



01/02 2012

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

**BLOCK**

## Future Context

Richard Naish on Opportunities for Invention



RTA's proposed inner-city development

It can be a daunting task to attempt to articulate and make any enlightened sense of why or how we work. So in true architects' fashion I have left this right to the last minute. That is not to say that I haven't given this a great deal of thought. On the contrary, I have been thinking about this for a lot longer than this task has been set. And as with architecture, it is essential to have an inordinate amount of time to think before the pencil goes to paper. So there are some things that I have been recently thinking about and there are some things that we have been doing since the beginning of the practice that might be worth sharing. I'll start with the latter.

As a start-up practice, we always looked to try to turn every project - no matter how small and ordinary - into something that was well beyond the [limited] functional brief that we were often given. This was, I guess, a frustrated impassioned act of creativity which was about looking well beyond the immediate problem and trying to

solve another more intellectual interest of ours. This approach set us immediately on a conscious path toward the type of architecture we like to practice - one where meaning and intervention were present in the company of function.

We like the fact that a number of our buildings deliver a slightly unexpected response. Well, not unexpected to us but possibly unexpected to others. I guess we subscribe to a philosophy that buildings should fit in, not necessarily in an expected way, but in a way that allows overlaying and underlying meanings and readings that might be relevant to our sense of place within the local condition.

Frank Gehry said when questioned about why his own house looked the way that it did - "after looking at what my neighbours houses were made of - I just wanted to fit in."

Continued on p.2...

When we embark on a project we like to consider all the possible *things* that might have an influence on the project and then gradually, by a robust process of thinking and interrogating, the strongest ideas gradually emerge.

So what sort of “*things*” do we consider?

I recently read a series of lectures by Peter Zumthor and in one of them he referred to a statement by an American poet William Carlos Williams. The statement read “*there are no ideas except in things*”. As I liked the sound of this, I immediately examined our work with respect to it. If “*things*” are the context that makes up the world surrounding each of our projects, then I would have to agree.

*“There are no RTA Studio ideas except in context”*

It’s far from an original idea to consider architecture being influenced by its context, in fact that was the great New Zealand architectural tradition that I was educated in and obviously influenced by, but it is our interest in the broader meaning of context that we find opportunity for invention. We like the idea that our buildings are relevant to their location and respectful of the local environment but we also like the idea that our buildings might be relevant to a future context.

When we think of context we don’t allow ourselves to be constrained to the immediate physical influences of the site; being natural or built conditions or even historical and cultural conditions, we are interested in the idea of post-existences of a site. We have a growing interest in the idea of how the context of a site can be altered by the architectural intervention and how the future context of the site might be relevant to our building. Perhaps we see the potential for buildings to be commentators on the *now and* perhaps messengers for the future.

– or at least that gives me a reason to get out of bed in the morning. *RN*

## The Fine Print: February

### CHAIR’S REPORT: Harry Street

*Draft Auckland Plan:* Hearings are now complete and despite confirmation of our wish to be heard we were not invited. There is some anecdotal evidence that some of our recommendations will be included when the plan is adopted at the end of March.

*Unitary Plan/Area Plans:* The draft plans are due to be completed in December 2012 and released for public consultation in 2013. We should take up the offer, made last year, of the Plan Development Team leader to present the developing plan.

*Urban Design Panel:* Patrick Clifford and I attended a meeting on November 19<sup>th</sup> at Auckland Council to discuss the role of the Urban Design Panel. The major changes to the UDP following this meeting are: the establishment of an independent governance board (to enhance the independence of the UDP from Council) which would include the national chairs and branch chairs of the NZIA, NZPI, NZILA, Property Council and the Council’s Built Environmental Unit.

*Council Procurement Policy:* Geoff Richards has had an opportunity to review the draft policy and identified that it fails to address goals or outcomes – perhaps it should have as a goal “make Auckland the world’s most liveable city”. This seems fundamental in moderating any undue influence that a “lowest cost” driver might have on the outcome of a procurement process. Geoff is awaiting the next draft and will bring it to the Branch Committee when it is available.

*MFaT:* On December 7<sup>th</sup> Richard Goldie, Greg Boyden and I met with representatives of MFaT (who were about to brief Government). The meeting was part of a fact finding mission to identify New Zealand’s economic ‘settings’ and issues relating to trade, exports, internationalization and the challenges/obstacles we as a profession face, particularly when undertaking work overseas. We talked about the Auckland Council’s HEAT initiative.

*HEAT:* Discussion with Auckland Council continues around a possible HEAT-type program but the scope is being broadened to include other services (marine, food, film, health) – more of an “Auckland Inc.” approach. We need to ensure that ‘design’ doesn’t get subsumed in all of the discussion – it is an industry/ service in its own right as well as contributing to all the others. The intention is to drop the HEAT moniker and to look at other models before developing a uniquely Auckland model.

*Branch AGM:* The date for the AGM is March 21<sup>st</sup>, but before then we need to discuss possible changes to the structure of the committee as well as changing roles.

*Heritage:* There is a need to discuss the recent Paget St controversy and the need for the Branch to formulate a position.

*Committee for Auckland/Future Auckland Leaders:* Marianne’s pilot project, “Playing in the Streets” is programmed for Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February. This will involve closing part of Queen Street and holding sports and cultural events. The next cohort of FAL participants, including our NZIA representative Alexandra Ja Yeun Lee, is due at Orakei Marae for a “Welcome Weekend” on the 24<sup>th</sup> February.

### PORTFOLIO GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: Sandy Hayward

Welcome back! We began the year by an attempt to initiate a graduate workshop to form study groups at the Auckland Branch, but underestimated the amount of registrations from interested graduates. We have since postponed this event to a later date to be confirmed in March or April. This year we are looking to introduce a new member to the graduate committee to replace Sarah McKenzie, and will seek to present two seminars through the year for topics of interest. I have a few people who have expressed interest in this, and plan to bring them to the March meeting. I welcome anyone who is interested in helping with

*Continued on p.5...*

WELLINGTON	CHRISTCHURCH	AUCKLAND
Sunday 18 March 6.30pm Start	Monday 19 March 6.30pm Start	Thursday 22 March 6.30pm Start
Futuna Chapel 67 Friend Street, Karori	DL Lecture Theatre, CPIT Campus Madras Street	Engineering Lecture Theatre 439 University of Auckland 20 Symonds Street
Cost: \$25.00 – Architects/Public \$20.00 – Students	Cost: \$20.00 – Architects/Public \$15.00 – Students	Cost: \$25.00 – Architects/Public \$20.00 – Students
<small>Note: A discounted cost has been arranged for the Christchurch lecture.</small>		

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## Biography of Auckland's Landscape

### Rick Pearson Reviews *Volcanoes of Auckland: The Essential Guide*

Coming to Auckland Architecture School from the Wellington region in the early 80s I had the baggage of Geology 101 and an appreciation of the earth's tipping crusts of fault lines, the geomorphology of Cotton and Graeme Stevens' book *The Rugged Landscape*. All shifting dynamics of plate tectonics, faults, water filled valleys and mountains plunging into a deep Prussian-blue Wellington harbour.

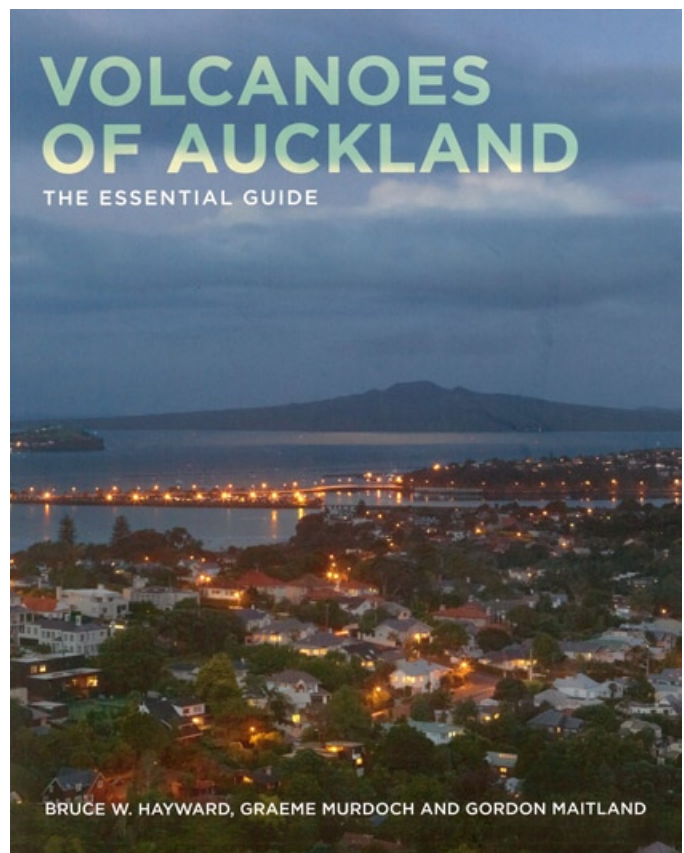
Like everyone from elsewhere, I would get lost in Auckland, in more ways than one. It's simpering little hills called Mount-this-or-that gave little geographic loci or personality that I could discern.

Dick Toy at the architecture school gave a crazy course called *Land and Form Studies* and John Dickson followed it up with lectures bristling with brilliance in a similar vein. Our deep relationship with Our Auckland Landscape was an under-pinning theme of 'locale' in students' education of this period.

This book is really a biography of the Auckland landscape. It depicts a personality that I relate to now after many years of living here and I can enjoy a depth of understanding I did not really appreciate before. Each maunga is a personality, if not a person; each with an incredible whakapapa and history behind it. The success of this book is that it brings so many of these elements – geology, volcanology, Maori whakapapa, human and natural history – together in one comprehensible entity.

The design of the book skilfully spans the gulf between a scientific text and a popular book, containing beautiful and revealing maps based on the early work

*Continued on p.4...*



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## The Fine Print Continued from p.5...

country finances and delivers social housing solutions. It has established the "Social Housing Unit" to work with other organizations that provide social and affordable housing, including Iwi, not-for-profits and private sector providers.

So there were many interesting contributions and much careful thinking about the problem in evidence. With the emphasis in this "hui" on the *How* things might be achieved, rather than the *What* exactly is to be provided (probably of more concern to Architects) although there were certainly references along the way as to *Where* new Social-housing might be located.

The overwhelming feeling to come from this assembly was that Collaboration and Partnership between the various parties/ stakeholders is essential from here on.

Architects will need to find a place in these partnerships and to collaborate to the maximum extent possible, to have any impact at all. This will be the first place to start, even before turning their attention to the omnipresent issues of *What* constitutes good Social-housing; *What* patterns and models are most appropriate etc, etc - the subject of how many Housing Competition initiatives to date with very little consensus to show for it so far?

Maybe the impetus will be there now to arrive at better and more thoughtful solutions as a result of what has been started here – Awesome houses even!! There should be still plenty for us to contribute.

### DONT MISS KIM SINCLAIR LECTURE

Auckland architecture graduate and winner of an Oscar for set design on the blockbuster *Avatar* will speak as part of the UoA's *Communique* lecture series

**WEDNESDAY MARCH 7th**  
6pm, UoA Eng 401



**It's a matter of  
black & white**

## Biography of Auckland Continued from p.3...

of Hochstetter and Haast, many contemporary and historic images, and illustrations consolidating the texts in a nice balance. In my own work in museum exhibitions, I know that this seemingly effortless delivery of information over a range of modes is not an easy task and this book does it well.

The book is in three sections. The first – *The Auckland Volcanic Field* – gives a generous over-view of the science of volcanology, volcanoes past and present, and the likelihood of one happening near you. This section has many very endearing accounts of anecdotal history and whakapapa giving a captivating view of the past landscape. The text paints vivid views of an Auckland past.

In the second section, I couldn't help but think of Manuel De Landa's, *A Thousand Years Of Non Linear History* in the context of Auckland's mineralisation within a young and growing society. It's titled, *The Human Interaction with Auckland Volcanoes* and it could be seen as how we wrecked a large part of our geological and geographical heritage but is actually a wonderful commentary on the importance of the stuff we live on and within – from the very rocks we have used and continue to use for building, to the relevance of water in our particular unique geomorphology in a percolating volcanic land.

The third section is called a *Guide to Auckland's Volcanoes*. If the first section of the book is a fully modelled landscape and the second a specification, this section has to be the details. Each and every mound and bump in this landscape that is Auckland is uniquely investigated.

However it is the tangibility of history depicted within the very fabric we live on and within that I found so invigorating in this book. And it is in the detail that the gods preside. *RP*

### Addendum - Block Issue 11/2011 - Itinerary n.40

We are advised that Nanea, the Pete Bossley Architects' house in Hawaii was realised with the assistance of architect James Downey.

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## The Fine Print *Continued from p.2...*

this portfolio to email me. If you have a topic that you would like to have explored from a graduate point of view, please email [sandyh@ignitearchitects.com](mailto:sandyh@ignitearchitects.com)

### **PRACTICE ISSUES GROUP:** John Anderson, Richard Goldie

In order to avoid PIG lethargy (that can stretch deep into the year) John and I have put our minds together and devised some topics for discussion this year, as follows: Restricted Building work- we introduced this subject late last year and as this legislation takes effect on 1 March 2012 we will probably kick off this year's talks with a follow up. We note that John Albert is preparing a Practice Note on this at the moment.

We're also looking at: trusts and gifting; design competitions Not necessarily in that order. Any further ideas/topics are welcomed.

### **UNITEC REPORT:** Tony van Raat

Applications and offers for places on the program are both up on previous years by about 20%. Final numbers will not be known for a few weeks yet, however, but we anticipate a First Year cohort of over 120 students. Clearly none of you have been talking to young people about what the practice of architecture is like just now...

After the success of the Haiti project with Architecture for Humanity late last year (thanks to several local practices for their support) the school is in discussion with AfH for another project this year.

The proposed new qualification in conservation is progressing through its approvals. A start date in July or August is anticipated for the suite of programs starting with a PGDip designed to be completed within a year of part-time study. Classes will be scheduled at times which will assist practitioners and other members of the building industry to attend. That means evenings and block-courses. The two-week conservation course in Tuscany designed for NZ architects will start on June 18<sup>th</sup>. It will constitute a 15 credit Elective in the conservation program mentioned above. It rates 200 CPD points.

This course will be preceded on 11<sup>th</sup> June with the start of a three-week Elective on sustainability designed mainly for NZ students. This will be run in Sabina outside Rome.

The Publications Trust is proceeding with new projects developed in cooperation with Random House. Currently these include books on John Scott and Peter Beaven. We also note the upcoming publication of the Malcolm Walker cartoon book and another on Crosson Clarke Carnachan – not cartoons.

### **UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND REPORT:** Uwe Rieger

1. Enrolments are still running. All targets have been met with over 30% more enrolments in the MArch(Prof) Programme than last year.
2. The first students have enrolled in or applied to the new PHD with creative practice.
3. Prof. Susanne Hofmann from TU Berlin will be offering a four-week intensive design studio from March till April. Susanne leads the innovative Baupiloten Project, an office within the Architecture Institute at the TU Berlin that has specialized in participatory design
4. The 'Communique' public lecture series will run again in the coming semester and is in its final stage of preparation.

### **EVENTS COMMITTEE:** Sam Williams

The events committee met last Wednesday. *Architecture Week* is possibly to be moved forward to coincide with a design show, The Festival of Clever Ideas, to be held

around the Wynyard Quarter and waterfront between mid-August and mid-September

*Tennis Tournament* – John is looking to hold the tennis tournament again in March. This is dependent on sponsor's support, however, which is yet to be finalised.

*Brit Andresen* – John met with Brit Andresen in Australia. She is very keen to visit and present a lecture. Dates to be confirmed.

### **UNITEC STUDENT REPORT:** Matthew Roberts & Stu Penno

Unitec students are still away on holiday with classes returning on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February. SAANZ student representatives from UoA and Unitec met on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February. After some meeting and greeting, the group set the framework for 2012 and began organizing various events including SuperStudio. All reps are looking forward to 2012.

### **AUCKLAND CITY LIAISON:** Andrew Patterson

Not much to report.

#### *Unitary Plan Review*

Item 1: Outcomes Matrix – Gap Analysis

Item 2: Outcomes Matrix – Audit Review

*Discussion:* The Council have a huge matrix of all the 'environments' (similar to zones). They have looked at collating all comments. They are identifying the conflicts and gaps – very laborious, too early to identify a framework reference to the existing zoning structure. No copies have been given out. Members offered to write a letter of support for Council officers ability to have an extension of time. A Design compendium is being done by a separate Committee run by Peter Maxwell. It's made up of a team of five Council members and ten outsiders.

### **PUBLICITY & COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO:** Ross Brown

*Social Housing (Iwi-Business Consortium Hui) 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2011:* The NZIA (Auckland Branch) were represented at the above event (hosted by Westpac in their splendid new Head Office at Britomart) by Andrew Patterson and Ross Brown. The participants to the Hui were The Committee for Auckland, The NZCID (Council for Infrastructure Development) in partnership with Ngati Whatua and invited organizations.

The topic for discussion specifically was that New Zealand's social and affordable housing environment has undergone significant change in recent years. The country faces a shortage of affordable homes, housing affordability has decreased and changes are emerging in the characteristics of who needs social housing and where and in what form they need it. Although many countries are wrestling with similar issues, NZ has yet to adopt some of the strategies observed off-shore to address them".

It is interesting to note one particular approach to this problem by the French where "thanks to the Socialist Party Govt of 1997-2002, the provision of social-housing is now enshrined in law. Since 2000 authorities in populous areas must aim to ensure that at least 20% of their housing stock is social, or face an annual fine. Some municipalities – most notably one of the richest, Neuilly sur Seine whose Mayor for 19 years was Nicholas Sarkozy – actively resist, preferring to pay to keep the rabble away" (AR – 11/11).

How best to do it here? One view – particularly attractive to Architects – says that if we keep looking after providing quality high-end housing at the upper levels then this continues to free up existing housing stock in the lower reaches to be made available to those less able to afford it; would that there would be anything like the quantity of new residential accommodation being produced for this upper echelon to create anything like the numbers of surplus units at the affordable end – currently something like 2,000-2,500 families urgently need a home!

We are at an important crossroads and a new model is required; the NZ Govt has made it a priority to reconsider the way the

*Continued on p.4...*