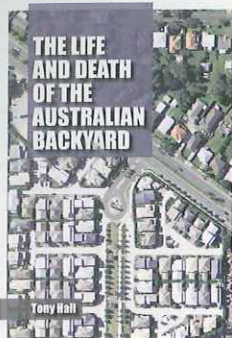


BOOK REVIEWS

WORDS CASSIE HANSEN



The Life and Death of the Australian Backyard

TONY HALL, CSIRO PUBLISHING, PAPERBACK, 2010, 176 PAGES. RRP \$69.95

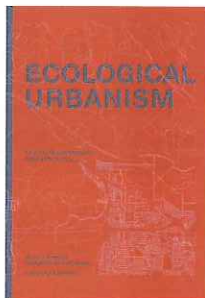
The humble suburban backyard is in the midst of collapse, according to author and researcher Tony Hall. In his book, *The Life and Death of the Australian Backyard*, Hall looks deeply into the changing landscape of suburban Australia and the causes and effects of such change. "The yard symbolizes a standard of domestic comfort to which the majority of Australians have traditionally aspired," Hall says. However, since the 1990s, in what was a dramatic and sudden change, new housing developments increasingly reduced the size of their backyards. This is nowhere more evident than in the aerial photography used in the book. In one aerial shot of the suburb of Boondall in north Brisbane, the left side of the photo shows older residential areas with significant tree cover, while the right portion of the photo shows newer housing where roofs dominate the land area. Hall investigates a range of possibilities as to the reason behind these changes, including housing design, longer working hours and even a declining interest in gardening, and draws solutions as to how developers can return to traditional Australian values under urban consolidation.



The Garden of Ideas: Four Centuries of Australian Style

RICHARD AITKEN, THE MIEGUNYAH PRESS, HARDCOVER, 2010, 244 PAGES. RRP \$64.99

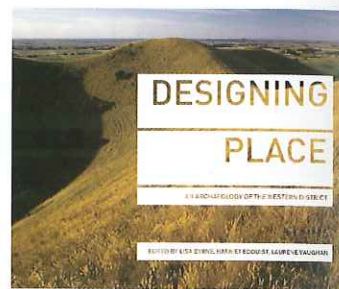
Described in its foreword by noted landscape architect John Patrick as "pioneering work" and "unlikely to be surpassed for the excellence of its scholarship, the keenness of its observation and the breadth of its interpretation," *The Garden of Ideas* does not disappoint. Author and architect Richard Aitken takes us on a delightful expedition of what he confesses is his personal selection of key moments and stylistic movements in Australian gardens. The book's beautiful presentation of text and images – from paintings, prints, plans and photographs – expertly depicts four centuries of gardening history. From seventeenth-century imaginings, to the Australian bush landscape and modern city settings, each place and time is beautifully reviewed by Aitken and supported by evocative images, many unearthed by Aitken himself in his tireless research for this book. The book is almost encyclopaedic in its content and at the same time shows a deep and personal respect for this timeless pursuit. With this book, Aitken wished to open a conversation that results in understanding and appreciation for both exceptional and representative examples of Australian gardens, and there's no doubt that he's done just that.



Ecological Urbanism

EDITED BY MOHSEN MOSTAFAVI WITH GARETH DOHERTY, LARS MÜLLER PUBLISHERS, HARDCOVER, 2010, 656 PAGES. RRP US\$59.90

The seed of this book began as a conference in 2009 presented by the Harvard Graduate School of Design entitled *Ecological Urbanism: Alternative and Sustainable Cities of the Future*. The conference brought together practitioners, theorists, economists, engineers, environmental scientists, politicians and public health specialists to examine ecological urbanism and its future. The book collates and extends these examinations with more than one hundred contributors featured. The range of these voices, from academic to non-academic, is appreciated. In Mohsen Mostafavi's succinct introduction, he introduces two main statements. Firstly it is of great importance to develop novel forms of design thinking that contribute to both disciplinary knowledge and sustainability in order to ease the tension between the two and pacify scepticism. The second statement Mostafavi makes concerns scale and finding alternative design approaches that manage large scale. With that, Mostafavi proclaims that the book's aim is to provide a framework that presents "nothing short of a new ethics and aesthetics of the urban." Whether the book achieves this hyperbolic goal is up for discussion.



Designing Place: An Archaeology of the Western District

EDITED BY LISA BYRNE, HARRIET EDQUIST, LAURENE VAUGHAN, MELBOURNE BOOKS, PAPERBACK, 2010, 160 PAGES. RRP \$39.95

Attempting to explore the meaning and making of place, a collection of Australia's leading artists and intellectuals focus on the Western District of Victoria for answers. The Stony Rises, the landscape formations in the Western District, draw from the artists' interpretations beyond the surface of the land, to the layers of volcanic plain and the natural and human intervention that created this place. As part of a four-day site exploration of the Western District, the book's participants look at the Indigenous and European history of the area, the topography and its artistic past. The book then moves into essays and deconstructions by cultural historians, design theorists, a geologist and an anthropologist, each imparting a new facet to this place. A photographic chapter of 117 homesteads of the nineteenth-century Western District provides yet another narrative to the region with its architectural history. Arranged chronologically, these pastoral homesteads vary from modest timber cottages to bluestone bungalow-influenced architecture. Overall, an interesting account of this unique area is presented by the essays and interpretations, supported by striking photographs.