FOCUS ON QUEENSLAND

The change of government in Queensland has coincided with a strong focus on urban design. Community concern is being loudly voiced over major projects; a major conference is planned for April , and Australia's first urban design graduates emerge in mid year.
Gordon Holden reports:

THE CHANGING FACE OF CENTRAL BRISBANE

Brisbane C.B.D.'s recent growth has been substantial by many measures. Several high rise office buildings around forty floors have come on stream and the next generation of sixty to seventy floors are at present on the drawing boards. This is changing the form of the approximately one kilometre square central district.

Two new anouncements are likely to accelerate the process of change but in a different direction.

The Roma Street Rail yards (Brisbane's equivalent of Melbourne's Docklands) at the S.W. edge of the city have been the subject of redevelopment discussions for some time. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects conducted an ideas competition for the site in 1983/84 and there have been several speculative designs published since then. Expressions of interest for the design of the 20 ha goods yards (this is

about 20% of the C.B.D. area) have now been called. The selection of the principal architect and town planner will be by three stages, the final being by design submissions from three shortlisted firms in March 1990.

A nearby site of about 3500 sq. m in George Street has been purchased by the state government for Departmental offices.

Together these two sites represent more than 1/5 of the existing city area of Brisbane and whatever proposals are accepted, their form will have great bearing on the image of the city.

QUEENSLAND'S
URBAN DESIGN GRADUATES

Australia's first "domestic" urban design graduates will soon come forth from Queensland University of Technology.

The original nine students in the Master of Applied Science (Urban Design) programme of three years part-time duration are due to complete their studies later in the year.

This is a milestone in the development of the professions associated with the built environment. The course accepts architects, planners and landscape architects and it is pleasing to see that the expected 1990 graduates represent all three professions. Hopefully we will see an increased awareness in the community regarding the nature of our cities as more graduates emerge.

The Queensland course will be reviewed in

1990. Though it is difficult to predict the outcome, items on the agenda include: reduction in the duration from 3 years part time to 2.5 years, more shared subjects with masters courses in planning and landscape architecture and the possibility of receiving a graduate diploma qualification as an intermediate stage towards the masters.

The 1990 intake of 12 students includes seven architects (the highest proportion for the first time) four planners and one landscape architect. Overall the course now has twelve architects, ten planners and five landscape architects. Their average age is 35 years; workplace origin favours the private sector and there are several principals of firms.

An interim professor of Architecture and Urban Design is proposed to be appointed later in the year during the absence on PhD research by the course co-ordinator Gordon Holden.

▲ *"Pacific Fair", south of Surfers Paradise. A shopping complex with a difference. Instead of an air conditioned box, a network of narrow streets and squares re-create a village character. Somewhat twee perhaps, but it at least shows that with careful placement of the magnet stores, the nucleus of a 'normal' town centre can be created as a new complex.*

SOUTHBANK
POST EXPO

Brisbane's South Bank Corporation launched its Draft Development Plan recently for public comment. It was produced by Media 5 Architects Pty. Ltd. who were appointed master planners as a result of a limited competition in September.

The design seeks to transform the post Expo site by "combining a leisure playground of international standard with a high quality urban section development". "The buildings within the park, the park within the buildings" is a major theme for the integrated mixed use proposal. There are nine precincts; Maritime, Hotel, Parkland, Boulevard mixed use, Business, Warehouse-services, Convention & Exhibition, Performing Arts and Commercial. The project is expected to cost $1,000 million.
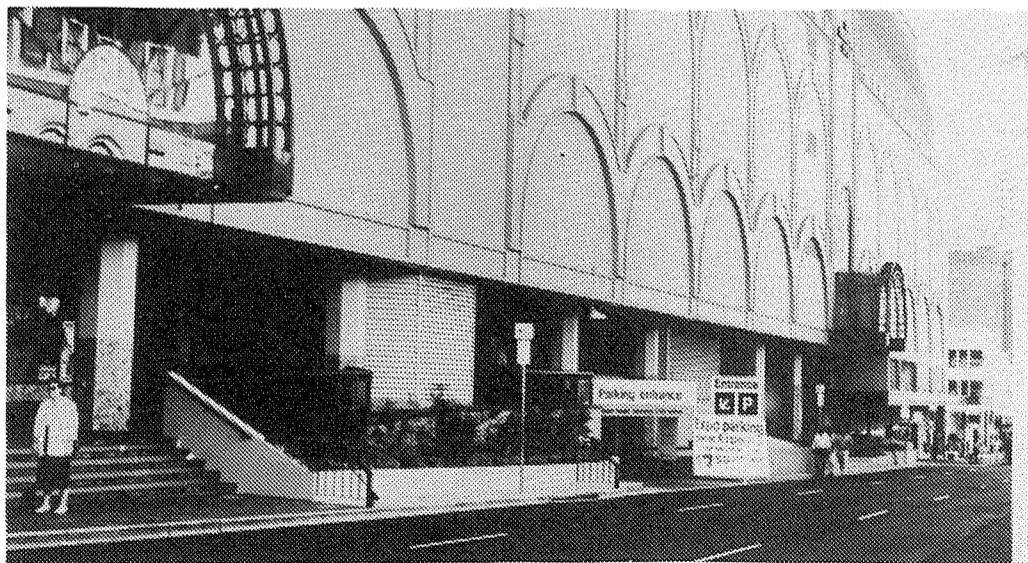
Within the 14 ha public parkland on the edge of the Brisbane River will be swimming cove, a beach, waterways, an aquarium, an aviary and a rainforest sanctuary (this part of Brisbane was a rainforest at the time of European settlement). The design guidelines call for low to medium rise development rising from the river bank level in terraces which step over the railway on the S.W. edge of the site. Commercial office space will be approximately 50%. Hotel and residential is expected to total 30%. In addition, there will be restaurants and specialty retail.

Initial public response to the very smooth media communication of the scheme appears to be favorable, as measured by the 16 question response form. However the

professions and the industry have been much less convinced that this proposal is significantly better than earlier ones. The government has been asked by the RAIA to put a hold on further development of the design until "appropriate debate and opportunity for revisions of the plan" can be achieved.

A group called "Architects for a Better South Bank"are lobbying to get it all right via a more accountable process.

The troubled birth of the South Bank Development Plan is perhaps a reflection of the "democratic times" in Queensland. We would probably have seen considerable site works by now under Joh; albeit of an even worse nature.

▲ *Back of Myer Complex, Brisbane CBD. The 'front' of this new complex, in the full glory of facadism, contributes positively to the Queen St Mall, but its 'back', onto Elizabeth St (another major central city street) is just that - a physical and visual ursurper of the public realm.*

CITY IMAGE URBAN DESIGN CONFERENCE

The first major urban design conference in Brisbane will be held on 22/23 April 1990. Titled "City Image - Putting Urban Design on the Agenda", it is directed at design professionals and government at all levels.

Over the past 10 years Brisbane has experienced remarkable growth and maturing. From the time of the Commonwealth Games in 1982 to the successful World Expo 1988 and close consideration as the venue for the Olympics, Brisbane has earned its place on the front pages of world newspapers as a "place" of difference and environmental uniqueness. As a result of the tourist boom, pastoral and mining development, shifts in corporate and industrial bases Queensland has witnessed

an explosive of development, construction and environmental change in which Brisbane has become the focus.

The city's future role as a focus of Australia's tourism - a sub tropical metropolis - a stepping off point to much of Australia's tourist market - a lynchpin in the national mineral resources boom makes its future "look" of vital concern to its administration, the people of Brisbane and indeed the status of Australia in the eyes of the world.

Yet Brisbane is still in some ways unsophisticated, laidback and different, a big country town. How can this be preserved? How can progress acknowledge and complement lifestyle?

This conference will attempt to identify Brisbane's strengths and weaknesses and provide guidelines for its future development not in economic or planning terms but in style and character - in cultural texture. Urban design arguments will focus community attention to the need for professional design skills in the design of Brisbane's successful move into the 21st century.

Prominent international, interstate and local speakers wil present a cross section of views covering issues from the philosophical to the very practical.

International speakers will include Mary Means (former co-ordinator of the U.S. Main Street Revitalisation Program), Charles Zucker and Phillipe Rasquinet.

Contact Secretariat on (07) 854 1258.

Rationalist planning is an urban design feature we see little of in Australia. Canberra is our shining example. Many European cities however were built at a time when rationalism was a way of displaying imperial power to remind the peasants who was the Boss.

One marvelous rationalist product is the square of the Marques de Pombal at Villa Real in southern Portugal. Villa Real is now a really down at heel border town on the Guadiana River in the dry dusty Algarve region. In years past it had all the grandeur of imperial Portugal that could be provided in an outpost of the Empire.

The town started in 1774 when King Jose 1 of Portugal, alarmed at the growing flamboyance of Spanish development on the other side of the river, decided that "this is the place for a village". To show the Spanish an example of Portugese ingenuity he had the town constructed in 5 months in prefabricated sections. Despite the haste in construction, quality wasn't compromised and the town still stands today largely intact in its original form.

The town is centred around the square (or Praca) and is the genesis of all street life for the inhabitants. The climate is conducive to an abundance of outdoor activity and the square is used for most of the year as a meeting place and a drinking place, watching events and being watched in turn. The extended family is still alive in the Algarve and night life in the square is enjoyed by people of all ages.

The Praca is quite small, about 25 metres along a side. Trees identical and evenly spaced form an inner perimeter and separate vehicular access from the pedestrian area. Roads lead away at each corner.

The square is an interesting example of simple geometric planning and architecture. From the edges alternate radiating lines of black and white tiles decreasing in width converge on a central obelisk some 12 metres high. The obelisk is in perfect proportion to the 2 and 3 storey buildings that surround it.

The radiating lines bind the square together. One is never lost. The lines act as locating beacons to firmly fix the position of all persons and objects within the space. The sense of enclosure is perfect.

The use of each building surrounding the square is announced by individual architecture yet all have a common theme. Civic offices, a church, shops, restaurants line each side in classic Latin style. The main entrance of each building is further defined according to use, some entrances more elaborate than others, but always aligned

with the central obelisk. Each corner is marked by identical buildings sporting steeply pitched roofs and gable windows in contrast to the plainness of the rooflines of other buildings in the square.

This praca could be used for ceremonial occasions but that would interrupt the confusion of activity underneath the gaily coloured umbrellas that randomly swarm over the stark black and white pavement. The noise and activity increasing as the sun dies away dictates the use of this square. A very pleasant and friendly place to be for locals and for tourists like myself to enjoy a cold cervejas! Bom Dia.

Neil Spencer

Neil is from Melbourne and has just completed the Oxford Polytechnic Diploma in Urban Design.

▲ *Praca do Marques dePombal*   *Source: Llewellyn Davies Planning UK*

HOUSING COMPETITION
FOR INNER MELBOURNE

(Left) The Southbank site, focus of Melbourne's medium density housing competition

The Ministry for Planning and Environment recently announced a design ideas competition for medium density housing. It aims to encourage architects to contribute towards the debate about what form housing should take in inner Melbourne.

The site selected is about 4 ha, on the Yarra waterfront just south of the CBD. It has location and potential, as the real estate agents might say. And of course, a few problems. The ideas generated should provide a lead not just for this site, but for all inner city developments including other notable waterfront sites.

The response has apparently been overwhelming, with just about every architects office in town being involved. It is indeed encouraging to see the architectectural profession taking such an interest in the broader issues affecting the city.... or is it just a sign of the (economic) times?

Judging will take place after Easter and results announced in May.

Update on the Bid by Bruce Echberg

February has seen the next step taken in Australia's bid, the publication of a three volume report detailing Melbourne's proposal for consideration by members of the International Olympic Committee who will vote on the issue next September.

The publication is a masterful example of public relations with glowing prose and superb photographs extolling the virtues of Melbourne, and Australia, as the next Olympic venue.

Part of the report explains the proposed venues which were designed over a two month period last year. So far they have had little exposure or detailed public discussion although some are significant urban design projects. The approach seems to be to present a united front to the I.O.C. with detailed review coming after September if we are sucessfull. The only problem with this approach is that we will be largely committed by this bid document.

On Processes by William Kelly

So far the Melbourne Candidature has presented its case with clarity, enthusiam and conviction. Understandably, information has been generalised and publication material more glossy than substantive.
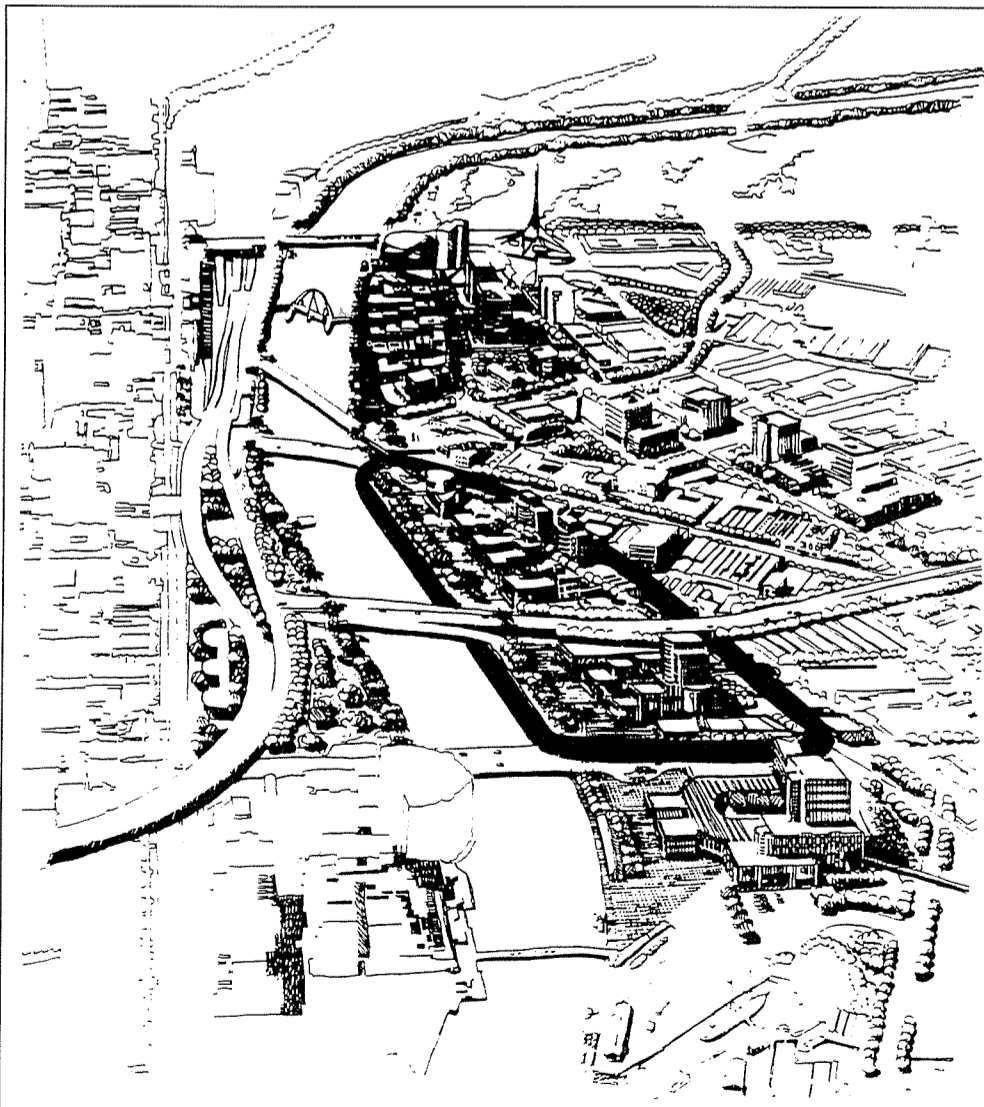
There are bound to be changes to some earlier concepts as a result of various processes. Some reference groups have been established, community meetings and professional briefings held. So far so good. Soon the stakes will get demonstrably higher and the DIALOGUE on social and cultural implications needs to be thorough. Those concerned have a chilling precedent in Los Angeles of massive abrogation of responsibility for socio-economic issues. It is not a "two week event" as they suggested but a 7 year event and its design issues are people issues not abstractions.

The WILDCARDS include the Very Fast Train project and the Western By-pass, the New "Boulevarde". There are also poetic possiblities and strong contrapunctual opportunities inherent in the notion of linking the Multi-Function Polis with the CBD and the Olympic Village.

I'd suggest that: 1) a mechanism be set up for reporting; 2) that formal links between the Facilities and Cultural Groups and the Art and Major Buildings Programme of the Ministry for the Arts be initiated; 3) that The Community Council Against Violence be integrated at a formal level as regards the maintenance of a safe city; and 4) that a development authority be established that is mindful of the Olympic ideals and social issues at stake and is representative of the community.

We have no need to accept anything less than what we should have. We have OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW AND INNOVATIVE MODEL based on dialogue and collaborative processes and a strong enough committment to social equity in our professions to affect real change in both method and results. The people have a right to demand that Victoria will be better place as a result of this. The processes must be those which bring this about.

A PERMEABLE WORLD:
THE RIGHT OF REPLY
An open letter to Jan Martin

Dear Jan

Well done for generating a hot debate between friends and fellow professionals. Your article " Throwing the Baby out with the Water" (UDF9) certainly does that , and if you allow me, I'll not only "take the gloves off ", but I'll put on a set of knuckle dusters as well.

If , when accusing us of subversion, you mean the overturn or the upsetting of a set of established principles, you are absolutely right and I'm disappointed that it is only subversive on five points. I could happily find a whole lot more.

First of all, the three diagrams supporting your article are rather naughty by implying in one of them something called a "Morris/Murrain extreme" (the mind boggles). The diagram is purely an organizational idea, not a literal representation of a piece of town. I never draw the diagram as simplistically as that, but even as drawn by you it provides the basis for the overwhelming majority of urban places from San Francisco to Sienna! Nearly every "beautiful" city in the world is a rational or deformed grid.

Therefore, the implication that "choice - laden or anonymous" are part of the same debate is patent nonsense. We can all go to towns and cities all over the world and find subjectively beautiful and boring, or characterful and anonymous places regardless of layout. However the one advantage of an anonymous permeable area of town as opposed to an anonymous impermeable one is that we can move through it in all sorts of directions and make our own mind up!

So, enough of anonymity; it's important of course but nothing to do with arguments about permeability.

JAN MARTIN'S
MORRIS/MURRAIN EXTREME
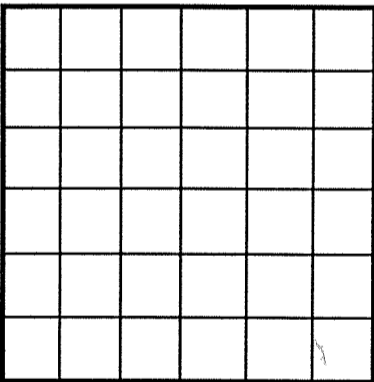
▲ Grid: choice laden or anonymous,

If however, the legibility of our towns and cities is one of your concerns then I am right with you. I defy anyone to find a less legible form of town than a no-frontage access distribution road lined with back fences. Combine that with culs-de-sac that no-one goes down unless they live there, visit or deliver (or are totally lost!). You only know a city and your place in it by being able to move through it. Permeability does not guarantee legibility but impermeability guarantees an absence of it!
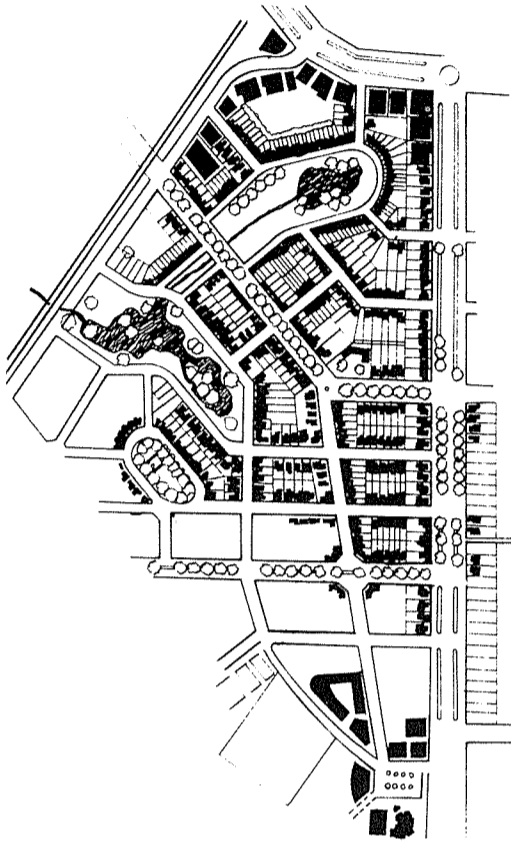
▲ *The Morris/Murrain permeable and legible concept produced at the Plenty Workshop.*

The key point to this debate is centred on an understanding of the physical form of the city as a political system ie: a manifestation of the values of those who produce it and buy into it as well as the impact it has on all the people who choose to use and interact with it. There is a sad and sinister trend in all our cities (from office blocks to retail malls and all the way down to the culs-de-sac) to privatise the public realm and literally turn our backs on it. You talk of defensible spaces being desirable. I'm afraid you are dead right. I acknowledge it, worry about it and I fight like hell to convince people of the self-fulfilling prophecy in it. If we back off from the public realm it in turn becomes worse, more neglected and squalid so we seek to retreat from it all the more; it gets worse and so on and so on.

Of course traffic management is essential. Who on earth said it wasn't? It is perfectly possible to carry out every traffic management scheme known in a matrix layout. Melbourne already has examples of that. The key difference is the democratic process decides when and where to do that and it is very easy to change should circumstances change. They are not private enclaves from day one until they are redeveloped some 125 years later. The difference is not arbitrary; it is fundamental to the whole idea of a democratic urban form.

Let us also remember that the cul-de-sac first appeared on the scene as a practical way of developing land when a through street was not possible due to configuration of the land or varying land ownership. It was not devised to keep people out. It is now. And I repeat, "under the guise of traffic management."

I certainly do equate permeability with vehicular permeability because I believe in streets and until such time as society does not want vehicles, that is where they belong. And what is more, so do pedestrians. Only in the densest downtown retail street is there any advantage in separating the two. The alternative of vehicular/pedestrian segregation is infinitely worse. If, as you claim, people fear streets then it is up to us to design streets that allay fears, not "throw the baby out with the water"!

On the subject of "defendable encampments", the point I was asking the participants to consider during the Plenty Valley workshop was what kind of city they would have inherited if the wonderful inner suburbs of Melbourne had been designed with the cul-de-sac front/back mess that current practice is leaving as a legacy for its future generations.

And if I hear claims that "community" (whatever it is?) is somehow more coherent down a cul-de-sac (and I often do), then we have to examine how much that is part of the retreat from public interaction I referred to earlier. I have no doubt that there is one hell of a "sense of community" on a battleship. I'm quite convinced that there was a "sense of community " inside a medieval fortress town. But what are we actually pursuing with that kind of concept? (or comfort blanket?).

I agree with your final point but interpret the implications somewhat differently re: "None of us actually know how different layouts affect social behavior and human happiness" (well Jan, you're the one who claimed people feared streets, not me). All the more reason to design choice into the environment that can be adapted and modified via democratic processes. Start with a permeable world and deal with it if you have to.

I suspect we are closer to agreement than the two articles indicate, and I look forward to continuing the debate in March.

Best Wishes,
PAUL MURRAIN

▲ *Dimboola, Victoria*

Before and after. One of the Victorian Townscape Advisory Service's first projects was to prepare Dimboola for life after the bypass. Five years later, the street trees, town square and shopfront improvements now enhance this delightful and friendly Wimmera town which is becoming increasingly popular as a stopping place between Melbourne and Adelaide.

URBAN ART MEETS
ARCHAEOLOGY:

William Kelly

CITY LINK DEVELOPMENT

The role of the arts programme at City Link is unique in our Australian experience for a development of its type and rare in the world.

Few commercial developments would have the volumes of historical documentation underpinning their planning that the City Link project has. In Melbourne's inner historic working class suburb of Footscray, twenty new buildings and a marina are to be located along a stretch of the Maribyrnong River.

Interest in the site's development spurred significant work on its origins and evolution. The Ministry for Planning and Environment entered into dialogue with the developers to ensure that design values appropriate to the site, its history and uses are acknowledged. Two thorough histories of the site, and the documentation resulting from an excavation (Victoria Archaeologi-

cal Survey) of early pubs, workers cottages etc. form part of the information base.

The location on the site of the historic Henderson House (which is now the Footscray Community Arts Centre), has lent weight to the acknowledgement of the high visibility of art and design elements. The Arts Centre initiated a report on the integration of arts at City Link (funded by the Victorian Ministry for the Arts). The art element is to be incorporated by collaboration between artist and architect. An artist has been appointed to work as a member of the design team and others will be commissioned as required for specific works. Rather than historic monuments, the art will from a part of the rich fabric of the site, celebrating its people and history.

The first two urban art projects will include re-expression of a historic pathway, and interpretation of the Stanley Arms hotel site.
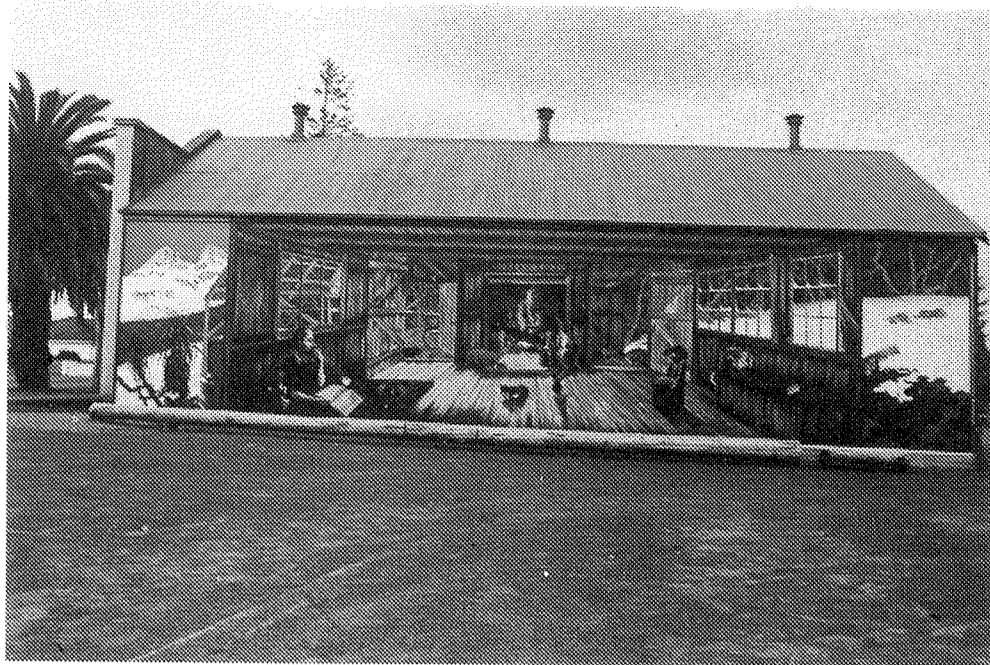
▲ *Sheffield Mural*

Sheffield, Tasmania is a town of murals. Almost all blank walls have been painted with scenes illustrating local history. Forming one edge to the main carpark, this mountain hut scene creates an eerie depth, whilst along another edge, a cream brick toilet block is now adorned with Tassie's tigers and devils.
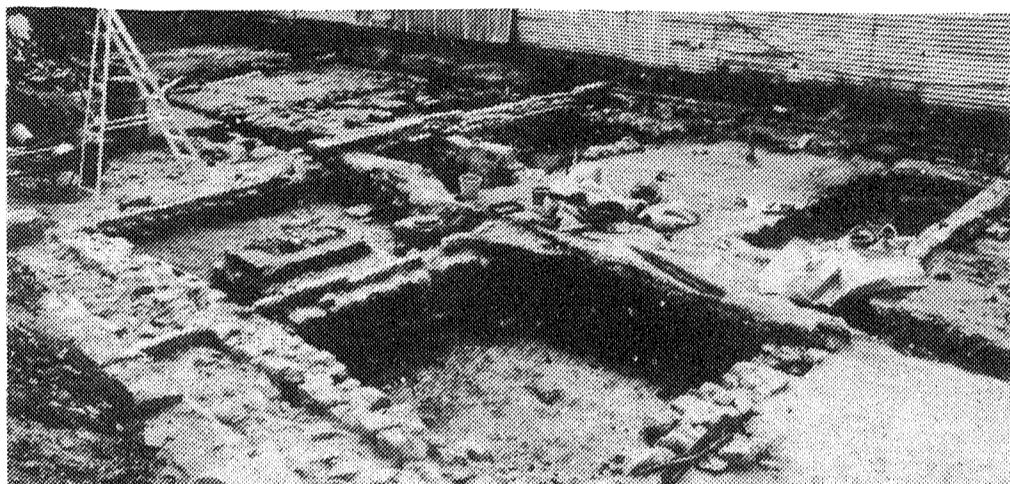
▲ *Stanley Arms Hotel site. The site of a fascinating 1850's story of a 'pub' within a 'pub', revealed by an archaeological dig last year, will soon form the basis for a major urban art interpretive work.*

Public Art in the West.

The recent formation of a Public Art Taskforce in Western Australia has been long overdue. It brings a hope that the Government can begin to encourage, through its own work programme, the intergration of fuctionality and efficiency with higher goals that are spiritually enriching, which delight the eye and stimulate the imagination.

A booklet entitled "Art in Livable Places" outlines a proposal for a percentage of

construction costs for art in State Government capital works developments. To facilitate this concept and other public art proposals a Public Art Directory is being created and a comprehensive library of photographs showing examples of public art has been compiled.

Copies of the booklet can be obtained from the Department for the Arts in Perth.

Charles Johnson.

BOOK REVIEW

CARSCAPE - A PARKING HANDBOOK
by Catherine Miller. (Washington Street Press, Columbus, Indianna, 1988.)

Columbus, Indianna is just a small, mid-west American town "famous" as the home of Cummins Diesels. And now they have held a competition for the design of a parking lot. Surely the last place to include on a urban design tour of the U.S.!

Anything but! Despite its small town size (31,000 in 1980) Columbus has had a far sighted program to encourage high quality contemporary architecture since 1957. And it was the Cummins Engine company that started it, by sponsoring the use of architects. Those selected were to have outstanding promise based upon completed work, but not yet nationally known. This program has yielded 23 buildings to date, but of even more importance, has made Columbus a design-conscious environment with an established history of using notable designers (including Saarinen, Harry Weese, Robert Trent Jones, I.M. Pei, Venturi and Roche, Cesar Pelli and Richard Meier) and for making use of design competitions.

Which brings us to the subject of this book. Columbus decided to apply some of the creativity and interest in downtown renovation and planning to the largely neglected problem of the parking lot. They sponsored a nationwide ideas competition based on a site in downtown Columbus, and the results have been collected in this book.

There is a lot to learn from this material. It starts with a potted history of the parking lot (the Romans developed parking lots and traffic cops!) and moves on to describe the Columbus architectural program; surely a

lesson there for some enterprising Australian town.

The bulk of the book is made up the entries themselves, some presented in full colour, with short jury statements for each. The collection is organised simply by the five predominant solution types: multiple uses, landscaping, screens, parking patterns, and

the use of sculptures and monuments. The result is a rich mine of ideas, some immediately obvious and practical, some outlandish, and some just beautifully presented. The winning solution by Eric R. Kuhne and Associates was both the former and the latter: it provides very dense planting of Bradford Callery pear trees with a well thought out system of tree guards, integrated lighting and patterned pavements that would allow the lot to be attractively used as both a parking lot and a market place.

Probably my favorite idea falls into the

middle catagory. "Green Ghosts" by Marc Treib and Ron Herman uses chain-link fencing to define the outline of buildings and vines to grow up to soften the edges. There are berms planted with grass, wheat or corn to echo the surrounding countryside, and the grid of cars echoes the grid of the city as the "Green Ghosts" echo its houses.

"Carscape" is an immensely useful source of ideas and encouragement for the landscape/urban designer in Australia. Goodness knows we have enough car parks in need of attention.

Stephen Axford.

▲ *Car parking lot design concept by Dan Ferguson and Michael Sommer*