dirty old town

How the architectural connection of blue and green elements within a concrete jungle can provide a sense of place and identity
I met my love by the gas works wall
Dreamed a dream by the old canal
I kissed my girl by the factory wall
Dirty old town

Clouds are drifting across the moon
Cats are prowling on their beat
Spring's a girl from the streets at night
Dirty old town

I heard a siren from the docks
Saw a train set the night on fire
I smelled the spring on the smoky wind
Dirty old town

I'm going to make me a good sharp axe
Shining steel tempered in the fire
I'll chop you down like an old dead tree
Dirty old town

Ewan McColl, 1949
i. PREFACE

Some may question the connection between a song written about Salford in 1949 by social activist Ewan McColl and subsequently made famous by Irish folk/punk heroes The Pogues in 1981, and a town in provincial New Zealand. To be honest, there may well not be really.

However, if we note that the narrator is reflecting with bittersweet memories of the old industrial town where he grew up and his longing to leave in pursuit of success, only to later realise that, with the passage of time, he has realised that despite his worldly achievements, it is actually in this dirty old town where he was the most content and optimistic about life.

Perhaps this can used as a metaphor for how, as a society, our fervent quest for automation, efficiency, financial prosperity and commodification over the past 50 years or so has been at the expense of the very things that truly make us content, like the uncomplicated simplicity of times past, even if they are not as sophisticated.

This may be a notion brought on by nostalgia. But in a society with issues stemming from social, cultural, mental and physical well-being, perhaps there is something to it?

That’s not to say that a single student’s architectural thesis project can fix any or even one of these ills, but it can at least acknowledge them and then spark a conversation.

About 30 years ago, New Plymouth could well have been labelled New Zealand’s Salford. A ‘dirty’ industrial city with railyards and industry taking centre place on the cityscape. This began to change in the 1980s, and as a provincial town, it is now considered quite progressive.

However, somewhere along the line, somewhat ironically some of the old town’s charm was lost in the aforementioned quest for mechanisation and efficiency.

As someone proud of my hometown I have noticed this change, but have not been quite able to pinpoint why?

Was it a loss of connectivity at a personal level, as I have grown older and moved on? Or is it due to the erosion of wider historical references, social interactions or physical connections?

And although far from an urban design basketcase, there is a latency that has seemingly at best been overlooked and, at worst, wasted due to the rigours of economic expediency.

There are things that can be addressed here, as perhaps with many places in New Zealand that are important to us. Such as our connection to a place and how this is shaped and how this can be slowly diminished by the forces of the modern economy (which could now be considered ‘old economy’) without even realising it.

With this project I hope to, like the optimism penned in the lyrics of ‘smelling the spring in the smoky wind’, through the wider discourse of an architectural project, reference and attempt to initiate a return of these connections, be they historical, social or even just plain old nostalgic.
Cesar Wagner, my supervisor. Muito Obrigado. Your patience and wisdom have been greatly appreciated.

Cam Moore, for your enthusiasm and taking the time out to assist me, even when you didn’t technically have to.

Special mention to Kerry Francis, who took time to visit New Plymouth, walk the project with me and then offer that I consider a Parisian De-rive artist’s approach to the project.

Peter McPherson and Christoph Schnoor, who in my first year at Unitec were incredibly accommodating of my unique circumstances. Your patience and encouragement made that year so valuable to me and helped me get to this point.

David Turner, for lighting a fire within for Urban Design and teaching that architecture is about how people live.

My Studio colleagues, for providing me with continuing inspiration through your collective creativity.

My friends, who are either genuinely interested or simply just feign interest in my architectural rants.

Surfing, lets me switch off. Music, switches me back on.

You, the reader, for reading this document. I hope that it is worthy of your valuable time.

Mum & Dad, thanks for having me and deciding to keep me.

Ana, thanks for your support throughout it all.

My children, Isabella and Luca, you both continually amaze and inspire me, and are exactly the reason why I should want to make the world a better place through architecture.
iii. RESEARCH QUESTION

Can an architectural proposition provide a connection between a city’s iconic natural assets and enhance a real and metaphorical sense of place?
iv. ABSTRACT

This research project set out to answer the question stated on page 6: can an architectural proposition provide a connection between a city’s iconic natural assets and enhance a real and metaphorical sense of place?

To effectively answer this question, an approach was taken to approach the project with a design, research, design approach. That is, a dual approach of both personal design and investigation of already established architectural literature along with precedent projects would assist in reaching an acceptable solution, from both an academic and a personal perspective.

Early in the project, it became apparent after examining several built projects that the primary focus of the project would be one of urban design.

While the subject of urban design has a wealth of literature available, it is still a relatively contentious subject in terms of both architecture and wider planning. That is because as a discipline it involves so many different variables that it is hard to pigeonhole under one profession’s umbrella.

However, it is these complexities that make it much more interesting and, because of its holistic nature, more varied and rewarding outcomes are achievable.

What’s more, in order to understand an urban issue that much more effectively, a full analysis of the scope of the project must be done. That is, not just architectural knowledge should be canvassed, but historical, social, environmental and economic information needs to be evaluated in order to reach a more definitive conclusion.

Therefore, a review of existing knowledge of the discipline and those built projects that have a specific correlation to that of the overarching parameters of this project was completed in conjunction with more location-specific knowledge-gathering.

These investigations included analysis of the current urban form of the place in an attempt to establish an architectural solution, which then in itself, highlighted several issues resultant from the past 50-odd years of poor city planning and development.

Thus, can a (single) architectural proposition provide the aforementioned connection and enhance sense of place. In effect, no. That is, without perhaps creating something that in itself becomes overly complex and out of context with the urban design theory investigated for this project.

However, a series of architectural interventions with a broad focus on achieving a connection that references academic, built best practice and coalesces with existing urban context should provide suitable illumination for a solution or solutions to the above mentioned issues.

And if designed primarily with people in mind, it should, with luck, enable the question to be answered effectively.
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As an entity, New Plymouth was ‘officially’ founded in the 1840’s, by surveyor Frederick Alonzo Carrington, and subsequently settled with people mainly from the Devon region of England drawn to the areas fertile landscape.¹

However, the area’s significance dates further back for local Māori, who were also drawn to Taranaki’s strategically important landscape and settled in what is the central part of the city known as Puke Ariki.²

With a resident population of around 75,000, like most regional centres in New Zealand the economy is largely dominated by the rural sector, but the discovery of oil and gas in the area has added additional economic prosperity since the 1980s.³

That, coupled with a large multinational expatriate community drawn to the city through oil and gas, provides quite a cosmopolitan lifestyle that might not normally be found in a city of this size and relative isolation.

2. Ibid
However, like many towns and cities throughout New Zealand, New Plymouth also endures a legacy of poor urban planning and less than far-sighted management of its growth and development. As a consequence, the city’s port is located at the southwestern edge of the city, with the heavy industry that it serves located at the northeastern fringe of the city.

The significance of this is that heavy traffic needs to get from one end of the city to the other, which occurs via undesirable snaking of said traffic through suburban residential streets until it gets closer to the city, where there is a busy-four lane road along the coastal edge completely disconnecting the urban heart of the city from the coast.

Some progress has been made over the recent past with the establishment of what is perhaps one of New Plymouth’s most celebrated assets: the Coastal Walkway. This is currently a 15km stretch of walkway along the coast, from the harbour to the furthest northeastern coastal suburbs, with plans to go further yet. Since its inception, it has been a place for both physical and social enjoyment and has added real public amenity to the fabric of the town.

What’s more, there is no shortage of other recreational assets for New Plymouth. Along with the walkway is the city’s famous and historic Pukekura Park, which sits Central Park-like in the city’s centre and weaves many kilometres inland through valleys towards iconic Mount Taranaki.

Constructed by the city’s earliest settlers, Pukekura Park, along with the Bowl of Brooklands, which lies within the park’s confines, is internationally renowned for both its physical beauty and the multitude of activities within for the enjoyment of both young and old.

Perhaps the real shame is that while the city has these two iconic recreational assets, there is no connection between them and there seemingly is no easy answer as to how they could be connected.

It could be argued that they are separated by poor vision and planning, allowing multiple arterial roads to dissect what could be a relatively casual stroll between them. While there is intent from the local council for a park-to-sea connection, there is still as yet no clear vision of how this connection may ultimately be achieved.

Recently, small steps have been taken to address some of these concerns of having to negotiate busy roading and rail infrastructure. A recent award-winning overbridge by architects Boon Goldsmith Bhaskar Brebner alleviated the need to literally walk over railway lines to get to the coast, along a riverside public space at Huatoki Plaza.

Furthermore, the addition of an albeit dark and uninviting under-pass under the four-lane road and railway from Puke Ariki Landing to the coast has also helped.

However, while these are good first steps, they are perhaps not the definitive solution that many may want to see occur.

2. RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

The rationale for choosing this research topic is essentially entirely selfish, in that it combines my interest in architecture and urban design, whilst allowing the chance for this interest to be integrated into my hometown of New Plymouth.

It will assist in alleviating some personal curiosity about how a connection between park and sea might be accomplished.

The opportunity to explore the notion of how a piece of architecture can help define physical connections in a place, along with enabling a greater sense of people’s connectivity to a place, is also quite alluring, as the answer is at times quite a vague proposition.

What’s more, while already having an idea of location for the architectural intervention, establishing the exact place of this structure or group of structures is the other intriguing aspect of this research.

Furthermore, there is the strong argument that there is a far wider set of circumstances involved for this research, such as regional town relevance and, to a certain degree, their long-term survival.

However, at the core of it all is the opportunity to design something innovative and interesting that may or may not be relevant to anyone but myself. Essentially, I am drawn to this research project for the sheer fact that, while it will be extremely challenging, I have a clear appreciation of the latent possibilities inherent to it, which ultimately makes this project all the more rewarding.
3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

While the primary aim of this research will be mostly one of personal interest and gratification, there are however several stakeholders who may also find this topic of some interest.

Most notable among those could be the New Plymouth District Council, who have indicated quite clearly in their literature that they wish to see an improvement in the link between Pukekura Park and the Coastal Walkway as part of their long-term strategic blueprint.

What’s more, if the council has an interest in this, by default there should be some corresponding interest from the residents of New Plymouth.

Furthermore, there may be interest from the retailers, property and building owners in the potential links that are proposed, in that there may be conceivable advantages to their operations and adjacent property values as a result of any potential improvement in the urban form, along with associated connections, nodes and better accessibility.

There may also be interest from local architectural firms, including my previous employer Boon Goldsmith Bhaskar Brebner Team Architects, as they have been involved in several urban projects for New Plymouth and, as mentioned earlier, the design and construction of an award-winning pedestrian rail overbridge.

What’s more, they may have additional interest in that they (and other local architects) previously proposed bold and innovative solutions for remedying the disconnect between city and sea, which have unfortunately not proceeded, due to various circumstances.
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

DESIGN PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY

DESIGN ‘HUNCH’

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

PRELIMINARY DESIGN BRIEF

PERSONAL EXPLORATION

Walking the City Observation Photographs Sketching

INITIAL DESIGN INVESTIGATION

EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Books Journals Internet Research

CASE STUDIES

Siena Paris New York Seattle Singapore Banyoles Auckland

DEVELOP DESIGN

HISTORICAL CITY KNOWLEDGE

Books Library Research Photographs Council Documents
SITE SELECTION

CITY KNOWLEDGE

Coastal Walkway
Pukekura Park
Huatoki River
Figure Ground
Serial Vision

SITE CONTEXT

Formal Cues
Materiality
Nodes
Connections
Nature

DEVELOP DESIGN

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Research Link
Compliant with Brief
Works Well
Looks Good!

FINAL DESIGN SOLUTION

DESIGN BRIEF

DEVELOP DESIGN
PART ONE: STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

1.1. WHEN WE LOSE OUR CONNECTION TO PLACE

1.2. CONNECTING WITH PLACE

1.3 OTHER CONNECTED PLACES

cats are prowling on their beat
“Place and the influence of place tend to be taken for granted. Yet places do more than establish boundaries. They open up possibilities and stimulate the imagination.”

New Zealand Heritage Issue 141, Winter 2016
1.1. WHEN WE LOSE OUR CONNECTION TO PLACE

What happens when we lose sight of something, visually, metaphorically and conceptually? What happens to people’s associations with a place and the identity embedded in that place when there are no longer any or very few, physical cues or connections to the history of a place?

A relatively recent phenomenon has seen many of our cities’ spaces transformed into what can only be considered uninhabitable zones, evidenced through disconnects in the physical and social fabric of those places.

This has typically arisen where transport and other types of (usually) infrastructural projects have cut through a place. These cuts in the urban fabric have eroded the identity of these places and created zones where people feel alienated and disconnected from their surroundings.7

The loss of connection to a place discussed in this document is seen as an important cue to society’s loss of association with place and identity - a type of ‘Urban Dementia’, for want of a better term. Thus, as we erode our memories of the past, and replace them with nondescript entities, our ability to function forward coherently into the future is compromised.

As a place’s identity is dynamic, that is, a living entity in a constant state of transition, we should therefore be fundamentally concerned with our relationship to a place.

Losing Connection: Placelessness

Lynch defines ‘identity of place’ as that which provides “…individuality or distinction from other places…”8

The concept of belonging relates primarily to having a secure point from which to look at the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the greater order of things along with significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular.9 Therefore, loss of place as a concept within architecture can perhaps be understood better if one looks at the inverse of place, that is ‘placelessness’.10

In the Journal of Urban Design, Mahyar Arefi writes on non-place and placelessness, stating: “…they are substantive enough to caution us against the consequences of losing sight of what constitutes meaningful places”.11

To expand this notion above, it could be said that these are the places that have no special connection to the places in which they are located, in that they could be anywhere. These are places where malls, petrol stations, fast food chains, convenience stores and motels are predominant.

As Stein succinctly puts it, “there is no there there”.12

Agnew & Duncan propose that place theory can be historically reduced to three elements of locale, location and sense of place.13

10. Ibid
Where locale is concerned with social relations, location is concerned with how economic transactions have shaped and influenced the effect on a place. Sense of place, however, is importantly concerned with people’s feelings and deeper attachment to a particular place.\textsuperscript{14}

So while ‘placeness’ suggests belonging, ‘placelessness’ signifies loss of meaning, which then reflects how our perception and attachment to place has shifted when responding to a piece of introduced architecture or infrastructure with a focus on transition over experience.\textsuperscript{15}

French anthropologist and sociologist Marc Augé refers to these as the ‘archetype of non-place’ and, as such, the process through which one travels and passes through places, exists in a state of placelessness.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Losing Connection: Transitory Places}

Thus, when a person transits through a transitory place, the traveller does not take notice of any individual space, but rather is only aware of the destination beyond these transitional zones.

These are places of the in-between, the places that become a blank on our collective mental map of a city. These blank places of transition are common to everyday life, and are becoming more and more prevalent as cities continue to evolve and expand.

Over the past 60 years, we have witnessed our urban environment change significantly. Increased development has to a point created infrastructural or commercial areas that bear little relationship to their surrounding natural or built environments.\textsuperscript{16}

As much of this growth has been emergent, the sum total of a city no longer seems to resemble a coherent body.\textsuperscript{17} It is, rather, a series of isolated places and moments which result in internal and peripheral places of placelessness.

This is because to intervene in a place, that is, to find a passage of a road or to build a building, has in effect become less about the experience of the place it is inserted.

Therefore to create a building, road, or whatever, however beautiful it may be, in a place where it does not integrate, does not actually solve a problem, but only creates another problem, by severing a place’s identity and, therefore, our ongoing connection to that place.

\textbf{Losing Connection: Suppressing Nature}

And while placelessness as a concept has been attributed to a lack of human identification with a place, it can also reflect a place’s landscape loss of identity.

Norwegian architect and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz uses the term ‘Flatscapes’. These are places that lack intentional depth, provide mediocre experience of place and lack diversity in the landscape and significant places.\textsuperscript{18}

The irony for New Zealanders is that we feel a strong association with our natural environment, which allows us to perceive in ourselves a strong sense of place and identity as a country.

However, this strong association with our national ‘Kiwi’ identity has perhaps not permeated through into our urban identity via architecture and infrastructure.

The irony is that with nearly 90 percent of our population living in urban centres our sense of place may not actually even transfer directly to our immediate urban environs.19

Thus, while we may feel quite connected to our larger environment, that is, the New Zealand landscape, we may actually have no real sense of connection to our actual place. That is, our own town or city that we live in.

We could perhaps associate this with the general youth of New Zealand as a colonised country. As discussed earlier, as culture and identity are ‘living entities’ and it is only through cultural and human awareness that place identity then becomes a tangible quality, are we still too young to have formed, or evolved this identity?20

Because identity is made up of our experiences which can be traced back in time, contrasting New Zealand’s youth with older countries in Europe, for example, creates interesting differences.

As older countries, many European countries and their cities have a strong association with cultural identity which is then represented through their architecture and urban design, and this is highlighted in two case studies further in the ‘Other Connected Places’ section this document.

Contemporary concepts of place identity should still be just as relevant for young countries such as New Zealand. This is because identity is not just our past, but a sum of the history, social makeup and geography that shape us, and thus “…today we are seeing new ways of considering place among architects. Places can be regarded as a layered landscape of physical as well as social and mental processes…resources that together create a place-specific building culture”.21

Losing Connection: Efficiency over Community

It is no surprise that the concept of place is dramatically changed when economic and political priorities take precedence over the social and cultural aspects of a place and, as a result, our perceptions of and connections to a place are no longer considered important.22

At times, such changes can be implemented with little regard to the social and cultural heritage of a place. Roads are cut through neighbourhoods or parkland, or large-scale egotistical buildings overwhelm fine-grain urban scapes, which then results in placelessness around them.23


However, perhaps it is in these lost places of the urban fabric, that become even more important to the preservation of identity.

These placeless zones importance to the overall function of a city is well documented. Robert Venturi discussed such spaces half a century ago in his 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, stating:

“… residual space in-between dominant spaces with varying degrees of openness is not unknown in our cities… [They include] the open spaces under our highways and the buffer spaces around them. Instead of acknowledging and exploiting these characteristic kinds of space we make them into parking lots or feeble patches of grass. No man’s lands between the scale of the region and the locality…”[24]

Although the resolution of these leftover spaces has been theorised for decades, they remain problematic, and worse still, in some cases the same mistakes are still made.[25] In New Plymouth, such placeless places are evidenced between residential zones to the south and the commercial zone to the north of the city’s one-way-street system.

What’s more, there is also the relatively recent development of a placeless zone between the central city and the sea with the construction of the Centre City Shopping Centre, associated 750-place carpark building, railway line and a four-lane highway constructed in 1987.

These areas, which were all once historically seamlessly intertwined with dense urban fabric, have now become the most disrupted urban spaces within New Plymouth.

Where once there were homes, the meandering Huatoki River, historic commercial buildings and very pedestrian-friendly, have been erased by car-dependent entities, leaving a void in the urban footprint and a barrier isolating the city from both its inhabitants and the natural environment.

In Phoebe Crisman’s article “Inhabiting the edge: architecture and transport infrastructure intertwined” in *Peripheries*, she suggests that when designing in such challenging spaces, the edges are where “the urban and architectural scales collide”, and these voids which are often created by highways and rail infrastructures result in uninhabitable zones, bringing with them discontinuities in the physical, social and temporal fabric.[26]

**Losing Connection: Failure of Utopia**

Ironically, motorways, roads and malls across the world were once considered to be the answer to urban renewal, as many utopian modernists of the postwar era designed with the automobile in mind, rather than a holistic approach.[27]

As Rem Koolhaas pondered, the modernists who “dreamed of public life and imagined a liberated new ground, understood that in reality, the places they created were essentially lifeless”. [28]

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Thus, roading added into a pre-existing urban plan, which began in earnest 50 or so years ago, often brought with it voids that many modernists could never have anticipated. The fact that so many of these infrastructural projects happened in a relatively short space of time also exacerbated the overall sense of loss.

As Jacobs argued, change should be incremental to maintain the essence of a neighbourhood (or place), thereby avoiding destruction of urban areas without understanding the root causes of their failure.28

And although the modernist approach to town planning has been debunked in recent years, there still tends to be a prevailing mindset amongst those who are most important in developing our cities, that an internationalist type of approach is best.

Leon Krier, in his 1970s critique of the contemporary city, argued that the modernist segregation of urban functions into easy-to-categorise compartments also in itself added further impetus to sprawl and gradual erosion of the urban fabric and thus quality of life in urban places.29

Or, as Architectural Review Editor Christine Murray argues:

“...in a world obsessed with developing glassy monuments surrounded by a limbo of shacks and beige generic constructions with no connection to each other, let alone the climate or culture of their location... we will be unable to distinguish any one city from another...”

A ‘Notopia’ as she calls it.30

That is, the unique identities of places are erased when we create cities that are not human settlements, but places where capital investment lives in architecture devoid of social purpose, there to dress up mediocrity just as “parsley dresses up a plate of rice”.31

This is because architects are dictated to by the primary concern of designing buildings for specific clients. Hence architects become strong advocates for their clients’ interests and for their own rights as artists.32

The deeper issue, aside from how these buildings look, is the no-places created on the ground. One building next to another does not make a place, and many buildings do not make a city. Notopia is a warning sign that the city as a place of exchange, dialogue and delight between diverse groups of people is slowly being eradicated.33

Losing Connection: Urban Dispora

With the exception of our main centres, New Zealand’s towns and cities are of relatively small population mass, coupled with low population density. Along with other significant occurrences at key times in this country’s urban development, such as the car, our towns and cities have essentially developed as suburban in nature.34

31. Ibid
Added to this, we have in our recent history, in keeping with a practical settler-type mindset and residual modernist intent, tended to shape our towns in ways that favour and reward cheap building costs rather than long term sustainable benefits to benefit the whole community over the individual.35

This has contributed to the urban issues that many of our cities face, such as reliance on the car, suburban sprawl and resultant social isolation.36 What’s more, this low population density has then manifested into low economic activity, exacerbated further by a population’s reliance on private car-dominant transport.

As a result, instead of urban land coalescing together to create defined urban centres, where land uses have a relationship to an urban centre, they have tended to dissociate and disperse on a wider radius than that which is actually sustainable.37 This is a direct result of the car literally creating fluid townscapes.38

The effect is a plethora of townscapes where land values can never build up and be stable in any one location over time to ensure long-term value-added development.

Rather, the land value is somewhat fickle and mobile in relation to the costs of building on it, where any investment can only ever generate short-lived returns, that is, the quick development of building for resale in a few years, or even less, rather than that which is strategic or visionary.39

Without an adequate knowledge of how this is happening, or a clear understanding of how to control it, urban centres and their residents can lose control over the destiny of their place. That is, cities become privatised, where the quest for profit and prestige leads to a loss of control for people and the destruction of unique built environments.40

Unfortunately most city councils and territorial authorities will see and believe that this type of development is a positive investment in their place and will promote, encourage and even invest in this type of development without realising the longer term implications of such decisions.

Furthermore, this also raises the pertinent question of who exactly are the stakeholders that should benefit from the development of a place. It is a delicate and sometimes precarious balancing act, where decisions should perhaps be made on the basis of the long-term strategic aims of a place, not the short-term financial gains of an individual investor. 41

35. Ibid
39. Ibid
“If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored. One’s destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.”

Henry Miller
1.2. CONNECTING WITH PLACE

As discussed in the previous chapter, for as long as we have chosen to live together in communal groups, we have known that the need for good public spaces has been just as important as the need for shelter.

Aristotle noted that frequent meetings, encounters and exchanges of ideas among citizens are the qualities of the public realm that are a fundamental requirement for citizens’ well-being.41

We are social creatures by nature; we desire a sense of belonging, and for the most part thrive on the connection with a place and interaction with others. We take comfort in the fact that others chose to convene in the same places and share similar experiences as ourselves.42

Many of us will have strong connection(s) with particular place(s) that are special to us. However, sometimes the reasons why might not be obvious to us.

This is where the role of architecture and urban design are key in developing places that people want to be in without effort or thought. What’s more, these places then become the enablers that support and enhance the evolving social activities and ongoing interactions that happen in a place.43

Thus, the form of our places has a remarkably strong influence on us, even when we are not consciously thinking about it. Therefore, great places not only need to look good, they intrinsically need to feel good at a visceral level.

What’s more, the tell-all signs of a successful and vibrant community are those that will offer choices for people at all stages of life, including the young, the elderly, families both large and small, along with more formal and informal groupings of people.44

Not surprisingly, urban design relates to the physical and spatial aspects and how urban spaces are perceived and experienced to create the sense of place mentioned above.45

These public spaces or places have been described as the ‘public realm’ by Jan Gehl and defined by him as the ‘life between buildings’.46 Colin Rowe adds further explanation by calling it the ‘Space between Space’.47

However, developing a broader understanding of the public realm can be somewhat problematic, as it is usually subject to the phenomenon of ‘Space Left Over After Planning’, or ‘SLOAP’, to use an unflattering acronym.48

This essentially occurs when the functions and architecture of individual buildings takes precedence over integrating them into the wider surrounding environment. Therefore, in an effort to facilitate an overall improvement in public spaces, the United Nations developed what it calls ‘Place-Making’, which must act to turn the public realm into inclusive, enjoyable, sustainable and walkable places.49

To further underscore the significance of the public realm, we should also remember that it is a fundamental tenet of

a democratic society and noted as the ‘theatre of the history of mankind’.50

Public space has usually been at the forefront of the world’s most important social or political events. It enables all to gather, linger, share observations and perspectives, discuss, debate and resolve issues of the day as a community.

Although the notion of public space seems a relatively simple idea to create, it can be difficult to get right. There are however, underlying principles of what makes for successful urban environments that can deliver overall positive amenity to everyone in a community.

**Connecting: Urban Design**

To better understand how urban space works, it is important to understand that it is not neutral geometric space but a dynamic event composed of many varied parts created by many different composers, including, for example, architects, planners, developers, financiers, and engineers.51

In an effort to simplify the appreciation of this complex multi-faceted urban narrative, several commentators have developed various instruments to both quantify and qualify what is good urban design.

Gordon Cullen in 1971 introduced the idea of ‘Serial Vision’. This concept was used to provide a 2D pictorial image to describe the 4D experience of moving through urban space with an “existing view” revealing an “emerging view” to provide a ‘here & there’ analysis of a urban space.52

Rowe and Koetter, through the use of ‘Figure Ground’ diagramatic mapping, were able to argue that the interplay between different buildings and non-buildings can help to clearly define urban space.53

They found that external space can at times be quite distinct with defined and continuous boundries, whilst at other times it can lack any real or recognisable edges.

For example, some forms exhibit dominance within the visual field (figure), while others perform more a supporting structure role (ground). This dynamic characteristic is then further compounded by constantly changing formal relationships as a person moves through the space.54

Leon Krier then took these concepts further, to develop aesthetic and spatial ideas about urban spaces and develop ways of creating more human-scale towns and cities.55

In an effort to offer a simple catch-all written explanation of what makes for good urban design, Jacobs and Appleyard, talk of five physical characteristics which must exist, which include liveable streets and neighbourhoods:

“...minimum density of residential development and intensity of land use, integration of activities; living, working, shopping in reasonable proximity to each
other, man-made environment, particularly buildings that define public spaces and many separate, distinct buildings with complex arrangements and relationships (as opposed to few, large buildings).56

At the heart of creating successful places, is understanding a city through identifying and documenting items such as paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks.57 This also includes noting attractive spaces, walkability, mixed use, higher-density housing, and overall vibrancy of a place.58

This is because life in the city is a relative concept that cannot simply be measured by the number of people living there, but more by the feeling that the place is actually populated and being used in all manner of activities, be it for enjoyment, commercial production or cultural events.59

Thus, high quality urban design should ensure attractive, usable, durable and adaptable places that achieve sustainable ongoing development.

Connecting: The Walkable City

The pedestrian experience is perhaps the key element of measuring how successful an urban space is, as walking should be encouraged as an everyday part of life in cities.

As Jacobs, notes, “A cityside walk is nothing by itself. It is an abstraction. If a city’s streets look interesting, the city looks interesting, if they look dull, the city looks dull”.60

However, in order for a pedestrian experience to be worthwhile, the composition of a city should be one that is an interlinked series of short distances (or destinations), each within close range.61

Central to the pedestrian experience is accessibility, which allows for ease, safety and choice when moving to and through places. Also, what the pedestrian might view and experience in their journey between destinations is a key consideration in their sensory journey through space.62

Importantly, any building accessways are matched with the wider circulations of the area, and if possible, provide new and enhanced access around the area.63

The 10-minute or 800-metre walking catchment template is a basic rule-of-thumb practice adopted by many planners when considering where the location of amenities should be. Put simply, it is a determination of the distance people are willing to walk to get to their desired destination.64

However, an acceptable distance is also quite dependent on the quality of the route.65 Therefore, increasing the walkability beyond this 800-metre catchment can be achieved when the pedestrian experience is improved.

Connecting: Human Scale

What’s more, as Leon Krier would note, the built form of an urban place should be clearly of a human scale.66 That

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is, people are able to relate their own physical size to the architecture, in that there are no grandiose statements or blank walls at street level.67

A place that is of a human scale will, by default, place greater emphasis on the well-being of community relationships over individual autonomy and reduced civic responsibility.68

A more human scale can be achieved through a number of design techniques, such as active edges which are a necessary part of ensuring vibrant street life.69

Lining street frontage with retail or individual residential entrances helps create transparency, visual interest, and enhances security by providing ‘eyes on the street’.70

Connecting: The DNA of a Place

Crowhurst-Lennard and Lennard believe that we can learn from traditional cities that still have strong communities how the specific design of streets and squares can encourage a rich public life, and how the form of buildings and their relationship to the street can support this.71

They refer to this as the “DNA of a City”, in that in much the same way as humans each have a unique composition evolved over time and directly relatable back to our ancestors, an urban place, as a dynamic entity, also over time develops a unique code, be it through building typology, street design or materiality of the surfaces.

This code is inherently fundamental to that place’s identity and our understanding of it.72 Any new intervention in that place must, as a rule, literally build on and further enhance the uniqueness of a place. To not do this in effect breaks the code and then essentially leads to the gradual decline of the very DNA structure that keeps that place functioning in a healthy manner.

Connecting: Study People, not Buildings

Interestingly, while Gehl also appears to support this theory around the unique built fabric of a place he is also very clear to point out that in terms of the humanness of a place, fundamentally people will still crave much the same thing: to feel a sense of belonging and connection to a place.

In his words, he does not study buildings, he studies people and life. And at the heart of it, he believes that “all over the world, regardless of climate, religion, culture, we are the same species, and that the fundamentals of making a good urban habitat are same anywhere, from the largest metropolis to the smallest village”.73

Therefore, when we build, there is in effect a manipulation of the conditions of people’s lives, so that building of place

72. Ibid
or space must manipulate those conditions of scale, style, texture and colour in ways that enhance, not constrain, people’s everyday lives.\(^\text{74}\)

**Connecting: Design for all**

Urban design should be centred on people of all walks of life. That is, if children, the physically impaired and the elderly can enjoy the space, then it should by default be enjoyable to all.\(^\text{75}\)

In fact, the ability to make the city a place for children to play, explore and learn is widely recognised as essential to successful places.

**Connecting: Design for People, not Cars**

It can be argued the first notion of the modern street was established not as a tool of convenience, but as a tool of repression. The Hausmann Plan for Napoleonic Paris of wide boulevards and open streets was more about the ability of military forces to gain access to areas quickly and effectively. The same is true for the development of the first Autobahns in Germany.\(^\text{76}\)

It is then with a sense of irony that today, when we are seemingly so dependent on motorised transport, we see it as one of our true freedoms.

However, this dependence on cars has seen a reversal in the way we build cities, to our detriment. Instead of planning and building for people’s convenience, we tend to plan and build with car convenience in mind.\(^\text{77}\)

Providing alternatives to cars, such as walking, bikes and public transit, results in more sustainable urban places and an improved quality of life for a place’s inhabitants.

**Connecting: Engaged and Connected Community**

Engaged communities who actively participate in the planning and designing of places provide an enhanced collective ownership of the place and thus better outcomes for that place and community.\(^\text{78}\)

**Connecting: Nature (and the Notion of Context)**

Architects have grappled with the dichotomy of what place the built form has in the wider context of its wider natural surrounds and physical context since the earliest beginnings of the profession.\(^\text{79}\)

Architecture, by its very nature, is not natural, and thus there is always an underlying tension between how a building relates not only to its built environment, but also to its natural wider environmental context.

\(^{75}\) http://www.resiliency.org
\(^{77}\) http://www.treehugger.com/urban-design/freedom-lost-when-we-design-cities-cars-freedom.html
\(^{79}\) http://www.thenatureofcities.com/2013/05/26/architecture-and-urban-ecosystems-from-segregation-to-integration
Perhaps the most famous of early architects, Palladio, simply defied the concept of context and designed buildings that were purely stand-alone edifices. In fact, he is famous for saying that a site should fit the building, not vice-versa.80

The notion of a building being a lone entity held sway over many centuries and architectural movements until the development of the Picturesque movement in the late 18th century. This movement was perhaps the first instance of architecture making a fundamental acknowledgement to the place of architecture within the natural environment.81

This evolution was in part a response to the theories developed by the scholars of the Enlightenment and Rationalist camp. These theories were challenged in that beauty and aesthetics may be a non-rational instinctive decision, thus more about the experience over intellect.82

Proponents of the Picturesque held a strong desire for a society that was founded on natural law, liberty and tolerance. Thus, their approach to architectural composition was to create contrasting scales and textures more in harmony with nature and which can be appreciated from multiple points of view, which in the words of philosopher John Locke, “allow our minds to travel in time and space”.83

The Picturesque was concerned with how a building sat in a landscape, or a garden. They believed that these landscapes should be informal, meandering and offer reciprocal vistas to the participant, thus blurring the distinction of what is real and what is composed.84

Therefore, in addition to the way a building sits within its natural environment, the Picturesque also created the notion of ‘context’, not just natural or physical, but historical for example.85

Connecting: Going Green

Conventional wisdom might offer that as a city grows and adopts good urban design practice, it will by default grow denser, and thus lose green open space and become more polluted and congested.

However, contemporary urban planning and architecture principles are moving to establish greener, sustainable and healthier cities.86

The concept of architecture having a sinuosity with nature in an urban environment provides an opportunity to blur the boundaries between the built form and natural elements.

It is becoming increasingly well demonstrated that these elements can have real measurable benefits such as productivity, emotional well-being, stress reduction, learning, and healing.87

82. Ibid
84. Ibid
What’s more, evidence suggests that from an environmental standpoint, it fosters a greater appreciation of nature, which, in turn, should lead to greater protection of our natural areas and in turn maintain a cleaner environment.88

**Connecting: The Benefits**

As an optimist, I believe we are slowly rediscovering the virtues of encouraging change and understanding that the built form is central to creating a more comfortable urban experience through compact, pedestrian-friendly and mixed-use communities.89

What’s more, it is clearly shown that there are quite tangible benefits associated with this, and not just from a narrow architectural point of view. These include attracting business investment and tourism, providing cultural opportunities, encouraging volunteerism, reducing crime and improving the overall health of both the general public and the wider environment.90

Therefore, the key is to actively encourage ways to promote healthy, safe and attractive urban spaces where business, social and cultural life can flourish.91 The potential for this lively city atmosphere is strengthened when more people are invited to walk, bike, and stay and live in city space.92

It can add economic value in the form of better value for money, higher asset exchange value and better lifecycle value, especially for long-term investors, and is thus, by default, a more sustainable place.93

It is important to also understand that although urban design is often delivered as a specific ‘project’, it is in fact a long-term process that continues to evolve over time.

It is this layering of building and infrastructure types, natural ecosystems, communities and cultures that gives places their unique characteristics and identities.94

Urban design should build social capital by cementing social relations through repeated contact among inhabitants in multiple overlapping role relationships.

What’s more, the public realm at its best is an incomparable teacher of social skills and attitudes; children and youth learn through observation, imitation and participation how to relate and behave with a diversity of others (young and old, poor and well-to-do, healthy and disabled).95

Lewis Mumford also concurred that contact among diverse inhabitants, and the dialogue that ensues in the city’s public places (its streets and squares), is the “ultimate expression of life in the city”.96

Public places are not owned by special groups, nor dedicated to special purposes; they do not impose restrictions on their use, so long as one person’s use does not limit anyone else’s.97

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90. Gundermann, B. (2013); New Urban Shores. Landscape Architecture NZ, Summer 2013
91. Lundburg, K. Beyond Motordom, Landscape Architecture New Zealand, Summer 2012.
94. Creating places for people. An urban design protocol for Australian cities. urbandesign.gov.au
"Culture and climates differ all over the world, but people are the same. They’ll gather in public if you give them a good place to do it.”

Jan Gehl
Connects: Physical & Metaphorical
Natural Elements Inclusive
Safe Secure Healthy
Accessible to all
Diverse Allows Choice
Enhances Sense of Place
Dynamic Vibrant Creative
Sustainable Enduring
Engagement, Collaboration Custodianship
Pedestrian First
Popular & Memorable
Context & DNA
Remembers History
Aesthetically Pleasing
1.3. OTHER CONNECTED PLACES

This part investigates architectural precedents for successful resolution of urban projects within both an architectural and an urban design context. Projects evaluated are places that have been abandoned, ecologically damaged or contribute to the history of the community.

Key to the analysis has been how the case studies are successful to either form a space that has withstood the test of time and still maintains its urban essence, or have reactivated lost sites through public-centred programmes areas that were previously considered largely inhospitable for public use.

Because not all projects are the same, and they each have various programmatic elements to them, to provide further analysis more than the simplistic appreciation of aesthetic or cosmetic aspects, based on current knowledge, a key list of criteria has been developed of those aspects considered to be fundamental to successful urban projects.

Key things that this set of case studies illustrate are:

- New parks and/or public areas are always within close proximity to higher-density residential areas
- Good public transport connections
- Along with better public transport, create different areas that are easily connected. That is, create the sense of a city of short distances through various attractions at short walkable distances
- The promotion of alternative forms of transport over the motor vehicle, eg: walking, cycling
- The banning of traffic from certain areas at specific times, or banning traffic altogether to develop pedestrian zones
- Encourage the development of buildings/facilities that are universally accessible and useable
- Plant as many trees as possible along with encouragement of understanding of the importance of the natural environment
- Creation of public spaces where children can play and adults can meet and talk
- The development of connected pedestrian laneways between various main and subsidiary streets
- Mixed use ‘Human scale’ of a building’s architecture
- Materiality that reflects a place’s unique ‘DNA’
- Encourage community-led social interaction in city squares and/or plazas, eg: farmers markets, festivals and street entertainers
- Special attention to paving of streets. In some cases, different patterns and materials help define individual spaces for an area and added to urban vibrancy.
1.3.1. CAMPO DEL SIENA, SIENA, ITALY. CIRCA 1300

ARCHITECTS UNKNOWN

Background Information

Siena is notable for its extremely well-preserved urban centre, with many of its buildings not changing since medieval times.98

Since the piazza’s completion, it has remained the site for the city’s public events, including festivals and the famous Palio, a bareback horse race occurring twice a year.99

The square seemingly works well primarily because of its edge uses, but also because of the public activity that occurs as one moves toward the centre, which helps to draw people further into the space and linger longer.

The curved side of the square provides very strong active edges with only small breaks for narrow streets that spill into the Piazza.100

The active edge, and the slope of the piazza towards the city hall, provide orientation navigationally, but also offer comfortable orientation for social gathering and interaction.

The promenade around the edge also tends to facilitate gathering and sociability. This channelling between public and private activity allows for ‘promenading’ as an activity where promenaders and stationary onlookers enjoy participating in each other’s experience.101

Siena is also perhaps a case in point of many European cities which have developed their unique identity over hundreds of years, building on their best-loved features.

This DNA, which is expressed in those architectural and spatial characteristics consisting of certain building...

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materials and colours, a typical arrangement of scale or architectural forms, building lot size, roof lines, scale of public/semi-public spaces.\textsuperscript{102}

Hence, in order to fit into the context, any new buildings have over the centuries respected this code, reflecting at least some existing patterns, or sympathetically interpreting them in a contemporary way.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Personal Evaluation}

As a self-confessed people-watcher, having experienced this space first hand allows one to fully appreciate the simple notion how a piece of open space between a dense array of buildings can be such a great theatre for life.

The edges of the piazza allow for active or passive participation, whilst within the the piazza there are a multitude of activities that one can either participate in, or simply observe the spectacle.

Although it could perhaps be argued that experiencing this space nowadays is somewhat corrupted by the commercialism of tourism, it cannot be ignored that this space is still the epicentre of not just this town, but for all residents of this region. Its full unique and varied history with all it holds is on full display for all to appreciate.

And this, essentially is why the space is so successful: its simplicity and ability not only to adapt to changing times, but also to in a sense guide how changes occur. This is manifest through an indelible sense of identity that prevails not only in the piazza, but also in the town of Siena itself and thus through the many generations of residents that reside here.

So while the world has changed apace, the people of this particular place, while still progressing, have resisted the urge to tinker with the very fabric of what makes them who they are, that is, their architecture and way of life.


\textsuperscript{103} Ibid
Fig 1.3.1.3
Campo access nodes highlighted
Source: http://www.placemaking.pps.org

Fig 1.3.1.4
Sketch of laneway to Campo
Source: http://www.jiwastudio.blogspot.com

Fig 1.3.1.5
Paving within the Campo
Source: http://www.placemaking.pps.org

Fig 1.3.1.6 (over page)
Campo panorama from ground level
Source: http://www.unesco.org
1.3.2. OLYMPIC SCULPTURE PARK, SEATTLE, UNITED STATES. 2007

WEISS MANFREDI ARCHITECTS

Background Information

Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle, Washington consists of a 36,000m² outdoor sculpture park, pavilion and constructed beach at its waterfront edge. The park’s lead designer was Weiss Manfredi Architects, who collaborated with Charles Anderson Landscape Architecture and was commissioned through an international architectural competition.

It is situated at the northern end of the Seattle seawall and the southern end of Myrtle Edwards Park, itself a popular walking route for Seattlites, and was envisioned as a new model for an urban park.

Located on a contaminated former industrial site, the design creates a continuous constructed green platform, which descends 12 metres from the city to the water’s edge and is one of the only green spaces in central Seattle.

As a free-admission public outdoor sculpture park with both permanent and visiting installations, the park is considered quite a unique institution within the United States. The design not only brings sculpture outside museum walls but allows the park itself to blend into the landscape of the city.

An exhibition pavilion provides space for art, performance, and education programmes. From the pavilion, a pedestrian route descending to the water links three archetypal landscapes of the northwest: a dense temperate evergreen forest, a deciduous forest and a shoreline garden.
As part of the parks construction, the harbour seawall was also transformed, with a new underwater shoreline inside Myrtle Edwards Park. A three-level underwater slope was built with 50,000 tonnes of riprap. The first level is large rocks to break up waves. The second is a flat bench level to re-create an intertidal zone. The lower level is covered with smaller rocks designed to attract sealife and large kelp. The hope is that it will help revitalise salmon from local rivers.\footnote{Ibid}

**Personal Evaluation**

The first, and perhaps most important, aspect of this project that resonates is that on top of all its other attributes, this project typifies successful urban intervention in that it has inspired the people of Seattle.

That is, rather than become a stand-alone place in both space and time, this project has become the catalyst for further discussion on how Seattle can further reclaim lost public space. This is evidenced by a proposal (shown far right) for a connection from Lake Union to Puget Sound. It is also easy to appreciate the aesthetics of the project in that it while it resonates a strong natural basis for the design, the architectural components of this project are still clearly apparent as man made insertions.

That is, in some instances, when doing more landscape type of works, it is easy to try and make the project look ‘organic’, with fluid lines and smooth curvature.

However architecture is not natural, and while it should strive to reference nature, it should not replicate. This is more so in a heavy urban environment. If it tries too hard to look natural, it may look unnaturally out of place.

Another important learning from this is the materiality of the project. As a coastal town, Seattle is subject to harsh coastal conditions, and thus the materiality, whilst also referencing its urban connection is robust and durable.
Fig 1.3.2.4
Site Plan showing how site formally responds to sloping topography
Source: weissmanfredi.com

Fig 1.3.2.5
Recent proposal for linking Olympic Park to Lake Washington
Source: http://www.seattle.gov

Fig 1.3.2.6 (over page)
View to park from Myrtle Edwards Park on Puget Sound foreshore
Source: http://www.seattle.gov
1.3.3. HIGH LINE, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES. STAGES 1 & 2, 2012. ONGOING

DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO, IN COLLABORATION WITH
JAMES CORNER FIELD OPERATIONS & PIET OUDOLF

Background Information

Originally launched to reclaim part of a disused elevated railway line, the High Line public park – designed by New York firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with landscape architects James Corner Field Operations and Piet Oudolf has quickly become one of New York’s most popular and iconic public spaces and has won many architectural accolades.112

“The one thing people don’t get, which I find interesting, is that when we were doing it I kept saying our job is to defend the High Line from architecture”, Ricardo Scofidio said in a 2014 interview with Dezeen magazine. “A lot of people think it’s this big architectural statement. It wasn’t. It was really pulling back from an architecture project”.113

The first section of the High Line is over 0.5km long. It extends over nine city blocks from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street, crossing through the historic Meat Packing District and West Chelsea neighborhoods.114

Originally built in the 1930s as part of the West Side Improvement Project, the High Line lifted freight traffic 9m in the air, thus removing dangerous trains from the streets below. Since the last train ran in 1980, the line was left unused for 25 years; it was considered an eyesore in disrepair and a blight to the neighborhood, and was subsequently under threat of demolition.115

During that time a thin layer of soil formed and an opportunistic landscape began to grow, capturing the

imagination of a few New Yorkers and triggering the idea for its conversion into a park. In 1999, the Friends of the High Line was formed with the mission to save the High Line and transform it into an extraordinary public park.116

**Personal Evaluation**

It would seem that, with deceptive simplicity, the architects have taken what was once considered a post-industrial eyesore and repurposed it, enabling the public to use this space for multi-programmatic activity, and local and wider community understanding.

This is primarily achieved through memory cues, such as embedding into the new path old rail tracks and taking inspiration from the plant life that overgrew the tracks while it was not in use. Through engaging the history of the site, the design facilitates a strong sense of place and history, rather than wiping the site clean of historic references.

What’s more, as the High Line is a piece of re-appropriated elevated industrial infrastructure, visitors are elevated 9m onto a new datum and thus provided with a completely new experience of the city.

Other important successes for this project are various covered and uncovered areas which offer adaptive space and allow active programmes such as restaurants, functions, exhibitions, films, exercise spaces and community gathering spaces to temporarily operate within.

Furthermore, repurposing this platform has seemingly changed the relationship between the previous structure and the architecture surrounding it, including increasing property values and creating revenue.

The High Line challenges the notion of what an urban park can be in the twenty-first century by retaining an historic narrative and elevating it as a green site above vehicles.

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116. Ibid
1.3.4. PARC DU VILLETTE, PARIS, FRANCE. 1983

BERNARD TSCHUMI

Background Information

As part of an international competition to revitalise abandoned land from the French national wholesale meat market dating back to 1860, Bernard Tschumi was chosen from over 470 entrants to create Parc Du Villette. Tschumi did not design the park in a traditional mindset where landscape and nature are the predominant forces behind the design. This park was to represent a new typology for landscape design in that it did not look to “preface nature or architecture”. Instead it generated hybrid forms that integrate the man-made with the vegetal.

That is, for Tschumi, Parc du Villette was not meant to be a picturesque park reminiscent of centuries past. The intent was for a more open expanse that should be explored and discovered in a form of acknowledgement that the public realm is quite transient in its nature. Tschumi wanted the park to be a space for activity and interaction that would evoke a sense of freedom, while still within a superimposed organisation that would give the visitors points of reference.

As part of Tschumi’s overall goal to induce exploration, movement, and interaction, he scattered 10 themed gardens throughout the large expansive site that people would stumble upon either quite literally or ambiguously. Each themed garden gives the visitors a chance to relax, meditate, and even play.

Parc du Villette was also designed with three principles of

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119. Ibid
121. http://en.parisinfo.com/paris-museum-monument/Parc-de-la-Villette
organisation which Tschumi classifies as points, lines, and surfaces. The 135-acre site is organised spatially through a grid of 35 points, or what Tschumi calls follies.¹²²

This series of follies give a dimensional and organisational quality to the park and serves as points of reference. The repetitive nature of each folly, even though each one is quite unique and different, allows for the visitors to retain a sense of place through the large park. ¹²³

Personal Evaluation

Having personally visited this park, along with several other (more traditional) parks in Paris, I found that I enjoyed this place exponentially more than the others.

The interesting aspect of this evaluation is that the times that I visited Paris were well before I began to study architecture. Hence, I did not have the advantage of learning to help explain why I might enjoy this space more.

The only explanation of why I should enjoy this more than perhaps say Jardin du Luxembourg for example, was that instinctively this park was more than merely a park, which is exactly what Tschumi wanted.

That is, the entire space in itself seemed to be more a modern piece of sculptural art than a set of clearly defined gardens or manicured lawns.

And while a traditional park can be experienced in many enjoyable ways, this particular place allowed one to experience it on other levels that others did not offer. This was primarily through the follies and the ability to negotiate them, climb and walk on the elevated walkway.

The overwhelming feeling was that whilst in a more traditional park you might sit down and enjoy the view, Parc du Villette seemingly encourages the participant to explore and experience. That is, rather than experience the view, view the experience.
Fig 1.3.3.3
Sketch by Tschumi showing his thoughts on the progression of the park typology
Source: http://www.tschumi.com

Fig 1.3.3.4 (over page) View of Parc Du Villette, Grand Mullins Canal and Follies
Source: http://www.archdaily.com
1.3.5. GARDENS BY THE BAY, SINGAPORE. 2012

GRANT ASSOCIATES

Background Information

Gardens by the Bay is a nature park spanning 101 hectares of reclaimed land that was a former container wharf.124

The park proper consists of three connected gardens: Bay South, Bay East and Bay Central Gardens. The largest of the gardens is Bay South Garden at 54 hectares. It is very popular, with approximately 7 million visitors each year.125

Gardens by the Bay is a key part of a strategy by the Singapore government to transform Singapore from a “Garden City” to a “City in a Garden”.126

An international competition for the design of the park was held, attracting more than 70 entries submitted by 170 firms from 24 countries. Two British firms – Grant Associates and Gustafson Porter – were awarded the contracts for the Bay South and Bay East Gardens respectively. Alongside lead designers Grant Associates, the design team for Bay South included Wilkinson Eyre Architects.127

A unique aspect of these gardens is a grove of what are called ‘Supertrees’.

These tree-like structures dominate the gardens’ landscape with heights that range between 25 and 50 metres. They are vertical gardens that perform a multitude of functions, which include planting, shading and working as environmental engines for the gardens.128

125. Ibid
They are fitted with environmental technologies that mimic the ecological function of trees – photovoltaic cells that harness solar energy which can be used for lighting, rainwater collection for irrigation and fountain displays. They also serve as air intake and exhaust functions as part of overall cooling systems for the gardens.\textsuperscript{129}

There is also an elevated walkway between the larger Supertrees for visitors to enjoy a more panoramic aerial view of the gardens.\textsuperscript{130}

**Personal Evaluation**

On a personal level, I find this place fascinating. Fascinating for the reason that, on the face of it, it is not a place that I would normally consider appealing. That is, it seems quite manufactured, overly designed and has huge amounts of money thrown at it in order to achieve something that is somewhat superficially natural. However, personal experience has shown that it is anything but.

In fact, this place is both fascinating and mesmerising. Like many urban and park spaces investigated in this document, it sets a new benchmark for what a public park space should be. That is, it is not merely about planting some trees and sowing some grass, but about providing the visitor with a multi-sensory experience, which is achieved primarily through its architecture.

So while it could be argued that this is turning the whole thing into a 'Disney'-like experience, it is hard to fault tiny Singapore’s vision to reclaim what it has lost in natural habitats. Furthermore, the way that this vision has been achieved on what was once a container ship berth and storage facility is a lesson that many cities could learn from.

While there is the understanding that something as overtly grand as this place, along with the accompanying Supertrees may be somewhat a grandiose design for a place like New Plymouth, there is also a clear appreciation for the intent of the design response.

\textsuperscript{129} http://www.wilkinsoneyre.com/projects/cooled-conservatories-gardens-by-the-bay
\textsuperscript{130} http://www.gardensbythebay.com.sg/en.html
Fig 1.3.5.3
Gardens by the Bay eco diagram
Source: http://www.grant-associates.uk.co

Fig 1.3.5.4 (over page)
Panorama of Super Trees and elevated walkway
1.3.6. BANYOLES OLD TOWN REJUVENATION, BANYOLES, SPAIN. 2011

MAIS ARCHITECTS

Background Information

This project consists of several smaller interventions throughout the historic town centre and in total covers an area of 18,000m².\(^{131}\)

The project is considered to be a successful contemporary urban design project that also deals with a strong historical context and has received numerous awards and international recognition.\(^{132}\)

The deterioration that initially encompassed the area, doubled by the entangled urban system that was present, in essence enabled the architects to come up with a project that was both functional and aesthetically pleasing.\(^{133}\)

They saw it as the perfect opportunity to update utility infrastructure such as undergrounding power lines. What’s more, they realised too many cars were parking in the Central Square, reducing the functionality of urban space.

It was decided that almost all the available space was going to be pedestrianised and that the old footpaths would be removed.\(^{134}\)

Another important change related to the town’s irrigation canals, which had become part of the sewer system and as a result hidden from view. They chose to make a central element of the spaces, blending them with local stone elements, which maintains the area’s medieval feel.\(^{135}\)

This project would not have been possible without taking into account that this town has a lot of old buildings and architectural elements that had been dating for some time.

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But it was the local venacular of the area that guided the architects, who in turn correctly chose elements that would correspond, ensuring the place maintained its unique sense of place for both residents and visitors alike.136

**Personal Evaluation**

With no personal experience of this transformation, it is hard to ascertain exactly how well it works. However, on the basis of the images and drawings, along with the many accolades it has received from architectural, landscape architectural and urban design circles, it is obviously well-regarded.

The thing that strikes one the most is that the architects have resisted the urge to tamper with the historical nature of the town’s built fabric, in a nod to or acknowledgement of the success of places like Siena in Italy.

What’s more, they have not tried introducing anything new into the existing context at all, only rediscovering what was already there, in the town’s water reservoirs.

So while it is clear that several spaces within the old town having been repurposed as pedestrian-only is a success, it is the introduction of water which seems to be the master-stroke of the design.

By doing this, a new point of interest has been added, along with the added sensory dimension associated with running water. What’s more, water by default then attracts children to the spaces. Children, being children, will always want to play with water and in the warm dry conditions of Catalonia, this is probably more so.

The sight of children in public is considered a clear indicator of a successful space. So it would seem that while the kids play in the water, the adults can watch from a safe distance while enjoying a drink and socialising with others.

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136. Ibid
1.3.7. WYNYARD QUARTER, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND. 2010. ONGOING

ARCHITECTUS (MASTER-PLAN)

Background Information

The Wynyard Quarter, or the Tank Farm as it is commonly known, is a 36-hectare area of reclaimed wharf undergoing a 15-year urban transformation that began in 2010. In only six years, and not even yet half-finished, this area has already become one of Auckland’s favourite places.137

The project was master-planned by Architectus, whose concept established design principles that would provide contextual connections to Auckland’s wider landscape, and strengthen urban connections to existing waterfront activity and the adjacent CBD.138

These concepts inform an open-space network that provides a highly connected, legible and generous public realm that prioritises waterfront access and reveals the site’s industrial and marine heritage.139

Auckland Council expects that eventually this area will be an exemplar for higher-density development for the entire Auckland region, with building designs that inspire and new behaviours that will be encouraged through approaches to recycling, energy and water conservation and generation, walking and cycling amenities, car parking and transport.140

To date, while a good portion of the area is still covered by petrol and liquid chemical storage facilities, there have been some notable changes. These include the first changes at the eastern edge of the Quarter, which has been revitalised with new office, entertainment and restaurant areas.141

137. http://www.wynyard-quarter.co.nz
141. www.wynyard-quarter.co.nz/designing-a-new-way-to-live
**Personal Evaluation**

While it is still at the very early stages of this regeneration project, there are already some clear examples of the public realm perhaps being considered just as important in New Zealand urban design as commercial and infrastructural priorities previously were.

Perhaps the real success of the Quarter so far has been the introduction of several large spaces dedicated primarily to a mixture of public recreational activities.

One of the most pleasing aspects is the opportunities available for children to play, with sand-pits and play opportunities at several locations. Furthermore, there are also several spaces, such as a basketball court, constructed of salvaged materials, that allows the bigger kids, that is, adults, a place to play.

Another pleasing aspect has again been the repurposing of redundant industrial infrastructure, such as cement silos, into more activity-orientated facilities. Visitors have the opportunity to climb these and then admire the view of the city and wider harbour from the viewing platform. This, along with a ‘folly’ made from old shipping containers, are the quirky key components to what makes this a unique and successful urban space.

Also, and importantly, as with the case studies from New York and Seattle, this project has opened the dialogue within the city for what more can be done in reclaiming lost spaces that were once a part of the old economy of thinking, and how a city can improve its residents’ quality of life through new and innovative architectural thinking.
Fig 1.3.7.3
Wynyard Quarter Master Plan
Source: http://www.aucklandnz.com/wynyard-quarter

Fig 1.3.7.4
Wynyard Quarter Master Plan Perspective image
Source: http://www.architectus.co.nz/projects/wynyard-quarter

Fig 1.3.7.5 (over page)
Playing basketball and strolling at Silo Park within the Wynyard Quarter
Source: http://www.archdaily.com/NZ/ArchitectureAwardsGallery/
PART TWO: HISTORIC KNOWLEDGE

2.1. PRE-COLONIAL (PRE-1840)

2.2. COLONIAL (1840-1918)

2.3. RECENT PAST (1918-PRESENT)

saw a train set the night on fire
2.1. PRE-COLONIAL (PRIOR TO 1850)

2.1.1 ORIGINAL LANDSCAPE

One of the most prominent features in the pre-European landscape of the central New Plymouth area was the Puke Ariki Pa site, an imposing nature feature which dominated the mouth of the Huatoki Stream.142

It comprised extensive earthworks, portions of which were named as Kai Ngutu, E Rangi, and, on the marae atea, Parahuka.143

Another section of Puke Ariki was Pukerangi, to the southwest. Pukerangi served as another marae atea for Puke Ariki. Many generations of Ngati Tawhirikura, Ngati Tuparikino and Ngati Whiti rangatira were buried within the earthworks of these ridges.144

Puke Ariki, meaning ‘hill of chiefs’, was, according to Ngati Whiti traditions, founded by the chief Te Rangi-apiti-rua and was a prosperous and important local political hub.145

A short distance from Puke Ariki, across the Huatoki Stream located where Centre City complex now stands, was Te Kawau Pa, whose original name was Kai Arohi. Te Kawau was a kainga or village and was essentially there as an overflow of residents from Puke Ariki. It had extensive cultivations which probably served to feed the vast numbers of inhabitants both from Te Kawau and Puke Ariki.146

Another prominent Pa site on the edge of New Plymouth’s central area was that of Pukaka, or Marsland Hill as it is now known. Construction of this Pa was commenced by the Potiki-taua people of the Taranaki iwi, but was completed by Te Ati Awa iwi after driving the Potiki-taua out.147

It is said that Pukaka was an excellent example of a Māori stronghold, prior to the English military occupation and subsequent remodelling after 1856.148

142. http://www.pukeariki.com/Learning-Research/Taranaki-Research-Centre/eResources
143. Ibid
144. http://www.newplymouthnz.com/OurDistrict/AboutOurDistrict/History.htm
145. Ibid
146. http://www.pukeariki.com/Learning-Research/Taranaki-Research-Centre/eResources
147. Ibid
By 1841, when New Plymouth’s original survey began, Pukaka was covered with a beautiful growth of Karaka, Rewarewa, Rangiora, Kohekohe and similar native trees. It is stated that at its northern base flourished one of the most beautiful Karaka groves it was possible to imagine.¹⁴⁹

The smaller Pa of Mawhera was located further inland along the Huatoki Stream. This Pa was a Tauranga Waka, or canoe landing-site, and provided a place where produce could be moved by waka to Mawhera and carried to the nearby Pukaka Pa and then further into the interior along trails that linked to several other Pa.¹⁵⁰

It is hardly surprising that New Plymouth’s central area was also once a thriving pre-European centre for commerce and trade. However, perhaps the most striking feature today is the almost complete absence of any trace of the local, indigenous people who resided where New Plymouth now currently stands.¹⁵¹

This is clearly evident in the destruction of the natural water systems of both sea and river. For Māori, freshwater and sea water were not only sources of sustenance for the body, in terms of fish, shellfish, seaweed and other sources of food, but also sustenance for the spirit in that they were the source of tribal identity, mana and rangatiratanga.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ http://www.newplymouthnz.com/OurDistrict/AboutOurDistrict/History.htm
¹⁵⁰ Ibid
¹⁵¹ http://www.pukeariki.com/Learning-Research/Taranaki-Research-Centre/eResources
¹⁵² Ibid
The native path at Whakatane, March 9th 1861, from the bar.
2.2. COLONIAL (1860-1918)

Officially founded as a New Zealand Company settlement, New Plymouth was surveyed and planned by Frederick Alonzo Carrington. His plan was quite rigid and structured on a grid system, reminiscent of English town planning of the time. His plan paid but little regard to the natural topography or landscape of the location.

Almost immediately, with dogged determination, the settlers of New Plymouth got to work and began to reconstruct not only their physical surrounds, but also the social and cultural systems of the area’s native inhabitants.

As a colonial settlement, New Plymouth was essentially founded on the basis of practical hard work, where forest and bush needed to be cleared and natural systems needed to be tamed to ensure the viability of the settlement.

Thus, the reshaping of New Plymouth’s natural identity began almost immediately with the development of two infrastructural projects that, without clear foresight, were the catalyst for how the city would then evolve into the future and that, in many ways, could be the root causes of the issues that currently affect the central part of the city today.

As a fledgling settlement on the west coast, isolated with no roads through rugged mountainous countryside, access to New Plymouth was essentially by sea. With no natural harbour, arriving at New Plymouth was at the mercy of the Tasman Sea, which could be quite treacherous.

Ships had to anchor offshore, whilst long-boats would ferry passengers ashore through the surf. If the sea was angry, it became a waiting game and it was noted (with exaggeration) that some settlers waited off the coast of New Plymouth for safe shore, for as long as it did for the ship to sail from England.

At one point, the settlement was almost abandoned in favour of either the Aotea or Kawhia Harbours approximately 100km further north on the coast, as these harbours offered a more suitable landing point for settlers.

156. Ibid
157. Ibid
The great irony (and perhaps triumph for those who manned the long-boats) of the whole immigration process was, that despite rough seas and several shipwrecks, not one person was ever lost whilst trying to come ashore.158

However, to ensure the ongoing viability of the settlement, it was decided almost immediately that a safe mooring had to be established. This began with the establishment of the New Plymouth Harbour Board in 1875 and construction of an artificial harbour at Moturoa at the south-western edge of the city.159

The city’s forefathers envisioned that the city’s industrial area would then grow radially from the harbour. However, the futility of this was that the city was already beginning to flourish in the area around Puke Ariki, as along with how Maori had thought, many settlers felt that this was the right place for the city to develop. With the wide opening mouth of the Huatoki flowing out to the sea, along with

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159. Ibid
bush-clad hills either side, it was surely quite a beautiful and picturesque location.\textsuperscript{160}

The resultant irony of the harbour being situated where it is, was that the only route for goods in and out of the city to both the north and south was via the relatively flat central part of the city.

Subsequently, a railway line was constructed from the harbour to enable trains to make a connection to the Marton main trunk railway line located to the northeast of the city and then subsequently on to Wellington and Auckland.\textsuperscript{161}

This resulted in significant earthworks to reduce the level of the hill of Puke Ariki and with the tailings create embankments along the Huatoki to enable tracks to be laid along its banks and then follow a path further inland via a valley behind the city.\textsuperscript{162}

The one flaw in this plan was that trains needed to negotiate a steep incline from sea level to this valley and, unfortunately, early steam engines lacked enough power to do this successfully. Horses were then required to assist the trains to the crest of the hill. The issue with this was that the noise of the trains caused many horses to bolt and injure themselves or their handlers.\textsuperscript{163}

Furthermore, as the early trains had to cross the growing settlement’s main street, (Devon Street) there was a safety concern. In fact, between from the beginning of 1879, when the track was introduced, and its subsequent realignment in 1895, there were 20 recorded pedestrian-meets-train fatalities on Devon Street alone. The question remains, however, how does one get hit by a train that is (at its fastest) doing no more than 10km per hour.\textsuperscript{164}

Thus, to rectify the problems noted above, the decision was made to undertake massive engineering works and level the last remnants of Puke Ariki, to allow fill to reclaim the entire

\textsuperscript{161} Scanlon, A.B (1962) Taranaki’s First Railway. New Plymouth: Author Self Published
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid
The council then commissioned leading English architect and town planner William Davidge to complete a report for the evolving town. This was a bold step for a town which at the time had already been subject to detailed site planning as a New Zealand Company settlement.

Davidge focused his concentration on the development of the seafront area which he stated should “form the principal attraction of the town”. For this to be achieved, he recommended that the railway that ran the length of the seafront separating the town from the sea, should be relocated to the Mangotuku Valley further inland.

He also recommended extensive engineering work be undertaken at the seafront to reinstate the beach and create a marine parade. The latter would, according to the plan, feature parks, amusements, a promenade and a pier. In short, it was to be a copy on a smaller scale, of many English seaside resorts becoming popular at the time.

**Fig 2.2.7 (Top)**
Train crossing Devon St circa 1875
Source: http://www.pukeariki.com

**Fig 2.2.8 (Bottom)**
New Plymouth Train Station circa 1910
Source: http://www.pukeariki.com

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165. Ibid
166. http://www.newplymouthnz.com/OurDistrict/AboutOurDistrict/History.htm
167. Ibid
Davidge also advocated for the development of walkways along the Huatoki Stream and the further development of parkland within a Town Belt to form "a ring of open spaces around the town".\(^{171}\)

Davidge’s suggestions were not confined to the development of the natural attractions of New Plymouth, he also addressed the design of what might be the civic heart of New Plymouth.

In Carrington’s original plan the main street was clearly to be Devon Street. However, for many years development concentrated on Brougham Street, which ran at right angles to Devon Street.\(^{172}\)

Davidge suggested a redesign that would concentrate all the major public buildings in a new civic centre, including the development of a new Town Hall and Railway Station which would be enhanced by the development of "ornamental water features with cascades etc".\(^{173}\)

This whole area would be oriented to the sea and would link the commercial and civic heart of the town with the entertainment and recreational features of the seafront.

Davidge’s plan was not formally presented to the council until 1916. By that point the rigour of war combined with the delay in presentation, served to dull the original civic enthusiasm. So, while the council paid a significant fee for this report of 25 Pounds, it never eventuated.\(^{174}\)

Whilst the existence of this plan has largely been overlooked, the importance of this proposal cannot be underestimated. It represents the first application of civic design and town planning in New Zealand.\(^{175}\)

For New Plymouth is a stark reminder of an opportunity missed. It is only recently, that the city has begun to embrace what Davidge envisaged over 100 years ago.\(^{176}\)

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\(^{172}\) Ibid

\(^{173}\) Ibid


2.3. RECENT PAST (1918 - PRESENT)

The early years of New Plymouth’s evolution were fairly industrious, with large-scale alteration of the town’s built environment to allow for the development of infrastructure to enable the town’s growth into the future.

However, it is the period since that has seen the most dramatic change in the central area’s built environment.

From a built perspective, the town went through a relatively quiet period between the two World Wars and through the 1950s and 1960s. It was not until a period of about twenty years between the 1960s and the late 1980s, that New Plymouth saw major reconfiguration of its built urban fabric.

Like many places, the optimism of the baby-boomer generation, and their increased mobility through private car use, led to the belief that in order for a city to progress it would need to make it easier for cars to get from one place to another.177

As a relatively fast-growing city, brought on by the discovery of large oil and gas reserves in the late 1960s, New Plymouth’s desire to be more modern and efficient resulted in the destruction of notable physical and built forms within the city that would forever change the central part of the city and perhaps our sense of connection to it.178

As a result of the oil and gas boom, New Plymouth was exposed to several large-scale ‘Think Big’ energy projects that earned it the moniker of “Texas of the South”.179 Town Planners were also quick to adopt the modernist measures that were in favour throughout the world at the time to ensure these large projects could proceed.180

A notable case in point was the introduction of a one-way system to the south of the town’s central area. And whilst not a motorway in the truest sense, this one-way system essentially acts as one, in that it severed the urban fabric and connections between the centre of the town and the central fringe suburbs that had previously enjoyed a seamless connection to each other.


178. Ibid

179. Ibid

What’s more, in conjunction with a laissez-faire zoning system, it allowed this peripheral area to morph from a predominantly residential zone to a car-friendly professional and commercial zone, along with light industrial entities that had once been within the downtown area. The resultant effect was the gradual deterioration of the core business area, which over the course of time exaggerated the sense of the city as a transitory space that people go past, rather than a destination in itself.

This came to a head in 1989, when a major shopping mall and supermarket operator, aware of the buoyant oil-and-gas-fuelled economy, was investigating developing a project on the town’s outskirts at Bell Block.

This resulted in a sense of panic and distress from both central business operators and the council, who feared that such a development would effectively destroy what was left of the central area of the city.

The response by the then council was to purchase several hectares of land adjacent to the foreshore that was at the time predominantly being used as warehousing and storage space. This parcel of land was then amalgamated into one title and onsold to the developer, with no covenant on the developer in regard to what they could build.

The sad irony is that in effect it destroyed some of the most unique parts of the town’s built environment just at the very point in time that these sorts of large-scale developments were largely starting to be discredited throughout the world.

Furthermore, in a world of mass commodification and standardisation, it is these unique built environments that people all over the world now crave, over the sameness of ‘Notopia’, so clearly obvious in a car-centric mall.

What’s more, the council then decided to gift a parcel of land to Land Transport New Zealand, who had been lobbying the council for more ‘efficient’ roading between the harbour.
Figs 2.3.2 - 2.3.12
Images showing construction of Vivian St overpass circa 1968, as part of one-way system development.
(Note the width of the Huatoki in Fig 2.3.12)
Source: http://www.ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetwork.nz.info
Figs 2.3.13 - 2.3.16 (top row)
Images showing pre/during demolition of heritage precinct buildings (1989) and corresponding existing view today.
Source: http://www/ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/Author

Figs 2.3.17 - 2.3.21 (bottom row)
Images showing demolition of heritage precinct and construction of Centre City shopping complex 1989, with further image of finished development.
Source: http://www/ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/Taranaki Daily News
at the southwestern fringe of the city to the industrial area at the northeastern fringe of the city.\textsuperscript{186}

In effect, the result was twofold. The fine-grain and historic urban fabric of the area was demolished to make way for an overscale mall, which inhibited any visual connection to the sea. Then, when Land Transport New Zealand developed a four-lane expressway, any physical connection the central city may had to the coast was severed, whilst also providing another alternative for private-transport-assisted transiting past the city, rather than experiencing it.

Unfortunately, these developments, although widely hailed at the time as the saviour of the central city, did little to change the already declining state of the city.

In essence, these projects, along with the lax zoning rules mentioned earlier, merely compounded the problem of a central area already struggling with what its identity really is and what it means to the people of New Plymouth.

Add to this the further development of big-box retail at the northeastern industrial edge of the city, along with a largely car-dependent suburban demographic, the opportunities for the central area of the town to become a vibrant multi-diverse place of gathering is somewhat diminished.\textsuperscript{187}

However, there is some light to this bleak picture, in that New Plymouth has two distinct advantages and one latent opportunity that other places might not have.

These two advantages are the key recreational assets the city has in the Coastal Walkway and Pukekura Park, along with the latent opportunity that exists in finding a way to connect these to further enhance both each other and, together, their overall amenity to residents and visitors of New Plymouth.
smelled the spring on the smoky wind

PART THREE: BLUE AND GREEN

3.1. COASTAL WALKWAY

3.2. PUKEKURA PARK
3.1. COASTAL WALKWAY : BLUE

In 1995, sensing an opportunity the New Plymouth District Council (NPDC) purchased several acres of railway reserve along the central foreshore. The Council, along with the original hapu of the area, Ngati Tawhirikura, would then jointly manage the land with the express purpose of creating a coastal walkway.188

The intention was to encourage and enable walkers and recreational cyclists to transition from road transport to commuting along the foreshore and connecting to the various inland walkways that run parallel to several rivers, namely the Huatoki, Te Henui, Herekawe and Waiwhakaiho.

Planning for the walkway began in 1997, with local landscape architect Richard Bain taking a lead role with the Isthmus Group in support. Construction began in 1999, with a 7km-long section from Ngamotu Beach to the Waiwhakaiho River officially opened in 2003.189

The promenade has been designed deliberately to have no edge, in order to accentuate the sense of being on the edge of the sea, with several finger piers, designed for people to view and enjoy the open coastline. A 2010 pedestrian bridge over the railline by BGBB Team Architects won a NZIA Gold award.190

The design of the overall walkway uses robust and simple materials such as concrete, in a mix of finishes, along with hardwoods and corten steel in places. These simple lines and textures reflect the character of the west coast.

In 2007, NPDC and Ngati Tawhirikura then signed an agreement to allow the walkway through the Te Rewa Rewa block, enabling the walkway to extend an additional 3km to the suburb Bell Block.191 This agreement also allowed for the design and construction of the now iconic Te Rewa Rewa bridge across the Waiwhakaiho River, which was named as one the top 5 pedestrian bridges in the world in 2010.192

There are plans to extend 10km to the north to connect with the town of Waitara and 15km south to Oakura.193

188. http://www.newplymouthnz.com/OurDistrict/Attractions/CoastalWalkway.htm
189. Ibid
3.2. PUKEKURA PARK : GREEN

When Frederick Alonzo Carrington laid out New Plymouth in the 1840s, following the Wakefield system of settlement, he reserved large areas for a Town Belt.\(^{194}\)

However, the Taranaki Land Wars of the 1860s disrupted these plans and much of the land confiscated for the town belt was returned to local Māori, with settlers removed back to the confines of central New Plymouth.\(^{195}\)

A direct result of this was that in 1875 the people of the town decided to secure and improve voluntarily the many gullies, swamps and fern-clad rolling hills now known as Pukekura Park.\(^{196}\)

A lawyer called Robert Hughes, who was only 27 at the time, led the public push for a recreational grounds “worthy of the fertility and prosperity of the district”.\(^{197}\)

The result was the passing of the Botanical Garden and Public Recreation Grounds Bill and subsequent establishment of Pukekura Park, at the time consisting of 39 acres of land in total.\(^{198}\)

Hills of scrub were cleared and replanted with a mixture of native and exotic species, whilst in 1878 a dam was constructed on the Pukekura Stream, creating a lake providing residents with a safe facility for bathing and boating. Other notable additions to the park’s attractions have included Poet’s Bridge (built 1884), The Band Rotunda (1887) and the Queen Victoria Jubilee Fountain (1887).\(^{199}\)

In the 1930s, a large tract of private land next to the park was donated to the city by prominent businessman Newton King. This was to become Brooklands Park, home of the Bowl of Brooklands, an excellent natural amphitheatre, and home to many outdoor music events, such as WOMAD.\(^{200}\)

Entirely a man-made environment, Pukekura Park is now considered a world-class natural environment, consistently rated as one of the best urban parks in the world.\(^{201}\)

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195. Ibid
heard a siren from the docks

PART FOUR: FINDING CONNECTION

4.1 FINDING A PATH
4.2 TO GO DIRECT OR TO MEANDER?
4.3 SERIAL VISION
4.4 AGENCY OF MAPPING
4.5 THE HUATOKI CONNECTION
4.2. FINDING A PATH

As discussed earlier in this document, there are several infrastructural factors that have occurred over the years that make establishing a connection between sea and park somewhat problematic.

As the Figure Ground diagrams (left) indicate, there has been a significant void created in the city’s built fabric. This is evidenced firstly by the city’s one-way roading network, evident in the large amount of white space below the relatively dense nature of the central business area.

A further large white expanse is also visible on the northern coastal edge of the central area, which is a result of the fourlaned expressway linking in 1989/90 the previously unlinked streets of St Aubyn and Molesworth.

When the Figure Ground is then overlaid with further data, such as green space and recreational/retail pedestrian activity, factored in with primary and secondary traffic thoroughfares, there is a clear correlation between these activities and how they influence the disconnection in the space between park and sea.

What is apparent, is that the one-way system and St Aubyn/Molesworth Streets links, along with the over-scale shopping centre, are a major factor in transitory behaviour on the central area and the resultant emergence of lost space and identity around these entities.

It is somewhat ironic, and very interesting, that when 800-metre walking radius circles are added to the Figure Ground at both the Coastal Walkway and Pukekura Park, they converge almost right on top of the one-way system.

This would indicate that this area is perhaps the key spot for some form of intervention to enable both a physical connection, and also, through further exploration, a connection that opens up historic, social and cultural links.
4.3. TO GO DIRECT OR TO MEANDER?

To reference an oft-used cliché, is it the destination or the journey that is more important?

On the face of it, our contemporary society seems to crave instant gratification. That is, to get something done or get somewhere quickly is considered the best outcome. Fast food, fast cars, ultra-fast internet, fast, fast, fast. Fast seems to be the order of the day.

To go direct is by definition to find the quickest path between two destinations and thus, implies that the destination has more importance than the journey. This in turn evokes the notion that the places along the route may become ‘transitory’ to the participant. If so, do these places become non-places, and does the rot of placelessness then begin to emerge?

In recognising the public’s strong desire to have a connection between the Coastal Walkway and Pukekura Park, the NPDC has indicated in its Long Term Strategic Plan that it will investigate the creation a boulevard-type route down Liardet Street, in a direct line (shown in the diagrams this spread) between park and sea.

Although the NPDC should be congratulated for having the foresight to at least consider something, the exact nature and design of this direct route is unknown at this stage.

It does, however, hold challenges, in that it would still need to negotiate several busy lateral roads and would also still be a shared car/pedestrian route, thus begging the question, who takes precedence?

To meander, however, conjures a romantic notion of tranquil slow strolls along river banks and through pleasant urban squares and streets interacting with fellow townsfolk.

Thus, should it be a longer, but infinitely more multi-sensory experience, allowing the participant to experience the journey and all the various aspects that it presents?
Fig 4.3.2
Direct or Meander
City Contours
Source: Author

Fig 4.3.3
Direct or Meander
City Streets
Source: Author

Fig 4.3.4
Direct or Meander
City Buildings
Source: Author
4.4. SERIAL VISION

Serial Vision has been a useful tool in assisting with a deeper, more intimate understanding of the overall context of the area and its varying uses, corresponding building typologies and spaces.

The journey starts with Fig 4.4.1, within the gates of Pukekura Park, with a view to moving out of the park and heading in a general southwesterly direction towards the foreshore and the Wind Wand that can be seen in Fig 4.4.2. The intent is that the journey is by way of a more pedestrian-orientated path (meander), rather than along the busy roadways that run directly from park to sea.

The journey continues down into the Huatoki Walkway, alongside the Huatoki River and then under the Vivian Street overpass into what can only be described as a no-man’s-land that consists of about 100 carparks (owned by NPDC) and the deteriorating south face of the historic Egmont Steam Flour Mill building.

This view then evolves through the relatively pleasant surrounds of Sir Victor Davies Park onto the fast and busy one-way system of Powderham Street, which is a somewhat sudden jolt into a more urban context.

The journey then takes a line down the vibrant mixed-use Brougham Street and onto the pleasant grassed area in front of Puke Ariki Information Centre. However, this view is interrupted by the out-of-scale bulk of the Centre City shopping complex and 750-space carpark building.

To a degree, this marks the end of the journey to the sea; however, an attempt is made to make a way back to the park via a different approach. This is via the Huatoki Plaza, which sits beside a small uncovered part of the Huatoki Stream.

Unfortunately, the path through is cut short at Devon Street, where the river disappears again and there is no further route, other than a deviation onto busy roadways again.
Fig 4.4.2
Exit into central residential neighbourhoods - Wind Wand beyond
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.3
Moving west towards city & one way system overpass
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.4
Into Huatoki Walkway moving closer towards one-way system overpass
Source: Author
Fig 4.4.5
Exiting walkway into Mill Carpark
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.6
Carpark, park, walkway & historic Mill Building
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.7
Powderham St & Council carpark building looking to Brougham St
Source: Author
Fig 4.4.8
Looking down Brougham St towards Puke Ariki & Wind Wand
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.9
Puke Ariki Landing & Centre City (to right)
Source: Author
Fig 4.4.10
Ariki St, Centre City with view to Huatoki Plaza
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.11
View back to central area through Huatoki Plaza
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.12
Entering Huatoki Plaza
Source: Author
Fig 4.4.13
Within Plaza, with view of Huatoki River
(note carpark building beyond)
Source: Author

Fig 4.4.14
Exiting Plaza at Devon Street, with nowhere else to go
Source: Author
4.5. AGENCY OF MAPPING

When an architect or planner is considering what path, direction or location of something may take, it is easy to default to a cartographic map to evaluate what lines it may present to you.

However, the risk in doing so is that it may restrict the observer to merely seeing the obvious. That is, a conventional map, while still an important reference, will only provide information on the quantitative and analytical survey of existing conditions.202

These maps when done well, represent a stable, accurate and indisputable mirror of reality, providing a logical basis for future decision-making, as well as providing a means for later projecting a design back onto the ground.

However, there is a more creative manner in which to map a project, which involves looking at the inherent latent opportunities that are available through the parameters of a project. Documenting these opportunities is a clear way to assist in developing a clear referential language for the project.203

Landscape architect and key collaborator on New York’s High Line project, James Corner, is a strong advocate for what is called ‘The Agency of Mapping’.204

He argues that concepts such as space are not external and given, but more constituted and formed through our participation with things. That is, sites are part of a ‘milieu’ and have no beginning or end, but are surrounded by other connections or relationships, extensions or potentials, in past, present and future tense.205

This envisions things in much the same manner as the Parisian Situationist artists of the 1950s and 1960s did. They were much less interested in art objects and stylistic concerns, but more with engaging life situations and social formations.206

203. Ibid
204. Ibid
205. Ibid
Fig 4.6.2
Path of Huatoki and Coastal Walkway of New Plymouth
Source: Author

Fig 4.6.1
Path to the sea of the Huatoki from Mt Taranaki
Source: Author
It is interesting how what was once considered to be a vital water source has slowly degraded. The Huatoki, so important in pre-colonial and early colonial times, with its free and meandering passage, has been considerably altered, to the point where its last few hundred metres journey to the sea has become little more than a glorified drain.\textsuperscript{207}

The river, in conjunction with several smaller tributaries such as the Mangaotuku and Waimanu Streams, were significant features (or now non-features) of New Plymouth’s central area landscape.\textsuperscript{208}

Te awa puawai o Huatoki translates as Hua: abundant and Toki: adzes, which reflects the large quantities of volcanic rocks along its path.\textsuperscript{209}

Huatoki awa is also the resting place of two tapu (sacred) rocks called Pai-are and Pai-tawa, who each stood mid-stream approximately 100 metres from each other.\textsuperscript{210}

These rocks were important boundary markers between resident Hapu each side of the river, especially during Piharau (eel) season. Due to artificial alteration of the river, the mana of these rocks has been diminished. Pai-are now sits beneath where the Egmont Steam Flour Mill stands and Pai-tawa now stands against the bank of the river.\textsuperscript{211}

Even the earliest settlers of the town appreciated the stream and the amenity it provided in both its aesthetic and nourishment qualities. “No more lovely a sight, than that of the settlement with its free flowing river into the beautiful bay” was just one early pioneer’s opinion.\textsuperscript{212}

A deep lagoon about 400 metres inland provided safe moorage for smaller vessels and was even the location for a burgeoning boat-building industry for a time.\textsuperscript{213} As the settlement expanded, it also became an important water source for the growing flour mill industry, and several mills were built alongside to utilise its free flowing waters.\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{208} http://www.newplymouthnz.com/OurDistrict/Attractions/CoastalWalkway.htm
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid
\textsuperscript{211} http://www.newplymouthnz.com/OurDistrict/Attractions/CoastalWalkway.htm
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid
shining steel tempered in the fire

PART FIVE: CONNECTION ZONE

5.1 CITY COMPOSITION

5.2 URBAN CONTEXT

5.3 CITY LONG SECTION
5.1. URBAN COMPOSITION & BUILDING TYPOLOGY

New Plymouth displays many of the characteristics of a provincial New Zealand city in the composition of its central city area.

There is the fine-grain mixed-use urban character that was developed from the city’s colonial and inter-war periods, with a more pedestrian retail-orientated activity.

However, on closer inspection it can be evidenced that this type of activity (which is integral to a place’s liveability) is slowly being eroded in favour of more practical modern commercialisation of the area.

What is perhaps most notable about New Plymouth and somewhat different from other provincial centres is that this town has allowed transport-orientated infrastructure and big-box retailing to dissect right through its very heart.

If this is compared to other centres of a comparable size and nature, such as Napier, Tauranga, Whanganui, or Nelson, for example, all of these clearly have their central business areas free of major highways, which bypass on the periphery of the city.

This dissection of the central area is evidenced by large tracts of land being given over to car-dominant industries like fast food and supermarkets along the one-way system and light industrial areas at the northeastern edge of the area, where State Highway 45 runs.

Fig 5.1.1
Composition of New Plymouth central area building uses
Source: Author
5.2 URBAN CONTEXT & PEDESTRIAN CONDITIONS

As noted earlier in this document, the downtown area of New Plymouth provides several challenges when trying to establish a path through from sea to park.

The most notable of these are the busy roading networks that cut through the area and an over-scale shopping centre that makes no gesture to the street at all.

There are, however, the notable exceptions of Puke Ariki Landing and the Huatoki Plaza as public spaces.

Puke Ariki Landing, however, is the more successful of the two, due mainly to its fortunate positioning adjacent the Puke Ariki Information Centre and on the edge of a large precinct of commercial properties, along with also being part of the main pedestrian thoroughfare onto the Coastal Walkway opposite.

The Huatoki Plaza, although a design of good proportions and providing the potential for further public enhancement, has not quite been as successful as many residents of New Plymouth would have hoped.

The reasons for this are perhaps twofold in that one, in a slightly chicken-and-egg situation, building owners who front onto the plaza promised that they would open their buildings when pedestrians inhabited the area. However, pedestrianisation of the area has been somewhat slow, in that there are no active frontages to the plaza buildings, and thus they provide no real reason for being there.

What’s more, because the plaza does not lead to anywhere in particular and stops when reaching Devon Street, while there are several streets adjacent that serve pedestrian traffic, it does not therefore function as a thoroughfare.

The intent of this project is to provide an intervention that opens up a route along the Huatoki River and then further inland on towards Pukekura Park through a series of connected spaces.
Fig 5.2.2
Existing North to South Cross Section through site
Source: Author

TASMAN SEA WALKWAY
WALKWAY
TEAM TRACKS & ROAD
FOUR LANE ROAD

CENTRE CITY MALL & CARPARK BUILDINGS
ARIKI ST/HUATOKI PLAZA

DEVON ST EX. BUILDINGS & CARPARK BUILDINGS
BUILDING COVERING HUATOKI RIVER

COUNCIL CARPARKING & MILL BUILDING
PART SIX: DESIGN CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATION

6.1 MATERIALITY

6.2 FORMALITY

6.3 INSPIRATION

“going to find a good sharp axe”
6.1. MATERIALITY, TEXTURE & FINISH

Key to this project’s success will be the incorporation of the existing environmental context, which includes the urban and natural elements that are prevalent, and most notably the materiality of finished structures.

Careful consideration of how various materials are employed will ensure a narrative about the value of what the community places in its built environment.

It can also help to intertwine with a city’s culture and traditions, society’s preoccupations, the history of a place and new technologies that are evolving in that place.

The materiality also allows for continuity and familiarity, so that even if the forms of the architecture are unique and challenging, the materials still convey a sense of place and identity to the public.

Furthermore, various materials not only also provide visual cues to context and go beyond space and form creation, but also add the additional sensory aspects such as touch, smell and sounds for example. These, too, also play a pivotal role in enabling people to relate to their surrounds and add further depth and quality to the theatre of a place and its inhabitants.

Noted (left) are the key context material elements of the existing urban context, which will form an integral part of the architectural intervention for this project.
6.2 FORMALITY

Because this project is inserting itself into an already existing urban environment, intuitively it seems that the right direction to take would be to examine the language of the existing places and spaces around the insertion area for formal clues to the DNA of the area.

This understanding should assist in informing any formal elements that can then be adapted into the project and thus continue an architectural dialogue that is already in play.

As discussed earlier in this document, since the advent of modernism, building design has been predominantly focused on expressing itself as a unique entity, perhaps becoming more like art than architecture.

However, the fundamental difference between art and architecture is that art is essentially a selfish form of expression with absolutely no responsibility to anyone or anything and if someone else admires it, then great. But architecture, while it can be a piece of art, must still inherently be responsible to people and its context.

It is somewhat worthless to explore form and do formal (shape) experiments in architecture without constantly being aware of what is the context of a place - especially more so in the case of urban design.

That’s not to say that architecture cannot still be a piece of art. It can be argued that most successful architecture is art in its own right. But by having the responsibility to respond to people, architecture is indeed a more challenging task than art. It is undoubtedly more limited and less expressive. It must be responsible at the very least to its immediate context and inhabitants. With the right skill input and perhaps a small element of luck it can then become a great piece of architecture worthy of its users.
Fig 6.2.3  Supporting beam structure to NPDC carpark building  
Source: Author

Fig 6.2.4  Cantilevered concrete structure of NPDC carpark building  
Source: Author

Fig 6.2.5  Concrete form of bridge structure crossing Huatoki River  
Source: Author

Fig 6.2.6  Concrete pilaster and beam structure of NPDC carpark building, plus concrete formwork of Huatoki Bridge adjacent  
Source: Author

Fig 6.2.7  Concrete balustrade anchor on bridge over Huatoki River  
Source: Author
Fig 6.3.1
Unfinished highway overpass structure, Los Angeles
Unknown
Source: http://www.pinterest.com

Fig 6.3.2
Water Tower, Joao Pessoa, Brazil
Sergio Bernardes
Source: http://www.brazilbrutalist.com

Fig 6.3.3
National Library Building, Brasilia
Oscar Niemeyer
Source: http://www.modernarchitecture.com

Fig 6.3.4
IBM Research Centre, Le Gaurde, France
Marcel Bruer
Source: http://www.f#kyeahbrutalism.tumblr
6.3. INSPIRATION

It will be noted that earlier parts of this document were quite critical of modernist planning principles and practice and their resultant effect on not only New Plymouth’s built environment, but that of many other places.

Thus, it is with a small sense of irony that the apparent inspiration for any architectural insertion should seemingly be in a modernist nature of the brutalist movement, along with overtly modern structures like those of freeway overpasses and roads for example.

Fundamental to this rationale is that there is already a strong apparent language of concrete in the existing context, not only in the buildings, but also the surrounding site infrastructure elements. There is perhaps no more urban material than concrete.

Furthermore, concrete as a material has a strong sculptural aspect to it, which opens up the possibility, whilst still referencing the area’s context, to experiment with a more artful interpretation of any architecture, as discussed in section 6.1 earlier.

Although somewhat an environmentally unfriendly material in its composition, concrete is an excellent material in terms of durability and longevity. This then allows any new architecture inserted into this context to then age with the site and thus become integral to the existing place.

What’s more, although an unmistakably man-made material, it also exhibits strong natural tendencies, especially so when employing various finishing textures into the mix.

Another visual and visceral pleasure of concrete is the tension that is evident between natural and non-natural materiality. That is when nature is allowed to take over and becomes interwoven with the architecture, such as water and vegetation. This then provides a sense of ruin, but also a sense of comfort in knowing that both man-made and nature can coexist in an urban environment.
spring’s a girl from the streets at night
7.1 DESIGN PROCESS AND CONCEPTS

The design process of this project initially centred around the challenge of how to negotiate New Plymouth’s busy traffic network that revolves around a one-way system and a four-lane expressway-type road on the coastal fringe.

Furthermore, as a city that was planned and subsequently evolved on a grid-type structure with lax planning rules around what type of development is permitted, there was the additional challenge of how to create a design that goes against that linear flow that has been imposed over the seemingly natural orientation of the landscape and watercourses, for example.

In order to achieve this, designs that tested the grid status that were set at a more angular axis, such as 35 degrees for example, in order to find links and/or connections with landmarks of the city, be they natural (eg.: Sugarloaf Islands, Mount Taranaki) or man-made (eg.: New Plymouth’s 170-metre [perhaps iconic?] and now redundant Power Station Chimney).

The Power Station Chimney was also the basis for the initial concept of massive concrete towers set at specific intervals that would become both the markers and structural span support for an elevated walkway that traversed a linear path straight from coast to park.

This concept was discarded after early workshop sessions responses felt that these may be somewhat overbearing and out of scale in a low-rise provincial city. The concept of the concrete tower still remains, but at a reduced scale and of lesser prominence to the overall project.

The project then seemed to stall somewhat in that a specific site behind the Historic Mill building would be the catalyst for a solution. However it soon became apparent that for this project to reach its full potential, a holistic design approach was needed to ensure that the true potential of any outcome would be realised.
Fig 7.1.2
Early Proposed New Plymouth
Central Area Sketch from Above
Source: Author
Fig 7.1.4
Early Plan Thoughts
Source: Author
Fig 7.1.5
Existing Cross Section with Early Zone Indications
Source: Author
Fig 7.1.6
Early Sketch of Possible Public Space
Solutions for Huatoki Square & Pai-Are & Mill Historic Public Riverside
Source: Author

Fig 7.1.7
Evolution of Design Thoughts with Greater Consideration to perhaps Connecting with the Tasman Sea
Source: Author
Fig 7.1.8
Early Cross Section Sketch of Possible
Public Space Solutions for Pai-Are &
Mill Historic Public Riverside
Source: Author
Figs 7.1.8 - 7.1.13 (L-R)
Early Sketches of Potential Buildings & Spaces
Source: Author
dreamed a dream by the old canal

PART EIGHT: MAKING CONNECTIONS

8.1 STRATEGIC VISION: OPEN / ENHANCE / REVEAL / CONNECT

8.2 OPEN: THE RIVERMOUTH

8.3 ENHANCE: HUATOKI PLAZA

8.4 REVEAL: HUATOKI SQUARE/PIAZZA

8.5 RETURN: HUATOKI RIVERSIDE

8.6 CONNECT: WALKWAYS & NODES
8.1 STRATEGIC VISION: OPEN, ENHANCE, REVEAL, RETURN, & CONNECT

The assumption at the initial stages of this project was that in achieving a link between New Plymouth’s two premier recreational assets of coast and park would be through the insertion of an architectural proposition.

Early thoughts were that this would be in either a specific location, or via a piece of architecture that spans the entire breadth of the project, such as elevated walkways spanning between large marker towers, forming a continuous tangible link between coast and park.

However as the project has progressed, it has become quite apparent that the real link was in the latent opportunity presented in the town’s landscape itself - the Huatoki River. This once free flowing watercourse, now confined and reduced in both value and mana, holds the true potential of enabling New Plymouth to reconnect with itself.

A reconnection not only in a physical sense, but metaphorically, historically, culturally, socially and, one would assume, economically.

To achieve this, however, requires a bold and aspirational vision that is less about an single piece of architecture, and more about establishing a strategic blueprint for the continuing development of the city.

This project identifies five zones that implemented as a whole will fundamentally change not only the course of the river, but also spatially reconfigure how the city orientates itself. That is, from a sparse vehicle-dominated entity to a vibrant, compact, pedestrian-friendly place where people gather and recreate - and, importantly, connect.

All the while, still achieving the initial goal of connecting coast to park and subsequently on further to the Mountain.

To complement these spaces, this project also advocates for an architectural template, that sets an agenda for any new buildings or structures that may evolve not only in the five zones, but citywide. The language for this has been identified in Section 6.1 of this document and through a brief design code also set out in Appendix 10.2.2.
8.2 ZONE ONE: THE RIVERMOUTH - OPEN

Perhaps the boldest part of the strategic vision to connect Pukekura Park to the Coastal Walkway is the option to remove the carparking and retail facilities of the Centre City retail complex and return the Huatoki Rivermouth back to a semblance of its pre-colonial and colonial form.

Not only would this allow for the river to regain its mana, it provides the opportunity for the city to reconfigure itself back towards the sea and, importantly, provides a tangible and resolute connection from Mount Taranaki to the sea through the very urban heart of New Plymouth.

The symbolism of this gesture is significant in that it would return a vital part of the city’s natural environment, provide a compelling destination to the heart of the city and ultimately shape how the residents of New Plymouth connect with their built environment.

Economically there is perhaps some justification for this, in that removing a building that is essentially fit for one single purpose, that is, a retail mall, ultimately then allows for multiple typologies of use to take its place and return some of the fine-grain urban form to this area that has been lost over the past thirty years, and provide economic security.

Typologies that are immediately obvious would be mixed-use retail, hospitality and commercial, where shops, restaurants and businesses operate at ground level along shared-space streets and pedestrian alleyways. In effect, the retail component already in existence within the mall would essentially be reconfigured into a more people and community-friendly environment and one that allows for more engagement, thus enticing people to stay longer than a single-entity shopping experience.

Meanwhile, residential dwellings and short-term accommodation (such as: hotels, for example), up to five levels, over the ground-level commercial entities, would enjoy the vista over the wide rivermouth and public open spaces below to the open sea beyond, and be considered desirable real estate.
Fig 8.2.2
Wide angle sketch view of Zone One, Rivermouth
Source: Author
8.3 ZONE TWO: ENHANCE - HUATOKI PLAZA

In terms of urban space, the Huatoki Plaza is quite attractive and pleasant. However, its success has been diminished by factors that are perhaps at this stage ultimately beyond its (and its designers’) control.

Most successful urban spaces occur when people congregate in a particular area due to the fact that it is a somewhere, or it is on the way to somewhere. That is, it is a part of a series of connected places.

Unfortunately, the Huatoki Plaza is neither. Although there is a connection of sorts to Puke Ariki Landing on its northern edge, on its southern edge it terminates at Devon Street and thus provides no further passage along this course. Furthermore, with two streets running linear to it at a relatively short distance, they in effect are the pedestrian arteries to further places that this plaza could be.

Added to this is a somewhat chicken-and-egg situation, in that prior to the plaza’s development, many property owners were enthusiastic about opening their buildings into the plaza, but because of poor pedestrian take-up and the fact that the buildings already have frontages on the aforementioned linear streets, the owners have been reluctant to make this investment.

As a result, this space has been widely criticised by the public, who perhaps don’t fully understand the complexities of what makes an urban space work. However, one aspect of the plaza that could perhaps be improved on is the lack of greenery and somewhat harsh concrete surface that can be quite reflective on bright sunny days.

The simple addition of a green canopy over the plaza, in addition to the overhead walkway, will assist in alleviating some of these issues, with an element of visual interest.

Further revealing of the river (see Section 7.4), and associated public spaces, will also allow this space to become part of a connected series of spaces, that in themselves, also go somewhere.
Fig 8.4.1
Huatoki Square Sketch
Source: Author
The removal of both the council owned multi-level carpark building and Downtown Metro Plaza building, will allow for the revelation and re-emergence of the Huatoki River within the central retail heart of the city.

This will also add to a corresponding visual connection from the existing Huatoki Plaza across Devon Street and the continuation of the riverside connection and walkway in each direction to both coast and park.

As part of a series of connected spaces, this square will also then allow for public activities that occur in other areas to spill into or occur specifically within. Such examples could be market days, festivals and public art displays. As a further gesture, the existing public sculpture that exists at the southwest corner of the area could be relocated to create a central Focal point.

There is also the additional opportunity for structures and/or buildings to be added onto the rear of the existing buildings and the vacant lot on the western side of the river. These buildings could allow for a mix of commercial premises and dwellings, or alternatively be extensions of the buildings’ already existing usage.

Furthermore, the development of these buildings to no more than five levels will ensure an appropriate human scale, and be an appropriate scale to the existing urban context, whilst also continuing the formal language that has been established at the rivermouth spaces, whilst providing a visual view shaft for pedestrians on their journey to either a coastal or park destination.
As noted earlier, a crucial component of this project is the re-instating of the Huatoki River to a semblance of its former pre-colonial mana.

Along with the opening of the rivermouth to resemble its original form, would be the remodelling of council-owned carparking facilities that currently exist in the gully to the south side of the historic Egmont Steam Flour Mill building, in addition to the removal of 1990s additions to this building to allow for widening and deepening of the river to a state that resembles its former width and volume.

This open space will then add a further continuation of the already (proposed) connected open spaces that link the Coastal Walkway and Pukekura Park.

This area will open up spatially and visually and thus allow for a much more pleasant experience. Along with structures and paths that interlink, cross under or over each other, this in essence will create something much more than just a walkway, but something that adds elements of interest and intrigue into the journey along the river. Thus, the journey, and not just the destination, is just as much a highlight.

Permanent and temporary pavillons located next to the path, and small river-fed pools and a playground, will allow for parents to let their children play whilst they can congregate and interact with others.

There are also twofold environmental benefits, in that it will remove large amounts of impermeable asphalt surfaces, which along with added volume and riparian planting will allow the river to better absorb any flood-type situations.

Additional aspects to this area will be the provision of working gardens for the use of the entire community. The intention is that this will help to engender greater community engagement in the place and foster a greater sense of connection, because the community literally sees the fruits of its labour. What’s more, it allows for active and continuing education into natural ecosystems for children.
Integral to the vision will be how new elevated walkways will form the link between the blue of the coast and the green of the park.

Essentially, these walkways are the primary architectural metaphor for the entire project. They will traverse the entire scope of the project and be the constant element in the transition between coast, urban, and natural areas.

In order to add a dynamic component to the overall link and challenge the notion of that you have to walk on the ground, users will be able to gather, partake in various activities or simply use the walkways as viewing platforms, providing over and above what might usually occur on a traditional walking track.

The design cues for the walkway form is partly a tilt to the modernist aspects that were part of the key drivers for the area’s relegation, and a direct reference to the existing context’s predominantly concrete characteristics. However, the stark utilitarian nature of the forms has been tempered with softer natural components and urban features such as bright graffiti to provide a more human aspect.

These forms and materiality also provide a tangible link to the industrial and urban heritage of the area, whilst also providing durability and longevity to the structure.

It could also provide an opportunity for the adaptive re-use of predominantly first floor empty spaces above the retail areas of buildings, that were once the shopkeepers premises. These could include new retail or hospitality opportunities, or conversion into residential premises with the ability to walk out your front door to be on to the walkway to then access a node to link to another part of the central city.

8.6 ZONE FIVE: CONNECT - WALKWAYS AND NODES
PART NINE: CONCLUSIONS

9.1 CONCLUDING WORDS

9.2 CONCLUDING DRAWINGS
9.1 CONCLUDING WORDS

This research project set out to investigate the (perhaps overly simplistic) notion of how two recreational assets of a town could be tangibly connected. They are where people come to gather, mingle and in due course where innovations and interesting events and affairs tend to occur.

In order to achieve this, the current urban form of a place had to be critiqued in an attempt to establish how an architectural intervention might then resolve this question. In a somewhat ironic twist to the project’s initial goal, of namely of bridging the disconnect between two iconic recreational assets, were as a direct consequence of the from the effects of the past 50 years. Those being poor planning, modernist infrastructure principles, with public and private development usually based on the lowest economic denominator.

However this critique subsequently highlighted several issues that affect the central area of New Plymouth, and that these issues, if not confronted, are slowly eating away at the urban fabric of the town. And without a hint of the dramatic, the central part of the city could ultimately deteriorate to a point where it does not exist as a viable entity anymore.

As most urbanists, economists, scholars, and social commentators will attest to, the complex urban spaces that exist in our central cities are too important to let this happen to, as they are actually the places where the beating heart of a city literally exists. With the benefit of hindsight, it has been clear that New Plymouth’s inner city has been the unfortunate recipient of many poor planning decisions, however well-intentioned they might be.

However, what has become more apparent is the strength of the towns built fabric still in place, and the inherently interesting story of how the town has evolved over the past 150 years or so. What’s worse, at key intervals in the towns development, a small amount of crucial decisions have been made that have exponentially altered the city’s development and, crucially, how the town’s inhabitants have come to perceive their central city.

Thus, as the project has developed, a traditional architectural solution has become somewhat of an enigma, in that the oft-subscribed ways of solving something architecturally did not become readily obvious.

Furthermore, with the pressures on the traditional aspects of what makes a central business area of a place exist, under increasing pressure from technology and the like, these places are in a somewhat unenviable position.

Even worse is that if a city is already in a relatively poor state, with limited opportunities and the place’s inhabitants somewhat ambivalent to it because of their lost connections, the job just becomes that much harder.
In order to reclaim some of this lost ground over the years, the question does not revolve around what can be achieved with architecture, but is perhaps more about what ambition do the people of New Plymouth have for their city and how do they wish to see it evolve?

This question is pertinent, because the very things that will perhaps enable this city to flourish and be successful are maybe the very things that the people of a provincial city will not wish to see happen to their place.

That is because what is suggested in this project is more than just some nice landscaping.

It perhaps becomes a catch-22-type situation?

To conclude, this project, by examining already built form precedent in many other places, both at a large and small scale, along with literature around urban design, and then enveloped with the history of this place, has established that the primary solution should be the re-emergence of the Huatoki River.

This would then re-establish it once more as a key artery in the city’s composition. What was once so important a piece of the area’s natural ecosystem, a pivotal part of our early Māori and colonial ancestors’ dayly lives, should at the very least be returned to its former glory.

Obviously, this project is limited in its scope to deliver a more comprehensive overall solution to the entire breadth of the project, but that in itself presents opportunities for further investigation and ideas and innovation that this project has not even considered or touched on.

This theme was touched on early in the project introduction, in that as architects, should we not also be concerned with the overall development of a place, not just specific buildings and thus, put in place strategic guidelines for a place to evolve, but then to step back. This then provides the opportunity for others to add their contribution. The result is then generally a much more diverse and richer overall built context.

Furthermore, by achieving this, a multitude of opportunities are then available to all inhabitants of New Plymouth to reconfigure their city.

This reconfiguration will then enable them to in so many new ways enjoy the benefits of a new and improved lifestyle and associated social, physical and economic benefits that will subsequently evolve from there.

Kyle Ramsay,
30 September 2016.
Fig 9.2.1
Strategic Plan
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.2 (Above)
Existing Cross Section
with zones highlighted
Source: Author

Fig 9.2.3 (Below)
Proposed Strategic
Cross Section
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.4
Water Tower &
Underwater pathway
marine experience
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.5
Off-shore water activities
with view back to city
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.6
Proposed Huatoki Rivermouth & Public Spaces
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.7
Potential Treatment of Coastal Edge
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.8
Proposed Pathways next to Rivermouth,
Associated Plantings with view to Proposed
Centre City Redevelopment
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.9
Proposed Centre City Redevelopment & River Side Promenade
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.10
Existing Huatoki Plaza Re-design
(including view of Urban Stitch Walkway)
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.11
View of Urban Stitch Elevated Walkway Looking to Coast with Devon Street & Huatoki Plaza Below
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.12
Proposed Huatoki Square
Adjacent Huatoki Plaza with Urban Stitch Walkway Above
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.13
Powderham Street Underpass to Pai-Are & Mill Historic Riverside Public Area
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.14
Cross Section through Huatoki Square inland towards Mount Taranaki
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.15
View of Urban Stitch Start Marker
Towers looking towards Huatoki Square
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.17
Pai-Are & Mill Historic
Riverside Public Area
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.18
Cross Section through Elevated Urban Stitch Observation Marker Tower
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.19
Observation Marker
Tower Interior
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.20
Cross Section through Pai-Are & Mill Historic Riverside Public Area looking towards Mount Taranaki
Source: Author
Fig 9.2.21
Elevated Urban Stitch
Walkway Diagram
Source: Author
clouds are drifting across the moon
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10.2 APPENDICIES

10.2.1 Urban Design Code........................................184
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10.2.3 The Urban Neighbourhood Guide...................190
10.2.4 What Makes a Great Place?..........................190
10.2.5 Benefits of Great Places...............................190
Good urban design can be broadly defined as those places that are functional, durable, viable, sustainable, good for people to use, and reflect the importance of the unique characteristics of a place.215

To achieve this, urban design codes are a key mechanism to deliver these high-quality places and to ensure that places evolve in a holistic manner, as opposed to a narrow-focus market-led approach, which usually favours short-term financial benefit to specific parties over the amenity to a entire community and the continued long-term viability of a place.

What's more, because urban design involves concepts that are sometimes elusive, and many different people with varying interests and criteria by which they will evaluate its merits, it is important that any code is comprehensive in what its criteria and deliverables are.216

A well-scripted code should allow for a place to evolve in a strategic manner that both respects the existing built history, context and fabric, while also providing the ability for cohesive contemporary development that retains and further enhances a place's distinctiveness.217

Hence, there are numerous benefits of well documented design codes for all parties involved, including: improved design quality; enhanced character and sense of place; greater co-ordination of different aspects at an earlier stage, highways, landscape and architecture, for example, which avoids expensive and cumbersome changes later in the process: certainty for developers; and better design cohesion between different developments or phases of a single development.218

It is essential that for any project, large or small, with aspirational intent, that there be a clear and coherent strategic vision.

However, there should also be recognition of the importance that the tactical aspects of the overall vision are not implemented by a single designer or entity, as this essentially goes against the very principle of good urban design. That is, a single design approach will more than likely result in a blanket aesthetic and ultimately create spaces that are devoid of interest and life.

Ideally, a vision should create a design template that sets clear parameters, which then allows and encourages different architects and designers to implement their own interpretation of this through individual insertions.

This will assist in creating spaces and buildings that are homogeneous in terms of their overall context to the city, but still offer different and varied forms and materials that provide interest and visual stimulation for all stakeholders, users and observers of the building and public spaces.

The elements set out in the following pages are a succinct set of overall design criteria to be observed when designing and developing an individual building and/or public space, not only within the vision but also the wider urban area.

There is no hierarchy of importance, in that there is no one criterion that takes priority, and they should all be treated with equal consideration as all aspects together create a successful place.

An overarching aim should be that any development add to and enhance the urban environment and provide quality, pleasant, attractive and safe places that provide choice and vitality to a city or town.
10.2.2.1 Human Scale

As previously discussed in this document, one of the most important aspects of designing a new building in any environment is that its scale and proportions both reflect those of its context but are also fundamentally human in nature.

That is, people can relate their own physical size to the architecture. Cities built at a pedestrian or human scale tend to embody a better quality of life for their inhabitants and visitors to that city.219 They, by default, enhance civic responsibility and place more emphasis on the well-being of community relationships over individual autonomy.220

219 (Telford, 2001)
220 (Jacobs & Appleyard, 1987)

10.2.2.2 Active Edges

Active edges are a necessary prerequisite for street life. Wherever possible buildings should avoid areas of inactive edges and be designed to provide a matrix of interesting activities and choices for people, that is, the provision of space on ground level for retail and/or hospitality.

Lining street frontages with retail or individual residential entrances helps create human scale, transparency, and visual interest, economic and social vitality, and enhances safety by providing “eyes on the street”.221


10.2.2.3 Integrated Carparking

Reduce the impact of carparking on both the appearance and amenity of the area by limiting the width of garage entrances. Any above ground-parking should be concealed or be wrapped in active uses.222

222 (Ministry for the Environment 2010)
10.2.2.4 Façade Design

Façade design is usually the primary component of how we perceive a building’s overall scale, proportions and massing. To achieve visual richness and help viewers read the building and activities within it, the design should reflect the different parts of the building.

Further to the articulation of a building’s façade, all parts of the building need to be designed coherently, so they have a clear relationship to each other and the local context. 223

10.2.2.5 Respect Context & Reinforce Local Identity

A building’s relationship with how it sits within its immediate and distant spatial setting is an important factor in its overall success. A building should take cues from the context of the street and immediate area for the building’s overall scale, proportions, bulk, materiality and appearance.224

10.2.2.6 Materiality

Materials are an important element to consider in responding to character and reinforcing or establishing sense of place in a building. By using good quality materials a building will immediately establish itself within its context and have the added benefit of low maintenance requirements and costs, along with longevity.225

10.2.2.7 Building Form, including Roofline

The extent to which the roofline contributes to the overall appearance of a building and a streetscape, and contributes to its silhouette against the sky, adds a point of interest and contributes to a skyline in a positive manner.\(^{226}\)

What’s more, creating green spaces on building roof-tops not only provides additional recreational areas, but also assists in reducing stormwater run-off and energy loss.

10.2.2.8 Landscaping

Landscaping, including furniture, plants and paving, will enrich space and help create more pleasant urban environments. Landscaping materials, including groundcover, should utilise a palette contextually referenced, be durable and provide visual continuity with buildings.\(^{227}\)

10.2.2.9 Accessibility

Successful urban buildings and space will provide barrier-free access for all. Integrate a building’s access with general pedestrian accessways and ensure that the building’s accessways are matched with the wider circulations of the area.\(^{228}\)

Where possible, provide new and enhanced access to existing buildings or public spaces.

\(^{226}\) (Ministry for the Environment 2010)  \(^{227}\) Ibid  \(^{228}\) (Santos, 2015)
10.2.2.10 Connected Spaces

Urban areas are more successful when they are part of a connected network of spaces. Designing space that connects or interacts with other spaces, will assist with that space’s success and provide for the long-term success of the overall area.229

10.2.2.11 Density & Diversity

Higher population densities will, by default, provide more people to an area and further enhance the area’s vibrancy, diversity and interest. Buildings should be of a mixed nature, to ensure that no one typology is prominent, with high emphasis on the provision of residential dwellings.230

10.2.2.12 Clearly Defined Space

To improve legibility and enhance users’ spatial appreciation, buildings should clearly define the space which they occupy, in terms of both street edge with no disrupted building lines and open areas in and around a building should therefore be public space.231

This should include a suitable ratio between width of space and height of buildings to maintain sufficient daylighting, while ensuring privacy standards are met.232

229 (Ministry for the Environment 2010)
230 (Ministry for the Environment 2005)
231 (Urban Design Organisation 2011)
232 (Crowhurst Lennard, & Lennard 2004)
10.2.3 The Urban Neighbourhood Guide.

Source: http://www.gehlarchitects.com

10.2.4 What Makes a Great Place?

Source: http://www.placemaking.pps.org
10.2.5 Benefits of Great Places.

Source: http://www.placemaking.pps.org

Source: http://www.placemaking.pps.org
Declaration

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This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: DIRTY OLD TOWN

is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE (MAS)

Principal Supervisor: CESAR WAGNER

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