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### ***The need for clarity of design***

It was Albert Einstein who said of our age that it is characterized by a confusion of aims and perfection of means. This applies aptly to many facets of existence in the mid-20th century, but is particularly true of today's floundering confusion that exists in the shaping of our physical environment—from city redevelopment to individual buildings and down to the design of furniture and objects of use.

The sound philosophies and principles put forward so brilliantly by the well-known pioneers of modern architecture forty and fifty years ago seem to have been forgotten or never absorbed by most of those concerned with designing, building and planning. Truth, integrity and conviction seem to have been lost to architecture in this superficial, impatient and shallow area. Short-lived thrills of appearance, fashion and a constant need for something "new" have replaced the old revolutionaries' dedicated search for intrinsic honesty and integrity in all design in which a true balance is achieved between suitability to purpose and economy of means with appropriate structural expression—and above all, with that which will bring it to life in significant aesthetic form and space. Instead, the only things that are finding acceptance are surface appearances and the increasing, constantly growing "arsenal" of the new building technology. The deeper meanings of the disciplines of modern architecture with their high aims towards a harmonious environment go unheeded

by the badly trained or unreceptive who replace genuine design procedure with fake, capricious individuality. Our cities and suburbs are ample proof of this with their wild riot of uncontrolled forms and colours—screaming for attention—aimed at entertainment value rather than any intrinsic quality contributing towards a worthy human environment.

To regain some balance in our thinking we must reject that which is irrelevant. In a world today plagued by a population explosion and a desperate housing shortage in even industrialized countries, we must concern ourselves only with building that which embodies a genuine element of a "significant solution". What is desperately needed are universally understood true value in order to reduce the appalling great bulk of the undesigned or the wastefully misbuilt. This will only be achieved by genuine deep seated convictions on what is significant in building and which superficial capricious tendencies must be rejected.

Restraint is a virtue in design. Above all there must be directness of approach. We need logical answers methodically consistent and imbued with single-minded integrity. Only that is worthy to be built which combines in every solution and selection, by a shortcut of the mind, the greatest economy of means with the most that material and labour can achieve. Building problems cannot be solved convincingly by over-simplified extremes. Building is neither all technology nor all form. To force industrialization is as false as insisting that above all form must be "creative". Has not our appetite for forms been cloyed by the desperate and hideous excesses of the misbuilt?

It should go without saying that every building must represent as far as possible a perfect answer to practical problems. The means employed must be the most appropriate economic-structural for the solution, gaining the maximum with minimum of labour content. Let the will of the building needs, the will of our level of industrialization, and of our climate, be done. Unless we give these truthful



form, the building will wither of rejection and the discomfort and unhappiness of its users. But even all this can be worthless unless it is brought to life by the designer's firmly based and valid aesthetic intentions. And can one say what these should be? In modern architecture there are definite and generally discernible aesthetic criteria which any designer can abandon only at his peril:

#### **Space**

Our eyes thrill to an architecture of space (in contrast to the solid volume and form of most traditional building)—it is its language of the intimate and simultaneously infinite, the life giving elements and subtleties of light and shade.

#### **Structure**

We succumb to the skilled defying of gravity which has been in other ways the aspiration of man throughout history. Not structural acrobatics, but structure revealing its logical form—to clearly see and feel it take stress and to understand the simple direct way in which it was physically achieved.

#### **Visual opposition**

Opposition will give life to environment. Not all transparency and not all solidity, not all soft and not all hard, but a skilled visual interplay between opposites. Planes opposing each other in space, verticals against horizontals, solid against void, cold colour against warm, curve against straight line and above all in Australia's climate, sunlight against shade.

It can only be through understanding, through education that the true ethic of architecture will be recognised. Only by sincere and humble understanding can an end be put to the unruly ill-mannered building excess of today so that our buildings will have integrity and will truly be part of our time and place.

*Harry Seidler*