

# LEO

## AT LARGE

HOW encouraging to see the Sydney City Council at last taking an interest in Hyde Park. Council's recently released draft Plan of Management and Master Plan is a step in the right direction. I can't think of a public space that has suffered so much over the years. The first job surely is to get rid of all the junk that's been installed there: maintenance buildings, totems, tatty furniture and daggy lights. I note that the report recommends reassessing all constructed elements such as fountains and monuments erected in the park since 1934. I hope "reassess" is a euphemism for eliminate. No-one surely would miss the Busby's Bore and F. J. Walker fountains to mention but two horrific latter-day additions.

THERE is a story (which may well be apocryphal) that when Harry Jensen was Lord Mayor someone suggested that while on an overseas trip he or a colleague should take a look at the gardens of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli with a view to picking up a few ideas for Hyde Park. Apparently the municipal mandarin went instead to the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and, rather than renaissance elements, we got those amazing steel tripods from which dangled arrangements like weighing scales filled with hectic annuals. These monstrosities stood along the Elizabeth Street frontage of Hyde Park for years before someone had the sense to junk them.

SOME years ago the Sydney City Council planted a row of *Magnolia grandiflora* along the centre of Challis Avenue in Potts Point. These have now grown into splendid specimens and in years to come their glossy evergreen leaves with brown suede undersides and magnificent lemon scented goblet-like flowers will delight residents and visitors alike. The trees have been well pleached so branches are not torn off by large passing vehicles and the ground underneath has been planted with hardy dietes. The whole strip is a real treat and an all-too-rare example of an intelligent and tasteful bit of public gardening.

YASUDA KASAI, the Japanese insurance firm that bought Van Gogh's Sunflowers for \$51 million, now has the painting on public view in its private art museum in Tokyo. The picture was exhibited soon after it was knocked down at Christie's, London, back in 1987 and to date receipts from admission fees and sales of postcards to people anxious to view the expensive masterpiece have totalled almost \$18 million. A neat way for a corporation to amortise the cost of assembling a collection of masterpieces.

CONEYBEARE Morrison is the firm responsible for much of the better urban planning and design work in and around Sydney. Macquarie Street is, in part, its baby. What a pity its well-designed and colourful bus shelters have already, mere months after installation, been so extensively vandalised. Hoons have banged fists or feet at the plate glass panels enclosing these shelters effectively shattering almost every one of them. Welcome to Sydney.



NOEL GASH of Bayview draws my attention to a curious fact. Back in the 1950s, architect Robin Boyd published *The Australian Ugliness*, possibly the first book to draw attention to urban environmental atrocities. Featured in the book was a house in Bayview described by Boyd as "the ugliest house in Australia". That very same house is now up for auction and is expected to fetch around \$1 million.

THERE can be no more pleasant way to experience a city and to sense its history than by taking leisurely walks through its streets. All one needs is a pair of sensible shoes and a good guide book. To coincide with Heritage Week, a splendid new walking guide, *Sydney from the Rocks*, has been published. A companion volume to *Sydney from Circular Quay*, this one, written by Joan Lawrence, takes the adventurous local or tourist on five separate conducted walks through the western part of our city from the Rocks to Macquarie Place, Hyde Park and Chinatown. Now all we need is some mild, sunny autumn weather.

AND while on the subject of walking, the Pyrmont Ultimo Historical Society, as its contribution to Heritage Week, is organising guided walks through these fascinating areas. Given that the theme of Heritage Week is "Our Industrial Heritage" and that no area better reflects this theme, the walks should be well worth supporting. Scheduled for tomorrow, next Wednesday and Sunday, April 29, the Ultimo excursions depart at 10 am from the forecourt of the Powerhouse while intending participants in the Pyrmont perambulation should rally at the Pyrmont Post Office at 2 pm. \$5 a walker, half price for pensioners and students. But the organisers warn that bookings are essential. Call 212 6186 or 692 9742.

WHILE not in any way industrial, the Yaralla estate at Concord is a unique item of this city's and this country's heritage. It is the most remarkable Edwardian estate to survive intact in this State and its garden is a bit of living, growing history. The estate and the adjoining Thomas Walker hospital were bequeathed to the people of NSW by that remarkable philan-

thropist, Dame Edith Walker, in the largest private bequest of the period. Since the convalescent hospital was closed, the garden has gone into a serious decline which is doubly shameful as Dame Edith left funds specifically for the employment of gardeners. A suggestion has been made that the Ryde Horticultural School be relocated here and incorporated into a major horticultural college along the lines of the Victorian State College at Burnley, a damned good idea as we are going to need major horticultural training and research if we are to be able to handle the alarming consequences of the greenhouse effect. This is a practical suggestion to the question of adaptive reuse (more than was forthcoming in the recent ruckus over Lindsay) but perhaps there are others. But in any case some appropriate use should be found and quickly.

"PEOPLE in Greenhouses should ride bicycles" — old 20th-century proverb. The Bicycle Institute is urging more people to use bikes as a means of transport. It claims that such a decision could help reduce the transport emissions that are a major contributor to the GE.

THAT the public at large is seriously concerned about pollution problems is apparent from the number of communications I receive each week, some 15 to 30 letters from readers, faxes from local groups, pleas for space in this column to publicise some aspect of this appalling world problem. Among this week's batch of mail comes news of a most ambitious joint initiative by Amnesty and the Wilderness Society. Together they're arranging an exhibition for July at the Tin Sheds Gallery at Sydney University. The title of the exhibition is "Inside the Greenhouse — Deforestation, Dispossession and Profit" and the organisers would welcome work in any media that reflects concern about the global consequences of Greenhouse, dispossession of indigenous people and threat to cultures. All artists participating will be invited to donate half or all of the proceeds from sale of their work to Amnesty International and The Wilderness Society. Interest parties should contact Ruth Waller on 660 5531.

THE Australian Bicentennial Exhibition, which toured the country last year, was not the whopping success the organisers had predicted and which it probably deserved to be. Let's hope that the auction sale in the Dairy Hall of the Showground next Saturday, during which the various components of the travelling show are flogged off by Lawson's, will be more successful. If you're in the market for three jerry cans, a cave made of moulded ply foam coated in fibreglass and fitted with an Onga model 4B electric water pump and hoses, or a cut-out acrylic figure of Ita Buttrose, you know where to go. In addition to these curiosities, there are some spiffing specially commissioned works of art.