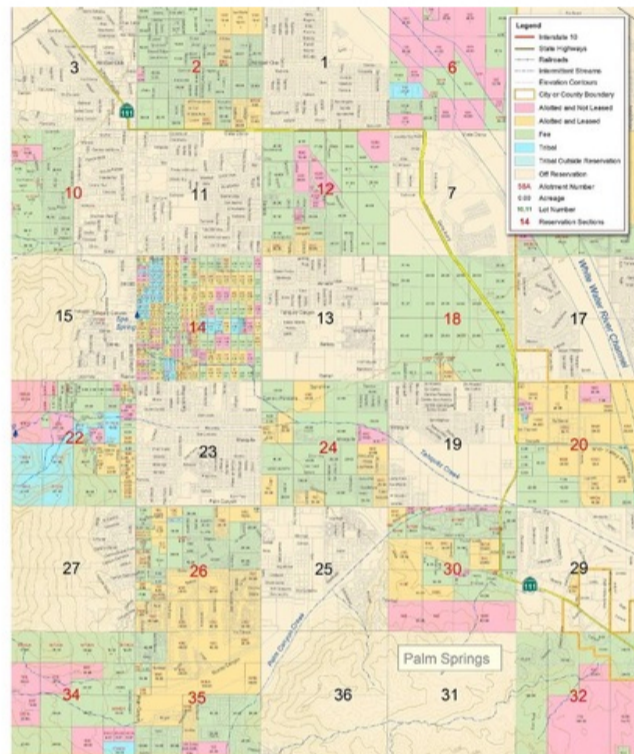


Week 22/23: Palm Springs plans / More ABC homes / Plibersek's resignation / Filling in infill / Queenstown in Venice / Bookends: Venice / Signs off the grass

Written by [Tone Wheeler](#)

Palm Springs' past planning guides its future plans



Palm Springs is in the Zeitgeist in Australia. A couple of months ago we discussed *Lost in Palm Springs* by Greer Honeywill in a *Bookends* review in *Things*. Now *habitusliving* (no relation) has published a piece on Modernism week by Australian Jack Lovel. Whilst all enthusiasm for this sunny bright modernist city is welcome, there is a dark side that is rarely mentioned.

As part of the research for a talk for the Australian Architecture Association your correspondent was intrigued to discover that Palm Springs has the ultimate gridded modernist plan (in the image), which seems to underpin all that comes later in the architecture. The streets and blocks resonate to this order. But this is no intentional rational pattern, but rather a result of the Coachella valley being carved into Indian reservations (beige) and white occupied territories, coloured, (with the arrival of the railroad).

There's a resonance for Australians here as the Indian tribes re-assert their rites to 'country', in ways our indigenous are doing, and it is causing some friction for the future of Palm Springs. BTW, the almost two-hour talk is being edited and will be published by [e-classroom](#) later this year.

The ABC of televised architecture



Last week I lamented that the ABC show doesn't do shows on the built world (architecture, design and planning) in the same way it does on natural environment. The second episode of *'The Homes that Built Australia'* on Tuesday night didn't get any better. It doesn't know what it is. Wallowing in social history, we never get to hear how the physicality of suburbia and our homes were formed, or indeed what the homes are.

The fascinating historical photography has an erroneous narration over, and the experts seem to have no connection to the visuals. I understand that the producers have expertise in nature doco's, which is perhaps why the ABC may have chosen them, but their storytelling doesn't translate at all.

Let's hope for better on Sunday night when Tim Ross, aka Rosso, presents the second series of *Designing a Legacy*. Ross is more enthusiast than esthete, and front and centre throughout, an approach needed to explain architecture to the wider world, at least according to TV producers. Australia has not had an architect worthy of presenting a program about architecture since Robin Boyd in the 60s, and no cinematographer seems to understand how to capture architecture on the screen. Hopefully Rosso and team can fill that space.

Tanya Plibersek's resignation



Housing is the federal Labor Government's Achilles heel. The cabinet seems blithely unaware of how the Greens have stolen the ground with a far better policy on affordable and social housing than the risible Housing Australia Future Fund or HAFF, which [Crikey's Guy Rundle](#) called: "four words, four lies". Labor's antipathy to the Greens runs so deep, they don't see the cant from the can't.

The usually measured Penny Wong unleashed on the Greens housing spokesperson, Max Chandler Mather, not only because he can easily ridicule Labor's ineptitude on housing, but also for having the temerity to defeat Labor favorite Terri Butler for the inner Brisbane seat. Their anxiety is on show: lots more Green's candidates, like the unheralded Elizabeth Watson Brown, are going win in 2024, and with the TEALS, they will hold the balance of power. Labor is so entrenched in a binary system they fully fear the ternary coming.

The last senior Labor politician to develop a serious policy on housing was former deputy leader Tanya Plibersek, just like the preceding deputies Tom Uren and Brian Howe. In the [recent biography by Margaret Simons](#) there are 24 pages on these issues from her time as Housing minister 2007-10. But Plibersek's excellent policy work on housing, and later education, was ignored when Albanese sidelined her as a rival by appointing her as minister for the environment.

It's a poisoned chalice to which she now seems resigned. [Crikey](#) and [The Monthly](#) (in the cleverly titled [PRRTy Trick](#)) both remarked on her air of resignation in a lacklustre interview on ABC RN this week. Plibersek, longest serving woman in the House of Reps, must know her time is up: by giving her the rotten job of defending the indefensible, Albanese has made sure the young, progressive electorate of Sydney will turn against her for her championing of coal, gas, and failure in the environment portfolio.



I expect the air of resignation to transform into an actual resignation sometime before the next election, as she will not want the ignominy of losing her seat to the Greens. Albo should have been more careful what he wished for. Like Kim Beasley (passed over for the unctuous Mark Latham), seen here with a very young Tanya, we will miss out on one of the great prime ministers we never had.

Filling in on infill housing



Fringe suburbia got a right bollocking recently. And not from the usual architectural and planning suspects. First, it was a report by [Infrastructure Victoria](#) highlighting how costs in greenfield sites are four times those of infill within existing suburbia, as discussed in [The Age](#) by your correspondent.

This week the NSW Productivity Commission weighed in with a report [Building More Homes Where People Want to Live](#), which came to the same conclusions: the sensible development of the city is going inwards and upwards, not developing outwards. The result of a this hard-nosed scientific approach is reviewed in the [Fifth Estate](#) and the [Australia Institute](#).

Queenstown in the Venice Architecture Biennale (again)



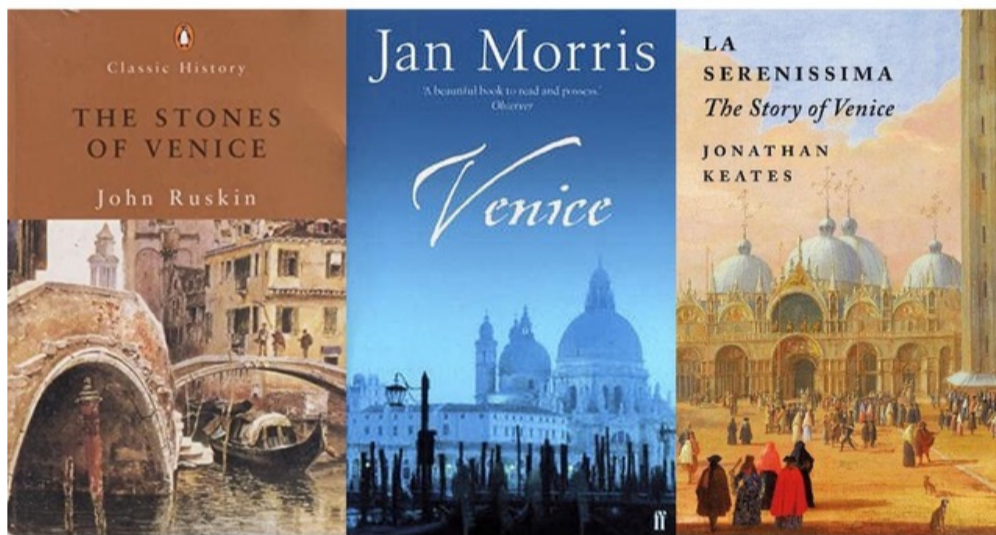
My plea for reports on the Australian Pavilion, and its exhibition [Unsettling Queenstown](#), has been answered. The London-based publicist advises that you can read reviews in [Dezeen](#), [Forbes](#), [CNN](#), [Euro News](#), an early reprint of the PR material in [Arch Daily](#), and in [GQ Italia](#) for those reading Italian. All are mentions, based on the PR, with little to no analysis.

For that you will have to turn to the review by Donald Bates, Chair of Architecture at Melbourne University, in [ArchitectureAU](#). I concur completely with his critique of past Australian entries being 'surveys', lacking penetration and depth.

This paragraph resonated: "The aspirations of "unsettling Queenstown" were well aligned to the ethos proposed by Venice Architecture Biennale curator Lesley Lokko. This was not to be an exhibition of architectonic inventiveness or spatial exploration (a critique voiced by many, suggesting that this and recent biennales have been less about architecture and more about social, environmental and political consciousness-raising)."

A must read.

Bookends: In Venice again, again



Speaking of Venice, this is the subject of bookends this week. My past visits to the Venice Biennale delighted in both the temporal excitement of the exhibitions, and moreover the visceral qualities of being in Venice, a city with piers but without peer.

Excellent books on the Venice start with John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, an architectural tour de force. Although 200 years old, the city remains as he saw it. Jan Morris, the great travel writer, wrote the best book on Venice, a stunning study of how beautiful the city is, at all times, in all weathers, in all conditions.

And just now there is a third by Jonathan Keates: *La Serenissima* as the city known as known, the Serene one. A beautifully produced book, with full page illustrations showing the long buildup in the history of city-making. A most handsome book to go with a most handsome city,

Sign off the times: Keep Off



We sign off this week with a sign to keep off. A timely reminder of how unsustainable grass really is. There's a deep irony in [Warragamba Dam](#) floodwaters ruining the 'lawn farms' growing downstream, when the dam is required to provide water for the myriad lawns that need watering in the city.

Time for a fatwa on grass at home. Necessary for golf courses, public parks and football grounds, we can find better plantings for our gardens. Keep off the grass, and grow vegetables, trees, and carbon sinks.

Reference: A&D Another Thing week 22/ 2023

Tone Wheeler is an architect / the views expressed are his.

*Long columns are **Tone on Tuesday**, short shots every Friday in **A&D Another Thing**.*

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