

Domain URBAN LEGEND JENNY BROWN

Lighthouse buildings show the way

Green projects are getting deserved recognition.

MELBOURNE has two under-appreciated buildings that have set world-beating benchmarks. Not for their height or design novelty, but for their environmental performance. They are called “lighthouse buildings” because it is hoped they point the way by demonstrating how commercial buildings, which in the city centre account for 50 per cent of greenhouse emissions, can reverse those outcomes and become either carbon neutral or something close.

According to this year’s LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) competition, by the US Green Building Council, which assessed 44,000 new buildings across 120 countries, the low-rise but colourful Pixel Building on the old CUB brewery site is the best of the best. Out of a possible 110 points, it rated 105 — 10 points better than any building anywhere has scored in terms of green Brownie points.

Designed by Studio 505 for the developer Grocon, the four-level Pixel services all of its own energy needs, has potential to harvest all of the water it uses, treats its own grey



Grocon's Pixel tops the lot for efficiency; (right) Melbourne City Council's CH2 building functions “like an organism”.

water on site and stands in technique as Australia’s first carbon-neutral commercial building.

Even the fractals of colour that burst from its facades are made of recycled materials, the panel cut-outs set up to maximise the penetration of natural light while reducing unnatural glare. Pixel is, according to the plaudits, “the prototype of the future office”.

Through its 1200 Buildings campaign, Melbourne City Council is encouraging retrofitting for improved environmental performance of older commercial stock. So far, and including parts of RMIT and the Crown Casino, there are scores of sign-ups for voluntary upgrades and one office building has been able to report a 60 per cent-80 per cent reduction in its

energy use. A downtown hotel has, after re-insulating, double-glazing and making other adjustments to save water and energy, started promoting itself as eco-friendly and as a near-carbon-neutral accommodation option.

The council has been leading by example in helping the environment and, not incidentally, improving the comfort and measurable



productivity of employees since 2006, when it unveiled its own new Swanston Street office building, Council House 2 or CH2, which was at the time one of the world’s greenest office buildings.

Designed by the council in conjunction with DesignInc and the visionary Zimbabwe-born, Brunswick-based biomimicry architect Mick Pearce, the 10-level CH2 reduces the carbon emissions of a comparable-scaled office building by 87 per cent, electricity use by 82 per cent and water usage by 72 per cent. It also takes black water out of the city centre sewers, multi-filters it and recycles it for non-drinking use throughout a building specifically engineered to interact with Melbourne’s four-seasons-in-one-day climate.

The first commercial project in Australia to achieve a six-star energy rating, CH2 looks and functions a lot like an incredibly complex living organism.

Pixel Building, corner Bouverie and Queensberry streets, Carlton. Melway 2B D10. Council House 2, 240 Little Collins Street, city. Melway 1B N6.