

# Pair bring practical skills to design

Richard Loader

Studying architectural design together at Ara in Christchurch, Nick Mann and Mike John always had the idea that one day they would go into business with each other.

After completing their degrees and honing their skills, knowledge and architectural appreciation through design work in New Zealand and abroad, Nick and Mike came together once again in 2011, establishing AO Architecture Ltd.

"Nick and I are very similar in our passion for design," says Mike.

"It's about honesty in materiality with a twist," he says.

"We have a core pallet of materials that we like to work with—concretes and timbers—tried and tested materials but using them in new and innovative ways to create a point of difference."

Equally at home with a tool belt, both Nick and Mike are practical people, not just designers.

Before completing his design degree Nick did a pre-trade course in building and both Nick and Mike are currently amidst major renovations of their own homes, developing an increased appreciation for the practical realities of construction.

Reflecting on his passion for design, Mike says the work is also very technical.

"There's that nice cross over—its not all about the pretty pictures.

"The technical environment and the building codes are forever changing so it's important to keep current with those changes, but that's a good thing because it keeps you interested."

Based in Christchurch, AO Architecture has followed the roller coaster of Canterbury's construction environment over the last few years working on anything from small renovation projects through to mid range industrial commercial work up to a few million dollars in construction value.

"We designed Accurate Instruments new Christchurch two-storey premises.

"It was a fun project because they are pushing



**Accurate Instruments new building includes warehouse and workshop space, retail/presentation space, training rooms and office space.**

forward as a business and the Christchurch facility is now their biggest fit for purpose building."

With a brief to design a building that looked smart and reflected Accurate Instruments 'go-ahead' philosophy, the building includes warehouse and workshop space, retail/presentation space, training rooms and office space.

Completing design work in 2016, the building was completed and opened by the Mayor of Christchurch in late 2017. AO Architecture maintained the role of contract manager throughout the project.

Constructed mostly of steel portals, the building includes tilt panels for bracing and fire ratings, as well as plenty of glazing for natural light.

Mike says a smart, minimalistic, pared back approach was used in the design with the use of black and white ceilings and columns with polished concrete floors.

"A key was to get the showroom presence right so that the merchandise stood out. The clean minimalistic look was again shown in the building's white exterior and the use of stained wooden louvers on one of the upper corners of the building.

With a team of four designers, including Mike and

Nick, the business operates the depth and breadth of New Zealand.

"We're currently more focused on residential work. Last year did very well achieving joint winner for Canterbury and national finalist in the ADNZ

Design Awards, in the Residential over 300sqm category.

"This year we have more commercial work in the pipeline and are now looking to hire another designer."



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