



# Design... Who needs it?

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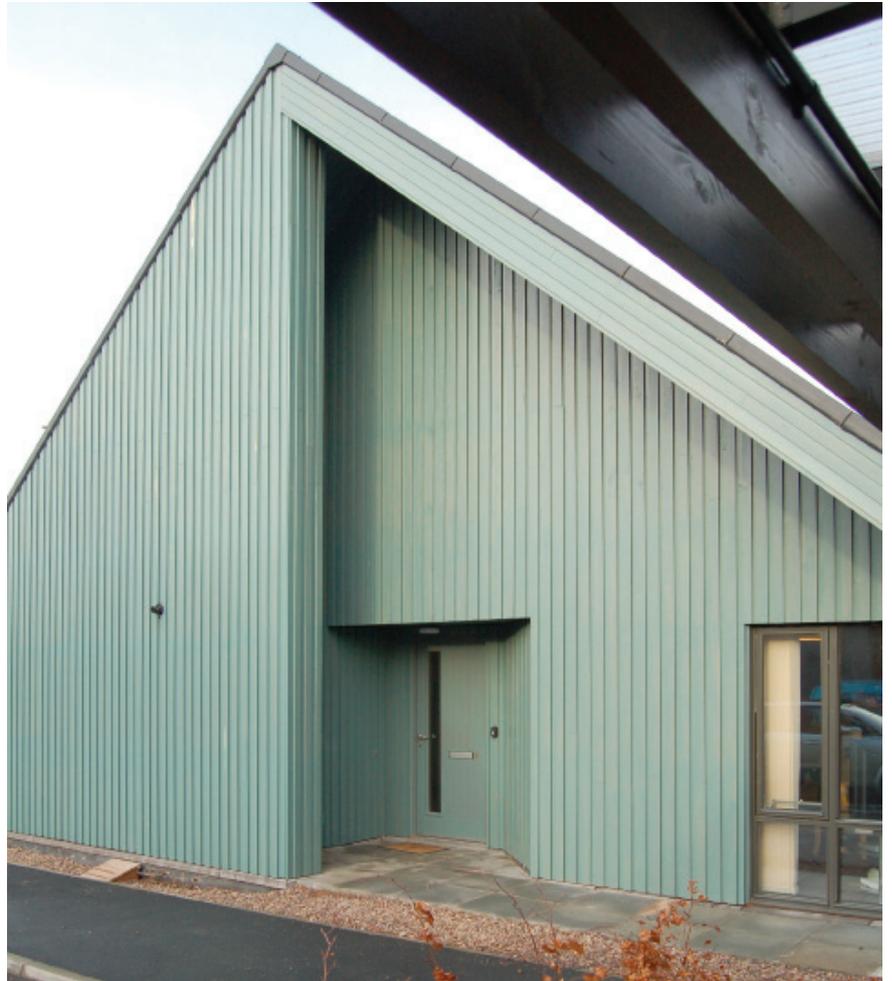


^ *Scottish Parliament Building*

Is design a luxury? There is an idea that it is. This is the idea of design as material, details, gimmicks and gizmos. In many cases these elements can be a luxury, not a necessity. If we think about the word "necessary", we may think about words like health, housing education and jobs. How necessary then is design? In a changing landscape of economics and public sector resources this is an important question.

At the root of design is a very simple principle, to provide for people. To produce places that work for people and enable people to make choices about the life they want to lead, their way. This raises an interesting dilemma – how do you create something physical that is fixed, sturdy and long lasting, but which is flexible at the same time? This is a problem of design.

The simplest building that enables people to make choices is the house. Personalisation transforms a house into a home. This environment of confidence enables people to make some choices; when the house is connected to the community and the system of the neighbourhood, additional choices open up. When the



*New Housing in the Borders*

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neighbourhood is connected to the town as a whole, even more choices are available. It's the Russian doll principle. Everything is connected, and the more connection there is, the more choice there is. These connections, physical, social and cultural, happen either by accident or by design. If it is by design, it's about decision-making working with the right ingredients at the right time to allow lots of possibilities to emerge. Fundamentally, it is about joining things up, making sense of a complex environment to enable confident choices.

Too often, instead of joined-up thinking, we think only about the individual bits and pieces that make places; housing, schools, health, all individually. Too often better design in this context means expensive materials, complex details, gadgets and gizmos. This is the idea that suggests an ordinary house with a windmill is sustainable. It's not. It's an ordinary house with a windmill. To think sustainably we need to think about what happens when you open your door in the morning. Where are the health facilities, the schools, and the amenities and how do you get there? What are your choices, your ordinary every day, necessary choices and how does your physical environment help?

In a changed economic landscape, we need to think more about joining up the parts, linking individual investments in health, schools and housing. We need to be more creative about how to achieve a sense of place with basic ingredients which are well combined and which meet the challenges of climate change. Design as a process of well informed decision-making is crucial. In this context, less is not more. More and better design is more value. It is necessary. It is a challenge.

Let's meet it.



^ *Maggie's Centre, Dundee*

*Cover image - Raigmore Hospital,  
Inverness*

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