

ESD Matters . . .

Small is beautiful

AUGUST 2010

At a time when the world is increasingly consumed by size issues, and arguably on the brink of a worldwide obesity epidemic, this issue of *ESD Matters* goes to the opposite end of the spectrum, acknowledging the notion that 'small is beautiful', and that a sustainable business or household is one which is sized to meet your needs, not one of excess.

Take a look at your typical kiwi caravan as a reminder of how beautiful small can be. Kitsch maybe, but proof of how smart design can turn a 6m² space into sleeping quarters for 2 adults and 2 children by night, and a living space, kitchenette and dining space for the family by day. Complete with built-in cupboards and book shelving, retractable clothes line and outdoor water equipment storage trunk. Then add to all of this the fact it is mobile.

"Fine" you might say, "for six weeks of endless sunshine in the 1970's, but where are the modern conveniences?" I use this yester year example as somewhat of a challenge to think 'small and perfectly formed' and to reiterate that space restrictions needn't constrain creativity.

Thinking small is really about utilising space well and maximising opportunities. By being flexible in how we live and work, one space can have dual purpose and cater to the differing needs that time of day or user type may present. And whilst this approach will not be applicable to all projects, our collective focus on sustainability means the days of thinking 'bigger is better' are being challenged.

Of course the benefits of a small space are multiple – less floor to sweep, less air to heat, a better balance between natural and artificial light, as well as lower land and material costs. The argument here is that well designed small spaces can be effective and efficient.

Consider yourself a small (and perfectly formed) part of a bigger family or organisational entity, within a wider community. Furthermore, your community is part of a regional, national and then global community. Ultimately the environment houses all of the world's societies and within them, individuals. If we can look after the small stuff, then the bigger picture will also be brighter.



KIDS' BEDROOMS, B HOUSE – Oakura

The design solution for these bedrooms, each with a small footprint (7m² each) encompasses built-in wardrobe, single bed with divan drawer system underneath and a grid of shelving and cupboards above a desk along one wall.

This storage solution eliminated the need for stand alone furniture, freeing up the floor space. Self-supporting metal shelving maximised space and colour applied across the desk and cupboard surfaces injected a playful energy into the rooms.

MONTROSE WINE BAR – Liardet Street, New Plymouth

A brief which presented a small inner city site and a client request for a wine bar with a point of difference, appealing to wine connoisseurs of the province. The style had to be in-keeping with shadowy years of Chicago in the 1930's – cigars, mahogany and a wine drinking culture.

The design for this slightly understated, intimate fit-out celebrates the process of drinking wine. Floor to ceiling glazing for cellar and shop front walls allows patrons and outside passersby to watch as an order is placed and the bartender enters the strategically placed red and white glass 'capsules' to carefully select the chosen bottle and pour your favourite tippie. This subtle drama unfolds each time an order is placed.

Size restrictions of the site, the limitations of the heritage building and the need to provide a separate yet shared staff operation of the adjacent boutique wine store meant that clever planning was needed to balance space on both sides of the counter. The design deliberately avoids any hanging lights or features and relies on diffused lighting throughout the bar area. Storage is a design feature and part of the experience, not an additional room hidden from view.



For more on the issue of size, visit:

<http://www.notesondesign.net/inspiration/design/li-ye-small-architecture-architecture-for-humanity-beijing/>

See how 'small architecture' is benefiting low income communities in Beijing as part of the Architecture for Humanity programme.

<http://www.architonic.com/aisht/yufutoku-restaurant-issho-architects-co-ltd-/5100203>

A compact noodle shop in Tokyo, with owner's residence above.

<http://www.mindfood.com/at-architect-reinvents-apartment-to-solve-space-crunch.seo>

Storage solutions for space challenged dwellings.

<http://www.architonic.com/aisht/townhouse-elding-oscarson/5100532>

A narrow, vacant site in Sweden utilised for small residence and home office.

There are also many books and magazine articles on this subject. When you're next at the library, seek out:

Small Spaces: Maximizing Limited Spaces for Living, by Elizabeth Wilhide.

Making the most of the space at your disposal, when you haven't got a great deal of room to play with, requires careful consideration and, sometimes, a special approach or sideways leap.

Little House on a Small Planet: Simple Homes, Cozy Retreats, and Energy Efficient Possibilities, by Shay Salomon.

Live in less space but have more room to enjoy it. Discover how living small can free up your mind, your wallet, and your soul.