



MITCHELL & STOUT IN AUCKLAND

The Japanese architecture scene is powered by such a mass of publishing, exhibitions, and lecturing that its key players are constantly required to declare their positions. The stances leading architects take on various design issues – the nature of community, the role of structure, the handling of materials – can easily be studied, compared, and critiqued. Due to the volume of David Mitchell and Julie Stout’s writing, teaching, and activism, as well as the fundamental consistency of their built output, they are among the few architects here in New Zealand whose positions are sufficiently defined and disseminated to allow similarly close study. Mitchell and Stout’s work is strongly theoretically informed. Through their writing – particularly Mitchell’s *The Elegant Shed* book and television series – they have proved astute observers of and commentators on the New Zealand scene. Mitchell was an early adopter of post-modernist ideas, particularly in their more whimsical and “pop” forms. This international, colorful, Fibrolite po-mo, as well as later, gentler, more specifically local work proved crucial in setting the direction of NZ architecture. Perhaps due to Kiwi reticence, or to a lack of faith in their audience, the intellectual rigor behind their work is often downplayed; the explanations are often a variation on “I just knocked the bugger off.”

This unfussy, no nonsense approach – at least in terms of appearances – is also found in their attitude to building techniques. While the work seems casual, unpretentious, and ingenious (almost number-eight-wire level solutions), on closer inspection it proves extremely carefully crafted. The work constantly shifts between the ordinary and the extraordinary. While Mitchell and Stout make use of new or unusual materials – corrugated stainless steel, Perspex, steel mesh – many of their most admired buildings employ inexpensive, commonplace materials – plywood, weatherboards, corrugated steel, and plastic sheeting. But even with cheap materials, wit and craft are used to uncover new possibilities; what seems to be tectonics without trickery, a poetics of the ordinary, often reveals the unexpected or offbeat.

Long before urban design became fodder for political speeches and op-ed columns, Mitchell and Stout have been strong advocates for urban issues. Through their experience in Asia, they are well versed in the thrilling possibilities of urban intensity, and have argued for intense but small scale development. Their urban thinking has not been confined to rhetoric – they have built their ideas. Due to Mitchell’s early experience at the Teacher’s College, for a small atelier practice a surprisingly large proportion of Mitchell and Stout’s oeuvre has been public projects. Producing public and private projects in parallel is perhaps responsible for their ability to negotiate larger scale projects while retaining the qualities of their smaller work; their carefully composed public spaces are intimate yet glamorous, dynamic yet gracious.

Perhaps Mitchell and Stout’s most lasting contribution will be in opening up new ways to reconcile an international awareness with local thinking. Through a close and sustained engagement with Pacific cultures – the pair spent years sailing and working in the Pacific and Asia – they have produced some of our strongest visions of an urban, yet specifically South Pacific architecture. Rather than using decorative clichés to locate their work, they focus instead on the Pacific climate and lifestyle. Understanding living between inside and outside as a central issue for local architecture, they have concentrated on finding an appropriate response to Auckland’s specific climatic and social conditions; almost every one of their projects – whether gallery, house, or school – makes use of veranda or courtyard spaces.

Mitchell and Stout are among the most respected figures in New Zealand architecture. As outlined in Mitchell’s NZIA Gold Medal citation, their careers represent “a synthesis between architectural theory and the craft of building”. Marrying thinking and doing, their direct influence, particularly on Mitchell’s students and former employees (Bossley, Cheshire, Clifford, Lane, Priest, McKay, among others) has been crucial for a generation of Kiwi architects. Articulate, adventurous, and assured, their example will be followed for years to come. *Andrew Barrie*

Biography:

David Mitchell was born in Auckland in 1941, and raised in Morrinsville. Studying at the Auckland School of Architecture in the late 50s and early 60s, his teachers were such figures as Vernon Brown, Bill Wilson and Peter Middleton. Julie Stout was born in Palmerston North in 1958, graduating from the Auckland School in 1985.

Mitchell and Stout’s two decades of practice together were preceded by work in a series of other firms. Mitchell practiced successfully with Jack Manning and Peter Hill in the 1970s and 80s. In parallel to practice, Mitchell taught design at the University of Auckland for 15 years from 1972 to 1987. Stout worked for Cook Hitchcock Sargisson and then Manning Mitchell before joining forces with David in 1990.

Though they traveled and worked overseas for much of the 1990’s – including a long spell in Hong Kong – the pair returned to New Zealand intermittently to complete private commissions. They returned permanently to Auckland to set up practice again in 2000.

They have received numerous accolades, including NZIA National Awards and the NZ Home & Entertaining House of the Year. In 2005, Mitchell was awarded the NZIA Gold Medal and Stout received the NZIA President’s Award.

- 1 1982 Northcote Public Library
Ernie Mays Street, Northcote
Hill Manning Mitchell
- 2 1984 Gibbs House
1 Taurarua Terrace, Parnell
Manning Mitchell
- 3 1986 School of Music
6 Symonds Street, City
Hill Manning Mitchell
- 4 1986 Epsom Girls Grammar Library
Silver Road, Epsom
Manning Mitchell



Located adjacent to Northcote Mall, this project picks up some of the sculptural elements from the Teacher's College and combines them with a lightweight functionalist language. The huge walls of glass on the façade and the exposed trusses on the interior are crisply detailed - almost factory-like - but are softened by romantic elements particularly the colored windows and vine-covered trellised walkway. The building's post-modern overtones - originally a strong counterfoil to the scheme's functionalism - have been dissipated. Now a uniform cream, the screw-fixed external wall panels were originally painted in pop colors. See *NZ Architect* No.3 1982.



In his book *At Home*, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins presents this as *the* representative house of its age - a time when deregulation produced a generation of young entrepreneurs keen to inhabit their rapidly accumulated fortunes in the form of houses and art. Jenkins describes the key attribute of this literally flashy house - its defining element is a glittering corrugated stainless steel ceiling - as its ability to make its occupants feel 'glamorous'. "Glamour, excitement, and a sense of connection to the wider world were exactly what New Zealanders were seeking after the isolation of the Muldoon years." The house received a NZIA National Award in 1986. See *NZ Architect* No.5 1984 and *Home & Building* Aug/Sept 1984.



One of NZ's key post-modern designs, it was put together by Manning and Mitchell personally. This building is a sophisticated collection of allusions, references, and quotations - the sources range from the world of music to international architecture and local buildings: sine curves and piano-lid shapes; entrance porticoes retained from a previous building on the site; vernacular shed forms. Underlying the post-modern collaging is a concern for climate and usage. The building's more public spaces - library, reception, music theatre - are arranged around an intimately scaled cloister and courtyard overlooked by balconies and seating areas. The building received a NZIA National Award in 1987. See *NZ Architect* No.6 1986.



This project involved a series of new buildings - a new library, classroom blocks - as well as renovations of existing structures. The library combines post-modern frivolity with a she'll-be-right tectonic pragmatism. On the exterior, the gabled po-mo façade (again, the colors have been removed) is moderated by a vine-covered veranda constructed with beams of huge, rustic tanalised poles. On the interior, the light-filled space is spanned by gang-nailed timber trusses arranged to create a decorative, almost two-dimensional effect. See *Architecture NZ* July/Aug 1990, or *Home & Building* No.2 1978 for coverage of previous HMM buildings on the site.

- 5 1987 Thirty Five State Houses
Rata Vine Drive, Wiri
Manning Mitchell
- 6 1987 Baragwanath House
4a Taurarua Terrace, Parnell
Manning Mitchell
- 7 1990 Mitchell-Stout House
4 Heke Street, Freemans Bay
Mitchell and Stout
- 8 1991 Gibbs House II
31 Paritai Drive, Orakei
Mitchell and Stout



This estate of thirty-five houses brought post-modernism from the inner city to the suburban fringe. Developed by Manning and Mitchell with a team of young architects including Stout, Bill McKay, Miriam White and Diana Stiles, this project used low-cost materials - wooden trellis, Fibrolite-and-batten - and vivid paint schemes to invest the seven house types with charm and wit. The decorative, Sure-to-rise colors have been painted over with muted tones, but the articulated volumes of the houses, the low fences, and especially the now-established trees give the estate a pleasant village-like ambience. See *Architecture NZ* July/Aug 1989.



Designed by Stout at Manning Mitchell, this was the practice's last project - soon after the design was completed, Mitchell and Stout departed for a six-month-long voyage around the Pacific, leaving the construction of the house to be supervised by Miriam White. The house is not visible from Taurarua Terrace, but can be glimpsed through the trees from across the valley on Rota Place.



One of NZ's most celebrated houses, this project crystallized a convincing image of contemporary urban life on Pacific Rim. (The Pacific influence is direct - it was designed on a boat as Mitchell and Stout traveled around the islands.) Reworking both row house and courtyard house models, this building presented a new suburban typology. The house is designed around two outdoor spaces: the front veranda has expanded into an outdoor room; the living space opens onto an enclosed lily pond at the rear. Despite the urban location, the house displays a remarkable fritturing towards the natural - roof to eaves to plastic to trellis to slats to vines. See *Architecture Review* Jan 1997 and *Home & Building* April/May 1995.



In the years since building the first house for the Gibb's, they had accumulated a substantial art collection, the display of which became a key issue for the design of this house. The house is arranged around a spectacular top-lit, three-story gallery space, threaded through at various levels by a series of transparent bridges and staircases (constructed from glass, stainless steel and Perspex). Contrasting with the restrained street façade, the flamboyant water side of the house (with its suspended punched metal screens) can be viewed from the adjacent Paritai Reserve.

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1991

Auckland Girl's Grammar Block
Howe Street, Freeman's Bay
Mitchell and Stout



An L-shaped, three-storied stack of classrooms has been arranged to enclose a north-facing courtyard. Reminiscent of the School of Music, the building also follows the pattern of prewar school buildings – wide covered walkways open to the courtyard provide for both access and recreation between classes. The large, cactus-filled planters which enclose these verandah spaces give the building a charming hairiness. With the classrooms looking out on their outer sides into the canopies of adjacent trees, the spaces seem to be wrapped in light and greenery.

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1995

New Gallery Building
Cnr Wellesley & Lorne Sts, City
Mitchell and Stout



The old Telephone Exchange building was bought by a group of art patrons headed by Jenny Gibbs, refurbished and then gifted to the city as a venue for contemporary art. The running costs of the gallery were provided for by the rentals on the shops on the ground floor. The most dramatic element of the design is the light well which brings light into the center of the building; it also allowed for the insertion of a stair and escalator that establishes an urban path through the building. Mitchell and Stout redesigned Khartoum Place to better link Lorne Street with Kitchener Street and the City Gallery, but the scheme wasn't realized. The building received a NZIA National Award in 2001. See *Home & Building* Oct/Nov 1995 and *Architecture NZ* Jan/Feb 1995.

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1999

Viaduct Basin
Customs Street West, City
Mitchell and Stout



This project involved the masterplanning and basic design of a series of buildings around the inner Viaduct area, including the Sebel Hotel and the Quays Apartments, and the Watermark. Having prepared the designs, Mitchell and Stout left to travel the Pacific, handing the project over to Peddle Thorpe Architects. However, while the plans remained essentially intact, substantial changes were made to the aesthetic of the various buildings. Perhaps the key surviving elements of the original Mitchell and Stout scheme are the large veranda-covered terraces which extend the dining rooms of the ground floor out towards the water.

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2002

Landscape & Plant Sciences Bldg
UNITEC, Carrington Rd, Mt Albert
Mitchell and Stout



Merging the patterns of both the cloistered courtyard and the Kiwi veranda, this two-storied building arranges a series of staff offices around a planted courtyard. Produced with a relatively low budget, the building was constructed from unfinished precast concrete panels, combined with plywood, timber and galvanized steel. The project received an NZIA New Zealand Award in 2005, the citation reading: "An intimate arrangement of offices and ancillary spaces is used to form a courtyard which reinterprets the Oxbridge model of tertiary buildings in a delightfully informal and contemporary South Pacific Way." See *Architecture NZ* Jan/Feb 2004.

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2003

Holt House
14 Allen Road, Grey Lynn
Mitchell and Stout



This low-cost infill house is simple, modest and unpretentious. Composed as a box in black-stained plywood with horizontal pinstripes of galvanized flashing, Aaron Sills described the house as belonging "more to the f... off school of facade composition than the new-urbanist." The house presents only ply and a translucent plastic double garage door to street; all the action is at the back, where a living space and deck look out over the valley. See *Architecture NZ* May/June 2004.

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2006

Narrowneck Studio
13 Old Lake Road, Narrowneck
Mitchell Stout



Now under construction, this project is a new studio (described as the 'loveshack') and residence for Mitchell and Stout themselves. The buildings explores what is for Mitchell and Stout a new type of outdoor room, the roof garden. The studio is in-situ concrete, and the house further develops the possibilities of the pre-cast concrete panels used at UNITEC, generating a more solid, grounded architecture - the studio's roof garden is intended to be covered with flaxes and other lush vegetation.

Other addresses:

Auckland Teacher's College ('67-)
Epsom Avenue, Epsom
Thorpe Cutter Pickmere Douglas
This series of buildings was designed by a team of young guns that included Mitchell as a fresh graduate and a thirty-something Jack Manning. Influenced by then-current British planning models and high-tech style, the various facilities have been arranged along a long, meandering circulation path. The inconsistencies between the various buildings reflect the personalities responsible for the individual buildings. Mitchell describes the project as hugely important to him as a young architect, but both Mitchell and Manning left TCPD before construction began and the buildings were not built entirely to their designs.

Walford House (1978)
End of Blundell Pl., Chatswood Hill
Manning Mitchell
Nestled into the trees, this house is a composition of interlocking cells in Fibrolite and glass. See *NZ Architect* No.3 1982.

Selecon Lighting (2002)
19-21 Kawana Street, Northcote
Mitchell Stout
A conversion of an old factory into a head office, factory, and distribution center.

Graham House (2005)
21 Old Lake Road, Narrowneck
Mitchell Stout

Sources:

The photographs are by Andrew Barrie; the drawings are courtesy Mitchell and Stout Architecture. Thanks to David and Julie for their help in preparing this guide.

The practice's work has been extensively published, both locally and internationally. The best sources are David's and Julie's own writings: David Mitchell with Geoff Chapple, John Maynard, Warren Viscoe; *Corrugated Iron in New Zealand*, (Wellington, Reed, 1983), *The Elegant Shed: New Zealand Architecture Since 1945*, David Mitchell with Gillian Chaplin; (Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1984), and Mitchell's essay on state of the local scene in *Architecture NZ* Jan/Feb 1995. Other useful sources include Stout's long article on Chinese shop houses in *Architecture NZ* Sept/Oct 1999, Mitchell's essay on housing in Charles Walker's *Exquisite Apart* (Auckland, Balasoglou Books, 2005) and Tony Van Raat's interview with Mitchell on the occasion of his receiving the NZIA Gold Medal (*Architecture NZ* May/June 2005).

