



# models of memory

Miniature houses are helping with grief.

**Right:** Richard Gardiner working on a current commission, McLean's Mansion.

**Above:** Some of Richard's past works.

**H**ouses are repositories of memories. Christchurch model-maker Richard Gardiner realises this more than most. He carefully fashions – from photographs or architectural plans – houses and buildings in miniature, as a precious and precise memento for his clients. Then he paints them with Resene testpots.

“Often there is an emotional response when people come to pick up the model of their house,” Richard says. “People may not realise how much of a memory-bank their house has been, until they’re confronted with the exact tiny replica. This is particularly so when they’ve lived there a long time and milestone family events have happened there.”

Buried or temporarily quashed grief – such as resulted from the Canterbury earthquakes – can come flooding back. These seismic disasters were, in fact, the trigger to Richard's career taking such a model-making turn. Owners of condemned houses have made up much of his client list – around 55 models to date. Others are developers who want to show potential clients scale models of imminent structures.

Richard retired from his Head of Art role at Burnside High School at the end of 2010, between the two most devastating earthquakes, and took up his model-making mantel.

Richard's web address says it all; ‘Scaled Down. Your world in miniature.’ As well as the exacting work of reproducing every element of a structure and having pieces laser-cut to achieve perfection, Richard documents each project online.

Because each model house takes several weeks or months to complete, he likes to have a couple on the go at once. “It's good for variety and interest to keep a couple progressing in tandem,” he adds.





A current work that could be the most challenging yet is simply known to Cantabrians as ‘McLean's Mansion in Manchester Street.’ Richard is as fascinated with the story of the place as he is with the intensive task of its tiny recreation.

It goes like this: the mansion, still at 387 Manchester Street, was designed in the 1850s by the England Brothers for a 78-year-old bachelor Scotsman called Allan McLean, who lived there with just his housekeeper. With an eccentrically eye-watering number of rooms, it was used as a private residence for 13 years.

As with all of his miniature projects, Richard will complete the house with the correct exterior paint colours and finishes, which he sources from Resene. “I can get absolutely any colour or mix from Resene. If they can't find a particular shade then nobody else can. They'll readily make the perfect mix.”

Richard plans to continue with his finely crafted, architecturally fascinating work “for as long as the demand's there.” In a very real way he's helping homeowners to unlock and preserve an important piece of their personal histories. **H**

For more, see [www.scaleddown.co.nz](http://www.scaleddown.co.nz).

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