

FUN AND GAMES AT THE 'VILLAGE GREEN'

The open paddocks around Waverley and Nottinghill, east of Melbourne, have become one of the vigorous growth points of our new Australia. Light-industrial factories grow like mushrooms. The skyscraper block of Monash university rears over the trees on the southern horizon.

And now amenity has arrived spectacularly in the form of a big new hotel on the corner of Springvale and Ferntree Gully Roads.

It is called "Village Green", and it spreads out on acres of carpark broken by lawns of the desired colour, in long, low wings arranged in roughly an aeroplane plan. It is described as a motor hotel, which means of course the best of both worlds: drive up self-contained bedrooms as well as enormous bars and a big restaurant.

A drive-in bottle department under a great porte-cochere projects forward towards the corner of the busy highways. A tantalizing multiformity of bottles spread over an enormous wall area beckons the passing wayfarer on these parched plains.

The colours of the whole enterprise also beckon. Dazzling white walls and charcoal roof and shutters complement the fresh green of the lawns and the signboards. It looks like an oasis, and it is one.

Inside the public spaces a warm, welcoming theme in red and black is developed. The walls are dark red clinker bricks laid in black mortar, the carpet is red with a small black overcheck, wall paper is claret, blinds are ruby. Table-cloths, napkins and the vests of the waiters' in the restaurant are scarlet. Chairs and settle-seats, ashtrays and other accessories are black. There are also panels and screens of dark wood and touches of bright brass.

The care and taste exercised in the selection of the colours represent high standards in nearly all things: in the airconditioning, the food, wine, the soft lights and muffled sounds of festivity. It is all so different from the old Australian pub - from either the cast-iron country style or the lavatory-fronted suburban one - that it might be in a different world from them.

And it is. This is the new Australia of new industries and new universities and new standards in comfort. The one and only pity is that it is often so unnecessarily un-Australian.

"Village Green" appears to be an entirely Australian venture which rightly and deliberately turns its back on the careless, ignorant recent past of Australian hotels. A pity then that,

in turning, it found itself facing overseas. The visual and social character of the enterprise is a merry mixture of nostalgic snippets from Olde England or New England.

The name itself (note the absense of a "the") sets the tone. It is written on green and white fretworked signposts that are pure Massachusetts style. The building maintains the New England (U.S.A.) stylistic influence, although the materials remain local. For instance, here the walls are brick instead of clapboard, but they are still painted white. And here the roof is of cement tiles instead of wood shingles, but they are tiles of shingle colour.

The little white lantern that sits on the roof at the crossing of wings, topped by a weather cock, is fine Minute Man stuff. More relevantly, it recalls the symbol of the Howard Johnson chain of restaurants across the U.S.A. Louvred shutters and multipane windows complete the colonial allusions in a style that we never saw in these colonies.

Indoors the nostalgia is stronger and a trifle more diversified. Oil lamps hold the candles on the restaurant tables and carriage lanterns hold electric lights. Old prints, maps and ships decorate the walls. Departmental names have a quite alien cuteness. The restaurant is called "The Squire's Cellar"; then there is "The Village Club", "The Village Tavern and the "Tap Room". Some Norman armour and Western-

style saloon swing doors add to the anonymous, timeless confusedness in which the only Australian notes are the twin plastic lady and gentleman silhouettes on the respective toilet doors.

None of it is meant to be taken very seriously, of course. It is all done for the sake of atmosphere; deliberately a little exotic and transporting. It is clever window dressing or stage setting.

It is so well done that it may trick some people into accepting it as real architecture, and this would be a pity; but apart from that it is harmless. And it is bound to be successful. The decorative fun and games will attract many and certainly did not spoil my good lunch.

Yet there remains an element of national tragedy here. All the inspiration for the character of this enterprise came from outside Australia. This is not the least logical justification for this. An atmosphere just as warm and inviting could be built up out of genuine elements - colonial if you must, or modern - of Australian origin.

Having mastered the extraordinarily difficult physical problems of erecting and appointing such a haven of comfort, there is a touch of tragedy in the fact that Australia at this time seems unable to rally the extra intellectual effort needed to find artistic inspiration here at home.