

London moves to Melbourne

Geoffrey London is enjoying life in Melbourne. He was appointed Victorian Government Architect in the middle of last year, and has settled in the heart of the CBD near one of his favourite places – the Reading Room at the State Library. He proudly explains that he is making a light environmental footprint, with a quiet, modestly-sized apartment from which he can walk or tram almost anywhere - without the need for a car!

Prior to his appointment as Government Architect, Geoffrey was in a similar role in Western Australia, his place of birth, for five years. He is a past Dean and Head of School at UWA, past Chair of the Committee of Heads of Architecture Schools of Australasia, a past President of the Western Australian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects, and a Life Fellow of that Institute.

He sees his role here as building on the achievements of his predecessor, John Denton, but moving into the next phase of what most people see as a very positive Government commitment to quality design by being situated in the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Geoffrey enjoys objects, such as buildings, but emphasises that it is the spaces around them, the places, that he really enjoys most. Therefore it is not surprising that he sees urban design, not just architecture, as a very

important part of his remit. His love of film frequently focuses on the way in which places are depicted and celebrated.

He muses on some notable places he enjoys – in Rome, with its history, New York because of its energy, the delightful ‘chaos’ of hill towns. But he particularly enjoys Melbourne as a collection of spaces and places, the quality of which he considers to be richer than other Australian cities.

As State Architect, Geoffrey sees his role as a strong advocate for good design, making sure that design is encouraged not inhibited. He sees Melbourne as the city in Australia that most readily engages with design and sees his role as a voice in government for the design disciplines. The main challenge is to be heard loudly enough at the decision-making level.

What is good design?

So what is good design? Geoffrey relates it to qualities of life such as amenity, pleasure safety, and economics – with faith in the idea and experience that good design is also good economics.

The Office of State Architect gets involved in a wide range of types of projects, for example schools, but is also active in advising on Public Private Partnerships, framing design processes, on juries and in design reviews. They also respond to requests from the Premier and Departments, and are involved in projects such as the Southbank Cultural Precinct and Federation Square East.

Geoffrey says a particularly challenging project is addressing sustainable, affordable, medium density housing in the context of rapid demographic change, with a concern that we are still producing traditional family housing in urban growth areas without the necessary diversity. He is also keen to be involved in the creative concepts to increase urban densities along tram routes. Clearly Geoffrey London has a challenging agenda, and we wish him well. He can be contacted at geoffrey.london@dpc.vic.gov.au



▲ Geoffrey London

Activity Centre project in Kartal, Istanbul

Alan March

Istanbul is a mega-city of over 12.5 million people, the third largest in the world. Located at the meeting point between Asia and Europe, divided by the Bosphorous, Istanbul's long history stretches back to Constantinople and Byzantium. It is literally littered with heritage sites, including a recently discovered Neolithic “shipyard” which has halted a major subway project. During Ottoman times, the city was the seat of power for the empire, comprising a dense walking city surrounded by royal hunting grounds and farmland. The current city, still largely oriented around the historic core, has grown exponentially from 2.1 million in 1970 to more than 12.5 million today.

Confronted with huge transport and servicing problems that cannot be dealt with by transport megaprojects alone, the Istanbul metropolitan planning agency is seeking to modify the city's mono-centricity. A main response is the Kartal Industrial Area Central Business District Plan. The 555 hectare site extends north from the Sea of Marmara and will include housing, business, tourism and leisure elements - seeking to shift Istanbul's centre of gravity east of the Bosphorous, towards Asia.

The design by architect Zaha Hadid is a sharp contrast to the box-form modernism typifying Istanbul's development of the last 50 years. The project's architecture is flowing forms and undulating arcs of steel, glass and concrete. An invited competition was won by Hadid in 2006, which subsequently stalled during

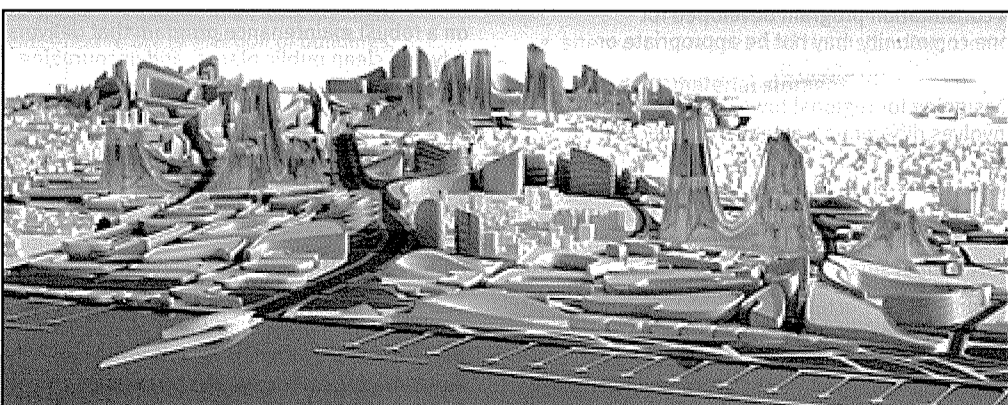
negotiations between major landowners, and detailed processes for compulsory acquisition and residential relocation remain unclear. However, it is now taking design shape as an immense cityscape of slipstream forms incorporating towers and courtyard buildings, following and accentuating Istanbul's undulating topography.

Street Level Planning

The design includes a construction area of over 6 million square metres, for approximately 100,000 people to live, work and recreate, supported by integrated public transport. The project has now moved to street-level planning to integrate Istanbul's world-class street life. Spaces flow into each other in a manner more like an organic walking city of old – a contrast to the car-centricism of recent Istanbul.

The project is based around a gridded street network with three major density clusters, and a main boulevard “spine” between a new metro station in the north and the rail and motorway transport hub in the south - via a light railway. North and south business districts are complemented by a number of large public and recreational areas, including a quarry converted to a major open recreational area centred on a lake a marina, cultural district and recreational areas near the seafront.

Alan March teaches planning and urban design at the Melbourne School of Design, and is on sabbatical in Istanbul. He can be contacted at alanpm@unimelb.edu.au



▲ Zaha Hadid master plan for Kartal, Istanbul

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The art of place-making

Gilbert Rochecouste

Place-making is the creation of meaningful and connected places. Essentially, it is an integral approach and process that delivers sustainable outcomes and lifestyles. It is a body of work that is very much needed in these challenging times. In a broader context, place-making can be defined as a movement that is connected to many other movements - like new urbanism, slow city, slow food, and eco-cities.

The essence of place-making is community engagement. It is more than just community consultation: it is genuine engagement and connectedness with individual community members - to a point where they themselves become place-makers of their own making.

It is about creating a culture of participatory and grassroots democracy where the community has direct ownership of the processes and outcomes. This is a huge difference from our current engagement and planning framework, which does the opposite. More and more people (developers, retailers and general public) are seeing the benefits of place-making, both short and long term.

In my experience over a decade and a half, I have seen the benefits to community when time and resources are invested in the place-making process. The results of this are people having the tendency to linger in a beautiful and comfortable environment, and businesses see the benefits of people staying longer which helps to sustain the local economy. It is a win-win situation.

Creating intransient value

Beautiful and meaningful places and spaces create an intransient value to the locality and a sense of pride to the community. As a result, people spend more time in their community: walking more, buying locally and spending more leisure and play time locally in vibrant mainstreets where there are places to sit,

pause, learn, shop, connect and celebrate.

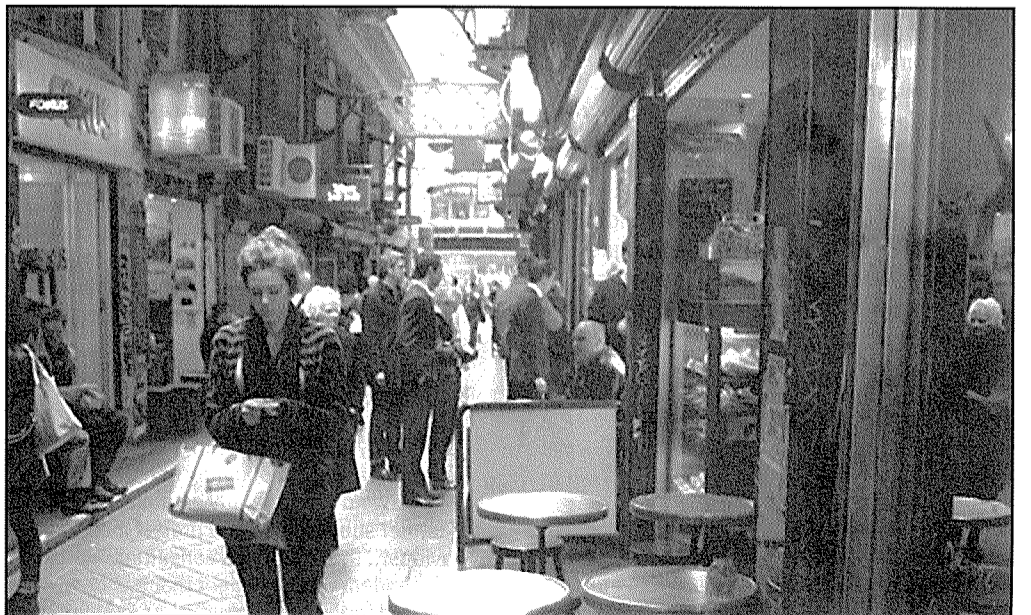
We all know and gravitate towards such places, and yet we keep building ‘empty’ places with little or no sense of ‘spirit of place’. Some would blame globalisation and consumerism on the demise of local communities, where they are reduced to their lowest common denominator - commercial exchange. Some would say that our built environment professionals are too focused on the hardware of place and have neglected the software, the soft skill of place-making.

The current economic crisis, peak oil and climate change have created, in my opinion, an opportunity to change the dominant story and culture to one that nourishes life and nurtures communities. It is a return to the local and the re-localisation of our economies and communities. Our task is to build resilient places and communities that can easily adapt to the many challenges and imminent changes.

Place-making provides a way of seeing the world through a more sustainable filter, and provides a platform to make the necessary changes and move towards sustainable lifestyles and behaviours.

Enlightened developers and councils have utilised the new place-making tools to deliver such environments: Rouse Hill Town Centre in northwest Sydney, Flinders Lane (Degreaves/Centre Way) and Victoria Market in Melbourne epitomize the power of place-making. As part of a larger movement, place-making will play an increasingly important role in healing our urban landscape and leave a positive legacy for the future generations.

Gilbert Rochecouste is Managing Director of Village Well, a boutique place-making consultancy based in Melbourne, is recognised as one of the world's leading place-makers, an urban deep ecologist, visionary and skilled facilitator, and can be contacted at gilbert@villagewell.org



A River's Tale

Angie Russi

Land dividing – stories connecting. Joined by the River and its flood plain, the twin communities of Shepparton and Mooroopna share common stories through the land that divides them.

With funding granted by Arts Victoria and the Greater City of Shepparton, four local artists, Angie Russi, Bev Hoffmann, Jan Donaldson and Sony Cooper have delved into the stories that help to create common ground through common experience between the two communities. These stories of common experience are centred around the Goulburn River and flood plain between the towns.



▲ Flood plain view

The stories collected from individuals from both sides of the river have been woven together to create the fabric of a new story as seen through the eyes of the river which has been witness to the layers of humanity who have lived along its banks and flood plains for thousands of years.

'A River's Tale' was told last November, through a sculpture walk traversed by members of the two communities to view temporary sculptures along the length of the walking path that connects the towns. The walkers were welcomed to country, at the midpoint between the towns, in a moving ritual by members of a local indigenous community, and then treated to a performance called 'A River's Tale' which posed more questions than it answered about how we see the river and how we treat it.

The sculptures and the performance were informed by stories collected from the communities by the artists, through personal interviews with individuals, group information sessions, documented historical records, and personal written accounts. The Mooroopna Education and Activity Centre and the South Shepparton Community House have been active partners in the project and have been collection points for stories and information centres for accessing all information about the project and a conduit through which people could get involved with the project.

Involving young people

We also partnered with Mooroopna Secondary College who's senior students and media teacher provided sound, lighting and multimedia support for the performance. Kids Town, at the midpoint, has been a major in-kind contributor. This playground sits on the



▲ A sculpture walk links two communities

site of the old municipal tip and was home to many aboriginal people who built makeshift huts from tip materials and lived there from 1939 to the early 1960s

Although challenging, the River's Tale project has no doubt started a conversation between individuals about what this land that divides us means, and how we relate to it. We hope that by completing a project such as this that others may find the courage to confront some of the many challenging social and political issues that underpin this parcel of land, so that both communities can move towards a more united future while acknowledging their shared past, both in common and different.

There is no doubt that the connecting land holds important stories for many sections of

the communities and that certain sites are of major significance to the local indigenous people. It is important for some permanent interpretive fixtures to be erected in this area before many of the stories are lost. It is also vitally important that this be done in full consultation with all stakeholders. There are many more River's Tales to tell in this place which is the crucible from which the communities of both Mooroopna and Shepparton were formed.

Angie Russi presented this project at the NUDFo8 in Shepparton. She is an Artist and Community Cultural Development Practitioner based in Rushworth, and can be contacted at angierussi@mcmmedia.com.au

Good urban design in small regional towns

Leon Yates

What is good urban design in small regional towns? Urban design is the practice of shaping human settlements - whether they are in cities or regional towns or places - to create practical, comfortable and delightful places for people to live and go about their daily lives. It is also about making well planned, logical connections between people, spaces and buildings. The key aspects for regional settlements are a sense of place and a sense of arrival.

A sense of place is one of many characteristics linked very closely to local identity. Local identity is linked to a sense of arrival. These are factors that make an environment physiologically and psychologically comfortable. The character of place is one with its own identity. Three variables of sense of place are: legibility and human scale; the perception of and preference for the visual environment; and the compatibility of the setting with human purposes.

Understanding of a sense of place helps to protect the region's cultural heritage and promote cultural awareness and strengthen the affinity with place. The implication for built environment professionals: planning and

design should involve sense of place and sense of arrival in four meanings: psychological responses to designs; preservation of the past of a place; creation of a sense of place for future environments; creation of a sense of arrival for future experience.

The entrance image of a town held by people contributes to a sense of arrival and sense of place. We should make every effort to maintain visual environments in harmony with the town's defined character during ongoing community development. Local symbols reflect and enhance a sense of place. This knowledge may be used to maintain and enhance place identity.

For many people, the settlement or town region is their true life space. At the local scale, we need to know how well people can define, and joyfully identify themselves with, the places in their township: the home itself, the town centre, the workplace, and the recreation ground.

Thinking of the sense of place and time, I suggest that designers and planners consider norms for:

- the ability of the elderly or the handicapped to traverse the region

- the perceived safety of being alone at any hour in various areas
- the image-ability of public spaces, as well as the limits of their spatial proportions, or the preferred degree of enclosure
- the degree to which an area should contain visual reminders of its past use and form
- the expression of current changes, future trends, and alternative futures
- develop design guidelines to enhance the sense of place in new development
- map areas to enhance character
- analyse the legibility of the region and the sequential form of its main routes
- study the underused areas of the region (rooftops, car parks, alleyways) to see if they can be opened up to public use
- integrate a regional system of bikeways and footways, including their management and design
- suggest how public access can be opened up to desirable areas such as waterfronts, nature preserves, streams, and fine viewpoints

- encourage public celebrations of the seasons or special holidays
- develop information centres where current changes and future possibilities are displayed
- develop a plan for region wide historic conservation, and set up programs of public education in local regional history.

In conclusion, Victorian towns, many of which have a rich past or a unique present such as Nathalia, provide opportunities in an independent rural town setting. The challenge of balancing township character and growth with improvements in services and community facilities are important for regional towns' future growth. In a place rich in cultural and environmental diversity, residents convey their sense of place through a myriad of cultural expressions, which planners can factor into their land-use decisions.

Leon Yates presented this subject at the NUDFo8 in Nathalia. He is Senior Urban Designer with the Urban Design Unit in Urban Development at the Department of Planning and Community Development in Melbourne, and can be contacted at leon.yates@dpcd.vic.gov.au

Planning for future development

David Dreadon

Planning and designing for small regional centres is often undertaken using the same principles and methodologies that are employed for large metropolitan areas. However, there are a number of considerations that are overlooked when working with smaller communities - and the result is that the objectives of some planning and design projects are not achieved.

Regional communities are passionate about their towns and are generally engaged in local planning and development issues. This can be seen as a mixed blessing for urban designers working with local communities on strategic planning projects. A range of strategic planning frameworks and design master plans has been undertaken in regional centres, with the intent to guide future development and assist with the management of change.

This strategic planning is often derided by communities as being a wasteful use of valuable council funds that could otherwise be used for capital improvements to local infrastructure, and is often seen as repeating work that has previously been undertaken.

To overcome this, it is essential that local councils, who prepare project briefs:

- convince their communities of the value that strategic planning will bring in terms of a consistent and co-ordinated approach to managing change and the allocation of funds in future Capital Works Programs
- are aware of previous studies and their relevance to current projects
- are prepared to implement capital works projects that are identified in strategic plans.

Strategic planning and design master plans are, for the most part, prepared by city-based consultancies. Their work is generally based on a snapshot of the town during the project, previous relevant studies, input of local communities and the guidance of a project steering committee.

Budget for Consultation

Community consultation programs are an important aspect of planning and design projects, and are generally established as part of tender submissions and project inception. Obviously, the extent of a consultation program is dependent on the budget that has been allocated to the project and an agreed fee.

To ensure that communities are comfortable with a consultant team and their understanding of local issues, a considerable amount of time and engagement is required, including the possibility of experiencing places and events over weekends and public holidays. It is important that consultants factor this into fee proposals, and that councils acknowledge the commitment required to meet community expectations for consultation.

In addition, councils can provide guidance about the most effective methods for engaging with individual local communities. A consultation program developed for one community may not be appropriate or successful with another.

Designing for regional towns and communities involves different parameters to those that exist in metropolitan areas. Aspects such as scale, urban density, transport and aesthetic considerations that are appropriate for metropolitan urban areas are not necessarily pertinent in smaller rural towns.

Community expectations and the way people use public spaces in rural towns are different to larger urban centres, and this needs to be understood when undertaking planning and design projects. However, this does not mean that urban designers should not

advocate increasing residential density, a variety of housing typologies, and increased pedestrianisation of main streets.

Budgets play a considerable role in determining project outcomes. Rural shires, with smaller populations spread across several communities, have to deal with competing demands for budget funds, and are often stretched to deliver projects that have been proposed in strategic master plans.

Urban designers need to focus on what can realistically be delivered to ensure vibrant and active small towns. This may be an emphasis on a robust maintenance program that delivers tidy and clean public places, and encouraging property owners to address building facades (that contribute to unique local character).

Planners and designers, with local councils, need to understand the opportunities and constraints that exist for smaller rural town projects in order to create constructive partnerships that will deliver successful outcomes for all.

David Dreadon presented these ideas at the NUDFo8 in Nathalia. He is a Principal Consultant Urban Design & Landscape Architecture at Coomes Consulting, and can be contacted at David.Dreadon@coomes.com.au

Bush fires and global warming

- density of rural settlements is the real issue

Bruce Echberg

There is an obvious link between extreme heat events and bush fires, but there is also a more fundamental link between rebuilding fire damaged communities and global warming.

These settlements we have lost, and many others like them, are essentially poorly planned, unsustainable communities in the sense that their carbon footprint is a high one. If we are serious about dealing with the cause of these extreme climate events, and resulting more intense fires, we should be thinking about new forms of rural towns that approach a zero carbon footprint.

Perhaps we should no longer allow, and we certainly shouldn't encourage, the rebuilding of detached houses scattered through the countryside, whether in fire prone areas or not.

Australia seems to be one of the worst countries in the world at allowing the car-dependent scattering of houses through the landscape. Only our historic country towns have any semblance of walkability and town edge, and most of them have oversized blocks and streets designed for turning a horse and cart. Even in these towns, this structure has usually broken down over recent decades with lower density "lifestyle" housing growing like a cancer around the fringes.

This form of housing is fundamentally unsustainable whether it occupies forest or open agricultural land. Nearly all planning schemes provide for this development type because there is a "demand" for larger lifestyle blocks.

New forms of settlement are possible in rural settings where people could live in economical, energy-efficient housing, where they can

have close contact with nature through views and short walks to natural areas. These communities could have sophisticated recreation and community facilities, local food production and employment - all without the need to own or drive a car. Sewerage, drainage and waste could all be put to good use on site without huge external impacts through properly planned development. Housing type could be varied but the key would be to provide a large proportion of efficient multi level medium density apartments so the money saved can be spent on, for example, quality public space, and energy systems, and because the density would ensure that most things needed, can be close by.

Government leadership is key

The key to this is government leadership and rigorous design of medium and higher density housing - within a carefully planned landscape setting. Why not use some of this fire rebuilding effort and energy to build just one experimental replacement community that is seriously designed to achieve a zero carbon footprint using the best of our science and expertise?

I imagine this much more ambitious goal would solve the fire risk as a matter of minor detail. Europe has been building these experimental communities for over a decade but to my knowledge there are no serious prototypes being seriously contemplated or discussed in Australia even though we have the expertise and resources to deliver them.

Bruce Echberg is an Urban Designer and Landscape Architect based in Melbourne and Nathalia, and Director of Urban Initiatives Pty Ltd. He can be contacted at bruce@urbaninitiatives.com.au

Design help for Local Government

John Curtis

Five years ago, driving most of the Shires of Murrindindi and Baw Baw as part of the Melbourne2030 fringe areas landscape assessment, gave me further appreciation of the varied and extensive landscapes of these areas - and now of the enormity of the bushfire devastation. It also gave me a further appreciation of the sense of place of each of the towns and hamlets which are the centre of each of these communities.

While the natural landscapes will repair over time, the towns will involve a massive rebuilding effort. Loss of much of the built fabric of these shires raises a number of questions which each of these communities will face:

- How do we rebuild? Many of these town economies relied on their attractive built form, public domain and landscape settings. Do these communities want to recreate

this character or reinterpret it in more contemporary forms?

- Are all of the locations suitable for rebuilding in terms of locations of facilities as well as future bushfire exposure.

The rush to rebuild and re-establish businesses may be at the expense of these and many other urban design issues, as well as the need for time for improving and adopting best practice building design techniques in terms of wildfire resilience.

To this end it seems important that each local government has in house design resources to guide each community in making these decisions about the future urban design and, specifically the public domain for each of the townships.

John Curtis is a part-time (former full-time) resident of the Shire of Murrindindi, and can be contacted at John.Curtis@yarracity.vic.gov.au

Planning to live in the bush

Phillip Loone

Australians have always had an affinity with living in the bush, and managing bushfire hazard has become part and parcel of living.

The protection of residential amenity and setting of standards for environmentally responsible building, siting and design needs to have high priority. The need to give particular attention to possible impacts on natural systems and processes is especially relevant to bushland, skylines and hill faces due to their physical attributes and the identified natural, environmental and cultural values.

The recent fire events in Victoria highlight issues that relate to erection of buildings, carrying out works and subdivision of land if the development or subdivision is located within 100m of one hectare of bushland. Planning schemes should permit development if:

- the development or use would not create a fire hazard;
- the development or use is not in a location so as to cause any potential danger to property owners and their property, or the general public, in the event of a bushfire.

In my opinion, the developer should provide, as part of a Development Application, a Bushfire Hazard Management Plan which has

been endorsed by the Victorian Fire Service addressing:

- site plan and map of surrounding area, to scale
- distance to site and proximity from water sources for fire fighting (hydrant, dams, creek)
- site access and egress points, including passing bays and communal access
- fuel-modified buffer zone
- building protection zone
- average site slopes, in degrees
- area of unmanaged scrub, bush or forest
- site water storages and hard standing areas
- hazardous material storages, such as LPG, petrol, diesel tanks
- check list for the reduction and management of organic fuels
- fire fighting equipment for the proposal
- that the proposal contains water storages of 10,000 litres (other than a dam), which are held in reserve to be exclusively used for the purposes of fire fighting.

Phillip Loone is Director of Planet Planning Pty Ltd, and be contacted at ploone@bigpond.com



▲ View from Google earth of Linz Pichling or "Solar City" a sustainable development in Austria that now accommodates 3000 residents and has been developed by Government and the private sector from an early concept stage in 1992. All buildings and the site development have been designed by the best of Europe's landscape architects and architects through commissions and competitions with a clear focus on sustainable outcomes. This approach could easily adapt to new Australian towns and settlements in various locations at various scales.

Musings over lunch

Robert McLean

Victoria's tragic bushfires have exercised most everyone's mind and they were, naturally, the topic of conversation at the recent monthly lunch of *Urban Design Forum* in Melbourne. The actual event has been examined extensively and, although that continues, those at the lunch thought not about how the fires could have been avoided, but how best people could continue to live safely in such an area.

Bill Chandler said that during a recent trip to Europe he concluded that sustainability was no longer applicable and people now really needed to be thinking about adaptability. He thought to himself he was just being smart with words, but the recent Victorian fire-events suggest he was closer to being right than just smart. Communities in Victoria's high fire risk areas need to think deeply and seriously about adaptability, as hidden within it is the sustainability they desire and, as evidenced by the recent fires, something they most certainly need.

Salvage from adversity

Melbourne City Council urban designer, David Prior, encouraged salvaging something from adversity; and David was not just thinking about salvaging lives or property. His view was much more long term, and he felt it was critical that we salvage some workable good ideas from the mess that is this tragedy. Although he did not articulate it in so few words, it seemed he felt that somewhere in the chaos left from the fires was the key to assembling and more secure future.

Bruce Echberg discussed the possibility of those communities returning to a whole different set up that saw them living in a much more concentrated area with bushland kept well back from the purpose-constructed residential areas. That, of course, make great

sense, but brings with it a contradiction in terms - those who live in the high-risk fire areas do so because they want to be free what they consider the crush of suburban living - they want to enjoy the country "feel" homes in bush bring. A concentrated style of living might bring them safety, but it also puts them back into an environment from which they choose to escape. Thinking about Bruce's idea, the cleared area around the living zone would be an ideal place/space for a community garden, something that will be increasingly important as climate change begins to really take hold.

Dessert at lunch was a broad discussion about evacuation of those areas threatened by fire: Can you do it? Should you do it? And would you do it? Would people leave their homes and livelihoods? Should people have to? Who would be responsible? Who decides when it is time to leave? Do we have a previously agreed "tipping point"- that moment when it is obvious that this fire has become bigger than anything we can adequately deal with?

Bush fire survival in the view of most seems to be locked into the contemporary view of individualism and, rather than considering how a community might survive such a testing dilemma, it seems that most think first of the individual. Anecdotal research suggests many see people threatened by fire should scurry to safety in a cellar under individual house constructed a result of change to building codes.

Rather than permitting the re-building of individual homes in fire risk areas, maybe we should push for a community built around concentrated living that encourages, and allows for, defence against such drama at an intensive community level.

Robert McLean is a journalist with a keen interest in urban design. He can be contacted at robed@mcmmedia.com.au

What do urban designers have to say about the Victorian fires?

February 2009 in Victoria has been one of those months. The traditional hot weather went feral, with temperatures as high as 47OC. The fires also went feral and, slowly, the devastation emerged through the smoke: 210+ people dead, 2,000+ buildings, uncounted wildlife, 500,000+ hectares of countryside. It is one of those times when everyone knows people who are directly affected: friends who have lost their houses, but were very lucky to

escape the speed and scale of the fires, some were not so lucky. The fires burn on, but most are partly under control and not threatening lives. The generosity and heroism comes to the fore. But the trauma and dislocation continues, and there are diverse responses to this disturbing situation. So, what can urban designers do? Send your ideas to wchandler@bigpond.com

Impressions of Freiburg

Tony Hall

Freiburg, in the south of Germany, has become very well known for its progressive environmental policies - in particular as a centre of the German solar power industry. I took the opportunity to see for myself in June 2008. I was particularly fortunate in being able to be shown round the new developments there by local residents. Freiburg is an historic university city known for its mild (by German standards) climate and, in recent times, radical green politics.

I wanted to see two of its new experimental housing estates, Rieselfeld and Vauban, about which I had read a great deal. Both have been realised by the City Council on land it owned - without the use of private developers - and have new tramlines running through them and connecting them to the city centre. Most, but not all, of the dwellings are arranged as 4-storey blocks of flats at 70dph. Each has a district heating plant. The speed limit is 30kph. As radical as all these aspects may be to Australian ears, they would not be seen as so unusual in Germany.

The radical departures are as follows. Although mains gas and electricity are connected, there is widespread use of solar panels. The insulation and general design of the houses limits their annual energy consumption to 65kwh/m² per annum compared to the national standard for new dwellings of 100 kwh/m² pa. Some Vauban dwellings are only 15kwh/m² pa, and some others are net exporters of power. Cuts in federal tax subsidies for social housing meant that original ideas for a predominance were cut to "only" 25% in Rieselfeld, and much less in Vauban.

Unique housing initiative

This has prompted a unique housing initiative. Prospective residents obtain their mortgage and then approach the City Council, which forms them into groups known as "baugruppen" (the nearest Australian legal

equivalent would be a "body corporate"). The group pools their mortgages and engages an architect to build them a block of flats on the Council's land. Through such housing policy the City Council has promoted Rieselfeld and Vauban as places for families with young children, and one of the remarkable sights is the large number of young children running around everywhere, often unsupervised.

Car parking in Rieselfeld is provided underneath the blocks, which struck me as a rather expensive, and not altogether sustainable, solution although it gets them out of the way of all other uses. At Vauban, cars can only be kept in separate multi-storey car parks for a substantial fee. As a result, 50% of households there do not have a car. The disappointment in both areas is, surprisingly, the urban design. Although all ground floor apartments and townhouses have a substantial private garden (unlike Australia!) screening by fences or hedges is perfunctory. The consequent low level of privacy makes for a high level of surveillance, and therefore security, but I found it culturally challenging. While this is an aspect that is debatable, some other urban design issues were clearly mistakes.

Residents spoke of Vauban having an "edge" where less desirable uses were put, such as the multi-storey car parks. One of these edges was the main road into town which, consequently, had little active frontage. Another was, of all things, the unfenced school playground where young people got up to no good at night because of the lack of surveillance. As excellent as the non-physical town planning was, the process appeared to go straight from this to the architect without a strong urban design layer in between - something I have also encountered in The Netherlands. Nevertheless, the positive achievements of the Freiburg experiments are so remarkable that they should be on everyone's list for further study.

Tony Hall is an Urban Designer based in Brisbane, and can be contacted at tony273@bigpond.net.au



Courses

Victoria – committed to improving design

Urban Design Unit training program 2009

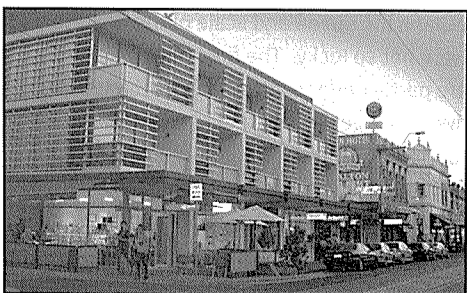
Now in its fourth year, the Department of Planning and Community Development's Urban Design Training Program has been a great success with over 450 public and private sector urban environment professionals across metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate participating in various urban design training events.

This training program is an important initiative contributing to the implementation of Melbourne 2030 Planning for sustainable growth (2002). The program has been developed to assist planners and designers deliver better urban environments through improved public safety, well functioning activity centres and good design for higher density residential developments.

The training program covers material essential to creating more liveable places. Each year the program is assessed and specialist modules developed to meet changing trends, with this year focusing on Structure Planning for Activity Centres; Designing Streets for People; Urban Layout and Subdivision Design; Urban Design around Rail Environments; Safer Design and the Public Environment.

This training program builds capability and urban design knowledge through best practice examples and hands-on design exercises.

For further details, contact Amanda Millis, Program Manager, Urban Design Unit, DPCD on (03) 8644 8815 www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning/urbandesign or PLANET Professional Development Program on (03) 9637 9602



Urban Design for Sustainability

14-17 April 2009, Perth

This annual 4-day short course in Urban Design for Sustainability at the Urban Design Centre of Western Australia (UDC), is co-hosted by the Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute (CUSP), Murdoch University's School of Sustainability and the UDC. It will be attended by professional participants, as well as enrolled students, and offers a unique opportunity for policy makers, consultants and community advocates to learn more about responsive urban design in general, and recent innovative practice in this field around Perth in particular. For more information see www.udcwa.org/education/brochure.htm.

Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies

- call for Scholars

The Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies International Urban Fellows program is designed to create a worldwide network of professionals engaged in the study of urban policy. It brings scholars in urban policy studies outside of the US to the Hopkins campus each year for a program of advanced study, research and training. Positions in the program are available at the Senior and Junior level, and for either four or eight months.

The program will benefit promising researchers who will gain a semester or academic year of reflection, exposure to American and cross-national experience, and immersion in the literature and issues of urban policy.

Successful candidates should have strong interests and a proven record of accomplishment in the urban policy field, the capability to conduct independent inquiry into some facet of the growth, decline, and revitalization of cities and the welfare of urban residents, and a solid fluency in spoken and written English.

Application deadline for the 2009-2010 academic year is 1 April, 2009. More detailed information and application procedures can be obtained by visiting www.ips.jhu.edu/pub/International-Fellows-in-Urban-Studies. Questions may be directed to Marsha R. B. Schachtel at mschacht@jhu.edu

Conferences

Placed

1 May 2009 submission deadline

Placed presents projects by artists, designers, architects, planners and other urbanists that are directed toward cultural innovation, action and change in Australian cities, suburbs, towns and communities.

Placed is a gathering project that will catalogue and map 100 or so projects produced in Australia in the last few years. The intention is to present emerging and changing ideas about our cities, communities and places. This includes interventions, artworks, and events that are articulated in urban, suburban and community situations, and that have catalysed or enabled other ways of thinking, living and doing in the urban environment.

These projects, regardless of scale, are genuinely concerned with the way we envision, create and live in our places. For more information contact Linda at lcarroli@pacific.net.au or visit: www.placing.synthasite.com/placed.php

Survival: implementing tomorrow's city 2nd International Urban Design Conference 2-4 September 2009, Gold Coast

This conference will identify and address ways to implement best practice sustainable actions and showcase exemplar projects for leaders, designers and communities to understand the complex issues involved, and how to apply these to meet individual urban design challenges. More information is available at www.urbandesignaustralia.com.au

ICTC Society 2009 conference and exhibition

27-30 October 2009, Geelong

The International Cities, Towns and Communities Society (ICTC) 2009 conference and exhibition will be held at Deakin University Waterfront Campus, Geelong, Victoria from 27-30 October 2009. The Call for Papers document is now available at www.ictcsociety.org/?D=81 Membership of the ICTC Society (no charge) is available at www.ictcsociety.org/?D=38 For further details contact Rob Henshaw on +61 7 5520 4288 or rob@ictcsociety.org

Whole life urban sustainability and its assessment

Second International Conference
22-24 April 2009, Loughborough, UK

There will be three keynote speakers: Peter Head (Director of Global Planning, Arup); Nigel Ingram (Director, Joseph Rowntree Foundation); and Lynne Sullivan (Executive Director, Sustainable Design Inbuilt), followed by a presentation of approximately eighty papers in parallel workshop sessions, covering a wide range of relevant topics. For further information see www.sue-mot.org/conference

More Footprints Less Carbon

Walk21 New York City, October 2009

This 10th International Conference on Walking and Liveable Communities will include papers, presenters, workshops, poster displays, walkshops, and pre-and post-conference workshops that can provide insight, guidance and support within each of the conference themes, from local to international levels.

For more information see www.walk21.com or if you have any questions contact walk21nyc@dot.nyc.gov

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Web: A new consultant register and an increasing range of related information is available at www.udf.org.au

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