

# Creations that stand test of time



Picture: LEIGH WOOLLEY

There is a way people can have their say and enduring architecture can be encouraged, says **Peter Partridge**

AMID debate over development in Hobart, a reader compared the "Hobart Supreme Court building which sits harmoniously in the Salamanca proposal.

The letter-writer considered the Kangaroo Bay designs "arrogant in that they will make a statement with no heed to the surrounding area".

To produce any proposal, an architect has to be arrogant, that is, display self-belief, however the Kangaroo Bay designs may be judged arrogant or disrespectful or reference to their surroundings. Some will disagree, certainly their designers have produced sensitive architecture elsewhere.

The Kangaroo Bay Urban Design Strategy and Concept Plan was published by Clarence City Council nearly 10 years ago, but by the time we, the applicant has invested heavily in a proposal.

It's hard to understand the planners' reasoning, or the councillors' values, giving away some of Bellerive's last remaining foreshore, overflowing recreational use, for use as a hotel, etc. A proposal that to me looks a little more urban and larger than I imagined looking at the original strategy means a hotel and training establishment in Bellerive, but surely as a community we can find a site that will not cost us so dear in the future.

Of late, politicians seem to have determined that the quicker proposals can be dealt with, that is, approved, the better it is for society. Statutes reduce freedoms for planners and elected representatives to determine what they consider to be most appropriate, consideration that seems a tick-box approach to matters of substance. Rules that if not followed expose the councils to fighting costly appeals. Rules that devalue the development deserves to be considered individually. Planning has been reduced to a control and appeal function.

Perhaps better outcomes may be achieved if the process started with the applicant publishing a simple statement of intent, inviting public and dialogue before spending time and money on a detailed application. It would empower society to have input without labelling comment as not every application to be slavishly considered against endless rules that do little to promote respect and reference to their surroundings, let alone design solutions creating memorable precincts.

There are many cities and neighbourhoods around the world that have retained individual scale and character that no one could label backward thinking, planning and competence. These cities do not stop tall buildings or hotels but they do ensure they do not diminish their heritage.

traditional buildings, precincts, townscapes and views, the ingredients that differentiate their city, the ingredients that attract discerning tourists

I'd been in Tasmania a little over two years when in 1971 I was handed my brief for the Supreme Court Buildings in Salamanca Place. My introductory meeting involving the client, users and protesters to a previous multi-storey proposal. This meeting redefined a basic parameter of the brief, and that huge decision made for me meant my task was simply to design a complex that created the dignity the courts deserved, yet made them in the public. The location was perfect, St David's Park and Parliament House adjacent, with wharves and sandstone warehouses close by. It did become a lasting member of the precinct.

I was lucky. This required an architecture that had been all around me as an impressionable student and young practitioner in the late 50s and when there was fine architecture being built, particularly in the university towns; new universities; new colleges; importantly, buildings and existing precincts; places where tourists look in awe, where any new work had to be of its time and as elegant as its surroundings, usually relying on concrete, glass and lead, sometimes stone, always simple, often brutal, but always melding in perfectly with both site and neighbours.

Like the Kangaroo Bay development the courts included the landscaping and street works and both were key to the concept.

My first design principle was to let the park flow through the site. This was essential in retaining a human scale; allowing the landscaping to soften informality, minimise the institutional character, yet allow the buildings to retain a classicism associated with courts. The second important principle was pre-institutionalised development.

The third was to create a showpiece for local materials and craftsmanship. The palette of sandstone, slate, copper, with white sand-blasted concrete and generous use of lead reinforced reference to the surroundings and added familiarity. The commission included furnishings, down to cutlery, and the design philosophy was rewarded in October, 2010, when the architectural profession awarded the courts their inaugural state and national award. On October 29, then premier David Bartlett put out a media release that said "our designers help to produce an attractive and sustainable life: a dynamic, authentic image for our island ... It is particularly pleasing to see the Tasmanian award winners recognised for their innovation, and the quality of their creations. Those qualities are at the heart of the Government's vision ... Here is a reminder that investment in ... architecture has a lasting impact."

It would be a shame and a loss for Hobart and Tasmania if the media release becomes just another opportunistic piece of spin. I am sure that Hobart enduring architecture cannot be created in isolation. Timeless development owes much to its neighbours, and fundamental is an inheritance that fathers believe championing worthy developments and precincts is worthwhile.

I am pleased the courts continue to be appreciated. Let's hope Bellerive, and the whole of Hobart, continues to get the enduring architecture that the buildings have a habit of remaining for generations but they don't just arrive, they are the product of a brief. While the owner should determine the brief, shouldn't the community have a say on the impact on the surroundings. It certainly paid off with the Supreme Courts.

**Tasmanian architect Peter Partridge won the state and national Enduring Architecture Award for the Supreme Courts Complex.**