



Media Release
January 16, 2015

Award-Winning Design Practice Celebrates Two Decades in Business

At a time when many Dunedin businesses are moving out of the region or shutting their doors, one firm is celebrating two successful decades and numerous design awards – by staying put!

Dunedin-based The Design Studio has been designing homes, multi-unit apartments, retail buildings and cafes since January 16, 1995.

Owned and run by respected designer Brent Alexander, The Design Studio began as a sole practitioner operation. However, over the last 20 years the business has grown and currently employs a team of six.

“The secret to our success,” says Alexander, “Has been to work hard, treat people fairly and do a good job for a reasonable price. You need to value every customer who calls or comes through the door. Many clients believed in what I was doing from day one, have remained loyal to me and have helped me get to where I am today. I will never forget that.”

Alexander also believes that to be successful in business, it is so important to choose the right people and look after them. “I treat them as family, as I would like to be treated. I train them well and provide plenty of encouragement. I am a strong believer in supporting local business and giving young people an opportunity to better themselves. I was in the situation of having to go door-knocking looking for work, which was no fun, especially as there were no jobs for young designers 25 years ago.

Alexander prides himself on being an employer of a team of skilled young professionals, having taken on over the years a dozen or so graduates from the Otago Polytechnic’s design course. “I’m an avid supporter of the Polytech. It has the best CAD design school in New Zealand and its students are highly sought after by the best architectural firms around the country,” he says.

Dunedin is, he asserts, a good place to do business and to form strong connections. “Business is about people and relationships, not just money and design. We have built up very good working relationships with builders and

other consultants who share the same values we do. We also get along well with the DCC building inspectors which is crucial. “They do a very important job in the building process. Ultimately the quality of buildings is higher because of their very robust processes.”

In a very competitive industry, The Design Studio has loyal clients who return with new projects. “By building a strong foundation, managing the company well and showing outstanding leadership, we managed to weather the recent economic downturn and come out the other side the better for it. We managed to keep all our staff employed during those few tough years.”

With a background in music – having travelled the country playing rock ‘n roll after leaving school and winning the equivalent of five Tui awards with his band the Netherworld Dancing Toys – Alexander is following his lifelong penchant for being creative. “I have always had a keen interest in sketching, designing and creating. As a young lad I would spend hours in the garage at home making things with my hands. Never satisfied with what I had done, I would then try to figure out how I could do it better. I set very high standards for myself which naturally follows through into my business and design philosophy,” he says.

With 20 years experience of being in business The Design Studio has well-established systems and processes in place which enable them to work efficiently while keeping a check on quality. The company’s number one core value is to take pride in what they do. Alexander says, “With any project we ask ourselves, ‘Would we put our sign outside?’ If not, then we change the design or walk away. Our biggest fear is to add to the mediocrity that scars the urban landscape. Most of our work is focused on designing well-thought out house alterations, quality new homes on steep or difficult sites in established areas, and on small commercial projects, mostly around Dunedin.”

Alexander lives and breathes design and construction. So much so that he even takes his work home. The alterations he designed for his family home were highly commended by the judges in the 2014 Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) awards.

(ADNZ is the country’s largest group of professional designers and Alexander was recently appointed deputy chair of its national board.)

The Design Studio won three national architectural design awards last year: National Winner, Residential Multi-unit Dwelling Architectural Design Award (Heritage View Townhouses); Regional Winner, Commercial Interior Architecture Otago/Southland Region; and Regional Winner, Resene Colour in Design Award, both for the new Cadbury World Café.

He has also designed several gold standard Master Builder award winning homes.

With a number of “very nice homes” around Dunedin and Wanaka under his belt, Alexander says his market niche is mid-to-high end residential and light

commercial projects. The new Nichols Garden Centre Redevelopment was his team's work and they are currently working on a high profile bar refit in central Dunedin, "which we are very excited about".

Alexander set up his business because, "I have an innate sense of being self-employed." His father at age 83 is still working in his food wholesaling company, Alexander's Marketing, and has been in business for more than 40 years. Alexander junior credits him as a major source of wisdom, experience and inspiration. He says, "I'm pretty sure I will still be working when I'm 83 although, as the saying goes, if you are lucky enough to be doing what you love then it's not really work, is it?"

The Design Studio has worked out of its offices in Consultancy House in the nascent Warehouse precinct from day one because Alexander felt it was important to provide a professional environment for staff and clients. It doesn't hurt that the offices provide excellent views out over the city and some of the company's best work.

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Contact details for Brent Alexander:

P: 477 2664

M: 027 492 7525

E: bsa@thedesignstudio.co.nz

W: www.thedesignstudio.co.nz