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## Review

### Designing Better Buildings

**Sebastian Macmillan (ED)**, Spon Press, 2005 £32.00

Contrary to the impression given by the title, this is not a technical handbook addressed at the construction industry. It deals with the role of the client, the effect of design on the end users, the value added by quality, and it attempts both to give advice and find objective (and quantifiable) criteria for the evaluation of design. It is strongly influenced by the 'first' Egan report, *Rethinking Construction* (1998).

The book is a collection of papers by researchers and practitioners assembled in four parts with sometimes overlapping themes. The first deals with the clients and their role in achieving quality. Two chapters are particularly relevant: Bill Bordass' discussion on how much can be learnt from Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE); and Dickon Robinson's promotion of quality at every level and for all. Part 2 reports on case studies from the commercial/private world and the public sector, including education and health. John Rouse's paper highlights the problems with current valuation methods and emphasises the need to find new ways of accounting for value. Matthew Carmona's is the only chapter that deals with the value added specifically by urban design; he summarises the work that he did for CABE on the subject (see review in *UDQ79*, p43) and suggests that more research is needed on the subject. Part 3 deals with delivering better buildings and returns to the issue of analysing them after they have been used for a while, and from the point of view of the occupant. The feedback from this analysis should be used not only to improve later designs but to rethink the brief as well. Recommendations are also addressed to the construction industry.

Part 4 deals with the difficulties in measuring design quality in economic terms: costs can be calculated but value is more elusive. Attempts have been made with Design Quality Indicators and these are discussed, most interestingly in Sunand Prasad's wide ranging discussion.

This book deals with very important issues and comes out at the right time, when spending needs to be justified and best value is measured in increasingly sophisticated ways. If good quality design is to be achieved more widely, the benefits need to be measurable in convincing ways, and the various contributors show how to achieve this. It can only be regretted that they mostly concentrate on the building itself rather than the place in which the building is located. The fact that they do not is probably an indication of the dearth of research in the field; almost the same questions asked about buildings need to be addressed for the public realm. Another task for CABE perhaps.

Sebastian Loew

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