

Creative Planning in Cairns

Ben Guy, PhD in urban design, continues the conversation on planning and designing a city that attracts and engenders culture and creativity. see www.benguy.com.

One of the first rules of good city design is 'continuous frontage'. This means that all public spaces (roads, parks etc) are faced (fronted) with buildings. It is a simple concept that has been implemented in western cities for over 2,000 years. It leads to the concept of back-to-back plots (with the fronts addressing the streets) in urban 'blocks' that are ideally of a 'walkable' size (100m-200m long). Think of a great city or Place – and you will not conjure up images of blank walls and fences, but active fronts.

When our streets and parks are lined with front doors and active windows, the public space is 'overlooked' by people's (yes, strangers) eyeballs. This makes these spaces inherently safer because most people are good and will help - phone the police etc - if they see untoward activities on the street. This was called 'passive policing' by Jane Jacobs in the 1960's. It is always safest to be in a 'busy' but not a 'packed' place.

People, and businesses, have public and private lives. The building in the street reflects this. The private 'rear' is where we keep the bins, the clothesline, rusting vehicles and the service area. Public fronts display our topiary, self-importance & trinkets.

Streetscapes of roller-doors and shiny vehicles are not humane nor interesting – otherwise we would ponder the splendour of the shopping mall carpark. In Cairns, and across Queensland, it is too common that housing estates are 'designed' with private backs (thus blank fences) to streets, &/or excessive setbacks, protruding garages and recessed front doors along.

The safety, the vitality and sociability, and ultimately the success of a street correlates strongly with the number of active doorways facing the footpath. It is that simple. Remember, the notion of attracting creative people is to have a creative and vital Place.

Examples?...

- The Trilogy ignores Abbott Street with oodles of dead 'driveway' space to the street edge. Opposite, the Oasis provides no animation to the footpath - leaving a street now largely devoid of Life, rescued only by the rebirthed quasi-brutalist CoCA building.

- Cityport proposal: on

observing the masterplan, it looks sure to have plenty of faceless walls and exposed service areas with its separated monuments, large setbacks and lack of spatial composition. Included is a 'major pathway' along one of the many faceless edges of the Convention Centre – a sure future crime hotspot.

- Opposite: the State Government stripey grey box has near no footpath interaction.
- Reef Casino: 2-storeys of glorious air-conditioning vents overlooking an underutilised pocket park (I wonder why?) - the blank walls extend some 80% of the block perimeter.

- A current construction adjacent Cairns Central (the definitive example of blank-wallism), celebrates, almost as a sales feature, a high masonry fence to the footpath in this city-centre hotspot.

- Suburban: Redlynch-Kamerunga Road is a social street edge transformed into faceless garages, carports and the blank edges of six-packs. This is not the fault of developers nor of apartments – it is a lack of guidance.

- Edmonton subdivisions: bizarrely curvaceous streets lined, from day one, with 1.8m pine fences...! Are we trying to create slums? ... I could go on...

A one-line policy halts the practice of inward-looking mediocrity and streetscape decay: 'continuous frontage in all circumstances'.

From this, streets come to life as avenues of interactivity, in/direct exchange and titillation - independent of the architecture.



blank-wall park



great seats, but for who? ... looking at what?



buildings here 'turn the corner' - with fronts!

Few would deny that computers create both wizardry and heartache. They have given people the ability to cut and paste without scissors, engage in heated discourses with inanimate objects and take advice from paperclips. But up there with some of the most insidious elements of computer sorcery, is the false sense of engagement the PowerPoint presentation has delivered users.

For those unfamiliar, PP is a computer creation that encourages bullet points to shoot across a projected screen like clay pigeons in a firing range, magically highlighting key points during a speaker's presentation. Generally this occurs in a darkened room with a trapped but not necessarily attentive audience.

Because of PP's high-tech appearance, automated behaviour and profusion of palm tree motifs it is used endlessly by the same speakers to purge the same material with the same clay pigeons all over the country. The subsequent banality of repetition goes some way to explaining why most PP speakers have abandoned voice intonation, eye contact and any attempts at humour.

Those who have read Don Watson's Weasel Words or Death

Sentence, will fully appreciate how the seasoned PP speaker, regardless of actual subject matter, invariably includes (with bullets in bold)... 'the need for a partnership arrangement to oversee a sub-committee and assess the long-term future of providing operational advice and a strategic, business-plan-centred model to access the efficiency of the much-needed overview.'

PP speakers never vary their script but master a strangely lyrical yet completely disaffected discourse proficient only at punching out big words like critical, proactive, and excited in the hope the audience might feel the same (or at least awake). But sadly their attention has long been engaged in trying to send text messages from within their handbag and the darkened auditorium.

So, what does this say? It's the human factor that engages audiences, not the bullets and beeps of a PP presentation, and if that's absent, much of the rest becomes all a bit (yawn) pointless.

Molly L'Estrange

TONIGHT

COMMERCE QUEENSLAND

Business After Hours

Thursday 26 May

Lockart Room
Cairns Colonial Club
Time 6.00pm - 8.30pm

Network with hundreds of Local Business people

Costs
Members \$20
Non-members \$25










Willie McBrides

Irish

Bar & Restaurant



Thursday
Live Irish music.

Saturday
Final - Super 12's
Nibbles supplied half time.

Everyday
Serious Steaks




253 Sheridan St Phone - 4041 0000

Tanks Arts & Crafts Markets

Sun 29th May

Tanks Arts & Crafts markets with **free kids and adults body & voice percussion workshops** and performance by **Matt Hill**. Plus Circo Loco youth circus, music, cafe, dance workshops and more.



Times: 9.00am - 1.00pm

Soul to Soul Ken Miida

Fri 20th May - Sun 5th Jun

Soul to Soul is the first solo exhibition of stunning new photographic work by Cairns based Japanese photographer, Ken Miida.



Nomadic

Fri 20th May - Sun 5th Jun

A dynamic exhibition of fibre works exploring the artistic properties of the emerging and environmentally friendly eco-fibre hemp, presented by Flying Arts.



Darren Hanlon

Fri 3rd June

Darren Hanlon has played with many international acts including Billy Bragg, Magnetic Fields, Evan Dando and the Violent Femmes. 'Punks Not Dead' made No. 45 on JJJ's Hottest 100.



Tickets: \$18 and \$15 concession, from Ticketlink 07-4031-9555, www.ticketlink.com.au
Doors: 7.00pm, **Show:** 8.00pm
Licensed Bar & Food

Coming Up:

World Enviro Day - Sat 4th Jun
Acoustic Folk - Sun 5th Jun
Qld Photographic Society - 10-13 Jun



Tanks Arts Centre

Gallery Hours 10.00am - 5.00pm

Address: 46 Collins Ave, Edge Hill
Info: tanks@cairns.qld.gov.au, 07-4032-2349

music > arts > community > culture >