



11 2009

THE BROADSHEET OF THE AUCKLAND BRANCH OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

BLOCK

Queens Wharf

Christina van Bohemen - Both Finalist and Branch Chair - Debriefs the Debacle

It has been an extraordinary two months for architecture in Auckland. A large number of our profession and others have been involved in the Queens Wharf competition. I hold personal views on the events that have unfolded and I am the first to admit they may be coloured by my membership of one of the finalist teams.

There has been a lot of soul searching about how we have got to this point. Some say that the profession should have made a stand (as some practices did) and refused to participate in the whole affair. When the purchase of the wharf was announced and ambitious plans for party central were discussed I wrote to the NZ Herald urging careful and thoughtful consideration of this important piece of Auckland's waterfront.

Schemes originating from a number of sources began to appear in the Herald. At that point, the Auckland Branch encouraged Auckland City to consider a competition as an appropriate way to demonstrate the possibilities of the site and, importantly, to broaden the conversation about this part of the city's watery edge. At the time, some of our members expressed concern about having a competition in too short a timeframe around an underdeveloped brief.

A multi-headed governmental client is always going to be a challenge, and from an early stage there were indications that the project sponsors were having difficulty committing to a competition, its brief and conditions. NZIA endorsement for the competition was not sought and not offered, although opinion was sought on the suitability or otherwise of the sheds for adaptive reuse and potential jury membership.

At the launch of the competition jury panel membership was not finalised, the final decision on a winning team was to be made by politicians, timeframes for both the competition period and delivery of the project by October 2011 were tight and the brief called only for an overseas passenger terminal, event space and public open space. Additionally, a dual entry method similar to that employed for the Te Wero Bridge competition, allowed for three finalists derived from an expression of interest process.

237 entries and probably close to two million dollars of pro-bono time later, did we get too carried away with the chance to influence the future shape of the city?

The result as things stand today, is that the competition is officially on hold. The finalists have all received notification that submitted schemes complied with stage two brief requirements, although this has yet to be publicly acknowledged. We await the politicians' decision on where to from here.

I believe there are a number of good schemes amongst the final eight and this will become evident when the jury is finally allowed to discuss them. A great deal of time and effort from both competition

participants and members of the advisory panel seems to have been disregarded because the politicians got cold feet about taking the process further. More than just the 8 finalists are feeling aggrieved that architects have been the fall guys for the politicians, and the situation seems a shambles.

In retrospect I believe the profession needs to consider if we are prepared to adopt binding conditions requiring NZIA endorsement of individual competitions before members agree to participate. While the sponsors' willingness to throw a major competition open to all comers acts as a form of public consultation it also sends a message that belittles the skills of professionals. The NZIA needs to advocate for the value of well-organised competitions, and that good public buildings and spaces require the specialist skills of design professionals – architects, urban designers, landscape architects and engineers. The professions need to consider how we might support each other and work collectively towards that goal.

The NZIA is charged with an advocacy role and did respond to criticism prior to the politicians calling a halt to proceedings. A press release was issued, but mostly ignored by the media. Beverley McRae was interviewed as part of a panel on Radio New Zealand where she advocated for the competition to be allowed to run its course. This may have been too little too late – as she noted that politicians had already been unnerved by media commentary.

Unsurprisingly the professional opinions given most prominence in the press were those of architects critical of the competition's organisation, brief and resultant schemes. Given the comments reported, I am not convinced that criticism was based on a thorough analysis of the schemes and the second stage brief requirements. There seemed to be a misdirected presumption that the RWC was the primary driver of the proposals and that the project was about individual buildings rather than an urban design strategy for the future evolution of the site.

A major failure of the competition organisers was to allow the public to expect that development of the wharf for the RWC would also procure a major public building of some as yet undefined use. The project sponsors undermined their own competition by a lack of proactive clarification to the public, and possibly to the politicians themselves, of what this project was intended and able to deliver as the first step in the long-term development of the wharf.

While we may be seen as suckers for punishment I believe that most of our profession will remain interested in the future shape of our city and will continue to take part in the debate. It therefore behoves us to establish the conditions to allow us to do so on our own terms. I believe this requires a form of collective action that forcefully states to potential design competition sponsors that the profession as a whole will simply refuse to participate unless a superior competition structure is in place, with compensation commensurate to the importance and complexity of the project. CVB

**Making Light Work
Pip Cheshire on
Ian Wedde on Bill Culbert**



Bill Culbert Making Light Work
Ian Wedde Auckland University Press
ISBN 978 1 86940 439 0

Reading Wedde's book on Bill Culbert I am struck again by how burdened our trade is by the pragmatics of construction, the necessities of program, the vicissitudes of clients and how, in the course of this melee, the core elements of space making are too often occluded. In Culbert's elegant light assemblies, invariably composed only of a few found objects illuminated by sunlight or fluorescent tube, we see work that is beguilingly simple yet elegantly experimental in its exploration of light. Of course an assembly of coloured plastic oil containers impaled on a fluorescent tube doesn't have the same battalion of codes and inspectors arrayed against it as does most of our work, yet for all that we have a lot to learn from the clarity of Culbert's delicious studies.

When viewed through the compression of author and Te Papa curator Ian Wedde's comprehensively illustrated biographic review, Culbert's life seems a trajectory, arcing inexorably toward works which distil moments of wonder and understanding from object and light. That much of the work involves found domestic objects, either arranged or observed, creates a frisson between the ordinariness of the objects and the profundity of the observations they make. Oh that we space makers were more often able to pare away the detritus of serviced assembly and operational necessity, not in favour of the vacuity of minimalist style, but the acuity of space simply examined and reported upon.

It may be just the state of this reader's neurosis, or perhaps a bad case of discipline envy, but it was something of a shock to see work that so effortlessly cut to the chase – light, shadow and colour. I was reminded too that architecture invariably struggles to find simplicity when it comes to discussing built work, preferring it seems to assimilate the language and critique of other disciplines, or to find refuge in causal relationships between programmatic requirement, site, climate or physical context, and the built artefact. Wedde describes Culbert's turning away from painting and his subsequent concentration on the exploration of light as being an engagement in light, not as an enabler of phenomena like the excitement of pigment on canvas, but as a study of the phenomena of light itself. Though Culbert eschews imputed meaning, and especially that of a theosophical bent, his work examines one of the principal mechanisms by which we experience the world, and does so with all the precision and iterative methodology of a scientific observation.

One might well judge this book by its cover - well, actually its dust cover - which has Culbert's 1979 'Small glass pouring light' as its centrepiece. It is such a simple image – a full glass of wine and its light bulb-shaped shadow cast onto a rough ground plain; at its centre, a filament shaped glow of refracted sunlight. The image is familiar from previous publications, dominates the book's title and minimal graphic assembly and draws the reader's attention to the glass just as the wineglass itself draws in and pours the sunlight. The cover heralds a beautifully made book; clear legible text, well laid-out and printed images, well footnoted, a comprehensive bibliography and index, and the whole thing solidly cloth bound into a sturdy, just off-square landscape format. The text is organised as a series of generally thematic chapters that track Culbert's life from mid twentieth century art school in New Zealand, through burgeoning painting career in Britain, to sculptor, assembler and photographer, resident in France but exhibiting globally.

Wedde's text has a looping didactic quality; we are introduced to an idea which is then set aside only to be returned to and expanded upon a few sentences, paragraphs and even chapters later. Though mildly intrusive, this way of writing does allow us to understand Culbert's life and work in a multivalent way, as being influenced by a number of events, meetings, friendships and works seen, many instances of which are recounted in detail. This is an understanding of Culbert that a more strictly chronological text might not have allowed. Wedde also hovers between biography and review; giving shape to the development of the artist's oeuvre without delving much into his private life - though we are reminded by Wedde that Culbert's convivial life is just as essential to the art's genesis as it is of the book's. Though we get only a few glimpses of the Culbert family life, much of the work is, by the nature of the objects employed, domestic; indeed work such as 'Sugar box' is described as somewhat lost in the public space of the Coracle Press Gallery where it was shown, yet not being so in the 'espace gratuit' of the family home at Croagnes. Some work is described as carrying its domestic character with it to the public world, and in some photographic work his sons appear as critical elements within the composition.

The text is well illustrated by reference to either photographs, reproductions of work associated with the text on the page, or on other pages or colour plates to which we are directed. The midsentence redirection to another page rather laboriously described, or to a colour plate that is without page number and may be found in any one of three groups spread throughout the book is a nuisance. I am uncertain why the large colour plates are grouped, neither paper nor print quality seems different from the main body of the book. This is a minor criticism and somewhat endemic to books on artists and especially one in which a strictly chronological order is set aside in favour of a wider assessment of man and work.

This is an important book for architects. The work described is beautiful, and invariably simple and clear in its exposition of fundamental observations of the physical world, while the text gently and clearly reveals context, discusses critical influences, and examines both impact and meaning to be gained from this gorgeous oeuvre. *PC*

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The Fine Print

Combined Excerpts from the Reports to NZIA Auckland Branch meeting of October and November 2009.

October Reports:

TECHNICAL ISSUES GROUP: Jerome Buckwell

The Last TIG seminar was held on Tuesday 22nd October. The seminar was presented by Dr David Gatley and titled 'Why architects have been caught up in leaky building cases and what measures could they adopt to avoid from being joined in the future'.

We had approximately 40 attendees and have received very positive feedback. So much so, that we are going to have a follow-on technical workshop based around the same topic.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES GROUP: Megan Rule

Jerome Partington's talk titled 'From Green to Sustainable' on Tuesday 8 September produced some lengthy discussion from an audience of 30.

Jerome, from his ESD role with Jasmax, talked about issues around the thermal envelope and energy performance. NZ is performing poorly with its unsustainable climate emissions, ranked 2nd to US in car use, as we consume more than the planets declining biodiversity can cope with. The introduction of Green Star environmental benchmarking is helping to re-educate the NZ construction industry around water, emissions, transport, indoor environment and ecology. With a focus on energy, and towards better practice, it has been found that collecting points can sometimes return less than satisfactory performance outcomes. Incremental efficiency adjustments may also achieve only marginal environmental gains.

A US study has shown that some 22% of the LEEDs rated buildings had actually consumed more energy than similar nonrated buildings. In terms of thermal envelope, and its potential to deliver ongoing energy running efficiencies for the life of a building, NZ is generally aiming low through its poor air tightness and thermal bridging, and with its choice of low insulated materials such as concrete and wall to wall glass. Use of better glass along with window wall ratios no greater than 30% have proved more optimal.

Good use of passive design incorporating insulated mass panels such as Thermomass or insulated roof/wall systems such as Kingspan and Isopan have led to building energy running savings of 30-65% pa. Existing buildings can also be retrofitted with insulated rainscreen claddings. With any of these systems good construction detailing to avoid thermal bridging and air leakage is paramount.

Jasmax have incorporated some of the above principles of passive system design in their new retrofitted offices to help reduce energy demand and are presently monitoring performance to gain useful guiding data.

PRACTICE ISSUES GROUP: Richard Goldie

There is still interest in the issue of risk mitigation and the PIG has been endeavouring to get Barry Dacombe to perform a repeat of his NZACS lecture on this topic. Essentially Barry's talk focuses on practice structures and estate planning - a good one for all of you who never paid attention to the Practice Management portion of our degree courses!

In essence the advice is get your assets protected, however small they are and however small you think you are as a target! I (RG) was recently in that continent of litigation, Australia, and was talking to a very clever IP lawyer. When I went over what was happening in litigation in NZ and the rapidly developing area of personal liability he was floored - the reality runs counter to the whole concept of corporate structure and the limits of liability implied. Such things happen when you have quasi judicial processes such as those of the WHRS.

Looking ahead the intention is to round out the year with a get together of the PIG and invite other professional organisations to send a couple of attendees to give us an overview of their activities and meet a few of the key personalities. The PIG always thought this would be a role it might entertain...

HERITAGE PORTFOLIO: Adam Wild

Auckland City Heritage Week

A number of NZIA members have been busy working on projects associated with this year's Heritage Week. One early feature was the workshop organized by Parnell Heritage featuring the combined skills of Stephen Cashmore, Anthony Matthews, Jeremy Salmond and yours truly.

NZIA Manifesto

Good to see the nzia regard heritage as one of the five key "stakes in the ground" and that a Practice Note has been published (PN 5.202 Built Heritage). What happens next?



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UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND: Uwe Reiger

1. The selection process for the five advertised positions on Lecturer/Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor level is on going. So far one offer has been made.
2. Two new 0.5 positions for a Public Programme Co-ordinator and Manager have been established and filled. This reflects the current expansion of the school's public interface and will further on lead to an increase of public events.
3. Fast forward Public lecture series started in September and is well attended
4. 120 second year students are excited to produce mobile objects for the architecture week Transformers event.
5. The public Thesis presentations will end tomorrow with a presentation by Prof. Peggy Deamer.
6. In November the School will organize a public exhibition of student work in coordination with the Elam open days.
7. Reactive Architecture exhibition at Te Papa opened on 19 September and will run until 21 March 2010.
8. Supported by the Goethe Institute, Wellington, the school hosted a 3 week student design workshop by Modulorbeat [D].

UNITEC STUDENT REPORT: Brad Balle

The Grad Show, Unitec's end of year exhibition opening night has been announced as Wednesday the 25th of November, with preparations currently underway. There, the top work from the Schools of Design and Visual Arts, Architecture and Landscape will be showcased. The Grad Show is a fantastic way for students to exhibit the fruits of their labour at the end of each year and a chance for public engagement with the students and their work. Food, drink and music will be in abundance, as well as student work for sale from the Design School. Get the 25th of November down in your diaries, it is sure to be a great night!

Asylum, Unitec's annual publication of the School of Architecture and the School of Landscape Designs work is underway, with sales starting on the opening night of the exhibition.

Carin Wilson and Rau Hoskins have offered a design/build project last quarter.

Students were required to collectively design a retreat near Lang's Beach, primarily using materials of the land and scavenged materials. Documentation of this project will be on display at this year's Grad Show.

November Reports:

CHAIR'S REPORT: Christina van Bohemen

Architecture Week: See the full report from Jerome Buckwell. After the event, the working group met to review how the week went. While a "recession" version of architecture week – i.e. we expected no sponsorship, and created a program that was low cost, we managed to achieve a relatively dense program that compared well to previous years in terms of number of events. That is to say, while there were fewer events for a small budget, the program we had about 2/3rds as many events.

While generally pleased with the way the week went, I was disappointed at the low attendance by Auckland Branch members.

The reasons for this may be as a result of late delivery of the detailed publicity material (ie the brochure), an abundance of events, busy lives/family commitments or lack of interest.

A limited survey was undertaken to gauge interest and sources of information, and whether people supported the idea of Auckland Branch staging AAW. Responses indicate that people thought

the program was interesting – but that did not necessarily move them to attend things. The main source of information was via the NZIA email and link to the website for NZIA members. Public participation was prompted by the advertisements/mention in Urbis, Home and Arch NZ as well as the link to the Big Idea website.

We need to give some thought to how AAW formed in the future – perhaps develop the idea of inviting a guest curator from the Branch, finalise the programme 2-3 months prior and publicize it earlier. As in previous years it would make sense to engage a PR company.

Final costs are not all in, but all indications are, that we have made a profit. We need to talk to the Institute's office about developing a mechanism to ring fence Auckland Architecture Week funding as the financial year rolls over.

Auckland City Issues: Central Area Bonus Regime – Senior planners/urban designers have sought NZIA input as to how the current bonus system works. This is part of ongoing work on the CBD plan. There is no intention to revise the plan given the transition to a single Auckland Council.

Plan Change 163: Environment Court Conference, Thursday 5 November. NZIA position is to move to have the new criteria for new buildings and additions and alterations to existing buildings adopted as soon as possible. Maps which indicate which buildings are included under the no demolition rule will be publicly notified under s273 of the RMA, but it is preferable to have this part of the process separated as it may delay adoption of the new criteria for some time to come.

Queens Wharf: At the time of writing a media release is being prepared by the Chief Executive in response to recent criticism, particularly directed at the political interference, and the lack of clarification or the management of expectations by the project sponsors as to the scope of the competition brief. I will circulate on receipt. Members are reminded that press releases on behalf of the Institute are only issued by the Branch Chair, NZIA President, or the Institute office. Architect members can make personal statements but should not indicate that they represent any sort of official Institute position.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES GROUP: Megan Rule

1. The Holcim Sustainable Construction and Architecture for Humanity School Classrooms exhibitions for AAW were supported by EIG. The AFH creative workshops for Better Classrooms in conjunction with exhibition were well attended by numerous primary school groups during AAW.
2. The Holcim Global Awards next biannual competition round opens in June 2010 for unbuilt sustainable design projects, so get to work now on your design ideas. Previous winners include a River Remediation and Urban Development Scheme in Fez, Morocco and Christoph Ingenhoven's Main Station in Stuttgart, Germany.
3. EIG also organised an AAW talk on Living Roofs by Zoe Zimmerman who stepped in at the last minute to replace a speaker on Soundscapes. The talk covered the benefits and challenges of creating landscaped roofs with a range of local and overseas examples. With increasing interest around these topics it is likely that both these talks will be held again some time next year.
4. EIG was recently represented at a Sustainable Symposium at Unitec.
5. CHH Tasman Pulp & Paper Mill, RMA application, to 220 000 litre Discharge for 35yrs to Tarawera River has recently been approved for 25 years, with requirement to monitor and improve by reducing outflow, etc.
6. November meeting will look at progressing sustainable data basing and earth charter issues.

HERITAGE PORTFOLIO: Adam Wild

1. Heritage skills & training survey

The Australians (through ICOMOS Australia) have been surveying heritage practitioners and academics on both sides of the ditch to measure the depth and health of the discipline. Clearly part of the analysis will be to build a business plan for more academic training in the profession; disciplines associated with heritage management ... something not currently taught in our New Zealand tertiary institutions.

2. Vernon Brown House - 33 Kitchener Rd (Wright House)

Renelle Jordan published the following on the NZIA chatlist on the 8th of October: "It is sad to see that yet another piece of NZ history is in the process of being demolished. The Wright House, designed by Vernon Brown in the 50's, it sits behind the Black Rock waterfront between Milford and Takapuna. (along and above great Mike Austin house right down on the beach at Thorn Bay). Both houses are recognised by NSCC being included in the Heritage walk between Milford and Takapuna. Wright House has featured in many architecture books, and a fairly recent Vernon Brown exhibition. Unfortunately it had not been given a Heritage listing. What a terrible shame! No doubt another 'monumental' piece of architecture will loom out from that site in time."

AUCKLAND ARCHITECTURE WEEK: Jerome Buckwell

We have received very positive feedback from architects and the public regarding the quality of the events and talks.

Events:

Included the Auckland Architecture Awards 2009; AAA Urban Eye Award; AAW Film Festival, in association with Jasmx; the TRANS-FORM-ers Mobile Architectures student competition; the ohnosumo.com 'Cupcake Pavilion'; Pecha Kucha Night; Design Charette - One Day Invited Design Competition; and the Architecture Building Tour.

Exhibitions:

Included Holcim Global Awards for Sustainable Construction Exhibition; Architecture For Humanity – Auckland Chapter: Architecture Challenge; Classrooms Exhibition and Design Workshop; Behnisch Architekten + Transsolar Climate Engineering Exhibition; NZ Architecture Awards; and Ak Architecture Awards.

Building Visits:

Four new building projects – 60 places were booked out quickly and attracted both members of the public and profession.

Talks:

These were diverse and numerous; attendance varied between approximately 15-55 people per session.

Final Costs are not yet in, but are within the budget – full report next month. I would like to thank all sponsors and the organising committee. The final windup will include a summary or framework for the next team to develop.

Let Them Eat Pie

Susan Wills Rounds Up AAW 09

'I hope there's enough pie for you all.' Sir Miles Warren's closing remark in his lecture at Auckland University during Auckland Architecture Week reflected both the solid turnout at the talk, and his concerns about the profitability of the industry at a time when it is embattled by a number of stifling commercial and legal influences.

Certainly, now is a challenging time for not just Auckland, but New Zealand architects. A time when a large developer can produce television ads referring to architects 'blowing the budget'; when national press overstate the legal challenges facing the architecture profession; when an international competition for a premier Auckland site gets relegated to a local governance issue. It made the celebration of architecture at AAW09 more relevant than ever.

Economic conditions meant that 2009's Architecture Week was conducted on a slightly smaller scale than on previous years. Yet despite this, there was an exciting and diverse mix of exhibitions, presentations, films and lectures across the week.

Opening night was launched with a particularly topical lecture by landscape architect Rachel de Lambert on city form. With a focus on understanding how Auckland's landscape has shaped our city and how we can best preserve our remaining urban heritage in a useful and worthwhile way, her lecture provoked some ardent debate. At the other end of the week, Sunday's building tour was clearly a highly anticipated event. Touring Ironbank, the Deloitte Centre, the Maritime Museum's new Blue Water Black Magic Pavilion and the NZI Centre, the 60 spaces were fully subscribed a week before.

Participants in Saturday's Design Charette – won by the team from Architectus, with a special creative commendation going to the Jasmx entry – were effusive in their positive feedback about the day of speed design. The judges were likewise impressed, expressing their surprise and admiration at the quality of the designs produced over the eight hours. The day before, just along the road, the Cupcake Pavilion at Britomart was a huge hit, and sold out of cupcakes within several hours of opening, raising a substantial sum for the Starship Children's Hospital.

For many, though, the highlight in terms of energy and numbers, at least, was TRANS_FORMers at Wellesley Street, the culmination of a semester's work by the three design schools – and which had a performance life of only four hours. The hundreds of people who trawled through this vibrant exhibition could only be excited by the inventiveness and vigour of the entrants. It was architecture crossed with performance art.

Three films showed at the Academy, a treat for those who were interested in sustainability, Frank Lloyd Wright, photography and modernism. A variety of exhibitions showcased everything from NZIA national and Auckland award winning buildings to international sustainable construction. And Saturday had a full programme of talks across two venues – of which there were eloquent experts from many fields: urban design, transport, sustainability, history, indigenous architecture, along with award-winning architects in conversation. Much knowledge and critical thinking was on offer, all for free. Although some talks suffered from a lack of participation, there were also those with wide appeal – for example, many wanted to hear from the Auckland Architecture Awards judging panel on what worked and what didn't. In addition, Jeremy Salmond, Patrick Reynolds and Jeremy Hansen's Villa talk had participants from both the public and the architecture profession. One member of the public even brought a picture of her own villa for comment.

Sir Miles Warren may be concerned about there being enough pie to go round, but those who were part of Architecture Week proved they had the passion to pursue it.

I look forward to the next, bigger and brighter Auckland Architecture Week. SW

