

Devon Street is entering its Glass Age

(By "Lifeline")

AS with the streets of other cities throughout the world, Devon Street has passed the "pseudo-classical age" and is now entering its Glass Age. This belief of a New Plymouth architect was given to me recently.

A second architect said the Brougham Street area of Devon Street seemed to be developing into the business and cultural centre of New Plymouth. He believed the area of Devon Street East known as "the flat" would probably become the main shopping area.

"Fitzroy will expand inevitably as a business area, not just as a shopping centre," he said.

"One of the greatest difficulties is the tendency to develop commercial building all along Devon Street, stretching it even farther. It would be wiser to develop the side streets, although to a certain extent the topography is a difficulty."

This architect believes that future buildings will not grow above a height of four or five storeys partly because conditions for foundations are not generally good.

More glass

The greatest influence on Devon Street Commercial buildings at present is that shop windows have a wider expanse of glass, and one can see right into the shop.

"Shop windows as showcases are going out," he added. "The

nicely handled, it might have been built in 1730 for all the difference it made."

The architect pointed to the window of his own office. The window itself was small and divided by thick green-painted iron into small panes.

"The window was designed in that way for no particular purpose," he said, "except to conform with the appearance of the corner of the building, where there are little balconies in the Renaissance style which are never used."

Pointing to a bank building across the street, he said the building was an attempt at a modern approach to classical form, using modern decorative devices.

Many Devon Street buildings erected in the 'twenties and 'thirties were designed with no attempt to copy a past style. But they were "perfectly ordinary buildings" which nobody would look at twice.

"Until recently, we invariably got

considerably.

"Aluminium has come into its own. Aluminium extrusions are used for curtain-walling in new Devon Street shops. Tempered glass, too.

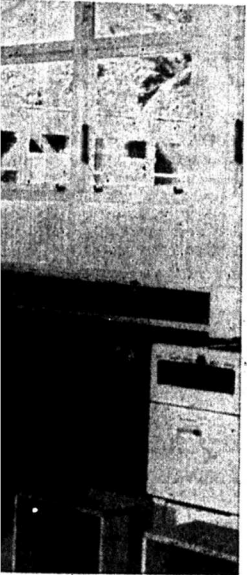
"Of course," he added, "the new style has constructional problems. All big areas of glass and aluminium contract and expand, and special expansion joints have to be used."

But it sounds a relatively small price for a more cheerful and efficient shopline along Devon Street.

Early risers

You might believe that Devon Street is just beginning to wake up by 8 a.m. But you would be wrong; many Devon Street shopkeepers are early risers.

As the former chief post office clock chimes the last stroke of eight, you have the choice of 70 shops in which to spend your money. Even if it means waiting a few moments for a sleepy shopgirl to drag off



TOP: Scaffolding still surrounds year. BOTTOM: Mr. A. Shippey lock of eight "specialised" rooms a first term.

tremendous problem. For instance—we needed 1500 horses. But we could not rent a horse in all of Hollywood. There are so many Western TV series being made that every horse is under contract. We had to comb seven states to find ours."

"And now what?" I said as dinner finished.

"Well," Wayne said, "I've only got one more ambition—to show the film to Churchill. The Alamo is the kind of thing he'd have appreciated. In fact, dammit, it's the kind of battle he'd have been in if he'd been around. I only wish we'd had him running this country instead of yours. We'd be the greatest country in the world under a man like that."



THE "PSEUDO-CLASSICAL" STYLE OF DEVON STREET ARCHITECTURE (left) is now flanked by a new building showing how New Plymouth is entering its glass age. The building on the right is the addition to the premises of the New Plymouth Savings Bank.

lighting has been improved, too, to make people look in.

"The general attitude before World War Two (with a few exceptions) was to design a building to certain 'aesthetic ideas, in past styles."

"The best example I can think of is the New Plymouth Savings Bank building, designed in a classical style of architecture."

"Built in all good faith and very

our effects by using a definite style of architecture," said another architect.

"But now, the brighter colours in the shops have helped a terrific amount to sell the goods. Brighter colours are used in the interior and exterior work, in the form of materials other than paint."

"There is now a much greater use of plastic materials. Even paint itself has changed its constitution

dustsheets and attend to the till.

Also, of course, there are the half-open shops. The bookstore where it is still dusk in the secluded corners among the ghostly sheet-covered stalls, and the chain store with one half-open door and a generally dead and abandoned look.

If you are seeking an ice cream, a chocolate éclair or a pair of shoes, you will be lucky. For nearly every milk bar in the street, five cake shops and five shoe shops are open before 8 a.m.

There must also be a pre-8 a.m. public demand—although I would never have believed it—for farm equipment, printers, plumbers' supplies, women's hats and music.

You even have a choice of two jewellers from whom to buy a christening mug or a wedding ring before breakfast.

Peculiar shoppers

"You can't account for the peculiarities of Devon Street shoppers," sighed the owner of one book and record shop as I found him at Tuesday lunch-time. He was shifting classical records from one side of a stand near the door of his shop and substituting rows of books instead.

"No matter what I put on this side of the stand, it immediately becomes difficult to sell," he said.

"The customers always congregate on the other side, whether classical records, jazz, books or birthday cards are for sale."

"I just can't understand it; I can see no reason at all."

"Classical records are not selling too well here, so I am going to make sure of selling some by switching them to another part of the stand."



MORE GLASS GIVES GREATER LIGHT AND VISIBILITY in the new department store of the Farmers' Co-operative Society in Devon Street East. This stretch of New Plymouth's main street is expected by one city architect to become the shopping centre of New Plymouth.

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