

celebrating the best

Award programmes have a special place in our design professions.

Antipodeans are known for their innovation – a fact no more aptly displayed than in Graham Lane’s award-winning house designed for the O’Learys.

Innovation and excellence would mean little, however, if that frock, holiday home, or council playground wasn’t displayed through awards programmes that let the rest of the country stand back and admire.

When the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) Resene Supreme Awards for Architecture 2008 were announced earlier this year, national judging convenor Pip Cheshire – of Auckland-based Cheshire Architects – noted: “We are seeing a great deal more sophistication in New Zealand design. While solutions are responsive to the demands of New Zealand, they display a true knowledge of world conditions of architecture.”

And participation in a forum like this takes real courage, says John Gerondis, sales manager for Resene, which has sponsored these awards since 1990.

“In the NZIA Resene Awards for Architecture, we’re asking architects to present their work to their peers and to be assessed by them, and that takes some grit,” he says. “However, because of just that,

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these are true industry awards. They are rigorous and demanding, but there’s a feeling that the assessment system is a fair one, and that’s been backed by tremendous growth in participation.”

And, as he points out, the award results are seen as a validation of the quality of the winning designs. Without this kind of recognition our achievement of new design benchmarks may well go unnoticed by anyone except the client at the receiving end of the finished project.

That’s a key reason why such initiatives are so valuable, says Renée Davies, president of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA), which has run biannual awards since the early 1980s, also sponsored by Resene.

“The moment a designer or their project wins something, that attracts the attention of the media,” she says. “And that immediately raises the profile of the profession and the work it’s doing. Press, TV and radio coverage is a great way to make the consumer aware of current trends and projects. And that leads to a greater consumer appreciation of the importance of good design.”

The impact of such exposure can be wider reaching, too, she observes. Much architecture or landscape architecture is integral to major civic projects, and as these attract interest at government or local body level, they tend to trigger more works of that quality, which leads to a better environment for all.

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Whether it’s the Architectural Designers NZ, or the National Kitchen and Bathroom Association, each sector of the design industry has its own programme that aims to reward outstanding creativity and professional expertise, and raise wider awareness of just what our designers are capable of. These events also challenge the designers themselves to consider what they’re doing.

“This is also one reason why we feel it is important to reward not just completed projects, but also examples of great planning, and some of those undertakings that never actually get built. Many of these last are just too difficult or expensive to execute, but some of the ideas they embody are ground-breaking,” says Renee.

Awards are an important barometer of the health of the industry as well. If entry numbers were to drop off year-by-year, or the quality of entries significantly decline, this should prompt alarm bells.

And last, but not least, says Renee, such important events attract the attention of industry professionals in other parts of the world, too.

“The media attention, the presence of overseas judges, or the elevation of our award-winning designs into international competitions, all stimulate the cross-border sharing of ideas... taking in new concepts and benchmarking our own against them is how we both validate our own achievements and move ahead.” **H**

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