

Newspaper office opens new page



Renovation

Catherine Groenestein

A building where South Taranaki stories were written for more than a century has begun a new chapter after a renovation that took half a decade.

The 109-year-old former office of the *Hāwera and Normanby Star*, which eventually became the *Hāwera Star*, the *South Taranaki Star*, and today's titles, the *Taranaki Star*, and the *Taranaki Daily News*, is now home to the South Taranaki team of Excel Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Limited.

Built in 1913, the Regent St building has a feeling of the history it helped to record, Excel Group director Craig Heerdegan said.

"It has a special spirit to it, it's got something about it."

The building was closed in 2016 due to being earthquake prone and, at 715 square-metres, was too large for the *Stuff* team, so Excel bought it.

"We needed a big home for our growing team, and part of the allure was the space," Heerdegan said.

Boon Architects were called in to work on the building, which needed a new roof and other repairs as well as extensive earthquake strengthening, he said.



The building, which opened in 1913, was the home of Hāwera's community newspapers for more than a century. Its renovation includes a modern workspace, inset top. The staffroom, left, is in a room formerly occupied by printing presses.

ANDY MACDONALD/STUFF

"We spent two years trying to come up with a plan."

Then Covid hit, and they discovered asbestos in the walls and roof, which caused more delays.

But, after a five-year wait, the company finally moved into its new HQ over Matariki weekend.

From the outside the building, with its distinctive arched windows, looks much the same,

albeit with a sharp new paint job.

But inside it's almost unrecognisable, even to someone who worked there in the past.

A warren of dark corridors and rooms has gone, as has the 1970s red carpet and cracked walls.

Now, light floods open-plan offices with custom-built desks and meeting tables in plywood, divided by glass walls and partitions

created from frames of potted plants, grown by a green-thumbed staff member.

But they have retained as many features from the building's past as possible, Heerdegan said.

In the staffroom, there is a large ink stain on the floor.

Gnarly roof trusses are a feature in the boardroom, along with a concrete square in the floor that

once supported printing equipment.

"We've left the roof trusses as is, they tell their own story, and all the dings and donges of the floorboards tell of their past," Heerdegan said.

There are tattered architect's plans for 1970s-era alterations framed on a wall, along with photographs from the building's history.