

BRISBANE CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE WITH ITS CIVIC IMAGE AND IDENTITY. IT HAS NOT COME TO TERMS WITH BEING A PROPER CITY

The lack of critical mass is a recurring theme when discussing the low level of architectural inspiration in Queensland, and even without the questionable influence of ghosts of convicts past, Brisbane continues to struggle with its civic image and identity. Unlike any other Australian state, Queensland's population is scattered across a vast area, and Brisbane has not fully come to terms with being a proper city. Hill goes further by saying: 'It is actively in denial as a capital, so as not to alienate the majority of Queensland's rural electorate. We still have a category of yeoman and farmer to cover thousands of otherwise unclassified residents.' Brisbane's architectural culture, he adds, compares poorly to that of Sydney and Melbourne. 'Brisbane just doesn't compete in the ongoing fight between Melbourne and Sydney – places where the devolution of rivalry can be traced throughout the profession.' In his eyes, while Sydney architects pursue the formal purity of the white and the smooth, in Melbourne the architectural culture is far more intellectualised, and you are more likely to hear someone say, 'I referenced that interior detail from Semper – and then made deconstructivist reading of it.' So, while Sydney's 'stunning beauty' remains unrivalled, and as long as the 'piss-elegance' of Melbourne

perpetuates its status as the hot bed of Australian architectural education and theory, what can be said of the scene in Brisbane?

INHERITING THE CRAFT OF DWELLING

Haig Beck – assistant technical editor of *The Architects' Journal* from 1970-71, co-founder of *UME* magazine (with Jackie Cooper) and now professor of architecture at the University of Melbourne – has a theory that concurs with some of Hill's observations. Beck's views also resonate with Rory Spence's 1985 essays in the AR, which described the difference between Sydney and Melbourne as the difference between the sensual and the cerebral. Visiting him in his Usonian idyll, situated on Queensland's delightfully remote Stradbroke Island, Beck explains the key differences between Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane in a way that can be usefully summarised in relation to Spence's classifications: 'sensual' Sydney is 'a place where functionalist ideals have become ever more focused on detail', while Melbourne, City of the Mind, is home to a generation of architects which has sampled the intellectual ideals of well-known Melbourne architect Peter Corrigan's without applying his level of spatial brilliance. This has resulted in 'an architecture of surface, in which the difference between

inside and outside is not in any way controlled by any sort of climatic ideal'. By contrast, says Beck, 'Brisbane was always below the radar, left to get on by itself'. But this was no bad thing. 'In fact, it was really rather good that Brisbane was just left to get on by itself,' he continues, 'as throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s there was a very powerful group of architects, authors, writers, artists and academics, operating here together as a genuinely engaged and supportive community.' In Brisbane's architecture, Beck concludes, 'climate was always a given. So, when functionalism came here in the '50s, it automatically took on a climatic viewpoint, along with the need to use the technologies that were available. And this was basically a timber technology.' From this came exemplary projects such as Richard Leplastrier's house in Mapleton (AR April 1998) and Andresen O'Gorman Architects' 1998 Mooloolba House – familiar projects that typify our idea of the best of the region's contemporary vernacular.

As would be expected, the smartest people in today's emerging generation, who understand architecture as a discipline of continuity, implement the lessons learnt from regional precedent, even when working in the city. The two Queensland projects featured in this issue exemplify this. They are featured here because they demonstrate that craft still figures prominently at all scales, from the small, in the case of James Russell's Brookes Street North Office (pages 52-55), to larger scale buildings like m3architecture's Brisbane Girls Grammar School Creative Learning Centre (pages 56-59).

As discussions with Russell reveal, however, lessons learnt from predecessors do not only relate to construction, to bricks and mortar, or to fibro-cement board and nails. The occupant's relationship to their environment is also a key concern, 'not just in terms of seeing what the weather is like, whether it's —



Left and centre left_ Donovan Hill has formed a joint venture with Hutchinson Builders to create a new form of prefabricated Queensland building, the Happy Haus. The first full production model is seen here being transported and craned into place on Stradbroke Island
Bottom left_ Richard Leplastrier's house at Mapleton, with its sweeping covered walkway leading from house to workshop
Right_ Stradbroke Island, one hour by car and ferry from central Brisbane, has become popular among Brisbane architects. Andresen O'Gorman Architects' 1998 Mooloolba House is an exemplary contemporary Queensland building
Centre right_ Bob Riddel's weekend retreat, an original 1940s fibro-shack, encapsulates the spirit of an islander's attitude to dwelling. Haphazard and principally external, this place needs no makeover
Bottom right_ Elysium is a recent premium housing development near Noosa, with individual houses designed by Queensland architects. Overall the development carries some, but not all, of the region's best architectural sensibilities

