

RAISED EXPECTATIONS

Quality design for work and play equals quality life

It's important because it affects our sense of who we are and delivers value for money

STREET WISE

■ Melinda Payne

We interact with the built environment every day. The homes we live in, the streets we walk down, the offices we work in, the public spaces we enjoy are all part of what we call the built environment and they have all been designed. Why is good design important? Because the quality of the places in which we live, work, learn and recreate affect our quality of life and our sense of who we are.

Good design is about how things work; not just how they look. Good design is about functionality, performance and build quality, as much as innovation and creativity. Good design delivers better value for money as well as better buildings — especially taking into

account the full cost of a building over its lifetime. Good design can increase workplace productivity, enhance service delivery, reduce energy consumption and water use and maintenance and operational costs.

Well-designed hospitals for example, have been shown to facilitate a reduction in the use of analgesics and lengths of stay for patients, as well as increasing staff efficiency, reducing staff turnover and lowering operational costs. There has been confirmation of the importance of good access to light, views, fresh air and the integration of gardens, nature and art to improved patient well-being and recovery times.

Better design in schools has been linked to improved educational outcomes, retention of skilled staff and improved morale. Careful management of environmental factors has been recognised as critical. A respected



Everyone benefits: We should expect more from the design of our spaces.

US study indicated that students with good classroom daylight progressed 20 per cent faster in one year on math tests and 26 per cent faster on reading tests than students who learned in environments with the least amount of natural light.

The workplace has also changed courtesy of new design initiatives that have improved the

productivity, retention, recruitment and general well-being of workers. In one study, individuals working in spaces where acoustics were carefully considered achieved 16 per cent higher performance scores in memory tests and almost 40 per cent higher in mental arithmetic tests by comparison with others working in office

environments with significant levels of background noise.

Importantly for West Australians, the evidence for good design is having a positive impact on the next generation of our public buildings. The new Fiona Stanley Hospital will feature a higher ratio of single-bed rooms than multiple-bed wards, cutting rates in secondary and cross-infection, increasing patient recovery times and wellbeing, and lowering operational costs.

Recently completed WA high schools have greater integration of information technologies, more flexible teaching areas and good access to light and external spaces. The benefits of good design are substantial and well documented.

It is time to expect more from our places and spaces and to enjoy the benefits good design can bring to everyone.

with Patrick Ford

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