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ARCHITECTURE

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MAGAZINE

TEN YEARS OF BAA

BEN ADAMS REFLECTS ON
THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF
HIS PRACTICE

Cheetah Plains

ARRCC DESIGN A GAME LODGE
IN THE KRUGER NATIONAL
PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

ALL THINGS TIMBER

WE EXAMINE PROJECTS CREATED FROM THE
NATURAL CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL

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NEC Birmingham

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WASTE NOT

Rodrigo Moreno Masey, Founder and Principal, **MorenoMasey**, outlines why architects have a duty to reduce waste in the construction industry



Much has been written about waste in the construction industry, particularly when talking about wasted energy. As architects we have the power to influence all aspects of the built environment throughout the life of a project. We clearly have enough control over the design process to impact on waste in the design, construction and use of our buildings; that is well understood. There are however, bigger questions about where we build, what we build or whether we should build at all. Our current buildings simply aren't good enough. But what do we mean when we say that our buildings are not good enough?

To me the most wasteful thing we can do is to build the wrong thing. When I look at any building I have a different way of looking at embodied waste. Building owners and architects are often demonised for ripping out a perfectly good house or gutting a building to start again and I won't defend the needless waste that I see everyday in buildings through a misplaced belief that old is bad and new is good. However, when admonishing the construction

industry, we rarely ask the question "Is old always good?"

It needs to be re-phrased to examine whether what is new is bad. When we appraise existing buildings we always make one important distinction. In simple terms, some things are "historic" and some are merely "existing". Historic fabric in old buildings has inherent value, not only through its cultural significance but also through its innate existence. Existing is something altogether different. Existing is a summation of the original building (good or bad) and all the things that have happened to it during its life. When tasked with deciding the value of existing buildings, we have a simple conceptual approach. Keep what is good, change what is bad. So much of what happens to buildings over the course of their numerous and diverse uses and adaptations is either of poor quality or simply incompatible with subsequent occupations. If we judge existing as good, we miss the opportunity to wash away the incremental compromises a building has suffered, that individually serve to chip away at the overall elegance of a finished project and together can suffocate a building entirely. I remain optimistic that through a

combination of legislation and enlightened clients, we can push the technical performance of the buildings we create to minimise their waste in construction and in use. However, I am also realistic that our client's spatial, financial and even aesthetic concerns will often overshadow or eclipse our most earnest aspirations to build sustainably. That is a technical challenge, but we must also be dreamers. Beyond simply meeting our brief and thoughtlessly adding a lump here or creating a hole there, our work should investigate everything a building could be, with a deeper understanding of how we occupy spaces in our everyday lives and how we might occupy them as our future selves.

If we truly want to reduce the wasted energy in new construction and the waste of embodied energy in unspent, unfashionable materials sent to landfill we need to be thoughtful and thorough in the things we build. Good architecture is appropriate, considered and timeless. Good design is never wasteful. Measure twice, cut once.

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