

The Appreciation of Place

I recently bought a copy of *Scientific American* and inside was an article titled 'The Evolution of Architecture' about the homes that animals and insects build for themselves.

The amount of creatures such as ants, termites, beavers and birds that build their nests, said the article, "are an integral part of the species as they are the... limbs, eye colour, skin covering ... All are inscribed in their genes (instincts) of these animal kingdoms architects".

I marvel at nature's architecture: plants, trees, the evolution of mountains and glaciers, and thinking of how all these came together. I'm supposed to be writing about interior design, and I am, I'm awakening your visual senses, perhaps slowly.

Visualise the difference between the new electric trains that run along the Hobson Bay causeway, and compare them to a steam engine of a hundred years ago. The former is clean and streamlined, kind of boring to look at. And then consider the fascination of the steam engine, bells, whistles, pipes and steam coming out from top, and a cheery train driver, waving at you.

The article from the magazine concluded with how man "originally built houses where form followed function and necessity", ie, the *vernacular* was being expressed.

However we humans are now accustomed, or have evolved, to follow trends, and regardless of where we live houses, and their interiors, cannot anymore be ascribed to be in one country or the other.

Open up the latest architectural, interiors or kitchen magazine and there is a general sense of sameness. Travel the business districts of the world and you can see the blandness of architecture that makes no attempt at originality, the same template used in Vancouver, Beijing, Auckland.

Yet this general sense of sameness can be usurped by designers and architects who recognise the value, and understand the visual sense, of difference. In those same magazines, and I'm writing of

recent New Zealand ones, there are interiors (and buildings) that really make the difference, and I ask you to have a look at one that is here in Parnell. It's Rosie, the recently refurbished cafe formerly known as Rosehip on Gladstone Rd. Anathema to some, not grungy enough, a certain class of clientele.

At first I disliked it. The interior (I love the staff who work there) reminded me of a smart airport cafe, the issue of sameness I've written about above. However, that knee-jerk judgment has changed and I now appreciate what the designers have achieved, and of the fact that I am not stuck in my views.

Have a look at the layering of different surfaces, the ceiling shutters, the lighting. Take in the leather webbing on the benches and chairs, the colours and textures of the seating poufs, the treatment of the walls and floors, the different stones used. Going into the toilets is similar to entering a monastic cell — ambient music and lighting, stone and mosaic walls, the granite floor. It's great; you say your prayers, have a quick, or long, meditation on life, wash your hands and go back to the bright cafe and your double-shot latte.

The cafe's designers have used their instincts in the design of using materials and colours that create a whole image. They haven't used 50 shades of white or grey, there is no re-interpreting what other cafes have done, no industrial chic. There are no trends here — it's classical, cool, and will not need to be refurbished for a long time. Designers are gifted when they clearly articulate their ideas, implement them, and have the client satisfied with the outcome.

I find good design fascinating; it's innate, as evident in the wholeness of nature, the use of scale, balance, randomness, texture, shape and form; the expression and confidence in the use of colour, having the ability of getting off that sameness train. — *Andrew Cox*.

Andrew Cox is a Parnell-based interior designer



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