



Richard Coleman: ‘We understand new talent’

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Richard Coleman of townscape consultants Citydesigner discusses best practice in selecting architects for challenging and sensitive projects

What does Citydesigner do?

Citydesigner is a team of 10 architects and urban designers interested in the heritage of cities and how high-quality, contemporary design can take its place. It assists project promoters to find the best architect, become a critical friend in the design development and provide analysis of the existing context and the way it will change.

What is the best planning approach for a challenging or sensitive development?

There is no typical procedure. Each project requires its own approach. All of our schemes are ‘adventures’ and we rely on illustrating everything as it is, without deceit and with integrity.

What is best practice for running competitions?

Contests need to be well planned and include an open question time for fairness. Judges should also not forget that there is a client.

It is said that townscape consultants can make or break an architect's career, how do you create openings for new talent?

We understand their talents and include them in selection. How do you think Patrick Lynch got the Land Securities Victoria Street job? A willing and intelligent client took some good advice.

How beneficial are competitions for selecting architects?

I believe in 'horses for courses'. Architectural competitions are essential for new ideas – especially for public commissions. In my work for developers, however, I believe in competition by interview, which involves putting forward a shortlist for the client to choose the people, not the scheme.

Your portfolio features some successes and others which have come in for criticism like Strata SE1 by BFLS. How do you strike a balance between delivering quality and realising maximum commercial value?

Maximum commercial value is a prerequisite, but within good planning parameters. I resigned from the KPF's Heron Tower because it was too high. It has caused gigantism in the city. Strata is different. The height is fine, but the value engineering was wrong. Maintaining quality beyond planning is my next campaign.

Has UK development suffered from the lack of government-funded design review by CABI?

Yes, without a doubt. But worse, there now is no independent 'watchdog' to embarrass those embarking on mistaken architectural ventures.

Are new trends, such as NPPF, making delivering challenging developments easier or harder?

NPPF is a great step forward. Proportionism is essential, but it remains an alien concept to too many heritage and planning decision makers.