

In conversation with Andrew Moyle.

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I interviewed Andrew Moyle, to discuss the importance of landscape architecture in the creation of the public realm, and how it can help people connect.

What are the key principles you would bring when visioning a public landscape?

Amenity is really the number one thing when designing parks and spaces for people. It's important that we try to understand the needs of the community. It's all about creating flexible spaces that people feel comfortable in and want to use, which translates into clear seating zones, shelters, and playgrounds, spaces that encourage both active and passive uses.

We try, wherever we can, to understand the target demographic, but often that information isn't available because there's not yet a community formed around these new facilities.

“It's about aiming to provide a range of amenities to encourage people to use these as much as possible.”

Above all, strong, elegant and functional design solutions that transcend trends is really what endures.

How important is the quality of the urban landscape in creating healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities?

That's a very large part of it - encouraging people to be out and about, using the spaces day and night. Connectivity is really important, the ability to link spaces in a really meaningful way from town centres through to park areas and streets, and that sense of lacing it all together. Creating spaces that people actually want to be in is really what landscape architects are primarily charged with. It's not just making it look interesting on plan or to be visually engaging but to make spaces that are comfortable and shaded and sheltered and provide a variety of experiences within the open space.



Andrew Moyle



Image 01 The community garden at Harcrest by Mirvac.
Landscape works by MDG

How can environments support people's mental wellbeing?

Connected to the environment is one thing, but the opportunity to connect with other people is also important to be part of a community. We must be mindful of trying to encourage...trying to design spaces that have room for large family gatherings.

“That ability to connect and engage with other people in a formal sense, in a structured sense or sometimes in an ‘accidental’ sense is what adds balance and interest to life.”

Not forgetting that we must provide restful spaces as well, having spaces set up where you can sit by yourself and read a book and actually relax.

Is there a relationship between the landscape and performance, arts and culture of a community?

This is tricky because often we're designing spaces where there is not necessarily a strong or specific cultural identity formed yet. Our work with clients such as Stockland often involves reviewing data relating to anticipated demographics or population identity, and that drives some of the design decisions.

We're often trying to create spaces that allow for either informal or formal performance in different event modes. It's really important in parks to have areas that can function both during the day and night. With landscape, the key is multifunction. The spaces need to be able to perform a number of different functions and uses.

What impact do the quality of materials, texture rich palettes and tactile environments have?

The detail and materials are the tangible things that people come into contact with, those tactile elements such as seating and surfaces are really important to get right. Of course, not every landscape project has the budget to use high-cost materials, so we prioritise where that expenditure is used, to be focused on the spaces where people actually congregate.



Image 02 A variety of spatial experiences at Riverwalk Town by MDG

As a design practice we take a lot of time to resolve the detailing. There's obviously a robustness that comes with any sort of public realm project, these details are really important to get right.

“As with buildings, well-designed landscapes achieved through the use of effective materials have the ability to elevate the spirit.”

Whose responsibility is it to maintain public spaces, preserving their quality?

For landscape, that's a very important issue - more often than not, unless it's an owner's corporation arrangement, it's councils that ultimately maintain public spaces. Community expectation around the level of upkeep is a big issue. We are finding that some councils are adopting the 'less is preferable' approach when it comes to landscape. In these cases, where a park would have previously have had 10 different elements, councils are requesting that it is reduced to 5 because their maintenance budget is so limited.

Is there a relationship between environmental sustainability and the built form?

It's more and more becoming the typical way of designing; recycled timbers; low embodied energy materials, etc. Sustainability is not just about what you build from the outset. It's about longevity, how often something needs to be replaced.

Getting this right in the first instance will mean it's a quality outcome and lasting for many years; this is a sustainable landscape approach.

Can community gardens be successfully designed without any community involvement?

Community gardens are terrific opportunities for interaction, for education. Typically there are two approaches; we either set it up as a trial garden with various herbs and edible plants, or other times it's a matter of just setting the framework for people to be able to come in and plant those gardens themselves. In both scenarios, action on the part of the designer and/or developer has been necessary to encourage community interest.

Mirvac have achieved a good outcome at Harcrest, with community gardens receiving a huge amount of positive feedback and excitement about having somewhere people could grow their own vegetables. They included educational classes and cooking lessons which has been a real success story.

If you could change one thing about the way we currently create communities what would it be?

I'd provide many more facilities upfront, community-focused spaces ahead of housing. Those really important amenities that encourage people to interact with each other - the library for instance, so often comes years down the track, whereas if it was possible to get some of that established early as a magnet for people to be able to interact with each other. This would offer a real sense of amenity and the channels to encourage social interaction to facilitate meaningful dialogue and build a community.

Image 03 Play equipment, shading and seating at Harcrest VIC, landscape by MDG

Image 04 A variety of recycled materials at Findon Creek by MDG



03



Image sources - 1. MDG, <http://www.mdgla.com.au/projects/community/harcrest-gardens>; 2. MDG, <http://www.mdgla.com.au/projects/open-spaces/riverwalk>; 3. MDG, <http://www.mdgla.com.au/projects/open-spaces/harcrest>; 4. MDG, <http://www.mdgla.com.au/projects/open-spaces/findon-creek>