



Interior of Armstrong Downes Commercial's winning renovation in Lower Hutt.

A home fit for an ambassador

CATHERINE HARRIS

THE meticulous renovation of a neo Tudor-style house in Lower Hutt has won Wellington construction company Armstrong Downes Commercial national recognition.

The local firm's sympathetic restoration of the "Ambassador's Residence" was rewarded with a gold and a category award for best commercial project under \$2 million at the recent New Zealand Commercial Project Awards.

The 20-room 320sqm stately home was built in 1931 and is used by an ambassador as a residence and for hosting functions.

It was meant to be a quick restoration job but after the cladding was removed it was quickly realised that this was not the case, said Tony Doile, Armstrong Downes' managing director.

Borer and rot had crept into the house, which had received no significant maintenance work for 50 years, meaning 60 per cent of the structure had to be replaced.

The project "instantly became much bigger" than a seismic strengthening job and serious consideration was given to its demolition, said Doile.

However, a desire to protect heritage and meet timing requirements meant the renovation option was chosen.

Not one part of the building was left untouched and 10 months later, it was restored to its former grandeur.

Doile said the challenge was in the level of detail and the desire to make it look a "seamless blend of the old and the new".

"It was quite a small job for the



The "ambassador's residence" in Lower Hutt proved to be a much bigger job than first expected.

company in terms of value but involved a lot of very specialised craftsmanship and detailed finishing."

The owners preferred to remain anonymous, he said.

The Commercial Project Awards are the commercial construction equivalent of the House of the Year. Projects are judged on extensive criteria covering all design, contract management, con-

struction and delivery.

Dave Mudge, president of Wellington Registered Master Builders said the job was an outstanding piece of workmanship.

"Armstrong Downes Commercial has restored this building to more than its original classical splendour with the latest in technology, services and finishes, completed by a dedicated team of master craftsmen."