

## WEEKEND MAGAZINE ★ SIX PAGES

## SHARP COMMENT



EVOLUTION

WHAT SORT of cities do we want? This country is now undoubtedly strong enough, rich enough and selfish enough to get what-ever it wants, eventually. Australian cities, now developing faster than ever, can be made to grow in any shape we want them to.

Some of them can become huge metropolises approximating the present size of London and New York — or we can limit them, to more manageable size.

They can continue to climb upwards to scrape the sky more effectively at 40, 60 or 80 storeys — or we can retain certain rather irrational regulations that now hold them in check.

They can be great expanses of dormitory suburbs surrounding central commercial hubs that are dying by day and dead at night, or they can be more integrated, with life more evenly interwoven through them, so that most people live closer to where they work, and some of their main leisure, nightclubs or theatres, and intellectual life is formed at the centre.

And what sort of urban character do we want to see more of: the ordered and sterilised or the disorderly and exciting: Canberra or Kings Cross?

These and numerous other alternatives facing the Australian city were discussed at length last week when the Royal Australian Institute of Architects held its 14th annual convention in Melbourne. The theme of the convention was 'The city of the future'. The architects were to try to reach, through discussions, some conclusions as to what cities they would like. At the same time a public exhibition called 'Man in the Street' had the aim of 'raising the citizen's sights' in regarding his city.

## Ideal shape

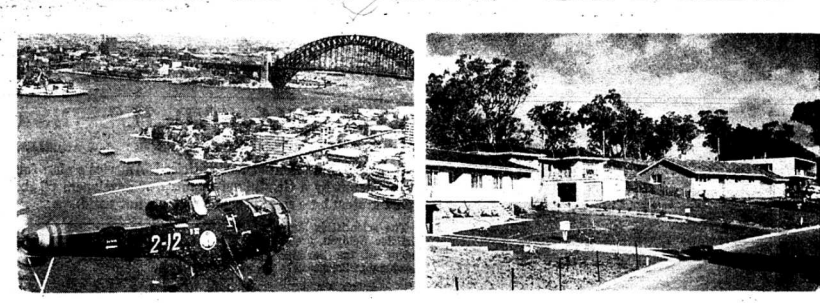
No conclusions were reached, of course — officially, at any rate — but out of many discussions there did emerge a fairly clear definition of the ideal shape for the Australian city of tomorrow—at least in the opinion of most architects and town-planners when in optimistic mood.

It was accepted that Sydney and Melbourne will grow to about five million people each by the end of this century. At more than double the present size there will be impossible problems of congestion and dreariness unless some radical changes are made now. The problems of the other capital cities are less acute, but the same quality, and soon enough they will be in the same boat.

The things that are wrong with the mythical typical Australian city are many. Many more freeways are needed, and these are already being ringed with freeways — at the outskirts where the new ribbon roads lead to the old gridlans.

By the end of the century the private car will choke and destroy the city unless some drastic changes are made. At the present rate of growth, soon traffic will not move in city streets and about half the city's

## NEW LIFE FOR CITIES



## The choice — metropolitan excitement or Canberra order?

ROBIN BOYD presents the alternatives for urban living in the Australia of the future.

buildings will have to have car parks.

So, to save the city for people, perhaps midsize cars will become normal for city use, and later foldaway cars that drivers park in slots beside their office doors. Or greatly improved public transport including monorails and undergrounds through the city, and a total ban on private cars. In any case the central city will be ringed by the multi-storey parking stations of the commuters, and in the centre the pedestrian will regain some of his lost dignity.

Under the heading of dullness are all the failures of the modern city on a human basis. At one time the four letters of the word city spelt excitement

Today they seem to spell filling cabinets and sterilised office foyers, and sandwich bars, and lights out and lock up at 5.30 pm, when everyone flees for some somewhere miles away in the suburbs.

This disease of dreariness attacks the smaller cities more cruelly, but it afflicts Melbourne badly enough and even Sydney would have had his answer except: Kings Cross. The cure is very simple: it is to let people back into the city centre to sleep, to live. Then the city will not be a cold controlled machine that turns off at 5.30 except for a newswear theatre and a restaurant or two.

In Sydney the legal obstacles blocking residential occupation of the city have recently been removed, and in Melbourne

they are now in process of being removed, and from now on gradually we will see a return of people and life to these city centres.

But more than that is necessary to cure the dullness. More open squares, more places to sit, more space and air to breathe, are required in the concrete jungle. These can be provided without great expense to the city by encouraging owners of big new building projects to leave much greater areas of land at ground level. As Mr Harry Sandler suggested, the owner who leaves more free ground can be given a bonus by the city in the form of permission to build much higher than others on the section of land he does occupy.

The sprawl of suburbs cannot continue indefinitely without stretching dreariness to a social snapping point. Some form of limitation of each city's area is accepted as inevitable, with

satellite suburbs or new towns or fingers projecting beyond — or all of these, in place of an amorphous mass.

At the same time flat-building will be encouraged close in. But not the sort of flats most familiar at present. The three-storey, own-four-own block built down to minimum standards received from the architects at the convention the warmest condemnation of any building type.

## Skyscrapers

The ideal flats in the future ideal city will be skyscraper blocks. Some will be right in the centre, mixing with the offices and theatres. Most will be in a second ring a mile or two out. This will leave, between them and the centre, a more populous and intimate inner ring of residences. Here revival of the old terraces or row of houses might occur — a

middle-class or residential district such as hardly exists at present, something halfway between King's Cross and North Balwyn — something between the present extremes of 150 or 12 people an acre.

And lastly, considering the category of ugliness, the ideal Australian city will have no more of that. The city will be a tidy, white place, controlling irresponsible advertising and frowning on all forms of civic vandalism. Utopia? Not at all. The prototype already exists in Canberra.

Yet is the Canberra character, the impeccable sweeping lawns and sterile cleanliness and neatness and draftsmanlike regularity, what we want for every Australian city? Probably not. The National Capital Development Commission, Mr John Overall, told the convention that he would not be happy that controlled atmosphere were to permeate everywhere—even in Canberra. 'Cities need that areas of seariness,' he said. 'Places where life is young and gay and a bit rebellious.'

They also need the evidence of age and growth and tradition, and Mr Arthur Odell, the president of the American Institute of Architects, put in a plea for protecting good buildings against the bulldozers of progress.

Here, then, greatly oversimplified, is how most professional designers seem to see the Australian city of tomorrow. First, the city heart where there are fewer buildings—a lot of low, old rubbish having been cleared away—and where new buildings are taller than ever. In this city heart some people actually live, and all walk in safety. The heart is surrounded by the car-parking stations of the commuters, and a ring of the whole's belly of the dauntless three who walked unharmed in the burning fiery furnace; and all the other legends in that collection of Hebrew folk-says that we may say I am flogging a dead horse; and in a sense you are right. This is no longer a controversial question; only a small number of singularly stupid people, a negligible minority, make the mistake of taking people's words for statements of historic fact.

## Best poetry

But what I want to insist on is the greatness of the Old Testament, the most wonderful anthology of prose and poetry, especially poetry, in the literature of the western world. The fact that for some centuries people persisted in mistaking the poetry for prose must not blind us to the greatness of the book as a whole. By your leave, I shall come back to this subject in a moment, but to the age of the earth, another question about which there are orthodoxes and heresies.

## It all began at 9 am

I AM, and have always been, weak on dates. The Norman Conquest, the battle of Waterloo, the accession of Queen Victoria, my own arrival in this vale of tears—beyond these four dates, my chronology is shadowy and uncertain; and all four of them were known to me only by hearsay.

I comfort myself with the reflection that a knowledge of dates is not, after all, a very important part of one's intellectual equipment. If I find myself at a loss, I can look up, to settle the question, in this question.

But to me the date of the creation of mankind—or a somewhat earlier date, the creation of the planet on which mankind lives? What authority can I look up on this point?

I am reminded of this gap in my knowledge by a recent talk given on the BBC by Mr Patrick Moore in a series called *The Sky at Night*. There seems to be a considerable divergence of opinion among the authorities on this question. Mr Moore quotes, for example, the views of the famous Dr Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh sometime in the 17th century, who proclaimed that the world came into existence at nine o'clock on the morning of October 23, in the year 4004 BC.

In these irrelevant days, I don't take the word even of an archbishop without question.



"How do you know?" we should ask. But Archbishop Ussher was a Cambridge mathematician. He had laboriously added up the ages of the patriarchs, and he published a book which told him the exact age of the earth. It seemed simple: just a little too simple for our sophisticated ears.

## Simple sum

All that we know of Dr Ussher's mathematical ability is that he was able to do a sum or simple addition. That reminds me that there was another prelate—only a bishop this time—who also inspected the mathematics of the biblical narrative, with results far from pleasing to the orthodox. But Bishop Colenso belongs to a far later age; in fact, he was still alive when I was a small boy. In those days, we youngsters knew only that there was in South Africa a very wicked bishop who didn't believe that Noah ever built an ark in his life.

Colenso, unlike Ussher, was a Cambridge mathematician. He published, while he was still a teacher at Harrow, a book on algebra and arithmetic; many of his fellow-churchmen doubtless wished he had stuck to this employment, which disturbed

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## AFTERTHOUGHTS

by Walter Murdoch

What a squabble in a tea-cup it all seems now! How little it has to do with the real problems which religion is facing today! Among the enemies of Christianity, the most formidable are surely those who cling to the decision that a faith in the exact and literal accuracy of every statement in the Old Testament, and every real Christian must believe in the picturesque tale of Noah's ark, and the stories of Daniel in the lions' den, of Jonah in the whale's belly, of the dauntless three who walked unharmed in the burning fiery furnace; and all the other legends in that collection of Hebrew folk-says that we may say I am flogging a dead horse; and in a sense you are right. This is no longer a controversial question; only a small number of singularly stupid people, a negligible minority, make the mistake of taking people's words for statements of historic fact.

For what I want to insist on is the greatness of the Old Testament, the most wonderful anthology of prose and poetry, especially poetry, in the literature of the western world. The fact that for some centuries people persisted in mistaking the poetry for prose must not blind us to the greatness of the book as a whole. By your leave, I shall come back to this subject in a moment, but to the age of the earth, another question about which there are orthodoxes and heresies.

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