



## Architecture gaining ground in Wales

‘What are the prospects for Wales?’ enquired Dewi-Prys Thomas in his treatise *Pensaerniaeth a Chymru* (*Architecture and Wales*) in the quarterly *Tir Newydd* back in 1939. Throughout his life the charismatic teacher and patriot was a passionate advocate for Wales and its environment. Drawing people’s attention to the importance of architecture in the nation’s culture was integral to his vision. To him, Welsh independence was synonymous with the advancement of architecture.

‘Having achieved a measure of self government, a better level of discernment will be fostered in general, there will be a demand for superior construction and the architect would be given a chance,’ he maintained. To conclude his essay, he insisted, ‘...we must endeavour to transform aspirations into facts.’

If, according to Dewi-Prys Thomas, architecture is a form of art that used to mirror the life and customs of the age, does it reflect the aspirations and hopes of the nation today? Especially in the wake of the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales and the prospect of the nation taking the latest step in the devolution process.

At the Vale of Glamorgan 2012 National Eisteddfod of Wales, there will be an opportunity to celebrate good design and the passion for it that featured in Dewi-Prys Thomas’s thinking and teaching. Thanks to the competition organised by the Royal Society of Architects in Wales and its south Wales branch, the Design Circle, a new structure can be seen on the Maes. The touchstone of the competition was to design an architecture pavilion, to be erected in the vicinity of Y Lle Celf, which would celebrate and inspire, and stimulate debate concerning the vision for the future. Coombs+Jones Architects submitted the winning design. The two architects are graduates of the Welsh School for Architecture, Cardiff, where Dewi-Prys Thomas was the first Professor of Architecture.

Coombs+Jones’s building has taken elements of the Welsh landscape – from its valleys, woodlands, and clearings to its hollows and walls – to evoke the feeling of being in the wild areas of the rural countryside. Equally, by going beyond the boundaries of a simple pavilion, the construction creates a wider space to experience.

Within the Architecture Pavilion, on Sunday, 5 August, the call for nominations for the Dewi-Prys Thomas Prize 2012 will be launched. The aim of this prestigious, triennial award is to recognise the importance of good design to the quality of life, identity and regeneration of Wales. In addition, a debate will be held on Tuesday, 7 August at which issues of Welsh architectural identity will be addressed.

In the meantime, the annual Architecture in Wales exhibition will be held in Y Lle Celf – albeit with a new spin. At the Vale of Glamorgan 2012, here's an opportunity to celebrate good design and the passion for good design in our culture.