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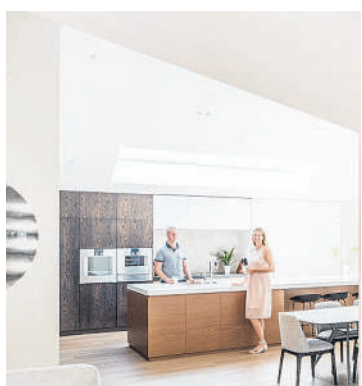
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Cranes reflect a high note

Anyone who has counted the number of cranes dotting Auckland city's skyline won't be surprised to hear that the number of new homes consented in the Super City hit a 15-year high last year.

"In November, Auckland home consents reached their second-highest level on record," construction statistics manager Melissa McKenzie said. "This is beaten only by October 2002, when nearly 2000 new homes were consented due to a much larger spike in apartments."

In Auckland 1450 consents were issued in November, boosted by apartments. Nationally, 3262 new homes were consented during the month, comprising:

- 1870 houses (down slightly from November 2016)
- 577 townhouses, flats, and units (the highest



number on record)

- 543 apartments (a nine-year high)
- 272 retirement village units

In seasonally adjusted terms, the number of new homes consented rose 11 per cent in November, following a 10 per cent fall in October.

"November's rebound in home consents was driven by apartments, which tend to fluctuate a lot and were particularly low in October," McKenzie said. "Looking at the longer-term picture, building consents for apartments and townhouses have seen double-

digit growth year after year, while consents for stand-alone houses have levelled off."

Leasehold

A legal challenge is under way in the UK to the way leasehold fees are calculated by landowners.

The case of Mundy v the Sloane Stanley Estate has some commentators saying that if Mundy wins it will send "shockwaves" throughout the UK's property industry.

According to a report in the *Guardian*, the case involves a small flat where the cost to renew a lease is £420,000. James Wyatt is challenging the system of valuing a lease, saying it is unfair, and claims lease payers are being overcharged by £430 million (NZ\$812m) a year by land owners.

"The Mundy case is a landmark moment in leasehold reform," says Jo Darbyshire, of the National Leasehold Campaign.

Six is good but 10 is best

DIANA CLEMENT

Kiwis are constantly setting their sights higher when it comes to having the best of everything in their new builds and renovated homes.

These days that could mean increasingly innovative products and to-die-for solutions ranging from vertical gardens to Wi-Fi operated curtains.

More homebuyers are looking for Homestar-rated properties, which spells out homes' health, warmth and efficiency.

The New Zealand Building Code is the equivalent of a 4 Homestar rating. To achieve a 6 Homestar, which is the minimum standard expected by more discerning buyers, new homes must be healthier, warmer and more efficient than the law requires.

Around 1000 homes have qualified for the 6 rating, says Andrew Eagles, chief executive officer of the New Zealand Green Building Council, which runs the rating programme. However, around 20,000 new homes are still going through the process of being certified.

A smaller number of homes reach a 7 Homestar rating. A 10 Homestar means you're buying a world-leading home. New Zealand's first home to reach that lofty height is in Christchurch.

Many apartment and home builders are designing new homes to qualify for Homestar ratings, says Eagles. They include Classic Builders, Dominion Constructors, Evolution, Fletcher Living, Legacy Property and MyPad.

Some home and apartment builders are taking the ratings one step further with their . For example, the St Marks residential complex



St Marks residential complex in Remuera received the first acknowledgement in the Innovation category of the Homestar Design rating system.

design in Remuera includes a trio of five-storey high vertical walls featuring specially grown vegetation, which earned the development the first acknowledgement in the Innovation category of the Homestar Design rating system.

"The additional bio-diversity provided from the flora growing in these panels will see bees and birds attracted to the structures, while simultaneously producing oxygen, and absorbing particulate matter and contaminants such as carbon-dioxide," said Natural Habitats landscape architect Mel Robinson. St Marks achieved a 7 Homestar rating overall.

The area that is catching buyers' attention at the Home Ideas Centre is home automation,

says director Philippa Lowery.

"Being able to control (things) from your phone is popular," says Lowery. "You can even control your fireplace."

Features such as LED lighting that were dreams 10 years ago, are now a reality, says Phil Smith, director at Collingridge and Smith Architects. These days we're more likely to dream of having an outdoor room (instead of a traditional garden), triple-glazed thermally broken windows from Germany or Scandinavia, and as much glass as possible.

For exteriors, we are dreaming of the converted barn look, says Smith, while inside, the emphasis is on kitchen and bathroom finishes.

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