



DesignInc Integrated Design

By Shona McPherson

Sustainable design is a welcome element in both residential and commercial design these days. Architects who employ green design techniques are making sure their buildings reduce carbon footprints and that's commendable, considering we human's impact on the environment, but so often they don't consider the dual concepts of the impact the natural world has on us. At DesignInc they're committed to reconnecting us with the natural world in positive ways.

Studies have shown that human beings need to feel connected to the natural environment in order to promote a sense of psychological, physical and social well being. Think about dingy offices with no windows, no open space and low roof lines and you're likely to feel that your world is caving in, which isn't conducive to a happy, productive work environment.

Architecture firm DesignInc has a holistic approach to architecture. They work toward a 'whole building design' viewed as an interdependent system, as human friendly as it will be ecofriendly.

DesignInc director, Stephen Webb says that the integrated design approach aims to bring a people focus to the firm's work. DesignInc pays homage to the innate affiliation that human beings have with nature and the living world.

"Singular elements give rise to multiple benefits. A logical aim of integrated design is shifting beyond a neutral sustainable design to one that is restorative and ultimately regenerative," Webb explains.

What this implies is that the built environment; human made, arranged and maintained structures become an extension of the natural environment and create spaces that are healthy and comfortable to inhabit.

"Rather than a uniform stylistic expression each project encompasses integrated variety. This can be seen in the eclectic mix of expressed ventilation shafts, modernist glass facades and expressed thermal structures," that Webb and his team give priority to.

Leading by example, DesignInc's studio on level two of the heritage listed Melbourne GPO building demonstrates the firm's principles at work. New and old dramatically contrast to create a timeless aesthetic of recycled timber and steel on a backdrop of white masonry in the studio which is both beautiful and highly functional.

The interior spaces provide a connection to the outside world, using patterns, materials, themes and ornaments reminiscent of nature. The use of indoor plants incorporate greenery into the space and enhance its feel together with organically reducing toxins from the circulating air.

Natural materials and forms such as reclaimed furniture and plywood walls provide neutral colouring and detail within the room and help to relax the tone of stark white walls. Large operable Victorian windows allow for natural ventilation as well as supplying a visual connection to daylight and nature. Open and sheltered spaces provide the ability to both retreat to personal space and promote interactive behaviours.

"The collaboration spaces and tables within our main studio space create an amazing ambience with their abundance of natural light, greenery and fresh air," Webb adds.

High ceilings are reduced in scale by pendant lights and decorative steel fixtures, which give the rooms a more domestic, less factory-like feel. An outdoor terrace provides easy access to the outdoor world, which allows for frequent interaction with what naturally happens outside.

The GPO Studio design structure highlights integrated design which is central to DesignInc's philosophy. This culminates from single ideas drawn together to deliver multiple benefits to the building's inhabitants and the environment alike.

Stephen Webb believes it is "a constant challenge to push beyond the immediate functional and fashionable influences of modern projects ... [and that] the city and its life support is the most important role for architecture. Reconnection, restoration and re-vitalisation of the city's life support system" is vital.

DesignInc create thoughtful spaces that are efficient. Embracing the aesthetics of the outdoors as well as considering the functionality and ecological nature of design recognises that whilst our impact on the environment is considerable, it's impact on us is even greater.



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