

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF AIRAH

JULY 2017 · VOLUME 16.6

RRP \$14.95

# Ecolibrium

## The Innovation issue

Eight trends shaping  
our industry's future.



# WELL considered



Can our commercial real estate be an enabler of wellness?

NDY Global Director Communications & Marketing

**Ric Navarro** investigates.

There's a movement taking place in the Developed World that might best be described as The Optimised Self\*. Driven by a combination of pressurised lifestyles, work stress and burn-out – dubbed *karoshi* in Japanese (death by work), this movement has seeded a backlash of the most positive proportions: a collective obsession with health and wellbeing. In essence, it's the idea that the body and mind can be maintained to operate at peak capacity – dependent on both internal and external conditions.

Perhaps the vitamin waters and protein powders are a fad, but the implications this holds for our built environments – the spaces in which we live and work – are both exciting and limitless in possibility.

## SEVEN YEARS OF RESEARCH

The result of seven years of research and development, the WELL Building Standard is disrupting the architecture and construction industry in much the

same way Green Star did when it was first introduced. And it's gaining traction, with the likes of CBRE (its LA offices the first in the world to be certified), and Grocon building to WELL standards. Other major companies, such as DEXUS, Frasers Property, Investa, Mirvac and Lendlease, have registered projects under the standard.

WELL is the brain-child of Paul Scialla, founder of the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), the governing body that administers WELL, and founder and CEO of Delos, which originally pioneered WELL. Through these two bodies, Scialla has led the development of the WELL Building Standard through extensive research and collaborative think-tanking that originally identified the various health domains that be addressed through the built environment.

"Things like cardiovascular health, respiratory health, immune health, sleep health," says Scialla when asked what these might be. From there Scialla and an expanded team of experts across

fields of medicine, science, design, architecture and sustainability began an initial construct of the WELL standard: a triage of components encompassing medical, scientific and practitioner peer review. Over 100 external experts were engaged to peer review the standard before version 1.0 was officially launched.

## A PERFORMANCE-BASED PROGRAM

Based upon the principle that health and wellness in the built environment is "a right, not a privilege", WELL "is not just about removing negative impacts on people's health", says Scialla. "A building actually has to be set up to boost people's health. It intends to actually help them to, at first, maybe passively, become more healthy – thanks to [integral environmental factors such as] quality of air and light." The intention is that workers, too, will be inspired to take a more proactive approach.

IWBI's Tony Armstrong describes WELL as a performance-based program.

"There's 102 features in the WELL Building Standard, and they are based on medically backed intentions," he says.

‘ A building actually has to be set up to boost people’s health ’

These features address air, water and light quality.

“There is a prescriptive way to fulfil that medical intention,” says Armstrong. “But there are many different ways to get the same outcome.

“An important aspect of the standard is to be able to look for other alternatives whereby the outcome is the same or better quality than what’s prescribed to meet that medical intention.

“To actually prove that, you need organisations like NDY with the expertise to ... produce the same outcome in accordance with that standard”, while being flexible to a project’s parameters.

## INTERACTION WITH LEED AND GREEN STAR

Armstrong acknowledges there is a 15 per cent cross-over with LEED and Green Star standards. WELL adds value through quality of lighting, HVAC systems and central management building systems.

“We know that if a building has a 5- or 6-Star Green Star rating, we can play around the edges with all the [elements that are concerned] with how to operate the building in a healthy way,” he says. “How to put policies and incentives in place, how to change the culture of the organisation.”

The beauty of WELL is that in addressing the human condition, its standards are universal. And while there are various intricacies involved in localised adaptation, human biology remains the same the world over.

The applications for WELL are pretty universal too. Beyond workplace contexts, Scialla and Armstrong have already seen traction in the residential and retail market. To date, more than 200 projects have registered or been certified in 13 countries, “actively engaging in the discovery process”,

as Scialla calls it. “And most importantly, there is a strong effort here to internationalise and localise the standard,” he adds.

Geography aside, Scialla expresses great faith in the far-reaching effects of WELL.

“When you passively introduce preventative medical intentions – and I really don’t necessarily think it requires behavioural change from the onset – there’s huge [potential] to impact and introduce prevention into people’s daily lives and have an effect, long term, on illness and chronic disease [for example].”

Within the organisations themselves, the standard encourages companies to assess their top-down policies as a means to engage occupants in WELL certified aspects of their spaces. “When you think of the broad term impact we can have on a population [accustomed] to working in WELL certified environments and extending those into their daily lives, it’s exciting!” says Scialla.

Through Delos, Scialla has also established a Well Living Lab, where he and his team can simulate workspaces, bedrooms and hotel rooms, and test subjects within those environments. It allows them to gain “real-time feedback” on things such as respiratory and sleeping patterns, heart-rate variability, long-term stress indicators and more.

“That’s a wonderful body of evidence,” he says, “that we will be able to build over time.”

Broader still are the economic and societal impacts that flow on from this research and the continuing growth of the WELL program. It’s quite compelling.

As Scialla says, when you think of the opportunity to really introduce again this notion of prevention in daily lives through a vehicle as large as real estate, the potential is, well, exponential. ■

\* *The Future Laboratory, Trend Briefing 2016: The Age of the Long Near (presented Melbourne, February 2016).*

### Would you like to know more?

For more information about the WELL standard read the Ecolibrium articles in our May 2016, June 2016, and September 2016 issues. Go to [www.airah.org.au/ecolibrium](http://www.airah.org.au/ecolibrium)