

Bypass Podcast Season One.

TRANSCRIPT | Episode Two: Down to Earth.

Bio: This episode is about building with Earth. More than that, it is a collage of perspectives that might have you reimagining what the future of ‘normal’ could feel like in the land of the long white GIB board.

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Bhaveeka's publication for *Bypass Journal*: <https://bypassjournal.com/A-Pleasurable-Methodology/>

Episode Transcript:

[beginning of episode]

Gabi: Tell me what you see.

Kid: A house.

Gabi: Do you know where the house is?

Kid: No.

Gabi: What do you see in this picture?

Kid: A weird house.

Gabi: Why is it a weird house?

Kid: Because it doesn't look like most normal houses.

Gabi: What does it look like?

Kid: A weird house.

Gabi: What about this house?

Kid: That's a castle, not a house.

Gabi: This that a weird house?

Kid: No, it's where princesses live.

Gabi: Oh, ok.

[Intro music]

Gabi: Kia ora koutou katoa. My name is Gabi Maffey, and I am the podcast producer for Bypass Journals newest publication; *Bypass Podcast*. We bring out an episode each month and it's different every time because we are about pushing the potentials of what gets written about as architecture, and who gets to hear about it. You're welcome. So this episode is about; dirt, clay, clod, turf, ground filth, it will one day fill your eyeball sockets. We are getting down to Earth. I love a catchphrase.

Yeah, the show is everything. Earth buildings, avocados, Barbara Streisand, all the colours of the rainbow, and it ends with a man dressed as a clown. But before all that let me just say, in our first episode "The Community Chest", I was never able to properly introduce myself, and I was never able to formally welcome you into this audio space that we are both interacting with. So, here it goes:

Ko Gabi Maffey tōku ingoa. Ko Maungawhau te maunga te rū nei taku ngākau. Ko Manuka te moana, e mahea nei aku māharahara. Ko kaipuke te waka, ko ngati Pākeha te iwi. Ko Ingarani te iwi. Nō Waiuku ahau, nō Tāmaki Makaurau ahau, e mihi ana ki ngā tohu o nehe, O Ngāti Te Ata e noho nei au. Ko Chris Maffey rāua ko Sarah Pēwhairangi ōku mātua. E rua tekau mā toru aku tau. Ko au ko te taiao, ko te taiao ko au.

I am Gabi Maffey. Maungawhau is the mountain close to my heart. Manukau is the ocean that alleviates my worries. My ancestors came by boat, I am Pākeha, with English connections. I am from Waiuku, Tāmaki Makaurau, I recognise the ancestral and spiritual landmarks of Ngati te Ata where I live. My parents are Chris and Sarah, I am 23 years old, (she/her pronouns) - and finally, *Ko au ko te taiao, ko te taiao ko au* :

I am the environment, and the environment is me. Let me say that again one more time for the kids at the back; I am the environment and the environment is me. I am the environment? And the environment is me? Oh, my God. I am the environment! And the environment is me! ...shit.

Gabi: Why is it a weird house?

Kid: Because it doesn't look like most normal houses.

Gabi: The voice that played up top was an eight-year-old that I nanny. The 'weird house' I showed her was a Hobbit house, a Shire, if you will. The 'normal' house was Malcolm's suburban home from the TV show *Malcolm in the Middle*. Good TV, iconic homes, that's an undoubted fact. But to the 'Malcolm in the Middle Earth' generation (see what I did there).. to us, it was normal to grow up in a three TV channeled colorless walls and ever increasing amassment of materials that will outlast their own usefulness. That was our normal. We watched normal play with ad breaks and a bowl of Cheerios for snacks. We sang *Life is Unfair* because *no one told you life was going to be this way*. There's a kind of plastic certainty that normal brings. Knowing you're living how you're supposed to be. Normal is relatable. But what is normal?

Like I said, this episode is about building with Earth. But more than that, it's a collage of perspectives that might have you reimagining what the future of normal could feel like in this land of the long white GIB board.

Last year, I watched as road workers dug up Karangahape Road in the name of Auckland's progress. It was pretty exciting. But also, I have to confess, I was kind of surprised to see dirt and clay under there...like it was still there...under the Ubers. I was surprised. I kind of forgot that there was an 'underground' to the city at all. The clay coming out of K was bright yellow and oily. I didn't think it was supposed to look like that, but maybe? Like, how would I know? I was and still am confronted by my lack of connection to the land. It's ironic, because I actually grew up rural as. Like, thick-feet-walk-on-the-gorse-kind-of-rural. My family farms their own meat, builds their own houses, grows their own produce. Ten-year-old me made PowerPoint presentations about why I needed to go to Manukau's *Supré* and *Jayjays* to get my Church outfits. We were not the same. My dad is a builder, like a Carpenter. Like; my-son-owns-a-timber-mill, timber-is-my-personality, I-got-a-mid-calf-tan-line-from-my-work-socks-and-arthritis-in-both-wrists kind of builder. And I grew up on construction sites, mostly for houses, most of my life.

Standing out on K watching its clay get dug up and trucked out, I thought about the building sites I grew up on; where diggers flattened land for bright, tight level lines and rusting nails. And there were our thick kid-feet, jumping on Gib stacks. My brother (best supporting actor), and me (looking far more superior) in my crop hoodie, purple jeggings, jelly bangles, fresh from Manukau Westfield. You could never, you could never come for me.

Looking back, I can now see that a building site is not an all good place for a kid. Building houses is hazardous, sharp. When we were kids we got told off for touching like literally anything. Don't touch that. It's toxic and your skin will burn. Don't move that it's dusty and it will stay in your lungs forever. Don't smell that, it'll rot your brain and, fair play, it totally did. Looking back, it was like every material that went into a building was poisonous, but somehow stopped being yuck once the house was ready to call home? Once on a building site, I made a wig out of pink batts, and covered my hands in white house paint to look like I was wearing long gloves. I wrapped myself in plastic building wrap, and I was *Cinderella* at her ball. I sprinkled concrete powder onto my brother's hair to make him the evil stepmom. And we tried to make a glass Slipper using a multipurpose filler.

It's part of the job to use all those solvents and paints, it prevents a house from rotting. Dad hates the rubber skip outside the building site full of plastic and old bits of buildings destined for landfill. He goes on about why we don't need to build like this. And as a kid I didn't understand or care... like I had PowerPoints to make, you know? But now I see why dad dreams for a new normal on the building site.

Fast forward from the jelly bangles and cut to me at 23; standing on K Road, wearing 'adult' body glitter, and watching us cut out the earth. Auckland; a city in love with beginnings. Property plops of quick-sale town-houses, Kmart coat hangers and floor sockets propping up your middle bits. A very serious housing crisis. People got to learn how to share. And by people, I mean the people that own all the houses. And by crisis, I mean, you're 52 years old Humpty, stop making your Dumpty midlife crisis everybody else's problem. Wipe that dried up egg white out the corner of your mouth. brunch was 8 hours ago. Yes, the 54 year old Humpty Dumpty has since gone into cannibalism, and it's only the brunch dates that are putting him back together again at this point.'

We grow up with stories, like Humpty Dumpty, stories we can imagine. Humans are actually great at imagining, it's how we imagine debt to be real. So imagine with me now, and I'll start the story. Imagine it's 3021, the year 3000. Your

great-great-great-granddaughter is pretty fine, and you and your ancestors have built this neighbourhood where it is totally normal to have whole houses that have been built up and out of the ground around them. These earthy structures are called "flim-flams" (giving them a name helps the story become believable to you). These earthy looking flim-flams can be built in any way you like, painted any colour you like, and to be honest, they look quite similar to the homes we have in the year 2000. But these flim plants are different from the houses you or I grew up in, in one very important way; these homes are designed to decompose back into the earth in ways that give the ground more life. A nutrient source for its own soil. "Flim-flams" can be built by anyone, and are a way of building where the communal act of preparing a home is just as much a part of the end result as the living in it is. It is a place where less is more normal, and a place where a "flim-flam" ... is pretty fucking down to earth (I love a catchphrase).

All right, Mary, stop drinking the beetroot dye. Round these paths we believe in real things like credit scores and heat pumps okay? That's our life. That's our normal. Well, is it ours? Housing, especially for those who don't own property, is a kind of take-what-you-can-get approach. Pirate law, "arr take what you can get, give nothing back!" Jack and Jill go up the hill for the ocean view, but the rest of us get damp walls and bronchial problems.

For the lucky, hardworking, privileged few; there are ways of doing things differently. There are different normals. And with that, I decided to go back home. I take my soft sneaker-feet back to the sheep fleece, church, pub, and beef-cheeks. To home: where it is fairly common for people to live off-grid, and with the land, growing produce that Farros could only dream of. And a couple: who together made an 8000 yellow-brick-game-changer...

an earth building.

So whānau, I'm about to play you an interview that I had with two people who live around where I grew up. Their lifestyle is actually really impressive in that they live completely self-sufficiently. They generate their own power, collect their own water, and they grow their own produce and meat. And apparently, their reliance on outside shops is around \$30 a week; enough for a bit of gas, dark chocolate and cream for the all important coffee, (which by the way they roast themselves). They also have a rudely thick avocado tree. And now they are even in the process of learning how to roast their own cacao beans to make their own chocolate! AVO, ESPRESSO, CHOCCO :o

And, as hard-work as it must be to sustain this kind of lifestyle, from the outside, on the surface, to me, to someone that's just come off the Southern motorway; their life looks pretty damn sexy. The couple look like they belong on a billboard for *Country Road*. Actually, not even that. They look like they're like the origin-story for how the bamboo-linen, palm-leaf and prettier-than-Jesus marketing team collects their mood boards for the next 'good vibe'.

Also, I know the people I talk to are listening to this episode and I'm slightly nervous to say what I'm about to say next, but fuck it I'll just come out and say it. They are a sexy couple. They are hot. They look like they've just been ravaged by the natural elements yet still continue to practice an amazing skincare routine. The husband wears relaxed blue jeans and an open dress shirt, showing his tan chest. He looks comfortable, in bare-feet, silver hair tied back up in a ponytail. (They're going to hate being described like this). Nah, embrace it Gabi: The wife beams a kind of fresh-faced exuberance that I can only describe as Barbara Streisand in the 1976 version of *A Star Is Born*. If you've seen the film, imagine the honeymoon house that Barbs and Kris built

together (it's an hour and 16 minutes into the film). It's an earth building, built by the hands of the Angel Barbs and the rock star Kris during a sexy, sunny, uncomfortably exoticized montage moment played out during an epic love ballad.

Anyway, whether my local couple likes it or not (I mean, come on, you gotta love it), I'm pushing the Streisand angle because the couple have actually asked to not be identified in this interview. They are very proud of their Earth building, but they don't like attention. They know me from being local, so they were game to chat and help me out. But for the remainder of this podcast, I shall refer to them by the people who they remind me of a lot: the *gravely* Kris Kristopherson and the silky Barbara Streisand. Kris and Barbs for short. So thank you, Kris and Barbs, thank you for talking with me. Let's give the public what they are now absolutely dying for...let's get into this interview..

[start of interview]

Kris: We sat on this Hill that looked out to the sea, and we both saw this house in our minds, and we came up with a concept of the shape of a bone. So that's where we started the shape of a bone and basically expanded.

Gabi: And it was always going to be an Earth building for you?

Kris: Yeah, it was always going to be earth and off grid. As I said: having grown up in a Villa, I know how cold they can be. This has been an amazing difference.

Barbs: Earth is so sustainable. Earth is where you start, it's on site. Building it ourselves, we like the learning process, we like the challenge, we like creating. So for us, it wasn't a job. It was a creation.

Kris: There's 8000 bricks in this house, and it was surprisingly easy to create those bricks. It took three weeks in the end to create 8000 bricks. We actually used a car park, and a guy with a big concrete mixer, and a tractor. We actually put the Earth into the big concrete mixer. So basically, then the concrete mixer got stuck on the back of a tractor, and the molds were behind the tractor, so we opened the concrete mixer, poured the earth into the mold, and as the tractor drove along it just dropped out into the molds. And then you screeded the top of the molds. And basically, we could make 1200 a day like that.

Gabi: That's amazing.

Kris: Being Earth brick as well, it's really user-friendly because I can come out and if it's raining I don't bother doing anything, or if the sun comes out I can lay say 50 bricks and then walk away. It doesn't all wash away, and it just grows at that pace. You can do it at your own pace, so it was really user-friendly to build.

Barbs: You can get a team of builders to wake it up in a few months, or you can take ten years. It doesn't matter.

Gabi: How long does this house take?

Barbs: Ten years. But obviously, life goes on around the building process. You go out and you earn a bit of money, and you have a life that you also build.

Gabi: Would you say, out of the 8000 bricks in this house, you've placed almost everyone yourself?

Kris: Absolutely. And you remember each individual brick because you'll pick it up and you'll go, "wow, this has got a hand print in it from when I-, that one's got a thumbprint on it from when I slipped" - and it's so cool because all that individualism is in it, and you can see it having built it. So it's really cool to have that within the building.

Gabi: Is it locally sourced soil?

Kris: The floor is, but the initial trials that we did for the bricks didn't come up to spec. They were a bit soft, so if you dropped the brick, it would shatter. It didn't have any stickability. So I actually was able to get really good soil from a quarry up north, and trucked it down in the end. So, yeah.

Gabi: Do you think given more research, you could technically build Earth bricks out of any soil?

Kris: Absolutely. Yeah.

Barbs: You just vary the recipe according to the clay that you're using.

Kris: The other thing about the bricks themselves, because we've built a round building, they're not all square. We've got triangle bricks, we've got half triangle bricks, we've got half bricks with holes in, we've got whole bricks with holes in for electricity to go through, for piping to go through, for all sorts to go through.

Gabi: That one material covers it all.

Barbs: And it's your insulation.

Gabi: And it's your insulation yeah, that big thermal mass. So I guess, in the limited knowledge that I know about earth building (because obviously there's different types, rammed earth as well and things) but, the main, 'disadvantage' that people will say is "well, it's Super Labor intensive and slow". So it's really interesting that you found a very 'Kiwi ingenuity' way, a car park with a tractor, that's amazing, to just basically bulk-manufacture your building material.

Kris: Yeah, because having previously made the 3000 bricks by hand with a concrete mixer over about a year.

Barbs: And then they failed.

Kris: And then they failed.

Gabi: Heart-breaking.

Kris: Yeah, it was. So you learn from that and you go right. We'll do it this way.

Gabi: Yeah. So again, you've got 8000 or so bricks and you're laying the bricks into your house. That's a lot of work. Was that a collaborative process?

Kris: Yeah. It was about the process for us, it was enjoying life and watching it grow.

Gabi: There's a lot of problem solving on the spot by the sounds of it. You've given the kind of challenge and immediately had to respond.

Kris: Yeah.

Barbs: To get a smoother look, we chose to plaster the bricks with another earth mixture. It's mud and lime mixed together, and it's rubbed into the bricks so you can still see the brick outline.

Gabi: And what does lime do?

Kris: Like a putty.

Barbs: Yeah, it makes a texture. It's more malleable, it sticks bonds to the bricks. We went to the extreme of always starting from the base product

Gabi: Because you'd know what's in it, would that be the main reason for that?

Barbs: Yeah. And understanding the process.

Kris: Well, it's natural, but also this whole house is decorated inside and out with \$70 worth lime.

Gabi: That's amazing.

Kris: That's the total paint cost for this house is \$70. A ton of lime, raw lime, you can buy from a quarry for \$200. And you can turn that into about 30 barrels of lime putty by adding water. And then it sort of heats up, and bubbles, and burns itself. And through that reaction, it creates lime putty. And then you can rehydrate it to create lime wash, which is what is on the walls. And what it does, it pulls out the carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and turns it back into lime rock. So you've actually got rock on the walls. So it's very hearty and it breathes as a Rock would.

Barbs: And if you want to colour it, you just add the basic oxides. So the outside is actually yellow, we used a yellow oxide.

Gabi: Yes, I was going to say, and in the bathroom you've got a bit of red, brown by the fire.

Um, as an architect (well, I'm not) but as people listening who are architects might be asking; is what was the consent process? And also, because it was so DIY, is there any kind of standards or information you found online that helped you come to build this house?

Kris: Well, initially, I tried to build an Earth house ten years before, and ran into a whole lot of problems with Council and architects and process. And I lost thousands and thousands of dollars creating plans, going from architect to Council, architect to Council. And so I shelved the idea. Then, I did a lot of research, and found a guy called Ian Redford who wrote a lot of the Earth brick standards, and basically ticked all the boxes for us.

Barbs: For them to approve the building process.

Kris: Yeah, and it is a matter of ticking the boxes.

Gabi: Currently is there a code in New Zealand for earth building?

Barbs: Yes, there is, the *Earth Brick Building Code*.

Gabi: That's good to know.

Kris: It is an approved way of building. So, the process is there to go through now, it's not a problem.

Gabi: We live in a hyper-capitalist world, and I think the main thing people maybe desire from a house, especially built from scratch, is speed: how quickly something can be done. Which is maybe why there are these kinds of templates? Could you see something like this existing in a city?

Kris: Absolutely.

Barbs: Yeah. Why not? It's just the house. Yeah.

Kris: It's like, the brick houses in the city: the bricks come from somewhere, they're trucked in. Same scenario, these bricks can be made somewhere, trucked in.

Barbs: And why make them just a veneer? Why not make them the structure of the house?

Gabi: Yes, that's a great point. The bricks are usually a kind of dressing, I like to think of it as kind of like makeup on the face of the bone structure. It's not the bone structure itself, really. So we know that timber and concrete and steel all come with their own risks; there's fire, there's earthquakes and they're heavy. The building site is quite a scary place, really. But.. it's normalised, it's normalised to build with them. So why do you think, in your opinion, is it not normalised to build with earth yet?

Kris: There's too many people making money out of processing. This house is 380 m², and it hasn't cost us \$100,000. You showed me where you can build a house in Auckland that's 380 m² for under \$100,000. But, there would be constraints because the engineering in this house, because of its shape [curved and long]. You'll probably find if you wanted to do a team build of bricklayers, it would have to be square.

Barbs: It's quicker to be square.

Gabi: Which really. I mean, this is an art object as much as it is a house. It's come from your hands, from your mind, and it's curvilinear. And it's gorgeous.

And also, from a more commercial point of view, it is a high thermal mass. There's no heat pump required for this house. That feels like a house that, as a first time buyer says, I'd want to move into.

Barbs: Absolutely.

Gabi: So you're on that. Speaking of, what is it like living here between summer and winter?

Kris: The house varies four degrees from the depth of winter to the heat of summer. It varies from 18 degrees up to 22 degrees in the heat of summer, and generally sits around 20 deg for most of the year. It's very comfortable, very nice. And if we do get a grey, rainy day in the middle of winter, I have the ability of creating fire and warming it.

Gabi: If aliens were to invade Earth, right now, and we all had to do this mass exodus to Mars, and we had to abandon all of the structures that humans have built on planet Earth: how would you expect this house to decompose?

Barbs: Gracefully.

Kris: Well, I guess the insects would eat the roof eventually. I guess the walls would break back down into the ground.

Barbs: A bit like what you see in England and Wales in the old buildings. The roof always goes first, and then the stone or the brick, or earth walls will gradually deteriorate.

Gabi: And there's no chemicals on the roof to get the bugs sick. There's no pink batts falling from the sky. I suppose the better question is, what wouldn't happen? What are you avoiding?

Kris: Yeah, it's just very user friendly to the Earth.

Barbs: Ashes to Ashes. Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust.

Gabi: Yeah. I mean, we all end up on the ground eventually. I just want to end by saying: I reckon, that if you're lucky enough, and you put the effort in, a house can become the expression of your values, and your lifestyle, and your vision. You're living here now, seventeen years after buying the place and ten years after building. What's your vision? What are you living now?

Barbs: Self-sufficient.

Kris: Yeah. Just working in the garden, and having not got a mortgage because we've only spent \$100,000 on a house, and just being able to live self-sufficiently on the land, and to basically give back.

Barbs: Give back to the land, to be in the now, we like to share it.

Kris: And if it inspires people, it's like you're inspired. You were inspired from day one with the earth, and building with earth. And if it inspires people, that's what it's all about for me.

Gabi: Yeah, definitely. I think it's one of those things where when you can imagine a world, it doesn't really feel as real until you're seeing somebody doing it. Not only someone doing it, but somebody with the same kinds of situation. I mean, you live where I live or whatever and kind of just feeling it's so accessible to create something that's different from the normal. And it's no grand design and grand designs. They always have these grand visions, and it's tenfold more expensive often than the average house. But what you've got is a clear set of values that actually benefits not only your living situation, but your pocket as well as the square meterage. You don't have a mortgage. It's amazing.

Kris: It's very cool.

Gabi: I bet it is. Okay. Well, thank you for sitting and chatting. I guess now I'd like to see the vision in action, and really, that's us. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Barbs: No problem.

[end interview]

Gabi: After the interview, I drove to the coast and walked beside the moana I grew up on, the West Coast. For some reason, I found myself whistling songs from *The SpongeBob Movie* while I was walking in the waves. As if to really emphasise how disconnected I am from nature. Like, why? I see the West Coast, and my subconscious asks me who lives in a pineapple under the sea? Anyway, I walk along the coastline holding my sexy, sexy Earth brick that Kris and Barbs let me take home from their house.

Holding the earth, deep in muddy thought, rippled with the water while the sand glittered up in my eyeballs, I thought about what Kris and Barbs had said about the car park. The ease with which the earth bricks were able to be made at a mass scale. I thought about how cheap the house was to build for its square meterage, and basically it was all built by one main material. And there was even a building code for Earth now, I didn't know that before.

I thought about what Kris had said about corporations making money from building materials we typically build with. I think knowledge is such a weird power dynamic because I don't know who is benefiting from building materials, so it feels too rash to paint it all with the same brush, and kind of like spit venom at it. But I live in buildings every day, so seeing an Earth home, something I'm not used to seeing, reminded me of how much building material is under our feet. So I'm sitting here, making wigs out of pink batts, knowing that insulation costs like \$100 a pop. That's about \$10 per square meter of your house. Approximate cost of plastering to a finished quality in New Zealand, including painting and skirting boards and plaster board, is about \$60 per meter squared of your house. And as a general rule, timber framing should cost around \$1300-1500 per 1500 /m². That's to say that we're looking at about \$1,270 per square meter of your walls.

So I'm walking the coast, hearing about a day in a car park with a tractor making 8000 bricks, \$70 worth of lime wash to finish the whole house, \$100,000 to build the whole thing, knowing the average cost to build an average sized home in Auckland...and I'm thinking to myself, make it make sense.

On the way back to the city. I got out my trusty Spotify, and I re-listened to a podcast episode I had first come across in 2020. It's called *Indigenous Urbanism*, and it's made by Whangārei-based architect Jade Kake (my architecture crush by the way). Jade

Kake makes podcasts by talking and curating the voices of key people who support and shape Indigenous environments in Aotearoa. I cannot recommend Jade's podcast enough, and if you take literally just one thing away from the sound of my voice, it is look up *Indigenous Urbanism*. The link is in the episode notes.

Anyway, I re-listened to the first episode for the *n'th time, it's called *Mangakahia Papakāinga*.

Mangakahia is up North, between Whangārei and Kaikohe. It is a beautiful countryside, and also - as Jade puts it in the episode - it is a place of high unemployment, with a lack of housing affordability and quality housing. It has a large Māori population, and a lack of education opportunities for our young people.

Papakāinga - meaning original home, home base, village, communal Māori land, is what Jade visits in this episode. She interviews Aroha and husband Richard who are facilitating the development of their whenua, iwi land

The papakāinga is about having whānau reconnect with their land collectively, in a value shift that challenges the colonial constructs of “what bit is mine?”, and “what bit can I get out of it?” I don't need to summarise the whole episode, you can just listen to it yourself- it's not my story to tell anyway. So, the only bit I will draw out for your ears now, is when Jade asked Aroha why they decided to build Mangakahia's homes using earth, earth bag and poured earth construction?

The answer is because earth sustains the initial vision they had, standing in that empty paddock.

Before houses, iwi developed its agriculture. Gardening began getting people back to the whenua, to grow community, feed community, and upskill community. Ticking the goals of the papakāinga.

Next step built from the earth was housing. Construction used the local earth to build - from Papatūānuku, the earth mother - where all things living originate from. The sites hired local whānau as workers, so its building that keeps people employed, upskilled, and also had young people getting to quite literally hold their whenua in their hands.

I got my own little answer to "Why earth" in a form I actually did not expect. Just before this episode was about to air, I took an unrelated trip to the Titirangi art gallery, the *Te Uru Gallery*, a building designed by *Mitchell and Stout Architects*. I went there to nab a Jess Johnson poster. And, it was an amazing thing, in a ceramics show happening there at the moment, there is a beautifully tender artwork by the artist Te Ara Minhinnick, who is of the Ngāti Te Ata iwi - from Waiuku, where I grew up. I couldn't believe that I was seeing the work at the time of writing this episode, because what I was looking at were earth bricks! Made from the mud collected from the bottom of the Waiuku Estuary, right by the house that I used to grow up in!

Waiuku: *wai* meaning water, and *uku* meaning mud. The artist Te Ara Stands in the Waiuku stream and collects earth, collects her whenua, collects its histories, through her hands. Behind the estuary is a pub (classic). It's called *The Kentish*. Overlooking the estuary, is the billowing steam of the *Waiuku Steel Mill*. Built in the 1960's, the Steel Mill is a main employment economy of my hometown, my mum worked there as a teenager. The biggest hustle when I was a kid was being mates with somebody who had family that worked at the mill, because that meant you could go to the end of year Steel Mill trip to *Rainbows End*, where the Steel Mill's boss booked out the whole amusement park for the workers and families. It was dope.

I never knew this though, the steel mill is a painful reminder to Ngāti Te Ata, of the loss of their sacred burial ground, Maioro, on top of which the steel mill is built. And that was what I walked into, when I came to Te Uru gallery in Titirangi on that day.

Ngā mihi Te Ara, ngā mihi.

On that, I'm going to play a little sound-bite from Bhaveeka; one of our two most oofy writers in our December Issue of *Bypass Journal*, check them out:

Bhaveeka: The whenua that falls in my garden. What if we could reuse that whenua back into our architectural methods, something that's basically free and everywhere? So my name is Bhaveeka Madagammana, I'm Sri Lankan, born in Hong Kong, but came to New Zealand when I was four-years-old.

Long story short, I've had experience working with forensic architecture methods which aim to look at violent incidents or particular events and begin to analyze how architecture might have played a role. I thought, what if you could shift architectural methodologies towards looking at the life and the joy of spaces, rather than the violence that's so present? And how does that inform architecture? How does that inform whole new ways of working?

I originally wanted to try my best to collaborate with the whenua, and include whenua as an almost autonomous being, as like Papatūānuku, into the drawing practice. Bugs, insects, you have decomposition. I sort of became fascinated to read whenua as a text. But not to know it, in a kind of positive sense like "*I'm trying to find everything I can about whenua*", but to begin to explore and understand what whenua experiences of us, and how it experiences the songs that already exist.

I love color. I come from a culture that loves colour. Despite the kind of suburbia; the lawn mowers that are over top of it, and like all this weird stuff, and street lights, and really big wide roads, - the colors are still present. The songs are still present. And you can never take that away from whenua.

Whenua entails ground, altogether, entirety, placenta, land. And, I also define whenua as anything that is directly made of, and evokes, whenua.

Gabi: *Ko au ko te taiao, ko te taiao ko au.* I am the environment and the environment is me. I am the environment! And the environment is me! It's not just about what we build, it's about how we build it. It's not just what ends up on our plate, but how it was grown, and prepared, and where it was shared, and who it was shared with. The sexy Barb and Kris: off-grid, rich in avos, living a life that they have been able to make real. And it's sexy, there's no doubt about that. It's a lot of work, and they are incredibly privileged and afforded to make their own 'normal'.

Could this level of connection with the Earth work in a City? Where space vies with capacity. Where the closest thing to a communal garden is the free fruit at Countdown, (it's an urban myth that it's just for kids by the way). To be honest, walking on a City pavement makes it hard to imagine anything different than 'this'. Proximity to life's bind, grinds the imagination down to a tab size. Are we fools for dreaming different in a broken egg system? Or are we foolish for pretending that it stuck like this for good?

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty together again. Humpty cracked under the pressure of the Earth. Are we fools for dreaming different in a broken egg system? I am a foolish human being, it's one of my most intoxicating qualities - thank you. We escape, we love it. We love the foolishness. And I know you love it too, or else you would have stopped listening at the start.

To be able to see this city as a scalable problem, I needed distance again. This time I didn't go up as far as Waiuku, I went to Waiheke [Island]. Like parts of where I grew up, Waiheke is a place where a privileged few can afford to escape conventions, or at least have a little pocket of their land. Paradise, away from the Southern motorway cloggers like me.

Waiheke was far enough away for a bit of space between me and Central. So I took my earth brick, and the whole ferry ride it sat next to me on my left, taking in the view. I held that earth brick, as the city shrunk away from me. Walking around, holding this now kind of like damp-with-sweat brick. Stepping, and turning. And every so often when I turned the brick, a thought would urk me.

One turn: *my body finds coffee on its own now, the whole world is in fancy dress.*

Another turn: *Perhaps life just turns a person who tries hard, into a person who felt that they might just write it on somebody else's report.*

Three turns: *A day is exactly the wrong length of time to address dispassion head-on. Call it names with speed and good manners, for the time-stamped hours between breakfast and society.*

I decided to take my brick to Pūtiki, a Marina being cut into right now in front of its guardians and mana whenua. Kaitiaki have been risking their safety to protest the Marina's construction. Follow [@protectpūtiki](#) for more information. I stood by that metal security gate, looking up at the driller's drill. I turned my earth brick to the rhythm of the loud machines. My touch traced its limits. It was dirt.

And suddenly the city felt ridiculous. I felt ridiculous. Me, a city more disposed to beginnings than safe continuations. Why am I on Waiheke? Queasy girls squabble and blob in the hot Gregorian summer. And then out of a temporary office at the building site of the Pūtiki Marina stepped out a man in a clown suit, looking like a sad nursery rhyme in a tie. There was a bit of dried egg in the corner of his mouth.

I hold the brick and I trace its limits. I'm an imprint of the Earth. I am a future fossil, of inherited blue eyes and overdrafts. I pick up that earth brick again and imagine half my cheekbone is in it, smoothed to time. My caffeinated ambition will return to the Earth. White blue eyes will turn to jelly. Hair will confuse the worms. As the spine loosens its grip and the futures that I never found time to get around.

And it's the end of the podcast now. And I got to admit, you did actually get a tad punk just there. I did just semi-prank you just there. I never went to Waiheke. I never went to Waiheke, straight up I could not afford the ferry. Instead, I just donated \$20 to Protect Pūtiki. I watched their Instagram stories while I was walking up Maungawhau. I breathed in the sky. I relied on the ground to hold me up, each step. I saw the roofs that my bloodlines had created in the in between. I wrote about this because it felt like a good place to end the podcast, because you didn't actually go to Waiheke either.

You also have never met Kris and Barb's, though I wish you bet you could. You weren't with me in Waiuku, or Titirangi. You might not know Bhaveeka, you might not know me. But you're here now, with us, in this world that we've created together. A world of birds, bees and iwis, and we are just living in it! You've seen it all, by my side, because you've been imagining it too. Just like me, you've been able to get a bit of distance from the city. You've been up in your head space, too, a place where you can live rent free.

And you know what? If you made it this far in the podcast, with not one single picture to be had...well, you sound pretty down to earth to me.

I love a catchphrase.

And it's the end of the podcast now. If you liked it, and even if you didn't, lol, you should know that this is a fulltime job to make. I absolutely love this job, but at this stage we don't have any kind of funding or way of getting paid for it. I work and I make it work, so I'm not complaining. But if you, wonderful listener, are lucky enough to not rely on an overdraft. And if you have a salary, or if you indeed have spare change at the end of the week..

Koha of any kind will help pay for studio recording, time, transport, getting to and from the interviews, the labor of the research, writing production of each episode and paying our sound engineer Ariki the rate that he deserves. Link in episode notes.

This was the second episode from *Bypass Podcast*. Thanks so much to our team, our sound producer, Ariki, our guests this week, Kris and Barbs, Bhaveeka. Thank you to Jade Kake, the voices of *Indigenous Urbanism*. Cheers to my brother Hugh for playing the tunes, and finally Te Ara and their pieces at the *Te Uru Gallery*.

If you like this episode, and you want to hear more by me (Gabi Maffey), listen to *This ain't Auckland* wherever you listen to your podcasts. It's a podcast mini-series that has come from *Karangahape Road*. All the links to find the people that are in this episode are in the episode notes. And lastly, thank you to you, the listeners, for choosing this podcast as one to listen to! Sounds like you'll be hearing a totally different episode next month! So tune in then, and until then...(Dad jokes coming on, pre-warning), see you next year!

[\[end of episode\]](#)