

Hit The

Deck!

As quintessentially Godzone as hokey pokey and jandals, the deck has become an integral part of our laid-back kiwi lifestyle - and renters value their decks every bit as much as owner-occupiers do! **Louise Richardson reports.**

IT'S HARD TO GO WRONG AS A LANDLORD

either by enhancing and maintaining an existing deck, or by adding one to your rental property. Tenants of all ages; students, families or working couples desire indoor-outdoor flow – especially in summer. As long as it's well built – small or large – it will not only add value but could also improve yields.

One West Auckland landlord reports that after renovating one of his properties recently and including the addition of a deck, he was able to increase the rent from \$350 to \$480 per week.

“I definitely believe that it helped me get a better class of tenant,” he says. “A deck can also make a property seem bigger.”

EXISTING DECKS

A simple safety inspection can pick up most potential issues. Ensure the deck is firmly bolted to the house, never nailed or screwed. Ensure all fasteners are secured tightly and none have rusted. Uncovered decks should have flashings where they meet the house, so it will pay to check these out too.

Look for signs of rotting wood, not only in the decking but in handrails, steps and all other timber parts. Use a screwdriver. If it penetrates the wood easily, without splintering the surface, you may have a problem and the board, or other component, must be replaced.

Next, you should check that all railings, banisters and steps are still solidly constructed, with no loose parts. Bear in mind that the boards on the deck may have been replaced while the underlying structure could be older.

SURFACES

Mould on a deck's surface can also compromise safety by making it slippery and mould in general is bad for human health. Resene's Karen Warman points out that you can't just wash moss and mould off the surface; you actually have to treat them. She recommends Resene Moss and Mould Killer for this sort of job but if the deck simply needs a good clean in preparation for summer, Resene Paint Prep and Housewash should do the trick nicely.

Make surfaces safer still by using a product such as Resene Non-Skid Deck and Path on the boards and steps to combat slipperiness. It comes in a wide range of colours and has a textured finish.

“Always make sure that a timber deck is stained or painted, then maintained annually,” Warman says. “It's far easier to keep a deck in good condition than to try and fix one that hasn't been looked after properly.”

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

The DIY approach is a favourite among budding property investors. If you have the time and inclination you can save significantly on builders' charges by constructing a deck on your rental yourself. Even a relative novice should be



Check the BRANZ website for guidance on deck design.



Staining will help extend the life of your deck.

able to make a good go of this job but a number of considerations should be dealt with first.

RULES, REGULATIONS

It makes sense to start with the rules and regulations. In New Zealand, the procedures around the building of decks have actually relaxed considerably in recent years. Local councils no longer get heavily involved, but the crucial thing is to ensure you follow the Building Code.

You don't need a building consent for decks that are up to 1.5 metres above ground. Railings are required if you plan to build a deck taller than one metre high, and you may need a resource consent.

Never assume anything, and check out a website such as www.building.govt.nz/bc-no-consent for the low-down on what you can and cannot do, then chat with your council in order to confirm that the proposed building work doesn't have any district planning implications.

DESIGNING YOUR DECK

Most of the large hardware chains run in-store workshops for wannabe deck builders and

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- MARK TRAFFORD

many offer useful, detailed, online tutorials too.

If you've decided to go down the DIY track you'll need to start by mocking up a design for your deck. It goes without saying that it will ideally be located on the sunny side of the house, with indoor-outdoor flow from living areas an essential ingredient.

Ensure that easy access from the interior of the property is going to be possible and that there is no power, gas, water mains or sewer pipes in the way.

In light of the leaky buildings nightmare that has gripped New Zealand over the last decade or so, BRANZ (Building Research Association of New Zealand) is especially concerned with ensuring that water cannot leak from a poorly

constructed deck into the walls of the dwelling it's attached to.

You'll find helpful information on their website, where they point out that it is good practice to install a timber-slatted deck at least 50mm below the interior floor level, so bear this in mind for your design. There should be a 12mm gap between the first board and the face

of the cladding, in order to prevent water from pooling there.

Remember that timber dries in the sun and swells in the rain so boards should be spaced carefully, with gaps that are just big enough to allow for ventilation and drainage.

As a builder – especially of the DIY variety – it's vital to study BRANZ guidelines carefully,

taking into account whether the deck is to be covered or not. Never be too embarrassed to ask for guidance. It can all seem a bit complicated to a novice, and they are there to help.

TAKING UP TOOLS

While it may seem that you're going to need a huge number of tools for your deck-building

RENOVATION: DECKS

project bear in mind that you can hire at least some of them.

Of course you'll need the basics, such as a hammer, spirit level, tape measure, spade, handsaw, circular saw, sledge hammer, square, string line and chisel ... phew!

Extras, such as a sliding compound mitre saw will make things easier still.

When it comes to choosing materials the traditional kwila or pine timber deck remains a kiwi favourite, but there are now some very interesting new alternatives on the market. Consider using inexpensive yet remarkably durable composites made from

materials such as wood fibre, reclaimed bamboo and recycled plastic.

SPLINTERING NO ISSUE

The composites can be especially effective because moisture will not damage these boards, splintering isn't an issue, and there is no need to paint or stain them.

When it comes to creating a shade cover for your deck – should you wish to do so – there are many possibilities in today's market, with clear corrugated plastic still a favourite.

Jess Sit, marketing manager at PSP says many contemporary options in translucent

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roofing are worth considering. "Yes, corrugated plastic is a popular and relatively inexpensive roofing material for decks but there are some recent innovations that are even better, yet they're still surprisingly economical.

"We're very excited about Clearvue, which looks like glass but is actually a tough acrylic. You choose from clear or grey tint and the cost is somewhere in between plastic and that of real glass. As long as your pitch is at least 10% this has the added bonus of being a self-cleaning product."

ENGAGING A BUILDER

Mark Trafford from Maintain to Profit says the perception that using a builder is going to be an expensive affair isn't necessarily correct.

"When you think about it, the cost for the materials stays the same and the extra you're paying is simply for the labour," Trafford says. "The builder can probably do it more quickly than you can and will know all the ins and outs of rules and consents."

He adds that it's often hard to find a builder in Auckland in the current climate



Nothing beats the satisfaction of a DIY job done well.

because they're all busy, but says in the provinces, you'll be fine!

Another up-side to using a builder is that you won't need to buy any tools yourself.

If you do choose to engage a builder, ask to see testimonials and make doubly sure that he or she is up to date with current rules and regulations.

It pays to use a certified builder or registered master builder because even a simple job such as a deck can occasionally go wrong and this

way you are guaranteed a level of skill and professionalism.

Always negotiate the cost of labour upfront and preferably get several quotes (as opposed to estimates) so that you can weigh things up objectively before proceeding. Always get everything in writing, for your own peace of mind.

There are a number of contract templates available on-line.

Issues such as progress payments need

Better safe than sorry

It's a rare occurrence but deck failures do happen and the results can be catastrophic. In the USA, where many decks are elevated, hundreds are injured in collapses each year and deck safety inspections are a big business. In the aftermath of a collapsed deck in West Auckland in September 2014, which left six very lucky people with only minor injuries, the landlord was fined \$4,500. It emerged the deck was not consented and did not comply with the building code at that time, as it was fixed to the house with nails rather than bolts.

to be hammered out early on too and if disputes do arise, refer to the Construction Contracts Act 2002 as there are adjudication procedures that you should follow.

It's hard to estimate the cost of materials accurately as many things are taken into consideration and there are so many products on the market. The height of your deck above ground is significant in dictating the cost and the choice of either stainless steel or galvanised bolts – an essential consideration in coastal areas where salt water can cause corrosion – will also have an impact. The cost of different types of timber also varies significantly.

A rough rule of thumb for a very ordinary deck under a metre in height would be \$150-\$300 per square metre – not including labour, but depending on materials this could fluctuate.

Don't over-capitalise, Mark Trafford warns. Think carefully about whether the deck will add value, although in most cases it certainly will. ■