

Life of the City?

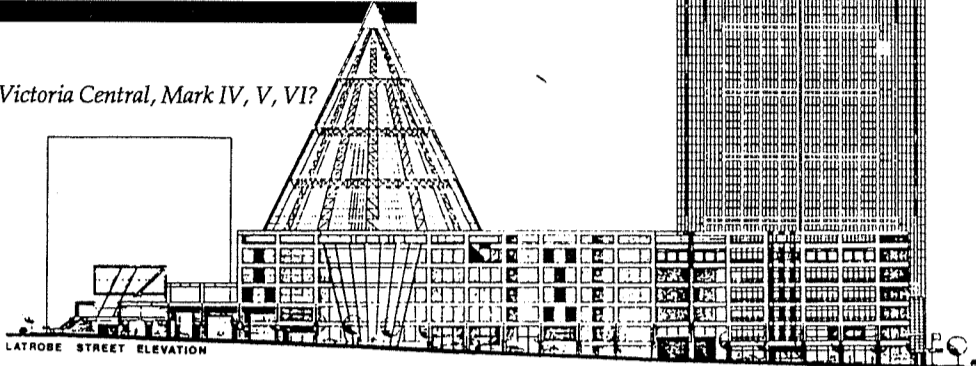
by Jan Martin

Rising at last from the bomb site that was Melbourne's Museum Station is the City's latest gesture to streetscape. Until recently it was known as Victoria Central. Now its called Melbourne Central. The word Victoria, said the PR chaps, has too many negative connotations. The design, alas, has refused to be influenced in any way by its Victorian (in two senses of the word) setting.

Consumers of Melbourne's media have recently learned of the proposed three level pedestrian bridge. It would link the development across Lonsdale Street to Myers. The alarm and opposition it has ignited is totally justified. It is not the only element about which we should be concerned. More fundamentally, it is the design process which is at fault.

Melbourne Central incorporates a 55 storey office tower with a modish chisel top. It has a metre high translucent cone which encloses, among other things, Coop's historic shot tower, which it dwarfs. The development will inject 35,000m2 of new retail space into the city heart. The principal designer is Kurokawa, working

▼ Victoria Central, Mark IV, V, VI?



out of Japan the developer is Kumagai-gumi the major tenant will be Diamaru. The proposal is by no means all bad. Neither its bigness, nor its gee-whizz architecture, nor yet its component functions are, of themselves, unwelcome.

Bridges vs Footpaths

But now to the nasty bits. Look at the current plan and consider:

1. The bridge. It would loom. It would ignore the street. Why descend from the air-conditioning? The street level becomes merely the infrastructure level, part of the city's plumbing.

2. The Elizabeth Street facade. The tower already under construction is turned 45° to the city grid. There is a suggested canopy arrangement fronting Elizabeth Street, but it does not continue the street line, it isn't straight, and it is not an effective visual screen or activity generator.

3. The lack, in the design, of corner emphasis or any identification of the station entries. Some of the earlier plans did these things well but have since been discarded.

4. The introverted nature of the design. Central Melbourne still has a pedestrian web of interesting complexity and, to a

degree, street level detail which is still rich and varied. These are inheritances in which Melbourne Central has no interest. The criticism, that the design turns its back on its context, is the source from which the previous faults spring.

It appears that Melbourne City Council is trying very hard to get a more appropriate final product out of the designers. It has won a number of worthy improvements which for brevity are not detailed here. MCC's statutory rights are limited. It does, however, own a lane which is essential to the scheme. Using this as a bargaining chip, it is trying to negotiate improvements on each of the above points.

Blackmail By Council ?

Is the Council using blackmail? Yes, but justifiably. Why is it justified? Because more "proper" ways of representing the interests of the community were not, in the case of Melbourne Central, available to Council.

Shouldn't the designers be allowed to follow their own consistent line. Isn't the MCC, under the banner of urban design, being bureaucratic and stifling? No, Council is trying to negotiate, not oppose. They have their obligations to work for the public face of Melbourne, just as the project proponents have their own legitimate loyalties.

Could the confrontation situation have been avoided? Yes, yes, yes. Urban design, as UDF uses the term, is not a reactive after-the-event mechanism for obstruction. It is a collaborative process between people of different skills and different constituencies. Some other city projects are being done in creative collaboration. Melbourne Central could have been. Now it can only be changed through a confrontationist chipping at the corners. What's the Japanese for *quel dommage?*

U.D.F. Goes National Locally

It's a bit of a contradiction in terms, but if you think about it, it makes sense. Starting with this edition, UDF will be distributed nationally with the "Australian Planner", courtesy of the Royal Australian Planning Institute. However, its emphasis will still be mainly based on local issues and interests.

The main aim of UDF is to provide a forum for ideas and views about urban design. Articles, snippets, and any other items of interest are invited for future editions. Although the initiative for UDF was based in Victoria, its interest and activity has now spread to other States, and the following correspondents would be pleased to hear from you.

Barry Sheldon, c/o Department of Architecture, Tasmania State Institute of Technology, Hobart. (002) 38 4385

Stephen Hamnett, c/o Planning School of the Built Environment, South Australian Institute of Technology, Adelaide (08) 236 2311

Gordon Holden, c/o Department of Architecture, Queensland Institute of Technology, Brisbane (07) 223 2677

Ralph Stanton, Planning and Design Consultant, Perth (09) 382 1069

Editors: Rob Adams
Bill Chandler
Wendy Morris

FLOW FORMS

David Morgan

Between 6th - 10th April, a wide range of people including professionals and students from the planning, landscape architectural and waste management disciplines as well as artists, potters, craftspeople and at least one farmer took part in a stimulating series of lectures and workshops given by John Wilkes from Britain.

John Wilkes, a sculptor, lecturer and water consultant founded the Sculpture Training Centre, Emerson College, which is based on the work of Rudolf Steiner.

John Wilkes is best known for his discovery of the "Flow Form Method" (1970) whereby water is induced to move in a rhythmical lemniscatory pattern through sculpted vessels. This movement can be seen to resemble the rhythmic pulsation of fluids within organisms which creates the basis for the sustaining of life. Such observation leads to the question: "Could these rhythmical movements enhance the inherent regenerative process present in the natural water cycle?" The exploitation and degradation of the world's water resource may be balanced by a more rhythm - penetrated environment able to give support to organisms which in turn improve the vigour, freshness and quality of water itself.

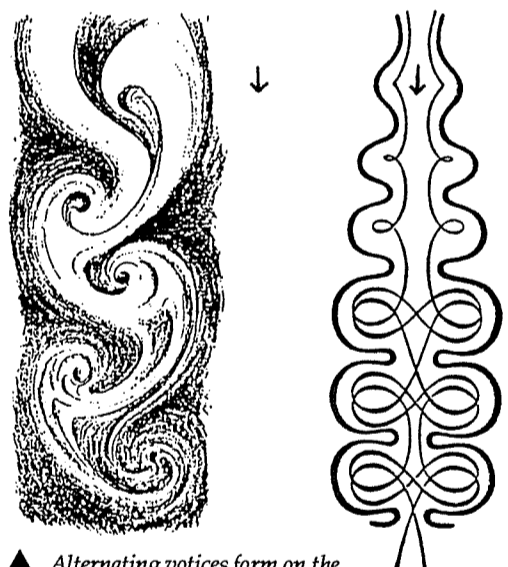
Flow forms have been used to offer an aesthetic experience in parks, children's play areas, urban public spaces, interior landscaping in office buildings and exhibitions. The qualitative effect of rhythmically activated water has found practical application in community

sewage disposal processes and enhancement of biological purification processes, plant germination and growth and further varied applications. About one hundred and seventy projects have been completed, including exhibitions, using some eighty Flowform designs in eighteen countries.

John Wilkes and the Flow Design Research Association are based at Emerson College, Forest Row, Sussex, England. An Australian Associate is Mark Baxter, Flow Research Group, 11 Birkley Road, Manley, N.S.W. 2095.

David Morgan is a Melbourne based architect in private practise.

▼ A working example



▲ Alternating voices form on the surface of still water through which an object has been moved in a straight line

Meandering boundary walls mirrored either side of the central stream cause it to oscillate in a figure-of-eight flow pattern. ▲

The Acton Park

Urban Design Ideas Competition

Lake Burley Griffin is Canberra's major water-based recreation resource. Its foreshores are largely underdeveloped except as formal and informal open spaces. Acton Park is one of these informal open spaces. It is adjacent to the Civic Centre and its development has been largely constrained by the major roads which form its boundaries. The competition has three objectives - firstly to overcome the physical constraints which have prevented the integration of the lake with the city centre; secondly to provide a high quality water frontage for the city; and thirdly to apply sound and imaginative principles of urban design in the exploration of a range of facilities, buildings and landscapes to satisfy the needs of all users and visitors.

Report of the Jury

The jury was impressed by the interdisciplinary nature of the competition, whose conditions called upon contributions from architects, planners and landscape architects to suggest an urban design strategy for an important, but unresolved, area in the Canberra plan. The problems faced by competitors were considerable, with an attenuated and restricted site along the shores of the

West Basin of Lake Burley Griffin, separated from the Civic Centre by strong barriers, and with no obvious clues as to what appropriate land uses might be.

Comments on the Prize Winners

First Prize:

Lester Firth Associates Pty Ltd (ACT)
John W. Firth and Rex A. Pepper

The design defines feasible vehicular and pedestrian connection into the site from Civic, and establishes a high quality water frontage to the city, with an appropriate scale and presence on the waterfront. The buildings provide for a mixture of "active

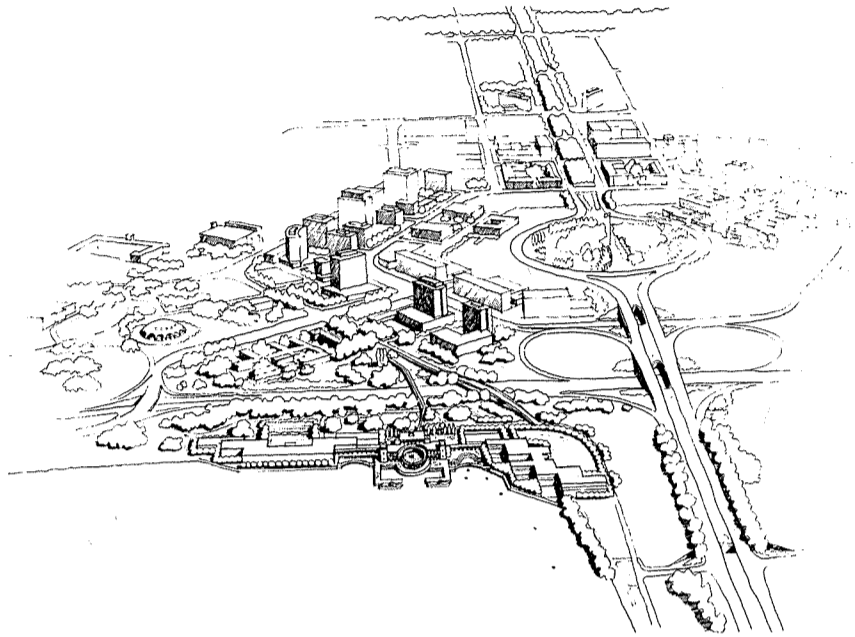
community based facilities" which would attract people to the waterfront and create a lively and popular focus. The planning establishes a hierarchy of open spaces which would give a pleasant variety of modulated spaces leading down to the water's edge and the drawings show a sense of fine grain lacking in most other entries. The treatment of the landscaping beyond the building group seems less convincing. The scheme should be attractive to a commercial developer, whereas most other solutions relied on public investment.

Second Prize:

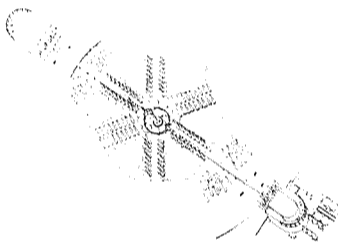
Urban Initiatives Pty Ltd, Melbourne
Team members - Bruce Echberg, Julie Lee, Andrew Gibbs

John McNabb & Associates Pty Ltd
Architects, Melbourne
Team members - John McNabb, Jennifer McNabb

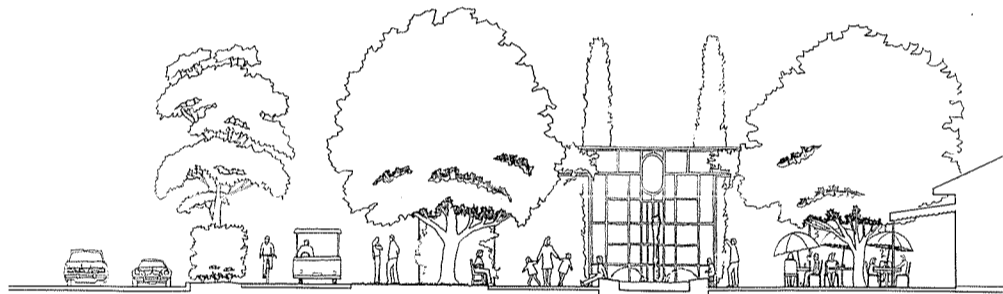
The design made one of the boldest attempts to provide a strong pedestrian link from the centre of Civic through to the water's edge, in the form of a formal promenade culminating in a terraced structure overlooking the lake. The strategy made it necessary to extend the design beyond the site boundaries and into the heart of Civic, and the imaginative solution has the merit of bringing people to the centre of the arc of the waterfront around the north shore of the Basin.



▲ 1st Prize - Overall Plan



▲ 2nd Prize - Civic Square



▲ - Pedestrian Promenade along Edinburgh Avenue

URBAN DESIGN IN THE REAL WORLD

by Margo Huxley

I have been following (at a distance) the exchange of views between Wendy Morris (UDF No.1) and Tony Cooper (UDF No.2). I am intrigued by both their impressions, particularly their ideas about the relationship of urban design to the 'real' world of economics, politics and society in general.

Wendy Morris seems to yearn for a time gone by, but she does not seem to make connection between the built form of Oxford and the economic, political and social context that produced it. Urban form does not spring complete from the brow of a cosmic designer. Rather, it reflects the society of which it is a part. We are not a group of medieval scholars endowed by Church and the nobility in search of favour in the afterlife and prestige in this one.

Tony Cooper claims to give "practical" reasons why we cannot have workable open spaces and more shops in the central city. I agree with a lot of what he says about the absence of shoppers (economic and social conditions), and about 'cleaning up' and 'making good' at the micro scale. Street furniture, trees, pavings, signs and so on are things that the State has some direct control over and they do make a difference.

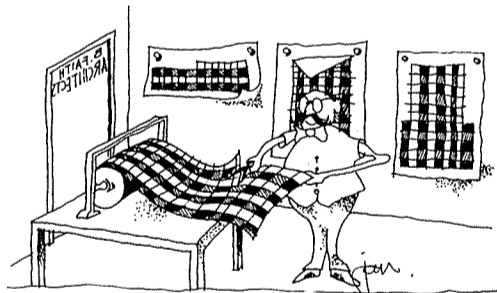
But I must point to the piquant ironies in some of Cooper's other "practical"

diagnoses.

When a plaza was provided for public use (on private property) to enliven and revitalise the central city, 'the public' turned out to be not decorous business people (like the tenants of the building) but "tinny-crushing rowdy youngsters" whose "bad behaviour forced" a change. The result was removal of an open space that was actually being used by some lively sections of the public. The reason for the change? The complaints of tenants paying prestige rents (social/economic conditions again)!

Tony Cooper is happy to blame the architects for "graph-paper facades". But architects, all by themselves, do not determine built form, however much they might like to believe in the architect-as-(male?)-creative hero. Neither is it just a matter of craft work not being available.

It is also that developers want value for money from their back-of-the-envelope calculations. Good design does not necessarily cost more money, and many developers might be willing to be daring enough to achieve a prestige building. The problem is that the combination of central city land prices, rates of return, international money markets, the requirements of changing office technology, obsession with size and height and shared perceptions of what are and



▲ After Rowland B. Wilson in "New Yorker"

are not acceptable uses or "behaviours" in central cities, converge in the production of the built form we do have. Central Melbourne is as it is because of the economic, political and social conditions under which our cities are produced and reproduced.

This sounds pessimistic and deterministic - maybe so. But we need to be aware of the limitations on urban design as a conscious attempt to influence urban form. Urban design is an intensely political activity and an inherently economic one, and cannot be separated from the social context in which it takes place. Alternative forms, and more importantly processes, of urban design cannot be separated from economic, social and political consequences and outcomes.

Margo Huxley is a lecturer in Public Policy at University of New England. She is an expatriate Melburnian and an Urban Planner.

Over the last three months we have been examining very carefully how Urban Design teaching should be introduced into the courses of the Faculty of Architecture and Planning at Melbourne University. Although an Urban Design Masters option was agreed to last year, there were some problems in getting this course soundly established in the way it has been planned. So with course changes required for the Master of Landscape Architecture and new options being considered for the Master of Urban Planning, and the Master of Architecture programs, there was a fine opportunity to rethink how Urban Design should be taught in the University.

The first and obvious constraint was resources. We agreed that there was no point in introducing a new Urban Design course if there were not the skills and resources to teach it very well and if the existing skills in the Faculty could not be used to greatest effect. We concluded that a new course could not be justified; we did not have the resources to support it. Instead we developed a new Urban Design program which would be available as a common first year to landscape architects, town planners and architects in three different Masters streams. In the first and common year, different groups of electives would be available to the different streams. In the second year the courses would move in different directions leading to a Master of Landscape Architecture, a Master of Urban Planning (Physical Planning) and a Master of Architecture option.

The Urban Design program will use a teaching approach, relating theory and skills to a carefully programmed sequence of problem solving exercises, similar to that used at the Oxford Polytechnic, but with emphasis on our need and conditions.

We were very fortunate to be able to use the skills and experience of Ivor Samuels, head of Urban Design at Oxford Polytechnic, Peter Walker, former Chairman of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and Alex Rattray, Chairman of the Landscape School at Manitoba University to help design the new structure. All were very supportive of the proposal.

To supplement skills of existing staff within the Faculty, we hope to bring in experienced overseas experts on a regular basis to help run the program. In subsequent articles for Urban Design Forum I will explain the program further.

PUBLIC ART IN AMERICA

William Kelly

The Philadelphia Conference, the first of its kind in America, was an extension of the practice of art becoming more public, the management of this becoming more astute and the realisation, amongst politicians, that a more considered and stimulating urban environment was advantageous socially and politically.

Oliver Franklin, Deputy City Commissioner for the Arts, Philadelphia, gave the Welcoming Address and related the idea of the Conference, held late last year, to its host city. Further discussion with him also quickly brought out that aspect of urban design and its relationship to art that touches on redressing cultural imbalances and, at times, inequities. He refers to the process as "cultural realignment".

Panelists included participants from the professions we now perceive to be central to the development of our urban environment - city planners, landscape architects, artists, developers, architects and public art administrators - as well as psychologists, engineers (construction & transport) lawyers, educators, museum directors, curators, publishers, writers, composers, recreation managers, specialists in real estate, and specialists from the area of health and safety.

The conference was organised by Penny Balking Bach and Laura Griffith of the Fairmount Park Art Association. In their planning, they managed to clear a significant conceptual hurdle, that of eliminating any perceptible bias towards their own area of interest. The mix in

Philadelphia proved to be a generator of dialogue of the level now required in connection with urban arts and design. They used well the skills of the "urban arts" practitioners and administrators of the host city as significant players in the conference, acknowledging with equal weight the importance of their contributions to the national and international dialogue.

A section on "case studies" was particularly informative. Two of these involved interdisciplinary collaboration. The Battery Park Project in lower Manhattan has a number of areas earmarked for architect/artist collaboration. One of these was developed by architect, Stanton Eckstut and artist, Mary Miss. Eckstut spoke of the collaborative process and of what it brings to a project. He spoke of craftsmanship (and of craftsmen), of wood, of stone, of traditional waterside materials, of attempting to create a "magical place" into which one can enter, and of the process he and Mary Miss went through to achieve this.

The Candlestick Point Park, an initiative of the Office of the State Architect, the Parks Department and California Arts Council is being designed in collaboration with Hargreaves Associates (landscape architects). Douglas Hollis (artist) and Mark Mach (architect). It presents a dramatic mound abutting the water's edge with retaining walls, wind dunes and a "wind gate" designed to focus the prevailing wind energies and to use these to create a substantial sound environment. Amphitheatre, cultural centre and indoor theatre call attention to the realization that parks now must acknowledge various levels of activity and address, in appropriate ways, the local community. Equally as important, and showing considerable insight by the government and its agencies, is that this major arts and leisure area (the "first urban park in the State Park system" in California) has been located adjacent to San Francisco's major

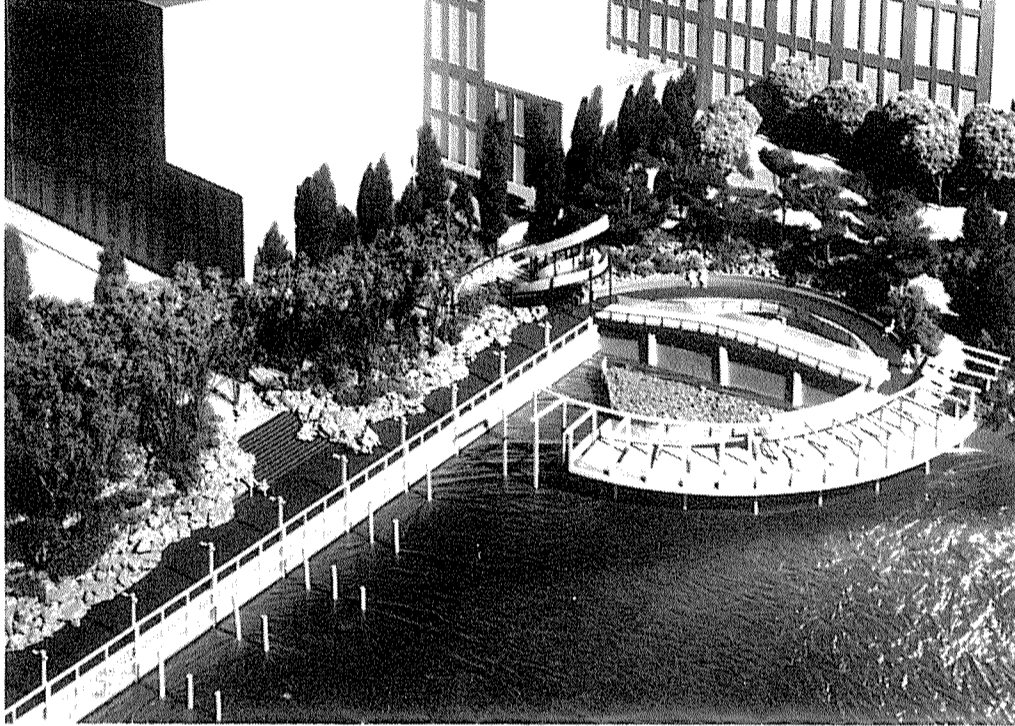
sporting venue and is being designed also with consideration being given to its use by people attending sporting events, either before or after the game. This does suggest, of course, application for this idea locally. Aspects of it could be applied in the environs adjacent to certain of the major sporting facilities in Australia.

The last example has more direct social implications and addresses a local community in Los Angeles which has demonstrably different needs. Mona Gable (in the New York Times) called it "..... a visionary public art program mounted by the Otis Art Institute to transform shabby, crime-ridden MacArthur Park into a beautiful, safe place". It is in a neighbourhood populated mostly by "elderly people and newly arrived immigrants from Central America". The park had become notorious for "violence", "drugs" and "prostitution". The artwork, going into an already existing park, is all being built on site, with artists interacting with local residents. Al Nodal, initiator of the project, calls it a "laboratory" for thinking how public art can work.

Like many of the projects that have been initiated by the Victorian Ministry for the Arts, and more recent proposals initiated by the Footscray Community Art Centre, "..... the work is tailored to the needs and social issues of the neighbourhood". Nodal is apparently not convinced by a lot of public art that "comes in by helicopter". It is worth noting, in summation, that the conference made clear that there is greater sharing among disciplines, that the considerable ego and boundary protecting that has been the hallmark of our public spaces, public buildings and public art is now clearly giving way to a more open, more flexible and positive approach to the expression of culture in our urban contexts.

William Kelly is a visual artist who has collaborated on various urban design projects.

▼ Battery Park - Eckstut/Miss



Urban Design Workshop

15th - 17th May, 1988
Footscray City Council

A report and review from the two West Australian participants.

Two thousand, seven hundred kilometres is a long way to travel for a three day Urban Design Workshop in Footscray. However it was worth it, as a diverse group of speakers shared their ideas with us and put participants through their paces.

Ivor Samuels and Wendy Morris presented a crash course in the "Responsive Environments" approach to analysis, planning and design for the urban realm. The relevance of this European model to the Australian context will continue to generate much debate.

The hands-on style of the workshop and small group sessions reminiscent of student studio days were of particular value.

Wendy's sessions with us at the Macintosh PC on an economic feasibility assessment programme brought home the financial implications of land use and design decisions, giving an appreciation of the developer's perspective and is an invaluable negotiating tool.

The involvement of developers in the workshop was of benefit and reminds us of the need to find a common language where aesthetic, functional and economic aspects are all given recognition.

There were some interesting dynamics between the development industry, represented by Tony Cooper, and those supporting urban design principles. We

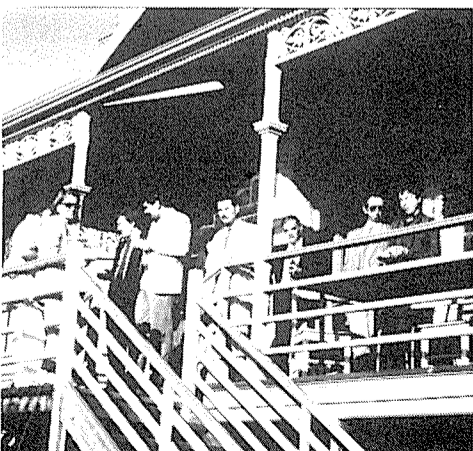
still disagree with Tony's comments that Melbourne developers would not accept mixed uses as a desirable urban quality. The recently proposed office and hotel complex on Bourke Street suggests that overseas trends toward mixed use are reaching Melbourne (and perhaps in a decade will get to Perth!)

Cheers to the "actors" of the Carlton United Brewery project 're-enactment', of the process and their tactics from inception to approval. Such sessions should form an integral part of any urban designer's education.

Perhaps for us the greatest benefit was the opportunity to establish contacts with people in similar fields. Any fellow adventures to the West are invited to drop in and check out our work and hospitality.

Anne Dunlop (Landbank, W.A.)
Charles Johnson (State Planning Commission, W.A.)

▼ Comfortable breakfast on the verandah of Henderson's Piggery, Footscray



Rumours & Snippets

Sometimes issues are just emerging and we can't wait for all the details. So in this column we provide the news items as they come.

Where to for UD in NSW?

With the recently elected new state government in NSW, changes are already being made to departmental structures and, one assumes, priorities will be different. But what will be the affect on urban design? In its capital city, self-styled as the "most beautiful harbour city in the world", will the new government make any difference? No one seems to know, or if they do, they're not saying. Are you there, Sydney?

Back to Square One!

It's exciting to see the plans to rejuvenate Melbourne's City Square and Regent Theatre Complex. Very interesting, to hear that Denton Corker Marshall, the original award winning designers, have been appointed to oversee the new design work. Seen by as many as one of Australia's best design groups, DCM should be in an excellent position to make good the sad loss of the waterwall.

And did we hear it right, that the "Vault", the controversial sculpture sometimes

known as the "Yellow Peril", is to be returned to its rightful position in the City Square, brought back from the forlorn banks of Batman Park?

Conferences Coming Up

We presume it's the stimulation of the Bicentennial! Over the next few months there are a number of conferences coming up which should be of interest to readers. More details can be obtained from the contacts listed below:

Sydney 12-15 June
RAIA International Conference - "Reflections - Unfinished Journey's". Stunning tours and a wide range of stimulating local and overseas speakers. (RAIA, NSW Chapter (02) 365 2955)

Melbourne 29 August - 1 September
RAPI National Conference "Planning and Developing Australia" A full program which addresses many aspect of present and future urban Australia. (Secretariat, F.I.T. (03) 688 4448)

Melbourne 5 - 7 September
Local agencies and UNESCO "The Creative City" An exciting seminar to explore how artistic and cultural activities contribute to the vitality and development of our cities. (Conference admin. MPE (03) 628 5014)

Your Forum-Be In It!

If you have something to show or tell, send it to:

Bill Chandler, Convenor, UDF,
C/O Loder & Bayly
79 Power Street, Hawthorn 3122

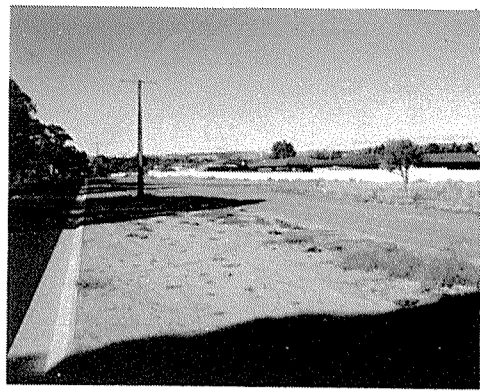
by Stephen Hamnett

This workshop, which mixed intensive practical design sessions with site visits and discussion, was attended by an invited group of planners, architects, engineers, local politicians, surveyors, academics and other professionals involved in the residential development process, drawn from both the public and private sectors. Its starting point was the assumption that there is substantial scope for improving the quality of new residential environments. This article summarises some of the more important issues raised.

1. Open Space

Perhaps the major area of agreement amongst participants in the workshop was that there is an urgent need to rethink the way in which open space is provided in new residential areas. At present the system relies on a simple quantitative measure. From the workshop discussions, and from the site visits in particular, it became clear that the quantity of open space provided is generally far less important than the quality of open space.

Open space seems to be the last thing considered in the design of new residential areas at present. There is a case for saying that it should be the first - that it should be



seen as providing the basic structure of an area. Or, better still, the relationship between built form and open space should be considered together throughout the residential design process.

2. Movement

The importance of proper design of the movement systems in new residential areas was recognised as being of vital importance and a number of points were made in discussion.

There was general agreement that many of our road-building standards continue to be excessive. The role of the collector road also needs to be carefully reconsidered and there is no reason to suppose that housing should always back on to such roads. It was suggested that perhaps we go to excessive lengths to separate motorists from pedestrians and that some of the benefits of separating the two groups might be achieved by better design of shared movement spaces. This led to discussion of some more philosophical questions about the design of residential areas to accommodate change in the



longer term. It was argued that our current adherence to strict hierarchical principles of road design might inhibit residential areas from adapting over time to changing social preferences and requirements. In particular, it was argued that some of our older residential areas, designed on modified grid patterns, have proved more adaptable to change than new areas with their excessive reliance on cul-de-sacs seem likely to.

A point made in the course of the open space discussion was raised again - the need to give identity and "legibility" to new residential areas by seeing roads and movement corridors as part of the overall design concept, related to open space, built form, location of community facilities and aesthetic questions such as the unfolding of views along curving streets. It was noticeable that workshop participants displayed a marked preference for the South Australian Housing Trust Developments visited where development had occurred following unified design principles.

3. Image

The last point above led on to a more general question which arose during a tour of residential developments in the outer northern suburbs of Adelaide - why do all new areas look so similar? Some of the answers offered were:

- rigid standards lead to the replication of similar layouts. The eight metre dwelling setback requirement should be dispensed with at once.
- most subdivisions are done by surveyors, or by junior and inexperienced planners. There is a need to have more design input and to consider the 'image' of an area.
- more work is required in issues such as variety in block size and shape, orientation, house design, clustering of dwellings, etc - in the interest of variety and diversity.
- Landscape design is important. Street trees should be planted at the start of development (or even earlier).
- Stop referring to "subdivision" forthwith and talk instead of 'the design of new residential areas'.
- More positive design guidance from government is required. A problem here is that standards are easily enforced and defended against legal challenge, whereas good design requires more subjective judgement and discretion on the part of planners. This problem needs to be addressed, but it is not a reason for carrying on as we do at present.

Stephen Hamnett is Associate Professor, Head of Planning School of the Built Environment, South Australian Institute of Technology.

BookBook NoteNote

by Stephen Hamnett

THE DESIGN PROFESSIONS & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

KNOX, P.L. (Ed.) (1988), Croom Helm, North Ryde, NSW ISBN 7099 3122-0

The proceedings of a conference held at the Virginia Polytechnic in the United States in April 1986, this book contains a collection of generally unrelated and esoteric articles of little obvious interest to the practising urban designer. The persevering reader is rewarded, however, by the discovery between pages 253 and 275 of a splendid article by Brian Goodey "Making Places: Urban Design in Britain".

Goodey's article begins with a fairly conventional history of the emergence of urban design in Britain as a activity intended to fill the gap which had opened up between a planning profession, which has largely abandoned its design origins, and an architectural profession dominated by "the thinking corporate client".

Goodey provides a critical assessment of urban design practice as it has developed in Britain since the early seventies. He is particularly concerned about the dominance of 'townscape' in urban design and about the 'deadening preoccupation with nostalgia' which he detects - "instead of being advanced with reference to a theory or theories, urban design training and projects are developed by traditional pragmatism... The most frequently chosen method of communicating, and often of realising, the image seems to be through historical example". Goodey argues that each design and development opportunity is in a unique place and requires professional investment in understanding the implication of specific locations. But in practise the search for the genius loci is forgotten.

There is an over-reliance on neo-vernacular imagery and "the pattern book is in danger of emerging as the architect's surrogate for an involvement in place".

THE DESIGN PROFESSIONS AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Edited by PAUL L. KNOX

Another point which Goodey makes is that "the essential participatory behavioural research base of urban design has been increasingly neglected over the past ten years". The emphasis seems to be on designing and achieving built form, rather than on understanding human relationships with existing form. And then there are the urban design students from developing countries who study in schools like the Joint Centre for Urban Design at Oxford - what is in it for them? Goodey notes that there is a fundamental dichotomy between the needs of those from 'developed' and those from 'developing' areas.

It is possible to see some parallels between these arguments and the argument that Australian urban design practice to date has likewise been biased towards townscape and contextualism in built form, with less attention paid to the (sub)urban design of large-scale greenfield housing developments. Goodey would counsel us to go beyond the education of "the streetwise architect-planner who can advise or snipe from the periphery of those professions" to the development of urban designers who are concerned with the social and behavioural basis of people's use of public space and with a strong commitment to placemaking which goes beyond the cosmetic and the nostalgic.

Goodey's article contains an excellent polemic and much of his critique of contemporary British urban design practice seems applicable in Australia also. Try to read it - but no need to buy the book!



▲ Langtree Mall 1988

Langtree Avenue Mall

Mildura

Langtree Avenue, the main commercial street in Mildura, was converted to a mall in 1986. The project involved MPE's Townscape Advisory Service, the Mildura City Council and the Community Employment Program. Benefits are already being experienced by retailers, shoppers and tourists.

Wendy Morris

The question is - does the sedate result correctly reflect the intrinsic character of a rural centre or is it all a little precious and suburban? Ed.



▲ Langtree Avenue 1985

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