

# prodesign



Architecture for Shanghai  
*Shadow Play at The Research Agency*  
Design Education 2011

# Features



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High gloss, high above. CPG Architects puts a modern spin on the lawyerly classic of wood panneling.



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Tips from those in the know if you're contemplating a career in design. In this *ProDesign* showcase, we talk to the design faculty and fraternity, and look at some of the work of graduating students.



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Design 2011, fashion  
design by Roxanna  
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# Show and Tell



## Let there be Light

Architect: Jose Gutierrez  
Client: The Research Agency  
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From neglected High St, Auckland squat to one of the most interesting fit-out projects we've seen lately. A pebbled floor for the office? Why not.

[josegutierrez.co.nz](http://josegutierrez.co.nz)  
[theresearchagency.com](http://theresearchagency.com)

## Legal Highs

Architect: CPG Architects  
Client: Buddle Findlay, Wellington  
pp. 34-38

How do you convey an impression of success and solidity without bragging about it? Neutral tones, wood veneer, and lots and lots of broadloom carpet.

[nz.cpg-global.com](http://nz.cpg-global.com)  
[buddlefindlay.com](http://buddlefindlay.com)

## Planes of Thought

Architect: Warren and Mahoney  
Client: New Zealand Trade and Enterprise  
pp. 41-44

Architect Blair Johnston discusses the merits of fighting for architectural attention at the 2010 Shanghai Expo.

[warrenandmahoney.com](http://warrenandmahoney.com)  
[nzte.govt.nz](http://nzte.govt.nz)

# Let there be Light

**Jose Gutierrez tames the light and harnesses the shadows with this surprising fit-out for The Research Agency. Words: Sam Eichblatt. Photos: Emily Andrews.**



**The Research Agency headquarters on High Street, Auckland. Architect Jose Gutierrez introduced a number of strong design elements to the fit-out, including an unmissable steel-framed version of the companies logo. The floor is also distinctive: ultra-glossy ressin-bonded pebbles are a subliminal invitation to kick off your shoes, which some staff do, from time to time.**

It seems weird. An attractive, north-facing character building in the middle of the city ... with derelict rooms and a former nightclub downstairs stuffed with debris. It's not hidden down some dank alley, either, but has an entrance on gentrified High Street, and a well-established and popular café-bar on the first floor.

The building's relationship with the creative industries also goes back a few decades. The club, Cause Celebre, broke new acts there. Bono and Public Enemy parted there. In the 1980s, *The Listener* had offices, and *Pavement* was based there until its demise in 2007. Indie record labels Propeller and huh! called

it home, as did a chunk of the local film industry.

The current tenants include architecture practices and music studios, and recently, the top floor was taken over by an arts collective. In any other city, it would be considered an asset to the area's development, a much-loved, multi-use building embodying the kind of hip cultural credentials and sense of place councils and developers give themselves a hernia trying to retroactively create.

Which doesn't explain why, when The Research Agency first clapped eyes on their new office at 35 High Street, it looked like a squat from the *Trainspotting* set. "It was a total shambles," says architect Jose Gutierrez. "The concrete floor was actually breaking apart. It was in a real state." Not only that, but a fake wall had been erected over the bank of north-facing windows, blocking out the light.

However, the company was still keen. While The Research Agency works with corporate clients, director Andrew Lewis was looking for a space that had soul and reflected the boutique character of the company.

After removing the false wall, Gutierrez was left with a decent open space, dotted with the thick supportive columns characteristic of older buildings, and two banks of

windows, one to the north, and one east over Freyberg Place.

Having previously worked in London on a series of idiosyncratic spaces within heritage buildings and terraced houses, this was familiar territory for him. A series of spatial analyses established a reception area, workstations for 10 people, and a separate boardroom that would also seat 10. A casual 'ideas space' with low seating, and a place the staff could eat lunch and have drinks – something other than your typical office cupboard-sized kitchenette – were also on the board, as well as a back office and substantial storage.

The office's natural light was now one of its best assets – however, the view, of a tired old mansard roof next door, was not. The Research Agency logo is an empty billboard framework, the idea being that the agency provides the content "behind the billboard". Gutierrez extrapolated this concept to the interior design of the reception area, now designated the "first impression" space: "I wanted to let light in but screen the view. The company filters information, so in a way I used the architecture to explain what they do," he says.

The raw steel frame he designed will rust over time, while the shadows and patches of light it casts constantly





change. "You can imagine an empty billboard in the American desert with cars whizzing past – those were the connotations I used," says Gutierrez, who replaced the crumbling floor with a FactioStone carpet of glossy black pebbles bonded with resin, giving it the look of a highway slick with rain. It also adds an unusual texture and warmth to the space, so much so that the staff sometimes walks around with bare feet.

The boardroom, where the agency presents its work to clients, was "totally pimped out," says Gutierrez. The stark black-white colour scheme extended to black ceiling, the glossy surface of which reflects light around the room.

"The consensus is that ceilings should never be black, but for me it had to be," he says. "It makes the space what it is." A row of Goldie-style portraits of prominent city fathers floats over hanging fabric on one wall. Logan Campbell presides, wielding a retractable four-colour Biro: to play on the idea of Victorian stuffiness, they were PhotoShopped to contain modern ephemera like iPods and tattoos. Similarly, the chairs reference old boardroom style, but are of modern design.

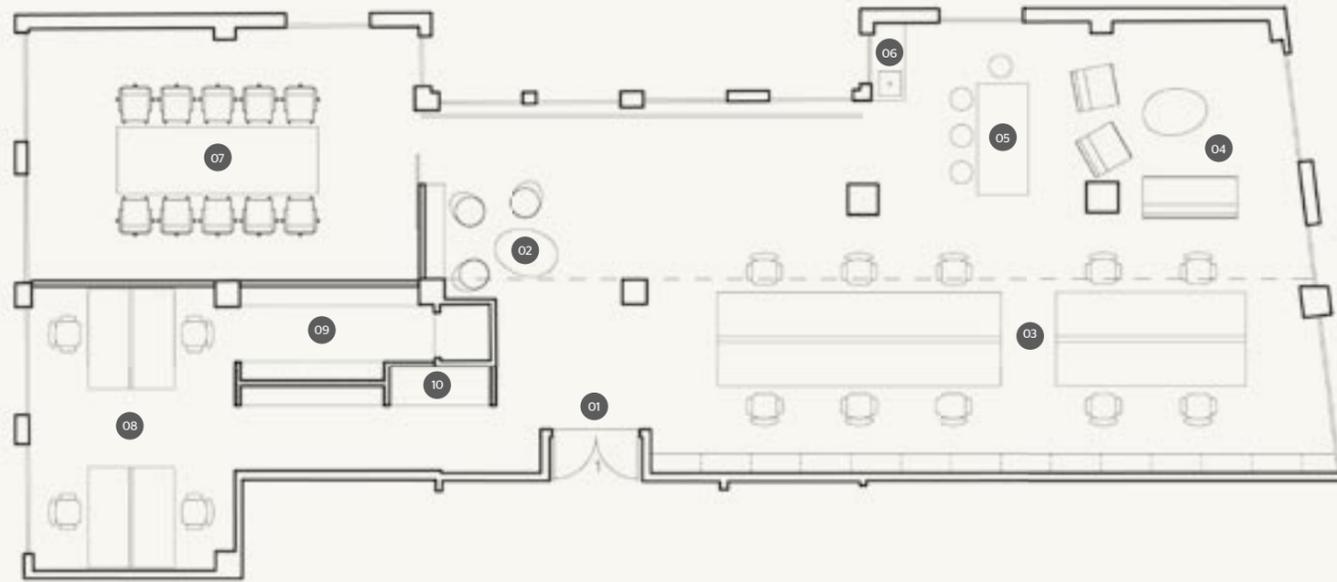
In the main work area, ceiling panels were crucial to the acoustics of the newly open-plan space, and also hide electrical conduits. Gutierrez designed the desks with a linoleum surface that acts as

one big mouse pad, and joinery that makes them appear to float. The bespoke "beam of light" above ties the space together visually. His other signature touches include using filing cupboards and the bar island as sculptural elements that integrate extensive storage space. In the casual lounge area, a whole wall has been covered in whiteboard material for easy note-taking, which now adds a personal, dynamic element, while the kitsch lightbulbs from Dark arranged randomly above it break up the otherwise strict order of the plan. Elsewhere, small details, like the metallic finish inside the casement windows, add to the newly high-spec feel of the previously neglected space.

**Kitchen island meets flexible workspace, facing page. There are subtle golden tones throughout, including the edges of the communal desk and fascias of the wall-hung storage, above.**

## Floorplan

- 01 ENTRANCE
- 02 WAITING AREA
- 03 MAIN WORKSPACE
- 04 CASUAL SPACE
- 05 BAR
- 06 SINK / TEA MAKING
- 07 BOARDROOM
- 08 BACK OFFICE
- 09 FILE STORAGE
- 10 PRINTER / STATIONERY



## Selected credits

- Architect** Jose Gutierrez
- Client** The Research Agency
- Project Manager** Jose Gutierrez Ltd
- Fit-out contractor** Tulp & Walker
- Paint** Resene
- Flooring** Spec-Tec International Coatings
- Lighting** Aesthetics Lighting
- Ocasional furniture** Robyn Skeates Office Interiors
- Textiles** Mokum

The light-diffusing drapes of The Research Agency's boardroom, left, provide a strong contrast with the black-pebbled floor.