

SUBTHEME 1:

DESIGN, PRACTICE, PEOPLE AND SYSTEMS

There are eleven papers in this subtheme encompassing such disciplines as Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Industrial Design and Craft. Designers in these papers have illustrated their influence on the sustainable wellbeing of the community by promoting more sustainable lifestyles, reducing violence in nightclubs through effective design, incorporating urban play into architectural elements, using place-focused design principles for aged care residents, improving accessible housing, using natural ventilation in office spaces, improving product attachment, innovating the craft industry and evaluating landscape character to better understand its value to the community:

The first paper in this subtheme looks at the unsustainable, consumption obsessed nature of home owners attempting to live their ultimate dream, and argues that widespread change is needed in order to shape and sell more sustainable lifestyles to home owners.

The next two papers introduce a review and study (respectively) of the influence of physical environment design on violence in nightclubs and conclude that changes in the design of nightclubs can create an environment that discourages violence.

The fourth paper presents the urban play activity known as parkour and argues that, in order to reduce conflict between authorities and traceurs, urban spaces ought to be designed with play in mind.

The subsequent paper investigates the effect of the aged care built environment's physicality on the 'oldest old' residents and proposes place-focused design principles that improves the wellbeing of residents.

The next paper provides a review of issues surrounding the implementation of universal design requirements for accessible housing in Australia.

The following paper proposes the use of contextual studies in the field of thermal comfort where the more sustainable solution of naturally ventilated (compared to air conditioned) office spaces in sub-tropical regions is feasible.

The next paper seeks to understand 'long term product attachment' as a means of prolonging the longevity, and therefore the sustainability, of furniture.

The third last paper in this subtheme presents a means of incorporating innovative design interventions into the craft industry to reinvigorate the value of a crafted product in consumer's eyes.

The penultimate paper in this subtheme proposes innovation strategies to sustain and foster the traditional craft industry in Indonesia

The final paper in this subtheme presents a new method for evaluating the landscape character of Malaysia's heritage river corridors with the aim that a better understanding of the unique and valued aspects of these river corridors can be preserved and enhanced in future riverfront development.

DESIGN DILEMMA: DRIVING A CONSUMPTION OBSESSED SOCIETY INTO AN UNSUSTAINABLE FUTURE

SMITH, N.D. *†

pp. 2-7

* Department of Design, Curtin University, Perth, Australia

† E-mail: nicola.smith@curtin.edu.au

Abstract: It is well known that as Australians we have, by global standards, a high standard of living but a wholly unsustainable way of life. There is an urgent need to rationalise the way we establish our home environment and modify it to our specifications, and an equally important need to investigate the way in which design influences the ambitions and aspirations driving the consumption around home-making.

This paper reports on early investigation into everyday design influences on our unsustainable lifestyles with a focus on the domestic housing market, and the process of home-making and re-making. Shelter, security and comfort are fundamental premises of making home, and yet many people have ambitions far beyond the basic requirements when they search for the perfect home environment. Contributions from participants in the author's doctoral study will provide personal reflections on the dilemmas faced by people trying to match their homes with their aspirations and creativity.

It will be seen that the real estate, design and media industries should bear some responsibility for fuelling consumption based behaviour and contribute to reshaping the current desire for a dream home. Re-focusing lifestyle aspirations will also require increasing awareness about the social, environmental and economic benefits of developing creative and craft-based skills through home-focused sustainability practices.

Key words: Aspiration, design industry, real estate, home improvement, consumption.

1 INTRODUCTION

The United Nations 2010 Human Development Report has ranked Australia as the second best place to live within the scope of its Human Development Index (HDI). The index measures three basic factors of human development: "a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living", and describes the facilitation of living "creative lives" as one of the key outcomes of well-structured human development (United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

In order to examine how design currently plays a part in peoples' lives and how individual creativity could be further enabled in the domestic sphere, the author's study has focused on home renovation including carrying out do-it-yourself (DIY) projects and home decoration. While the motivations, capabilities and implications surrounding self-modification of buildings are all interesting, complex and inter-related topics, this paper will look specifically at the conceptual frame around these issues; the design-based influences driving the search for a better life, leading to investment in property and consumption of materials.

The primary data informing this paper is based on an 'Everyday Cultures & Lifestyle' survey given to over forty people during 2010, followed by conversational interviews relating to the home-making experiences of thirty of these participants. The interviews were frequently supplemented by photographs of past renovation projects, and/or house and garden tours to explain current or proposed improvements. Although participants were located in a number of countries, the observations and examples for this paper will be situated in the housing market of Perth, Western Australia; related media information for which has been collected as context for the study.

2 DESIGNER LIFESTYLES

2.1 The Good Life

The family of words that continually permeate the marketing of real estate in Perth frequently stem from 'design' and associated terms, such as designer/designed, architect designed/architectural,

style/stylish, and resort-style/life-style. This is particularly evident in the more affluent 'western suburbs', an area located close to the city, the river and the beach (refer Fig. 01).



FIGURE 01: Real estate signage for house in Cottesloe, WA (August 2010).

There is a perception that having 'the good life' or 'living the dream' is to own a large, architecturally designed home in a prime location, where everything is sleek, contemporary and clutter-free. It has ample well-proportioned rooms, top-of-the-range appliances and the latest technological innovations. This representation of ultimate success has been deliberately crafted in the sales patter surrounding the property market: "Stunning and uncompromising design and quality in a property that accentuates a refined and casual ambience only found in five star resorts. With stunning views... to the ocean... whisper quiet lift, a fabulous gourmet kitchen... lifestyle home – at its most indulgent" (refer Fig. 02). In mail outs, flyers and brochures appearing in the letter boxes of western suburbs residents each month, real estate agents' glossy full-colour adverts regularly talk about properties that are "designed to pamper" and include "cutting edge innovation", or offer "the Ultimate Lifestyle" and are "handcrafted, flawlessly created" (samples received by participant, November 2010).



FIGURE 02: Real estate signage for house in Cottesloe, WA (April 2010)

While it would be easy to dismiss the treacly descriptions in a brochure simply as marketing play, the extent of dream spinning is persistent and pervasive, extending through all aspects of home-making, to include furniture, furnishings, home décor, garden products and interior design features. Images that accompany the sales patter are most frequently devoid of all the internal signs of life that transform a building into a ‘real’ home. The sanitisation of homes and interiors that reach us in magazines, on flyers, or via the television send a powerful message about the state of our less-than-perfect lives. Carefully crafted by stylists skilled in presentation techniques, the spaces photographed are de-habited, immaculately clean and tidy, furnished with exclusive designer items, and artificially lit to emulate sunlight flooding in.

Through such advertising the home owner is encouraged to feel dissatisfied with their current environment and instead aspire to “the ultimate dream home”, one that is “absolutely gorgeous and opulent”. By implication, the ‘right’ home for you is not the one you are in, but one that delivers “you and your family the lifestyle you deserve... the ultimate lifestyle” (extracts taken from ACTON Group property sales booklet, distributed in Cottesloe, WA during early November 2010).

The search for a perfect life appears to be a very powerful concept used by many retail businesses and service providers, and an attractive motivator for consumption activities in relation to the home. Given the proliferation of the word ‘lifestyle’ in marketing and popular media, the use, misuse and selective interpretation of lifestyle clearly carries economic value, and yet there appears to be no conclusive description of what it means to the average home-owning Australian, currently representing about 70% of the population (Gibson, 2009).

The word has been popularised in the media through the genre known as ‘lifestyle television’, in association with domestic practices and leisure pursuits such as gardening, do-it-yourself, interior design and home decoration. Lifestyle programmes were established in the 1940’s on British television with Australia following suit two decades later, introducing home, cooking and do-it-yourself instructive segments, and later home and garden ‘makeover’ shows (de Solier, 2008). As property-ownership increased, programmes moved from informing and entertaining viewers with a focus on ‘how to’ maintain the home, to treating audiences primarily as consumers and customers.

2.2 Selling the Dream

According to Fiona Allon (2008), the Australian obsession with the home has arisen from conscious political agendas, patriotism and

periods of sustained economic prosperity – accompanied by rising standards of living.

The Australian desire for “wealthier lifestyles... of self-conscious and self-focused consumption” (Allon, 2008, pp.57), has led to increased investment in bricks and mortar, and an almost insatiable need to engage in the practice of making practical and aesthetic improvements to the home. For many aspiring Australians a house or apartment has become a commodity, part of a wealth creation scheme rather than a building within which to create a sense of self and future home life. This fundamental change in living intention signals the greatest potential for increasing levels of unsustainable consumption.

The implications of ‘updating’ on a continual basis in order to meet market trends as steered by the real estate, retail and advertising industries are significant in terms of generating waste and consuming energy through the manufacture, packaging and supply of hardware products, tools and materials. Improvements range from repainting and replacing fixtures and fittings, such as gutters, windows and doors to more major work to include replacing roofing, and adding extensions. At the greatest extreme lies the demolition of a house and replacement with a more modern aesthetic, and frequently a much larger property.

Real estate agencies contribute heavily to raising the benchmark in standards of housing stock; on the one hand marketing solid and liveable but slightly outdated houses ‘with potential’, and on the other hand presenting a constant supply of ever more exclusive, high-tech, architect designed exemplars of the ideal. The activities of the wider real estate industry, to include home builders, developers and planners, also reinforce a situation where supply (both real and imagined) *leads* demand.

2.3 Building the Dream

The following image by homebuilder Dale Alcock Homes is typical of the lifestyle-oriented property on the market in West Australia, introduced to the potential customer as a way to experience the good life: “If a well appointed home which fits the various lifestyles of the whole family is what you are looking for, then the Nautilus is the ideal home for you” (refer Fig. 03). Far from simply maintaining the already high standard of living our modern homes already offer, the ‘mass’ housing market is contributing to the upward spiral in homeowner expectations through providing ever more opulent finishes: “The master suite sets a new standard in luxury with a hob-less shower with central tiled pier, full height mirror and twin square semi-recessed basins” (‘Dale Alcock Homes – New Homes’, 2010).

These increasingly luxurious materials and features are communicated to the wider market through stage setting in display homes, real estate adverts, home and garden magazines and then find their way into the hardware retail stores often as a result of this ‘cultivated’ market demand. Readily available and widely publicized in the media, the latest trends subsequently drive consumption practices and changes to living patterns.

One of the main changes to have taken place in the last twenty years has been the disappearance of the iconic Australian backyard and the increasing size of the building footprint. This trend is influenced in part by mortgage lending institutions, real estate agents and developers for whom “there is more to be gained by selling buildings than yards... maximizing the investment is seen as maximizing the floor area” (Hall, 2010, p. 94).

Following a study on the physical characteristics of contemporary suburbs in 2004, Tony Hall concluded that “the urban form of a large house on with little natural light and ventilation and minimal



FIGURE 03: Street elevation for the ‘Nautilus’ Display Home

backyard”, of which the Nautilus is typical, “is being driven by...socio-economic changes in Australian society” (Hall, 2010, pp. 94). Hall warns these changes are seriously detrimental to the quality of life, with negative impacts on family relationships, sociability, public health and well-being, and critically - on biodiversity, microclimate and future sustainability.

2.4 The Green Debate

During a recent forum titled ‘The Green Debate’ at the ‘DesignBUILD Commercial and designEX: Showcase 2010’ event in Perth, a panel of architects and interior designers discussed the issue of sustainability in relation to the current housing market of Western Australia (WA). The real estate industry was targeted for encouraging the increase of house size, with Australia surpassing the United States last year for the largest houses with a directly inverse number of people living in them. Apparently most WA clients are commissioning architects to replace older style modest traditionally built property with enormous energy hungry buildings with features contributing to unsustainable consumption practices; swimming pools, multiple living areas across several levels, 600 to 800 square meters of internal space, all air-conditioned and electronically climate controlled. Most often these buildings are constructed and fitted out for re-sale rather than for owner enjoyment over a life-time, which reinforces the market-centric reliance on incorporating all the newest fixtures and appliances, and the focus on financial goals over quality of life.

Architect Julie de Jong, suggested that homebuyers should “rationalise their expectations” regarding affordability and what is really necessary for a comfortable existence. Even the more mass produced developer built project homes in the outer suburbs reflect the desire for large homes on single blocks in low density planned communities, recognised now as suburban sprawl. De Jong, highlighted the moral dilemma architects face with regard to renovating older style buildings, many of which were built “with ideals related to longevity”, but that are now too expensive for many clients to remodel; building new is more cost effective. In terms of wider housing stock, de Jong commented that project homes are not built for the long-term, representing “a criminal waste of resources”. Commercial interiors are also grossly wasteful of materials, with shop fit-outs replaced every five years on average, and office and hotel fit-outs following suit generally in seven year cycles. Interior designer, Jacqui Preshaw, adds that a “huge quantity of things get thrown out – often driven by fashion and fad”. This observation shows parallels with domestic interiors, with evidence that the average kitchen lifespan is seven years (Shove, 2007).

The panellists agreed that it is the lifestyle that we choose to live, or as this paper argues *are influenced to pursue*, that costs us both individually and, according to Architect Adrian Welke, on a meta-level. While people continue to seek the ‘Great Australian Dream’

they may in fact, he warns, be “creating the Great Australian Nightmare”, especially for those forced out beyond the fringes of the city for affordable housing, and for future generations who will have to pay for the environmental consequences of continued sprawl. Perhaps, suggests Welke, the only way of “avoiding the nightmare” is by “destroying the dream”, implying future homeowners should have less choice about free-standing homes in key suburbs, instead being somehow redirected into higher density settlements, and in buildings designed for greater longevity.

While architects and interior designers may have some influence on educating their clients about more sustainable practices, the profession might only have an impact on, at best, 5-10% of the domestic housing market and realistically very few clients are prepared to forsake their dream home to live in higher density accommodation. Of far greater influence on the general housing market are the ‘dream sellers’ - the real estate industry, the glossy home-oriented magazines, and retailers of interior décor and hardware, and lifestyle television programmes.

2.5 Making Home

With increasing fiscal instability, home has become retreat for psychological and financial security, a refuge of privacy and comfort from social and workplace stress. For those who are able-bodied, ‘handy’ and motivated, home can also be a place where you can take control of your family’s future by investing time, labour and money engaging in renovation work on a do-it-yourself basis, sometimes referred to as ‘sweat equity’.

The increase in retail support for do-it-yourself activities, such as the comprehensively stocked hardware stores, equipment hire companies and material supply yards, have provided the opportunity for any ‘ordinary’ homeowner to learn from the ‘experts’ on lifestyle television and “achieve the taste and style of the elite and wealthy” (Allon, 2008, pp.57). In this way, do-it-yourself has brought the dream closer for those who have the capability, motivation and finance to invest in improving their immediate surroundings. However, where it focuses on the renovation of buildings for re-sale, effectively a new category ‘Investment DIY’ or even ‘Commercial DIY’, the activity also contributes to the huge volume of building waste generated by the construction industry each year.

The building typology and form of construction will also play a large part on the ease of manipulating the fabric of the home. The dominance of double brick houses in Perth makes amateur building work of the kind tackled by DIY practitioners much more difficult than popular construction methods favoured in other states, such as single brick. Adapting the building to suit the practical and aesthetic needs of a new inhabitant may require more input from tradesmen, engineers and design professionals which increases the costs to a level where some homeowners feel the better option is to demolish the house and re-develop the site. While this presents the opportunity to re-work the basic orientation and layout to achieve a building that will consume less energy in climate control, such as a passive solar design, it requires the wasteful practice of demolishing a solid building, originally built for longevity.

2.6 Dreaming of Comfort

Within this contemporary Australian context and living through era of residential market change and home re-modelling, have been a number of people whose practical knowledge and personal reflections has contributed to this study on the process of literally ‘making home’. The participant group is centred primarily on inter-related knowledge of other participants (‘snowball sampling’), contributing further layers of social and cultural networks which are beyond the scope of this paper.

Participants were chosen for greatest diversity of background and DIY experience; ranging from architects and designers renovating their own homes, to first time homeowners struggling to establish their identity and sense of place on a limited budget. Both genders are represented equally in the participant group ranging from 22 to 75yrs in age, across various life stages including several ‘empty nesters’ and retirees, both couples and singles. The task of gathering select data from a wide range of participant profiles has been further enriched by locating participants in countries with similar high standards of living and all ranked ‘very high’ on the 2010 Human Development Index (HDI), including the United States (ranked 4), Hong Kong (21), Ireland (5) and United Kingdom (26), although overall the majority are currently living in Australia (ranked 2); 27 participants, of whom 24 are Perth-based residents.

In the survey completed by all participants, responses were sought on aspects of life surrounding cultural and leisure activities in the domestic sphere, with a view to gaining some insight into the relationship between people’s backgrounds, their aspirations and tastes, and their current homes. A national statistical survey of Australian cultural practices, the Australian Everyday Culture Project (AECF), has informed some of the questions asked in the participant survey, in particular those focusing on the home-based leisure activities, media influence and taste (Bennett, Emmison & Frow, 1999). The AECF questionnaire, with 2,756 usable returns collected between November 1994 and March 1995, specifically asked respondents which terms from a list of twelve would be of most and importance in describing their ideal home, and which would be of least importance. The most popular response was *comfortable* (23.2%), followed by *clean & tidy* (19.7%), and *well-designed* (15.1%). Of ‘least’ importance were *distinctive* and *modern*.

When participants in this study were provided with the same set of descriptors and asked to select the three terms that would come closest to describing their ‘ideal’ home, the most frequently selected terms were *well-designed* (85%), *comfortable* (45%) and *easy to maintain* (37.5%), with a quarter of participants also selecting *uncluttered*, *spacious* and *clean & tidy*. Factors that featured as ‘least’ important in their ideal home environment were *traditional* (47.5%), *distinctive* (42.5%), *elegant* (42.5%), *modern* (40%) and *lived in/homely* (30%).

In the light of earlier discussion regarding marketing tactics of real estate agents, it is interesting that most participants valued effective design input, and yet did not associate this with a distinctive or elegant property or modern style. More modest ambitions of comfort and ease of maintenance were accompanied by a preference for the spacious and clean – the essence of the glossy images but without the added luxury or opulence. Perhaps better understanding what creates or promotes a feeling of ‘comfort’ in the home environment rather than continually raising expectations of what residential buildings should deliver, may offer an opportunity for both the design and real estate industries to contribute to re-modelling aspirations of future home owners.

When selecting the three most relevant terms from a list to describe their current homes, the majority of participants chose *lived in/homely* (55%), *comfortable* (50%) and *spacious* (40%), with 25% acknowledging their homes were *cluttered*. A large number of participants (85%) felt the current condition of their home was *in need of a facelift*, with almost half of those feeling their homes were *in need of major improvement* work in the very near future.

This recognition of ‘need’ (or ‘want’) already qualifies these participants as potential consumers of a wide range of home improvement services and materials. It is also likely they will be more susceptible to popular media and marketing encouraging the transformation of their homes into something better, more in keeping with current trends, perhaps moving closer to an ‘ideal’.

When asked about the reasons for choosing their current home, every participant with only two exceptions indicated that *location* was the most important factor. This has implications for the dreams and aspirations of future homebuyers who may be forced to more remote areas rather than their location of choice. In line with ‘The Green Debate’ discussions, there is a need to focus on higher densities and affordability in order to reduce outward displacement and continued suburban sprawl. The second most important factor ranged in popularity from existing criteria such as *suitability of house size* (30%) and *internal appearance/features* (25%), to the *future potential* of the lot or internal layout (35%). The purchase of a property with potential for adaptation in future appears to indicate acceptance of limited affordability, buying a property that is currently unable to deliver ‘the dream’. This shortfall has implications for future consumption in relation to home improvement activities for at least one third of the participants.

2.7 Stylish Homes with Hidden Lives

What is consistent with the media images of a ‘perfect life’ is the desire for a lack of clutter and absence of human habitation. Over a half of participants felt their current homes had a *lived in/homely* feel, yet this was selected one of the ‘least’ important aspects of an ideal home, indicating that being *lived in* - appearing occupied and full of personal debris - is not how people prefer their homes. The powerful need to contain the signs of daily life has been voiced in other aspects of the study, reinforcing the desire for a home offering comfort to the people who live there and yet somehow render the inhabitants invisible, even to themselves. Several interviews explored the unwanted chaos of daily living (and also renovation); the struggles to contain the mess of day-to-day artefacts in use, and the spatial problems caused through collecting ‘stuff’ and outdated home layouts. The distance between the idealised images of immaculate and spacious interiors, and the crowded lives of participants appeared frequently as sites of major conflict. One interviewee, a professional soon to retire, voices the dissonance in her home life; ‘I’ve been very unhappy here... it is so depressing, the house is a shambles... the lack of storage... and so much clutter, we’ve got to get rid of stuff, but that takes time...we want to make the laundry into the dining room... and I want a deck so that you can come outside, but he doesn’t... and an open plan kitchen... My expectations were different, a roomy Federation-style home with a few river glimpses. That was not an unreasonable dream at this stage in life I don’t think’.

Investigating this ‘dissonance’, the survey asked participants to list the four most significant things that make up their lifestyle, and also what changes to their home would improve their lifestyle. The answers varied enormously indicating a lack of consensus about the meaning of ‘lifestyle’. The responses about change yielded a broad range of everyday aspirations including; quality interaction with friends/family/social networks, creative activities, improving the home/home layout, a bigger/smaller garden, more space, more leisure time/less work, better opportunities for entertaining, less clutter/more storage, improved finances, take advantage of climate/location, education/sport pursuits and “being comfortable”.

2.8 Media Makeover

In terms of media related design/style influences on home-making, participants were asked to indicate which lifestyle television programmes they watched regularly, and which home/garden magazines they enjoyed. For both categories, the participants were asked their reasons for this choice. In relation to television programmes, *Grand Designs*, an award winning British TV series about bespoke self-build projects – architecturally styled dream homes, was viewed by almost all participants. Other programmes such as *Gardening Australia*, *Changing Rooms* and *Renovation Rescue* were also popular. The main reason for watching these programs included; to gather ideas for future projects, to look at images and to source ‘how to’ instructions or products. The same reasons were given for buying magazines such as *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Vogue Living*, *Burkes Backyard*, *Handyman* and even browsing the *IKEA* catalogue (refer Fig. 04). About one third of the participants also *sometimes* visited home design stores such as *IKEA* and *Freedom* to gather ideas for their own projects.

The vast majority of participants (85%) indicated that they visited hardware stores (such as *Mitre10* or *Bunnings*) on a frequent basis, exposing them regularly to retail pressure for new products and consumption based activities around the home. Reinforcing this, 36 of the 40 participants (90%) indicated that they *often* engaged in home repairs/maintenance/home improvement projects on a DIY basis, in fact only computer-use surpassed home improvement as activities listed in the survey responses.

In the AECF survey over fifteen years previously, ‘home improvement’ shows were ranked the third overall most popular television viewing by the respondents. Almost half of the respondents (47.6%) in the same survey undertook DIY home improvements, indicating there has been a close relationship between television viewing and an interest in home-based projects and DIY retail activities over this period in Australia.

In addition to television shows, the sheer proliferation of popular literature on home improvement, renovation, remodelling and decorating, either instructive manuals or fictional works appears to indicate that engaging in DIY has become a popular activity in Australia in much the same form that it is in the UK. According to Elizabeth Shove, consumer research in the UK in 2005 found that over 25% of adults enjoyed their engagement with DIY, but did not specifically reveal not why. Market research data also confirms that involvement in DIY activities is sometimes related to “pursuing ideals, images and aspirations formed and disseminated by the mass media” (Shove, 2007, pp.49), linking the activity of DIY with media portrayal of a better or an ideal way(s) of living.

The appearance of DIY as a popular activity has often been attributed to the post-war labour shortage of labour. However there are indications homeowners had already begun to engage in their own maintenance as early as 1930 in Great Britain. The Ideal Home Exhibition started in 1908 and by the mid 1950s fully supported the do-it-yourself home improvement market, with a record attendance of 1.5million people in 1957 (Ryan, 1997). The contemporary version, the Ideal Home Show runs annually in London, with the formula repeated in other countries including Australia (Perth 2010), Ireland, USA, and Canada (all highly ranked on 2010 HDI). It has been the inspiration for various other home-industry trade shows and design expositions, such as Perth’s recent ‘DesignBUILD Commercial and designEX: Showcase 2010’ introduced in section 2.4, and ‘Grand Designs Live’ which took place in London in May 2010 (refer Fig. 04).

Although less than 5% of participants said they attend trade or design shows, these events do provide an opportunity for exhibitors



FIGURE 04: Sample of publications (L to R - show guide, magazine, catalogue) promoting home improvement ideas, products and services

to showcase contemporary ‘ideal home’ features, and allow distributors to reach the market directly with new products, tools, furniture and interior décor, contributing to consumption practices in the search for a perfect way of living. They also often expose the public to innovations in sustainability and energy conservation.

2.9 Self-Crafted Lifestyles

There are many reasons why people undertake DIY activities themselves, although the most frequent cited by interviewees were both practical *and* financial, especially in their early home-owning years: “Newly-wed, short of cash, and expecting our first child – something had to be done! In the early days I had to design, purchase the materials and then construct... then new materials and gadgets came on the market... magazines and TV programmes began to appear and DIY took on a craze status... now one can buy flat packs and special tools”. The same participant reflects on a change in socio-economic conditions, feeling that “lately people have become more prosperous and I think there has been a move away from DIY”.

At the core of the activity, DIY also satisfies a desire for change either to the aesthetics or the fabric of the home, altering the appearance or the functional way of living (i.e. turning *imagined* into *real* lifestyles). Paul Atkinson proposes that doing-it-yourself is “the ultimate expression of individual taste”, while also likely to be regarded as “conspicuous consumption, emulation, self-preservation or self-expression”. He suggests DIY might be seen “as an accurate yardstick by which the popular aesthetics of design can be measured” (Atkinson, 2006, p. 9). However, the expression of design and style in the home, is more likely to be driven by retail and marketing sectors, and will reflect the materials, products, tools and services available, the time and financial resources of the homeowner, and the motivation, skills and social situation of the individual steering the project.

During an interview, one participant admitted the pressure from others was the motivation for his bathroom renovation; “visitors to our house continually remarked on how old-fashioned our bathroom and separate toilet were”. The same participant discussed his dilemma about engaging tradesmen for this type of project: “If the price is exceptionally high or the completion date too distant, I will reluctantly undertake the job myself, that is if the task at hand is within my DIY capabilities... I have a shed full of electrical woodworking and DIY equipment, but I lack the motivation to get started... and if something goes wrong the confidence and interest wanes. But if I complete the job with satisfaction I can look back and congratulate myself for not employing a tradesman”.

The decision to do-it-yourself, rather than engage the services of tradesmen or professional builders/designers, is indicative of a distinction between what Atkinson terms as ‘Essential DIY’ an activity performed as ‘a necessity’ rather than a ‘leisure pursuit’, the latter would be seen as ‘Lifestyle DIY’ (Atkinson, 2006).

The majority of participants who engage in home improvement on a ‘lifestyle choice’ basis, indicated that this would be an activity

often done as a couple, ranging from decorating (paint, wallpaper) to remodelling gardens, with some of the participants assisting or being assisted by members of the family in a different generation. Many participants report acquiring some basic DIY skills at school but most often learned techniques from friends or family. Many had tools handed down from parents; although ironically these frequently remain unused having been superseded by modern, lightweight tools, such as cordless drills and nail guns.

2.10 Re-shaping Dreams

In summary, Australia needs to actively cultivate a new residential dream. The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures from 2006 indicate that 58% of dwellings were occupied by only one or two people, and over 80% were suburban homes, contributing to the sprawling areas of free-standing homes. The trend of homes getting larger and occupancy decreasing seems set to continue; consuming land, energy and material resources and resulting in ever more unused rooms, while increasing numbers of homeless people require accommodation (Allon, 2008).

With a society becoming more 'time poor', the instant gratification of purchasing new rather than remodelling (homes, furniture, tools) has already influenced DIY practices and certainly impacts home design and presentation. Even though the merits of solid homes built for longevity are clear, the older housing stock in Perth is costly and difficult to renovate. Likewise the time taken to accommodate adaptive practices is in direct contrast with the speed of building vast new residences, known locally as 'Mc Mansions'. Unfortunately the design professions, while best placed to re-educate those with the resources to commission new housing, have a reduced sphere of influence and are often moderated in their creativity by the pre-conceived notions of the client.

Market based sectors, including real estate and planning institutes, finance bodies, home improvement and décor retailers all influence the purchasing patterns of home owners. Graphic design, advertising, magazine images, television programmes, display homes, and home design shows/building expositions fuel consumption further and deliver contrived images of an ideal lifestyle. The construction industry, including product manufacturers, project homebuilders and developers all work within established markets and most often respond to demand and supply forces rather than steering more sustainable practices.

3 CONCLUSIONS

There is an urgent need to shape and 'sell' more sustainable lifestyles. We need a realistic understanding of what constitutes a 'good life', and we need help defining the boundaries separating how we can live a 'comfortable lifestyle' from an idealised way of living that is unsustainable in the longer term. Filters to media and retail pressures are required to prevent drawing people into the ever-expanding horizons presented to us as the 'great Australian dream' offering the perfect (and ever improving) lifestyle. As we have seen, the current rate of development and consumption is already changing the dream into a nightmare for future generations.

Homeowners as represented by the participants in this study have offered some insight to what constitutes an 'ideal' home for them, with modest requirements - being well-designed, comfortable, spacious and easy to maintain, rather than the lofty aspirations fed to the public chiefly by the broader real estate industry and popular media. Some of the participants have actively engaged in making improvements to their homes in order to move closer to their ideals, frequently updating kitchens and bathrooms, but most focus on keeping their properties in a state of good repair, and the interiors clean, tidy and comfortable.

The practice of do-it-yourself has been introduced as a way of enriching personal creativity in leisure time and an activity that can keep alive skills and practices from former generations. As a way of engaging with the materials and fabric in the home in order to save money it is the contemporary equivalent of the post-war response to lack of cheap labour and resources. As evidenced by some of the participants in this study, the sense of independence, achievement and self-sufficiency resulting from quite literally 'making home' may even contribute to the sense of belonging, satisfaction and contentment in the longer term. Where DIY is seen as a creative or social leisure activity rather than a mode of income, it may contribute to the 'facilitation of living creative lives' introduced at the beginning of the paper as one of the key positive outcomes of well-structured human development.

The same methods successfully selling us dream images of perfect homes and lifestyles, could potentially act as a conduit for re-educating future generations about realistic aspirations. Finding ways homeowners will invest emotionally and financially in a longer-term relationship with a building will increase aspects of social stability and home-based longevity. Achieving a high standard of living for all Australians is an important goal, but it has critically spiralling environmental and social costs. Perhaps the goal lies in creating more compact, better designed, flexible living systems that can efficiently adapt to different occupants, life stages and functional requirements. Moreover, design input should facilitate the beneficial aspects of self-crafted lifestyles.

The lack of sustainability in the housing sector is too complex a topic for reduction to a few simple conclusions here. What has been intended is to paint a broad picture about the key stakeholders, and communicate some of the possibilities for reshaping the influence of design on the home, and re-calibrate our expectations of what constitutes an 'ideal' home.

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