



# Stairway to mathematical heaven

by Joseph Barratt

Ever since the Renaissance period many of the world's artists and architects have proportioned their works to the golden ratio.

The number 1.6180339887 seemingly is a random figure, but artists and scholars have been fascinated by its perfection for centuries.

Leonardo Da Vinci used it in his works, and the Egyptians called it the Sacred Ratio, which was fundamental to the building of the pyramids. It fascinated ancient Greek mathematicians and has puzzled intellectuals for almost 2400 years.

Now, the renowned New Zealand artist Billy Apple is bringing it to Auckland.

"I use it in a lot of my work, even in my deals for commercial work. I get 61.8 per cent and the dealer the rest. Normally it is a 60-40 ratio."

However, Mr Apple's latest work hasn't been for the money. It's more a labour of love.

At Monkey Hill Reserve in Mt Eden, near his home, Mr Apple has designed stairs as a practical accessway and a work of art. It will be opened next month.



BILLY APPLE DEAN PURCELL

"It has been something that I have wanted to do for a very long time. For years, I have been working a design out.

"It's beautiful, almost perfect—or as close as I can get it."

The stairs connect Onslow Rd and George St at Monkey Hill Reserve and are used by many people going to and from Eden Park.

"Those old steps were more than a hundred years old and were dangerous," says Mr Apple.

The new steps incorporate striking, coloured granite strips based on

the seven stages of the solar system and represent the Tower of Babel in ancient Persia.

Much of the design also follows the golden ratio, including the placement of Mr Apple's name and logo on the first step.

Ensuring the design worked in the practical sense was Adam Wilde, a director of architecture and conservation firm Archifact.

"It has taken a while for this to come to fruition but it has been worth the wait," says Mr Wilde.

"Billy had a dream he could do this and has really demonstrated that it could happen."

Mr Wilde says the golden ratio was integral to the work.

"Every small gap in the steps had to fit into the mathematical concept. So it meant we had a much smaller margin of tolerance.

"The science behind the art is what makes this so impressive. The big plus is now people will have a much safer way home through the park and they can enjoy the art at the same time."

The project was made possible by the donation of granite by arts patron Bruce Trethewey.