

Melbourne leads the way

In late October the writer and his wife spent a pleasant two weeks, staying at a small hotel in central Melbourne.

The city has a population of just over 3 million, although the greater urban area would appear to have a population approximating that of New Zealand, at just over 4 million.

The central business district is set out in a simple grid pattern of predominantly wide streets, many of which contain central Tramway lines. Historic trams dating from 1936 and known locally as "red rattlers" provide a free service around the central city perimeter.

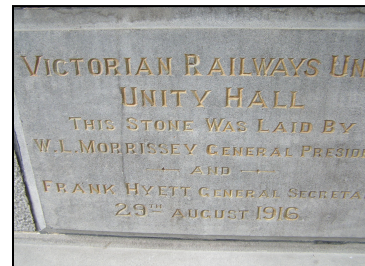
Melbourne would seem to have been an inspiration to generations of New Zealand architects, in both domestic and commercial fields. Currently the fashion in New Zealand is for "one coat to fit all" so that many public buildings now have the appearance of airport terminals, regardless of their end use. The Melbourne Museum would seem to have been one of the inspirations for that trend.

Public art works in Melbourne have inspired local artists. For example in front of the State library there is an angled and part buried piece of classical architecture remarkably similar to a work located in a park on Ponsonby Road. Elsewhere another site features a series of large rocks, onto which have been attached a number of small bronze sculptures. Something similar has been created in central Henderson.

Melbourne appears to be somewhat ahead of Auckland in its preservation of historic buildings. True, facadism is alive and well, but in most cases the integrity of the original architecture is reasonably well retained with new work set well back to give depth to any retained facade and there are only a few examples of the shallow older building facades being attached directly to modern work, as is so often the case in Auckland.

Melbourne appears to be more ecologically sensitive than Auckland. A good example is the small hotel on Bourke Street where the writer stayed, known as the Alto. It is a modernised older building, indeed scheduled by the National trust of Australia (Victoria). It had been built for the Australian Railways Union at a cost of 15,000 pounds in 1915. The cost is not necessarily a true indication of building costs of the period as there would seem to have been some "volunteer" labour, in addition to which a number of building materials are said to have appeared magically on-site from parts unknown. The building features brick, granite and bluestone in the façade. The architect was A E H Carlton, building in the then popular neo-baroque/small scale palazzo style. The interior has New Zealand kauri flooring and features an entry foyer, with terrazzo marble inlaid A R U design.

The building was purchased by the present owner/operator/developer in 1999 and redeveloped in 2005/6, retaining most of the heritage features of the original, except that permission was not forthcoming from the local fire service to retain the original open steel mesh lift.



The operators stress a number of ecological features including the following:

- Electricity:** Key tags switch off all electricity in each apartment
95% of primary ceiling lighting is less than 18 W per globe
50% of wall lighting is less than 11 W per globe
- Water:** Showers have water flow restrictors
There are AAA rated dual flush toilets
Gardening and cleaning is via roof water supply
- Gas:** Water is heated on demand with only 630L reserve for a building with 57 bathrooms.
There is solar preheating.
- Windows:** Rooms have open windows, which reduces air-conditioning requirements.
Windows are either double glazed, or 1 cm thick laminate.
- Paper:** All paper used for stationery and elsewhere is recycled or plantation secured.
- Chemicals:** All chemicals used are non-hazardous.
- Plastic bags:** All biodegradable.
- Rubbish:** A recycling regime is in place.
- Toiletries:** refillable dispensers are used, rather than miniature bottles.

General: A worm farm recycles kitchen waste.

It can be seen that on a very small scale this type of development can be ecologically friendly leading to a more sustainable living style.

This particular visit merely scratched the surface in considering areas of sustainability which are now becoming commonplace in Melbourne and elsewhere in Australia. Water conservation is now extremely important there and storm water retention tanks are located along various parts of the waterfront, from which water is recycled.

Our big neighbour across the sea provides some lessons on what not to do. Generally however, the lessons are positive and, as in the past we have much to learn.

Munroe Graham

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