



Images: Patrick Reynolds

ROOM TO THINK

While we often hear stories about what a blight we humans are on this planet, we can also make fabulous contributions to aesthetic beauty. Great architecture is one such contribution and while the prevailing modern attitude prefers architecture that hides or at least blends into its environment, the Home NZ magazine BMW Home of the Year, by Mitchell Stout Architects, does no such thing. It stands as an emphatic statement reminding us that architecture is capable of hugely enriching its location.

Auckland, 13th October - Mitchell Stout Architects have gained something of a reputation for being 'thinking' architects – that is they are known for bringing an uncommonly cerebral attitude to their work. This made them a perfect fit when their future clients, an academically inclined couple, came knocking. The couple had a unique idea that drew the architects to the project. *"They wanted a room to think in,"* says David Mitchell. *"We'd never been asked for one of those before."*

David Mitchell and Julie Stout took this germ of an idea and let the rest of the house develop around it, utilising ArchiCAD BIM software to develop their initial sketches. The 'thinking room' almost feels like the brain of the house because it is so internalised, with only narrow windows peering out like human eyes to the Waiheke vistas. The room's white interior, quirky

furnishings and simple paper lanterns give it a dream-like atmosphere. The curved internal wall has a dual purpose: as an asymmetrical acoustic feature and to deliver gradiated light to the space.

"Because a thinking room by its very nature is meant to be introspective, we have kept the focus quite internal. The owner likes to play the grand piano and both features of the wall complement this," says Stout.

The reasonably small windows of the house are emblematic of the different approach the architects have taken to the view. While so many houses in idyllic settings salaciously expose their visitors to the view, Mitchell and Stout take a different approach. *"In many ways, the view is the enemy of architecture, because it lifts you out of it,"* says Mitchell. The idea is to program very carefully what can be seen so the house doesn't defer to the view.

The client brief was for a house that was all about great ideas and not conspicuous consumption. They didn't want marble floors and the like; preferring instead to incorporate interesting features like Japanese Fusuma sliding doors and warped cedar cladding of the thinking room's external wall makes the house appear organic and windblown – anchoring it to the exposed site.