

THE CHANGING AGENDA FOR URBAN DESIGN IN CANBERRA

BRIAN BINNING

The agenda for urban design in Canberra has changed over time, and relates closely to successive adaptations of Griffin's original plan for the city (1912).

Lord Holford (1958) is mostly associated with a plan for the National Area, but his layout of roads and landscaping effectively provided a new agenda for a suburban city form, with high levels of car ownership. Holford's recipe for the National Area was also essentially suburban: while he formally deferred to Griffin, his plan established the basis for the growth of a series of separate precincts, each having unconstrained access by car and attendant surface parking (eg. the Russell plan by Skidmore Owings and Merrill of 1960). The quality of the national setting was ensured by gluing together these different precincts with what is now a brilliantly successful series of arcadian landscapes.

The New Towns

The other consequences which followed Holford was the New Town Programme: here the agenda was not constrained by the

effective solutions to these links.

If Woden was Stevenage but with more cars, Belconnen was a Cumbernauld. The resulting plan was for highly integrated "megastructure" on a picturesque but difficult site, with subgrade service tunnels and parking structures designed to link into the adjacent office "megastructure" - Cameron offices (John Andrews) and Benjamin offices (MSJ). The retail mall was to be compact and based on multi level retailing. In implementation, Belconnen literally (and one might say with hindsight predictably) fell apart under the impact of large space consuming discount retail layouts, and the economic dictates of providing surface parking rather than structures.

The result today is office areas with multi level circulation linking poorly to a retail mall, which has its own closed environment. Belatedly, attempts have been made to recast Belconnen, using buildings facing streets to fill gaps, but it is a hard task and there is little consistency of built form or materials.



▲ Tuggeranong town centre

need to fit into Griffin's pre-existing plan. Successively, each of the New Towns set out to build a centre which was to contain a range of functions, including a major shopping centre and decentralised Commonwealth office functions. It was in the 1970's and 80's that these centres became the "hot-bed" in the NCDC and their realisation effectively mirrors changing perceptions of urban design.

Woden, the first centre had a simple linear layout which enabled a series of office buildings and a retail mall to join at a town square. Parking was dispersed to the flanking areas. All the pedestrian public circulation relied on a pedestrian broadwalk in the office precinct, plus the usual network within the air conditioned retail mall. Although a series of spines at right angles to the linear form were planned to link to adjacent residential areas, the intervening surface parking areas negated

Tuggeranong a highlight

The third centre, Tuggeranong, marked a return to a centre structured by urban streets, with pavements, frontage access and a simple urban design vocabulary of low rise buildings set up to street frontages, with pitched roofs and masonry walls penetrated by windows. The retail mall achieves some decked parking and links directly to a lake foreshore with informal groupings of public buildings including Edwards Madigan's highly successful secondary college, with its integrated library and other facilities open to the general public. Tuggeranong incorporates all of the lessons of the earlier centres and is the highlight of the NCDC era.

Return to the centre

The push towards decentralisation is today

less dominant, and there is a growing pressure to provide for greater amounts of development in the Central Area. Viewed in the context of Holford's plan, this creates demands for the provision of parking and single purpose buildings to fill in vacant holes within the landscaped setting. It also requires increasing provision for larger scale roads. Introduced into the arcadian confines of Griffin's central area, these are indeed potentially destructive forces.

So today Canberra is entering a new era where there is a need to move planning away from Holford's model and to reconcile the formal demands of Griffin's plan with a new more cohesive urbanisation. This should embody a greater variety of

uses (urban texture and vitality) and much more constraint on the use of the motor car.

In this development, urban design has a new task which involves demonstration and simulation of design outcomes, allied to debates in transportation and new methods for implementing plans. This change will represent a further evolution of Canberra's story, but it is a chapter which is just beginning.

Brian Binning is the Director of Urban Design, National Capital Planning Authority



▲ Tuggeranong town centre main street

20 20 VISION

In March this year the Premier of South Australia announced a major planning review, intended to provide major policy objectives for Metropolitan Adelaide and to advise on improvements to State and regional level planning. The first report of the planning review team was published in July this year under the title "2020 Vision".

At present a series of position papers are under preparation and one of these deals with urban design. A report on the South

Australian Planning Review and in particular its Urban Design component, will be included in the March issue of Urban Design Forum. Anyone interested in doing some background reading in the meantime might look at an excellent article published earlier this year by Raymond Bunker - "Urban Design in a Metropolitan Setting: A Case Study of Adelaide" in "Town Planning Review", 61 (1), pp.21-39, 1990.



Hillarys Harbour wins W.A. Civic Design Award

Showing a strong spirit of professional co-operation, the West Australian branches of AILA, RAPI, RALA and AIE come together to run an annual award for civic design projects in the state. This years winner was the Hillarys Harbour project, a waterfront tourist retailing and marina complex that provides a very valuable asset to Perth's newer northern suburbs.

The third in the successful series of South Australian Residential Design Workshops was held on 13th and 14th of September 1990, at Tanunda, using a site at Golden Grove, north east of Adelaide.

The workshop format was similar to previous years. Participants experienced in the residential development process - planners, architects, developers, surveyors, house builders, engineers and others - worked in groups to prepare designs for a selected site then critically discussed each group's work. The workshop was led by Stephen Hamnett, for the Planning Education Foundation of South Australia, with Jan Martin of Loder & Bayly as guest urban designer and critic.

Previous workshops in this series have tended to take large, relatively unconstrained greenfield sites and under the influence of Ivor Samuels and Paul Murray, to concentrate on street layouts, 'fronts and backs' and inevitably permeability. This year the brief was a good deal tighter and the site more challenging.

A sloping site, fairly steep in parts, was chosen. This is the next site to be released by the Golden Grove Joint Venturers and the groups were required to work to a marketing brief - specifying so many courtyard dwellings, so many villas and so many standard houses, so many medium density units and so on. Some realistic costs were built into the exercise, with each group required at the end to justify its proposals in terms of financial feasibility.

The constraints proved uncomfortable to some participants who felt that this type of product mix did not allow them to respond to the characteristics and potential of the site. This was part of a more generally

expressed criticism during the workshop, relating to the somewhat unsympathetic way in which new development at Golden Grove is being carried out, with the undulating landscape being moulded and levelled to accommodate standard builders' houses on flat blocks, rather than with housing being designed to take advantage of the many sloping sites. The justification for the current approach relied heavily on the need to ensure housing affordability, but not all participants found this to be completely convincing. At any event, all participants came away with a clear understanding of the financial realities of the current residential land development process, as well as with an appreciation of many of the good things being accomplished at Golden Grove.

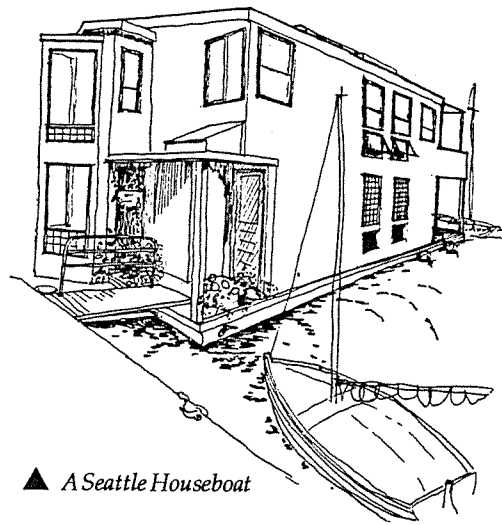
There was some concern beforehand that the format of these workshops might be a little stale after three years. In practice however, the workshop generated an enormous amount of energy and debate, a fair number of heated exchanges and some interesting innovations. It therefore seems likely that the Planning Education Foundation will organise another such workshop in 1991.

In addition there are proposals for other activities on the theme of residential design next year. A week long course on landscape and urban design focussing on the redevelopment of an inner suburban area is scheduled for February and a number of workshops are proposed for later in the year. Further details are available from Angela Hazebroek or Stephen Hamnett at the School of the Built Environment, South Australian Institute of Technology, North Terrace, Adelaide 5000.

Stephen Hamnett.



▲ Participants at the Tanunda workshop



▲ A Seattle Houseboat

HOUSEBOATS IN THE U.S. & CANADIAN NORTHWEST: A MODEL FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIES ?

Cities on the Pacific northwest coast are often compared to Australian cities. Seattle in the U.S. and Vancouver in Canada for example, are essentially built on a Victorian heritage and have been compared to Melbourne and Sydney; an effect that has been strengthened recently since Melbourne began selling its old trams to Seattle.

Needless to say local conditions do lead to differences, and one that I noted during a recent visit was the number of houseboats in this region. At first sight, they appear to be modern medium density units that have slid into the water, complete with concrete slab. Unlike their European counterparts, they did not seem very boat like at all. On closer inspection, there was a fair degree of variety: some appeared to be renovated shacks, whilst others were clearly new. In fact most are now architect designed, and provide a high standard of accommodation.

The houseboats first appeared towards the end of last century, beginning with

fishermen who tied their boats to the piers and railroad trestles near the cities. Soon they became more "floating shacks" than boats, providing cheap housing for workers, artists and a rich variety of maritime eccentrics.

Over the years there were many attempts to remove the houseboats, usually on environmental grounds. There was also a desire to rid the city of the "unsavory types" thought to be attracted to water borne housing. Finally, by the 1960's the authorities accepted the inevitable and began providing services. The result was dramatic: rents for moorages went up to account for the services; houseboats became worthwhile, even trendy, investments.

As middle class trendy accommodation goes, they are surprisingly efficient. The average houseboat would measure around 7m by 13m, may be of one or two stories, timber framed and clad, and supported on a concrete slab which includes styrofoam flotation blocks: a true "raft slab". They are

typically moored only a few metres apart, sometimes singularly along a pier, and sometimes on both sides of a jetty.

Originally they were seen as making use of "sunken land" for which no better use could be found: now the houseboats are recognised as providing an interesting if minor alternative to the more usual city housing, adding life and security to waterfronts, docks, and so on. Needless to say, some of the earlier examples are now seen to have heritage value.

An Australian Model ?

Could the Northwest "houseboat" be adapted to Australia? I believe so. I think immediately of the Maritime and Docklands area of Melbourne, and of course all those protected waterways around Sydney. Or, what about a floating island for Port Phillip Bay? And who knows, perhaps we could redress the dreadful imbalance of trade in historic treasure and import some of their earlier examples. Or would they be so foolish?

Stephen Axford



MELBOURNE STRATEGIES FOR THE 1990'S

Rob Adams

1990 has arguably been one of the most dynamic years in Melbourne's history. The city finds itself in the midst of enormous change; a building boom that rivals the 19th century, a bid for the Olympics that explored opportunities for future development, selected as one of the top cities in the world in terms of livability, and a downturn in the Victorian and Australian economy. In the midst of this change is an exciting challenge for the future.

In October, the City of Melbourne and the Department of Planning and Urban Growth released a document highlighting issues for the 90's. This document reviews the City's 1985 Strategy Plan and asks where we go in the 90's. Unlike earlier documents, it is concise and it is an honest look at the City's development over the past few years. There is an implicit admission within the document that not all that has been achieved is to the quality that Melbourne would desire, and that we need to strengthen and refine our strategies for the future.

Significantly this document focuses on four areas that the City is aiming to improve on in the 1990's. These are -

- Environmental Sustainability
- Melbourne's Global Competitiveness
- The City's Built Form, Character and Diversity
- Livability

These may well sound like motherhood statements that every city should be pursuing. The fact is that Melbourne has been pursuing these objectives for some time, but still needs to focus its attention more directly on these particular fields of endeavour. If Melbourne is to retain its position as one of the pre-eminent cities of the world, we have to seriously address all of these issues.

Previous documents have contained large numbers of policies and actions. The difficulty has been the ability to market these and for people to understand the direction and emphasis that has been given to the City. This document for the first time clearly indicates the direction that we should be taking. It provides four basic themes that are easy to market and understand and hopefully will enable the drawing together of municipal, state and federal resources to achieve these goals.

The document is currently at the stage of calling for comment prior to the establishment of strategies for the 1990's. This will be a public process and comments are invited from interested people.

MEDIEVAL CITY DREAMING

Experiencing a festival and a conference in the Italian hill-village of Siena.....

*Fortified shadows fall upon a soup of human faces in the ochre piazza.
The crowd is a wave, the wave has its own life: it floods the city.*

Dozens of pole bearers follow flags of promise: One flag must win the horse race; one neighbourhood will possess the city heart for another year.

*Over the rituals of a medieval community ride the voices of the contrada girls who fight with songs in the street for the honour of the Shell, the Goose or the Tower.
One contrada will win today.*

Politics pervades the air, as the horses scatter off the line.

The human shell of faces scream, as the jockeys jostle.

A horse slams a fence. You see his eyes glaze, and then they trample him.

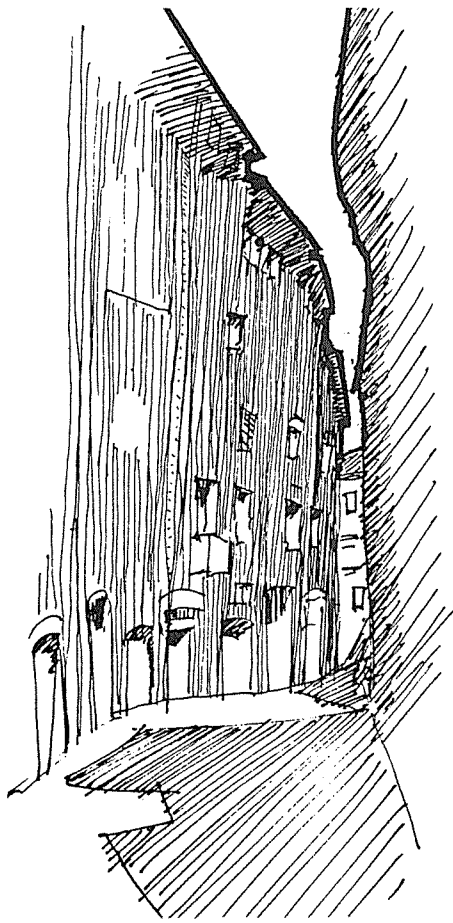
The winner surprises, and the community rise, either with laughter or crying.

The trouble maker jockey in the pink is chased through the piazza and beaten up lightly.

Bad taste in clothes, or too much skulduggery? And in the streets of the Tower, favourites but not favoured, they weep openly and together.

And so it is that a medieval dream is re-enacted for a city, which like its country, lives on with its past. Siena is the proud mother of a popular culture which lives and breathes its traditions so potently that tourism will not destroy it.

The meaning of this medieval festival : a horse race through the main piazza of the



city; a competition of honour and civic pride in which each neighbourhood, or contrada, must don its medieval colours and challenge for the communal control of the city core.

In this vivid setting an appropriate conference about making cities livable was held. The idea of urban well being was touted among the gold-stuccoed halls of a baroque academy. Good city values: the DNA of a healthy city: achieving open space justice: achieving walkability. These themes, among others, were discussed within the conference and were exemplified in the streets outside.

Siena teaches that urban well being must be the concern and the pride of its citizens,

not merely planners, architects and urban sociologists. The experts at the conference agreed!

The Italians' sense of culture pervades their use of open spaces. Meeting and living in the street is not an urban design option, it is the lifeblood of that society.

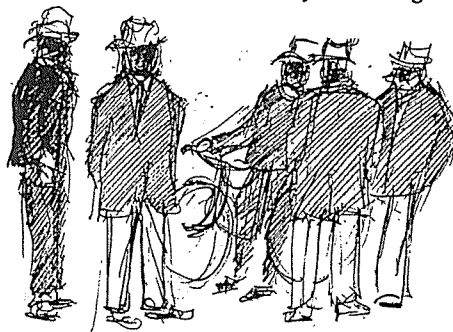
Australia is a recreational society and is not yet so cultural. We value natural open space but not the urban: we are not yet urbane.

Australians hunt for culture in places like Siena (the conference had an above average number of aussies). Yet we do have our own cultural rituals; we fight our post-medieval contests on the beach, our banners are those of the surf carnival.

Perhaps if we gathered enough pride in our cities, rather than merely at the surf, we could make our impoverished city squares part of our communal life.

We may yet dream of a city lifestyle, which as the Sieneese boast, has lasted for over five hundred years.

John Mongard



John is a lecturer in landscape architecture at Q.U.T. and is a principal of Terrain, landscape planners and urban designers in Brisbane.

TEN MYTHS OF GOOD TOWN PLANNING

It appears that few planners are sufficiently aware of the ultimate physical form that results from judicious application of planning controls. Viewed from an urban design perspective, ten of the basic "commandments" of presently-practised town planning often contribute little, and indeed often detract from the design quality of a city.

My ten myths, presented as food for thought, are:

1. **The Zoning Myth;** which believes that separation of uses is essential. Instead we should be encouraging compatible mixed uses.

2. **The Traffic Myth:** which has created rigid hierarchies and segregation, rather than managed networks with long term adaptability. This myth has also largely reduced the complex functions of streets to the limited functions of roads.

3. **The Carparking Myth,** which increases parking off street and reduces it on street. On-street parking is highly flexible, helps make footpaths comfortable, and helps slow the speed of traffic. Off street parking should be at the rear, rather than at the front of development.

4. **The Setbacks Myth,** which requires substantial space between a street and a building. There is a belief that more space is better rather than appreciating that it can diminish urban interaction and is often just wasteful of valuable space.

5. **The Built Form Myth,** where controls over plot ratio and heights are believed to be sufficient to generate an acceptable building envelope, appearance and layout. These controls fail to ensure that the building faces the street, or that the ground floor has active frontages where appropriate.

6. **The "Architecture isn't our Business" Myth,** where the appearance of a building is not questioned. Yet it is critically important to reinforce the character and identity of precincts, with new facades being in context.

7. **The Open Space Myth,** which says "more is better," using quantity rather than quality as the criteria, often resulting in bland green spaces expensive to maintain and of little value.

8. **The Green Myth,** which believes that planting will fix it all up. However unless there is a clear concept for the street's landscaping, then there will often be little contribution made by a row of variously 'shrubbied-up' setbacks.

9. **The Heritage Myth,** which regards only those old buildings with heritage classifications as important. Yet there are many reasons for retaining old buildings, particularly for providing lower rent space.

10. **The Weather Protection Myth,** which has contributed to large scale developments and enclosed complexes privatising significant parts of town centres, with blank walls along streets.

The "ideal city", if derived from judicious application of the planning principles behind the ten myths, is thus a collection of separate buildings set amongst carparks, rather hidden by a miscellaneous collection of greenery, and all served by an efficient vehicle distribution system with separate pedestrian ways winding off over dull green reserves. A daunting thought!

Wendy Morris

Adapted from "Buildings and Spaces - Managing the Micro-elements of a City's Image," presented to the City Image conference, April 1990.

FACELIFT IDEAS FOR MANLY CORSO

Town planning students from the University of New South Wales undertook a valuable real world project last year when they prepared a series of shopfront facade colour schemes for the Corso, Manly's major tourist shopping street. The students developed a range of experimental colour design concepts for the street, and detailed schemes for two historic and two modern buildings. Under the guidance of project tutors ten colour schemes were placed on public exhibition in the Manly Council Chambers.

These schemes varied from

- multi-coloured and bright
- limited range of related colours
- almost monochrome
- white or pale background with bright highlights
- predominantly blue (seaside theme), to
- awning fascias in single colour.

None of these approaches appeared to be better or worse than others, and of greater importance were good building facade maintenance, strict control over advertising signs, and sensitive painting of individual buildings.

Public Response

The public responded very positively to the exhibition, and 50 provided written submissions, with the majority expressing preference for strict colour controls, and supporting a co-ordinated colour scheme of muted base colours and stronger highlighting colours.

Building owners and occupiers were also supportive, with the exhibition stimulating

60% of the Corso traders to agree to repaint their buildings.

Lessons Learnt

The following lessons and experiences from the whole exercise are worth noting:

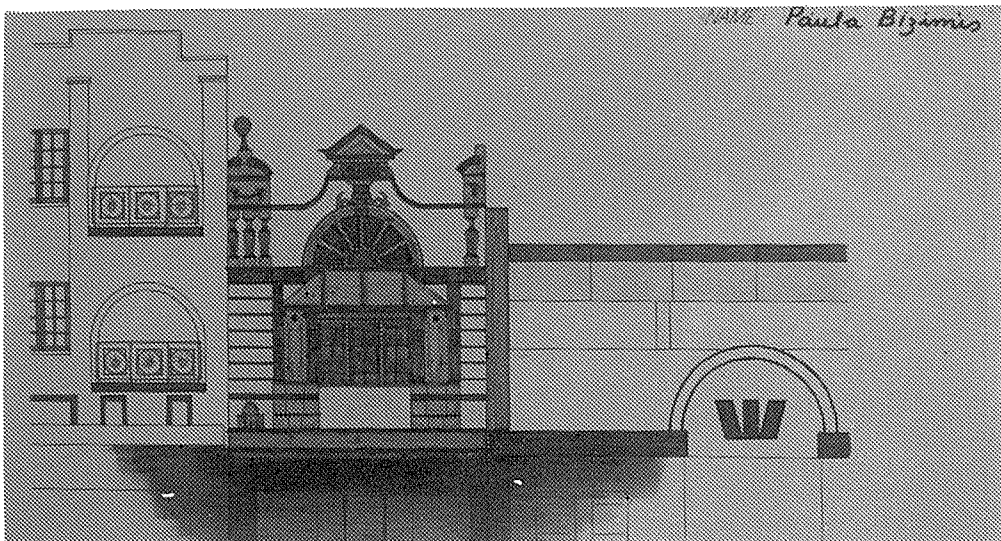
- the students benefitted from taking part in a real life project, meeting with important officials, explaining their work to outsiders and bringing it up to a standard suitable for public display;
- the Council obtained a much broader range of alternatives to display and consider than they could from a private consultant, and at a much lower cost;
- the public benefitted by having a great variety of alternatives to look at. If nothing else, they were made more conscious of the appearance of the Corso buildings and of the need to care for them;
- although 50 replies is not a huge response, the expressed verdict in favour of strict controls is interesting and gives some

mandate to the Council to apply controls and to have these accepted with some degree of acquiescence and understanding which may not have happened without the exhibition.

- although controls may help, the evidence of the drawings suggested that no one particular system of colours was clearly better than any other - though something between the two extremes (multi-coloured chaos vs. monochrome dullness) seemed to be favoured.

The colour project is now contributing to the 'Main Street' project recently launched in Manly, to retain and enhance the viability of the Corso in the face of competition expected from the new Manly Wharf retail development.

Dr.Tamas Lukovich and Elias Duek-Cohen (University of New South Wales) and Brian Wilson (Manly City Council).



Landscape Architecture and Theory - The Critical Path

20th - 24th February, 1991. Auckland, N.Z. A joint conference of the New Zealand and Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. The conference will examine the theoretical base of landscape architecture, debate its applicability into the 1990's, discuss avant garde theory and landscape architectural practice.

Contact: Conference Convenor, P.O. Box 9050, Newmarket, Auckland, New Zealand, Ph. (09) 773 732, fax. (09) 770 689. or A.I.L.A.

Making Cities Livable

26th February - 2nd March, 1991. San Francisco, USA. This is the 9th International Conference of the Lennard team. Fifteen Australians got to the 8th in Siena and brought back some interesting reports - see article in this issue. Contact: I.C.M.L. Conference, P.O. Box 7586, Carmel, California, 93921 USA. ph.(408) 626 9080, fax (408) 624 5126.

Urban Design Forum Group Lunch

Second Tuesday of each month, Melbourne. All welcome. Contact Bruce Echberg on (03) 329 6844 for location.

ECO Design Conference

July 1991, Melbourne. An international conference on issues facing designers in an environmentally sensitive market. Contact Chris Ryan, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, GPO. Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. ph.(03) 660 2362.

SMALL TOWNS LEAD THE WAY IN COMMUNITY BASED DESIGN

In Bangalow, NSW, and Smithton and Stanley in Tasmania, community based design workshops have recently been run to foster and focus local improvement programs. Whilst the approaches used differed, they both involved a group of design professionals in intensive visits to the towns, with substantial 'hands-on' community involvement in the process.

Bangalow is a small historic coastal town near Byron Bay. The "Bangalow - Small Town Image Building" project was run through the University of Sydney Department of Architecture, and was supported by the Arts Council of NSW, amongst others. It focussed on strategies for improving the physical environment of the town as well as enhancing its cultural programs.

Stanley and Smithton are within the municipality of Circular Head, in far north west Tasmania, one a stunning little historic settlement around the Nut (the Circular Head), and the other a very utilitarian rural service centre. This program focussed on townscape improvement as a basis for improving community pride, culturally-based tourism and development potential. A key role



was taken by Tourism Tasmania, in initiating and promoting the workshops.

Most interestingly both projects produced reports which clearly outline the methodology used, making them of value to other small towns committed to a high level of community participation in determining their future.

"Bangalow - Small Town Image Building" produced by Arts Council of New South Wales, 117 York St, Sydney, 2000. ph. (02) 264 2500.

"Municipality of Circular Head Improvement Program" by L. J. Cutler and Associates, May 1990. \$10 from Municipality of Circular Head, P.O. Box 348, Smithton 7330, Tasmania ph. (004) 521265.

Wendy Morris

Queenstown N.Z. Seeks Facilitator

The community of Queenstown in New Zealand's South Island is seeking an urban design and community development facilitator to bring together their aspirations and to achieve a positive and widely supported view of the city's future.

This could be a two to three month appointment early in 1991 based in Queenstown. Enquiries should be directed to Keith Grantham Chief Executive Officer, Queenstown-Lakes District Council, Queenstown, N.Z. ph.+64-3-442 7333, fax +64-3-442 7334.

World Congress Centre - Melbourne's shame!

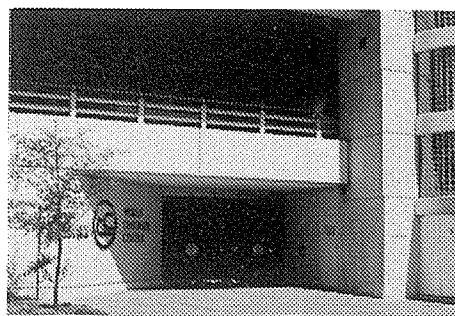
Metropolis '90 has been and gone, and interspersed amongst discussions covering world issues, was a persistent theme - whatever happened to the front door and the pedestrian? Unbelievably, to enter the Congress Centre, one has the choice of a narrow ramp dominated by huge concrete columns, squeezed against the car ramp, or a recessed bolthole into an unwelcoming lower foyer.

Surely now, having had such critical feedback from prominent world dignitaries, the WCC might consider modifications to create a fitting public front on just a little of the 150 odd metres of street frontage available.



Main Street N.S.W.

A "Main Street" program is now well established in N.S.W. Stimulated and guided by the Department of Planning, traditional town centres and suburban shopping streets are being revitalised with the assistance of "Main Street" co-ordinators based in each centre.



▲ World Congress Centre pedestrian entries ▼

Dear Editor,

TIBBALDS TIT - BITS

The significance of Tibbalds comments, if proportionate to reporting of them by your publication and the Age (John Stevens Column), must be buxom.

It reminds me of ten years ago when local Urban Designers were "kicked in the guts" by the state department responsible for our cities' development claiming inadequacy of local talent. At that time the tertiary institutions were similarly stultifying local initiative by only granting senior positions to 'anyone but one who is a local'.

Of course this reeks of 'cultural cringe' reflected in the period in the 50's by the deferment to the British model, in the 60's and 70's to the American models and then 80's and now 90's to anything but local.

Our national economy is suffering through excessive imports. While it may not be easy to export our professional services at this time lets give evidence to local talent and not seem to grovel and take as gospel the 'Tit - Bits' of Tibbalds.

Peter Hirst

P.S. I find Tibbalds comments generally fair and said by others of our profession many times before. I would like to see the Ministry for Planning and Urban Growth (not Containment) and the City of Melbourne acknowledge the wealth of talent locally and if we invite comment let it be informed and experienced and reflective comment based on our needs.

SNIPPETS

"Hands on The Earth" Project

The Queensland Conservation Council is running a community arts project where artists will work with conservation groups in designing and producing posters, banners and other material to promote conservation activities.

Urban Design Source Book 1990

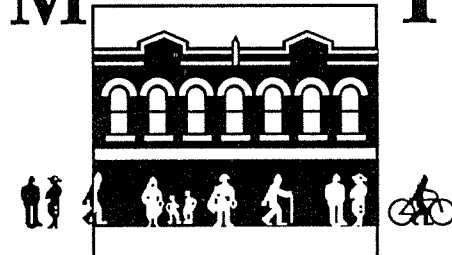
The UK Urban Design Group has published a valuable source book on urban design practices, urban design courses and UDG activities in the UK. The UDG now has about 800 members and runs an extensive program of lectures, forums and study tours, as well as publishing a quarterly journal. The UDG is also seeking to establish a National Centre for Urban Design as a permanent home for the group.

Contact the UDG, c/o 17 Hatton St, London, NW8 8PL, UK, ph. (071) 239 7777 or Wendy Morris on (03) 628 5469.

Design Academy targets Asia

At the Australian Academy of Design's first AGM in September, a 14 member Council was elected, with Dr. Peter Miller, a consulting engineer from Sydney, as President. One of the first tasks of the new Academy has been to promote local design services in Asia. Effort was focussed on the Second International Design forum held in Singapore in October.

MAIN STREET



New South Wales

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