

# eastern cape institute of architects



June 2013

Dear Colleagues,

The week before last, I spent two days at the end of the term with the first year students at NMMU School of Architecture. I have over the years given my time as external examiner to the School, but never for first years. I was hesitant, but I came away from the exam encouraged that the crop of young people that our schools are producing is of the highest order. I know there is a general education crisis in our province, but this does not take away from the fact that there are still a few good schools producing matriculants that are a match for any other in the world.



I was also struck by the energy, creativity and innovation that the NMMU School of Architecture exhibits. Time spent at the school is always refreshing and challenging. I recommend as a “tonic” to all of us professionals, who have become jaded and cynical from years and years of confronting, cajoling and chasing government and corporate clients; that we spend a day or two at the University every six months.

Speak to Boban Varghese, he is head of the Department of Architecture. Speak to Nicola Darke, she is head of the Department of Architectural Technology and Interior Design. Volunteer to help in examinations or crits or excursions. Your time there will be good for you, good for the profession and good for the University. We cannot afford that the profession and the University grow apart. We now have very good ties at the leadership levels between the ECIA and the School of Architecture. I meet regularly with Prof. Gavin Maclagan. Gavin is head of the School of Architecture under which Boban and Nicola’s departments fall. But let us be sure that we are working together not only at the highest levels. Let each of us, in our practices; in our offices, forge a relationship of sorts with the School of Architecture. This will make us strong.

The strength of our profession comes from a strong University and from a few other important places. I would like to focus our attention for a minute on the strength that comes from Architects developing craftsman like skill and understanding of the “stuff” of architecture. As a painter like Picasso comes to know what the limitation of oils or watercolours are, he masters them. So too, as the Architect comes to know the medium she works in, she comes to master them. Our medium is of course not oil on canvas.

Our medium is brick and mortar. Our medium is concrete and formwork. Our medium is timber and stone.

We are fortunate to have among our members, Architects who have learned to master selected media and have been prepared to share their knowledge with us. John Blair spoke to the ECIA about the artistry of concrete. Albrecht Herholdt spoke to us about stainless steel and its magic, John Rushmere has undertaken to speak to us of his mastery of brickwork. Are there other masters who will share their knowledge with us? Don't be shy. Remember; "Modesty killed the cat!" (or was it generosity that killed the cat?) I don't remember. Nonetheless, please let me know.

By becoming strong, we become competitive. But when we compete, remember we (as members of the Institute) have agreed to compete in such a way that is civilised. We have gone to the extent of agreeing between us what we mean by "civilised". We have all signed up to a Code of Conduct. (I am attaching the code of conduct to this email, just in case your copy has become worn from reading it every night before bed)

As members of the Institute we will sometimes be appointed by clients for the work we would like to get, and sometimes we won't. We will sometimes win a tender and sometimes we will lose. Being civilised when you win is quite easy. The real measure of being civilised is how we behave toward our fellow members when we lose. But remember being civilised is more than just not breaking the laws of the Republic. Being a member of the Institute places a bigger commitment on us toward our fellow members and toward the built environment that would be the case if we were not members.

Please think carefully about this as you re-read the code of conduct and perhaps reflect on your own actions in business. Correct them where you can, apologise if you must. This too, will make us stronger, even if we are fewer!

Yours in the service of our beautiful profession,

Tim Hewitt-Coleman

*(President – Eastern Cape Institute of Architects)*