque wetland reserve at the rear – became central to the design strategy. This natural feature provides each unit with direct access from its backyard, tranquil views and valuable privacy. More importantly, it enabled Jason to orient all three units to achieve north-facing gardens, living areas and master bedrooms.

Jason's design approach centred on simple, clean modern forms with a deliberate colour strategy.



AXON™ PANEL GROOVED GRAINED 133MM

This textured fibre cement cladding panel delivers a premium architectural finish with practical long-term performance. The textured profile creates depth and visual interest while the 133mm groove width enables clean, contemporary lines. Non-combustible and designed for New Zealand conditions, Axon™ Panel offers design flexibility with paint colour selection while ensuring minimal maintenance and lasting durability.

“For medium-density development, the fire-proofing is always a main concern for the council. Hardie™ fibre cement cladding is non-combustible, meets fire-rating requirements and offers a low-maintenance, good-looking finish.”

“We really focused on creating a simple clean modern exterior form, so we kept the colour palette very intentional. The strong black and white contrast gives the homes a crisp modern look that is accentuated by the quality materials.”

Achieving this aesthetic required careful material selection, particularly for the exterior cladding. For Jason, the choice of Axon™ Panel Grooved Grained 133mm addressed multiple priorities simultaneously.

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The decision to specify the Axon™ Panel Grooved Grained 133mm profile over a smooth finish was driven by aesthetic considerations.

“I chose the Grooved Grained profile to achieve a textured cladding look, which is aesthetically appealing. The profile gives a better textured surface, which makes the design look more high-end and stand out. The 133mm groove width also provides a simpler profile to achieve the modern look I was looking for.”

While the Axon™ Panel Grooved Grained 133mm represented a higher upfront investment compared to other cladding options, Jason viewed it as essential to achieving the project’s design vision. The Hardie™ fibre cement cladding also delivered practical benefits that aligned with his market positioning.

“Because it’s fibre cement, I can choose the paint colour freely. Everyone thinks the ebony and cream-white combination works well. And of course, there’s the long-term low maintenance.”

The builder, Elijah from Para Projects, reported that the installation process was straightforward and efficient, which helped Jason’s team meet their deadline. During construction, the James Hardie helpline responded to queries promptly, ensuring builders weren’t held up.

Beyond the technical performance and aesthetic qualities, Jason sees the broader implications of material choices in shaping Auckland’s urban environment.

“I believe people deserve a better product than what’s mostly on the market. After all, houses are the biggest purchases most people make in a lifetime. As designers and developers, we could and should provide better options to buyers and shape the city to be easier on the eyes. Our homes are not just built to sell, they are built to live enjoyably in, so that family life can flourish.”

The Burswood development demonstrates that medium-density housing doesn’t require compromise. Through considered design decisions – from limiting density to maximise liveability, to selecting premium materials that deliver both performance and aesthetic appeal – Jason has created homes that the target market of young couples and families can genuinely aspire to own.

When asked if he would specify Hardie™ fibre cement cladding on future medium-density projects, Jason’s response was unequivocal: “Yes I would!”