

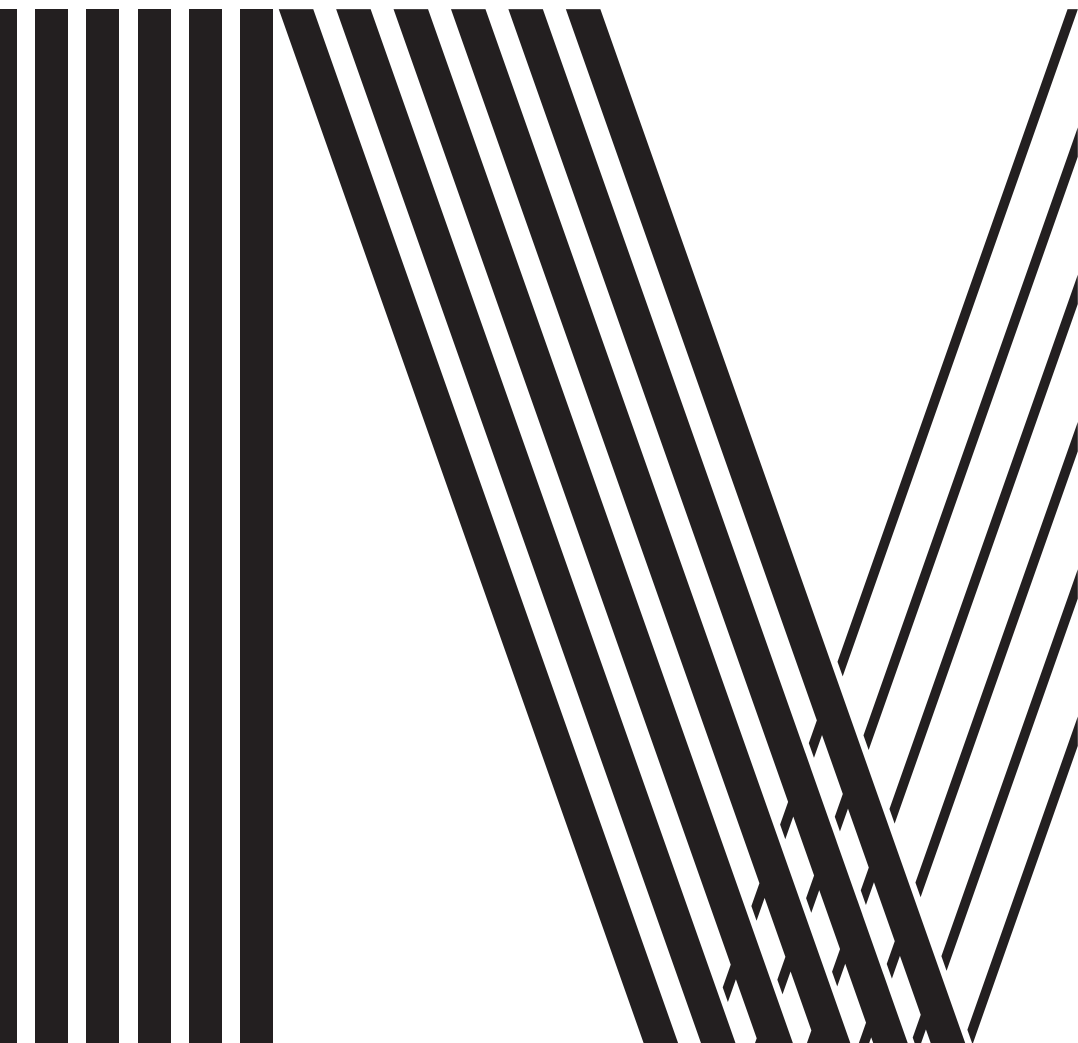
New Zealand at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale



la Biennale di Venezia

14. Mostra
Internazionale
di Architettura

Partecipazioni nazionali





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The International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale – the “Venice Architecture Biennale” – is the world’s leading and most publicized architecture event.

Partly an exposition of architectural practice, partly an investigation of architectural possibilities, and partly a critique of architecture’s current condition, the Biennale has a unique place in the international design calendar. The Biennale runs for at least three months during which time it attracts hundreds of thousands of international visitors (228,000 in 2014), many of them architects, architecture academics or students, but also many people (e.g., engineers and builders) who work with architects, or make the materials and products that architects specify, or commission and use the buildings architects design, or just have an interest in architecture. Several thousand media representatives from around the world are also accredited to the Biennale.

The Biennale’s distinction rests on its record – the 2014 International Architecture Exhibition was the fourteenth iteration of the event since its inception in 1980, although architecture was included in the Venice Art Biennale from 1968 – and

its authority. The core of the Biennale comprises official exhibitions presented by national architectural organizations and cultural institutions. Thirty countries have permanent pavilions in the Giardini – the ‘Gardens’ in Venice’s Castello district – and these pavilions, together with more than two dozen national ‘pavilions’ temporarily housed in the adjacent Arsenale buildings, constitute the core of the Biennale. The Biennale also includes the pavilions of countries which, because they don’t have permanent pavilions or don’t take a space in the Arsenale, install their exhibitions in other buildings around Venice.

The status of the Architecture Biennale is a product not just of its scale and duration, and the unique architectural environment of Venice. It’s also attributable to the calibre of the architects and cultural figures who have served as directors of the Biennale itself, and of the national pavilions. To create or curate an exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale is a highpoint of any architectural career.

In 2013 the Council of the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) decided it would support a New Zealand pavilion at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale.

There had been a New Zealand presence at the International Architecture Exhibition before: in 1991 the University of Auckland School of Architecture beat 42 other international student teams to win the Exhibition’s Venice Prize, and at the 2012 Biennale Andrew Barrie (University of Auckland) and Simon Twose (Victoria University of Wellington) led a student team which entered an exhibition into one of the Biennale’s collateral events. But 2014 would be New Zealand’s inaugural national entry into the Venice Architecture Biennale.

New Zealand’s participation in the 2014 Biennale entry owed much to the determined efforts of Tony van Raat, head of the Department of Architecture at Unitec, Auckland. Associate Professor van Raat had tried to enter a New Zealand exhibition into the 2010 and 2012 Venice Architecture Biennales. Both attempts foundered through lack of financial support. It was clear that if New Zealand were to participate at an official level in the Biennale, then the country’s exhibition would have

to be organized by, and staged under the aegis of the NZIA.

The NZIA Council confirmed Associate Professor van Raat’s nomination as Commissioner of the New Zealand Pavilion and endorsed the case he made for New Zealand’s participation: an exhibition at the Biennale raises the profile of a nation’s architecture and architects, both in New Zealand and abroad; provides an opportunity for architects to examine their work and measure their performance; exposes architects to new ideas; and allows them to contribute to and benefit from the discussion about the issues that confront architects around the world.

Accordingly, in August 2013 the NZIA asked for expressions of interest for the role of Creative Director of the New Zealand Pavilion at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale. Selection was a two-stage process decided by an NZIA-appointed jury; entrants who made a shortlist were given some time to develop their presentations for the jury’s final consideration.

floor
wall
ceiling
roof
door
window
facade
balcony
corridor
fireplace
toilet
stair
escalator
elevator
ramp

fundamentals

biennale
architettura 2014
7.06–23.11

Creative directors or curators of exhibitions at the Venice Architecture Biennale are expected to respond to the theme set by the Biennale's director.

In 2014, the director was the influential Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, who accepted the role on the condition that 'his' Biennale be extended to almost six months. The title Koolhaas gave the Biennale was "Fundamentals", as in getting back to basics. In this spirit, Koolhaas' own curated exhibition in the Giardini was called "Elements of Architecture", and was, it eventuated, a jam-packed presentation of architectural componentry (door, window, roof, fireplace, etc.) – a compendium that suggested that the high-priest of the avant-garde might be an Eighteenth century Encyclopedist at heart.

Koolhaas had another, particular theme intended for the creators of national pavilions: "Absorbing Modernity: 1914-2014". This is the topic the national pavilions had to address (and most did – a testament to the coherence that Koolhaas imposed on the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale). Koolhaas wanted national exhibitors to consider the effects of modernity on the architecture of their countries over the past century. He asked exhibitors to consider what has been lost – "the erasure of national characteristics" – and what may still be found – "the survival of unique national features and mentalities".

Koolhaas asked large questions, which are not without their ambiguities. Is modernity synonymous with modernism, the dominant architectural and cultural

movement for much of the twentieth century? Is it another word for modernization, which most countries have embraced, by choice or necessity, at some time over the past hundred years? Or does it just mean modern times, which renders the term rather tautological?

Most national exhibition curators and creative directors interpreted Koolhaas' theme as a prompt to look at the relationship, in their countries, between local traditions – cultural as well as architectural – and modernism, which became the global architectural lingua franca in the twentieth century. Is modernity (and modernism / modernization) compatible or incompatible with national styles or approaches to architecture? How was modernism – a European phenomenon – realized around the world? Does modernity mean homogeneity? In a time of globalization is the "where" of architecture increasingly irrelevant?

For each curator or creative director, the question became: what, if anything, is different about your country's architecture and your country's architectural story over the past century?

Left: Back to basics – a poster for Rem Koolhaas' 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale.

The NZIA's request for Expressions of Interest for the role of Creative Director for the New Zealand pavilion at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale attracted 26 entries.

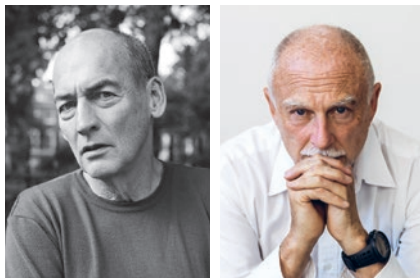
This was a good response, considering this was a first-time effort and that there was a six-week deadline for submissions. Respondents were asked to submit a brief proposal outlining the exhibition concept, nominating the creative team and support structure and stating the experience and capability of the Creative Director. As a condition of eligibility, creative teams had to include an architect registered in New Zealand.

Prospective Creative Directors assembled teams combining a wide range of skills. As well as practicing architects, many teams included architecture academics and students. Landscape architects, artists, writers, graphic designers, gallerists, 3D animators, and construction and logistics specialists were also present in many of the creative teams.

The NZIA nominated a jury to choose a shortlist and then select a winning entry. The jury comprised NZIA 2014-15 President Pip Cheshire (Cheshire Architects), Patrick Clifford (Architectus), Kerstin Thompson (Kerstin Thompson Architects, Melbourne, and VUW School of Architecture), and Associate Professor van Raat (Unitec). Ms Thompson recused herself from considering

one submission – she was related to a team member – and when that submission made it to the shortlist, she withdrew from the jury. She was replaced by Christina Barton, Director of the Adam Art Gallery (VUW).

Selection criteria considered by the jury included: the strength and quality of the proposed exhibition concept and its alignment with the Biennale theme; the ability of the creative team to deliver the exhibition concept; and the scope of the exhibition to travel nationally and internationally.



Left: Biennale Director Rem Koolhaas. Right: New Zealand Commissioner Tony van Raat.

While the exhibition proposals generally headed towards Koolhaas' theme of "Absorbing Modernity" they did so via a few different routes.

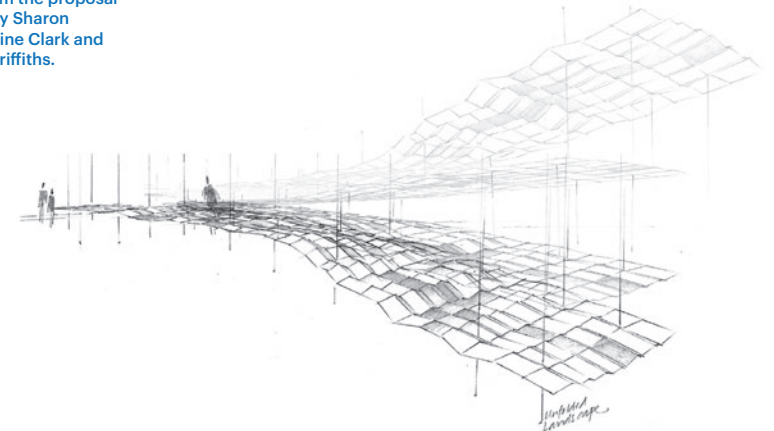
In the main, the proposals fell into one of several categories: some had a strong focus on the influence of the landscape (a familiar New Zealand preoccupation); some sought to explore the influence of Māori building traditions (as a New Zealand architectural point of difference); and some wanted to display Kiwi vernacular forms and materials (as an expression of indigenized modernity). Several proposals had post-earthquake Christchurch as their subject matter, and a few others were interested in innovative pre-fab and timber technologies.

An overt concern with national identity was a common trait, perhaps unsurprisingly. Koolhaas' Biennale theme, after all, encouraged national exhibitors to show

what was special about their country's architecture. Also typical was the decision to take a survey approach to the exhibition content. Again, this was not surprising, given Koolhaas' temporal parameters – a hundred years of modernity. Exhibition creators – and this applied to the Biennale as a whole – had to make a basic choice: say a little about a lot, or a lot about a little. That is, track a century's worth of architecture, or focus on a moment within that sweep of time. Most exhibitors chose to go broad, not deep.

Six submissions for the role of Creative Director were shortlisted; the finalists were given three weeks to develop their proposals and re-submit them to the jury.

A sketch from the proposal submitted by Sharon Jensen, Justine Clark and Catherine Griffiths.



Imprints

Jasmax Architects, Auckland: Euan Mac Kellar, Matthew Glubb (principals in charge); Patrick Loo, Arnika Blount (creative team leaders); Jun Tsujimoto, Mark Craven, Laura Cooke, Callum Dowie, Julian Harris, Kenneth Li, Ludovic Bacon (creative team).

Noting that New Zealand, as a nation of immigrants and “cultural implants”, has “always been under the influences of globalization”, the Jasmax team proposed an exhibition showing how buildings “can become meeting points for diverse ideologies and construction methodologies”. The proposal centred on new ecclesiastical architecture because “spiritual structures often act as both a focus of tradition and an expression of future aspirations for their communities”. The Jasmax team said they would choose 15 religious or “spiritual” buildings to illustrate their proposition. Exhibition design elements included a “soundscape”, a projected ceiling, and an “eclectic congregation of furniture”.

Last, Loneliest, Loveliest

David Mitchell (Creative Director), Julie Stout, Ginny Pedlow, Julian Mitchell, Claire Natusch, Sara Lee (Mitchell & Stout Architects, Auckland); Professor Mike Austin (Unitec); Rau Hoskins (DesignTribe and Unitec); Rick Pearson (Pearson & Associates); Frances Cooper (Athfield Architects).

David Mitchell’s response to Rem Koolhaas’ theme was to argue that there is a tradition of Pacific architecture in New Zealand that was not erased by modernity. The survival of this tradition, and its interaction with modern architecture – a matter of cultural exchange, rather than absorption – was the focus of Mitchell’s proposition. The exhibition design centred on a tent or ware-like structure with fabric panels imprinted with images of structures dating from the contact period in the Pacific to contemporary buildings such as Auckland Art Gallery and the Christchurch ‘Cardboard’ Cathedral.

Point of Distance

Creative Directors: Sharon Jensen (then Tennent+Brown Architects, Wellington); Justine Clark (architecture writer and researcher, Melbourne); Catherine Griffiths (graphic designer: Studio Catherine Griffiths, Auckland).

To illustrate the forging of New Zealand architectural identity through encounters with modernity, the creative team proposed to trace “twelve stories of architectural encounter”. These stories might take as their subject matter buildings or careers or debates, or materials and methods of fabrication. Taking account of the modest exhibition budget (including transport to the other side of the world), the Creative Directors proposed a paper architecture exhibition of archival images, drawings, texts and mappings that would tell the “twelve stories”.

Lost and Founded

Creative Directors: Jessica Halliday (architectural historian and writer, Christchurch); Luke Allen (GHD Ltd, Wellington); Barnaby Bennett (architectural researcher and publisher, Christchurch).

This entry married Rem Koolhaas’ concerns with issues of modernity and “erasure” with the story of post-earthquake Christchurch. The proposal was to present the lost buildings of Christchurch, the emergence of transitional architecture in the city (including “gapfiller” projects), and the advent of new buildings in the city. The exhibition would make considerable use of photographs, interactive digital panoramas and 4D (that is, including timeframes) representations of Christchurch.

The New Zealand Way

Creative team: Chris Kelly (Architecture Workshop, Wellington); Paul Walker (University of Melbourne); Trish Clark (gallerist, Auckland); Barnaby Bennett (architectural researcher and publisher, Christchurch).

The creative team proposed to both examine the canon of New Zealand architecture, through images of 54 significant buildings, and to subvert that canon – in the New Zealand way, perhaps – through the ubiquity of these images. The intention was to make a virtue of New Zealand’s “homelessness” – i.e., its lack of a permanent pavilion in Venice – by taking the exhibition to the streets, and placing the images in cafes and bookshops, even hanging them from the Venetian washing lines. Why 54 buildings? That’s (roughly) the number of cards in a pack, and packs of cards could be souvenirs of the New Zealand exhibition. Films, projections, seminars and a web/blog would also be included in “The New Zealand Way”.

Trade & Exchange

Creative Directors: Giles Reid (Giles Reid Architects, London); Jason Whiteley (Matheson Whitely, London). Creative team: Max Lozarch (graphic designer, New York); Blair Johnston (Warren and Mahoney, Christchurch); Simona Casarotto (Fondazione Claudio Buziol, Venice); Danae Mossman (Hopkinson Mossman Gallery, Auckland); Francis Upritchard (artist, London).

This Christchurch-focused proposal centred on three large timber models of buildings in the city that were destroyed or affected by the 2011 earthquake. The directors wrote that “the intention is to design and stage an exhibition that highlights the importance of creative dialogue between contemporary architecture and the past through an intimate comparison of three existing works.” The exhibition would present a craft-based approach to architecture – a Christchurch trait since its settlement – and allude to the city’s neo-Gothic and post-War modernist architecture.



The winning proposal: Last, Loneliest, Loveliest

David Mitchell's exhibition proposal "Last, Loneliest, Loveliest" – the title comes from a line, applied to the colonial city of Auckland, in Rudyard Kipling's *Songs of the Cities* – was chosen by the jury to be the New Zealand exhibition.

Mitchell, a director of Auckland practice Mitchell & Stout, was well placed to deal with questions about modernity for, in the course of a long career, he has himself absorbed a fair amount of modernity. His life in architecture extends back into the 1960s; he has practiced architecture, taught it, written about it, and made TV programmes about it – all to considerable acclaim.

The holder of New Zealand architecture's highest honour, the NZIA Gold Medal, Mitchell, in partnership first with Jack Manning and latterly with Julie Stout, has designed many award-winning buildings, including the University of Auckland School of Music (1985), the Gibbs Houses (1985, 1991), the Mitchell-Stout Houses (1990, 2009), the Auckland Art Gallery New Gallery (1995), the Unitec Landscape and Plant Sciences Building (2003), and the Tauranga Art Gallery (2005). Mitchell & Stout's latest work, the Lopdell House Gallery in west Auckland, opened in November 2014.

Mitchell's career started not long after that moment in New Zealand architecture when modernism was self-consciously localized by The Group, an alliance of young post-War architects in Auckland. Like many architects in remote countries

Mitchell has always been acutely aware of both international developments and local practice realities, and the inevitable negotiation between those two poles. In short, the focus of the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale seemed to be perfectly congruent with Mitchell's career-long concerns.

Mitchell's exhibition proposal was also shaped by his experience of long sailing journeys through the Pacific. "In 1988 Julie Stout and I sailed to Tonga and Fiji and Vanuatu and New Caledonia, and in the 1990s we spent years sailing to many more islands, like Borneo and the Philippines," Mitchell says. "We saw and went into buildings that are Pacific buildings, made of sticks and thatch. We liked them, they were architecturally interesting to us."

"The Pacific has a great architectural tradition, although hardly anyone honours it. That might be because it is not like European architecture, which is solid and massive and looks permanent. Pacific buildings are timber structures of posts and beams and infill panels and big roofs. It's a lightweight architecture that's comparatively transient."

"This architectural tradition was carried by migratory voyagers through the islands of the Pacific Ocean, arriving in New

Zealand with the Māori 800 years ago. It survived European colonization and has adapted to modernity, rather than being subsumed by it.”

“As the relations between Māori and Europeans in New Zealand have become more interwoven over the past half century, so have the two architectural traditions. Perhaps that’s not surprising – the modernist and Pacific ways of building have some things in common, such as a preference for openness and a commitment to sufficiency.”

“In a time when influence is instant and everything seems familiar I think we have become aware that if anything makes our architecture different, it is the evolution of the lightweight Pacific tradition. This is what we wanted to show in our exhibition. We also wanted to communicate our optimism about this architectural direction. Given the world’s concerns about climate change and the sustainable use of resources, and New Zealand’s own worries about its seismic circumstances, the Pacific architectural qualities of resilience, flexibility and reparability have a lot to offer.”

Besides the tent-like form with fabric sides printed with images of Pacific and New Zealand structures, “Last, Loneliest, Loveliest” comprised three large panels – one showing migration routes through the Pacific, and the others presenting two contemporary internationally-acclaimed New Zealand buildings, Auckland Art Gallery and the Christchurch ‘Cardboard’ Cathedral. The exhibition proposal also

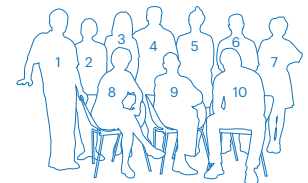
included a whatarangi, carved for the exhibition by Justin Marler; this single-poled pātaka or storehouse housed a model of Auckland Art Gallery (one taonga inside another) made by Unitec architecture students under the direction of lecturer Ainsley O’Connell. The exhibition also included models and images from Frances Cooper’s 2013 University of Auckland MArch thesis, a scheme which in the same year won the postgraduate prize in the prestigious Global Student Architecture Awards run by *The Architectural Review* in the UK.

The Mitchell exhibition proposal continued to evolve after it was selected as New Zealand’s Venice pavilion. The creative team wished to acknowledge in some way the effects of and reaction to the Christchurch earthquakes – the biggest things to (literally) hit New Zealand architecture in decades. In a way, Mitchell says, the February 2011 earthquake marked “the end of Englishness” in New Zealand architecture, and in New Zealand’s most “English” city. Rather than dwell on destruction, Mitchell wanted to highlight a constructive response to Christchurch’s calamity. Besides Shigeru Ban’s “Cardboard” Cathedral, Mitchell decided to include in his exhibition a small tower made of post-tensioned timber, which would be used to display Frances Cooper’s work. The tower connected the exhibition’s lightweight Pacific theme with a building technology being researched and deployed in post-earthquake Christchurch.



The New Zealand creative team:

1. Mike Austin
2. Claire Natusch
3. Chia-Lin Sara Lee
4. Julian Mitchell
5. Frances Cooper
6. Rick Pearson
7. Ginny Pedlow
8. Julie Stout
9. David Mitchell
10. Rau Hoskins



Quid pro quo in the Pacific: A Maori bartering a crayfish with an English naval officer [ascribed to Tupaia], 1769, from *Drawings illustrative of Captain Cook's First Voyage, 1768-1771* (©The British Library Board). This illustration was used in the New Zealand exhibition.



Sponsorship and support

A considerable amount of support, and significant contributions from sponsors, made New Zealand's official participation in the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale possible.

The NZIA's current President, Pip Cheshire, and his predecessor, David Sheppard, devoted much time to the project, the NZIA office, in particular Chief Executive Teena Hale Pennington, Communications Manager John Walsh and Communications Advisor Michael Barrett, and accountant Ronnie Kay, committed significant resource to the exhibition, and Tony van Raat was closely involved as the exhibition Commissioner.

A project manager, Terry Urbahn, who has worked on several Venice Biennales, was contracted to supervise transport and logistics. This was an important part of the exhibition project: the European Union has strict rules about importing materials – everything that enters the EU has to leave the EU. Furthermore, the New Zealand exhibition was delivered to a tight timetable that necessitated transporting the pavilion's components by air. The project manager also liaised with the Biennale authorities – it pays to know the ways of Italian bureaucracy – and with the Venice-based venue manager, Diego Carpentiero. Auckland graphic design company Inhouse was commissioned to produce branding and collateral material such as publications and signage. A London-based media relations company was engaged to promote the exhibition to the international media.

Exhibitions at the Venice Architecture Biennale are generally open for eight hours

a day, six days a week, and require supervision. The NZIA put out a call for volunteers to staff the exhibition; their tasks included securing the venue, checking the condition of the exhibition's elements, and engaging with visitors to the New Zealand pavilion. Volunteers were also asked to contribute to the exhibition's Facebook page. More than 80 respondents – including architecture and other students, but also a wide range of other people with an interest in architecture – expressed an interest in the unpaid position (accommodation was provided at the venue). Around 20 were selected; the volunteers included New Zealanders – some of them based in Europe – and Italians. (Naturally, many of the Pavilion visitors were Italian speakers.) Volunteers served in pairs, usually for a period of three weeks. A Venice-based New Zealander, Veronica Green, was contracted to supervise and support the volunteers.

The NZIA received valuable advice and assistance from the Australian Institute of Architects, which has staged half a dozen exhibitions at the Venice Architecture Biennale, and Creative New Zealand, which has staged several New Zealand exhibitions at the Venice Art Biennale. The Embassy of Italy in New Zealand, and in particular Ambassador Alessandro Levi Sandri, was very helpful – the Ambassador hosted a fund-raising reception for the exhibition at his private residence in Wellington.

Auckland Art Gallery hosted a similar event. The endorsement of the Minister of Culture and Heritage, Hon. Christopher Finlayson, and of New Zealand's Embassy in Rome was essential. New Zealand's then-ambassador in Rome, Dr Trevor Matheson, was consistently supportive of the New Zealand exhibition. New Zealand's three Schools of Architecture – at Unitec, the University of Auckland, and Victoria University of Wellington – also made valuable contributions to the project.

Securing sponsorship for an inaugural project – one that is necessarily something of an unknown quantity – is never easy. The New Zealand Pavilion at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale would not have been realized without the commitment of the NZIA Council to assume responsibility for project. Nor would it have been possible without the contributions of major sponsors, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, and Philips Selecon (which donated the exhibition lighting). Wine company Amisfield is an example of

a New Zealand company that understood that a high profile international event with a sophisticated audience presented a worthwhile marketing opportunity (Amisfield wines lubricated New Zealand events at the Biennale). Resene made a significant contribution to the project as did the Warren Architects Education Charitable Trust (a reliable and generous promoter of architecture in New Zealand) and Fletcher Construction.

More than two dozen New Zealand architecture practices separately donated to the cost of the exhibition, and other companies and individuals made generous contributions. The support was not just financial; several of New Zealand's leading architectural photographers, for example, submitted images that were used in the exhibition and its accompanying material, and artist Miriam van Wezel designed a brooch as a fundraising item. There was a lot of goodwill around the exhibition, before it opened, at its launch, and during its six-month tenure in Venice.

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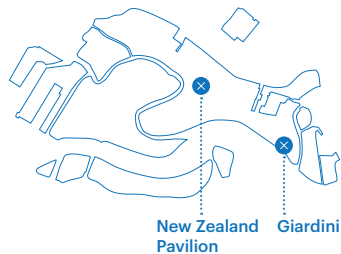
Gretchen Albrecht & James Ross, Ardex, AS Colour, defineDesign, Fearon Hay, Forever Beech, Herbst Architects, Brent Hulena, Anna Litsch & Mikail Broatch, Jack Manning, Matthews & Matthews Architects, Parsonson Architects, Salmond Reed Architects, Scarlet Architects, Sheppard & Rout, Sills van Bohemen, T+ Architects, The Takutai Trust, Tennent + Brown Architects, Miriam van Wezel, Vulcan Steel

The New Zealand Pavilion was housed in a ground floor room in the Palazzo Pisani a Santa Marina, a fifteenth century, four-level level building in Venice's Cannaregio district.

The palazzo is a 30-minute walk (if you don't get lost) from the Giardini and its permanent pavilions – quicker via vaporetto down the Grand Canal. On the plus side, the Palazzo Pisani has a small apartment, which was occupied by the exhibition volunteers, and large, upper-level rooms available for functions. The Palazzo is also near some well-visited Venetian sites, including Campo Santa Maria Formosa and the churches of San Giovanni e Paolo and the Miracoli, and so its location is reasonably well trafficked. Its more remote location means the Palazzo Pisani is more affordable than many venues nearer to the Giardini and Arsenale.

The exhibition was installed by three members of the creative team, Rau Hoskins, Julian Mitchell and Rick Pearson. The team had not previously visited the venue, and discovered that an antique building rich in character can present some installation challenges. One element of David Mitchell's original proposal that

had changed was the intended use of the canal access to the venue. It had been anticipated that the exhibition could open out in the rear to steps leading down to the water and thus nicely refer to the sea-borne heritage of New Zealand architecture; in the end this was not possible so a large image of a Pacific horizon was placed as the backdrop to the exhibition.



Right: The Palazzo Pisani a Santa Marina, venue of the New Zealand Pavilion at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale.



The installed exhibition: 7 June — 23 November 2014

The New Zealand Pavilion, on the ground floor of the Palazzo Pisani. From left: a panel by Kim Meek showing Pacific migration routes; images printed on suspended fabric panels showing the evolution in New Zealand of a lightweight Pacific architectural tradition; a whatarangi (single-poled pātaka) carved by Tristan Marler.





Left: Looking through the lightweight fabric structure – suggestive of a tent or whare – to a small post-tensioned tower illustrative of the timber technology under development in post-earthquake Christchurch.

Above: In a reversal of the usual museum-taonga relationship the whatarangi contains a 3-D printed model of Auckland War Memorial Museum, made by Ainsley O'Connell and Unitec Architecture students.



Above: Visitors in the New Zealand Pavilion during the Vernissage.

Right: Models from Frances Cooper's scheme for a more Pacific-flavoured development of Auckland's waterfront.





Clockwise from top left: The exhibition catalogue; signage in the Campo Santa Marina, near the exhibition venue; volunteer t-shirt; the exhibition website.



Events around the exhibition were integral to New Zealand’s Biennale project, and the NZIA, and especially Chief Executive Teena Hale Pennington, dedicated much time to fostering sponsor relations and meeting Biennale obligations.

David Mitchell presented his exhibition scheme at two launch events in New Zealand, one in Wellington at the residence of the Italian ambassador, and one at Auckland Art Gallery. (He also presented the exhibition after its installation at the University of Auckland and Auckland Art Gallery.)

In Venice, the Architecture Biennale is launched with the Vernissage, a hectic, three-day programme of opening events conducted by all the national pavilions (there were 66 pavilions at the 2014 Biennale). This is an opportunity for pavilions to get media attention and for creative teams to make connections, and is also an opportunity to acknowledge sponsors and supporters. The New Zealand pavilion hosted a cocktail evening, a launch party and a talk by David Mitchell and Rau Hoskins, all at the exhibition venue, the Palazzo Pisani. These successful events were well attended; the audiences included New Zealand architects, sponsors and supporters who had travelled to the Biennale, and numerous Australian guests. A media launch, an essential element in the Vernissage programmes of all pavilions, was also held in the pavilion.

A feature of the New Zealand pavilion’s launch events was the incorporation of

a Māori welcome, led by Rihi Te Nana and Rau Hoskins. Guests were led to the Palazzo Pisani after gathering in an adjacent campo, and made to feel at home in the pavilion. This welcome was a distinctive introduction to the New Zealand pavilion, and much appreciated by foreign guests – one Australian publisher said the New Zealand events had the inclusiveness of a family function. New Zealand’s ambassador in Italy, Dr Trevor Mattheson, spoke eloquently at the opening events, and the NZIA appreciated the presence of Dr Larry Bellamy, who spoke on behalf of major sponsor, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Mention should be also made of the generosity of sponsor Amisfield, whose wines were served at New Zealand’s Vernissage events, and whose Chief Executive, Craig Erasmus, also spoke at the opening function.

Clockwise from top: Guests at the exhibition opening assemble in the Campo Santa Marina; Rihi Te Nana calls guests into the Pavilion; Teena Hale Pennington, Ambassador Dr Trevor Mattheson, David Mitchell; guests at the opening event; Dr Larry Bellamy (left) and Tony van Raat, and Craig Erasmus at the exhibition launch.



Pre-Vernissage press releases and exhibition images were distributed to international design and architecture publications and to the relevant editors of general newspapers and magazines.

The media company contracted by the NZIA to publicize the New Zealand pavilion, especially in Europe, set up interviews with Creative Director David Mitchell both before and during the Biennale. The NZIA prepared exhibition press kits, which were available to the media during and after the Vernissage.

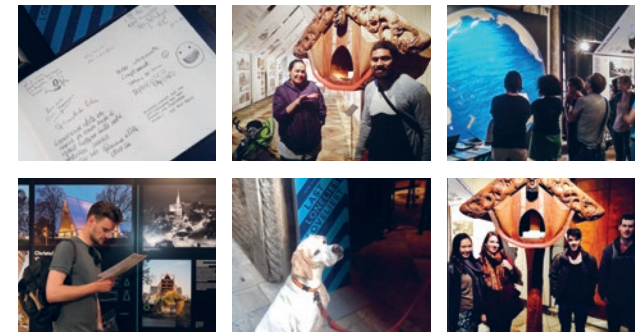
In New Zealand the exhibition received extended coverage in general titles such as *The New Zealand Herald* (which ran a long interview with David Mitchell), *Metro* magazine, and design and industry publications such as *Home NZ*, *Architecture NZ* and *Interior*, and their online versions. The Vernissage coincided with the 70th Anniversary of the D-Day landings, which commanded the attention of New Zealand television's two European-based reporters, but *Te Karere* (TVNZ) aired an interview with creative team member Rau Hoskins. Local and metropolitan newspapers, such as *The Dominion-Post*, published news of the exhibition and aspects of its content. Student publications such as *Salient* and *Te Ao Mārama* ran features on the exhibition.

The exhibition received a boost when the prestigious international design

magazine *Wallpaper* listed the New Zealand pavilion as one of the Biennale's top exhibitions. A column on the Biennale by the celebrated design commentator with the BBC, Jonathan Glancey, focused on one of the buildings featured in the New Zealand pavilion, Futuna Chapel in Wellington. David Mitchell was interviewed at the New Zealand pavilion by reporters from the USA, China, Italy, Turkey and Australia. Illustrated articles about the exhibition ran in numerous international online architectural publications, *Arch Daily*, *Archinet*, *Archinfo*, *Design Bloom*, *Architetto*, *Arkitera*, *Il Giornale Dell'Architettura*, and *ArchitectureAU*. The content of the New Zealand exhibition also appealed to humanities publications, among them *Perspectives on History* and *AHA Today* (published by the American Historical Association).

The New Zealand pavilion had its own media presence. An exhibition Facebook page was kept current with items posted by the pavilion volunteers; the NZIA's Twitter account was also used to broadcast exhibition news and notices.

Pavilion volunteers kept a tally of visitors to "Last, Loneliest, Loveliest". Over the course of the Biennale, 16,500 visitors were recorded, many of them architects and architecture academics and students, together with practitioners in related fields such as engineering, landscape architecture, art and construction. Visitors from all around the world found their way to the New Zealand pavilion, but it was especially pleasing that so many New Zealanders – from many walks of life – went to the exhibition and took considerable pride in New Zealand's participation in the Biennale.



Scenes from the New Zealand Pavilion.

Visitor comments

“Very impressed with the integration of the original culture’s designs into modern work. Bravo!”

– USA

“Absolutely brilliant! Lovely to see the Western Pacific combo.”

– Canada

“A very insightful exhibition on architecture in the Shaky Isles. It makes the point well regarding the unique quality of New Zealand architecture. Well done to all concerned.”

– New Zealand.

“Great to find a New Zealand exhibit in Venice! What a surprise!”

– USA

“Stupenda architettura.”

– Italy

“Bought back memories of New Zealand in an equally lovely city, Venice.”

– United Kingdom

“What a stunning show – such delicacy against a classical, robust enclosure. Felt good about being a NZ architect and part of the Pacific culture.”

– New Zealand.

“Molto bello!!”

– Italy

“Wonderful to see the ties to the Pacific as we live in Hawaii. Thank you for sharing your thoughtful exhibition.”

– USA

“This is amazing.”

– Finland

“I’m impressed – happily surprised that a different way to build survives.”

– Italy

“One of the most special exhibition spaces. A very interesting composition and use of the location. Thank you.”

– Israel.

“I più simpatico del mondo.”

– Italy

“Great to see some well selected works from New Zealand in Venice! Promise: next time I visit, I’ll visit more architectural projects.”

– Germany.

“Very good presentation of tradition and modernity in NZ, giving us a first insight into your culture.”

– Switzerland

“A lovely space within a lovely space. Thank you.”

– United Kingdom

“Bravo pour cette première participation.”

– Canada

“Beautiful to see ‘old-fashioned’ values and crafting wood in the midst of a lot of modern ideas. A refreshing change, and very beautiful houses.”

– United Kingdom

“We found the New Zealanders very nice.”

– Czech Republic

“Really interesting to find out how the cultures in New Zealand have remained so strong!”

– Hungary

“Thrilled to have made it and really impressed.”

– New Zealand

“Very interesting to take a look at New Zealand architecture and to have a better idea and more knowledge about the influences on NZ architecture.”

– Germany

“Thanks for this proposition. We didn’t find other examples in the Biennale of this treatment of architectural fundamentals, heritage and practice.”

– France

“Beautiful exhibition! You made a better case for absorbing modernism than most of the Biennale Gardens pavilions.”

– USA

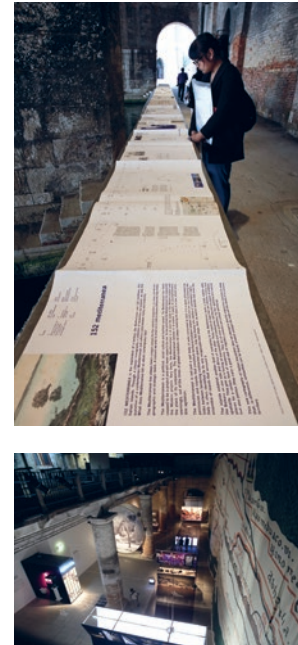
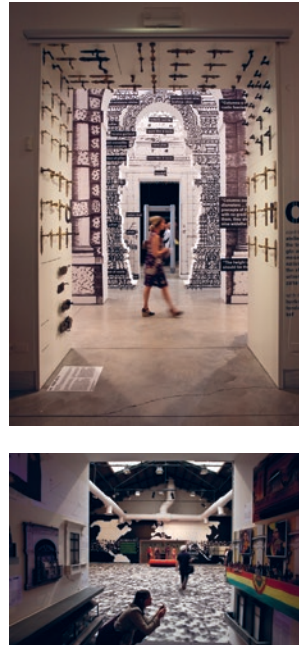


Elements of Architecture

Director: Rem Koolhaas

Rem Koolhaas' own exhibition in the large Central Pavilion in the Giardini well and truly expressed his determination that the 2014 Biennale would focus on "Fundamentals", that is, it would be less about architects than architecture. (The ironies of a star architect rejecting architectural hagiography did not escape the critics.) "Elements of Architecture" was just that: a compendium of building bits – floor; wall; ceiling; roof; door; window; façade; balcony; corridor; fireplace; toilet; stair; escalator; elevator; ramp. Partly a giant pattern book made manifest, partly a tour through construction history, the exhibition made the point that while

iterations might be local, typologies are universal. As presented in "Elements of Architecture", architecture responds to primal needs and is advanced by technological evolution – a materialist interpretation that challenges the adulation of the auteur. Individual human agency was as irrelevant to the exhibition as it is to Marxist historiography. A huge number of elemental items were on display – big teams from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and Koolhaas' own practice, OMA, laboured over the exhibition – which was accompanied by an impressive series of catalogues.



Monditalia

Director: Rem Koolhaas

"Monditalia", a "portrait" of the last century of Italian architecture, was Koolhaas' other exhibition, and it was the yin to the yang of "Elements of Architecture". The exhibition was sited in the Corderie, the magnificent, 320-metre long brick building in the Arsenale complex, where for seven centuries the Venetians manufactured the galleys that made the city rich. "Monditalia" was a sprawling, crowded and very diverting exhibition; a panoply of material illustrated modern Italy's almost-too-onerous cultural inheritance, its urban and topographical conditions, its regional variety, and its political challenges.



The effects on architecture of earthquakes, Fascism, imperialist adventures, the post-War economic boom, hedonism, religion, the Mafia and Berlusconi all received coverage in an honest exhibition that demonstrated that, whatever the problems confronting Italy's polity, ignorance of the issues is not one of them. As if to amplify some of the exhibition's concerns, the opening of the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale coincided with the mass arrest of city officials by police investigating corrupt dealings on the huge construction project intended to protect Venice from flooding.



Austria

Plenum: Places of Power

The Austrian pavilion was a very well executed example of the keep-it-simple approach to a Biennale exhibition. Scale models (1:500) of the all of the world's parliament buildings represented the national ambitions (and nationalistic tendencies) of more than 150 countries, and the changing styles in which state power has been architecturally expressed over the past two centuries.



Bahrain

Fundamentalists and other Arab Modernisms

Thousands of free copies of a generous catalogue, stacked high – with Gulf State largesse – on circular shelves, surrounded a round table imprinted with a map locating 100 Arab buildings. The catalogue traced the architectural history of the transnational 'pan-Arab project', which had a lifespan coincident with the rise and fall of modernism in the region. Now, architecture in the Gulf is an expression of real estate development and a form of neo-liberal economics.



Brazil

Brazil: Modernity as Tradition

Brazil had no trouble finding 100 buildings to illustrate its survey of 100 years of modernity. New Zealand Creative Director David Mitchell said: "The Brazil pavilion resonated with us, probably because Brazil is New World, and exotic, and embraced modernity with verve through the last century. We New Zealanders, brought up on European and American Modernism, are interested in the ways mainstream movements are crossed with other traditions – we were invigorated by Brazil's architectural parade."



Canada

Arctic adaptations: Nunavit at 15

Canada's well-curated pavilion presented modernity "pushed to its limits" in Nunavit, the country's most northerly territory. The exhibition consisted of engaging models of buildings and communities in a large Arctic region occupied and governed by Inuit. The question is: will architecture in this harsh environment prove to be as adaptive and resilient as the human population? The exhibition provides grounds for optimism.

The 2014 Biennale: selected pavilions



France

Modernity: Promise or menace?

Perhaps surprisingly, the French exhibition, under the direction of the very smart architectural historian Jean-Louis Cohen, was witty, honest and without hauteur (although the country's entry in the official Biennale catalogue did point out that "since 1914, France has not so much 'absorbed' modernity as shaped it".) Modernity's menace was represented, amusingly, by a large model of the modernist house in Jacques Tati's 1958 film *Mon Oncle*, and chillingly, by the 1942 Drancy housing estate outside Paris, which served as a Nazi internment camp.



Germany

Bungalow Germania

The Germans know all about architectural expressions of national identity. Their exhibition was a pavilion within a pavilion: the modest, democratic 1960s Chancellor Bungalow – the former official residence of the German head of state in Bonn – was recreated in the German Pavilion, which had been modified during the Nazi era. This pavilion was itself the subject of another Biennale exhibition, by the German Werkbund organization, which presented alternative options for rebuilding or altering the Nazi-tainted building.



Great Britain

A Clockwork Jerusalem

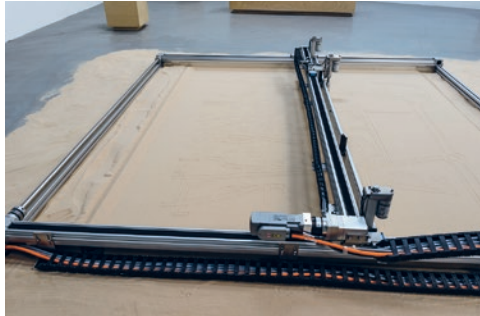
Some Biennale exhibitions showed architecture, others were shows about architecture. The British Pavilion was in the latter camp. A high-concept exhibition that overtly expressed the artifice of its contrivance, it nevertheless had a provocative energy that contrasted with more sombre Biennale offerings. The exhibition recaptured the optimism of now-maligned post-War British modernism, presenting the architecture and town planning of the time as a liberalizing movement influenced by the British traditions of the picturesque and the pastoral, and affected by a sort of Swinging London pop sensibility.



Greece

Tourism Landscape: Remaking Greece

The spread of modernist architecture, and modernity, in Greece was coterminous with the growth of mass tourism. As this exhibition showed, much of the Greek coastline was reshaped, for better or worse, in the post-War decades as tourism became the golden goose of the Greek economy. Koolhaas' theme of 'Absorbing Modernity' is especially resonant in Greece, where economic performance, debates about national identity, and tentative moves towards sustainable development, have been given concrete expression in the country's architecture.



Israel
The Urburb

In the Israeli Pavilion, programmed machines inscribed patterns of settlement on beds of sand – a graphic representation of the top-down planning of 1950s Zionist modernism that treated the land as a “tabula rasa”. Hundreds of new “urburbs” – from-scratch towns created by an essentially anti-urban political movement – sprung up in a decade. The elephant in the room housing this clever exhibition was Palestine for, of course, the land upon which the Zionists built Israel was already occupied. The omission was so obvious that one wonders whether, in an official exhibition of a nation still pursuing a controversial settlement programme, some point was being not so subtly made.



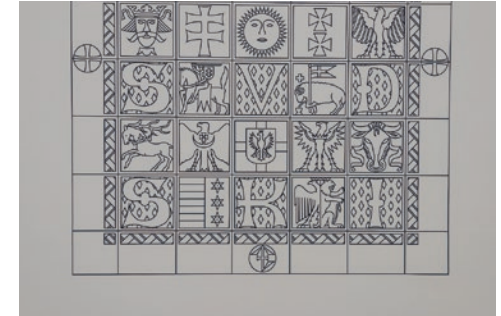
Japan
In the real world

This pavilion was as packed with stuff as a Japanese two-dollar shop on Auckland’s Queen Street. Visitors could rummage their way through thousands of plans and drawings and around hundreds of models and other artifacts. The material particularly illustrated projects and research from the 1970s, a period of experiment for young Japanese architects who went out into “the real world” in search of new directions after modernism had seemed to reach an impasse in Japan.



Nordic Countries (Finland, Norway, Sweden)
Forms of freedom: African independence and Nordic models

Sited in the Nordic pavilion (the best work of architecture in the Giardini), this exhibition captured one of the most hopeful of all modernist encounters – the meeting of Nordic aid and African nation building. For two decades from the early 1960s newly independent nations such as Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia turned to architects from the Nordic social democracies – chosen because their countries were free from the taint of colonialism – to design infrastructure projects. The exhibition told a story that deserved a good telling.



Poland
Impossible objects

The Polish pavilion was the outstanding example of an exhibition which reduced an era to a moment. “Impossible objects” did not merely focus on just one building; its subject was one part of one building: the canopy or baldachin – recreated in 1:1 scale – above the burial crypt in Krakow’s Wawel Cathedral of Polish war leader and ruler, Marshal Józef Pilsudski. The canopy was created in 1937, during the brief period of Polish pre-War independence, from enemy materials: jade from a demolished Russian Orthodox cathedral and steel from captured Austrian guns. As the excellent exhibition catalogue pointed out, this was modernism at its most morbid – it’s surprising the structure didn’t collapse under the weight of its own symbolism.

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Photographs

Jane Ussher (pages 6, 10, 13)
John Gollings (pages 19–22)
Inhouse (pages 23, 27–29)
Alexander Mayes (pages 24, 25, 30)
La Biennale di Venezia (pages 36–43)

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