



Speech by H.E. Mr Michael Bryce, AM, AE

Gold Coast/Northern Rivers
Regional Architecture Awards
30th Anniversary Architecture Oscars

Versace Hotel, Gold Coast Queensland, Saturday 20th April 2013

Councillor Donna Gates,
Deputy Mayor GCCC

Ms Karen Andrews MP
Federal Member for McPherson

Dr Alex Douglas MP,
State Member for Gaven

Councillor Barry Longland
Mayor, Tweed Shire Council

Mr Shane Thompson
President, Australian Institute of Architects

Mr Malcolm Middleton,
Queensland Government Architect

Councillor Cameron Caldwell
Chair, City Planning Committee

Mr Chris Gee
City Architect

Ms Amy Degenhart
Chair, AIA Gold Coast/Northern Rivers

Councillors
Professors
Architects, Colleagues, Friends

I acknowledge the traditional keepers of this land on which we meet; their Elders past and present.

It's wonderful to be here in my much loved city of Gold Coast, after a five-year sojourn in Canberra, which, as you may know is this year celebrating its 100th anniversary of declaration as the nation's capital – a year much devoted to the work of master architects Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin. (*reference to MB as Lady Denman, wife of the Governor-General*)

There is an interesting parallel between these two cities which I will explain later.

Meanwhile:

Thank you for inviting me to be part of tonight's Australian Institute of Architects Gala Gold Coast Awards – of the OSCARS – celebrating 30 years of design achievement in this unique linear city.

It is also very comforting for me to be welcomed into the design diaspora, and I'm sure I will catch up with a few old pals before the night is out.

It has occurred to me that this gathering of architects and their friends and clients might use this occasion to celebrate the life of OSCAR –

- no, not Oscar Wilde nor Oscar Pestorius, but Oscar Niemeyer – the great Brazilian architect who died in December last year at 104 in his beloved Rio de Janeiro – a great life – a great architect.

Still working at 103.

I think that deserves our recognition. (Pause)

After the geometry and precision of the Bauhaus generation, Oscar gave us back the curve – indeed with his mentor and colleague Le Corbusier, he did nothing but curves, and sun-drenched shaded forms,

- and it may be significant to compare the west coast of Brazil with the east coast of Australia, both facing a long Pacific coastline with a continuous mountain backdrop.

Niemeyer's fame, which rose to its height with the design of Brasilia in 1961 reshaped the design movement, and perhaps influenced its nearer neighbour, Miami -- with its pastel palette of art deco stucco beach houses – was it a cousin to this new freedom?

Did this have an influence on the shape of more daring forms of “the coast”, than the boxy norms of Brisbane suburbia?

While the literatii have often scorned the decorative nature of the Gold Coast's early 'motel' architecture, it is something that I find curiously attractive and eminently suited to the strong sunlight and pastel surfaces – a playfulness that in its kitch somehow was truthful to its role as a resort town.

I confess to being a product of this Gold Coast – my parents first house in Hilda Street, Mermaid Beach, was a typical skillion roof fibro cottage with a cute patio to set it off and a frangipani tree over the carport. In the late '50s and early '60s, our weekends were “at the coast” with weekdays in Camp Hill Brisbane.

Later, as a young architect my father trusted me to design a modern flat roof (Miesian) house in Alexandra Avenue, Broadbeach – alas now replaced with a brick six-pack.

What days they were as summer arrived, and the family felt the warm sea breezes and trod the fine golden sand.

Then came the inevitable move to London to see the world.

The eighties saw my architectural practice moving towards graphics and industrial design, and my world shrunk from big structures to little squiggles; my fascination with buildings replaced by more “look and feel” image and identity.

These were the days of the XII Commonwealth Games in Brisbane, and I began my life in graphics, turning my face from architecture, in a year when I had won the RAA House of the Year.

Then the World Expo in Tsukuba, Japan, as graphic designer for the Australian Pavilion; and then World Expo 88 back to Brisbane as Master Graphic Designer.

These events opened the eyes of the world to the wonderful climate and lifestyle of Queensland, and took the population out of their homes into a new outdoor mindset.

Urban design was born!

During this time I had not lost my love of the Gold Coast; and many of its eccentric developers were my clients.

As graphic designer for the new Paradise Centre, I found myself in the company of Mr Eddie Kornhauser
(“Mr Bryce, Mr Bryce, do you think I’m made of money?”

Well, Paradise Centre’s logo – a heart shape, won the heart of Mr Kornhauser, and my fame was assured.

Bond University gave me the chance to see a new serious transformation from the resort town to a world class campus/suburb; working with Alan Bond and Sir Sydney Schubert to design the university arms.

Griffith University followed, and today you have two excellent design schools to wrap the coast architecture and streetscape in a new professionalism.

Since the '80s the Gold Coast has become Australia's 6th largest city, with its own brand of street facades, high rises (and how!), tourist facilities, hospitals, schools and a vigorous industrial backdrop.

The Coast, with all these refinements, has been influenced by a growing awareness of its heritage, and unique character.

From the formation of the Urban Design Advisory Committee, to the Gold Coast Heritage Character Study, and the first city in Queensland to have a City Architect and biannual Urban Design conferences, it has marked out its own destiny.

There has been strong direction, supported by the Australian Institute of Architects, the Institute of Landscape Architects and the Design Institute (the professions) towards design thinking.

I congratulate the Council on its success with the Central Improvement Program, and the Surfers Paradise Foreshore refurbishment, and the Southport Broadwater Parklands project, and now recent multi award winning Gold Coast Rapid Transit Corridor Study (have I covered it all?)

You have much to be proud of, but lest I seem like Polyanna, there is still much to do.

I have always been influenced by the late Professor Tom Heath's monograph series for Architecture Australia.

"What, if anything, is an Architect?"

Heath's challenge came in turn from the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould (1984) "What, if anything, is a Zebra?"

I keep asking myself, "what, if anything?" and I wonder if it might now be appropriate for the thought:

"What, if anything, is Urban Design?"

The Urban Design Forum, an urban design think tank based in Melbourne, has been asking this question for 25 years, and it is about to publish a compendium of papers and opinions to mark its decades of contribution.

In a Foreword I am writing for this I make the point:

Fifty years ago, the terms Urban Planning and Urban Design didn't ring a bell in most minds, as we were barely aware of town and regional planning.

However, over the past four decades, the professions of planning, architecture, landscape and design have built a new dialogue in response to the need for better design –

- not only of our bridges and buildings or town squares, or bus stops, but how they combine to make a more cohesive and attractive landscape, or village or 'complex'.

A few decades ago it was not envisaged that graphic design or industrial design, or 'public' art, could play a part in the built environment.

These were peripheral issues.

Today the roles of many design fields are considered essential in public projects.

Now let me go back to Heath, and "what, if anything".

Heath says, in referring to the role of the architect "the legitimisation of the architect as artist conveys the benefit of a long established theoretical tradition – still being identified as an artist is not wholly desirable.

"In a philistine society (and I'm not suggesting any similarity here) artists are easily represented as disposable."

"There are connotations of bohemianism, financial irresponsibility and general untrustworthiness."

"The struggle for legitimisation follows for all members of the design professions and, by inference professional bodies that embrace design as mantra." *[Heath]*

However, I say without design of our urban spaces, our schools, our hospitals, our systems and communications, and our home life, there is, in contemporary culture, an emptiness.

With design comes humankind's contribution to nature, with design there is harmony and efficiency and improved productivity, and all of this requires the services of designers.

And so it is with urban design.

To embrace, or to ignore.

Yet "what, if anything, is urban design?"

It seems to be a mental construct where what is good in totality is in some people's mind poor in detail; and what in others mind is a great piece of design, may find itself longing for a better setting.

To fully realise the benefit of urban design, the whole design community needs to be included from the outset – not just employed, sub-consulted or tokenised.

Planting forms, colour schemes, public furniture and signage controls need to be an essential part of the plan, and not just a consequence or a default.

The recent formation of a collaborative design body, the Australian Design Alliance, attempts to bring all the design, architecture, crafts and visual arts under one umbrella, where significant projects by government or civil authorities can be examined for their contribution to our cultural identity.

But are we happy?

In my career, over 40 years, I have witnessed many, if not all, design bodies rise and fall, only to rise again, and be cut in budgets first fall of the axe.

As a consequence, we have no national design policy, no expression of pride in our urban context.

Even the recent Cultural Policy, much trumpeted, does not include architecture or design – not even a reference, as if our built environment is not the most important legacy in our nation's cultural capital.

Design is, I'm afraid, often taken as lightweight in the scheme of governments.

Ladies and Gentlemen

When we examine the deeper layers of cities, we find that they are a mixture of the beautiful and the ugly, the refined and the coarse, but each has its own story.

The Gold Coast is its own "utopia", with its fair share of good and bad, but it ***has*** made a mark in the world.

It is internationally famous.

I said I'd return to Canberra.

While Surfers began as a fun place, it now wants to be taken seriously. And while Canberra began as a conservative home for bureaucrats, it now wants to be fun.

I'm confident that both cities will exceed expectations.

Let me finish with a quote, however, from our Oscar for the night; on receiving the Pritzker Prize in 1988, where he called for:

- "A concern for beauty and zest for fantasy and an ever present element of surprise."

Congratulations to the winners of awards.

May you continue to surprise us. **My friends**