

what's happening with the PM's UD Task Force ?

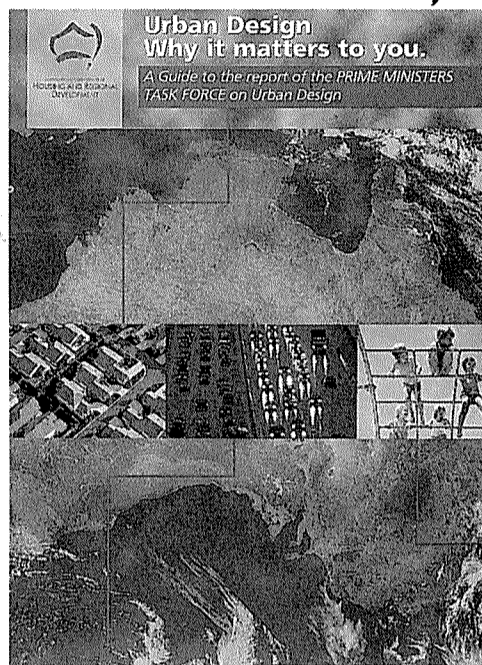
When the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, announced his Task Force on Urban Design, *Urban Design Forum*, along with others, applauded the initiative and offered support for its work. That was in October 1993. The report took a year to produce and was launched by the Prime Minister at the OECD Conference in Melbourne in November 1994.

Many people have been frustrated by the slow pace of action following the report. It seems that urban design action doesn't neatly fit government structures and programs. But now things are starting to happen. A user-friendly guide to the report (see below) has been produced. On Pages 2 and 3 a series of articles on progress have been provided by the Commonwealth Government. Let's hope the pace is increasing.

Urban Design Why it matters to you

A guide to the report of the Prime Minister's Task Force on Urban Design

This guide has been prepared by the Department of Housing and Regional Development and draws out the major themes and messages of the Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force report, entitled *Urban Design in Australia*. While it is not a summary of the Report, it is intended to highlight the recommendations and key points. The guide is also to assist in developing a better understanding of urban design in Australia. For copies of this guide, contact the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development's central office on (06) 289 2308.



The biennial RAI national convention is the major professional development event in the Australian architectural calendar. In 1996 it takes place in Adelaide in March, during the Telstra Adelaide Festival in which Festival director Barrie Kosky explores architecture as a major theme.

Major speakers will include renowned Italian architects Gae Aulenti and Alessandro Mendini, as well as Deanna Petherbridge, Professor of Drawing at the Royal College of Art, London. Phillip Adams, cultural commentator, broadcaster and agent provocateur, will act as Convention moderator. Australian speakers who will represent the spectrum of practice philosophies in contemporary Australian arts, architecture and design, include:

Andrew Andersons, Director of Peddle Thorp Architects.

Also Architecture Studio Sheona Thomson, Julie Borgelt and Alice Hampson.

Richard Brecknock, is a consulting artist.

Gregory Burges, architect.

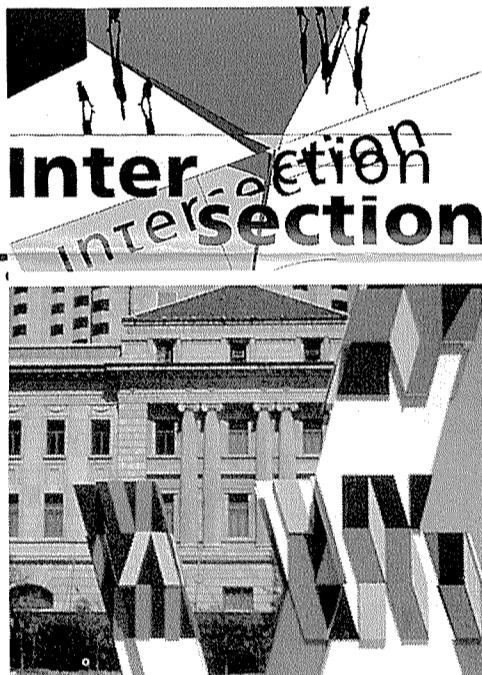
Dr. Catherin Bull Conciliation and Technical Assessor, the Land and Environment Court of NSW.

Peter Corrigan, architect.

John Denton, architect.

Richard Dunn, architect.

Garry Emery, principal of Emery Vincent Design.



Richard Goodwin, is a Sydney-based artist who also trained as an architect.

Steve Grieve, architect.

Denis Harrison, Principal Architect with the South Australian Department for Building Management.

Donovan Hill, architect.

Brian McKay, a self-taught artist.

Phillips and Pilkington, the partnership of Susan Phillips and Michael Pilkington.

Tropo Architects, promoting good tropical architecture in Australia's Top End.

Alec Tzannes, educated in Australia and New York.

Speakers at Intersection will explore the cultural, social, political and physical relationships between art and architecture and discuss questions relating to the economic and social benefits of collaborative design, its future, and the pragmatics of making it work.

Contact Sue Averay, State Manager RAI (08) 272 7044 for further details.

URBAN DESIGN FORUM

ISSUE No.32 December 1995

Unravelling the problem of sign clutter

There is nothing new or terribly exciting about Local Government producing yet another policy, code or guideline in relation to commercial signs - except when the process by which it is achieved is innovative in terms of the methodology employed to develop the material and implement its findings!

In recent years considerable concern has been expressed by residents of Geelong regarding the visual impact of proliferating advertising signs throughout the municipality. Poor signage, in the form of an increase in illegal signs and sign clutter, is considered to detract from the visual amenity of the municipality and potentially impact upon the economic viability of particular shopping areas.

In May 1994, Council directed its Strategic Planning and Urban Design Department to develop a comprehensive sign policy for all commercial advertising signs. A broad consultative committee made up of community members, trader representatives, sign industry representatives and Council officers was established to guide the study and develop the objectives to which the policy had to respond.

Balancing effectiveness and appearance

An overriding objective of the study was to achieve a balance between the effective promotion of businesses and goods, whilst promoting a level of urban design that enhances the quality and appearance of the City. 'Geelong 2010 - A Preferred Future' study, which represents a profile of community expectations and aspirations for the City in the year 2010, particularly as a centre of cultural experiences.

It is from the approach adopted through the broad consultative process developed for the '2010' exercise, that the unique elements of the Comprehensive Sign Policy emerged. First and foremost, the consultative committee had most of the responsibility for managing the project, enabling a high degree of ownership and legitimacy. Secondly, the brief provided a heavy weighting in favour of undertaking market research to gauge consumer sentiment in relation to various forms of signage. The intention was to empirically test, and hence justify, the design measures that would be employed at the end of the study to achieve the objectives.

In this way, rather than Council recycling yet another series of guidelines and controls that result in having to use the stick approach, the opportunity arises for retailers to have demonstrated to them the economic benefits of employing different forms of advertising to which their customers better respond. A good idea in theory. The test would be to see whether or not the outcomes desired by the urban designers (i.e., a reduction in the amount of signage) corresponded with the views of the consumer.

In order to complete this assignment, Council engaged the services of Elizabeth Jacka, Town Planner and Landscape Architect and Simon Bell from Melbourne University's Department of Management and Industrial Relations. The key component of the consultant's work was to provide an urban design assessment of

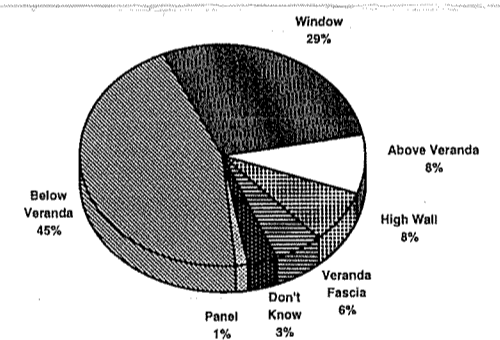
different character areas throughout the City and the impact of advertising signs, and undertake the market research into retail shopping behaviour and shopper attitudes towards particular types of advertising signs.

Options and reactions

The unique market research undertaken surveyed the opinions and behavioural reactions of a cross-section of Geelong's residents. Of 1200 detailed survey forms posted, 562 were returned, which represented a highly reliable 47% response rate. The resultant conclusion is very instructive.

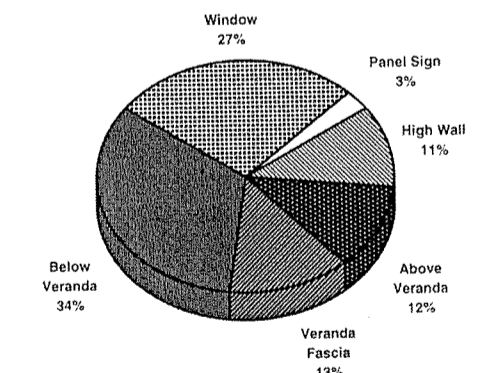
'The research demonstrated that Geelong resident's decisions of where to shop is influenced by the attractiveness of shopping centres, and further, that sign clutter not only detracts from the appearance of the areas, but also reduces the overall effectiveness of signs and for these reasons it is in the interests of business to make a real effort to reduce sign clutter.' (Jacka and Bell, 1995)

The two diagrams below summarise a sample of the findings of the research, in this case what consumers regard as effective advertising signs.



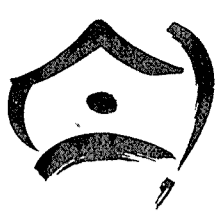
▲ Signs people tend to notice first

▼ Where signs should be located for the best effect



The document is currently on public exhibition. It is intended to develop a performance based code, where signs that have been identified through the research as positively contributory go the appearance of an area and also effective in gaining consumer attention will be deemed as-of-right, whereas other signs will require a permit or be prohibited. It is also hoped that this information will form a useful base for the Victorian Minister for Planning's Sign Review Panel.

Neil Savery
Manager Strategic Planning and Urban Design, City of Greater Geelong.
[Phone (052) 270 850 for more details]



THE COMMONWEALTH RESPONSE TO THE

The Commonwealth Government recognises that efficient, well designed, environmentally sound and equitable urban areas are key assets. It also sees that quality urban design is critical to developing Australia's international competitiveness, attracting international business investment, improving how our cities work, and creating cities for people

The Minister for Housing and Regional Development, the Hon. Brian Howe, who has been responsible for co-ordinating the Commonwealth Government's response to the Task Force's report, *Urban Design in Australia*, said that the report presents the Federal Government with a major challenge to take a leadership role and embrace good urban design practice in its own programs and activities.

The Commonwealth Government has agreed to a two-phased approach in responding to the 41 recommendations in the report. The action agenda for the first phase intends to:

- Generate debate and discussion with a broad constituency on such issues as good urban design practice.
- Achieve a better understanding of urban design among this constituency.
- Achieve recognition of urban design excellence within Australia.
- Gain acknowledgment across Commonwealth programs and other spheres of government of the value of good urban design practice.

This year's Action Agenda is focused on the following national activities:



The Prime Minister's

Australia Award for Urban Design

The Australia Award for Urban Design was announced by the Prime Minister, the Hon. Paul Keating MP, at the OECD conference November 1994. This national award is a response to a major recommendation from the Urban Design Task Force Report and will recognise urban design excellence in Australia. It will also help raise general community understanding about why urban design is important.

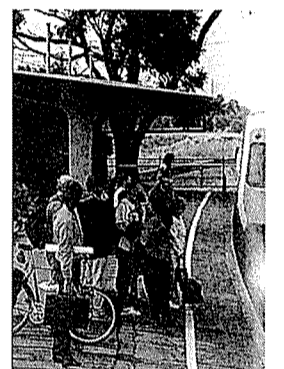
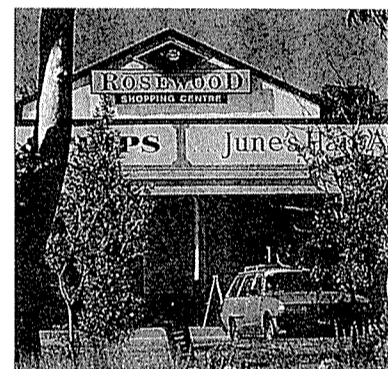
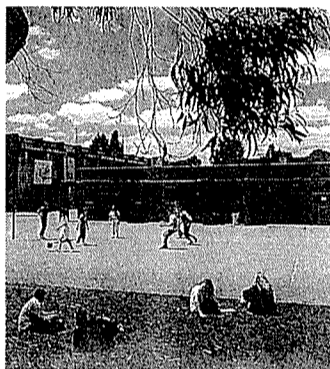
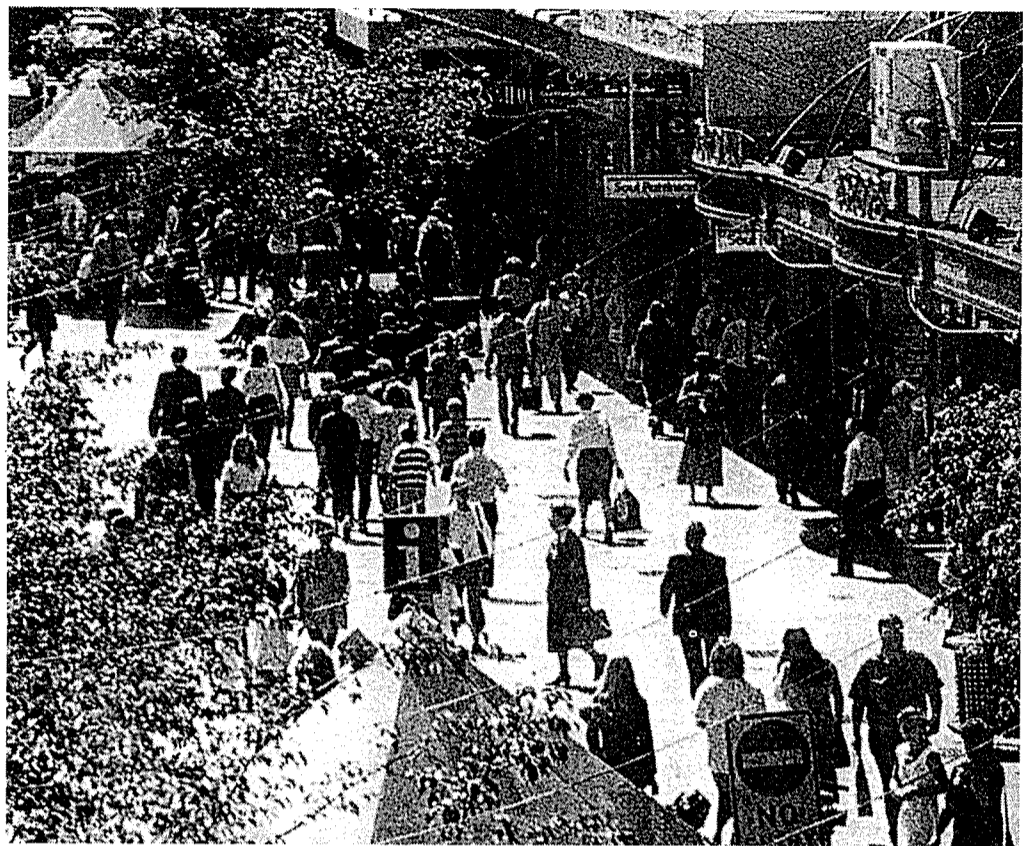
While most people do not use the term urban design, implicitly they make individual statements about urban design. Our everyday choices of places to shop, or simply to pass the time of day, speak volumes about what people sense as good or poor urban design.

In its first year, the Award will recognise excellence for built work and in the second year, for plans and ideas. The in June this year the Prime Minister called for the inaugural Award nominations. Twenty-

Communication activities, research, education and training, incorporation of urban design principles into the Commonwealth's activities; and discussion on the reform of current practices. The specific initiatives are as follows:

- In this first year, the Commonwealth has examined its own programs and activities. Urban design outcomes have been identified in a number of new Commonwealth programs such as Better Cities II, the Local Government Development Program, the Innovative Public Transport Program and the strategic planning initiatives under the Commonwealth Coastal Action Program. Further, opportunities for incorporating urban design outcomes into other activities such as the development of Commonwealth surplus land, urban renewal, and the management and design of Commonwealth properties will be examined.
- The inaugural Australia Award for Urban Design was announced by the Prime Minister in November 1994. The entries for the Award have closed. The winners will be announced early in the new year. (see article below)
- A discussion of forums and workshops around Australia will be sponsored to foster debate and discussion around what constitutes good urban design and the factors leading to its success in various spatial contexts (see page 3). Concurrently, research into identifying the economic impact will be commissioned.

It is hoped that these activities will result in a series of publications.



• Discussions will take place with the peak professional organisations and academic institutions on how aspects of urban design can be incorporated in core curriculum areas.

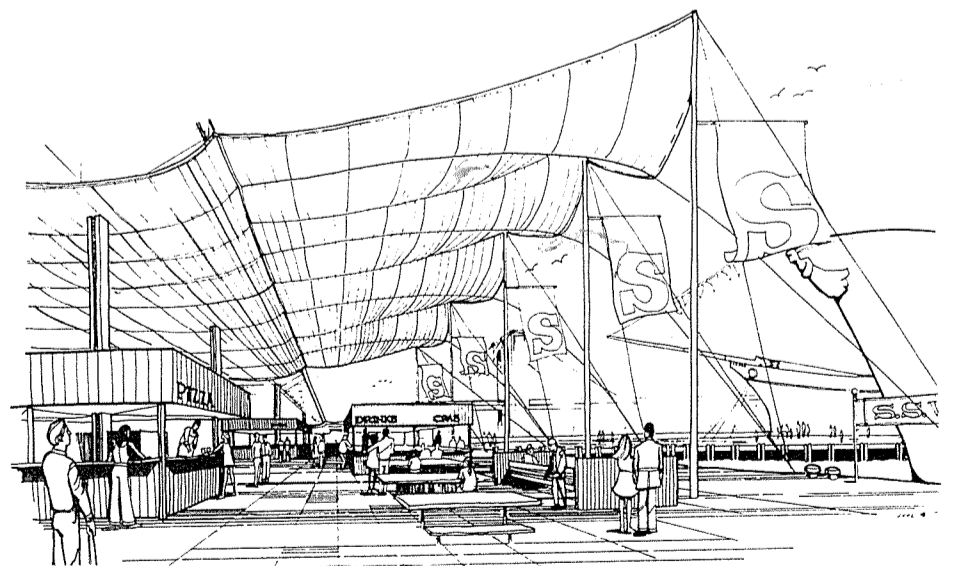
• The Commonwealth sees that reform of government practices is necessary to achieve integrated urban design outcomes. The Local Government Development Program and the Accord between the Commonwealth and the Local Government Association, which was recently signed by the Prime Minister and Mr. David Plumridge, President of the Australian Local Government Association, will support reforms by local councils.

• The Keep Australia Beautiful (KAB) organisation will assist the government in

promoting and acknowledging community participation in urban design activities in rural and regional Australia. With sponsorship assistance from the Department of Housing and Regional Development, KAB will include an Urban Design category in the 1996 Vision for Australia Awards for Excellence in Environmental Achievement.

After a review of the first phase by June next year, a longer term action agenda will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders for the Government's consideration.

(For more information contact Mandy Hillson, Urban Strategies Team, Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development (06) 289 2222)



interested groups were invited to nominate names of possible jurors. The membership of the panel is now being finalised

The inaugural Award will be presented in the new year.

The National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA), a statutory authority within the Housing and Regional Development

portfolio, will administer and manage this year's Award. The NCPA will produce a publication show-casing the entries and organise a national seminar in early 1996 which will further promote discussion on the nature of urban design in Australia.

It is anticipated that the nomination for next year's entries will be called in April, 1996.

PRIME MINISTER'S URBAN DESIGN TASK FORCE

Learning About Urban Design

What makes an urban designer? This question fuels the debate about the approach to urban design education in Australia. Currently, educational institutions separate their disciplines, offering disparate courses and qualifications, for example, degrees in architecture, and degrees in urban planning. The Urban Design Task Force report states that it is important to foster connections between professions and says that urban design education needs to be a part of the education of planners, architects, and property managers and not a specialist discipline in its own right. Students from the various disciplines need to learn how to work collaboratively and, with input from client groups, such as residents of an area that is to be redeveloped. This is how it should be done in the real world.

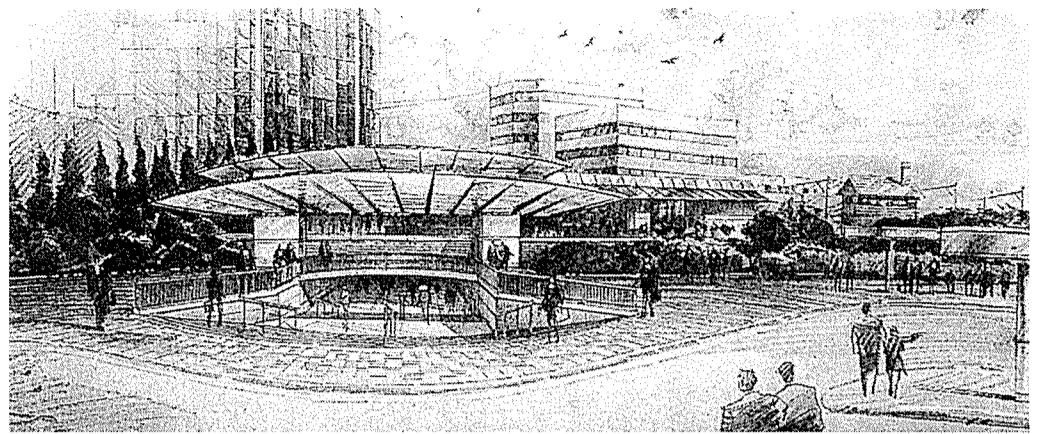
An education strategy

The Commonwealth is proposing that an education strategy be developed to address how Australia can achieve more effective urban design through education. As a starting point there will be an assessment of the extent and nature of current urban design-related education.

Local Government and urban design

Local councils are the key to ensuring that decisions, regulations, and policies provide an environment for good urban design. The Commonwealth welcomes Local Government's willingness to pursue reforms that will improve the quality of our cities and thus the quality of life of our people. During the recent Local Government National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Hon. Paul Keating MP, signed the first partnership agreement entered into by the Commonwealth and local governments. Mr. David Plumridge, the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), and Minister Brian Howe, have been working hard to develop this Accord between the Commonwealth and the ALGA. Part of the Accord which sets out shared values and goals, is a commitment to urban reform, including improved urban design outcomes.

Through the Accord, the Commonwealth is committed to supporting two urban design initiatives. One is the development of a Local Government urban design policy and practice notes by the Australian Local Government Association. It is important to raise the awareness of Local Government to urban design issues and to provide councils the adequate guidance and tools to address these issues at a local level.



A training program

The other initiative is an urban design training program, which may include in-service courses for council staff from a variety of professional backgrounds. Training might address the importance of promoting, through integrated planning, the importance of collaboration and multi-disciplinary approaches to urban design.

Does Urban Design generate economic benefits?

This question will be posed by a research study being commissioned by the Commonwealth. The quality of a region's urban environment was raised in the Urban Design Task Force report as a factor in attracting and accommodating investment and economic activity. 'In the drive for greater comparative advantage more and

more cities embrace bold urban design programs'. The research will use a number of locations as case examples measuring the quantitative impact on the local economy of specific urban design activities.

The Urban Design Unit of the South Australian Department of Housing and Urban Development has been interested in this topic for some time, and has undertaken a literature search. Some studies that have examined the economics of amenity, (see page 4) provide interesting anecdotes supporting the economic and quality of life impact of amenity. Recent hard data on the economic impact of urban design in an Australian context, however, is not available.

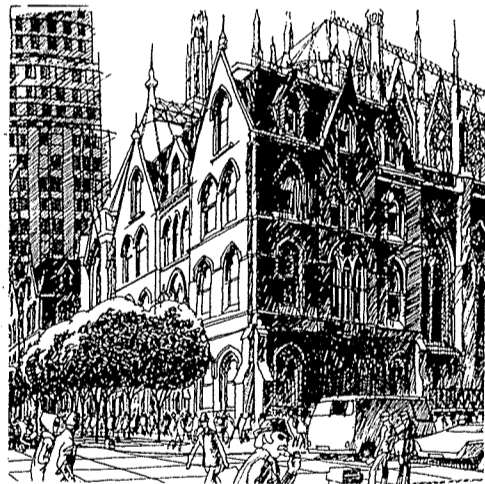
(The South Australian research is due to be completed by March. For more details contact Philippe Mortier on (08) 207 2291)

U.D. Seminars

Coming Up!

- Protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources
- Providing clean and healthy environments that blend with natural and built landscape
- Allowing for choice of movement
- Providing a source for visual amenity
- Allowing for growth, adaptation and change.

To commence discussions in each State, staff from the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development



The Commonwealth is keen to foster debate on urban design practice, to engage people from diverse professional and organisational backgrounds, and to critically look at how we have created our urban fabric. What are the various perspectives on urban design that the different professional bodies bring to the planning and decision-making processes? How have we as planners, architects, government authorities, artists, community workers, been involved in the decisions about our public spaces? How do they affect people who use these places? Are these spaces:

- Efficient and well-managed
- Responsive to changing needs

have met with interested individuals to propose the concept of running seminars that would:

- Assist in promoting urban design
- Seek the various perspectives of a number of organisations on current urban design practice in each State
- Assist in developing principles and outcomes to achieve quality urban design.

The forums will facilitate:

- Discussion and presentation of current urban design practice in the State (a variety of perspectives; and the what and the how)
- Identification of the barriers to good urban design
- A distillation of principles for urban design practice
- A distillation of outcomes of good urban design.

Examples should cover a variety of contexts CBD: urban fringe; renewal; rural towns; regional centres; and a variety of scales residential development; main street; city block. Documenting these examples

and the outcomes will be important in contributing to a good understanding of the state of play of urban design in Australia and providing a direction for the future.

After several meetings and much discussion, there has been considerable support in most States. Individuals from a number of disciplines and organisations representing surveyors, planners, the community sector, developers, engineers, landscape architects, artists, architects, State and Local Governments will be invited to attend the seminars which will be held in February 1996. Following on from the State-based seminars, a national seminar will gather together the concepts, best practice examples, and commitments to provide a national overview of urban design practice in Australia.

The seminars will also serve to inform national urban design policy to be developed, in consultation with key stakeholders, mid-next year.

(The March 1996 edition of UDF will include key issues and highlights from the seminars. Ed.)

The RMIT / Melbourne City Council

GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN URBAN DESIGN

One of the great advances of recent times is a renewed interest in urban design - a recognition of the need to think beyond the confines of specific sites and across all the disciplines involved in the built environment. As readers of *Urban Design Forum* well know, although it is now a commonly used term, urban design is still too often seen as simply a form of street landscaping, or site planning.

RMIT's Faculty of Environmental Design and Construction and the City of Melbourne Architecture and Urban Design Division have jointly established a Graduate Diploma in Urban Design in response to the keenly felt need for a greater understanding of the issues relating to the built environment. The course is being co-taught by leaders in the field from the MCC and RMIT over two semesters.

In designing this Graduate Diploma, Melbourne City Council and RMIT have recognised the urgent need for practitioners to understand the range of pressures which act on the built environment, and the means available to intervene and to redirect outcomes.

The curriculum will cover development of:

- A modest and achievable strategy setting out the numerous actions and policies required to produce a better urban environment.
- A design philosophy which articulates in simple and readable terms the basis of many of the design actions that will take place.
- Master plans for various special areas. In the main, these consist of the parks and gardens.

- Action plans which address precincts and deal with both physical actions and activities.
- Urban conservation controls which deal with tree planting and open space and form the basis of much of the budgeting within capital works programs.
- An urban design strategy for development control.
- Technical notes which are produced to ensure consistency of treatment in many of the day-to-day details used throughout the area being considered.

The skills developed in the program will include methods of inquiry and analysis, the presentation of an urban design problem, the social, economic and visual components of urban design; an understanding of building types and uses, developing briefs, communicating - the

production of reports and the communication of ideas and decisions; negotiation; design issues in public space; and issues in transportation and car parking.

The studio workshops will co-incide where possible with lectures, workshops, exhibitions, film festivals and other events run by the Faculty of Environmental Design and Construction, and graduate students will be encouraged to attend and participate in these. The Graduate Diploma in Urban Design is a fee paying course. For 1996, the fee for the two semester placement will be \$8000. A taxation deduction may be possible. Enquiries should be directed to Professor Dimity Reed, RMIT, Telephone (03) 9660 2226.

VALUING LANDSCAPE, SITE PLANNING, & AMENITIES

Lloyd W. Bookout

(Abridged from an article first published in *Urban Land* November 1994)

A hypothesis has long existed that money spent on site planning, landscaping, and amenities will provide the developer with sufficient financial return - in terms of the project's increased financial performance - to justify the added cost of development. Further, projects that incorporate high-quality design features are commonly believed to hold their value better and contribute to the quality of life of both the eventual users of the project and the larger public long after the developer's role has ended.

Three years ago and with financial support from the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), Urban Land Institute (ULI) set out to test this hypothesis. The findings that emerged from the pilot research study provide some interesting insights as to how value is perceived and weighed. The findings also point out how 'best practices' in planning and design are changing with the times.

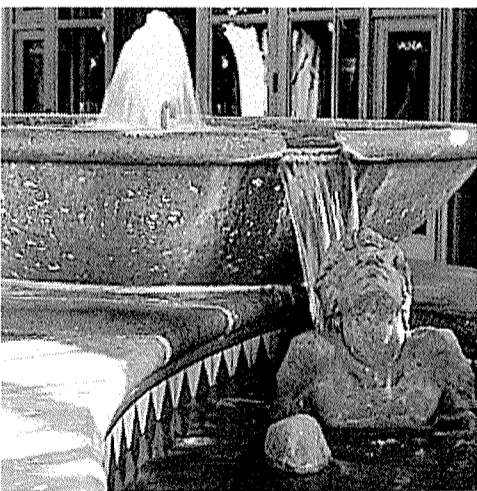
Value to Developers

A considerable portion of the research on value to developers focused on dollars returned relative to the dollars invested. Developers' perceptions of qualitative contributors of the landscape and amenity program were also assessed.

Increased Financial Return. Most of the developers of the projects studied believe that money spent on the landscape and amenity package helped them to achieve higher profits. In several instances, project developers speculated that the landscape and amenity program added a sales or rental premium of about 5 percent over the local market and competition. None of the developers, however, were able to provide the hard numbers needed to quantify this belief. A wide array of other factors such as location, access, and marketing program also played roles.

Competitive edge and faster absorption.

Developers believe that spending more for excellent landscaping and amenities will generate value for the project over the long term, primarily by keeping it competitive with newer projects entering the market.



Landscape and amenities are correlated as well with the rate of product absorption. Again, factors beyond landscape and amenities - price, concessions, product availability, extent and nature of the competition, and market programs - also strongly affect absorption rates, and the role of no one factor can be separately measured.

Increased Public Support. In most of the projects studied, developers who exceeded standard practices for landscaping and amenities reaped non-financial benefits as well. Most notable of these is the role of planning and project amenities in pleasing local public agencies or citizen groups, and thus improving the developer's reputation in the community.



Value to Residents.

Substantial and conclusive evidence supports the contention that landscaping and amenities weigh heavily in decisions made by purchasers or renters. In interviews conducted for this research, residents often cited the distinctive character of the project or community as the first feature that attracted them.

Interviews and available surveys of project residents show that they respond favourably to site plans and landscape designs featuring natural themes and preserving or enhancing natural site conditions. Among the design features they appreciate are environmental protection provisions, views and preservation of open spaces, preservation of mature trees, and use of native and/or perennial plants. Residents cited these types of design features as being important more frequently than they cited active use recreational facilities.

Regardless of the residential market targeted, research supports the claim that residents place considerable value on communities featuring a strong sense of security, privacy, and place.

Value to Commercial Tenants

The four commercial projects studied show that landscape and amenities influence tenants' decisions to locate in the projects and to remain there for the long term. Retail tenants believe that landscaping and amenities that enhance the shopping experience can contribute to higher sales.

Office and retail tenants in all three projects believe that the quality of the project's landscape and amenities boosts the morale of employees that thus adds to their productivity. Several tenants believed that the work environment contributed to employee professionalism.

Value to the Community

The community contributions of superior landscaping and amenities are diverse and difficult to generalise. Most public officials interviewed believe that the amenity program did contribute to some extent to the project's success and value, but they found it difficult to quantify.

Some Bottom Lines

While the perceived value of the landscape and amenities program varied among the projects, some common and instructional themes emerged. For example, an excellent amenities package seems to require the developer's active participation. In all these cases, the developer invested considerable personal time during planning and construction, closely

monitoring - and often discussing - tasks that were delegated to other members of the development team. Many of the developers took care of their consultants, contractors, and managers who could bring their own personal touches to the projects. Development team members' commitments to detail were instrumental in executing unique and exceptional projects.

Most of the cases featured landscape design elements that complemented natural site conditions, such as existing trees, hillsides, drainages, and views. Respecting site conditions made each project distinctive, giving each a market identity. Further, the developer was often able to save money in site improvement costs, for example, by minimising the number of trees removed and site grading.

One of the most interesting and consistent findings of the research is that project tenants and residents are unable to isolate the amenity or design feature they value most highly. Residents and tenants almost universally perceive the project as a whole, not as a series of parts that can be measured individually. Users tend to value the total package and the sense of community or image projected through a combination of landscape and amenity features.

The tendency of residents and tenants to perceive a project as a whole supports what might be the most significant finding from the research: good site planning is essential to a project's ultimate success. In all 11 cases, the site plan served as the glue that held together the various design elements.

While the case studies suggest that a project's landscape and amenities contribute to its market acceptance and financial performance, other essential non-design factors must also be in place. Nothing in this research suggests that a project's landscape and amenity features can overcome other potentially fatal flaws, such as poor location or bad access.

The information gleaned from the case studies provides compelling, if anecdotal, evidence that high-quality site planning, landscape design, and amenities create long-term value for project developers, residents, tenants and communities. The research also gives credence to the rule that real estate development projects are most successful when all design elements are closely interrelated.

Lloyd W. Bookout is Director, housing and community development research/education, at Urban Land Institute (Washington D.C.) He was the primary researcher and author for the book on which this article is based: Value by Design: Landscape, Site Planning, and Amenities published by ULI in October 1994. To order, call 1-800-321-5011 and ask for Catalogue Number V05.

Antipodesign

Architecture & Design In Australia

For some time, a number of us who meander around and through architecture and the various design disciplines in Australia have discussed the need to create a magazine that would cover all those areas in some coherent way, and which could look at the issues that interest practitioners in a way that might also be of interest to a wider public. We are now making a start. The first issue of *Antipodesign* was launched in spring by Hilary McPhee, Chair of the Australia Council, at the new Art and Industry Gallery 51 Little La Trobe Street, Melbourne. It was great event and an auspicious start to the new venture.

The magazine is unique in that it works from the idea that Australia is the centre of the universe and what happens here is important. As opposed to the view in European and North America publications on design and architecture that the other hemisphere is the one that matters and that that is where all ideas come from.

It has been designed by Mariola Sagin and looks very stylish. The first issue covered architecture, communication design, fashion, industrial design and new issues in digital photography.

Antipodesign is keen to attract writers with something to say about a discipline or a project, and who are able to say it with some wit and insight. Contact me at Building 8, RMIT, if you want to write for us. (We're keen if you are!) *Antipodesign* is available by subscription to *Antipodesign*, RMIT P.O. Box 12268, and in bookshops and newsagents in Victoria. It is published four times a year.

Professor Dimity Reed
Head RMIT Department of Design



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