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Cymon Allfrey

BEYOND THE ICONS

Architect Cymon Allfrey asks us to experience our city by foot in order to gain a new understanding and perspective on the progress of the rebuild...

With the Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) national conference to be held in Christchurch in October, I have been engaged to assist in the incorporation of a four kilometre walk around the city. A walk that will allow early attendees the opportunity to be guided around the inner city by local designers, and experience our city at a more intimate level.

Beginning at Latimer Square and ending at the Re:Start Mall the walk encompasses Victoria Square and the top of High Street, as it snakes its way through the city in a Z like shape. So far, in preparation, I have done the walk twice. The first time to determine the route and a second accompanied by some 'guinea-pigs', offering me a gauge into the timeframe and the questions that might emerge.

When we live in a city, we know the layout and we experience what is on

offer often without engagement. However when you walk through the city you start to see and experience things you wouldn't unless you are on foot. Living in a city, our experience of our surroundings can be described as snapshots. We drive in, and drive out, only seeing and engaging with the destination. However on foot, your journey is an experience of engagement from beginning to end.

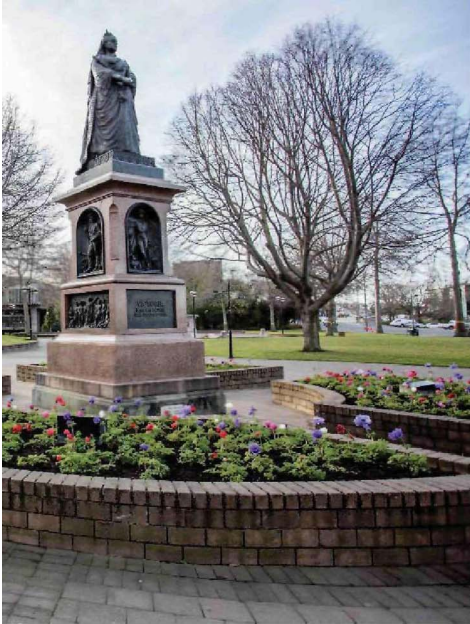
In a recent opinion piece in The Press by Auckland-based Urban Designer Garth Falconer entitled 'Let's talk about the Christchurch rebuild', I was pleased to discover his position on our city was different from many other urban designers across the country. He stated, "the future of our second biggest city and the one with the greatest design tradition needs to be back on the national radar". Rather than focus on what Christchurch should be doing in order to achieve

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success, the piece discussed the need for others around the country to be engaged and focused on the outcome of the rebuild. For those living in Christchurch the rebuild is what we live and breathe, day in, day out. So for the recognition to come from an outsider that our city needs engagement on a wider scope than simply Canterbury, illustrates the importance the rebuild has to both the success of our city, and our country. For me, reading



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Falconer's article about engaging with the rest of the country was refreshing, it was like walking around the city and experiencing it in a different way.

City Councillor, Jamie Gough recently commented that the Cathedral has "become a symbol of everything the Christchurch rebuild should not be about". For those visiting, or watching from outside, it is our icons which continue to be at the centre of debates and disputes. And our icons which continue to stand in states of disrepair.

What my recent walks around the city have highlighted is that we are living and working within a massive building site.

There is progress being made around

every corner, activity and development on every inner city street.

My walks have also highlighted that our architectural community is deserving of acknowledgement in their approach to overcoming the constraints and restrictions placed on the development of sites by the likes of CERA and The Resource Management Act. Rather than squarely designing buildings to height limits, we are seeing a delineation of facades crafting exciting edges and lines designed to create interest. Design responses which should be celebrated and applauded.

We are dealing with the gaps in a relatively well-considered way. For me the city and its people can be safe in the knowledge that the architectural community is showing its ability to be creative within prescriptive and often limiting boundaries.

We are moving forward. Walk through the city, stop, engage and listen to what is going on. There is no need to get bogged down by the icons of dispute, be refreshed by the fact our city is making progress.

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