

AB

THE BLOCK

DYMOCK

DYMOCK

GOWING

GEORGES

R.M. WILLIAMS

McDonald's

placemaking



Architecture Bulletin Winter–Spring 2016

Front cover: Conceptual drawing of the 'living furniture' and 'smart carpet' of the George Street Living Room by Nicola Balch (McGregor Coxall) and Albert Quizon (CHROFI), urban enlivenment aimed at the young and less mobile. It was the winning entry in the Urban Land Institute's 2015 Urban Innovations ideas competition 'George Street 2020', which aimed to stimulate ideas about how cities can add social, cultural, ecological and economic value through investment in public space. Balch and Quizon presented their ideas in June at the ULI Asia Pacific Summit in Shanghai. The illustration includes Junya Ishigami's *Cloud Arch*

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placemaking

Placemaking is a word used a lot these days – but what defines a successful place? Can they be planned and designed, or is it something that is out of our control? Is it about the architecture or the stuff between? And when do the decisions that lead to great places get made – at policy level, at feasibility stage, at planning stage or at design stage?

Philip Graus looks at the Greater Sydney Commission and how a metropolitan level planning authority has been an important missing ingredient in Sydney's governance that can bring citywide thinking. Murray Brown unravels the structure and remit of the Greater Sydney Commission, the relationship between each of the 'districts' and how policy will make its way into planning decisions. Still on the Greater Sydney Commission theme, Shaun Carter interviews Environment Commissioner Rod Simpson and discusses how design-based placemaking is the future.

Anton Kouzmin reminds us that governments have in recent years relinquished their role in driving urban renewal projects, opting for low-risk, profit-driven and opaque private sector solutions. He argues that the design of the governance structure around a project frames the design outcomes that we get.

Alec Tzannes dissects the process behind Central Park, one of Sydney's most successful recent placemaking outcomes. He notes the importance of a rigorous masterplan, but also the commitment from the property owners to support good design through to completion. Circular Quay is one of the great places of Australia, despite a lack of a coordinated vision. But it could and should be better. Murray Brown asks whether it is time for the AIA to initiate a new round of discussions on its future.

Paul Walter looks at the hybrid study/café/club spaces in universities which 'blur the line between campus and urban', and we report on an Australian Research Council funded project into planning innovations at Australian universities.

Nicola Balch explains how tactical urbanism is being applied to the George Street Living Room project. April McCabe introduces us to the collaborative network supporting women-led ideas for positive change that is Urbanistas Sydney.

Away from the urban environment, Dan Plummer and Belinda Smith look at the conflicting needs of regional-based versus community-based placemaking inherent in the Tweed Regional Gallery. Glen Spicer gives us an update on the ideas for the closed heavy rail corridor in Newcastle city and notes more work still needs to be done. Noni Boyd writes about the wonderful Sirius Building whose days may be numbered. David Bennett stretches our analysis of placemaking with the use of data-based apps and City Dashboard websites that give us real-time data.

Lastly, Matt Chan has been to the Venice Biennale and gives us his take on the event whilst Tim Horton wonders why architects are still resisting the need for CPD.

Andrew Nimmo, Chair of the Editorial Committee



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CORRECTIONS

Please note the following corrections to the 2016 NSW Awards
edition of *Architecture Bulletin*: [1] Lennox Bridge Portals
received an Architecture Award for Heritage. The project is
attributed to both Hill Thalys Architecture + Urban Projects and
Design 5 Architects. [2] In the Interior category three commenda-
tions were awarded: Apartment. Finger Wharf by Architect
Prineas; UTS Tower by Lahznimmo Architects; and Faculty of
Engineering + Information Technology, University of Technology
Sydney by Denton Corker Marshall. These corrections have been
made in the online edition: architecturebulletin.com.au



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2016 NSW Architecture Awards

Architects are proud of the role we play in modifying our built environment so that it continues to meet the needs of present and future generations. Our annual awards ceremony celebrates the positive achievements that the profession considers our peers have made in fulfilling that role in the community.

It was great to see so many friends and colleagues at the NSW Architecture Awards at Australian Technology Park in July. The vibe was very positive and upbeat. We were delighted that dignitaries such as Planning Minister Rob Stokes and Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore were able to join us for our ‘night of nights’. We certainly appreciate the public statements they have both made advocating the critical role of design in the future amenity and value of our denser urban environment.

Design thinking is the key to developing great projects and great places. We can look at the very best parts of our cities and towns to see this is true. Architects have strategic and creative thinking ability. Architects are the great generalists. And we claim this title with pride. Architects are boundary-spanners. We are the people that connect disparate professional disciplines and departments into a functioning, beautiful and cohesive whole.

Creativity and design thinking should be the bedrock of any process that is involved in planning for the future, whether it be buildings, streets, footpaths, street furniture and street art, public domain or planning and public policy.

I want to encourage governments at all levels – local, state and federal – to make

better use of our skills. They need to move architects up the value chain of decision-making to inject design thinking into the discussions and decisions that decide the future of our built environment.

That is why I have presented the President’s Prize in the two years of my tenure – Helen Lochhead in 2015 and Graham Jahn and Bridget Smyth this year – in recognition of people who have made substantial and excellent contributions to public life and the built environment. They are well-qualified architects in their own right, but they have given up the individual pursuit of their talents to have a greater impact on the profession and on the quality of the built environment.

These recipients of the President’s Prize have achieved all of this as generalists and boundary-spanners, both within their organisations and in their dealings with people outside it. They have provided long-term outstanding service to the community.



1 Shaun Carter presents the Adrian Ashton Prize for writing and criticism to the winners Amelia Holliday (not pictured), Isabelle Toland and Michelle Tabet
2 Bridget Smyth and Graham Jahn (City of Sydney), recipients of the President’s Prize for their substantial contribution to the profession of architecture

Casino at Barangaroo: the final chapter?

I have kept members informed of the Institute’s efforts to achieve a better result for the public at Barangaroo Central than a high-rise casino and apartment tower on the Sydney Harbour foreshore. Mine was one of several voices raised against the development at a public hearing held by the Planning Assessment Commission in late April.

The Commission published its determination two months later. Although the development was approved for construction on the site agreed to by the Government in 2013, the Commission was concerned that approval of the proposal in full would result in the loss of a large area of prime foreshore park. It therefore imposed a number of conditions on the development:

- Enlargement of the public park behind the casino to make it ‘an inviting, quality green space with good winter sunlight’; and
- Widening of the western foreshore ‘to provide an unencumbered 30-metre foreshore promenade’ in front of the casino building.

These two measures have substantially increased the area of public domain in the precinct. The Commission also maintained low building heights on the rest of Barangaroo Central and restricted the use of any future development on the pier ‘to a community facility owned or controlled by a public authority or non-profit community organisation’.

Clearly, the Commission had heard the depth of community concern about the location of this development but considered that its hands were tied by the Government’s decision three years ago.

The NSW President of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects and I have written jointly to the Premier urging him to reconsider the Government’s consideration of future projects in places that are so vitally important to Sydney. We said: ‘The public good must outweigh the private gain in assessing these proposals. Urban design thinking, consultation and assessment must help drive the outcome’.

Shaun Carter, NSW Chapter President



Chapter Manager’s report

Sadly, I am leaving my post as NSW Chapter Manager in mid-August. In my brief (yet sweet) time in this role, I have enjoyed meeting many of you at our events and other activities in the last year and sincerely thank those who have given up their time and knowledge to assist the Chapter.

It has been a pleasure working with Chapter President Shaun Carter. Shaun’s passion for architecture and incredible drive have ensured that the NSW Chapter has steamed ahead with major initiatives like Male Champions of Change and addressing the gender-equity imbalance in the profession. Shaun has also been a productive advocate for the profession and NSW, in key areas, such as the Coalition for Planning Reform, saving Sirius, MOD 8 Barangaroo and SEPP 65.

One of our successes was the NSW Architecture Awards on 1 July. We changed the format this year to a sit-down dinner and MC Judith Lucy kept the awards flowing. We achieved our goals to increase attendance and made this annual event be a real showcase and celebration of NSW architecture. Not only were an unprecedented 179 entries received, we also increased attendance this year by over 100 people to 605. I would like to thank the NSW Chapter team, particularly Hannah Burgess and Rosanna Scarcella, for their hard work in delivering the Awards evening. Special thanks to the awards committee and juries for their contribution to the event’s success. Congratulations to all nominees and the winners of awards and prizes for their outstanding work.

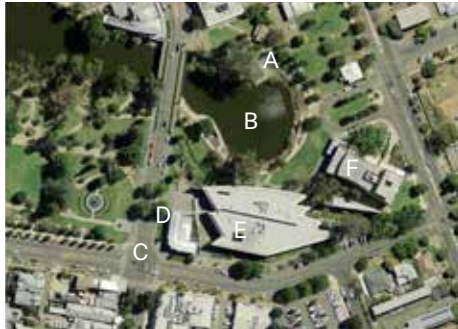
Finally, despite the challenges faced this year including the closure of the Newcastle regional office, we are in a strong place now to move ahead. I am confident that our new CEO Jennifer Cunich will lead and build a stronger, focused and more influential Institute. We are in good hands.

Audrey Braun, NSW Chapter Manager

3 Winners and gridders at the NSW Architecture Awards night at Australian Technology Park in Redfern. Awards photos (pp 4–5): Boaz Notham
4 Audrey Braun at Tusculum, Potts Point



1 DARCH / EmAGN NSW's Barangaroo South tour led by Avtar Lotay. Photo: Joseph O'Meara
2 Watt Space Gallery, Newcastle by Andrew Donaldson. Winner of the Blacket Prize and a NSW Architecture Award for Small Project Architecture; and shortlisted for the Public Architecture Award. Photo: Brett Boardman
3 Wagga Wagga's amphitheatre (A), Wollundry Lagoon (B), the main street Bayliss St (C), Museum of the Riverina (D), Civic Centre (E) and Civic Theatre (F)



DARCH / EmAGN NSW

Over the past few months, DARCH / EmAGN NSW held two amazing sold-out tours, was on the judging panel for two awards, travelled to Melbourne and started recruitment in Newcastle.

The Barangaroo South tour held in May was led by Avtar Lotay, managing director of Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners together with the RSHP team. His knowledge about the design and detailing of the precinct at both macro and micro scales was appreciated. In June, the construction site tour of the International Convention Centre Sydney was lead by Gordon Brown, project manager at Lendlease. This tour looked at architectural and sustainability features of the design by HASSELL and Populous. We'd like to thank the tour leaders but also committee member Cara Doherty, for their time and energy organising the tours.

Co-chairs Phuong Le and Joseph O'Meara were judges on two awards presented at the NSW Architecture Awards. Congratulations to panovscott, winners of the Emerging Architects Prize and Anne Colenbrander (Hancock Architects), winner of the David Lindner Prize.

Phuong and Joseph also travelled to Melbourne to meet EmAGN chairs from around Australia at the biannual face-to-face meeting. Watch this space for exciting collaborations! Finally, DARCH / EmAGN NSW is recruiting interested members to join the EmAGN Newcastle committee. Look out for exciting news from Newcastle.

DARCH Committee

Country Division

Wagga Wagga in southern NSW (population 64,000) is the Riverina region's major town centre and has been placemaking for many years. In the early 1990s, Wagga Wagga held an international architectural design competition for a new civic centre and Melbourne architects Garner Davis were selected. The Civic Centre includes the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, City Library, Civic Theatre, an amphitheatre, Council administration and the National Art Glass Gallery. The centre has become a destination place for the locals and visitors and has many events throughout the year to pack the precinct.

Masterplanning was also undertaken for Fitzmaurice Street and the adjacent Cabarita Park, with the aim of revitalising these underused areas of the city. Fitzmaurice Street has been revamped with a new median strip and many restaurants and eateries are now opening, most recently a boutique brewery called Thirsty Crow. This has created a lively area on most nights, especially during the weekend. It's not quite Lygon Street, Carlton but it's getting there!

Cabarita Park was an underutilised area beside one of the city's greatest asset, the Murrumbidgee River. It has been upgraded with many public facilities, BBQ shelters and playground. Over the summer, thousands flock to the Cork & Fork Fest, enjoying the scenic beauty and the region's focus as the nation's food bowl.

Noel Thomson, Treasurer / Heritage Committee Representative, NSW Country Division

Newcastle Division

The Newcastle Division committee continues to work towards providing activities to support our members and the local architectural profession. We estimate this comprises approximately 220 AIA members and at least as many non-members, as well as university students.

We recently hosted Chapter Council allowing Councillors to learn more about the Newcastle Division and to discuss local issues with members. The history of the Division from 1925 was outlined. Following the forced closure of our office at the end of last year, we await a permanent staff member employed by the NSW Chapter as a dedicated resource for the Newcastle and Country Divisions.

Other recent activities included a PALS course run over three Saturdays with 14 registrants. Architecture on Show held in Andrew Donaldson's recent Blacket Prize-winning Watt Space Gallery, featured local award-winning architects discussing their projects.

The committee hopes to produce a book on late 20th century Newcastle architects, following the successful book *Early architects of the Hunter Region: a hundred years to 1940* by Les Reedman.

Newcastle is undergoing a significant amount of development at present – this is a good opportunity to focus on advocacy. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with CEO Jennifer Cunich and increasing support at both state and national levels.

Peter Kemp, Acting Chairperson, Newcastle Division

4 The Village, Balgowlah by Allen Jack+Cottier (AJ+C)
5 Rendering by Bates Smart for the Australian Technology Park design competition: urban renewal to capture a rising generation of innovators



Allen Jack+Cottier

It is widely agreed that the creation of truly democratic, healthy, socially inclusive, workable and economically viable cities is reliant on the appropriate development of its public spaces. What defines the character, essence and identity of a city are those very places 'owned' by all, not its private ones. Even investing a little into quality public spaces delivers significant returns. The City of Sydney is a great example.

In all the significant urban transformation projects across Sydney and NSW that Allen Jack+Cottier is a part of, our focus is on the public domain and on city and placemaking benefiting all. This includes the large-scale masterplanning of major new developments designed to best meet the city's population needs while maximising liveability and amenity, along with the smaller scale, such as the critical creation of a new Parramatta Road gateway site for Sydney's rapidly expanding second CBD, Parramatta.

In every project, our intention is to: support sustainable travel, accessibility, health and wellbeing, public safety and social engagement; for all users to be well connected in beneficial, attractive streets and public spaces with environmental amenity; for each project to be the catalyst for public engagement, for social activities and to maximise opportunities for formal and informal gatherings, conversations, people watching, window shopping, outdoor dining, resting and more; and to offer public spaces regarded as desirable destinations with a clear identity, complementing the cityscape.

Bates Smart

A holistic approach to urban renewal is being fuelled by the demand for authentic work/life experience in city fringe regeneration areas. The low-tech revolution is driven largely by tech companies that eschew the futuristic 'tech-utopia' in favour of diverse environments that are anything but an office park.

Our research has focused on how to create a bona fide technology ecosystem, adaptable to future uses that aren't even imaginable today. Bates Smart recently took part in a design competition for Australian Technology Park in Sydney.

Future workplaces will create or be part of an authentic urban environment, allowing work to happen everywhere. These places will be mixed-use, integrating cafes and restaurants, as well as shops and apartments: a place to live, work, and relax. Tomorrow's workplace is the city.

The masterplan framework we propose creates a holistic city precinct, a self-sustaining ecosystem of diverse organisations in a range of tenancy sizes, from the incubated startup to campus size floorplates linked by bridges. In this arrangement, big companies support the small startups and small companies help the big firms innovate. They facilitate growth and nurture growing technologies.

We believe the answer lies in long life, loose fit, low energy buildings. We have identified five principles to building in flexibility and adaptability, where low-tech is the new high-tech:

- 1. High ceilings (3.5 m to soffit)
- 2. Concrete core cooling
- 3. Operable windows
- 4. Flexible occupation
- 5. Stays cold / stays warm

Our design proposes to break down the block size to increase the permeability of the site, increase its street frontage and create a series of low scaled buildings in keeping with the existing heritage stock. The heritage-listed locomotive workshops are refurbished to provide a range of office, retail and hospitality spaces. New office space is designed to provide ample daylight to the deep floorplates.

Gathering spaces, retail and wellness facilities are arranged at ground level to maximise activation and draw in the surrounding community. Public open spaces and a fine-grained network of laneways will create the diverse social conditions where urban life thrives.

Purpose-designed and highly-connected workplaces drive innovation in spaces to think, collaborate and create. Long life, loose fit buildings provide flexible, scalable and multifunctional spaces, with room for diverse companies to coexist.

Philip Vivian, Director, Bates Smart

6 Conceptual drawing for BKA Architecture’s masterplan for the development of a sporting hub and public park upgrade to Penshurst Park in Hurstville

7 The Connection, Rhodes by Crone Architects. The new community precinct facilities have been designed as a set of flexible, autonomous modules that can be adapted over time to changing community needs

8 Orange Regional Museum by Crone Architects. The building features an integrated roof-scape which becomes an informal public space above the flexible Museum Hall below



DKA Architecture

DKA Architecture is a practice of around thirty people with offices in Sydney, Newcastle and Byron Bay. Our projects categories include residential development, education, local government and individual houses.

DKA Architecture has recently submitted a masterplan for the development of a sporting hub and public park upgrade to Penshurst Park in Hurstville. The redevelopment will provide professional level training grounds for Cricket NSW, along with separate facilities for Football NSW and local youth service providers.

The community’s wellbeing will be improved with access to a new running track, exercise station, new grandstand, change rooms, and an upgraded playground – as well as an extension to the existing sports and recreation centre.

In addition to the dynamic Hurstville community, the project serves a wide group of stakeholders including Cricket NSW, Football NSW, local youth service providers, community sporting clubs and the existing Leisure Centre.

With the new Georges River Council as the client, the project will be delivered in stages by a team of consultants from Wood & Grieve Engineers, along with Sturt Noble Landscape Architects.

Cox Richardson

Cox Richardson is excited to be working in partnership with UNSW Built Environment and UDIA NSW to create an interactive app called Urban Pinboard. The app will connect government, industry and the community in a single conversation about how we build cities, provide infrastructure and create places for people.

The team is using innovative digital technology to drive smart city transformation and create conversations about the places we want to live in and how they can be built. The app will also connect users to the large, existing body of data that is used by the industry every day to allow for a more transparent evidence base in city building. This partnership between COX, UNSW and UDIA is dynamic, with the ability to relate rigorous academic research to existing practice and industry experience.

Crone Architects

Diversity and adaptability of the built environment is integral to successful placemaking strategies. Maximising opportunities for communal synergy and information exchange is not achieved through overly prescriptive conditions. Places today need to benefit a range of users and consider places within their current context but also relative to the future character and conditions of an area.

Socially inclusive and malleable built environments will drive and support the knowledge-intensive economies of the future. In a fast paced world, it is essential that our buildings work with us, not against us. Through careful and considerate design, the spaces in which we live, work and consume can help us connect better with others. Every project needs to engage with people first, catering to the subtle nuances of relationships.

Placemaking cannot be achieved through progressive architecture and urban design strategies in isolation. It is through insightful consultation that we can get to the heart of a place and the best result for communities. Real unification of architects, thinkers, designers, artists, economists, social planners and end users is a good place to start.

Ashley Dennis, Associate, Crone Architects



9 FJMT’s Liberty Place, Sydney: winner of the 2016 City of Sydney Lord Mayor’s Prize for improving the quality of the public domain through architecture and urban design. Photo: John Gollings



10 Rendering of the Governors Centre by TKD Architects for Sydney Girls and Sydney Boys High School



11 Concept for a dwelling at Tullamore in Doncaster, Victoria by Mirvac Design



Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp

FJMT was recently awarded the 2016 City of Sydney Lord Mayor’s Prize at the NSW Architecture Awards for Liberty Place, in recognition of work that improves the quality of the public domain through architectural and urban design excellence.

Uniting public, corporate, hospitality and retail architecture into a cohesive urban design, Liberty Place provides an enabling, flexible and human environment and is a unique offering for Sydney’s CBD and its community. The ‘through-site link’ connecting Pitt St and Castlereagh St with its public plaza is highly popular with tenants, workers and visitors as a place to eat, meet and hold events.

Described by Elizabeth Farrelly as ‘a genuine urban harbour’, the scheme departs from ‘modernist icons [with] open plaza at base’ to achieve new urban places and connections. Places for people that will contribute to the layers of memory and experience of life within the city.

Mirvac

Mirvac’s vision is to transform the Eastern Golf Course into a landmark masterplanned community featuring approximately 800 dwellings, including a mix of vacant land allotments, Mirvac homes and medium density living options.

Featuring extensive public open space including heritage trees and existing lush vegetation, the spectacular fairways will be masterplanned to offer residents beautiful vistas of the local area, as well as city views.

Mirvac Design creates homes with an emphasis on low maintenance lifestyle and architectural innovation. Modern and vibrant in its vision, Tullamore is set to provide an aspirational living environment that represents the quality, placemaking and workmanship that is fundamental at the heart of all Mirvac masterplanned communities.

House planning is site specific with the program carefully arranged to capitalise on passive environmental opportunities by responding to orientation, optimising cross ventilation and passive solar design principles, as well as incorporating extensive areas of glazing and openings, where appropriate, to allow the integration of internal and external living areas.

We also focus on a contemporary palette of external materials, colours and textures, selected to complement the landscape context and create a sense of unison amongst the built forms while also providing a subtle individuality, reinforcing a sense of place and shared community values.

Andrew La, National Housing Design Director, Mirvac

Tanner Kibble Denton Architects

The Governors Centre, a shared performing arts centre for Sydney Girls High School and Sydney Boys High School, received development approval from the City of Sydney in June. The new centre, located on Cleveland Street at Moore Park, includes a 400-seat auditorium and a new multipurpose examination hall and is entirely funded by the school community.

TKD Architects has also been recently appointed to undertake the renewal and transformation of the heart of six Charles Sturt University campuses in regional NSW, including Wagga Wagga, Albury, Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo.

Spread over three years, this project seeks to create a series of new social spaces both in the public domain and within key campus facilities, fostering collaboration and interaction whilst providing a real identity to each campus. Allied to the campus hubs study is a program of work to upgrade and transform the teaching and learning spaces of each campus.

Greater Sydney Commission challenge



Can it integrate money, politics and design?

What do progressive cities like New York, London and Chicago have in common? The answer is *metropolitan level governance*. Alexandros Washburn, former chief urban designer of the New York City Department of City Planning under Mayor Bloomberg, in his book *The Nature of Urban Design* (Island Press, 2013) states that economics, community and design, in equal measure shape effective, resilient, equitable and well-designed cities – in other words, money, politics, and design are given equal consideration and are integrated.

In the above cases, it is the metropolitan city government that has responsibility for the city; the city is managed and run by the city, for the city. While this may sound obvious, achieving an effective way of running a modern global city presents a significant challenge for all Australian cities, as our governance structure is fundamentally different when it comes to cities.

In New South Wales, like other Australian cities, the federal government is responsible for tax, defence and national highways. In essence, it has the

macroeconomic levers to drive population and economic growth. The states are responsible for health and public education, public transport and set state plans, housing and job targets that local government is charged to deliver in local plans. Federal and state governments are jointly responsible for health, education and public housing.

Local government is exactly that – local. Local governments closest to the community deliver local services as well as make local zoning plans to deliver state targets. Each local government is an ‘island’ in some sense.

‘In metropolitan cities, the economic unit geographically is the region – this is not reflected in any level of government. As the global economy continues to place more emphasis on metropolitan cities, fragmented city governance will increasingly put cities like Sydney at a significant disadvantage’

There is currently no level of government with a clear responsibility for cities; responsibility for metropolitan growth, land use planning, public transport and physical civic improvement are fragmented. In metropolitan cities, the economic unit geographically is the region – this is not reflected in any level of government. As the global economy continues to place more emphasis on metropolitan cities, fragmented city governance will increasingly put cities like Sydney at a significant disadvantage.

As noted above, cities like New York, Chicago and London with a metropolitan level of government have the ability, authority and funding to manage metropolitan cities as places. Place, economics and community are integrated.

The challenge

For these reasons, the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects has strongly supported moves to create a more integrated level of governance for metropolitan Sydney and the regions in submissions to government over the past seven years; specifically, a metropolitan commission linked to local communities with the authority to integrate public transport with forward strategic planning.

It is encouraging to see such a body being created. The greatest challenge perhaps for the Commission will be to win broad community support as an unelected body. This may not be insurmountable as commissions in cities such as Chicago are appointed rather than elected. They are however highly transparent, with strong community representation on the Commission itself. Hearings are public. They are an important link between city government and the state. The challenge for the Greater Sydney Commission will be being an effective link between *multiple* local bodies and the state.

Another challenge will be integrating public transport, roads, education and housing in long- and medium-term planning as these sit under separate state agencies reporting to different

ministers. The district plans will be crucial in bringing together the higher level strategic thinking and setting a cohesive framework for local plans, as well as integrating public transport, schools and hospitals.

Like all state bodies, the powers of the Greater Sydney Commission are limited to the extent of their remit. In the case of the GSC, it has the responsibility to deliver the district plans and approve planning proposals. Perhaps a measure of success in countering ad hoc political decisions will be the quality of the district plans and whether they actually deliver public benefits, such as the Green Grid and the much needed open space metropolitan Sydney needs as it grows.

‘Innovation district’ plans?

The changing nature of jobs in a global market presents a particular challenge to all metropolitan cities – economically as well as socially. Can the Greater Sydney Commission with commissioners dedicated to economics, social and environmental considerations bring more focus to this? Can the district commissioners, together with local government, develop district plans as ‘innovation district’ plans like the ones being developed in the US and the UK?

High productivity jobs increasingly cluster around universities, major research/teaching hospitals. Referred to as innovation districts in the US, they rely heavily on the integration of economic activity, health/research/education, accessibility and physical placemaking. The Brooklyn Naval Yard and Roosevelt Island in New York are such examples.

The UTS/Ultimo cluster together with the Goods Line and access to Central Station is such a district, as is the University of Sydney/RPA Hospital and UNSW/Prince of Wales Hospital, the latter soon to be made more accessible via light rail. The above examples are Sydney CBD centric, each including significant health and education institutions. How can the Commission better consolidate such elements together in district plans?

Achieving this will be critical to Sydney as a successful metropolitan city. There are other opportunities throughout Sydney: Westmead Hospital near Parramatta CBD and Western Sydney University is one such opportunity, as are the Liverpool and Campbelltown hospitals. We must also think at the broader metropolitan regional scale including Newcastle and Wollongong with their strong universities, hospitals and excellent placemaking potential on Australia’s coast. Integrating this level of thinking will be vital for the future of this metropolitan region.

Philip Graus is a director of COX. In 2014 he was appointed inaugural conjoint professor at UNSW Built Environment

Franklin D Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park, Roosevelt Island, New York City – built four decades after Louis Kahn’s death. © Iwan Baan

New Sydney planning regime takes shape

Breaking down the district planning process
that will guide the city’s productivity,
environmental management and liveability

The Greater Sydney Commission was created by the Baird Govern-
ment last year with the support of the ALP, but not the Greens. Its
primary task is to direct the planning of the Greater Sydney region,
comprised of six districts.

The Commission has not started with a blank page. The first
comprehensive plan for the region was the *County of Cumberland
Plan* (1948), followed by the *Sydney Region Outline Plan* (1968) and
Sydney Into Its Third Century (1988). There have been also several
iterations of the Sydney metropolitan plan over the past three
decades.

The goals of the most recent iteration, *A Plan for Growing Sydney*
(2014), are:

- a competitive economy with world-class services and transport;
- a city of housing choice, with homes that meet our needs
and lifestyles;
- a great place to live with communities that are strong, healthy
and well-connected; and
- a sustainable and resilient city that protects the natural
environment and has a balanced approach to the use of land
and resources.

The NSW Chapter was a strong advocate for regional planning in
Sydney during the consultation process for the O’Farrell Govern-
ment’s new planning legislation in 2012/2013, abandoned because of
the community backlash against code assessment. In advice to then
Planning Minister Pru Goward in 2014, we recommended the
Western Australian Planning Commission as an appropriate model
for the proposed Greater Sydney Commission.

The shape and functions of the Commission were in fact inspired
by the Greater London Council. But it has a number of unique
features and is therefore being watched with great interest by urban
planners around the world.

Commissioners

The first appointments to the Commission in December 2015 were
Lucy Turnbull as chief commissioner and three commissioners:

- Economic Commissioner Geoff Roberts (adjunct professor in the
City Futures Research Centre, University of NSW);
- Environment Commissioner Rod Simpson (architect and urban
designer, and associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture,

- Design and Planning at the University of Sydney); and
- Social Commissioner Heather Nesbitt (experience in social
sustainability, social housing, community infrastructure planning
and social impact assessment).

The Commission’s chief executive is Sarah Hill, former PIA NSW
president and Hill PDA director. The chief commissioner and CEO sit
on the Cabinet Infrastructure Committee and advise on infrastruc-
ture priorities for the Sydney region.

The Commission has an important cross-agency role. Its aim is
to cut through the bureaucratic silo mentality and incorporate the
planning work of key departments to create a better integrated
Greater Sydney. The secretaries of Transport for NSW, Planning
& Environment and Treasury are ex-officio members of the
Commission and agency officers from Infrastructure NSW, Educa-
tion, Health, UrbanGrowth NSW provide regular input into the
Commission’s work.

District commissioners

The Greater Sydney region has been split into six sub-regions,
known as districts. Each district encompasses a number of local
councils. The North and Central Districts are each comprised of
eleven former councils; the other four districts encompass three to
six councils. The six district commissioners, appointed early this
year, are:

- North: Dr Deborah Dearing (established the Urban Design
Advisory Service, followed by executive and urban design
positions with Stockland and the Sydney Harbour Foreshore
Authority. She was the Institute’s NSW president from 2005
to 2009)
- Central: Maria Atkinson (experience on not-for-profit international
institutions and Government boards and committees)
- West: Sean O’Toole (former managing director, Landcom)
- West Central: Professor Ed Blakely (honorary professor of urban
policy, United States Studies Centre, University of Sydney)
- South West: Sheridan Dudley (former general manager,
Camden Council)
- South: Hon Morris Iemma (former NSW premier)

Each district commissioner has been appointed for an initial
two-year period.



District plans

The first major task of the district commissioners is to coordinate the
preparation of a plan for their district. The plan-making functions of
the Department of Planning & Environment have been transferred to
the Commission for this purpose, but the Department retains
responsibility for State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs).

Each district plan will be high level in its scope. It will identify urban
growth centres and priority precincts, but not drill down into detailed
planning for each of them. In line with the broad goals of the metro-
politan plan, urban design amenity and quality will be key elements of
the plan. The Office of the Government Architect has already had
discussions with the district commissioners on this aspect of
the plan.

In a discussion with the NSW Chapter’s built environment
committee earlier this year Dr Dearing has emphasised that the
district plan making process is both bottom up and top down.
Councils’ existing strategic plans are useful reference tools that help
in determining priorities for the district in delivering on the goals of
A Plan for Growing Sydney. She has had several meetings with
council planners to determine the broad shape of the plan; she is
encouraging the councils to look broadly at the future shape of the
district as a whole.

Evidence-based planning

Robust data sets are being prepared to encourage evidence-based
district planning. The Commission has released the first studies that
provide details on how Sydney is working and the likely shape of
its future.

This suite of documents and reports was developed by the
Department of Planning and Environment and external consultants.
The reports provide facts and figures about each of the districts
and analyse the drivers and barriers to economic and employment
growth. Further studies will be added as the Commission’s
work proceeds.

Dr Dearing has said that ‘targets will be
established during the planning process;
they will be indicators, however, not an end
in themselves’. It is her hope that the district
plans will ‘set the scene for future policy and
initiatives that will result in the design and
development of great places with high
amenity, connectivity and liveability’

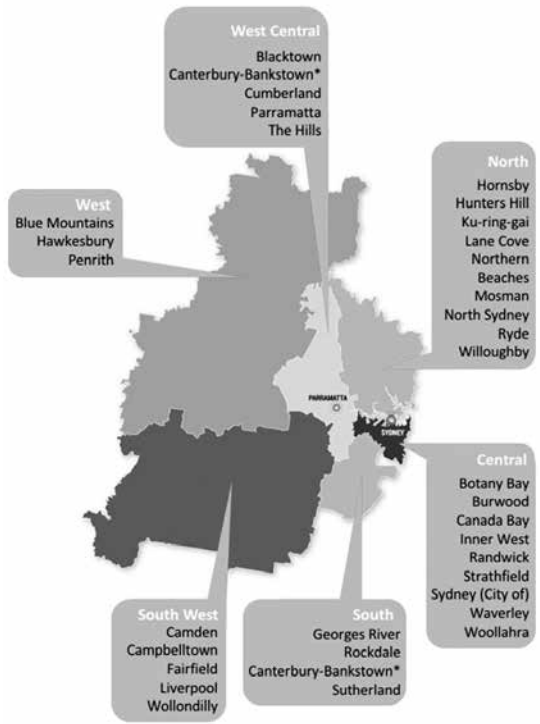
Community engagement

The development of the district plans is the first opportunity for the
Commission to demonstrate a collaborative approach to strategic
planning across Greater Sydney. District commissioners are
engaging with community groups, individuals and businesses,
as well as a range of State and Federal agencies and local councils,
to understand what people want for their district.

The Commission will share the reasons behind its plans and
priorities, and publish them on an online dashboard to monitor
progress and to make the planning process accountable to
the community.

The engagement program will raise people’s awareness of the
work to plan for long-term growth and will encourage people to
contribute to the process. The draft district plans will be released for
online comment and community engagement at the end of the year.

Dr Dearing has said that ‘targets will be established during the
planning process; they will be indicators, however, not an end in
themselves’. It is her hope that the district plans will ‘set the scene
for future policy and initiatives that will result in the design and
development of great places with high amenity, connectivity
and liveability.’



Development assessment

Following the development of the district plans the next major task of
the district commissioners is to manage the consideration of major
development projects as the chairs of the new Sydney planning
panels. The panels will replace the existing Sydney East and Sydney
West joint regional planning panels.

They will:

- determine regionally significant development applications
(generally development with a capital investment value of more
than \$20m) within the Greater Sydney Region; and
 - consider pre-gateway (rezoning) reviews, through which propo-
nents can request a review if a council decides not to support a
rezoning request or doesn’t make a determination within 90 days.
- These are the same functions carried out by the current joint regional
planning panels.

The City of Sydney will continue to be excluded from the operation of
the Sydney planning panels for the consideration of development
matters. The Central Sydney Planning Committee will continue to
operate as normal. Pre-gateway reviews for the City of Sydney will
continue to be undertaken by the Planning Assessment commission.

Each district commissioner will chair one of the six Sydney
planning panels. Each panel will include four expert members with
strategic and statutory planning expertise – two appointed by local
councils and two by the Government.

The panels will aim to improve decision-making time frames for
assessing regionally significant planning applications and reduce
pre-gateway or rezoning review timeframes to less than 90 days for
85% of requests.

Murray Brown is policy advisor at the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute
of Architects

Deborah Dearing photo by Quentin Jones. Courtesy Greater Sydney Commission

Greater Sydney Commission



In addition to the Chief Commissioner Lucy Turnbull, the three commissioners of the Greater Sydney Commission are Economic Commissioner Geoff Roberts, Social Commissioner Heather Nesbitt and Environment Commissioner Rod Simpson. The Institute’s NSW President Shaun Carter spoke to Rod about his role and the work of the Commission.

design-based placemaking is the future

Rod Simpson photo by Quentin Jones. Courtesy Greater Sydney Commission

Shaun Carter In his book, *The Nature of Urban Design*, Mayor Bloomberg’s former chief urban designer, Alexandros Washburn, says that economics, community and design, in equal measure, shape effective, resilient, equitable and well-designed cities. Your two fellow commissioners cover economics and community. Does this mean that your environment role also encompasses design?

Rod Simpson The overarching framework for the work of the three of us is sustainability. The way we’ve conceived sustainability is to break it into these three aspects – environment, economics and community – but in a broader conception there’s really five aspects to sustainability. The fourth aspect is culture and the fifth aspect is how we actually govern: how do we actually *deliver* sustainability? In other words, how do we engage with the community, what are the governance structures?

Regarding the end of your question, I think that I was appointed environment commissioner because I’m expected to bridge over into design.

I think it’s important to distinguish urban design or city design from architectural design or landscape design. I think it’s important to recognise the importance of design as a process as well as a product. The particular skills that we have as

designers are not only to think laterally but to join many different influences together into a coherent proposition. To my mind, that is our key and foremost skill.

How do we deal with the complexity, the mosaic of the city, the variation, the hyper-

diversity that we have in communities in Sydney? What sort of form of governance? What sort of design process? What sort of planning process do we need to put in place to actually give respect to that diversity and to realise its full potential?

We can’t simply have a top-down process in the way that we plan for those places. It also has to be localised, so that we produce urban quality as opposed to simply architectural excellence or design excellence.

I think that’s a very important distinction. We’re interested in the liveability of places, which then expands into issues of social equity. We’re interested in the social mix, the diversity of household types. These are the things that we recognise as making a place liveable, interesting and capable of further evolution and adaptation. The key challenge is: how do we imagine those places into the future?

On top of that we have architectural excellence. It would be a fundamental mistake, though, to rely on architectural excellence or the idea that panels that assess the design excellence of individual buildings are going to necessarily produce good cities. Urban quality, I think, needs to be the focus.

‘It would be a fundamental mistake to rely on architectural excellence or the idea that panels that assess the design excellence of individual buildings are going to necessarily produce good cities. Urban quality, I think, needs to be the focus.’

Design excellence is too late if you got the masterplan wrong?

We have to think of every place as being a system. It’s a social system, an environmental system; we’re also starting to think about green infrastructure.

How do all these things actually interact to create a sense of place but also to perform more efficiently? That’s very different. Not so much the masterplan but the urban proposition. What’s the affordability of living in that place? What are the daily patterns of living that are possible or not possible through that design? Actually thinking about that consciously ... that’s very different from simply architectural excellence.

Rod, thinking about these propositions, the great challenge is that you’ve got all these government department silos. So is your role to divert the agencies from this hegemony of specific thinking to embrace this complexity?

The way to cut through the silos is through place-based planning. What that means is that you have everyone engaged in a project to make a great place, recognising that everyone has a part to play.

It needs to be a collaborative, integrated design process. I think it’s also important to recognise that it happens already to a certain extent – with new motorway design for example. We can question motorways, but now we have them with some fantastic cycleways alongside. Conceivably, we can think of those as also being vegetation corridors. You can see how you can think about the infrastructure doing more than performing a single function.

The way that we’ve set up the planning system in the past, the way the land is subdivided, the way that we lay out streets, the variation in the size of lots, the way that large areas of commercial land might be handed over to a single developer ... we’ve set up a very efficient system to produce only one form of urbanism.

It’s possible to think about different ways of designing places by actually looking for evidence in the city that already exists. This isn’t theory, it’s simply a pure observation and understanding the underlying reason why the patterns of living are different. We can decode those very different patterns of living and then think about applying them in other places where the underlying conditions or potentials are similar.

It’s the idea of an open city. It’s the idea of being open ended. The design is never finished. In Sydney, the process that we’ve set up really tends towards completion of a project, as opposed to a proposition which is open ended and able to evolve and adapt over time.

Rod Simpson is also an associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Sydney and a founding partner of the architectural and urban design practice simpson+wilson.

The deal is the DNA of the project

the good governance imperative

We have historically looked to government to assume risk and planning control in building our cities. For example, the activation of the once dilapidated historic wharves at Walsh Bay into a thriving cultural and entertainment precinct demonstrates how multiple small decisions, brought together by a strategic vision, can incrementally bring about a successful result. Since initial remedial works were carried out on the piers of the wharves in 1983, to the present masterplan for Arts NSW, the culture-led regeneration has been open to contributions by multiple participants under the stewardship of guidelines and policies established by government, authority and tenant stakeholders.

Similarly, although in a much more heavy-handed manner, the Darling Harbour revitalisation in the late 1980s converted railway shunting yards into a conference, retail and recreation precinct. The whole process was undertaken with the active direction of then Minister for Public Works, Laurie Brereton.

In recent years, however, there has been a loss of public accountability and transparency as infrastructure and urban renewal projects have been packaged into profit-imperative, low risk, private sector business opportunities. Our primary decision-makers lean towards an opaque consortia of project financiers, builders and operators contracted to a governance framework characterised by varying levels of introversion, with a lack of public participation and accountability.

This new trend in the delivery of public infrastructure has led to mixed results. The least successful projects are mono-functional, generic and physically and socially disconnected from the surrounding urban context, whereas most successful urban regeneration projects are diverse, authentic and acknowledge their historical, cultural and urban context.

How we design the governance structure fundamentally affects how we design the deal. And how we design and structure the deal inevitably becomes the DNA of a project.

This is evident in the case of the Cross City Tunnel, undertaken as a public-private partnership

to be financed, designed, constructed, operated and returned to government. The project was to be delivered at no net cost to the public purse. This meant that any cost increases were passed onto the private consortium comprised of infrastructure and banking groups.

Whilst the government sought the best financial deal for the taxpayer, the interests of the public users of both the tunnel and alternative routes to the tunnel were jeopardised. This was evident in the high toll price and the prioritisation of tunnel mobility over surface accessibility. The outcome was public disillusionment and criticism of the government's role in the project. The private sector partner went into receivership and the project was sold a year after completion at a substantial loss.

How much discretion are deal-makers allowed to exercise? Our perception that planning is ad hoc, opaque and driven by private benefit is revealed in the subordination of a planned harbour foreshore park to an inferior inland pocket park at Barangaroo Central. In its final approval stage, the now approved casino tower received sustained criticism at public hearings before the independent Planning Assessment Commission. A decision made by a former government to pass legislation that specified the foreshore siting of the casino meant that subsequent attempts to redistribute the casino's substantial mass were thwarted.

The Crown Casino development was put to government as an unsolicited proposal. A proponent of a successful unsolicited proposal enters into a commercial relationship with the government outside of usual open tender processes. The proposal is assessed on the basis of uniqueness, value for money, whole of government impact, return on investment, capability, capacity, affordability and risk allocation. But an otherwise appropriate process-driven bias to mitigate financial risk does not appear to be balanced by a process-driven bias to engage with the public and to deliver public benefit. Financial return to government is only one component of the public benefit, particularly regarding the development of public foreshore land.



Where is the clearly defined framework to ensure that the public interest is addressed in these public-private deals? NSW governments tend to release only limited details of private partnerships, on the basis that the details are commercial-in-confidence. We need to ensure governance and commercial arrangements are transparent and that the community is well-informed and engaged. Disclosure of contracts and material variations is the minimum we should expect.

‘Success involves not only the mitigation of financial risk to taxpayers but a practice of openness and transparency leading to a sense of public ownership towards urban renewal. Iterative and incremental development should prevail over the wholesale closure of lands for development by a single player’

Australia's major cities are among the few in the developed world without metropolitan governments and the means for public involvement in planning, resource allocation and structural issues such as urban consolidation. State ministers should ideally set the policies that guide development of urban areas. But they should not be involved in routine assessment processes that can create conflict as political intent mixes with profit-driven urban renewal ambition. The loss of a planned foreshore park as a consequence of legislation approving the specific location of a restricted gaming venue is a case in point.

The creation of the Greater Sydney Commission and its relatively open district plan making process is a major step forward in establishing a new regime for developing the future of the metropolitan area from a regional perspective.

The success of current and future urban renewal projects depends on carefully designed governance, the inclusion of the public and multiple authors in all stages of planning, delivery and operation. Success involves not only the mitigation of financial risk to taxpayers but a practice of openness and transparency in greater public participation leading to a sense of public ownership towards varied, interconnected and engaging urban renewal. Iterative and incremental development within an agreed framework of project principles should prevail over the wholesale closure of lands for development by a single player.

Business as usual will always aim for the highest profits with the lowest risk, or, in the case of infrastructure, perform a narrow function and do little else. A better way to design the DNA of a project would be to establish a set of guiding principles which lead to fairer, diverse and accessible urban renewal. The process must be open to change, iterative and incremental, and should not have a fixed start and end state. The physical form and ownership pattern must be open and permeable, open to change and open to the contributions of many participants and residents over time.

The NSW government agency UrbanGrowth NSW announced in June that it would assume the role of master developer of the White Bay Power Station foreshore site. In doing so, it rejected the commercial and design driven bids of all invited private sector consortia to redevelop the site as a technology hub.

Viewed in the context of deep public mistrust that proper planning processes are being bypassed in favour of behind-the-door deals it might be inferred that the government is beginning to listen to the public in this apparent break from the business-as-usual development model. Let's watch this space. In anticipating a change in course, we must ask ourselves what type of city do we want, and for whose benefit.

Anton Kouzmin is principal of Anton Kouzmin Architecture and is a member of the Built Environment Committee of the AIA NSW Chapter

White Bay Power Station conceptual rendering. © UrbanGrowth NSW

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Designing Central Park, Chippendale



In the years between 2003 and 2009, the masterplan for Central Park, Chippendale authored through a joint venture between Tzannes Associates and Cox Richardson, guided the urban renewal of the Calton United Brewery (CUB) owned land in Chippendale.¹ In 2007, the CUB sold this land to Frasers Centrepont Limited (Frasers) and under the direction of Dr Stanley Quek of Frasers in 2009, Norman Foster + Partners authored amendments to the approved masterplan.² The new neighbourhood in Chippendale, named Central Park, is the result of the work embodied in the masterplan process. This is a brief account of the masterplan process and design framework that underpinned the urban renewal of land that has become the precinct of Central Park in Sydney.³

The early years

In 2003, CUB sold an option to Australand to develop their redundant Chippendale brewery manufacturing plant and offices. Australand appointed consultants and immediately commenced work on a masterplan for the site. By early 2004, frustrated by progress on the resolution of design issues related to the masterplan, Australand under pressure from the City of Sydney, agreed to undertake a relatively novel design process – a design excellence competition conceived and endorsed by relevant authorities, for the selection of the scheme and lead consultant to carry out the required masterplan services. In parallel, the City of Sydney elected a new Lord Mayor, Clover Moore and with the support of her team of Independents, new and strong views were expressed about Sydney guided by a political agenda reflected in the Independent’s slogan ‘city of villages’. It was clear from the onset of the design competition that the new political leaders of the City of Sydney had a distinct focus on urban issues, with the CUB site as one of the more significant urban renewal projects to be used as an exemplar of their political agenda.

The competition was held based on a brief that included a reference scheme by Hill Thalys, that predated the newly elected government of the City of Sydney. A distinguished competition jury selected the scheme by Tzannes Associates / Cox Richardson (TZA / COX) ranked ‘1’ with no declared winner as the outcome.^{4/5} Following this outcome and as suggested in the jury recommendations, TZA / COX were engaged by Australand to continue with the development of the masterplan. The jury report, amongst a range of observations and recommendations, signalled concerns over what was seen as the excessive height and density set by the competition brief as an important reason for not choosing a winning scheme.⁶ Similar issues fuelled community objections to the redevelopment of the site and were at the heart of the concerns of the popular Clover Moore led council. Australand and TZA / COX continued the masterplan process for 18 months until 2005 without certainty about the preferred density and a range of related design issues. As a consequence, Australand rescinded on the option to purchase the land from CUB at a significant commercial loss.

CUB took the option to proceed with the masterplaning process, appointing TZA / COX. In contrast to prevailing community and City of Sydney views, TZA / COX supported significant density on this land, given the excellent transport infrastructure at Central Station and Broadway, proximity to major education institutions and a long list of other community facilities. Simply put, TZA / COX argued that if reasonable levels of density could not be placed on this site the unanswerable question was: where else in the City of Sydney and beyond could it be put? The level of density that continued to be proposed at this time for the urban renewal of the site was consistent with the competition brief.

By 2006, the redevelopment of the land was experiencing further delays reflecting the City of Sydney and local community concerns about the scale and density of the development. In June 2006 the then minister for planning and former Lord Mayor, Frank Sartor declared the site of state significance. In the context of ongoing controversy, the CUB masterplan DA was finally lodged in October 2006 and approved by 2007. By September 2007, the site was sold to Frasers on the basis of the development potential described by the TZA / COX masterplan.



Urban design principles underpinning the 2007 masterplan

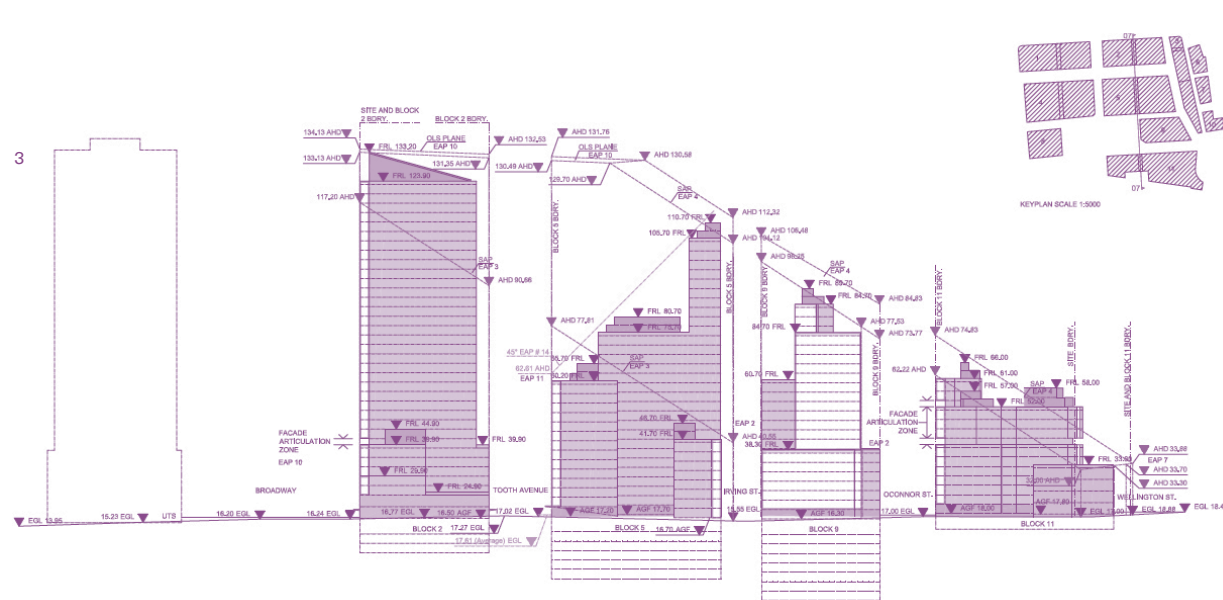
The urban design principles that underpin the TZA / COX masterplan are best understood by examining the development control drawings for the site. In these control drawings, the design of the public domain is given primacy. Development controls further reinforce the design of the public domain with measurable development requirements articulated in terms of the protection of public amenity.

The location of the park was reorientated from the Hill Thalys north–south axis to an east–west axis and relocated at the centre of the site to maximise its neighbourhood role and use, as well as to ensure the protection of heritage-listed subterranean drain infrastructure. The new park location was also placed to ensure all residents of Chippendale could now walk a similar distance not greater than 400 metres to any one of a number of public parks in the area. ‘Green fingers’ extending from the park completed the urban open space network by linking the park and major streets in the precinct through landscaping.

The second most important public domain element was the enhancement of Balfour Street to connect for the first time across the centre of the site on a north–south axis. Balfour Street became the only continuous link between Cleveland Street to the south and Broadway including the UTS campus, to the north. The extension of Balfour Street formed the primary urban structure of the blocks in the precinct and was conceived as major pedestrian-oriented experience crossing the new park and linking the major east–west vehicular streets to enhance retail opportunity and create exceptional residential addresses.

The neighbourhood streets beyond Broadway and Abercrombie Street were extended into the site to achieve an integrated street and lane network throughout Chippendale. The network of streets was calibrated to accommodate larger buildings primarily on Broadway and Abercrombie Street. The creation of Little Broadway, bookended by historic structures, was proposed as a pedestrian-focused and service road parallel to Broadway to enhance the potential of development on Broadway and to give a new experience for pedestrians. Little Broadway and Broadway framed the largest blocks with the greatest floor space and delivered the urban structure for the commercial heart of the precinct.

Kensington Street was identified as being at the heart of a distinctive precinct with the potential to become a



major pedestrian-orientated retail and food destination. High level of protection associated with the smaller scale, heritage-controlled buildings in this precinct was another important element of the masterplan. The conception of the Kensington Street precinct was also informed by its placement between Central Park and Central Station and linked to Broadway, the main pedestrian corridor associated with existing public transport infrastructure.

The open space network, including the park and street pattern, was established in conjunction with practical building envelopes. One of the most powerful built form controls was the mandatory regulation of solar access to public open space (see figure 3). Other more subtle built form controls to enhance livability and public amenity related to the circulation systems designed to minimise the negative impact of service vehicles, loading docks, on street locations for building services and above ground parking. Of primary concern was the allocation of floor space and land uses in a built form that both related to the scale and character of the historic Chippendale fabric and responded to the large-scale buildings of the UTS campus on Broadway. One of the objectives was to ameliorate the negative perceptions of the architecture of the UTS tower by placing this structure into a more sympathetic context (see figure 4). Finally, the masterplan sought lower carbon urban initiatives in the detailed design of its elements including water conservation and management, roof planting and façade planting as part of water filtration, cleaner energy supply, effective cold air drainage and wind management, and the minimisation of urban heat sink effects (see figure 2).

The 2009 amendment to the approved masterplan
After the approval of the masterplan, Frasers purchased the site. Frasers visionary and design-focused leader, Dr Stanley Quek, embarked on a mission to regain the confidence of the local community and the City of Sydney through commitments to design excellence and more environmentally sustainable urban development. He gained support from the City of Sydney for a blend of proven designers for commissioned works to enable an earlier start to the development process and committed to future design excellence competitions for the remaining parcels of land mostly located closer to the existing Chippendale neighbourhood borders to the south and west.

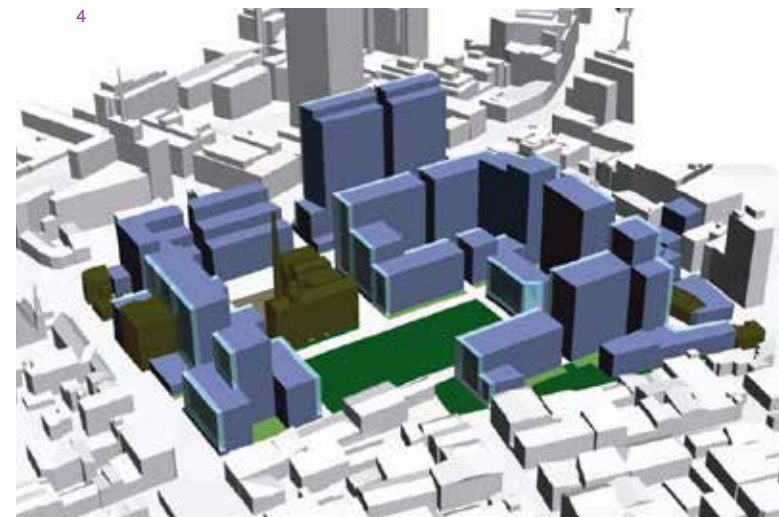
Frasers, noting the building footprints between Little Broadway and Broadway were at about 1,800 m², were concerned that an anticipated market for commercial uses targeting the banking sector required footprints at 2,000 to 2,500 m².

The requirement for an increase in the block dimensions for properties on Broadway was one of the most important drivers for the decision to review the masterplan and undertake a statutory amendment. Whilst there were a number of changes in the masterplan amendment, in many ways the change of greatest impact from an urban design perspective was to the street and block pattern. The proposed new street parallel with Broadway, Little Broadway, was moved further to the south and the proposed vehicular connection to Abercrombie Street downgraded to a through site pedestrian link. These changes enabled the requisite increase to the building footprints, setting off a suite of other related but relatively minor changes to the approved masterplan (see figure 5).

Central Park today
The implementation of the masterplan for Central Park by Frasers, and (from 2011) their joint venture partner Sekisui House Australia, is sufficiently advanced to reflect on the design principles that guided the development process.

The density proposed in the preferred competition scheme and subsequently exceeded by a relatively small amount in the amended masterplan is now generally accepted as appropriate for the site. This is evidence of the prescient nature of the original competition brief prepared by Hill Thalís for the City of Sydney. The design of the public domain and built form outcome as proposed by the masterplan has also generally been accepted as appropriate to the location and related infrastructure of Sydney.

Overall, the emphasis in the masterplan (including the amendment) on the design of the public domain has delivered a successful public domain outcome. Measurable amenity requirements for the public and private domain have been sufficiently practical and robust to enable a masterplan statutory amendment to be undertaken without major negative impacts on the original masterplan concept. The primary impact of the amendment to the masterplan was to reduce connectivity in the road and lane network arguably to the detriment of the



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amenity of the public domain. The level of connectivity has not significantly compromised the overall positive urban experience within the precinct, with the possible exception of the loss of Little Broadway including the impacts on the blocks linked to Broadway. Little Broadway, aligned with the axis of Broadway and Central Park, connected all the primary heritage elements within the precinct between Kensington Street and Abercrombie Street in a tree lined avenue form.

One less obvious consequence of the amendments to the street and block design is built-form outcomes at the boundaries of the site that are less related to the bulk, scale and character of the buildings within the adjacent

‘The commitment by the property owners to support good design in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture and engineering, including the implementation of lower carbon energy systems as well as high-quality urban art, has greatly enhanced the masterplan proposition as a built outcome’

Chippendale neighbourhood to the south, north and west. This outcome also contributes to Central Park as a precinct being more distinctive than the original masterplan envisaged as a special place in Sydney, to provide compensating urban benefits.

Broadway is improved as a pedestrian experience. The negative effects of the UTS tower have been ameliorated. The park and open space network including

the Kensington Street precinct have already established themselves as special places in Sydney and there is a general uplift in value, both material and cultural, throughout Chippendale as a direct consequence of the masterplan.

The commitment by the property owners to support good design in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture and engineering, including the implementation of lower carbon energy systems as well as high-quality urban art, has greatly enhanced the masterplan proposition as a built outcome. This level of commitment to design excellence is relatively rare within the City of Sydney at precinct scale.

Overall the masterplan appears to have been a useful instrument to guide and control development with the high standard of realisation in design. This is a credit to the site owners, including their collaboration with the City of Sydney and the broader community.

Alec Tzannes is founding director of TZANNES and emeritus professor at UNSW Built Environment

- NOTES**
- 1 Masterplan project team for Central Park, Chippendale (2003–09): Tzannes Associates: Directed by Alec Tzannes and Peter John Cantrill. Team: Allison Cronin, Adam Brewer, Amy Cruikshank, Julia Simpson, Natalie Bracar, Nigel Sampson, Robert Kite, Neil Haybittel. Cox Richardson: Directed by John Richardson and Nick Tyrell. Team: Michael Grave, Oleksandra Babych, Janet Vogels, Natalja Bartonez, Yue Wu, Kristen Neise, Belinda Hopkins, Deborah Young. Landscape Architect (Sue Barnsley), Statutory Planning (JBA Planning), Community Consultation (Elton Consultation), Retail Advisor (Bonnetin Chapman), Commercial Advisor (CBR, JLLS, Colliers, Knight Frank), Civil & Road Engineering (Robert Bird Group), Environmental, Geotechnical, Hydrogeological (URS), Structural Engineering (TTW, Arup Structures, PDR Smart Structures), Services Engineering (Lincolne Scott / AEC, NDY), Water Sensitive Urban Design (Ecological Engineering), Heritage/Archaeology/Industrial Archaeology (Godan Mackay Logan), Access/Traffic (Masson Wilson Twiney), Waste Management & Recycling (Evans & Peck), Accessibility (WHP Architects, Access Associates, Morris Goding), Energy Efficiency (Heggies Australia, NDY, Lincolne Scott / AEC), Wind, Reflectivity & Acoustics/Daylighting (Heggies Australia), Shadow Studies (JIM Computer Modelling), Photomontages/Perspectives (Haycraft Dulo), Modelmaking (Modelcraft), Surveyor (Cadastral – Degotardi Smith, Physical – Denny Linker & Co), Legal (Corrs), Heritage View Analysis (Richard Lamb & Associates), Solar Expert (Associate Director/Centre for Sustainable Built Environment UNSW).
 - 2 This work was led by David Nelson from Norman Foster + Partners. The full team is not credited. Tzannes Associates (Alec Tzannes) provided supporting advice.
 - 3 Central Park development timeline, designed by Dr Phillippa Carnemolla for the UNSW Built Environment Massive Open Online Course ‘Re-enchanting the City’ on FutureLearn, directed by Associate Professor Oya Demirbilek. <http://tzannes.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Central-Park-Timeline.pdf>
 - 4 Competition jury: Graham Jahn (Chair), Russell Barnes, Keith Cottier, Richard Johnson, Robert Nation, Professor James Weirick. Refer to the competition jury report for the Carlton United Brewery Site (Balfour Park) design excellence competition. <http://tzannes.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CUB-SITE-JURY-REPORT-2004.pdf>
 - 5 Other competition participants: ARM, Bates Smart, FJMT, HASSELL.
 - 6 The design concept within the brief was prepared by Hill Thalís.

All images courtesy TZANNES, Cox Richardson and Sue Barnsley Design:
1 Photomontage of Central Park completed. Image by Haycraft Deloy
2 Masterplan: design intent illustration
3 Masterplan: example of solar access controls
4 Masterplan: built form concept
5 Amended masterplan: open space network

Here is a small water inlet or cove symbolically entering the heart of the city, guarded on one side by the huge arch of the Harbour Bridge, and on the other by the unique form of the Opera House: the one, impressive for its monumental scale and simple form, and the other, with its headland-like base and sail-like vaults, capturing the spirit of the Harbour and the imagination of the world.

Elias Duek-Cohen, 1983

Circular Quay



architectural views and visions

Any final urban design proposals for Circular Quay should properly be the subject of national or international competition. This site, between the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge, is second to none in our city, and demands no less than such a public resolution.

Ken Maher, 1983

What our current national president said 33 years ago still holds true today. The significance of Circular Quay as a place is without parallel in the whole of Australia. From the New Year’s Eve celebrations to the Vivid Festival it is the place we are drawn to for public celebrations in our city. As St Mark’s Square in Venice is the ‘drawing room of Europe’, Circular Quay is Australia’s maritime meeting place and promenade, a multi-mode transport hub where commuters and travellers arrive and depart against the unchanging backdrop of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

It is equally true that built-form interventions in this place give rise to heated debate, both within our

profession and in the wider community. This again confirms the significance of the place, our attachment to it and our constant desire for it to be better.

The most significant changes to the place since the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 took place in the late 1950s:

- January 1956: Circular Quay Railway Station
- January 1957: Jørn Utzon wins the architectural competition for the Sydney Opera House
- March 1958: elevated section of the Cahill Expressway

The announcement of new designs for the wharves and boardwalk by Premier Baird in September last year was just the most recent of many attempts – some integrated but many piecemeal – that successive governments have made to improve the urban design quality of the precinct. Because the precinct can be perceived even by the casual visitor as an integrated whole, any attempt to improve part of it inevitably gives rise to calls for wholesale improvement and particularly renewed clamour for the removal of the elevated expressway.

But attempts to create a more unified precinct inevitably run up against the bewildering array of government and private interests with a stake in the future of the place. For example, despite the universally acknowledged historical and heritage significance of Circular Quay to all Australians – Aboriginal, long-term residents and recent arrivals alike – it has never been possible to develop a comprehensive conservation management plan for the precinct.

As Andrew Nimmo wrote 13 years ago in *Architecture Australia*:

Perhaps the root of Circular Quay’s problems lies in the way in which the responsibilities for decision making are divided amongst various groups that each have vested interests. Concentrated and layered within the Quay is perhaps the most complex array of problematic stakeholders that could be contemplated. While there appears to be considerable goodwill amongst these stakeholders to improve the Quay, there is actually no single authority who has the responsibility for the entire Quay. ...

Major design initiatives at the Quay are generated at the political level when there is a perceived need for an upgrade, such as in the lead up to 1988 and 2000. In both cases the Government Architect managed the upgrade works, and battled as best it could through the long-winded process of stakeholder approvals. ... Each clean-up will be tempered with the flavour of its time, as part of the general circular nature of design conformities. So along with the predictable build-up of accretions that must be chipped away, like barnacles from a boat, there will also be a ritual removal of items from the previous ‘clean-up’ that are no longer viewed in a positive design light.

For anything visionary and lasting to ever happen at Circular Quay (and that is not to say that anything visionary is actually required), there would need to be a change in how decisions are made regarding the Quay. Otherwise ‘tinkering’ will continue to be the fate of the Quay. – *Architecture Australia*, May 2003

As well as Nimmo in the Institute’s national publication, several Institute alumni have weighed into debates about the urban design of this precinct in the pages of *Architecture Bulletin* over the years.

But undoubtedly the high water mark in the Institute’s involvement in the future of the precinct was reached during Chris Johnson’s presidency in 1983. The phenomenal level of Institute activity during this period included:

- an ideas competition for the Gateway site at 1 Macquarie Place organised by the Institute following the designation of this site for a major development – 92 submissions were reduced to eight finalists for presentation to the City of Sydney and a public exhibition of entries was held at the AMP building;
- the *Quay Visions* exhibition and associated book (edited by Ken Maher), which included articles on the history and planning of the precinct and 15 ‘visions’ for the future invited from practices ranging from Peter Myers and Richard Leplastrier to Ken Woolley, Conybeare Morrison, Philip Cox and the Public Works finalists in the Gateway competition;
- the ‘Conflict’ conference jointly presented by the Institute and Commonwealth Association of Architects that included a number of presentations on the future design of Circular Quay; and
- a second ideas competition by the Institute for the Overseas Passenger Terminal.

The *Quay Visions* project in particular flushed out some pithy principles for the future planning of the precinct that are relevant to this day, none more succinct than those of Neville Quarry and Francisco Urbina: throw out the clutter, invoke new forms, restore real public uses, create accessible public monuments and recapture confidence.

A complementary list was proposed by author and journalist Craig McGregor in the booklet: give people access to the harbour, make the railway transparent, keep the Quay maritime and keep it lively.

Taken together, these provide a useful first principles prescription for architects and planners today. As McGregor says: ‘the principles are more important than the plan’.

What does the future hold for Circular Quay? Where is the comprehensive plan that builds on the impressive work by the Government Architect’s Office in 1988 and 2000 to strengthen its unified sense of place and remove the accretions of the last 15 years?

- We know there is a lot going on:
- upgrading of the Gateway building at 1 Macquarie Place, including three revitalised lower levels for food and beverage outlets (Woods Bagot);
 - redevelopment of the AMP’s property holdings in the precinct to a Quay Quarter Sydney masterplan by 3XN, including a 49-storey tower at 50 Bridge Street (3XN & BVN) and connecting interface to the shorter tower at 33 Alfred Street (JPW), new development at 2–10 (Make Architecture) and 16–20 (Silvester Fuller) Loftus Street, 9–17 Young Street (SJB) the conversion of the former Hinchcliff Wool Store, 5–7 Young Street (carterwilliamson), into a retail building and public domain design by Aspect Studios;

- replacement of the Coca-Cola Amatil building by an apartment and hotel development (TZANNES) that also completes the East Circular Quay promenade;
- replacement of Gold Fields House by a residential tower and hotel (Kerry Hill Architects, Kengo Kuma & Crone Partners), laneways, new open spaces and pedestrian thoroughfares;
- Lend Lease redevelopments at 174–176 George Street and 33–35 Pitt Street including a 220 metre-high commercial office tower, with additional low-scale buildings, a public plaza directly accessible from George Street, a secondary plaza space on Rugby Lane and a pedestrian bridge link from the primary plaza to the commercial office tower podium; and
- redesign of the Circular Quay wharves by the NSW state government (Woods Bagot).

In addition, the draft *Central Sydney Planning Strategy* unveiled at the City of Sydney’s Transport, Heritage and Planning Sub-committee meeting in July includes a proposal for three new squares at Central, Town Hall and Circular Quay. The Circular Quay square will convert Alfred Street into a fully pedestrian precinct from George Street in the west and along the southern façade of the Circular Quay Railway Station to Young Street in the east.

But all this activity begs the overarching questions: What is the precinct masterplan underlying all this private and public investment? What are the associated public domain improvements? How are they to be knitted together into an integrated whole?

In recent years the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, in association with other government organisations, has developed an urban design strategy to reduce clutter and re-unify the precinct under its management. But not only does this plan apply only to that part of the precinct north of Alfred Street, it hasn’t been released to the public, nor has there been any progress towards its implementation.

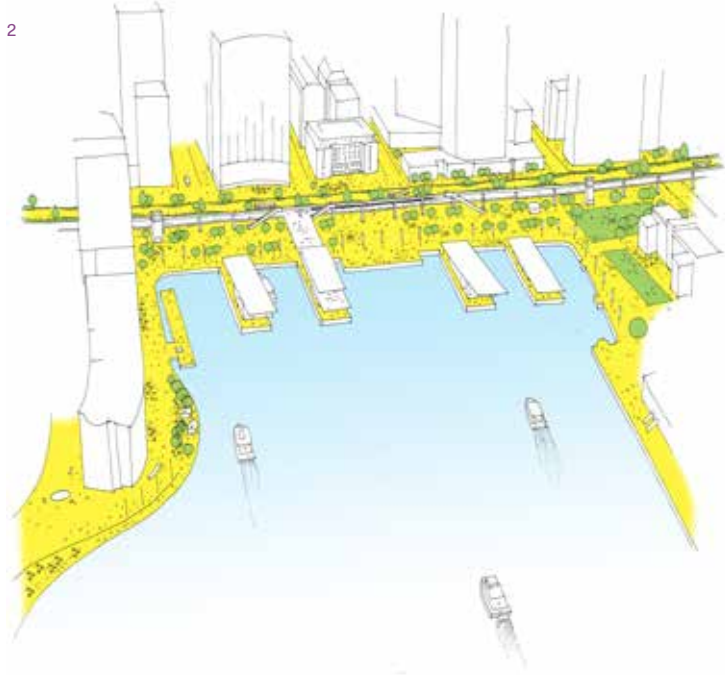
So where do we go from here? Have we arrived at another 1983 moment where the Institute, acting as an impartial but committed corporate citizen, could convene a discussion of all the precinct players to reach agreement on the broad principles to govern the future of the precinct?

We did it once. Can we do it again?

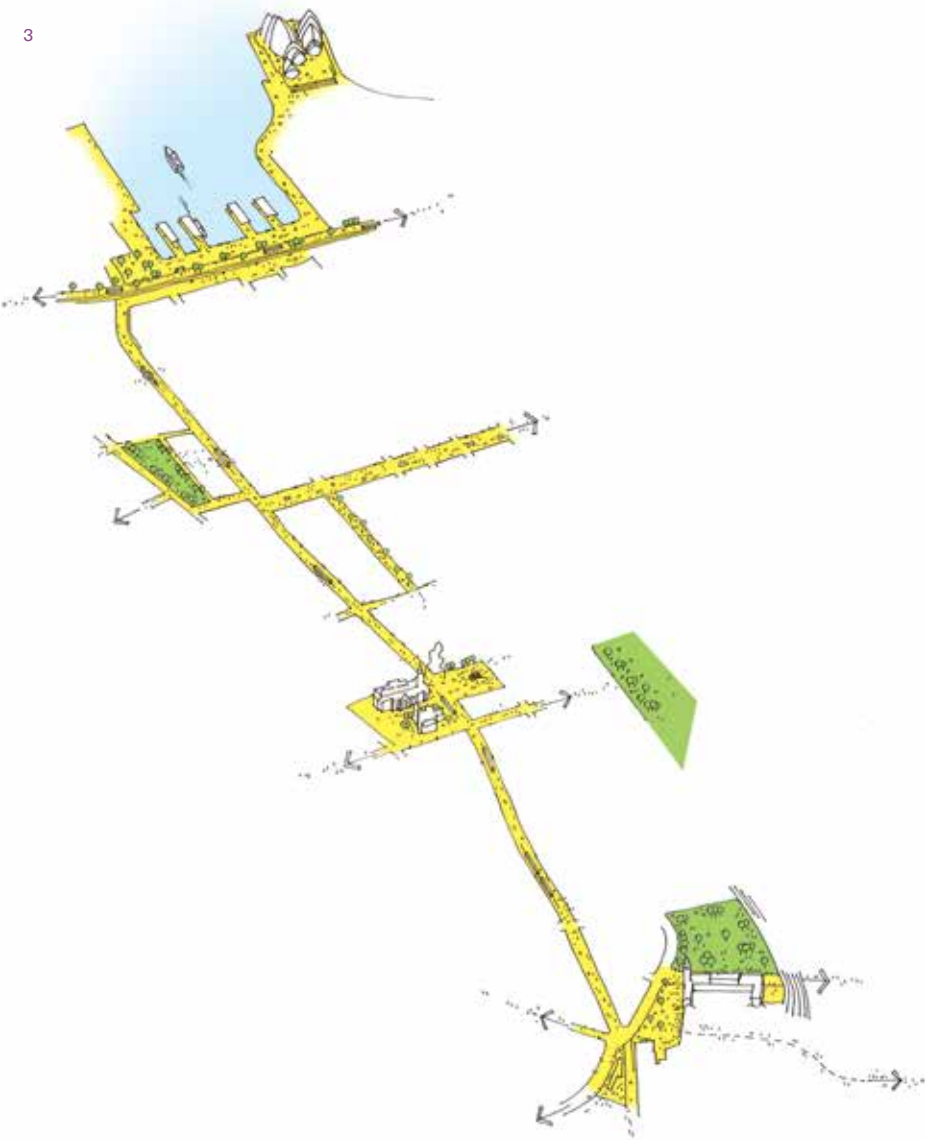
Murray Brown is policy advisor at the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects

1 Circular Quay image: airviewonline.com

2–3 Implementation images from the draft *Central Sydney Planning Strategy* (City of Sydney, 2016). ‘Catalytic project ideas to facilitate growth’ include holding an open international design competition for Circular Quay Station, Cahill Expressway bus interchange, ferry wharves and a new square (top); and extending George Street pedestrianisation to Circular Quay and Railway Square (left). Concept drawings by Stewart Hollenstein. Courtesy City of Sydney



‘What does the future hold for Circular Quay? Where is the comprehensive plan that builds on the impressive work by the Government Architect’s Office in 1988 and 2000 to strengthen its unified sense of place and remove the accretions of the last 15 years?’



Research Landscape, architectural and planning innovations in university campuses
Andrew Saniga, Rob Freestone and Cameron Logan

Campus

building modern Australian universities



The commitment to the environmental quality of university campuses is central to the contemporary tertiary education experience and represents a growing multi-million dollar public investment in higher education infrastructure. In the decades post-World War II, campus development created unprecedented opportunities for experimental and influential planning, architectural and landscape design across Australia. Yet the origins of Australian campus design, its built legacies and ongoing challenges, have attracted little scholarly research.

A new Australian Research Council-funded research project led by Dr Andrew Saniga of the University of Melbourne addresses that oversight by seeking to acknowledge and learn from past and present innovative design strategies that will help frame vital choices and challenges for the future. There are many stories and lessons to be captured at a national scale.

The project has four main aims:

1. To understand the physical design of modern Australian campuses as sites of experimentation at the intersection of educational programs and institutional ideals of universities on the one hand, and broader national imperatives, environmental contexts and design trends on the other.
2. To document and analyse the landscape, architectural and planning innovations that have shaped university campus development in Australia from 1950 to the present day through comparative national and international themes, a categorisation of types and in-depth case studies.
3. To create a vivid picture of the physical attributes of campuses as ensembles of landscape and buildings by recording and comparing design ideas and spatial morphologies using innovative digital visualisation and web-based dissemination tools.
4. To develop new national and comparative knowledge to help guide current and future campus planning, management and conservation informed by an historical perspective.

Across the postwar decades, some clear patterns in Australian campus design begin to emerge. Architect/planners such as Wally Abraham (Macquarie University, NSW) and Roy Simpson (La Trobe University, Victoria) tapped into international trends in architectural expression – especially a late modernist concern with bold form and rough-hewn materiality. A push for natural landscape plans carried undertones of cultural nationalism. At Melbourne’s Monash

University, the landscape ensemble reflected an expanding use of native plant materials and ecological conservation a little at odds with the ambitions of Bates Smart and McCutcheon to create a modernist campus setting looking to the Dandenong Ranges. Monash’s Robert Menzies School of Humanities Building, designed by Eggleston, Macdonald and Secomb (1961–65) was bold in form and became a striking eleven-storey landmark on the fringe of Melbourne’s suburbs, which until then had been the domain of orchards and pasture but were quickly becoming caked in 1960s suburbia. The ‘Ming Wing’, as the building was labelled, helped set a visually brutal backdrop for student protest which helped define Monash as a centre for radicalism in Australia. Exploring such interactions between international design trends and local motifs is at the heart of our research.

This three-year interdisciplinary project will be the first comprehensive and national historical examination of the evolution of Australian campus design analysed through the disciplines of landscape, architecture and planning. Thematic investigations and detailed case studies will focus on design responses to governmental, institutional, cultural, environmental and strategic shifts and demands. The study is timely and significant, not only to produce new historical understandings but also to show how campuses can be developed, adapted and managed to meet future needs in sustaining a vital tertiary education sector.

A major co-authored publication on the modern campus in Australia is envisaged along with journal articles and conference papers along the way. A practitioner-focused workshop with key campus managers, designers, planners and heritage consultants is planned. A project website will be established as a mode of dissemination and communication of progress and outcomes, including published papers, digitised resources and analyses of campus plans.

Central Courtyard at Macquarie University, Sydney. Photo: Andrew Saniga

AUSTRALIA RESEARCH COUNCIL DISCOVERY PROJECT
Dr Andrew Saniga, University of Melbourne
Professor Robert Freestone, University of New South Wales
Associate Professor Christine Garnaut, University of South Australia
Professor Philip Goad, University of Melbourne
Dr Susan Holden, University of Queensland
Associate Professor Hannah Lewi, University of Melbourne
Dr Cameron Logan, University of Sydney

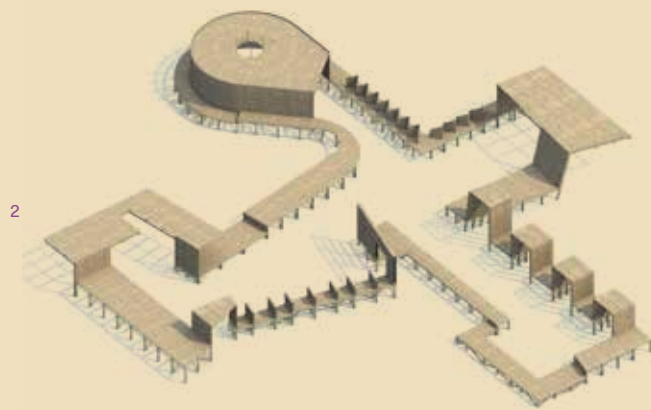


The evolving Australian university campus

There is a significant and very fruitful placemaking contest under way between our universities as they seek to attract the best academics, researchers and students; some are also targeting the lucrative market for international students. Strong trends are developing around ‘student focused experience’. The exciting thing for our profession is that so much of the transformation is about the quality of experience and space. Distinct strategies being deployed are:

- new campuses in the CBD;
- increased intensity of activity within existing campuses;
- design for a laid-back student experience; and
- fundraising through trusts and foundations

The older universities are playing to their strengths (heritage, ivy and stone), their strong brands and their prestigious and wealthy alumni. Their corporate strategies include growing funds for capital works programs –



what Americans call ‘endowments’, Australians refer to as ‘corpus’. Sydney University’s recent fundraising drive overshot the \$500m target by \$150m. Melbourne University has set the target of its current campaign even higher: one billion dollars.

The newer universities, many with sparsely-developed campuses and brutalist buildings, are now building to a critical mass to make them more active and engaging for their students. After years of working in hard mid-20th century buildings and trying to negotiate confusing non-rectilinear master plans, students are now choosing to occupy some really good buildings that feature street-like avenues and promenades, entries with places to hang out and interiors with warmth and interest.

The new kind of space emerging on our campuses is a far cry from the hushed library cubicle or the solitary desk-by-the-window in students’ bedrooms. Is it a cafe? Is it a meeting or a lounge room? Is it a nightclub? These types of stimulating campus environments have become the norm for many students.

Our universities are developing some innovative examples of this new type of space with a variety of quite distinct strategies. For example, the University of Newcastle (UoN) is trialling a set of temporary spaces on the Callaghan Campus, using different configurations to see what works best. The findings of this ‘architectural experiment’ will guide the large-scale rollout of its capital works program.

At the Australian National University (ANU) the College of Business and Economics Building has largely given its first two floors over to group workspace. The entry level (Melinda Dodson Architects) houses a busy café, designed as an inviting congregation space for students to informally meet and study. A foyer upgrade achieved this by inserting the new café into the existing and underutilised kitchenette, creating an outdoor seating area and dappled seating throughout the ground floor. A mezzanine includes technology-enabled group workspaces, with large screens, meeting tables and whiteboards. The design sits within a wider strategy to facilitate incidental interaction between researchers, academics and students by bringing them under one roof and creating spaces for encounters.

Macquarie University has adopted a slightly different strategy in its old concrete library building (NSW Government Architect Edward Farmer, 1966). Since it has a new library, the old one is now reconfigured as a flexible student-focused learning, group work and hangout space. The hard frame of the old building remains, now colonised by a series of funky spaces – each by a different architecture firm: Bennett and Trimble, Woods Bagot, Budden Nangle Michael & Hudson and NBRS + Partners. These are spaces that students make into their own domain: working in groups, chatting, working quietly or sleeping. The whole reconfiguration is branded as ‘MUSE’.

Universities are also playing to the competitive strengths of their location. UoN is taking advantage of Newcastle’s ‘Surf City’ identity: its most significant investment is in the new CBD campus at Civic (HASSELL). Students at this campus are able to experience the full range of the city’s attractions: close to the surf, the alternative cafes and small bars, the Civic Theatre and the new Justice Precinct. There are also inexpensive but hip shared accommodation options nearby.

UoN & ANU have both had significant success in building student accommodation close to their campuses. In the case of UoN, the new student accommodation precinct at Callahan has helped to create round-the-clock activity at a campus in a sleepy suburban and bushland setting. For ANU, two significant accommodation blocks managed by UniLodge have been placed between the Canberra CBD and their campus. These ‘stitch together’ the campus and the city. The strategy works for the university, and to have a major landowner/ developer (ANU) causing intensification and improved public domain is a boon for the city. New grocery stores, small restaurants and bars are springing up in response to the new street-level activity generated by ANU.

Universities have long been places where culture is tested, challenged and made. In recent years, there has been a sustained education boom, an education export boom, strong alumni foundations and an alignment of private corporate capital. These are land-rich and well-resourced institutions with long-term strategies and stable, centralised control.

The key change between old and new campuses is that in the 20th century the campus was a city ‘workplace’ and students and staff were ‘commuters’ from elsewhere; today it appears that the campus is the precursor of the joined-up city where students are both residents and workers in the same place. Architecture and design are being deployed to make that a physical reality.

New approaches to placemaking mean that these competitive and responsive institutions are blurring the traditional lines between ‘campus’ & ‘urban’. Interesting and open architectural design briefs for student-focused spaces are producing spaces that are quite new. These factors combine to make universities a great theatre of design in our time.

Paul Walter is director at Atlas Urban Design & Strategy and chair of the Built Environment Committee, NSW Chapter, AIA

1-2 Macquarie University Spatial Experience (MUSE) is a series of learning spaces in the former library building that can accommodate multiple ways of student workplaces. Bennett and Trimble were one of four architects engaged. Photo: Peter Bennetts / Desk axonometric: Bennett and Trimble

3 Also as part of MUSE, Woods Bagot designed flexible spaces that facilitate a technologically-enabled, fluid mode of social learning and collaboration, using walls, lighting tracks and raw/recycled materials





George Street Living Room

Placemaking is a strategic process guided by local communities and grounded on ownership. Success lies in a project’s ability to strategically combine analysis with the knowledge and aspirations of a community into a shared vision for a given place.

Tactical urbanism, on the other hand, achieves maximum short-term impact by being flexible, cheap and achievable. While the implementation of these initiatives may be low cost, considerable investment in proper consultation processes is needed to drive them. In many cases participating consultants working on these projects can be poorly paid or they may rely solely on volunteers. It is easy enough to quantify the aesthetic and the product but how do we also quantify the importance of these processes?

Last year, the Urban Land Institute Asia Pacific Chapter launched its inaugural Urban Innovations idea competition ‘George Street 2020’. The brief was to deliver an innovative proposal for George Street once the light rail and pedestrianisation had taken hold. Albert Quizon and I were lucky enough to offer the winning scheme and it was these ideas that became the key driver for our submission. Our aim was to offer a democratic public space for the city that delivers a variety of social infrastructure types that create diversity. As a benchmark, we selected the two user groups to which cities are infamously hostile: children and the less mobile. We aimed to balance the impermanence and testing that are fundamental to tactical urbanism with the authenticity and ownership achieved by real placemaking, and at the same time adding significantly to the social infrastructure of the street.

2015 was a prolific year for initiatives of this type: MOMA’s architecture exhibition *Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms* for

Expanding Megacities in New York reframed interventionist projects as ‘an alternative to neo-liberal urbanism’; Assemble Studios won the Turner Prize, Britain’s most prestigious art award; and Newcastle’s very own Marcus Westbury, founder of Renew Australia, was busy crowdfunding his book *Creating Cities*.

In the same year, Sydney-based Place Partners launched *Oxford Street Activators* in the wake of Oxford Street’s continuing struggle to rediscover the vibrancy of the 1970s and 80s as a result of the lockout laws. Working with local businesses and residents, the project aims to heighten community activity in the area through crowdfunding and workshop sessions. Their current projects *Oxford Stories* and *Oxford Galley* include partnerships with the UNSW, Laneway Learning, Work-Shop, Gap Filler and Art and About. *Oxford Stories* presents musings about the area and its history through art installations; *Oxford Galley* takes advantage of empty or underutilised shop fronts to create sites for temporary installations that are helping to rebuild the local gallery scene.

Starting in 2013, the Park to Pacific project had been using temporary projects to develop a movement that stretches from Centennial Park to Clovelly Beach, envisioning Clovelly Road ‘as a greener, safer and more sustainable street’.

The parklet concept is one of the most well-known progeny of a movement made famous by the Rebar team in San Francisco (who have since joined Gehl Architects) and which went global through *Park-ing Day*. In Glebe, due to the hard work of urbanist Elise O’Ryan and Chamber of Commerce President Kris Spann, parklets have now been seen in six different locations as part of a study that relies heavily on manual counting and surveys as a means of estimating the public benefit of urban design initiatives though quantifiable data. This type of data collection operates in a similar way to the methods

of internationally renowned placemakers Gehl Architects (authors of the George Street Concept Design and Urban Design Strategy for Sydney). The process is rigorous, organisationally complex and time-consuming with a heavy reliance on volunteers.

Our shortlisted proposal for stage one of George Street 2020, was a simple suite of plug and play furniture elements, a kit-of-parts that targeted specific ages and demographics and urban social situations that could be installed to respond to the light rail construction timetable, yet also change in accordance with the city’s needs. But how could we two twenty-somethings design on behalf of children and the less mobile? Even if we ran a small-scale consultation, our response would be static: once we tested them, how could we know if our targets are reached? It was these questions that enabled the design to evolve from a fixed, top-down design solution to the design of a system that would allow George Street to reimagine itself, set targets, measure feedback and achieve the targets.

The catalyst for this transition was a session with one of our mentors Bruce Taper of Kinesis, a data-led sustainability and strategic urban design consultancy that aims to make cities more resilient, productive and sustainable. The notion was: if we have smart cities, why can’t we have smart public spaces? To enable this, our kit-of-parts furniture system was refined and broken down further so that it could be assembled and disassembled like Lego, to offer an endless number of configurations for different uses and users.

Secondly, we developed an underlying ‘services carpet’ consisting of paving modules arranged along a pixel grid not unlike the cobblestone streets of old Sydney. These modules use low-tech pressure sensors to gather footfall data, which can then be collected, analysed and interpreted. The types of software capable of analysing these types of data sets are already in use by the City of Sydney through Kinesis. The interaction between these two systems – the kit-of-parts ‘living furniture’ and the ‘smart carpet’ – would establish a positive feedback loop in which ideas about our urban spaces could be designed, implemented, analysed and refined in a continuous improvement process. This real-time feedback mechanism could make George Street a street that learns from itself, responds to public input and communicates intelligently with its stakeholders and the council on how to collectively maintain and improve the health of our public space.

The aim of the kit-of-parts was then to create maximum flexibility and design to traditional measurements with even increments: the step, the seat, the table, the countertop, the canopy, the umbrella; working with a range of additional plug-in mechanisms, bespoke play equipment and configuration, handrails, backrests, bike racks, outdoor libraries, planters, free wi-fi and power-fitted benches for outdoor classrooms and working scenarios. Each will fit within a simple aesthetic framework that interacts with Sydney’s existing and future icons – the Opera House and Junya Ishigami’s *Cloud Arch* over George Street – while aiming to minimise street clutter.

Oddly enough, a precedent for this concept came from the universal shopping centre, the traditional nemesis of the urbanist cohort. To companies like Westfield, the idea of tracking customer movements with infrared cameras or wi-fi mobile signals is nothing new. The analytical insights generated by this technology enable

‘The interaction between these two systems – the kit-of-parts ‘living furniture’ and the ‘smart carpet’ – would establish a real-time feedback mechanism that could make George Street a street that learns from itself, responds to public input and communicates intelligently with its stakeholders and the council on how to collectively maintain and improve the health of our public space’

retailers to understand their customers: where they spend time and how long they pause at a single display. This is a feedback process that can result in the remodelling of whole stores.

So our shopping centres have learnt and leveraged the power of flexibility and testing. There are, however, some major red flags raised when translating these tracking mechanisms into the design of public space, primarily regarding the issue of privacy. In addition, the use of wi-fi tracking can miss large sectors of the very demographics our project intended to target, in particular, the very young. Our project therefore opted for an alternative approach used though the paving. This would allow the public to vote with their feet, continually propose and test new social interventions and learn from them in real time. To navigate and translate the data into useable information, an online platform would become a shared resource communicating with the council, stakeholders and the public for ongoing consultation and real-time updates.

The value of the data itself also allowed the project to generate income as a way of securing the financial sustainability of costly exercises such as regular transformations. For example, perhaps urban-focused research institutions could ‘rent’ portions of George St to gather high fidelity data on new urban interventions. Corporations could test event-based marketing strategies, while local businesses could pay for access to the data to better understand their customer’s preferences. The data could also allow the council to optimise its resource allocation, adjusting the level of maintenance personnel response, based on intensity of use. Flexible street use arrangements could be developed with small businesses, allowing extra commercial capacity during off-peak pedestrian times. Finally, the data generated could be used to prove and encourage the transfer of these types of social infrastructure to other locations, both locally and globally.

By following these themes of tactical urbanism and placemaking, we had to transform ourselves from being designers of a singular space to becoming designers of a system that would allow the public and stakeholders to have continual input into the design and use of public space. The result is the creation of a quantifiable solution capable of gathering the information we need to make better decisions about our cities.

Nicola Balch is an urban designer at McGregor Coxall and teaches at the UTS School of Architecture. She is a member of the AB editorial board

Conceptual drawing from the George Street Living Room by Nicola Balch and Albert Quizon – the winning entry in the ULI 2015 Urban Innovations ideas competition ‘George Street 2020’. The ‘living furniture’ and the ‘smart carpet’ give a feedback system in which ideas about our urban spaces could be designed, implemented, analysed and refined over time.

Focus CBD and South East Light Rail
Graham Pointer and Tanya Vincent

Long term planning around a city’s liveability is just as important as the things we can do today. The temptation is to ‘put up with’ construction sites. But if we can innovate during disruption, like the Sydney Light Rail project achieved over Christmas, imagine what we can do when construction is over.

Professor Ed Blakely, Greater Sydney Commission

How can we make better places during infrastructure construction?

In a first for a transport agency in Australia, temporary placemaking is being implemented alongside the construction of the CBD and South East Light Rail to reinforce that Sydney is ‘open for business’ and to support directly impacted businesses. Transport for NSW is focussed on opportunities to maintain the vibrancy and excitement of key precincts during construction.

Our approach has been influenced by US-based organisation and placemaking experts, People for Public Spaces, which has developed a series of principles for placemaking that aims to make places more social, accessible, comfortable and active. The ‘tactical urbanism’ movement has also influenced us to use placemaking opportunities as a way to evoke the forthcoming pedestrian boulevard.

If you visited George Street last Christmas you would have seen, visited or relaxed in our first temporary placemaking initiative (installed within the construction zone between Market and King Streets) that aimed to support the 2015 Christmas retail period. More comfortable people-centric zones in front of Town Hall; and between Martin Place and King Street have also been set up over the past six months. Given the success of these initiatives, we are working with local urban designers and architects such as JOC Consulting Archrival on more placemaking initiatives in the CBD, Surry Hills, Kingsford and Kensington.

With light rail, we want to create a city that people want to use and spend time there. By creating temporary placemaking during construction we are providing spaces for people to meet and enjoy whilst maintaining the important connection between people and this thriving city.

Graham Pointer is principal manager of the Business Activation Program, CBD Coordination Office, Transport for NSW

To support CBD retailers in the lead-up to Christmas last year, Transport for NSW transformed one of Sydney’s main CBD roadways and part of the light rail construction zone into a temporary public space. Using a tactical urbanism approach, road space was converted to hangout zones for city workers and residents, giving them a taste of the future pedestrian area on George Street.



Light rail: making places, connecting people

In the past ten years, more than 50 cities around the world have built new or expanded light rail projects. Australia is now part of this global trend: new or expanded light rail projects are being planned or in construction in the Gold Coast, Canberra, Newcastle, Parramatta and the Sydney CBD.

Due to start operating in early 2019, the CBD and South East Light Rail will add to the existing Inner West line with a new light rail service from Circular Quay to Randwick and Kingsford. The route will follow George Street from Circular Quay to Central Station, through Surry Hills via Devonshire Street and under Moore Park to emerge on the eastern side of Anzac Parade with a stop for the sporting and entertainment precinct.

The route then branches. One branch goes to the Randwick town centre and the health precinct via Alison Road, the other follows Anzac Parade to Kingsford via Kensington and the University of New South Wales lower campus.

The flat floor vehicles with multiple wide, level entries will each accommodate 450 passengers, including families with prams and people with disabilities or mobility impairment.

Cross-platform bus connections will be provided at Rawson Place and Kingsford for intermodal connections. All suburban stops will have space for bicycle parking; the terminus stops of Randwick and Kingsford will offer Opal-activated secure bicycle storage. The project will also provide new or replaced bicycle paths impacted by the light rail route,

including around Centennial Park and through Surry Hills.

Design excellence is a key driver for the project. Grimshaw has responsibility for all built elements of the project including the stop architecture, substations and two bridges. Aspect Studios are responsible for the public domain: 24 km of urban design and interface with neighbouring sites over a 12 km route.

Much design effort has gone into achieving perhaps the hardest challenge for infrastructure in existing places: simplicity. At each stop, the various rail and customer elements that are usually disparate objects will be consolidated into a single integrated services cabinet.

The light rail system will use wire-free technology in the 1.2 km pedestrian area of George Street between Hunter and Bathurst Streets. Boarding areas will be flush with wider footpaths for a more enjoyable and quieter walking experience.

Granite paving throughout the public realm will continue the city centre palette and, with level street crossings, will reinforce George Street as a people-first boulevard.

Trees will add shade to a more legible spine with a consistent new suite of street furniture offering ‘staying places’ and outdoor dining. Multifunction poles will contain the light rail and street infrastructure; smart lighting will provide a distinct night-time identity.

Tanya Vincent is principal manager for Urban Design, Transport for NSW

Focus Ideas and projects for positive change
April McCabe

Urbanistas positively changing places through collaboration

Across the world and certainly in Sydney, we are seeing more collaborative networks popping up in response to specific urban issues and a desire for a collective voice as a way to influence how cities evolve and change. The rise of the sharing economy and increasing social networks allow for solutions to be borne out from a disruptive, noninstitutional, spontaneous, DIY and place-specific approach.

Urbanistas started in London four years ago by Liane Hartley and now has seven chapters across the UK and in Sydney. It all started in recognition of women’s networking capacity and to seize the opportunity to do things differently, to lead and encourage each other to develop ideas that have a positive social benefit for cities, places and people. A driving motivation was that despite there being an abundance of amazing women, we are still largely underrepresented; as leaders, as innovators, as voices and as role models.

Urbanistas Sydney is amplifying the voice of women by supporting women-led ideas and projects that create positive change. Our network represents a diverse range of professional backgrounds, with many of the ideas and projects having strong placemaking elements, such as the creation of a new mural on Oxford Street or the call to build and install a street library. These ideas reflect the shared interest and desire to positively influence the ‘everyday’ within our neighbourhoods and city spaces.

A core philosophy is that we inspire, share and do. We offer a space for ‘the pitch’ – providing a supportive space for women to share their idea, ‘crowdsource’ expertise and find collaborators to help turn the idea into reality. At this year’s Sydney Architecture Festival we are going live and opening the event to both women and men.

Urbanistas Sydney in collaboration with BKA Architecture and the Sydney Architecture Festival (1–3 October) are taking the crowdfunding model from the virtual into the real world. The (sh)ArchTank will be a night full of potential DIY solutions pitched by changemakers and an opportunity to hear about past projects that show

the power of ‘architecture in the cracks’. You will not only be inspired by the pitches, but you can be part of making them happen.

Our neighbourhoods are rapidly changing. A challenge for all built environment professionals is how to provide urban places and experiences that improve the everyday lives and connections of residents, workers and visitors. We are calling all people from across the built environment spectrum and city enthusiasts to submit their project idea that responds to this challenge in an unusual, surprising and realisable way.

April McCabe is the founder of Urbanistas Sydney and a policy advisor for Clover Moore, Lord Mayor of Sydney

sydurbanistas.weebly.com @SydUrbanistas

(sh)ArchTank, Sunday 2 October

To download the EOI brief, go to sydneyarchitecturefestival.org/program/the-sharchtank and send us your pitch. The selected project ideas will be given the opportunity to jump into the (sh)ArchTank, deliver a quick-fire pitch to garner audience support on the night and get a small amount of seed funding and some expert support to turn their idea into a reality. See the full Festival program at sydneyarchitecturefestival.org – and visit the website for your ticket to enter the (sh)ArchTank on Sunday 2 October and info on how to submit your project idea and a chance to pitch.

Urbanistas with Oxford Street Activators painting a new mural on Oxford Street, Darlinghurst. Photo: Simone Sheridan





Placemaking or place awareness?

Tweed Regional Gallery in the local landscape



Locating the Tweed Regional Gallery and Margaret Olley Art Centre, Murwillumbah (architect: Bud Brannigan). Photos: Dan Plummer and Peter Hyatt

The Tweed Regional Gallery has been a celebrated project, both architecturally and culturally, since its opening in 2004. The gallery is perched on a low hill in an undulating pastoral landscape that borders the Tweed River floodplain on the southeastern residential fringe of the Northern Rivers town of Murwillumbah. It commands sweeping views of the Tweed River, the Tweed Valley, and the green caldera backdrop including Mt Warning (Wollumbin), and the Border, Lamington and Springbrook Ranges.

More than anything, the current success of the gallery is a story of generosity. The site was gifted by the former politician Doug Anthony, whose farm takes up the foreground of the view. The most recent and very popular addition to the site is a result of a gift from the estate of artist Margaret Olley. Neither of these elements works by itself: the success of the architecture plays a significant role, as does the work of gallery staff in establishing an impressive collection, a schedule of public programmes and an appropriate tribute to Margaret Olley’s life and art.

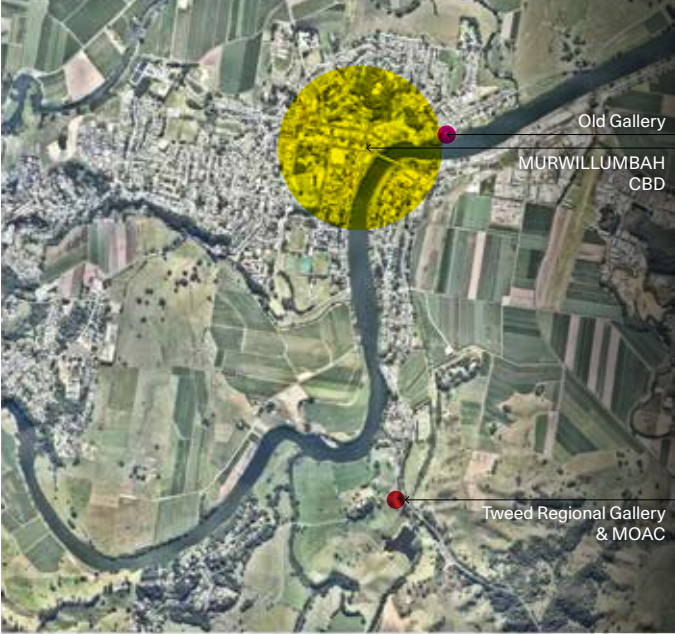
The gallery was previously located in a Federation-era house on the edge of the Murwillumbah CBD. Its reinvention and relocation are mostly thanks to the efforts of the Friends of the Gallery, who raised a significant portion of the funds required to make the leap. Architect Bud Brannigan worked with the new site’s location to design a vernacular ‘tin shed’ style building, that from the inside, frames spectacular pastoral and caldera views as emotive as any artwork. In this new space, the institution has been able to operate on a regional scale and sit within a fittingly-scaled landscape. A byproduct of this is that it also frees up the smaller heritage building in Murwillumbah for more intimate community-based roles.

The new gallery has become a significant regional drawcard. Visitor numbers have steadily increased since its opening and visitor numbers have doubled to 120,000 annually following the completion of the Margaret Olley Art Centre in 2014. However, its popular tourism status does not preclude local community use. For example, when the gallery is closed on Mondays the foyer fills with the quiet chatter of the local bridge club.

Applying the concept of placemaking to this project throws up some interesting contradictions. In this instance, two distinct types of placemaking are considered. The first focusses on placemaking on a regional scale – an institution that showcases a region’s landscape, culture and people. The second is the more community-based perspective of placemaking – the reimagining and reinvigoration of place for the everyday benefit and betterment of a community.

These two perspectives are largely at cross-purposes. In order to succeed on a regional scale, there are a number of elements of community-based placemaking that are forsaken. The gallery’s commanding position within the landscape is favoured over convenient linkages and access within the local community in the town. However, the local council is tackling this issue by making the gallery the first stop of a rail-trail pilot program on the abandoned rail line from Murwillumbah.

The building does not really engage in any meaningful way with its immediate site due to programming and site planning decisions such as elevating the building off the ground to allow for undercroft car parking. This means that visitors enter the building through the car park. However, these were sacrifices worth making for the benefits gained in regional landscape appreciation. The payoff for entering this way is that once inside the building none of the site’s services



‘Is this an exemplary project for others that combine cultural and landscape appreciation? As good as any art or cultural exhibit may be, is it not the opportunity to observe the landscape and life from the calm and detached confines of quiet architecture that gives these places at least part of their allure?’

are part of the experience. The visitor and the building are floating in a landscape context.

The Tweed Regional Gallery does not really succeed as a community/grassroots reinvention if viewed through the lens of placemaking, but this is not a place for placemaking. This project, and the site are about place awareness. Upon entering the building the architecture is saying ‘this is the landscape setting in which you stand ... and it is stunning’. The chief role and success of the building are to operate as an accessible, regional lookout that also houses an institution of considerable community and cultural value.

Could this project become a catalyst for a series of dispersed sites that take in spectacular or particular vantage points and panoramas of the Tweed Valley and its context? Is this an exemplary project and a teaser for others that combine cultural and landscape appreciation?

And is this combination of culture and landscape really key to the success of any such cultural institution? As good as any art or cultural exhibit may be, is it not the opportunity to observe the landscape and life from the calm and detached confines of quiet architecture that gives these places at least part of their allure?

In this instance, it is the natural and pastoral landscape of the caldera and the Tweed. Also, consider the wonderful light-filled riverfront spaces in Brisbane’s Gallery of Modern Art, where one can turn their back on art to gaze across the flowing river to the silent hum of the city’s CBD on the opposite bank. And the vista need not be grand. It is equally refreshing to stand at the large frameless windows in Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art and look at the much closer and intimate grain of the urban landscape.

The Tweed Regional Gallery project is an endorsement of the value of providing both local community cultural programs and a regional and national drawcard that blends and showcases two of the region’s key assets: a culture of creativity and a landscape of grandeur, biodiversity and history. The architecture, cultural programming and the landscape all leave visitors with a lasting impression of place and the desire for further exploration.

Dan Plummer and Belinda Smith are directors of Murwillumbah landscape architecture, art and design practice Plummer & Smith

Fashioning the pieces to create a vibrant connected city

In July 2016 UrbanGrowth NSW released its planning proposal for the heavy rail corridor between Hamilton and Newcastle stations, which has been closed since Christmas Day 2014. The proposal – prepared by UrbanGrowth NSW, Transport for NSW and HASSELL – aims to lay the foundation for the rezoning of surplus land to connect the city to its waterfront and to achieve the overall objective of creating jobs and economic growth.

The visual material provided with the submission enables the public to visualise the proposed land use changes to the corridor. The animated presentation is particularly evocative, with trees

sprouting out of the grassed former corridor, which is populated by scores of people occupying vibrant active spaces along the harbour. UrbanGrowth’s focus on connecting Newcastle to its waterfront is commendable; this has always been the rationale for removing the heavy rail back to the western edge of the city.

The proposed route of the light rail leaves the heavy rail corridor at Worth Place as it heads east onto Hunter Street and Scott Street to Pacific Park and Newcastle Beach. This route frees up the former corridor east of Worth Place and provides an opportunity for visionary uses of the land.

There are still some who feel the wrong decision was made regarding the route for the light rail. But the decision was made and as the planning process proceeds there is a growing feeling in the community that uncertainty is worse than the disruption that it may cause. We just need to physically start the project. Building the light rail will bring certainty to public transport in Newcastle. The rezoning of the old heavy rail corridor also needs to bring certainty to how this land can be developed to benefit the city.

The rezoning proposes several sites along the old heavy rail corridor as potential development sites and proposes controls and zonings to match sites nearby. While the rezoning is still evolving, there has been some criticism that the visions presented to date do not fully address the broader context and issues of the city outside the specific boundaries of the individual project sites proposed. This follows on from the light rail proposal by Transport for NSW that looked at creating an optimum ‘technical’ light rail solution, without addressing the light rail’s impact on existing parking and lane closures. The best outcome for UrbanGrowth’s proposed development sites and the city is the amalgamation of the sites with the adjacent land, to create improved development sites, public spaces and connections throughout the city. UrbanGrowth’s task is to rezone this land in a manner that will encourage others to do just that.

The rezoning proposes controls for the heavy rail land, which when consolidated with adjacent properties make sense. However, if they are not amalgamated, then the outcomes are uncertain. For the section of rail corridor from Worth Place east to Civic, the proposed

controls (30 m and 3:1 FSR) match the land to the north of the corridor. However, if these controls are used only on the corridor, then they would create overshadowing and amenity problems to the existing and proposed development to the south; with a height limit of only 24 m and both sides of the lane being compromised in their inability to adequately comply with the guidelines of SEPP 65, if residential development is proposed. A solution might be for Council to propose specific DCP controls to ensure the stepping of buildings towards the north on the corridor to ensure adequate sunlight and amenity for development along the north side of Hunter Street.

On rail corridor land west of the split of Scott and Hunter Street, again UrbanGrowth has proposed this could be suitable for shop top housing. While this may be possible, again the amenity of these apartments is likely to be compromised by the narrowness of the site and the proximity of the existing commercial and residential buildings to the north. It would be difficult to comply with the Apartment Design Guide. The controls proposed will therefore not provide any certainty for developers or the community until these issues are addressed. In this situation, alternate uses or landscape options for this thin strip of land linking to the green open spaces to the east might be better outcomes.

Newcastle is growing; the tower cranes on the city skyline are a testament to this increased activity. The goals for the city’s future development should be the rejuvenation of:

- a liveable city;
- a sustainable city which is not governed by the car;
- a city connected to its surrounding suburbs by an integrated public transport network; and
- a city connected to its natural assets – its coast, beaches and harbour.

Rejuvenation of Newcastle as a vibrant and connected city needs to be done in a holistic way. While a city is a collection of buildings and public spaces activated by its community and commerce, it is actually the connections between those buildings and the public spaces that make a city liveable and desirable.

In leading the way for this rejuvenation the NSW Government needs to focus on the creation of connections through the city from east to west and south to north that link active public spaces and existing and new buildings to efficient public transport. The UrbanGrowth images are positive and the current rezoning approach is going in the right direction. Hopefully, the controls will be correct, they will have the support of Council, they will be defensible and development will be able to work within them to create the vibrant amenity-filled internal and external spaces that we desire.

Newcastle city has incredible potential, only a fraction of which has begun to see the light. The older part of the city east of Civic has the capacity for extensive redevelopment into one of Newcastle’s premier residential suburbs with its heritage buildings and tree-lined streets, proximity to the harbour and beaches and a lifestyle that would be the envy of anywhere in the world. The rezoning of the heavy rail corridor is a linear strip that can tie the whole city together and boost further development along its length. However, getting it right is crucial. If Newcastle Council can work with UrbanGrowth and with the inevitable refinement – concentrating on connections across the city rather than just on built forms – then UrbanGrowth can achieve their objectives and create something special.

Glen Spicer is a director of EJE Architecture in Newcastle

yoursay.revitalisingnewcastle.com.au

Conceptual image from UrbanGrowth NSW's rezoning proposal covers an area of approximately 4.25 ha from Worth Place to Newcastle Station. From Worth Place to Newcastle Station in the east, around half of the area is proposed for public space with the remainder a mix of retail, commercial and residential uses. The planning proposal will be considered by Newcastle City Council as part of the NSW Government’s overarching Newcastle Urban Transformation and Transport Program, a \$500m plus commitment to revitalise the city. Image courtesy UrbanGrowth NSW



Saving the Sirius is hard to do

Sirius apartment building
36–50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks
Tao Goffers, 1978–79

Built in the late 1970s on land initially resumed by the NSW State Government in 1901, the Sirius apartments replaced Rowan’s Bond store erected by the NSW Housing Board in 1916. Ironically, it was the erection of commercial properties that resulted in the Housing Board being disbanded in the mid-1920s, after criticisms that it had not focussed on its principal purpose of housing provision.

The Sirius apartments were erected by the NSW Housing Commission to house people who would be displaced by the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA)’s redevelopment scheme. The Green Ban, which had effectively halted the planned redevelopment of the entire Rocks area, was lifted in June 1975 to allow the erection of a building on the Bunkers Hill site to proceed. The green bans made SCRA rethink its initial proposal to demolish the majority of the surviving building stock in the precinct and replace it with high-rise towers. Architects including Neville Gruzman had assisted the Rocks Action Group with the preparation of a People’s Plan. Public pressure led to the conservation of the area north of the Cahill Expressway and the creation of The Rocks as one of Australia’s most popular tourist destinations.

The project’s architect, Tao Gofers, had trained in Canada and was influenced by the New Brutalist movement, especially its focus on design based on social concerns and the truthful expression of materials, function and structure.¹ As was frequently the case during the 1970s, social concerns were an important consideration throughout the design of the Sirius project. Gofers remembers that:

The brief that Jack Burke (Chairman of the NSW Housing Commission) and I prepared for the design of Sirius was quite simple. The building was to provide for a range of units from pensioner one-bedroom units, accessible two-bedroom units, two, three and four-bedroom split level units with balconies, roof gardens or terraces. The complex was to encompass community facility area and a special pensioners’ community space. The complex was to include undercover parking. The designs were to be based on the three-storey prototype built at Sans Souci although all accessible and pensioner unit were serviced by the lifts.²



Professor Phillip Goad notes that the design represents ... architecturally, the important philosophical move by the NSW Housing Commission in the mid-1970s away from modernist ideals of housing in towers or slab blocks on cleared sites towards solutions that involved community participation and sympathetic contextual placement of such housing and retention of long-time low-income residents in historic inner urban precincts.³

Sirius is listed on the NSW Chapter’s Register of Significant Architecture; it has also been registered by the National Trust. However, neither of these listings affords statutory protection. The local campaign to save this building was generated by the local community and has attracted international press coverage. Chapter President Shaun Carter has been advocating retention and retrofitting of the block and serves as president of the Save our Sirius Foundation, a lobby group formed late last year.

Sirius is one of the many brutalist projects under threat from demolition that are featured on the international #SOSBrutalism website sosbrutalism.org, a growing database of over 700 brutalist buildings. But some of the most well-known brutalist works have also achieved official recognition: Habitat 67 in Montreal remains ‘a functioning icon of 1960s Utopianism and one of the period’s important buildings’ and has been heritage listed by the Quebec Government,⁴ while Ernő Goldfinger’s Trellick Tower (1968–72), a 31-storeyed social housing block in West London, is also a listed building.

One of the arguments used in attempts to downplay the significance of the design of Sirius was that the architect was not well known. But this ignores the fact that architects working in the public sector in this period sought to improve the quality of public architecture rather than advancing their own careers. Project recognition was directed to the agency undertaking the work, not to the individual architect.

The reason given by the Minister was that the listing would reduce the sale value of the site by up to \$70m and that there were conflicting views regarding its aesthetic significance.⁵ The National Trust, DOCOMOMO and ICOMOS all support the retention of the Sirius building, as does the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects.

In preparing its recommendation that Sirius be listed on the State Heritage Register the Heritage Council of NSW did not accept Housing NSW’s view that Sirius was not worthy of heritage protection at a state level. It instead sought independent architectural advice from one of the nation’s leading architectural historians, Professor Philip Goad at the University of Melbourne. The nomination submitted to the Minister included Goad’s findings that Sirius is

... a direct outcome of the so-called ‘Green Bans’, the protest movement instituted in Sydney in late 1971 against the commercial redevelopment of The Rocks and Millers Point precincts in the 1970s. Instead of relocating local residents, the NSW Housing Commission decided in an unusual move to consult and build affordable public housing for those residents and others displaced in the area.

[A] fine example of the late Brutalist architectural style, especially in its application to public housing and in its use of off-form concrete and its picturesque massing of stacked cubic components intended to minimise its impact on the neighboring historic precinct of The Rocks and alleviate the effects of vehicular noise from the Sydney Harbour Bridge approaches.⁶

At the time of publication the future of the Sirius looks bleak. On 31 July the NSW Minister for Heritage Mark Speakman announced that he had decided not to list the building on the State Heritage Register. Since this announcement, there has been considerable comment in the media, including comments regarding the use of the financial hardship argument by the NSW Government. This provision in the Heritage Act is meant to apply when the costs of conserving the building are prohibitive. Tao Gofers’ design prototype for Sirius at Sans Souci has already been retrofitted, demonstrating that such an approach can be undertaken successfully.

The Australian Institute of Architects’ NSW President said to the *Sydney Morning Herald*: ‘The government says the building is not fit for purpose. But it was designed for housing, operates as housing, is fit for tomorrow and is perfectly fine for housing right now’.

‘We see this as a backwards step for the government, and we will continue to fight to save the building’, he said.⁷

Noni Boyd is heritage officer at the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects

saveoursirius.org sosbrutalism.org

- NOTES
- 1 Russell Rodrigues quoted in the State Heritage Register nomination

2 Tao Gophers quoted in *The Sirius Apartments*, millerspointcommunity.com.au/the-sirius-apartments

3 ‘Expert report: Sirius apartment building’ prepared by Professor Phillip Goad, 2 November 2015

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/may/13/habitat-67-montreal-expo-moshe-safdie-history-cities-50-buildings-day-35>

5 Minister Speakman’s media release, 31 July 2016

6 ‘Expert report: Sirius apartment building’ prepared by Professor Phillip Goad, 2 November 2015

7 smh.com.au/nsw/sirius-building-will-not-receive-heritage-listing-nsw-government-declares-20160731-gqhp0f.html
- 1 Sirius at dusk. Photo: Craig Hayman

2 Early promotional image for Sirius from the NSW Housing Commission, showing how nearly all tenants can enjoy growing things with their access to roof and terrace gardens

If you need a PhD in Architecture to ‘appreciate’ the Sirius building, then it’s clearly not a building for the people of NSW.



Expert report: Sirius apartment building
Excerpts from the assessment on aesthetic significance by Professor Philip Goad

As measured against SHR Criteria A – historic significance
It has historic significance as being a direct outcome of the so-called ‘Green Bans’, the protest movement instituted in Sydney in late 1971 against the commercial redevelopment of The Rocks and Millers Point precincts in the 1970s. Instead of relocating local residents, the NSW Housing Commission decided in an unusual move to consult and build affordable public housing for those residents and others displaced in the area.

As measured against SHR Criteria C – aesthetic significance
It has aesthetic significance as being a rare, representative and fine example of the late Brutalist architectural style, especially in its application to public housing and in its use of off-form concrete and its picturesque massing of stacked cubic components intended to minimise its impact on the neighboring historic precinct of The Rocks and alleviate the effects of vehicular noise from the Sydney Harbour Bridge approaches.

It has aesthetic significance as representing, architecturally, the important philosophical move by the NSW Housing Commission in the mid-1970s away from modernist ideals of housing in towers or slab blocks on cleared sites towards solutions that involved community participation and sympathetic contextual placement of such housing and retention of long-time low-income residents in historic inner urban precincts.

Reality insight

Cities have always been shaped by and for people. Data can now provide exciting new insights about buildings and urban places.

Design and home-buying decisions are typically based upon what we can afford and what we value. Before people purchase or design a house to live in they are curious and do their best to try to predict what it will be like to live there. Architects and our clients do this too – we *imagine future possible living realities*. Architects are specifically trained to do this. How citizens are making their decisions is now being transformed by new apps that access big data. Concurrently there are some changes in what our society values when they make decisions about our buildings, our living arrangements and how and where we aspire to live.

When briefing an architect for a renovation or in choosing a house and its location, clients and architects are making a complex set of trade-offs across many different areas including privacy, number of bedrooms, cost, the future of the suburb, ease of parking, commute time, value for money, the social mix of the community, build quality, the kitchen fixtures and the proximity to shops and schools and many others. What is the common link? Apart from build quality, they are all based in the imagining of a future reality. When we are considering where and which home to live we often wear our ‘let’s-imagine goggles’. What will it be like when we are there?

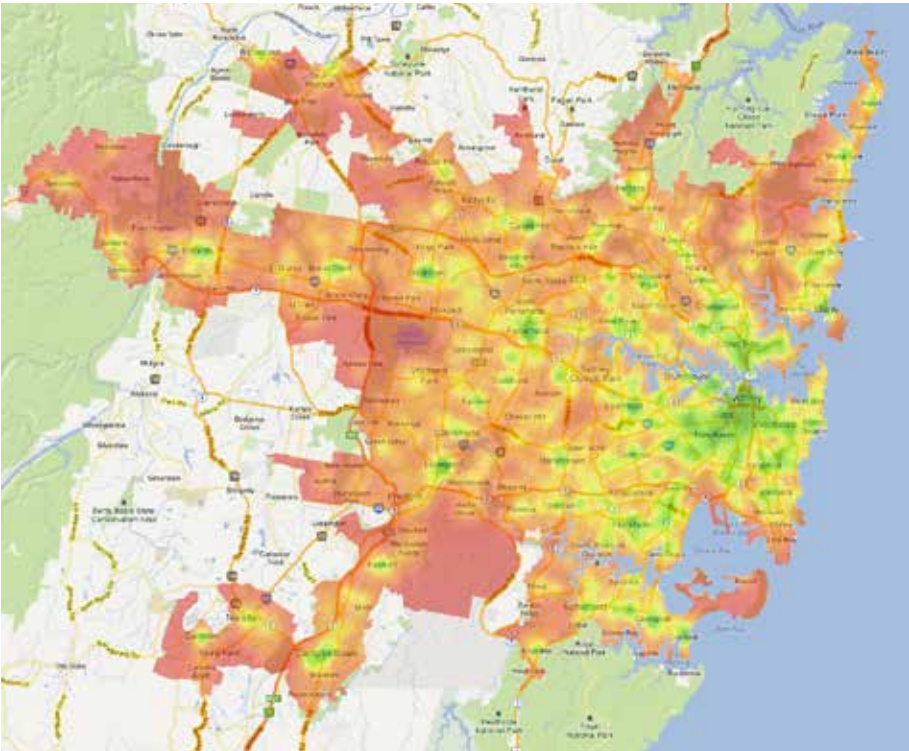
Sometimes real estate agents promote a home’s proximity to things; they understand that people value being near things that are important to them. Using an economist’s way of interpreting what we value (by looking at what we are willing to pay for) and according to property data, the median price for a house in Stanmore is similar for a house in Castle Hill. Leichhardt and Beecroft also are also on par with equivalent median house prices. This tells us that our society values these options much the same; however, the buildings and the suburbs they are in are very different. So our choice is being made by how we value the other components. But how do we *really* know what it will be like?

A new range of tools drawing on big data is now enabling people to better answer this question. To highlight the breadth of opportunity, here are a few examples: City Dashboards, Walk Score and energy monitoring and a recent NRMA insurance initiative. The rapid rise of City Dashboards (from London to Amsterdam) is an example of the interest in having insight about places in real-time or near real-time. These sites allow us to see how a city is performing compared to last minute, this time last week or this time last year. ‘Smart cities’ and open data platforms are now giving empowerment to city makers and citizens to make real-time decisions,

not only on traffic or transport, which already happens via smartphones but other things like air quality, energy markets, sound pollution and microclimatic issues such as urban heat islands. In other words, what our lives will be like when we’re there. A comparable sentiment was recently captured by our PM and first-lady duo in the Cities Agenda and ‘the 30-minute city’.

Free apps such as Walk Score are rapidly transforming the North American real estate market by empowering purchasers with information about what a place will be like. Walk Score is based on research that found we are most likely to walk when there is a mix of destinations within a reasonable distance. The app harvests data from Google Maps to show how car-free your life can be at an exact address. Walk Score is transforming people’s decisions about places to live; this in turn, is positively affecting the quality of life, local communities, the cost of living and health.

Another example is in energy monitoring. The ability to provide real-time feedback to building users on energy use is available by a range of third-party products, many costing less than \$100 that provide real-time information into homes you design. Beyond raising awareness such information can affect behaviour about usage *before* an



‘*Smart cities* and open data platforms are now giving empowerment to city makers and citizens to make real-time decisions on things like air quality, energy markets, sound pollution and microclimatic issues such as urban heat islands. In other words, what our lives will be like when we’re there’

unwelcome quarterly bill arrives. The last example is NRMA’s recent web-mapping service saferHomes, designed to allow citizens to know what the incidence of crime, bushfire, flood-risk and house fire is for a particular address. Data provides the opportunity to get answers to previously unanswerable questions on issues of finance, sustainability, time and quality of life. Will there be less crime in a place with more trees? How many cars is my family likely to need to live there? What type of energy usage and financial outgoings am I likely to have? Is it safe to ride a bike on this street? What will my daily commute options and time be? Am I likely to get enough incidental physical activity by living in this location?

This real-time knowledge, coupled with the rise of the sharing economy, shared workspaces, Airbnb spare rooms, sustainability, collaborative consumption and shifting demographics are enabling new generations to question some fundamental aspirations of previous generations. ABS statistics tell us that the vast majority (73%) of us live in a single detached home. But Gen Y and Millennials are increasingly questioning the suburban dream and whether they need to own a car or even need a driver’s licence. Growth will typically occur first in established centres but low-rise suburbia and the Aussie dream is being reconsidered as the ‘great inversion’ phenomenon – and book by the same name – revalues proximity.

This is not a call for high-rise. Our proximity expectations do not have to shift so far as to living on top of one another to gain the benefits of walkability, transport options, shared social infrastructure and community. Also, there will always be differences in people’s attitudes – one person’s ‘valuing of community’ will be another’s ‘being too close to other people’. Whatever you or your clients may seek, new tools are allowing desired futures to be better known and they can help in developing new possibilities for our built environments.

It is probably true that we can now collect information faster than we know what to do with, but as the ability to process and interpret catches up, there will be new inputs in how we design and assess the built environment. So then architects, let me ask you: which professional group is best placed to synthesise the information from all this data to what it actually means for people?

David Bennett is co-chair of the AIA Sustainability Committee and is currently undertaking a PhD with the CRC for Low Carbon Living

With a Walk Score of 63, Sydney has first ranking of the most walkable Australian cities and suburbs. Red indicates up to 25 errands can be accomplished on foot; bright green indicates up to 100 errands

Sustainable architecture: residential

Sustainability can’t be like some sort of a moral sacrifice or political dilemma or a philanthropical cause. It has to be a design challenge.

Bjarke Ingels



This five-part CPD seminar series will focus on the design and construction of sustainable residential architecture. It will equip attendees with the metrics and the technical, political and communication skills to complement your design skills. Seminars can be experienced individually or as a series.
Full CPD program, pricing and booking information: architecture.com.au/cpd-events/nsw-cpd-events

Organised by the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects and funded by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, through the Environmental Trust

Module 1: Sustainable architecture – the big picture

Loading you up with data, this seminar will explain how architects can influence sustainable outcomes and communicate these initiatives effectively to clients, authorities and builders.
Thursday 6 October, 9am – 12.30pm

Module 2: Residential architecture – passive systems

This seminar will focus on the material and passive intelligence of architecture as these decisions play out in practice through a series of exemplary local case studies.
Wednesday 12 October, 9am – 12.30pm

Module 3: Residential architecture – active systems

What heating, cooling and water technologies are appropriate in Sydney’s warm temperate climate? This seminar will expose you to a range of appropriate cutting-edge systems, tools and approaches.
Thursday 20 October, 9am – 12.30pm

Module 4: Multi-residential

In addition to designing efficient and climatically appropriate buildings, learn specific strategies for dealing with clients, councils, consultants and builders to ensure more sustainable outcomes.
Thursday 27 October, 9am – 12.30pm

Module 5: House

An array of professionals producing innovative small-scale residential architecture will share strategies designed to achieve more sustainable outcomes.
Thursday 3 November, 9am – 12.30pm

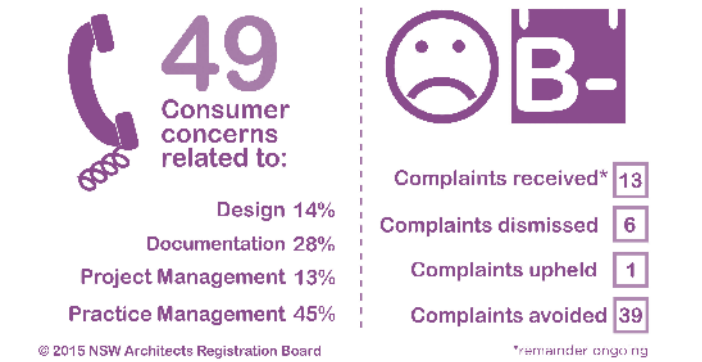
Hitting the target while missing the point

When exactly did architects give up on learning? When did professional development become a dirty word? And why is it that an industry which builds real things with real knowledge for real people seems to be hitting the target while missing the point when it comes to sharing what it knows?

Last year, almost half of all enquiries to the Board from homeowners were about poor practice management by their architects. Another 28% related to problems with documentation. So imagine our surprise when an architect tells us they have no need for professional development. They’ve done it for so long they know it all. Really?

At one level, CPD is (just) a measure of how an architect learns, grows and improves. But can we measure how the profession learns, grows and improves? CPD is important. As it is for doctors, lawyers and the rest. Often, it involves sharing mistakes. So do architects make mistakes? Does anyone know why architects don’t or won’t do post-occupancy evaluation, let alone share the results? Post-surgical follow up is required for doctors. Heck, even cars go back for a tune-up after purchase. So how do architects learn, develop and refine their skills, and tune their performance over time?

In 2003, when the then Minister for Fair Trading, Reba Meagher introduced the Architects Bill to NSW parliament, she made it clear that the Act was intended to do three things; provide greater



consumer protection, more effective professional discipline and enable the Board to take a more active role in promoting community discussion on the role of architects.

Bucking a trend in deregulation at the time, protection of the title ‘architect’ was extended by the Act on condition that architects signed on to two things in return; to remain ‘covered’ and ‘current’. ‘Covered’ meant that insurance would provide protection for consumers in the event something went wrong. And staying ‘current’ would mean consumers would know their architect is operating at the frontier of the competencies that define them; design, documentation, project delivery and practice management.

Both of these distinguish architects from building designers, yet both are generally regarded by architects as costly at best. Drudgery, more likely.

Staying current is about continually building on the knowledge gained at university, applied in practical experience after graduation, tested through the registration process, and improved through an architect’s life. This should be a cinch. Through the projects they design, visit, see and study, generations of architects have shaped the discipline’s standards and practices. Construction technologies and new materials evolve through R&D sketched on yellow trace and applied on site. An architect’s sketch kickstarts a supply chain of materials, technologies, services, manufacturers, suppliers, and trades. For every \$100 spent by a client, \$8 goes to the consultant, \$12 to the head contractor and a whopping \$80 goes to subcontractors and their materials. The least cost centre creates the greatest value upstream and work for supply networks downstream.

This image of the architect at the centre of production should mean they have the greatest insight into why things go right and where they go wrong. NSW Fair Trading figures show 6% of all building-related complaints are due to design faults. What kind? What’s the actual cause? Can we halve these faults over the next two years? Around 65% of defects are related to workmanship. Where? Can these be designed out?

Just imagine if project data was systematically gathered and shared? Wouldn’t this add value to the profession as a whole? Could it spawn new enterprises – like the US practice Duvall Decker who launched a facilities management company to learn first-hand from their projects? Isn’t this a model for how to learn, grow and improve?

Each year, the Board reviews a snapshot of CPD undertaken that year. An algorithm selects 5% of all practicing architects to report. This sample builds a picture of how the profession likes to learn. There’s the usual smattering of slip resistance, product presentations, and the national architecture conference. Architects are required to develop in at least two of the four units of competency and they’re expected to develop a plan for the year ahead.

Audits are just a compliance mechanism to ensure architects hold up their end of a bargain made with the government in 2003. The bigger question is how and when will the profession get serious about developing a knowledge culture that shares data and learns from its mistakes? The need is urgent, as policymakers around the country see evidence in mounting defect claims that the sector isn’t learning. CPD needs nothing less than a total overhaul if the industry is to keep its side of the bargain.

Tim Horton is the registrar of the NSW Architects Registration Board

1 Prof Kerry London quoting Gyles, ‘Theoretical supply chain network modelling in the building industry’, RMIT, 1992: www.arcom.ac.uk/-docs/proceedings/art1998-369-379_London_Kenley_and_Agapiou.pdf

A snapshot of complaints to the NSW Architects Registration Board from 2015



Dense + Green: Innovative Building Types for Sustainable Urban Architecture
Thomas Schröpfer
Birkhäuser Verlag

The integration of nature into architecture is a key concern for sustainability. Yet all too often sustainable design is reduced to improving the energetic performance of buildings and the ornamental application of natural green. *Dense + Green* explores new architectural typologies that emerge from the integration of green components, such as sky terraces, vertical parks and green facades, in high-density buildings. Featured on the cover is the Central Park highrise by Jean Nouvel in collaboration with French botanical artist Patrick Blanc. Compiled by Thomas Schröpfer, Professor of Architecture and Sustainable Design at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, *Dense + Green* is a key reference work on sustainable urban architecture, presenting successful case studies by leading international authors, practitioners and scholars. The book describes green strategies across different design tasks and climate conditions. Expert essays complement detailed international case studies, all illustrated with informative drawings and photographs, which demonstrate the current paradigm shift in sustainable urbanism.

From *Episodic Urbanism*: Peter Elliott Architecture + Urban Design designed A’Beckett Urban Square in Melbourne as a temporary recreational space. RMIT University opted to turn this previously underutilised and derelict space into a publicly accessible 2,800 m² park incorporating multi-use sports courts with spectator seating. A specially commissioned large-scale artwork by artist Ash Keating covers the walls that wrap the site on two sides. Courtesy Uro Publications



Episodic Urbanism: The RMIT Urban Spaces Project 1996–2015
Peter Elliott et al.
Uro Publications

Episodic Urbanism is a book about the transformation of two city blocks in the heart of Melbourne, alongside the transformation of an educational institution. Over the course of nearly two decades, Peter Elliott Architecture + Urban Design has worked to turn RMIT University’s inner-city premises from a private fortress into a public-spirited urban campus. RMIT’s rejuvenation sits in stark contrast to typically homogeneous masterplanning exercises, and the book tells a story about how we might create dramatic transformation within our cities without dramatic rupture; subtle, incremental changes respect existing conditions and their history. Thoughtfully designed by celebrated graphic artist Stuart Geddes, *Episodic Urbanism* features contributions from leading urban thinkers, including Leon van Schaik, William L. Fox, SueAnne Ware and Robert Nelson. This is an essential publication for those with an interest in how we can better shape our cities, not through erasure and homogenisation but with an appreciative eye to history, diversity and vitality. As Peter Elliott puts it: ‘One city block is like a little experiment in how you reimagine a city.’

Place and Placelessness Revisited
Edited by Robert Freestone and Edgar Liu
Routledge

Since its publication in 1976, Edward Relph’s *Place and Placelessness* has been an influential text in thinking about cities and city life across disciplines, including human geography, sociology, architecture, planning and urban design. For four decades, ideas put forward by this seminal work have continued to be discussed, from the concept of placelessness itself through how it plays out in our societies to how city designers might respond to its challenge in practice. Drawing on evidence from Australian, British, Japanese and North and South American urban settings, *Place and Placelessness Revisited* is a collection of first-hand research and theoretical discussions of contemporary applications and interpretations of place and placelessness. It takes a multidisciplinary approach – covering architecture, environmental psychology, geography, landscape architecture, planning, sociology and urban design – in critically revisiting placelessness in theory and its relevance for twenty-first century contexts. The book includes essays by Relph, 13 authors from Sydney and Melbourne, and others from the UK and Canada.

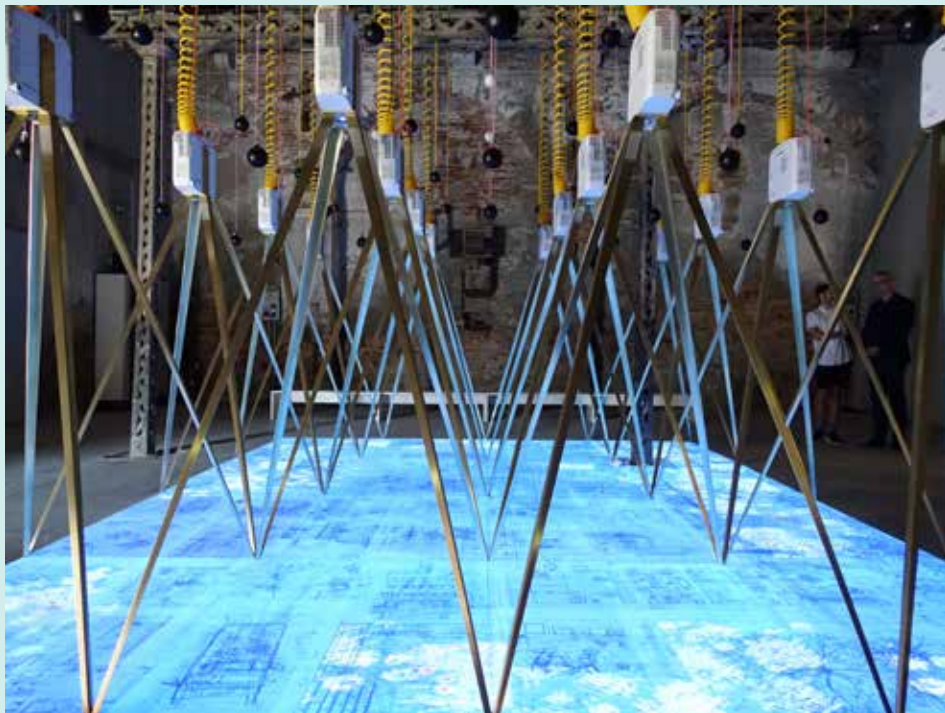
Members receive 10% discount via the booksellers from Archibooks: architecture.com.au/services/archibooks



Venice Architecture Biennale

Reporting from the Front

Curated by Alejandro Aravena
28 May – 27 November 2016



For the last two years, Alejandro Aravena had been stockpiling discarded material from Rem Koolhaas's previous edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale. As this year's curator and 2016 Pritzker winner, he recycled plasterboard and metal framing studs for his statement in the opening rooms of this year's show, *Reporting from the Front*. Highlighting the vast amount of waste that shows like this generate, the Chilean architect reminds us we are complicit in architecture's wastefulness.

Whereas Koolhaas insisted on two full years to curate the exhibition, Aravena had a mere ten months to assemble this show. And while Rem asserted architecture alone is not capable of filling the Arsenale's vast space and collaborated with dance, music and film biennales to do so, Aravena in this 15th edition of the Architecture Biennale reverts to the ambitious proposition of occupying the entire space with content. Filling both the Arsenale and Central Pavilion with a vast catalogue of upcycled, recycled, low-tech, self-built, community-initiated exhibits – aligned to the social responsibility theme – is a massive undertaking.

There are moments of insightful and focussed exhibits such as *Ephemeral Urbanism* by Rahul Mehrotra, Felipe Vera and José Mayoral. Investigating a range of scales from temporary megacities to small urban infill, they argue 'that for cities to be sustainable, they need to be accommodating more temporary fluxes in their structure'. The result of Aravena's struggle to meaningfully occupy the entire Arsenale, however, is a slightly too granular and exhaustive collection; one is left fatigued by the sheer volume of content, set adrift in the lack curatorial focus.

Moving through the exhibition is a curious reoccurrence of exhibits of thin-walled, compressive structures. In the centre of the Arsenale exhibit are 399 digitally-fabricated limestone blocks, assembled with no mortar by specialist stone masons, by ETH's Block Research Group's (in collaboration with Ochsendorf DeJong and Block). The *Armadillo Vault* seems unthinkable expensive in terms of both effort and cost, particularly when displayed alongside their array of *low carbon, low cost* vaulted structural experiments.

Another vaulted structure, Foster Lab's Droneport, sat outside on the water's edge and Solano Benitez's Golden Lion-winning brick arch was in the Central Pavilion. Awarded by the jury for 'structural ingenuity and unskilled labour to bring architecture to underserved communities', the idea of accessible, low-cost architecture with high-value design appears to have been a tantalising proposition for Aravena. But is this nostalgia for vaults and arches, delivered via a heavy reliance on technology, a viable example for building communities in remote parts of the developing world?

At the end of the Arsenale are several national pavilions, including the Irish pavilion's installation by Níall McLaughlin Architects. *Losing myself* comprises 16 downward-facing projectors, mounted on custom-made quadpods, connected with yellow umbilical cords, set amongst a field of 56 speakers. Playing birdsongs, radio news clips and Angelus bells at midday, extensive studies of the Alzheimer's Respite Centre, designed by McLaughlin some 15 years ago, led to this mesmerising time-based drawing. Projected directly onto the rough concrete floor of the Arsenale, McLaughlin and his team of drafters reimagine how 16 Alzheimer sufferers see that building. It was a thoughtful, site-specific response and a timely palette refresher. Thailand's pavilion *Class of 6.3* exhibits nine schools after the 2014 Chiang Rai earthquakes. It highlights architecture's important role in the rebuilding communities, while simultaneously creating an opportunity for young offices.

Over at the Giardini, my top pick was the British pavilion. Putting the home back at the 'frontline of British Architecture', *Home economics* explores five new models of domesticity via 1:1 installations, each themed around specific time-based occupations of the home, spanning hours to months to decades.

Also noteworthy was the Japan Pavilion's reliably thoughtful contribution. Positioning architecture as a potential agent of social change, it addresses problems of inequality and poverty, particularly

'Large openings were created in walls of Germany's heritage-listed national pavilion, symbolising the country's current open-door policy ... a willingness to suspend architectural bravissimo for the sake of re-engaging architecture with politics, placing social conscience above design. Yet, this kind of politically correct gesture sparked off heated debate'

in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Real-world design, represented through video, drawings and large-scale models, made this exhibition accessible, engaging and relevant.

Australia's contribution, *The Pool*, is the first architecture exhibition in the new DCM-designed pavilion. The refreshingly single-themed installation by Sydney trio Amelia Holliday, Isabelle Toland and Michelle Tabet, comprised of a shallow pool, replete with timber bleachers. This created an ideal scene for nattering by the water's edge with feet dangling in the cool water.

A common criticism of *The Pool* was its apparent frivolity against Aravena's weighty topic. However, the call for entries to the Australian architecture biennale occurs before the main theme is announced. Any response to the overall theme is by chance encounter or by reworking details after the fact. Yet most visitors view the pavilion in the context of the Biennale's overall focus, unaware that it is detached from the theme. Enabling a more considered response would require the commissioning process to occur after the curator's call.

Germany takes the elephant out of the room and tackled the pressing issue of the immigration crisis. Large openings were created in walls of their heritage-listed national pavilion, symbolising the country's current open-door policy. *Making Heimat. Germany, Arrival Country* is evermore relevant as Brexit ramps up debate around reducing immigration. The pavilion shows a willingness to suspend architectural bravissimo for the sake of re-engaging architecture with politics, placing social conscience above design. Yet, it is this kind of politically correct gesture that sparked off heated debate. Patrik Schumacher, the director of Zaha Hadid Architects, provocatively called for this biennale to be closed, stating: 'we have to stop what we are working on in our real lives and suddenly become amateur commentators on social processes, which we're unequipped to comment on'.

Schumacher is right, but only in revealing just how far architecture has drifted from its role as a legitimate agent of social change. Yet rather than closing the door on social processes, Aravena's Biennale attempts to re-equip the profession with a renewed focus and responsibility, seeing 'architecture in action as an instrument of social and political life, challenging us to assess the public consequences of private actions at a higher level'.

The headline image of archaeologist Maria Reich perched on a ladder has little relevance as a poster for an architecture exhibition. Aravena's Biennale dances this line precariously, providing just enough visual stimuli and heady research. In many instances, inconsistent curation of exhibits, further diluted by preacherly slogans, detracts from the rare moments of brilliance in the show. However, Aravena does not seek applause. Rather, he paints a picture of quiet resourcefulness in observation and empowerment by action; for when Reich carries her ladder into the desert, it is only then she can make sense of the significance of stones on the ground, and from this 'conquers an expanded view'.

Matt Chan is principal of Scale Architecture and adjunct senior lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney

- 1 Recycled plasterboard and metal framing studs in the opening rooms of Alejandro Aravena's *Reporting from the Front*
- 2 Ireland Pavilion: *Losing Myself*, Níall McLaughlin and Yeryia Manolopoulou
Photos: Matt Chan



Waterside revamp benefits from German design

The installation of 157 motorised Weineror Folding Arm Awnings in Sydney’s Walsh Bay precinct represents the biggest single order to date for German awnings specialist Weineror. Undertaken by Australian distributor Blinds by Peter Meyer and supplier/installer Erebus Shading, with help from leading motorisation supplier Somfy, the project was a complex but skilfully executed operation. As **Blinds by Peter Meyer** Managing Director Simon Meyer recalls, his company’s involvement in the upgrade of one of Sydney’s most prominent waterside landmarks through the addition of Weineror awnings was fortuitous.

‘We were working with a consultant on a business development project relating to our new Weineror awnings and as it happened he came to our office. The purpose of his visit was to see the products and discuss how we get national market distribution partners to give consumers access to the Weineror products, and also support the Weineror brand’s penetration into the market,’ says Meyer. ‘It just happened that he was also involved in the Walsh Bay project. He was commissioned to help them find the perfect awnings to replace the aging awnings that were already on site.’

‘Weineror awnings and our Weineror partner Erebus Shading went through a tender process and won it, beating off two other products in this prestigious location,’ he

says. ‘The job was then installed by Erebus Shading, who tackled this project and difficult install with precision and ease.’

‘We were only on the scene late in the piece; the tender project had already been going on for 12+ months and the boys from Erebus Shading had been tasked with bringing three options to the table. Weineror’s superior arm strength, sleek award winning design, integrated LED lights, Dyneema long life tape in the arms and durable scratch resistant powder coat finish were all part of the reason the Cassita 2 awnings won the project. We were not the cheapest awning on the project but we were not far off. With the awnings installed onto the Pier 6/7 and Shore 6/7 and Shore 8/9 buildings in the Walsh Bay precinct, the client got the best possible price for a superior German quality awning.’

Erebus Shading director Martin Melrose adds that certain specifics of the project meant the awnings’ unique design was another plus in terms of selection. ‘Many of the balconies at the Walsh Bay development don’t have a lot of height, so lack of headroom presents a challenge. The elegant, low profile design of these awnings was well suited to this project.’

Among the issues to be overcome in expediting the project was the freight of 157 awnings in a timely manner, Meyer confirms. Another challenge was operating

the awnings ‘with 157 motor signals bouncing around, and wind sensors’.

‘Weineror overcame the freight time frame by producing 157 awnings in just over two weeks. Then, with sea freight, the awnings managed to get here within 9–10 weeks from the date of the order. Somfy helped provide a way to ensure that the project operated perfectly and was protected with RTS wind sensors. All awnings are being operated via Somfy RTS motors and control systems and are using Weineror’s own exclusive range of solution dyed acrylic fabrics.’

Martin from Erebus Shading comments that the installation of the awnings has enhanced the look and feel of the whole development at Walsh Bay.

‘The pier and surrounding buildings have been in situ for some time and were turned into a residential development by Mirvac over a decade ago. Previously the awnings were fairly basic, open style products and looking at the development from Sydney Harbour, the overall impression they gave was a bit higgledy piggledy. The addition of the new awnings has certainly enhanced and elevated the overall aesthetics of the development, as well as offering vastly improved functionality.’

petermeyerblinds.com.au



Stormtech provides seamless drainage at luxury development

Leading edge products from **Stormtech** have provided a customisable, elegant drainage solution at Bondi’s newest luxury development, Pacific Bondi.

Characterised by a ‘natural luxury’ aesthetic, the Pacific Bondi is designed to push the boundaries of high end living, combining 112 designer residential apartments including 19 penthouses, a boutique hotel offering 69 apartments, and premium retail sites for stores, restaurants and bars, all positioned around a six-level atrium.

When specifying grated drainage solutions for the high-end mixed development project, PTW Architects, the firm responsible for the overall design of the development, chose Stormtech for its ability to provide the perfect balance of form, function and customisation.

According to PTW’s Craig Hines, Stormtech was the company’s first choice when it came to specifying drain solutions, because Stormtech products could provide the perfect balance of form and function. In addition, they were ideally suited to meeting the project’s complex brief.

‘Since the project was a redevelopment of an existing structure with a concrete slab that had flaws and cracks throughout, and there were new floor zones being put in, the project required a grated drain to fit within these new floor zones. Where normally in a

new building you’d be designing them into the structure, or into the set downs and making allowances for it, the existing conditions meant a grate with shallow depth was required. Stormtech was able to come up with a solution with a very narrow, shallow profile which met the tolerances of the project,’ says Hines.

The development’s beachfront location, as well as expected high traffic, demanded grated drains made from 316 marine grade stainless steel to be installed throughout the project, including the bathrooms balconies and the atrium area.

In the bathrooms the design called for linear drains that ‘disappear’ – both in the shower as well as one running the full length of the bathroom underneath the wall hung toilet and vanity basin. Stormtech’s Ti Tile Insert drains were specified to meet these requirements.

As different designers were responsible for different sections of the project, there were disparities between the tile thicknesses in the bathrooms throughout the development. Stormtech examined each room one by one to view how the entire interior design was laid out, and then provided three different styles of drains at three different price ranges, ensuring each bathroom had the ideal drain.

Meanwhile each sliding door to the balconies in the residential and hotel

apartments utilised Stormtech’s Threshold Drainage. These slim line drainage products are used to provide a level entrance, with the narrow profile minimising impact on design, allowing smooth integration of internal and external areas, and creating seamlessly combined indoor/outdoor spaces. Across the balconies another drain from Stormtech’s TR range was used.

Drainage was also required around the perimeter of the atrium and in the middle of the courtyard, which also had to be interlinked to the surrounding drainage. Stormtech specifically altered its manufacturing process to suit the site specifications, creating a drainage solution tailor made for each of the varying depths of the space.

Overall the functional and aesthetic superiority of Stormtech products used, as well as the wide range of options available and the company’s ability to customise solutions to fit a highly specific brief, proved key to the quality experience offered by this new luxury residential development.

Pacific Bondi’s success to date is evidenced in record sales of the residential apartments, with all but two of the 75 first release apartments sold within the first two hours and a national record price set for a penthouse apartment that sold for \$21 million.

stormtech.com.au