

Building better New Zealand Conference

Presentation by Professor Jules Moloney, Victoria University of Wellington

The Role of Design in Achieving Better Buildings

There's no point having beautifully designed cities if 90 percent of New Zealanders can't afford to live in them. We might have to get a bit ugly. (Bill English, TV3 News 31.05.14)

What do we mean by better in relation to buildings? Current debate in New Zealand has a focus on affordability and achieving warm, healthy homes. Better in this context can be measured in terms of cost per square metre or through calculating building performance. According to Deputy prime Minister Bill English this means small, cheap apartments and the abandonment of any 'feel-good' factor such as the quality of space, materials or visual appearance. From this perspective, it would appear building better equates to a spreadsheet of construction cost and environmental performance, at the risk of ignoring social and cultural aspirations. In this presentation I will locate building better as a balance between the science and art of building. That 'better' has a qualitative component that is integral to meeting the needs and aspirations of New Zealanders, and that this is best achieved through design-led research.

The key to balancing building performance and qualitatively better buildings, is the integration of design and scientific research. Designing gives physical and lived form to the implications of scientific analysis, enabling complex and often competing variables to be evaluated in context. Reflecting on designs can also challenge assumptions and lead to further scientific research that can underpin new design iterations. 'Better by Design' is an established paradigm for adding value to business, products and services. The addition of a similar approach to the agenda of *Building a Better New Zealand* brings a responsive, interdisciplinary lenses that enables environmental and economic performance to be integrated with social and cultural values.

The proposition for design-led research is explored and illustrated through projects undertaken at the Victoria University School of Architecture. The Victoria school has a tradition of design quality grounded in technical excellence. It is unique in Australasia in terms of interdisciplinary collaboration between Architecture, Building Science, Interiors and Landscape Architecture. This provides the opportunity to undertake design-led research at a range of scales and contexts. Recent projects include: the First Light House, VUW's award winning entry into the US Department of Energy Solar Decathlon; the Cuba Street precinct in which issues of urban heritage and seismic upgrades were tested through the redesign of over 80 buildings in central Wellington; and the Outpost project where landscape and Architecture students are exploring the hypothesis that the city and its regional landscapes need not work as a network of compromises but rather as a network of mutual benefits. These and other projects illustrate the added value that design brings to realizing buildings that perform better and enhance quality of life in New Zealand's cities and landscapes.

What do we mean by 'better' in the context of the building

Qualitative or quantitative?

Split between sciences and design.

Quote is damning on where we are?

We might have to get ugly

Doubly damning

Suggests that architects only point of value is stylistic

And at the same time accepts that ugliness is the default position

So how 'ugly' can we get

How low do we go to achieve better in terms of cheap

The bar is low

A frontier mentality still affects the NZ psyche

If it is cold – put a jumper on

Who needs libraries and art galleries

Spent a substantial part of my life studying architecture and educating talented students

... and seen talented students fail with the industry

So returning to the role of design and the ministers dismissal that affordability comes at the cost of design quality.

The role of the architect – Vitruvius firmitas utilitas and venustius

How else could it be?

Australian small homes

The economic value of design

Shift from historical perspective to BIM

Digital technologies