



06 2012

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

BLOCK

City Making

Sills van Bohemen Architects Reflect on Urban Design



Central city residential intensification and associated public open space

The editors of this esteemed organ have requested autobiographical writing on this city's architects and "what they're doing, how they're doing it, and why".

A lot of what we do is the same as any other small practice: a bunch of generalists attempting to spend as much of our day as possible practicing our architectural craft. In our practice the more senior of us, or the most general of the generalists, are also engaged in the peripheral tasks that go with running a small business: management, marketing, strategy, tech support, HR, etc. There's something disheartening about knowing that one isn't doing any of these subsidiary duties especially well, but also some satisfaction in developing diversified skills and having the appearance of controlling one's own destiny.

An aspect of our practice that is dissimilar from many other small outfits is that we partake in an area of work commonly described as urban design. While on one hand this makes us especially generalist it also paradoxically allows us to legitimately label ourselves as specialists. As many business pundits have noted, marketing a practice as capable of all types of work may in fact be the reality, but it doesn't do a lot to differentiate it in the marketplace. So for better or worse we don't trumpet to our residential clients that

we design parts of the city and we don't tell our urban clients that we have spent the morning working out someone's kitchen.

Practising in an area in which we have no formal qualifications is a bit of a dilemma. We have considered doing post-graduate study but it is difficult to balance with financial survival and maintaining a viable practice. Having said that, it is our learning and experience over the last 10 years that allows us to work in this field, not our architecture degrees - many architects have a confident belief that their architectural training has more than adequately prepared them for pronouncements on the city, but in our opinion we often don't deserve to be so self-assured.

The work that we do in the urban realm can sometimes be what we would call urban design (i.e. some aspect of the built environment that will be built to our design) but often is master planning or urban planning (areas that will be populated by buildings and landscapes designed by others). It is urban planning, along with constituent transport planning and demographics that will dictate the future shape of Auckland.

At last week's Winter Lecture Series Alistair Ray presented some research his team had undertaken with Patrick Fontein on the

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viability of the intensification signalled in the Draft Auckland Plan. Afterwards in a post-match discussion about intensification in Auckland there was a real sense that many architects in the audience believed that a new building typology or two would somehow solve the issues Auckland is said to face: how to fit and provide for the extra population (the equivalent of two Wellington's) moving into the city over the next 30 years. This sense of people wanting to rearrange the deck chairs as the Titanic slips below the waterline is similar to the feeling we had when Miles Warren described the gratis work a group of Christchurch architects were doing on sites in their devastated central area: perfectly useful and commendable to illustrate viable developments, but not really the big picture.

Part of that discussion focussed on the suburb. There is no doubt that the suburban model with its one-car-per-adult requirement has suited (and continues to suit) a large percentage of Auckland's population. It is also clear that there is a portion of the population that would rather live closer to a town centre, drive less and don't need a garden consisting of four thin strips of lawn around the edges of a 250m² site. When Pete Bossley says on Nine to Noon this week that the suburb is one of the best forms of habitation that humans have invented for themselves we need to remember that the amenities of the city centre are a lot more accessible to his house in Cocks Bay than one in Glen Eden or Dannemora. Our work has illustrated that average densities in typical suburban residential areas rise rapidly once you dot a small number of medium rise apartment buildings around. Remuera Road illustrates that this can be done without destroying the suburban character. Of course viability of those apartment buildings is reliant on sufficient proximate amenity.

Just as the call for more intensive forms of housing closer to town centres is not going to be the death knell of the suburb (the need to protect heritage areas and the amount of capital tied up in suburbs will see to that), so too the call for a more walkable and cycle-able city won't spell the end of cars. It is not either/or, but rather about choice of modes of movement. As recent converts to bicycles we realise how cycling and walking doesn't remove the need for a car but it does mean you don't need to use it so often, and cycling reveals how easily accessible the city can be. In our case it is central Auckland that is our closest town centre but the same need for mode choice should be available for example for someone in Henderson to get to and around their town centre on a day-to-day basis.

Many architects come to the profession because they wish to work on the built environment and create buildings that will survive them. To answer the editors' question about why we're doing what we are doing - it is that we believe the future shape of the city is extremely important and urban planning materially affects this. Engagement in design at both ends of the built environment spectrum is personally rewarding. *Aaron Sills and Christina van Bohemen*

Recent Cavalier Bremworth Design Awards student grand prize winner, Dino Chai, will be exhibiting a series of six architectural interventions entitled *Bare walls, empty room* at Split/Fountain - one per week over the next six consecutive Saturdays. Sounds like something worth checking out. Split/Fountain is located at 3C/23 Dundonald Street, Eden Terrace and will be open Saturday 1-5pm or by appointment.

Each Block is laid by a dedicated editorial team:

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The Fine Print: June

CHAIRS REPORT: Richard Goldie

Correspondence: We have prepared and sent a letter of Congratulations to Bob de Leur on his honorary appointment to the New Zealand Order of Merit. Bob continues to make significant contributions to the development of Building Policy throughout NZ and actively listens to and acts upon our input. At the post-AGM workshop we received very positive support for the idea of sharing Auckland Branch news with the rest of the country. To this end we now have the list of Branch Chairs and will start sending them electronic copies of Block. The Block crew are in support.

We have passed on to the National Office for distribution to the members the invitation received from Tarry Badham for the Nga Aho AGM at the end of June in Rotoiti.

Committee: Suggestions for Branch functions hosted and focused on that 'Issue Group' that each of us is coordinating are welcome and should be inserted into the Branch calendar.

I have spoken with John Walsh regarding the Branch having a voice in local issues and he has suggested that access to the media can be easily established. He has also kindly offered to provide the necessary 'wordsmith-ing' to shape these pieces. Again, coordinators' suggestions are welcomed. Issues that spring to mind are 'densification', 'heritage vs character', housing affordability?

We acknowledge John Walsh's well-crafted opinion piece in the NZ Herald of Monday Jun 4, 2012. Well done, John. In my view this was a balanced and well-argued piece that avoids the pitfalls of dogma and sets an appropriate standard for contributions to the ongoing debates in which the Branch should participate. Thank you John.

Vacancies: The revolving Branch secretary position! Matt Grant has resigned for personal reasons. New candidates are being sought!

Urban Design Panel: We are currently working to assemble a list of nominees from the Branch to sit on the Panel. This will be completed by the UDP Governance Board meeting on June 26th, at which the Board will confirm the appointments to the Panel.

Local Awards: The venue for this has been confirmed at the Viaduct Events Centre, and a Convener is being sought.

Chatlist: The Institute has withdrawn its hosting of the chatlist for fear of becoming a potential target of legal action. In my view this emboldens this type of cynical action that uses such a threat to silence criticism. Frankly I was surprised at the Institutes unilateral action in withdrawing the chatlist - in my view one of the very fine qualities Architects possess is a generous attitude towards of informed discussion. Fortunately an individual has stepped up, and our thanks go to Paul King accordingly.

Other: I have handed over the Branch's representation on the Auckland Council Consumer Advisory Group to Michael Thompson at last week's meeting. Michael will report independently on the items discussed.

PRACTICE ISSUES GROUP: John Anderson

Why do architects get paid so little, and what can we do about it! Yes, we may be sailing into economic head winds in conditions ranging from dirty weather to long periods becalmed, but it is always helpful to regularly review the many ways and many areas within the business of architecture where we can make a difference to our bottom line as individual practices and as a profession (apologies to those who are satisfied with their fee levels).

John Albert kicked off with some pertinent observations from his experience as an ringside observer of the profession and also fielding client complaints and other feedback from clients and architects alike, the main thrust being: **Why are fees so low?** Architects are their own worst enemy in driving down fees, and competing or negotiating against each other far too often. Some of our fees are uneconomic and damage the profession. Competing against themselves - poor negotiating techniques. They think they deserve a great fee but their service is appalling - REPUTATION of architects Don't stand up for what they believe in - roll over too easily - partial services and the fee Consumers in particular don't understand what they do - NZIA trying to address this. **The business side** Insufficient experience in running a business - belief that they are doing this for architecture rather than to make money Expectation that they are not going to be paid a good fee - self fulfilling prophecy Look at the way you present yourself to clients.

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Vitrification And the hopelessness of cleaning

In the late nineteenth century developments in modern plumbing enabled the toilet and bath to become permanent fixtures within the domestic interior. For the first time, a small room was partitioned off from the rest of the domicile, and was purpose built to cleanse the body. Ellen Lupton notes that, “hygiene, rather than bodily comfort, determined the evolution of the bathroom.” Many contemporary bathroom spaces still place a greater emphasis on matters of hygiene rather than bodily and psychological comfort.

The material composition of bathroom fixtures and wall and floor linings has been subject to the vagaries of fashion and technological developments. While rich variegations in colour can be evidenced in bathroom designs produced in the 1920s and 1950s, for the most part bathrooms have tended to be monochromatic.

The design iteration that has endured is one that enlists materials such as non-porous vitreous china, enamelled metals, and ceramic tile, most frequently coloured white. Historically, tiles have been used to ‘line hygienically sensitive interiors.’ Georges Teyssot observes that tiles have also been deployed to conceal or gloss over ‘contaminated buildings’, refacading buildings that were politically contaminated. This suite of materials constructs smooth surfaces that are seemingly impervious to dust and moisture. The high gloss finish on these hard, white, products makes dust and dirt clearly visible. There is nowhere for the errant strand of hair to hide. Cleaning white bathrooms becomes a particularly Sisyphean endeavour. In his essay entitled *The Ugly*, Mark Cousins writes: “What I polish recedes; what is dirty approaches. But the hopelessness of cleaning is all too apparent. The more you clean something, the dirtier it gets. As the surface is cleaned it reveals those fewer but more stubborn stains which demonstrate even more starkly how the remaining stains consume the surrounding space.”

White, shiny surfaces are designed to distance us, to keep us at arms length, for fear we will contaminate them. This distancing becomes particularly troubling in bathrooms because it is antithetical to what we do in these spaces where naked bodies are subjected to detailed scrutiny. They are washed, exfoliated, dried and rehydrated. They are vigorously poked and prodded. Bodies are examined under task lighting with prosthetic looking devices used to scour skin for premature signs of ageing and degradation.

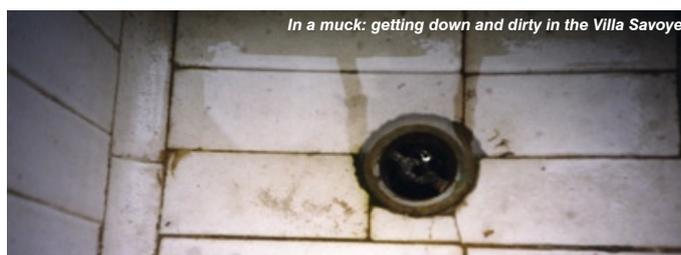
Like our bodies, our bathrooms are vigilantly policed for signs of weathering and deterioration. The level of forensic scrutiny paid to the body is also paid to the sanitary fixtures, and wall and floor surfaces lining the interior. We cannot distance ourselves from the bathroom’s white walls: their reflective capacity amplifies our transgressions. Dirt makes a spectacle of itself and these entropic residues unsettle us.

Ellen Lupton has noted that the bathroom is “at once the most and least important room in the house...It is a private room yet it is made public by its shared status. It is physically clean yet culturally dirty.”

Bathroom salespeople can smell our fear and respond accordingly. They know we are apprehensive about having white tiles but want them anyway. They ameliorate our anxiety by recommending we select grey grout. Grey won’t show the dirt so quickly they say. They try to spare us the indignity of slowly watching our white grout turn grey.

Bathing rituals are fraught with anxiety: anxiety about how clean we must be and similarly how clean our bathrooms must be. Cousins proposes that the house and the body can be considered as co-extensive. He observes that:

Continued on p.4...



In a muck: getting down and dirty in the Villa Savoye

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Vitrification *Continued from p.3...*

"There is a certain correlation between the anxiety about these elements of the house that go wrong, and the repression about the body. The house has not only to bear the phantasy that it is the support of life, but that it is also really the body." He reasons that this relationship manifests itself in a hatred for builders, for in renovation work, they are the ones who literally tear our insides out.

In 1999 I visited Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1929-31) in Poissy, France. As a work of architecture it was superlative: its gently sloping promenades and exquisite rooms sandwiched in plain air were extraordinary. The living spaces within this modernist masterpiece were elevated to the piano nobile: the noble plane of existence poised on piloti above the ground plane. Le Corbusier raised his villa up to distance it from the dank earth, fashioning a dwelling at a healthier altitude. Matters of health and hygiene were paramount to many modern architects. They were intent upon eradicating the psychopathologies thought to inhabit the pre-modern domicile and wanted to replace these spatial fears with an emphasis on hygiene.

Modern architects advocated the creation of sanitary living environments that prevented the spread of diseases and germs and promoted the formation of a healthy inhabitant. Architecture was designed to promote the movement of the body through space-devices such as the promenade architecturale are evidence of this. (eg. LC double Ramp in the Villa Savoye) The roof garden was also conceived as a place to take exercise. But something was out of place in Corbusier's machine à habiter when I visited. Fissures in its utopian programme had begun to appear. Specifically, many of the sinks were filthy. The white, shiny rectangular ceramic tiles lining the sinks were cracked. The grout between them was embedded with muck.

Cracks threaten to undermine the meta-narratives espoused by the polemicists of the modern movement. The white facades that were characteristic of modern architecture needed to be technically controlled to avoid cracks, "cracks that completely subvert the status of the surface by revealing that it is but a coat." The illusion of homogeneity is shattered by cracks. Cracks subvert and undermine. Cracks bring to bear what lies hidden beneath the surface.

For an architect, cracks are also emblematic of hydrophobic dread: a fear of water going where it shouldn't. During detailed design, architects line buildings with a host of impermeable prophylactics and carefully attend to the design of fenestration and eaves details to immunise the interior against taking on water. In bathroom spaces, cracks can cause us especial anxiety. It is particularly unsettling to think about vitrified surfaces crazing and cracking within an environment that is designed to expediently evacuate corporeal remains from the interior. Consequently, traces of effluent and dead skin that are lodged in these crevices disturb our sense of propriety. These bodily residues, or "premonitions of death" as Neville Wakefield describes them, stick around as harbingers of our

own mortality. They haunt the person enacting daily ablation rituals. While we primp and preen ourselves in front of the vanity or exfoliate our dead skin, these stress fractures in vitrified surfaces foreground the cycle of entropy and decay our bodies are subject to. They operate to undermine the distancing effects of white shiny surfaces.

It is difficult to relax in all white bathrooms. Such spaces seem to call for expediency: for prompt ministrations and evacuations. Glossy design magazines depopulate bathrooms and strategically avoid showing sanitary fittings if at all possible. They are represented as spaces without bodies. They are spaces that can make bodies nervous. *Rachel Carley*



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

I don't see any suits here today Unlike lawyers there is no general public knowledge of what you may expect to pay an architect – cost per hour, because of the percentage. NZIA cannot be seen to promote fee scales to raise the expectation of fee levels **What can you do to improve the fees?** Change the way you think, change your behaviour, and start thinking like the engineers. THIS IS FUNDAMENTAL. You have to have a self belief that you can earn a better fee. Stop moaning. Understand that you will achieve a higher fee if you can offer a benefit someone else can't. Higher value for money = higher fees. Find some added value ideas – broaden the scope. Only as good as your last project. Great architecture will earn a higher fee. **How you run your business** Fundamental that you know your cost structure and your charge out rate Must have a gross and net profit objective for the Practice Must measure your performance on each project to see how you have performed and where your fee proposal was incorrect Scope of services – maybe better to have a lump sum for each stage – better to understand the value to the client than a percentage fee Many clients do not like percentages difficult to relate services provided with a build cost – not transparent Charging for the risk involved Very detailed scope of work – ensure the client understands what is included and what is not. Explain that variations will be charged for Keep detailed documentation for variations from scope Disbursements charge for all Get it right up front – if the budget is \$1.0m, design to \$1.0m otherwise you will lose money re-documenting to reduce the tender cost.

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The Fine Print *Continued from p.4...*

Negotiating the fee Suggest that you get hold of negotiating fees and contracts from Blue Turtle Use the Guide for Architects Fees as the benchmark fee. If you discount this before you see the client you have already given away 3-5%

Go through the Guide with the client, explain what the phases are Give them a detailed and professional presentation outlining the fees and services. Negotiating against yourself – you keep on lowering the fee as the negotiating goes on Don't roll over quickly If the client wants to reduce the fee, reduce the services provided

John Bierre gave some salient advice from a legal perspective especially relating to the NZIA AAS document: John made a plea to make sure we understand critical importance of a clear scope of services for what we are being instructed to do.

Preparing and defining this ahead of fee negotiations Make sure we charge adequately for this work/ the LPB will require more work, not less and therefore more fee. Site administration need an adequate charge c.f. engineers Exclusions - Only tick the box in the schedule section in the AAS that you have been engaged to carry out. Scope needs to be clearly defined, so if scope changes or creeps it can be addressed. We must have an adequate basis for charging for variations and extras. Explain the value architects bring to the process- if architects want better fees they need to show clients how they can add value, and to explain how. Lack of fee agreements or agreements inadequately defining scope figuring highly in indefensible or hard to defend claims against architects.

Greg Boyden's theme of internal and external psychology of fee negotiation we all experience which can impact on our perception and ability to obtain a better fee: Who else is the client talking to. Relative lack of potential work is exacerbated by more architects competing for fewer projects. The underlying creative impulse can work against achieving better fees. What is the market prepared to accept. Expectation of clients for architects to fall into a tendering process like other parts of the building industry. Also- The idea of allowing a fee contingency for those parts of a project that are hard to predict. Increasing liability may well be a good thing if it forces a more focused approach to fee definition and fee agreements. Being prepared to talk more amongst ourselves about fee setting would be a positive thing. Learning from engineers bottom up hourly rate charge rather than a percentage basis. Comparing fees with other sectors e.g. real estate agents who seem to be able to communicate and manage to keep their fees high.

Other points raised in the meeting: The idea that a mandatory written fee agreement with a fully defined scope for all projects for architects would go a long way to helping raise fees and reduce issues and disputes with clients. From clients point of view, the lack of transparency of the percentage fee (especially if adjusted to actually construction cost) approach compared with time charge estimates and lump sums, adversely affecting the image of the profession. How could focused marketing of the profession and the image of the profession be best presented as an aid to better fee income. Avoid partial services.

The meeting was well attended with standing room only for later arrivals. Many thanks to the presenters, John Albert, John Bierre and Greg Boyden for their joint presentation reminding us of our potential failings by way of their useful insights and observations.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES GROUP: Alec Couchman

General: Like Michael, Alec is still coming to terms with having accepted the Environment Issues Portfolio in a weak moment. We had a very good joint UIG/ EIG presentation from Heather Harris, the head of Auckland City's Resource Consent Department. It has been noted that recent Auckland Council ROI/RFP processes have requested buildings be designed for Net Zero/Living Building Challenge certification or to NZGBC 5 GreenStar certification. This betrays a lack of understanding in this area. Does this now reflect Auckland City policy? The response to this may require a co-ordinated approach from NZIA.

Alec and John Balasoglou met with Argentinean architect Pablo Lavaselli to discuss housing and community projects being built in the Amazon rainforest. Third World issues which dwarf anything we think we might have here. Very humbling. Possible lecture being considered.

Proposed Events: Initial discussions have been had with Darren Jessop re giving a presentation about the new PassivHaus project

currently on site/ under construction.

Other matters: Z4 Projects Update; Auckland Council Environmental Portfolio; Auckland City Environmental & Sustainable Forum; Living Building Challenge (NZ) Update; Technology & Materials; PassivHaus Update; University Research & Education; Solar Energy Update; Energy/Water Use Update; NZ Green Building Council Update; DBH Sustainability Update.

UNITEC STUDENT REPORT: Matthew Roberts & Stu Penno

B.A.S. and 1st Year Masters students have completed Crit Week for the first semester of Studio for 2012. Work has now been moderated, and students are eagerly awaiting the results. Exams are to follow. Second Year Masters students are preparing for a midway critique with visiting academic and professional critics.

Twenty students from the B.A.S. and Masters programs departed the weekend of 9th June for the Architectural Sustainability Elective being held in Italy. Set in the countryside of Sabina outside of Rome, the three-week live-in program run by Italian Architect Sabina Santovetti commences on the 11th of June.

Arnika Blount, a Second Year Masters of Architecture (Professional) student has recently completed a co-authored paper with Dr. Christoph Schnoor titled 'Wunderkammer: Scenes of curiosity, experiment and, spatial fabulation in early modern Europe.' It is to be presented at the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ) Conference, which is to be held in Tasmania from the 4th to the 8th of July.

On the 17th May, six Unitec students along with tutor Mark Mismash presented a seminar on their trip to Haiti with Architecture for Humanity titled 'Build Back Better.' The group assisted Architecture for Humanity with community-led reconstruction, redevelopment and mapping initiatives in Haiti. Coinciding with the presentation, photographs taken during their trip at the end of 2011 were exhibited.

Opening on the 31st May, the elective 'The Essentials of Energy Efficient Housing Design' run by Kara Rosemeier exhibited their work. The 1:1 detail models were constructed by students were then judge by the Manager of Carters who presented an award to the best scheme.

Architecture PORTFOLIO: Andrew Patterson

Unitary Plan Technical Advisory Group: During the last month the panel has been considering and commenting on papers and topics presented by council staff: regional consultants/local valuation; outcomes versus effects; heritage and character; tools and techniques; mapping, graphic and overlay methodology; and the zoning framework. Most Architects comments have been well received by officers.

Architecture Portfolio: The Auckland Architectural association completed the first of its three construction site tours last week. It was sold out, video of the tour can be seen on the aaa.org.nz site. The following Architectural writers are considering visiting New Zealand and Australia over the next six months if anybody is looking for a speaker or a judge: Jonathan Glancey, Hugh Pearman, Tom Dyckhoff, Kieran Long, and Clifford Pearson.

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING REPORT: Uwe Reiger

Semester 1: The semester has ended with crit week from 29.5-1.6.

Christchurch: In cooperation with Unitec, AUT, Victoria University and CPIT the school will run an event studio for FAiT (Festival of Architecture in Transition) in Christchurch. Over 300 students will be working on large-scale installations, exhibited for one night as a key part of the festival.

International visitors: The school will host Manuel Aires Mateus from Lisbon as our 2012 International Architect in Residence. In addition, Peggy Deamer (Yale University) and Martin Axe (Malaysia) will each be teaching intensive design studios at SoAP in Semester 2.

Heads of Schools Meeting: A meeting was held on June 7th between the heads of the architecture schools from Victoria University of Wellington, Unitec, The University of Auckland and the NZIA (representative Beverley McRae). A core topic discussed was the 'new student mobility', which is encouraged through the adaptation of the international 3+2 year degree structure. The parties agreed to collaboratively investigate the effects, potentials and attractors around this development.