Next to sport and sex (and possibly before), the Australian house is the preoccupation of Australian life. Thanks to a booming economy, low interest rates and tax incentives, Australians have greatly indebted themselves in order to purchase and outfit their…

Domains
So it has always been.

The ‘quarter-acre block’ is an icon in Australia, deeply rooted in the collective psyche. And no wonder. As in Canada, struggling migrants with little hope of a future in their native lands could acquire property, build detached homes and create an entire society of land-owning everymen – or so it seemed to them.

Australia came of age in 1901, when the country became a federation – accompanied by the first distinctive residential architecture ...
Federation Style

Designed to embrace the outdoor lifestyle, responsive to climate (we’d call it ‘sustainable’ today), these deep-red and dark-brown brick bungalows feature welcoming verandas, as open to the world as the Aussie character.

Details: tiling on the front walks and tiles on the roof, frilled terra-cotta ridges, lots of gables, bay windows, leaded glass, white picket fences. Echoes of Federation Style can be found, much diluted, in contemporary tract housing.
Desiring to maintain their character, the most attractive suburbs of inner Perth along the river and park allow little increase in housing stock. And so rising value is reflected in the cost of the land.

When a lot is purchased for a premium, it is usually not viable to leave the existing house on the site, resulting in ‘teardown’ – a phenomenon seen in Kerrisdale in the late 1980s. Only a new house, very much bigger, will justify the price paid. And so the neighbourhood changes anyway, no longer reflecting the middle-class character of a less affluent time.
Perth’s early attempts at highrise housing, insensitively done, soured the public on denser development for years. A slab like Observation City is as much a cautionary tale as an unloved landmark – a lesson that new kinds of development need to be neighbourly and well designed when first done.
Last month, because so many citizens are adamant about keeping building heights low and there was an election going on, the state Labour government promised to impose a five-storey height limit all along the coast (up to eight with community approval). Not everyone agreed. Some coastal municipalities were in the midst of negotiating major upgrades of their beachfront by trading off height for amenity.
So where does the growth go?

Given the geographical limits on Perth – the ocean to the west, the Darling Scarp to the east – the urban region has, since the Stephenson-Hepburn Plan of 1955, adopted the strategy of the ‘corridor’ city, spreading north and south in a kind of H, with open space in between to protect underground water supplies.

The plans, of course, called for a balance of highways and transit lines. But up until the 1980s, only the highways got built, along with some regional town centres like Joondalup. Now the state is trying to correct some of the transportation imbalances in a strategy called Network City, simultaneously developing Transport Corridors for through vehicle traffic, and Activity Corridors to consolidate mixed-use and transit-oriented development along rail lines.

In North America, our through routes, the freeways, have inevitably turned into the congested main streets of suburbia. Unless Western Australia can protect their Transport Corridors from local traffic and shift passenger growth to rail, they’ll end up the same as us.
For more on Network City, click on the map.
Along the northeast bar of the H, centered around an old gold-rush town strangling in sprawl, the Western Australian government is trying to build the future.

After a successful charrette in 1997, the Midland Redevelopment Authority was created to transform the century-old Railway Workshops into a catalyst for a strategic regional centre, with a revitalized core.
All the right concepts are here: jobs and housing, heritage and sustainability, transit- and pedestrian-orientation, public art and design control. The densities are higher than usual in the suburbs (80 to 100 dwellings per ha), but the population still seems low, with little provision for non-market housing, given the major public investment of $100 million on infrastructure.

Possibly they’re starting conservatively, hoping that a high-profile success will overcome the doubt and hostility that often greets such projects when proposed for the region beyond the city core.

For more on Midland, click here.
Well, good luck to Perth: they have a growth greater than Vancouver’s (27,000 people per year versus our 24,000). They also have plans for some of the largest housing developments in the world on their northern front. The Tokyu Corporation is moving ahead with a 5000-hectare development in the St Andrews region, beyond the picture below, 50 kilometres north of Perth city.

Ultimate property development worth A$12 billion could produce 55,000 homes for 150,000 people over the next 25 to 30 years. This represents 13 per cent of the state’s future housing requirements. They’re also aiming for 60 percent job self-sufficiency. They’ll have to – otherwise the traffic generated will overwhelm their highway system.

New-urbanist architects Peter Calthorpe and Andres Duany have been commissioned to work on the plans. Let us hope that they can avoid the kind of monoculture that typifies so much of the region.
Canada and Australia have among the best lifestyles in the world – and not surprisingly consume resources at a commensurate rate. To the left are our comparative ecological footprints – estimates of the equivalent area of productive land and water ecosystems required to support our material and energy flows. Below are the amount of greenhouse gases we emit.
February 22-28, 2005

**Doing nothing about climate change is not an option**

City business **Gordon Price**

When it comes to climate change, there are three kinds of stories:

Every few days new indicators of climate change are reported: "Global warming melting Antarctica” ... “Evidence suggests global warming enhances destruction of ozone.“

Then there are the serious warnings from important people: "Task force calls on G-8 to combat global warming."

Then, in response, a columnist or commentator will ridicule the junk science and environmental radicalism that has hijacked the media. The more frequent and ominous the report, the greater and more strident the denial: "Global warming? A gloom/doom myth” ... “The danger is hot air, not global warming.”

The current darling of this school is *Jurassic Park* novelist **Michael Crichton** for the twist he casts on climate change in his new thriller *State of Fear*, well documented with fact-filled doubt.
This creates a counter-response, of course, and the game is on: experts arguing, details disputed, the public confused, the politicians confounded. So long as doubt deters action, however, the critics of Kyoto prevail.

For business, the problem is how seriously to take the possibility of climate change, and how to respond in the short term. No one really thinks Kyoto will solve the problem, but should decision-makers in business simply shrug it off and adopt the defence of doubt?

That might work - if it wasn't for the first kind of coverage. The constant drumbeat of consequential evidence is relentless. Every time another ice ledge falls off an Antarctic shelf, every time another species shows up in places it hasn't been seen before, every time there's another story on how it's been the hottest period of weather since whenever, the sense of dread increases.

Could the climate go catastrophic? Is it already too late? The anxiety is stoked in the words of apocalyptic preachers and in the books on the collapse of civilizations that destroyed their environment.

Unfortunately, that's not the best climate, so to speak, in which to make short-term decisions that can cost millions. If business leaders say, "Hey, the risk is not established well enough to justify the cost" or "There are higher priorities on which to allocate our resources," they might be making sensible points, but it looks as though they're not taking any responsibility for the health of the planet, only the responsibility to make a profit, and damn the consequences.
That is not, as they say, a sustainable strategy, not when the drumbeat keeps getting louder and the science more assured. As the monitoring of the planet increases, so does the demand for political action - the longer delayed, the more radical the response.

In fact, many businesses and governments are already assuming climate change is real and are changing their way of doing things, literally at ground level, whether in more sustainable infrastructure, by adopting green building standards, or by planning new communities like Southeast False Creek.

Nonetheless, top North American leadership, whether business or political, with few exceptions is either hesitant or in denial. George Bush Sr. established the bottom line when he said at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit that "the American way of life is non-negotiable." The current American president says nothing at all, so completely is climate change off his table.

It has left those leaders who would take the issue seriously in a moral quandary. Why should Canada undertake any but the most token actions when our major competitor will not take any serious action at all? Why should we disadvantage ourselves when it will likely make little difference, given the use of carbon fuels in emerging economies?
Conclusions? Climate change is real, even if we don't know the degree. Kyoto is a doable challenge and prepares us for more drastic measures if required; it might even give us a competitive advantage over time. Not responding is not an option. It indicts those who would do nothing in the face of an escalating threat as either stupid, cynical or irrelevant.
As a member of the Advisory Board of the Wosk Centre for Dialogue, I’d like to extend an invitation to attend the luncheon at which Mary Robinson will receive the Jack Blaney Award for Dialogue.

MARY ROBINSON
2005 RECIPIENT

Outstanding courage, leadership and commitment to dialogue characterized Mary Robinson’s Presidency of Ireland, her work as UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and currently, her work as Executive Director of the Ethical Globalization Initiative (EGI) in which she is successfully challenging nations to see—and act on—the human face of HIV/AIDS and other serious human rights concerns.

Friday, April 8, 2005, 11:45 am to 1:30 pm
Park Ballroom, Four Seasons Hotel
$75 per person

Following the award presentation Dr. Robinson will discuss "The Power of Dialogue".

If you’d like to attend, please click here, and I’ll arrange for a ticket.
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