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# Grand designs inspire great work

THERE is a good deal of rhetoric among Tasmanian leaders these days about this State nurturing the creative industries.

But when it comes to architecture and design, two of the most economically and socially valuable contributors to Tasmania in the 21st century, the rhetoric is ringing a little hollow.

Unless we recognise that good architecture and design are not luxuries but necessities in a society that wants to prosper then that rhetoric will remain.

Oliver Kraetzer, National President of the Design Institute of Australia, notes that business and government "need to understand that design is neither self-indulgent, superficial, nor a management fad, but a powerful discipline that enables and leverages industry".

He is right. There is, for example, a plethora of studies and literature which confirms that optimal design of schools improves the capacity for teaching and learning.

More generally, the imperative for increased productivity in the workplace finds a solution in design and architecture.

The physical workplace design is one of the top three factors which affect performance and job satisfaction.

Perceived "high-end" or "cool" offices attract and retain employees as well as customers.

Nice office space simply increases morale and creativity.

It has been estimated that productivity increases by about 20 per cent due to a well-designed office space, writes Californian architect Elisa Garcia.

Given the low productivity rates of Tasmanians and the sub-standard educational outcomes, one would have thought political and policy leaders would ensure that architecture and design were taken more seriously. Unfortunately, they are not at present.

The demise of the Government Architect is a case in point.

The role of Government Architect is akin to that of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

Both are independent offices which ensure that we as a society adhere to appropriate values.

They also educate and steer us when necessary into better ways of



GREG BARNES

doing things.

Ironically, while the Liberal Party in Tasmania has castigated the idea of a Government Architect, Liberal governments in Victoria and New South Wales embrace the idea.

In fact, in October last year Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu, himself an architect, upgraded the Office of Government Architect so that it can "advise more openly and candidly about issues of design quality and to become more visible and autonomous in its role as advocate and advisor".

Having a Government Architect helps to build a culture where government and the private sector begin to factor in the economic and social importance of good design when they are tendering out construction or building offices and facilities.

This in turn encourages the development of the local architectural and design industry in Tasmania.

The second failure of policy makers and political leaders in Tasmania concerning architecture and design is one of missed opportunities.

Hobart currently has four major public projects – Parliament Square, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Menzies Institute and the Hobart Hospital.

There are only two principal architects for these projects.

FJMT from Sydney is commissioned in respect of the Parliament Square and TMAG and Lyons Architects from Melbourne for the Menzies and hospital projects.

Why would a government award major building projects to a duopoly of firms?

Why not see the inherent benefit in diversity in design by appointing



**VITAL ROLE:** The demise of the position of the Government Architect, previously held by Peter Poulet, was a huge loss for Tasmania.

Picture: SAM ROSEWARNE

different firms to undertake each project?

The other advantage in having four firms as principal architects for four important projects is that it broadens the opportunity for Tasmanian firms to win projects.

Tenders should of course be won by

whomever it is who provides best value for money irrespective of where they hail from, but the more tenders there are the more opportunities arise for Tasmanian architects.

It is one of the ironies of Tasmanian design that it is a highly successful export industry, and that some firms

would make most of their money outside of their home state.

Elvio Brianese and Peta Heffernans Liminal Studio is a case in point as is the internationally renowned Terroir which is still headquartered in Hobart.

The response from those who award

tenders would be that local architectural firms are partners of interstate or international firms.

But as Peta Heffernan noted in a paper for the University of Tasmania's Salon/South last year, these partnerships often amount to little more than "using a local firms

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office space for fly in/fly out visits by offshore practitioners".

It would be far better for the Tasmanian government when devising tenders for architectural and design services to insist that if there is to be a partnership between local and international or interstate firms that it be a genuine collaboration, because this will ensure that the local intellectual input nuanced by years of practising in the space that is Tasmania, properly informs the project.

Architecture and design is a critical component of Tasmania's future so all of us should take an interest.

We cannot afford to do anything else.