For more information about Ngā Waka o Pōneke visit wharewakaoponeke.co.nz and Wellington.govt.nz

Te Hononga and Te Rerenga Kōtare

Visitors can see two waka on permanent public display through the glass sides of the wharewaka — the waka taua Te Rerenga Kōtare and the waka tēkura Te Hononga. Both are working waka and can be launched from the slipways into the lagoon for ceremonial occasions.

Te Rerenga Kōtare and Te Hononga were carved under the guidance of renowned waka builder Hekenukumai Busby, known as Hector Busby and a carving team led by James Molnar at Whitireia Polytechnic. The waka were carved from kauri dug out of Northland swamps and thought to be more than a thousand years old.

The waka were built in 2011. Alongside the traditional waka and used more frequently are the two waka ama, Amokura and Whio. They are used for training and in competitive racing.
Waka taua are the largest and most elaborate of the single-hull carved waka used by Māori for ceremonial events and in the past as war canoes. The presence of a waka taua signifies self-determination, prestige and strength. The name, Te Rerenga Kōtare (flight of the kingfisher), refers to the native kingfisher, a bird that strives to complete tasks and protect its own. When the kingfisher takes flight, it is strong, balanced, focused and effortless.

Waka ūtēkura are multipurpose canoes used for fishing and transportation. They can be paddled by men and women. Te Hononga is less elaborately carved than Te Rerenga Kōtare. It has a distinctive prow known as a ūtē. The bow piece typically takes the form of a face with a protruding tongue. The name Te Hononga, means to bind together and form alliances.

Te Raukura, named for the flight of the kingfisher. Image by Stephen Fox

Te Raukura — the wharewaka (canoe house) on Wellington’s waterfront is not only an elegant home for the city’s two waka (canoes), it is the fulfilment of a vision to return a Māori presence to Te Whanganui-a-Tea/Wellington Harbour.

The vision belonged to Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika, a collective of people from Taranaki, whose ancestors migrated to Wellington in the 1820s and 1830s. The name of the wharewaka, Te Raukura symbolises the peaceful resistance of their tupuna at Parihaka in the 1880s and the white feather (Te Raukura) is still worn by the descendants today. Taranaki Whānui includes whānau and hapū from Te Ātiawa, Taranaki, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāti Mutunga iwi.

The wharewaka design is based on a korowai (cloak), which signifies mana and prestige. The korowai roofline recalls the traditional sails of the waka fleet, and the louvred metal panels symbolise a cloak draped over the sides of the building.

The wharewaka opened in 2011 and was built in partnership with Wellington City Council, acknowledging the past and marking the city’s future commitment to Taranaki Whānui. Te Raukura is open daily and can be accessed through Karaka Café.

Te Raukura, named at the official dawn ceremony on 6 February 2011