



DESIGN MATTERS

With TONY TROBE

The new architecture for an old landscape

Architect Tony Trobe talks to Professor Martyn Hook, a director of Iredale Pedersen Hook Architects and Dean of the School of Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University, about his upcoming presentation for the Contemporary Australian Architects Speaker Series which begins at the National Gallery of Australia on September 4. The series is a partnership with the Australian Institute of Architects (ACT Chapter) and showcases the latest work of renowned Australian architects.

TT I understand your talk will look at how, over 20 years of practice, you have sought to use architecture to “do good”. Do you have a specific example to explain how the firm goes about things?

MH Broadly I think architecture has a great deal to offer to communities across Australia and is able to play an important role in contributing to solutions to many of our social and environmental challenges. Specifically, our practice – Iredale Pedersen Hook – has worked with Aboriginal communities for over two decades on a series of building types across Western Australia. The projects we have completed have explored the complexity of working in cultural and climatic extremes to produce an architecture that is culturally supportive as well as durable in these remote environments.

So can architecture contribute to equality and reconciliation of Indigenous peoples?

Indeed, we are now bringing our understanding from these experiences in the north-west into regional and urban areas of Perth. The most public example of this is the recently completed Yagan Square (in collaboration with Lyons and Aspect



Perth's Yagan Square is informed by historical research and Indigenous community engagement.

Studio). This public space in the heart of the CBD is informed by substantial historical research and deep community engagement with the Whadjuk people that are at the heart of our process and seeks to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together. We think architecture and landscape architecture can make a unique design response by implementing an “Indigenous led” approach to the environmental and social context in which all our projects are situated. In turn, it reveals the stories of First Nations people and connects non-Indigenous people to the importance of this place.

What you actually mean by “bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together”?

Indigenous Australians are the custodians of the oldest continuous culture on Earth. By bringing Australian

Indigenous culture into a major new public space in the city, the project signals a “normalising” of the presence of Aboriginal culture in everyday lives.

You coin a term “cultural surveillance”. I like the idea; can you explain in a little more detail?

We have observed that, globally, there is an increased awareness of [the] language, gender and customs of people who do not completely overlap our own decreasingly dominant Anglo-Celtic cultural values. The emergence of an architecture that is not grounded in a European or American tradition will be the focus of the 21st century, and developing relevant strategies to engage with this shift will be critical to the future success of our cities. The thing we used to call empathy is now a business called “cultural competency”; we tend to think that architects should be able to

move beyond mere competence [so] perhaps cultural surveillance is more progressive. A good design response for a project respecting Indigenous cultural values would embrace multiple aspects of culture and lore with strategies that are respectful of protocols, understand gender and relationships, perhaps frame views to country, picking out culturally significant markers in the landscape and using the architecture to help tell stories of the people.

What does your practice bring to the table when dealing specifically with Indigenous clients

We understand that most community members that we deal with have not previously worked with an architect and they may not be aware of what our role involves. As architects, our role isn't to interpret Aboriginal culture in any way, but to listen carefully, listen again and respond to the brief from the client and, in turn, respond to those conversations. The fundamental process of design should realise good functional spaces but do so within beautiful buildings that reflect people's needs in a way that [they] feel ownership and attachment. Our best projects do that. Time and experience have been our only guide – and lots of listening.

■ Contemporary Australian Architects Speaker Series, Lecture 1: Martyn Hook from Iredale Pedersen Hook
Time: 6pm-7.30pm, September 4
Venue: James O Fairfax Theatre, NGA
Price: From \$15. Buy online at: nga.gov.au/architects/

Tony Trobe is director of TT Architecture specialising in the design of sustainable residential architecture. If there a design issue you would like to discuss, email tonytrobe@ttarchitecture.com.au

YOUR FAVOURITE NEWSPAPER - WHEREVER YOU ARE

Premium subscribers get access to a digital version of each day's edition of The Canberra Times so you can flip through every page of the printed newspaper on your mobile, tablet, laptop or desktop

Sign up to premium today at canberratimes.com.au

The Canberra Times
TO SERVE THE NATIONAL CITY

