



HOME

# FIVE YEARS ON



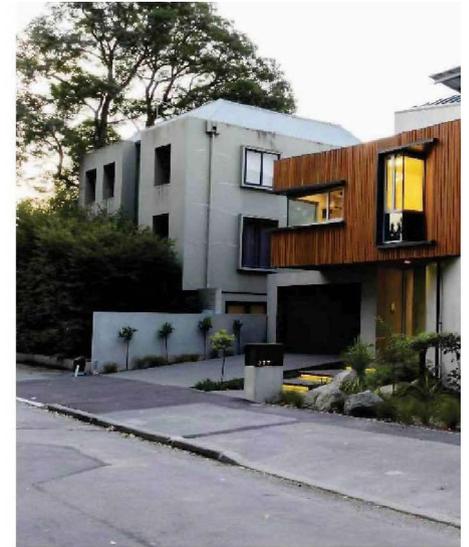
Cymon Allfrey

*As we reflect on the last five years, architect Cymon Allfrey asks us to look forward. Is our greatest challenge yet to come?*

Towards the end of last year I was asked to present a paper at the Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) conference about how we, as a design community, responded to the events of 4 September 2010 and 22 February 2011. Centred on the days and weeks immediately after these events unfolded, the presentation was designed to provide an insight into Christchurch at that time. As a lead-in to the discussion, raw footage of 22 February was played and, while I was prepared for this video, I was unprepared for the manner in which it affected me and how hard it was, nearly five years on, to talk about that day.

The last five years can be viewed as a collection of stories which, despite being connected by a common thread, are all different and unique. Regardless of the time that has passed, there is a raw grief that continues to connect them and always will. Perhaps we will never be able to talk about that period separate from our emotions.

While there have been some incredible lows over the last five years, in those first few weeks and months some of that was about making sure the stress of the people who relied on me, emotionally and financially, was reduced. I needed to reassure staff they would still get paid and



that there was still a job for them when all else seemed to be falling apart. While there was, and still is, discussion around the opportunities that were created, at that point it was about the survival of the team and helping clients. It was a different kind of opportunity – one of emotional support and expert knowledge, rather than growth and development.

As we moved past the initial grief and devastation I began to feel privileged to be part of building a city – and I still do. For the design and construction industry, this



is the most significant contribution being made to an urban area since Christchurch's settlement over 170 years ago. Development at that time was fuelled by excitement and decisions to establish, rather than fuelled by necessity. We have been given a chance to make a positive mark on the landscape and the future of our city. This is both aspirational and inspirational.

While we pause to look back and reflect, it is just as important that we look forward. What will the next five years bring? Five

years ago, both of my girls were at primary school; now my youngest is at high school. Our needs have changed - not just as a small family unit, but as a city. Where five years ago companies like Tesla were in their infancy, now we are faced with self-drive technology. Where once we looked at how to deal with cars in the central city, in five years we will be looking at where the cars wait for us, not simply where to park them.

With evolving technology, rapid change is inevitable and we need to be innovative and challenged in our thinking. We need to be designing for the future and thinking about "where to" next? Given the rate of change in technology, a number of our decisions may become redundant or obsolete. We need to consider the legacy of the decisions we are leaving behind and shift the focus from convention and the way we have always done things, to the unimaginable. We need to open our minds to the future.

The events of five years ago are not only our past, but they are our future. Our biggest challenge is to take the blinkers off and be prepared for change. Anything is possible.

**HOME**



*Closing a chapter on the journey from loss to rebuilt for one family: A recently completed central-city home by Cymon Allfrey Architects Limited.*

Architect: Cymon Allfrey

Photographer: Juliet Nicholas

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