

# The chrysalis city

Imogen Rose admires the spirit of the people of Christchurch



There is a familiarity, a genuine connection between Australians and New Zealanders. When New Zealanders suffer, particularly from something as devastating as the 2011 February Christchurch earthquake, it feels personal for many of us.



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So when the Crusaders, a team that's inseparable from Christchurch, did what no other team could do – rolled up their sleeves, literally and figuratively, winning game after game in a different stadium each week before finally reaching the 2011 Super Rugby final against the Queensland Reds – many rugby fans, even in Brisbane, were quietly backing the Kiwi team.

Like their loyal Cantabrian supporters, many outsiders wanted to see this inspiring and courageous team, a beacon of hope for an entire city, enjoy the ultimate triumph. They didn't win, but no matter the final score, the Crusaders had made their historic point. It was one of those rare sporting stories that made people feel proud – proud of the human spirit, proud of the ability to rise and never surrender against great challenge.

As I walk around Christchurch, I'm constantly reminded of that spirit. Three years on, the wounds of the earthquake remain evident, especially in the CBD. There's an extraordinary juxtaposition between the signs of damage and the untarnished beauty of spared pockets. The Avon, a romantic, gentle, Wind in the Willows-like river, meanders through Christchurch, passing attractive picnic spots and derelict sites alike.

This is a city in a state of rebirth and regeneration. To see Christchurch today is to experience history in the making. The severity of the earthquake left a landscape that recalls the destruction of European cities after World War II. And just as innovation was central to post-war recovery in Europe, in Christchurch I can feel the dynamism of innovation, creativity and

pragmatism laying the seeds for a prolific future. It's evident in architecture such as the visionary design of the Transitional Cathedral, the world's only cathedral made substantially of cardboard. At sunset, the resplendent stained glass shines forth.

There's an almost feverish development under way, powered by determination and resilience. It is born of the earthquake experience and a commitment to use adversity as a catalyst for regrowth. All around, there is evidence of ingenuity and initiative.

I spend a day shopping and dining in some of the temporary pop-up businesses, including the highly-functional and unique Re:START Development in Cashel Street. Here I find a broad range of retailers operating within the purposeful structures of shipping containers! It's impossible not to admire the tenacity of Cantabrians as they find imaginative, workable ways of creating a sense of normality.

Major re-development includes the Justice and Emergency Services Precinct, New Zealand's most high-tech government building; and the Metro Sports Facility. With so many of Christchurch's sports venues damaged or destroyed, this complex is an important step in rebuilding the city's future.

Nowhere is the spirit and potential of Christchurch more evident than through Todd Blackadder, the legendary former All Blacks captain, Crusaders captain and current Crusaders coach. The unassuming Blackadder and his team have been instrumental in generating hope and inspiration immediately following, and



Opposite: The damage and the clean-up.  
This page: Re:START retail development; the Avon; Transitional Cathedral

since, the earthquake. Many Crusaders helped others clean up before attending to their own damaged homes. And despite the loss of their stadium and training ground, as well as the enormous practical and logistical impediments confronting the elite sports team, the Crusaders achieved what to many would seem the impossible – not only to play-out the season, but to reach the final.

Like the chrysalis of a butterfly, Christchurch is a city in transformation, a city on the cusp of great things. It has risen from the earthquake and embraced the opportunities that come from adversity. For Christchurch, like the Crusaders, the best is yet to come.



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