"I shall tell you as much as I can about the general principles that affect architecture." . . . .

Sir Reginald Stradling used these words in speaking at a luncheon arranged by the Centre during his recent visit to this country. In the context of his talk the words referred, of course, to his own experience as a building research scientist. Out of their context as they are above, they might well sum up the purpose of this broadsheet.

For we of this Architectural Centre in Wellington are a group of architects and draughtsmen and wood engravers and other people whose greatest claim to affiliation is an overriding enthusiasm for good design in all things.

We are not, therefore, a professional body. Nor scarcely a learned society. But we have, as we said, a common enthusiasm.

In our daily work we of this Centre are, like most other people, very busy individuals. For most of us design is our work. But our individualism ceases almost before our first thought upon a thing has been formed. Whether that thought be the design of a house, or a bookplate, or a steel girder, we cannot frame it without consideration for the thoughts of others.

We are entirely dependent upon, at best, the understanding, and, at worst, the tolerance of our society in what we draw or calculate or engrave or write down.

Example: We illustrate inside this paper a little group of shops in a new residential area near Wellington. They are very good shops. Clean, light and pleasant for their purpose. Good design in other words.

Nevertheless, to achieve this simple building free of the customary orgy of liver pill and toothpaste advertising, the designer fought hard. And in the few years of the practical working of the shops he has carried on a gradually losing battle against the tigerish billboard and the signwriter’s piece. The remorseless hand of “popular” demand asserts itself.

Folk art perhaps, you say?

The spirit that urges the bargee to the incomparable "primitive" decoration of his floating home or the Maori to weave brightly-coloured bits of flax into his straw-hued mat should find this outlet in modern life unhampered by a designer’s puritanism?

Then we must agree to differ.

Even the simple-minded bushman or "uneducated" peasant generally understood and acknowledged the dictates of his own human nature. Rhythm and shapeliness are generally his second nature, comely if crude creation showed in his “pots and pans and earrings and spoons.”

But in a society such as ours it is different.

We can no longer rely upon native instinct for colour and design.

Tradition cannot help us for the stream has dried up.

Even time, time for tactile moulding of a thing made, for contemplation of natural things, for even the most subjective reflection, is rarely available.

So we feel that, internal and historical impulses lacking, the only remaining solution lies not in a barbarous individualism, such as the advertisement hoarding, but in external co-operation, discussion and campaigning to the general acceptance of at least reasonable standards of visual design in daily life.

This paper is one of our ways of putting that conviction into effect. We offer no apologies for adding to the current literature upon design. Too little of it finds its way into this country and much of that which does so is couched in terms familiar only to its own European or American audience.

New Zealand, self-consciously perhaps, is emerging from the restricted pioneering stage and may be both over-suspicious and over-eager where imported cultural statements are concerned.

It is not unhealthy nor is it impossible that this should lead to a vigour in our work in terms of our country’s conditions—a vernacular.

And since any true vernacular extends beyond the designer and the thing designed to the sympathetic enjoyment by the people for whom it was designed, then we unashamedly burst into print.

... "the pioneering stage" ...

**BIographical note:**

The people who have run the affairs of the Architectural Centre over the last twelve months should, we feel, be named.

They are the President, John Cox; the Honorary Secretary, D. G. Porter; the Honorary Treasurer, R. E. Barraclough; and a Committee consisting of Graham Dawson, A. G. Kofoid, I. B. Reynolds, R. Hull, R. Fantl and Geoffrey Nees. There is also an active and vitally important student committee whose enthusiasm is essential to keep the sixty or more student members in touch with Centre affairs.
PRINTS & THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK

The recent exhibition of prints in the Wellington Central Library displayed work by K. W. Hassall, E. Mervyn Taylor, George Woods and Stewart Macilman, which would stand favourable comparison with similar work of any European artists. The print is a democratic form of art, being easy of acquisition to the slender purse, and is one of the most potent means of forming public taste through its wide dispersal as book illustration.

The last few years have witnessed a revival of interest in the production of books which can claim to be unified in design and a higher awareness of good book design has identified sound design with saleability, thereby permitting publishers, who dictate the format, to enlist the services of an artist's work and advice. Many books published recently in Switzerland, although purely commercial ventures, are a delight to handle, while New Zealand has been fortunate in having men with skill, taste and a conscience in publishing.

In spite of five hundred years of experience the problem of the illustration of books remains. What is the purpose of an illustration? How should it be done? The answer depends largely on the book. "Alice in Wonderland" is unthinkable without Tenniel. Here then in brief are the design problems of book production and some of the many solutions.

and kindnesse of Fortune. Nor might I let it alooe, so long as I had these eyes, lest if it should fall to the ground, some of the Cattel as they feed, should tread upon it, or

The above illustration shows part of a page from a modern French edition of "Daphnis and Chloe," with woodcuts by Aristide Maillol.

There are two main classes of illustrators; those who retain the old idea of using every medium, to whom all restrictions are intolerable; and those who make typographical drawings in two-dimensional patterns that preserve the integrity of the page and often tend to the abstract.

The character of the book is the next factor. A good artist—Andubon, Bewick, Daglish—can turn diagrams into works of art. The illustrator of
Building Review: A group of four shops at Naenae, Lower Hutt

Designed by State Housing Architects and built by Government Trainees under Rehabilitation Dept.

If architecture is to have any significance to average people again then we must look for it in buildings such as this. A little range of shops in a large and essentially young community is the scene of as much traffic in human affairs in one day as a civic monument sees in a century.

The first question involved is one of planning. The positive achievements represented here are surely these:

... The shops are sited at a central intersection for convenience but they are kept well away from the corner to ensure traffic visibility.
... The whole building is set back from the street front and an attempt has been made to plant the open foreground and corner.
... A service lane and back yard—rare facilities—are provided.

Against these merits must be placed the lack of provision for car and bicycle parking.

There are four separate shops—a butcher, a greengrocer, a grocer and a dairy—and the dairy has a house attached. They could hardly be more straightforward. A simply apprehended block of white plastered concrete walls, untampered copings and verandahs, and pleasantly disposed openings. The random stone end wall is quite arbitrary but it makes a pleasant contribution in texture to the whole and the green grass and shrubs around the building are a colourful advance upon the customary hard paving. The whole group is in its simplicity a visual surprise in the generally riotous landscape of the surrounding houses.

And within the shops themselves? Here the prime achievement must lie in the elimination of the shop window back—there are no show windows for dreary displays of the window dresser's art. The shop becomes the show window. And to heighten this effect unusually deep clerestory windows over the canopy light the shops brightly.

However, it is now apparent that the smooth white walls, thin painted woodwork and neat finish of modern buildings such as this are not proof against daily handling. These shops have served their busy—if brief—career as a local play centre for the youth of Waddington, and so the problem is an acute one here. Perhaps the customary vulgarity of a dark tan or sunset orange finish would have had some merit after all. Anyway it would be more in keeping with the work of the over-zealous signwriters whose sole victory over frustration so far has been to achieve some painted shadows under a carefully detailed name panel.

But the various outbreaks of professional and amateur vandalism aside, the shops are attractive and soundly built. Only in such details as are beyond the immediate control of the architect are there those shortcomings which indicate the unresolved duality within his field and that of civic design generally.

From bony telegraph poles which fence in the building, to a drunken sign for the bus stop; from naked rubbish bin in the photograph, to the near impossibility of growing plants near a footpath, the absence of a general sense of mere tidiness even in our communities, is once more indicated. The result is a good looking building—in spite of its context.

—I.B.R.

Shakespeare, Chaucer or a lyric poet could contribute little except ornament, relative or not. The illustrator to a modern edition of the gospels might attempt a translation of the spirit into plastic form, presenting the Absolute, the timeless essence of what inspired the author, taking care that it is the book and not his own personality, that he illustrates. The "gossipy" kind of book permits the illustrator to embroider the author's ideas or execute variations on his theme in the way that Heath Robinson provides a running commentary to Rabelais. The bold and confident illustrator may regard the book as a springboard and jump off into free imaginative drawing.

For the modern book the woodcut or wood engraving is most suitable, but type is refined and finished and the block must approximate in texture, having the same relationship of thick and thin as the type used. The letters of print are rigid and exact, with slow and precise movement. The strong, clean sculptural character of the wood block can be made to match the type. How much modern illustration is spoilt by being too crude or too black?

The dictionary tells us that "illustration" is to make clear, explain; elucidate by drawings; ornament with designs. The artist finds the matter not quite so simple.

—E. C. Simpson.
STUDENTS OF ARCHITECTURE

There are now nearly sixty architectural students in Wellington City. Rightly or wrongly they are all aiming to qualify for entry into the governing professional body, the New Zealand Institute of Architects. Since the only School of Architecture in the country is attached to Auckland University despondent students in the capital have long voiced the need for organised direction in their studies. Their road to qualification is inevitably painful and often ultimately crushing.

Thus, since all sixty people have apparently been accepted as fit candidates for the profession, the Centre has made some attempt to provide what part-time instruction it could and to broaden the scope of their preparation.

In doing so the Centre last year used nineteen unpaid lecturers to give a total of twenty-five hours of specialised lectures and tutorials each week. Classes ranged up to twenty-four in number and most of the students were supplied with typewritten notes on their subject matter.

Is this a misplaced charity which can only dull initiative and kill vital enterprise, ultimately producing a group of mediocre and over-numerous professionals? We don’t think so. We feel that ultimately no more will gain admission to the Institute than the standards required by that body will allow. But we do insist that whoever is admitted shall not have spent eight to ten disheartening years floundering through a series of mysteries to emerge at the other end with no more educational background than a store of unrelated technical facts with which to practice his art. And we make no apologies for the word “art”.

Whether the students continue to fail examinations or not is of little concern. The main thing is for some to emerge at the other end with an attitude toward architecture other than sheer relief at having qualified.

CUTTINGS FROM THE CENTRE SCRAPBOOK

50 STUDENTS ENGAGED ON REPLANNING: STUDY GROUPS TO CONSIDER PROBLEM OF TE ARO FLAT.

“. . . The purpose of the first Summer School of the Architectural Centre held in 1946, was to take advantage of the University vacation to give architectural students a broad background in design principles before starting on their academic training. Twenty lectures and design problems made up the course, but this year . . . the detailed replanning for the development of the Te Aro Flat area of Wellington will be undertaken . . .”

—From the Southern Cross, 26/11/47.

“NOT A DREAM”

TE ARO REPLANNING
COUNCIL VIEW AWAITED

“. . . The scheme on show is not a dream. It could be made real in five-yearly steps to the advantage of the public, the slum dwellers and investors alike. That . . . summed up the Te Aro Flat replanning scheme which has been on display at the (Wellington) Central Library for almost two weeks . . .”

RURAL CRAFTS IN RETROSPECT

"... shape ... evolved from the purpose. ...

THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S EXHIBITION of British Rural Crafts has gone from Wellington. We may now ponder on the impressions that remain and sit among them to try and discover the elements that made the exhibition so memorable.

It was appropriate that this first important exhibition of craft in New Zealand should deal with fundamentals. The collection represented, primarily, good workmanship and the unconscious beauty that results from the use of natural materials worked with sympathetic skill and understanding in the production of useful objects. We saw wood, metal, clay, wool and leather used in the making of agricultural implements, utensils, baskets, pottery, fabrics and harness—the works of such village craftsmen as the blacksmith, the potter and the weaver.

Variety in shape, size, thickness, colour, weight and texture evolved from the purpose of the objects, the materials used and the method of making. Design was almost wholly unconscious and variations resulted from conditions peculiar to the districts where the articles were made rather than from the creative impulses of individual designers.

It would be a fine thing if this exhibition could be followed later by one showing an equally worthy collection of the Decorative Crafts—stained glass, mosaic, printed fabrics, writing and illumination, typography, bookbinding, metal work and so on—crafts wherein the individuality of the designer is expressed. A book well bound in good leather and suitably titled is a thoroughly efficient piece of work in that it secures and protects the pages, is pleasant to handle, is readily recognised and will wear well. It loses nothing of efficiency, but gains in beauty if suitably enriched with perhaps inlaid leather and tooling in gold. The decorative crafts grow from the basic crafts, but they also merge into the fine arts when the practical purpose motive recedes and the work tends to become an end in itself—something created by the artist with materials and tools specially designed for the making of pictures, prints, sculpture, etc.

These basic crafts which lead to the fine arts on the one hand, are also the fundamentals of industrial design. The Exhibition of Rural Crafts demonstrated the fact that things made by hand developed over the years, a traditional form that was entirely satisfying because it was efficient, natural and characteristic. To-day the designers have not yet developed a response to the potential quality of the machine-made goods that can compare with this sympathetic understanding of his materials and tools possessed by the craftsman.

William Morris made the mistake of ignoring the machine; now we are apt to speak of mastering the machine. Perhaps the solution lies rather in understanding the machine. Eric Gill, Paul Nash, Keith Murray, Douglas Cockerill, John Mason, Marion Dorn and other great modern designers have shown us what can be done, and perhaps an exhibition of their works for industry might prove as revealing as was the recent collection of British Rural Crafts.

—STEWART MACLENNAN.

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