

Architecture school studios are hotbeds of inclusivity and understanding. They encourage us to pursue diverse interests like “Coffee Constructivism: Red Trusses and Green Operating Practices.” or “Bee Dancing Patterns as a Generative Process for Architecture” and we are duly rewarded with the praise and recognition of our educators and peers. But a self-deception occurs in these congratulations: we assume that other people besides our tutors and classmates will understand or care about our ideas. They really couldn’t give a shit. Now hang on a second, I’m not saying red trusses are not appropriate devices in sustainable architecture, I love red trusses! And I’m sure that buildings made using observations of dancing bees could produce some pretty interesting results... Our cause is essentially just.

But the role of the architect has shifted, no longer the custodians of taste and good building practice, they are now dreamweavers. Weaving together the threads of Pinterest feeds and magazine clippings, for clients emboldened to action by episodes of The Block NZ TM and Grand Designs NZ TM. Of course, in these cases the architect will still exert some influence over the project, designing the sequence of spaces and structural / functional necessities. As long as features from a good percentage of the images in their Pinterest board “Funky Modern Design 2” are included (the title in isolation conjures visions of the Famous Flames performing with chrome instruments in a Wright-esque panelled timber hall, a symphony of musical and architectural rhythm a-la The Blues Brothers (but that’s not what they mean)). It’s a collection of photographs depicting a series of sleek and vacuous “architecturally designed homes” of dubious origin. The kind of houses reproduced en-masse in suburbia that will suck the soul (and funk) right out of you.

The majority of existing suburbs and building projects can be seen as a wasted opportunity. For some time architecture in New Zealand has neglected the majority, and increasingly served a wealthy or cultured clientele. This relationship affords architects the ability to craft fine, high quality and opulent homes for clients that appreciate their art. Quite a generalization, but one that offers a way to critically appraise the operation of architects under the guise of a humanitarian or cultural moral authority.

The tragic and infuriating thing is that every single building project can benefit from expert design input, but relatively few projects do. A day trip around Auckland’s periphery suburbs reveals the absence of architecture’s influence in the lives of the average citizen.

Our clients are not necessarily wealthy or cultured, we shouldn’t aim to compete with elite architects; we should want to compete with group home developers and mechanistic corporations filling communities with mediocre property investments. We can match them on price through smart planning and technology, and obviously, the outcome for the client will be immeasurably more functional and delightful, regardless of whether the client has read Alain de Botton.

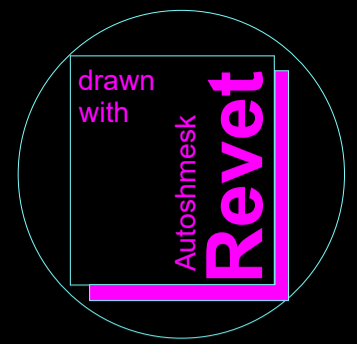
We should make extraordinary buildings for ordinary people in ordinary places. Because we want ordinary people to know that they can make better choices for the built environment.

**\*THIS SHOULD NOT BE READ AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF KIWI DIY CULTURE AS A REPLACEMENT FOR QUALITY ARCHITECTURE\***

The recent spectacular live televised failure of The Block NZ should go some way to discouraging those who say that the average citizen would do better to design and build their own home. The romanticised notion of the doer up’er could be traced to the colonial settler builders whose Victorian pattern books were the blueprint for Franklin Road’s villas, somewhere along the line the idea was separated from the necessity of a finely crafted building, and has contributed to the marginalisation of professional architects.

Perhaps New Zealand’s most enigmatic DIY’er, Sir Bob Jones is “constantly having to fix all their mistakes” (of professional architects) and therefore has designed his own building for construction. Bob’s own episode of Grand Designs NZ is playing out in magazines, newspapers, radio and TV news, where he rails against “thoughtlessness”, “this concrete column, right in the corner”, and “protruding fins that architects think are very fine but which needlessly obstruct or tunnel the occupant’s views”.<sup>1</sup>

1. Jane Clifton, “Game of Jones”, *The Listener*, August 2017.



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**Revision Schedule**

Ref.	Description	Date

**Your Company Name**

Your Company Address Here

Project: **DIY FUNKY** No: **Project Number**

**MODERN**

Address:

Client:

Issue Date: **03/24/17**

Drawn By: **ELIZA**

Reduced Scales: 1:100 - x 1.50  
1:50 - x 0.75

Scale: **As**

**Section 2** indicated

Sheet:

**A109**

Mentioned briefly in the media coverage is the fact that Sir Bob Jones worked with the Wellington practice Studio Pacific Architecture in the building design, the elegant lines of the timber tower sit well amongst their other commercial work, and one suspects that SPA have had a much greater role in the project than Sir Bob would care to mention. Bob claims his building will be functionally faultless and “invites sceptics to name [other faultless buildings] and we will point out the faults”. Sir Bob’s patronising attitude towards architecture and his positive reception in mass media is characteristic of the public opinion. It also represents the area where architecture can gain the most ground; by engaging mass media, and inspiring the support of ordinary people, architecture could start to be recognised for the service it provides, and not for its faults.

Perhaps it could be productive for all parties involved to reconsider the terms of the relationship between architect, client, and building. Pezo von Ellrichshausen, who spoke at the recent NZIA INSITU conference and are based in Chile, make buildings that are based on rigorous geometrical exercises, to which the pragmatic concerns of context and program appear secondary. They have previously fielded a question on the subject: How do you convince clients to allow you to build your designs? Their response was that “we don’t like the word *client* ... client implies someone who you are doing a service, someone you want to please, so they can return and keep working with you.” For the majority of people a new architecturally designed house will be a once in a lifetime undertaking.

“We really like the notion of a customer, so you receive someone with certain necessities [and they are] helping you to customize a product, the architect becomes a customer for the same product.” This acknowledges that both parties have a vested interest in the building. It removes scrutiny of the architect’s methods and influences for the project from consideration. Instead, it places more importance on a successful outcome which the customer could not have predicted, and yet, “doesn’t come as a surprise”. It allows the architect more autonomy to explore an architectural idea in a project without it being diluted by external factors. “When we agree on basic conditions and basic values, all the rest is very easy.”<sup>2</sup>

A little closer to home proof of this concept might be found in the Swanston Square apartment building by ARM in Melbourne. Controlled perforations that contrast cladding with shadow transform the building facade into an enormous tonal image, the portrait of indigenous land rights activist William Barak. Thirty one storeys high and facing The Shrine of Remembrance World War Two memorial, the facade asserts an additional narrative of significance in the CBD. The irony of this message being communicated on privately owned land by a luxury residential apartment block is articulated in the way the image wraps itself around the building like a Halloween ghost costume. There is a conceptual separation between the high-spec interior volume that satisfies the developer’s requirement for profitable square meters, and the exterior appearance of the building which has been crafted by the architect to provide a surreal reminder of other histories to the city walking the pavement below.

Currently under construction in a suburban holiday town on the Coromandel Peninsula, is a small home that attempts to apply the idea of a separation between the client brief and the architectural inquiry that is articulated by a literal separation of building and facade. The house will be built on a budget below industry square meter rates, and will sit jauntily next to an 80’s faux Tuscan villa (with the decaying stucco and general state of disrepair giving it a quality of rambling authenticity). Nondescript from the street to the South, the sunny pavilion style house is set into an excavated hillside, opening out to the North creating a dramatic sequence of spaces that deny, then reveal views over the harbour. The North facing façade necessitates a perforated screen to shade the upper level, this climatic imperative provides the opportunity to craft the outward appearance of the building. Using parametric image sampling, the clients can choose to recreate any image 3m high along the length of the house: a scene, an advertisement, an abstract pattern, their own faces at larger than life size gazing out over the houses and harbour below... Unique circumstances led to me designing the house with next to no experience, a DIY job of sorts. I can only hope the result is something funky and modern enough to end up in the right Pinterest boards.

2. “Pezo von Ellrichshausen”, *Columbia GSAPP*, February 15, 2016. <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/events/54-pezo-von-ellrichshausen>

