

THE AESTHETIC BENEFITS OF METAL CLADDING

The aesthetic benefits of metal cladding in today's construction industry are many and varied, but when considering these it has to be stated that they can rarely be considered, particularly with new build, in isolation from the other two major benefits which come with the metal cladding 'package' – namely, construction and energy efficiency, and cost efficiency – without these the benefits of aesthetic and design opportunities offered by metal are unlikely to arise. But the fact is, they are there, and once the designer is committed to this route then his/her creative opportunities are virtually unlimited whilst, at no time, compromising the fundamental construction benefits of the system. The Metal Cladding and Roofing Manufacturers Association (MCRMA) takes a look at some of the exciting possibilities.



Woodhorn Northumberland Museum Archives and Country Park. Image courtesy of Architectural Profiles

Whilst not dwelling on the benefits of insulated rainscreen over metal profile or vice versa, nor the benefits of one fixing system over another, but looking at, for example, how metal cladding has virtually reinvented the industrial unit, the 'shed'. One only has to visit any new industrial estate to see a stunning array of construction creativity offered by metal: roof designs impossible to consider through traditional construction methods, or long elegant wall elevations which can be punctuated with glass, brickwork, render, wood... you name it and it can be incorporated,... and in virtually every case the fact is that when it is incorporated within a metal clad elevation it is given a strength of design, an importance, that would have not been possible had the entire elevation been in that medium.

It is quite reasonable to consider the industrial unit, 'the shed', to be the virtual birthplace for metal profile cladding.... But look now at how it has been embraced throughout construction: hospitals, schools, airports, call centres, so many public buildings... even some residential developments are now incorporating coloured rainscreen or louvres in their housing designs. And in almost every case it has to be the versatility of metal and its ability to accommodate almost any creative requirement or design element which is the pre-eminent requirement for the designer/architect.



Vodafone contact centre, Stoke on Trent. Image courtesy of Euroclad

Colour – what better or easier way can there be to guarantee a striking building design than through the creative introduction of colour, and what better way to do that than through the use of the many specialist finishes offered by metal profile cladding and/or rainscreen. Be it a juxtaposition of different panel colours in a rainscreen clad building or subtle colour changes in a ‘half round’ or louvre continuous elevation, colour can make or break a design.

The palette of colours with which an architect can work is again virtually limitless. All manufacturers offer an extensive colour range in various finishes and, in many cases, special colours and/or finishes can be delivered to specification at minimal additional cost.

Detail – in any development there will always be an element of detail to be considered, but in a metal envelope system so much can be considered with the benefit of knowing that the extraordinary can be achieved. Slim verge overhangs for instance; there can be no simpler way to achieving this often essential design feature other than the use of a metal roofing system. Slim parapets and eaves - the same.

Bullnose edges, rounded corners, rising feature elevations.... in shining silver, in corporate colours, under brise soleil overhangs, maybe using perforated profiles to allow subtle light through. The detail opportunities are, like the design opportunities, immense.



Grand Pier, Weston super Mare, Image courtesy of SpeedDeck Building Systems

... and then there is refurbishment. Unlike new build, with refurbishment aesthetics can sometimes be the primary benefit when considering metal cladding as the main construction is already in place. There can often be big decisions to be made as to whether a building should be demolished or refurbished when it has come to the end of its primary lifespan, and often a complete retrofit can be the answer... and for complete retrofits metal can provide, once again, wonderful design opportunities, providing tired and often no longer functional buildings with new and exciting leases of life. Also, once again, in today's economic environment, there seems to be a whole raft of sectors willing to consider the retrofit or refurbishment solution over new construction.

In summary it is fair to ask the question, "Where would today's construction sector be without metal cladding of the building envelope?" - many of the more adventurous and often wild, colourful and extravagant designs are there courtesy of the metal cladding industry.

Yes it can be purely functional. Yes it can facilitate a building to be erected quickly and inexpensively without any great consideration to aesthetics.... But why, when for such a little extra input in the design, and at no extra materials cost, a functional 'box' can become a design statement.... That's what metal brings to the party, and long may it be a welcome guest.

For more information about the inspiring possibilities that metal offers visit the MCRMA web site at www.mcrma.co.uk.

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