

# Leah has designs on changing perceptions

By MATTHEW STEWART

**AWARD-WINNING** Masterton interior designer Leah M. Burns has been elected to the council of the Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ) and wants to change public perception, which often underestimates the professionalism of those in her industry.

“It’s one of those sectors that hasn’t been taken seriously, in the past we’ve been seen as crafty. DINZ is helping people to recognise the professionalism of all of us,” she said.

“A lot of people think we just fluff around with curtains and paint charts. We actually design spaces, we have to specify products and align structural, performance and aesthetic values,” she said.

This means consulting with architects and draughts people on everything from fascia colours right down to door hinges and having an intimate knowledge of extensive product lines and building codes.

“We get involved in every single detail of the design process – I don’t think people realise how involved we are.”

Historically, Auckland designers have dominated the council and Ms Burns sees her appointment as bolstering Wairarapa’s reputation as a creative hub.

She has an extensive background in the interiors and construction industry and studied extramurally at London’s Rhodoc International Design School.

The DINZ brief is to have professional designers valued and rewarded for the contribution they make to the economic, cultural and social growth of New Zealand, she said.

Advances in technology have heralded new types of professionalism, particularly in the evolving interactive media and graphic design fields, she said.

“The council represents all the different areas of design, including website designers, furniture designers, product designers and graphic designers – I represent the spatial side of it, which includes architects, interior designers, basically people who design spaces,” she said.

Professionalism must be married to accountability and it would be advantageous for all the professions covered under the DINZ umbrella to be registered with the organisation, she said.

“The institute maintains the integrity of its professional members by only admitting them after a thorough examination by their peers – this new era of the council represents the membership with a vital mix of gender and experience creating a team with a positive and energetic dynamic,” she said.

The other main focus of her work on the council is the licensing and regulation of building practitioners, which will initially take effect voluntarily from November.

“By law, anyone who wants to work in the building industry – from the builder to the plumber to the



**NEWLY-elected Designers Institute of New Zealand council member Leah M. Burns. The Masterton interior designer wants to alter the public’s perception of her industry. “We get involved in every single detail of the design process – I don’t think people realise how involved we are.”**

PHOTO: LYNDA FERINGA

architect – will have to be licensed,” she said.

The DINZ appointment lasts for two years and Ms Burns said she is really looking forward to it. “I’m looking forward to helping other designers to be recognised as professional.”