

SHAPING VIBRANT WATERFRONTS

TEN INSIGHTS

to unlock the potential of our waterfronts



URBIS

“

ON AVERAGE, COASTAL CITIES ARE GROWING 20 PERCENT FASTER THAN ANY OTHER CITIES IN THE WORLD, THEY HAVE 10-15 PERCENT HIGHER DENSITIES THAN OTHER CITIES, AND 15 OF THE WORLD'S 20 MEGA-CITIES ARE COASTAL.

Sharad Shankardass
UN-Habitat

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Cover image: Howard Smith Wharves



WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

OUR CITIES AND OUR WATERWAYS ARE INSEPARABLE

Water has – and always will – shape our cities.

Our waterways, harbours, rivers and coastlines are the lifeblood of our cities and have shaped settlement patterns globally for millennia.

Australian cities, most of which enjoy a coastal location, are realising the potential of our waterfront land. They are reconnecting with their waterfronts, transforming neglected post-industrial docklands into contemporary cultural, recreational and lifestyles spaces.

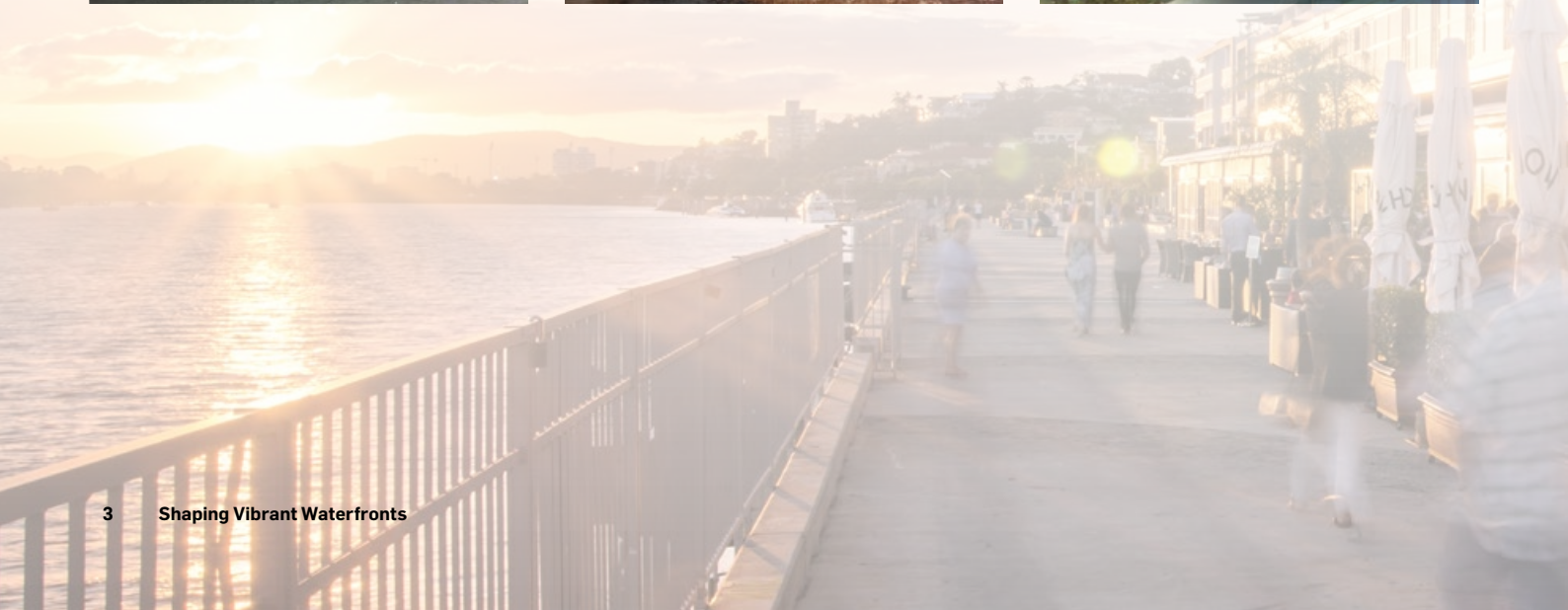
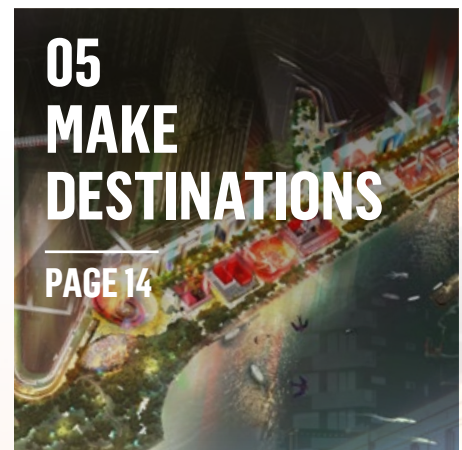
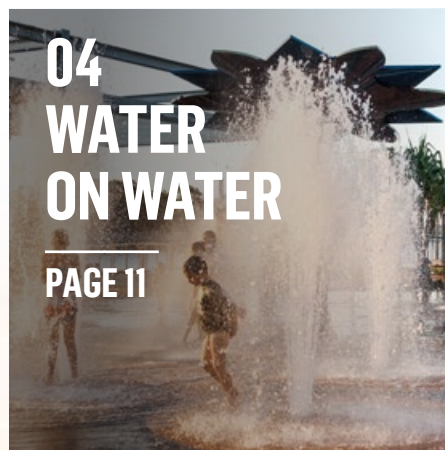
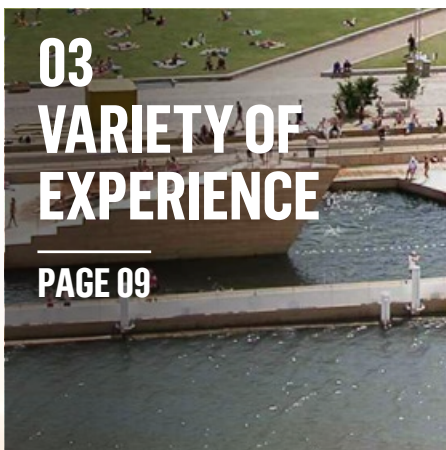
Nearly every one of Australia's capital cities is currently home to a significant waterfront renewal project. These projects are transforming not only the waterfront, but the cities themselves.

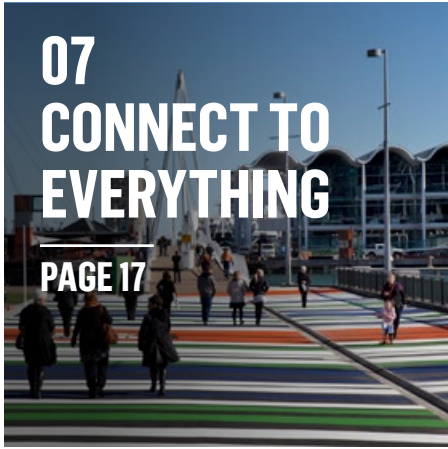
These waterfronts are becoming our cities' hottest property – demanding a 20 percent uplift in property prices and becoming home to major public facilities and open spaces.

Ensuring best practice design of key urban waterfronts is paramount to the success and liveability of our cities. Through these ten insights, we share our ideas on shaping successful, vibrant waterfronts.

TEN INSIGHTS

TO UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL
OF OUR WATERFRONTS





01 THINK STRATEGICALLY

WATERFRONTS SHOULD WORK HARD TO SUPPORT URBAN GROWTH

As the world's population continues to grow and urbanise, our cities need to accommodate more people in less space. Transit infrastructure has rightly been a focus for this intensification, however amenity is the essential component for dense development.

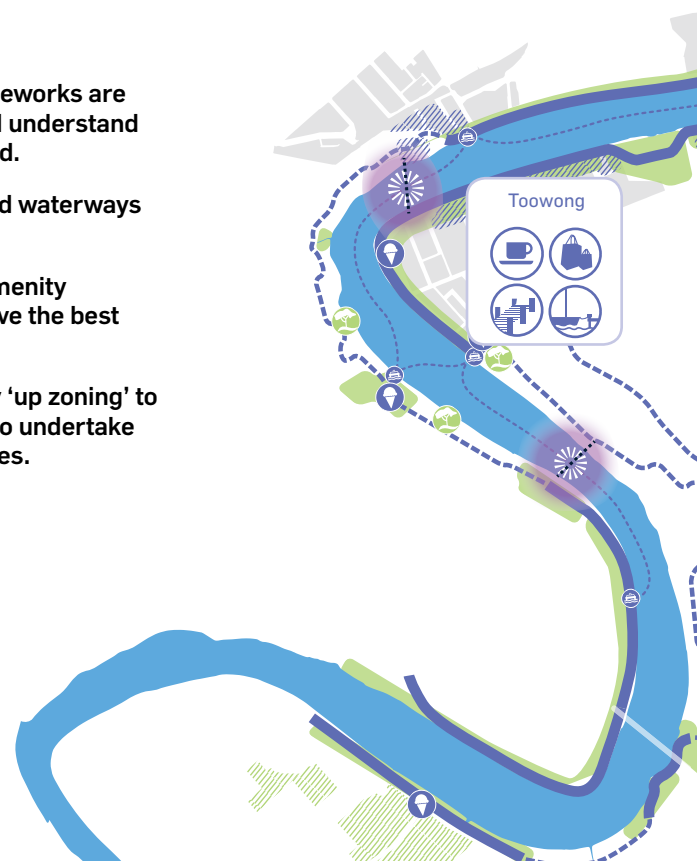
Waterfront sites are blessed with abundant amenity. Characterised by an open edge on one side, every single waterfront site inherently incorporates long views and access to sunlight and breezes.

Additionally, all waterfront sites are intrinsically part of a bigger system. The cumulative benefit of the redevelopment of a network of waterfront sites offers the most significant strategic opportunity for cities. They have the ability to accommodate urban growth, connect city-wide movement networks and become a focus for public urban life.

In this way, they are more things to more people. As strategic assets they contribute to the sustainable growth of cities and deliver significant public benefit in the process.

KEY FINDINGS

- Wider master planning and strategic frameworks are required to best identify opportunities and understand the scale and sequence of change required.
- Unlock the potential of waterfront land and waterways as part of city-wide transport solutions.
- Strategically focus density around high amenity locations, such as waterfronts, as they have the best chance of success.
- Renewal of industrial areas requires early 'up zoning' to facilitate the capital investment required to undertake sometimes complex remediation processes.



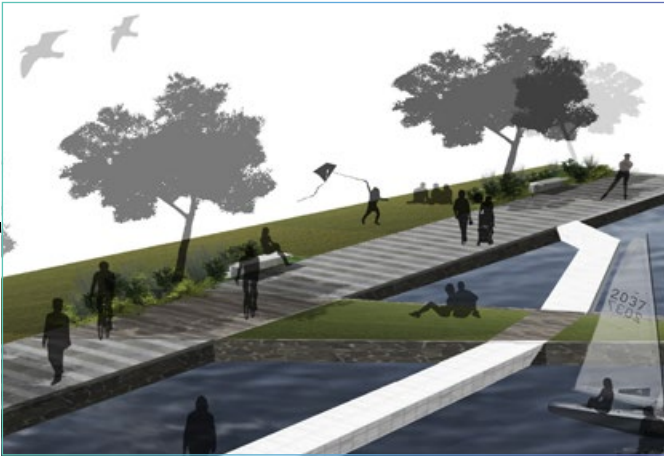


Image source: Getty

RIVER'S EDGE STRATEGY | BRISBANE
 Urbis (with Lat27)

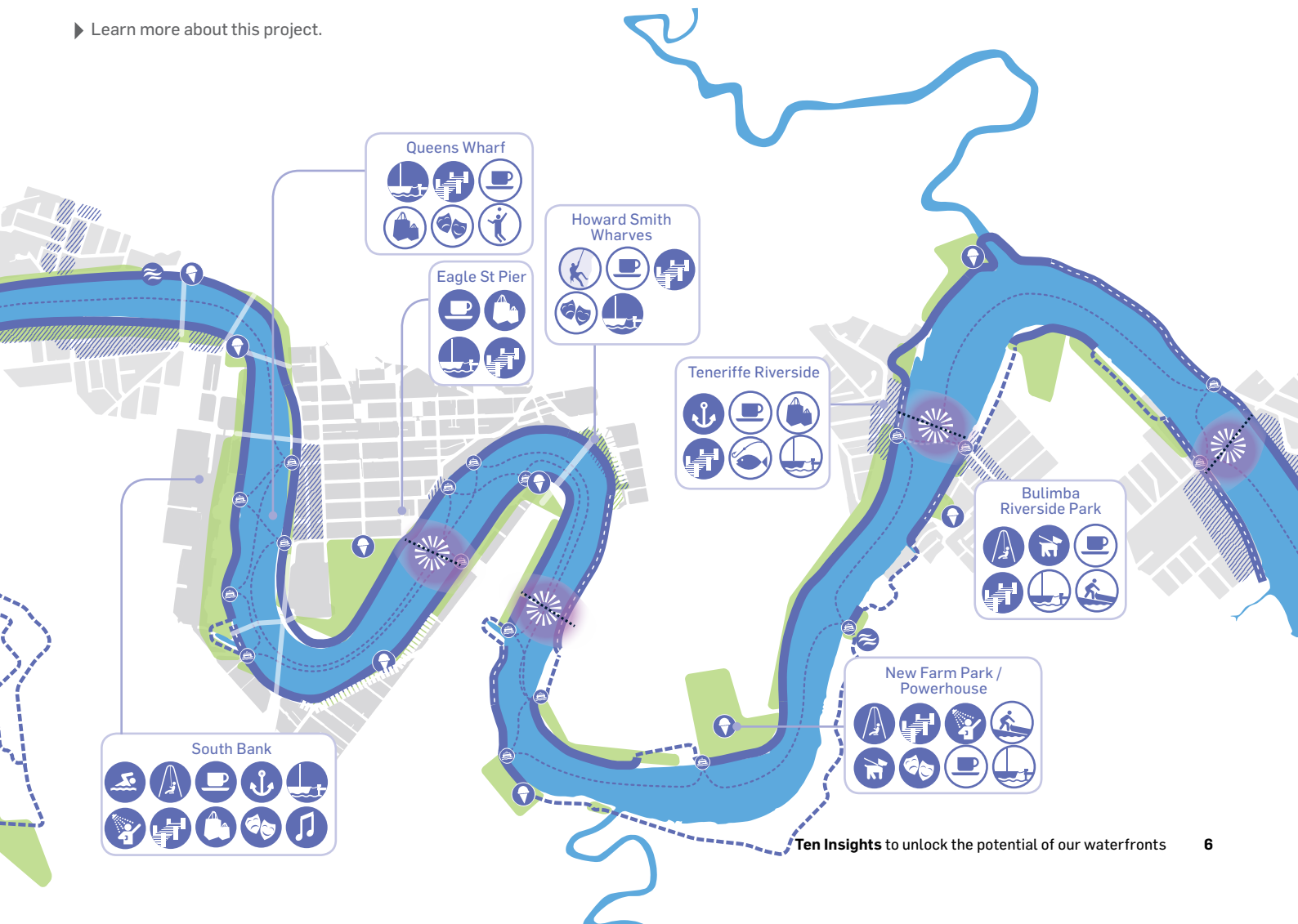
Urbis, in partnership with Brisbane City Council, led the preparation of an inner-city river activation strategy for the Brisbane River. The strategy aims to provide a co-ordinated decision making framework to promote the river as a world-class recreational, tourism and economic asset for the city.

WINNER QLD AILA Awards - Planning (2015)

► Learn more about this project.

BENIDORM SEAFRONT | BARCELONA
 Office of Architecture Barcelona

The Benidorm Promenade hugs the seafront of this Spanish town, unifying the city and the sea through a continuous waterfront pathway. This radical innovation in waterfront public space design provides shade and viewing platforms to facilitate connections between the town and beach.





KOOMBANA NORTH | PERTH Urbis

Koombana North has been transformed from an industrial waterfront into a sought after coastal destination. The development focuses on community needs, featuring an improved public waterfront area, better family beaches and a revitalised setting for future retail, commercial and residential development.

WINNER WA AILA Awards - Award for Excellence for Civic Landscapes and the WA Medal (2017)

► [Learn more about this project.](#)



HOWARD SMITH WHARVES | BRISBANE Urbis (with Woods Bagot)

Urbis was part of the winning bid for the redevelopment of Howard Smith Wharves providing overall master planning, urban and landscape design and planning approval for the site. The unique design for the iconic location celebrates the history of the site and its prime waterfront location.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)





02 LOCAL RELEVANCE

INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS IS RELIANT ON LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

City-making today is all about creating authentic experiences. People everywhere are seeking opportunities to have more meaningful encounters with places and cultures.

As tourists, we want to go where the locals go and do what the locals do. We seek insider knowledge that allows us to become 'temporary residents' and experience the best of a city. This phenomenon of 'experience' is not limited to tourists alone. Locals too are looking to become tourists in their own cities.

Many of our waterfront sites have extensive, far-reaching histories that have defined the settlement patterns and development milestones of our cities. Their landscapes often include significant concentrations of historic structures set within neglected industrial sites with little or no public access.

The redevelopment of these sites presents a significant opportunity to unlock the history of our cities, and at the same time, provides opportunities to see what the future might hold.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Tourism today is all about providing local experiences. The waterfronts of any city are often the best stage from which to engage with local urban life.**
- **Use local operators, local events, the local climate and local history to create a package of experiences that is compelling and truly distinctive for everyone.**
- **Identify early the key characteristics and 'stories' of the waterfront and use these as a central part of place making and renewal strategies.**

03 VARIETY OF EXPERIENCE

MAKE PLACES FOR EVERYONE

Our waterfront environments are astonishingly diverse. However, looking nationally, the renewal outcomes we often see are astonishingly homogeneous.

Rivers, bays, seafronts, harbours, climatic orientation, tidal variance, demographics, and a host of other factors, give an almost endless palette from which to create great places. Despite this, the linear promenade or boardwalk is often the go-to response.

More considered responses develop our waterfronts as a series of unique nodal spaces that are connected by a secondary unifying element. This approach delivers a public environment that is characterised by a series of more intimate and locally relevant spaces, each with a specific strategy for engaging with water.

In this way, the contemporary waterfront achieves both intimacy and the sense of wider coherence.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Water bodies are often expansive spaces and inherently are the grand gesture themselves. To complement this, design a series of small spaces with variety and richness to bring back the human scale and create relevance.**
- **Deploying a variety of 'edge design' in the form of curves, vistas, steps, ramps, seating, landscape, and other mechanisms, allows for the creation of an engaging place.**
- **Diversity of space drives visual interest but it is critical that it is unified in some way. Art, lighting, structures and landscape strategies all have a role to play here.**
- **Food and beverage, retail and commercial activities bring life and sustainability to the modern urban waterfront.**





Image source: BIG-Bjarke Ingels Group. Image by Julien de Smedt.

COPENHAGEN HARBOUR BATH | COPENHAGEN BIG + JDS

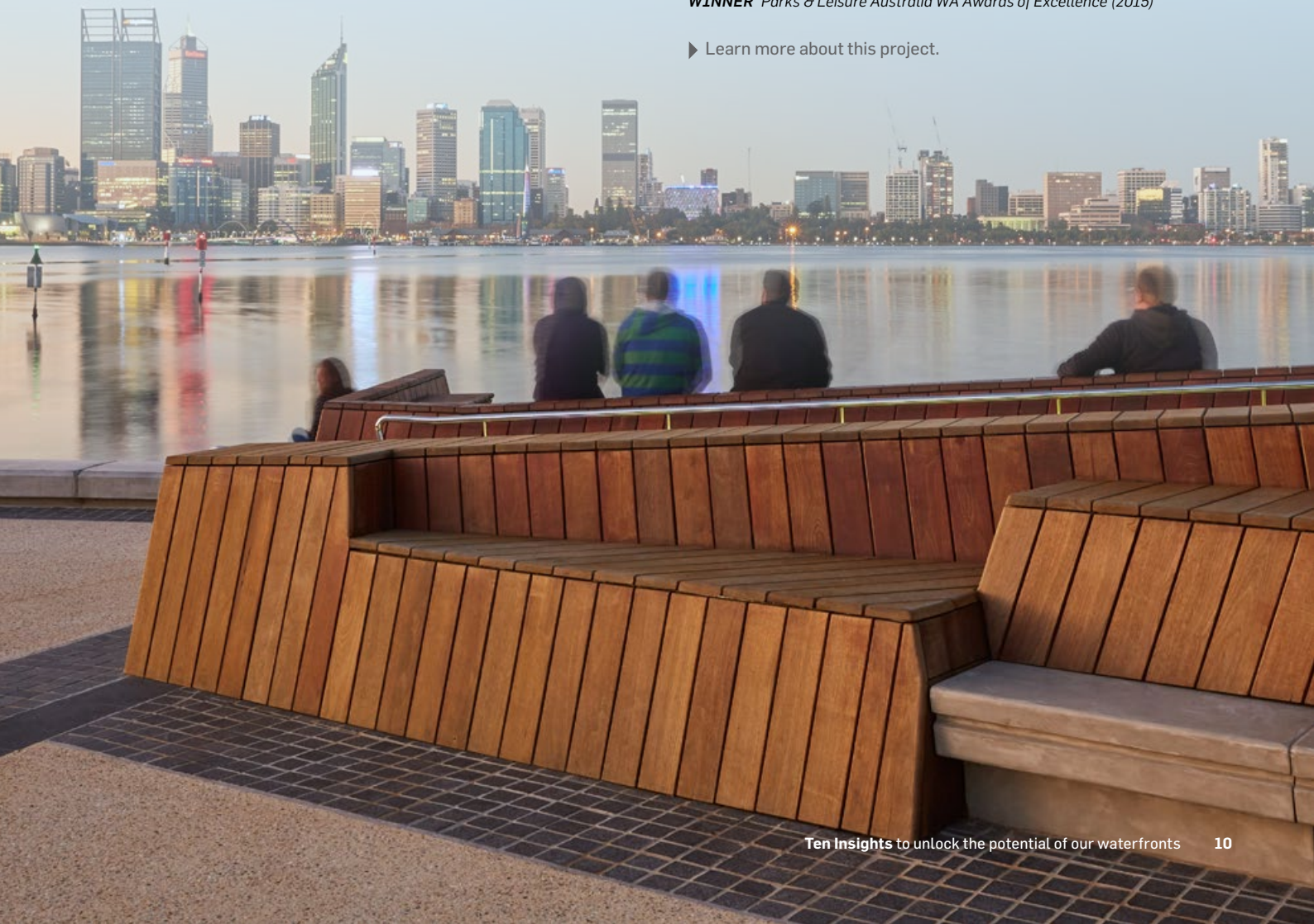
A terraced, urban harbour landscape, the Harbour Bath offers a variety of spaces for recreation and play. As an extension of the land, the “harbourscape” provides key focus for activity that caters for a wide variety of people.

SOUTH PERTH FORESHORE | PERTH Urbis

The South Perth Foreshore Strategy Management Plan articulates a clear vision for the 3.5km Swan River waterfront. The plan includes strategies for the delivery of a range of memorable, linked spaces and experiences. The project creates a destination that appeals to the full spectrum of the population.

WINNER Parks & Leisure Australia WA Awards of Excellence (2015)

► [Learn more about this project.](#)





04 WATER ON WATER

DELIVER TRUE INTERACTION WITH THE WATER

A connection to the water itself is the greatest asset of any waterfront site. Be it the rolling waves at the beach, a gently flowing river or an expansive harbour, the attraction of people to the water and the water's edge is universal.

To take true advantage of waterfront sites, we need to ensure water remains the centrepiece of the design and the focus of any programming and activity within the space. Yet in today's risk adverse environment, the opportunity to implement designs that allow people to get up close, touch and interact with the water's edge can sometimes present challenges that are difficult to overcome.

A clear trend is to look for opportunities to introduce, artificially, the element of water into the design, building in opportunities to touch and play with water and blurring the line between land and sea.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Water is the focus.** Build in as many opportunities to visually connect, touch and interact with water as possible, being sure to introduce the element of surprise, fun and play.
- **Blur the water's edge** through extending structures out over the water, cutting into the land to create inlets and creating a stepped edge that maximises the water interface.
- **Creating water-based play spaces** next to the water is a manageable way to deepen the experience of the waterfront as well as provide a centrepiece from which to leverage commercial opportunity.



Image source: Family New York, Courtesy of Friends of + POOL

EAST SHORES FORESHORE PARKLAND | GLADSTONE Urbis

The new \$42m foreshore parkland at the mouth of Gladstone's Auckland inlet transforms it from a simple parkland into a jewel in the city's crown. The water play park is a spectacular example of integrating children's play, sub-tropical landscape, exciting lighting concepts and waterslide entertainment.

WINNER QLD AILA Awards and PIA National Awards for Planning Excellence - Great Place Awards (2016)

► [Learn more about this project.](#)

+POOL | NEW YORK Family + Playlab

+Pool is an exciting example of how a city can create new opportunities to interact with our waterways. Providing both environmental and recreational benefits to the city, +Pool combines a kid's pool, sports pool, lap pool and lounge pool in what could be the largest ever crowd-funded civic project.



Image source: Getty

WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT | HONG KONG Cistri

The West Kowloon Cultural District is a vibrant cultural quarter in the heart of Hong Kong with a dramatic harbour-front location. Our advice helped create a commercially viable master plan - and develop one of the largest cultural quarters in the world, blending art, education and public space.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)

NORWEGIAN NATIONAL OPERA AND BALLETT | OSLO Snøhetta

Culture and place are the core principles of this public building. The intuitive and practical sculptural exterior transforms the building into an extension of the city with a sloping public forecourt cascading down to the river and an accessible roof providing spectacular vistas.



05 MAKE DESTINATIONS

CONCENTRATE ACTIVITY IN CONTAINED NODES

Our waterways have always been places full of activity, from the focus of industry to an essential mode of transport and now as major recreational destinations and stages for civic events. The activation of these waterfront spaces is a key factor in their success.

Concentrating activity in and around carefully located nodes rather than thinly spreading it along a continuous edge ensures the creation of usable, safe and inviting spaces 18 hours a day. This also allows these nodes to be developed as identifiable destinations - be it cultural markers, commercial centres, or entertainment hubs, each with a distinctive identity, role and function. As destinations they attract people and create the vitality that is essential for successful urban places.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Define clear nodes of activity, each with a clear function and distinctive offer.**
- **Avoid the approach of trying to 'activate' everything and spreading uses so thinly that no critical mass is ever formed.**
- **Include key gathering and performance spaces, facilities and attractors.**
- **Build momentum and awareness through temporary events and programming to encourage patterns of public and, where appropriate, commercial use. Start simply with low cost but high impact initiatives.**

06 DESIGN FOR CHANGE

EMBRACE THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Waterfronts are some of the earth's most dynamic places. From daily tidal cycles to storm surges and the long-term impacts of climate change, our waterfronts are always changing.

While managing the daily flux has been part of our design considerations for some time now, it is the incremental change that can be the most difficult to deal with.

However, design is a powerful tool to imagine creative solutions and offer incremental investment strategies that future-proof some of our most important amenity and community assets.

KEY FINDINGS

- Designs should utilise predictable daily and seasonal changes of flow and tide, looking for and celebrating uniqueness.
- Balance environmental considerations, engineering requirements and responsive design.
- Maximise opportunities for education and learning associated with the natural environment.
- Understand when defensive or adaptive design responses to changing sea levels are required and, importantly, when they are not.



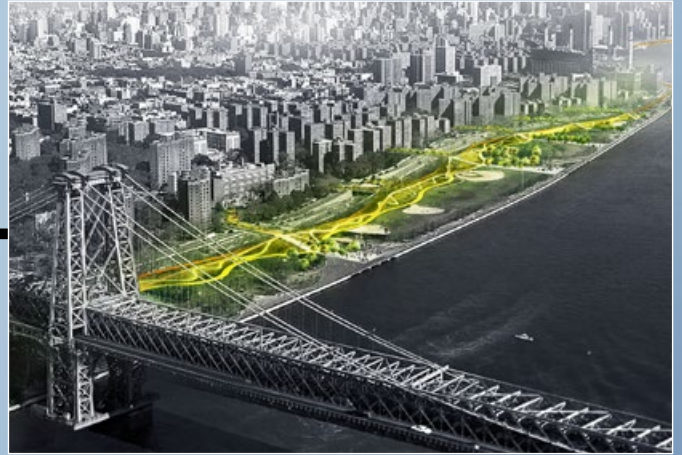


Image source: BIG-Bjarke Ingels Group

ROCKHAMPTON RIVERFRONT PRECINCT | ROCKHAMPTON Urbis

The Rockhampton Riverside Precinct is a world-class waterfront area. The design incorporates playground areas, river lookouts, shaded walkways and gathering spaces. It delivers an activated open space that links back to the CBD and responds to the flooding of the Fitzroy River.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)

THE BIG U | NEW YORK BIG U Team

An ambitious protective system around Manhattan, this design competition winner seeks to shield Manhattan against floods and stormwater through an elevated public realm. Three compartments provide a flood-protection zone, whilst also providing community amenity along the river.



07 CONNECT TO EVERYTHING

ANCHOR WATERFRONTS BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY

As most waterfronts are linear, activity tends to be focused on the water's edge. It can be a challenge to create paths, journeys and connections inland.

Boldly making clear linkages between the water's edge and other parts of the city serves to create a 'super grid' of connectivity. This can tie employment centres, cultural institutions and transport nodes to the amenity of the waterfront.

KEY FINDINGS

- Provide regular physical and visual perpendicular connections to the water's edge, linking the waterfront to inland neighbourhoods and destinations.
- Create dense development within a porous, funnel like, urban structure to provide high levels of connectivity.
- Supplement large 'urban scaled' connections with a fine mesh of intimate and 'discovered' connections.





Image source: Alamy Stock Photo

QUEEN'S WHARF | BRISBANE Urbis (with CUSP)

The renewal of Queen's Wharf Brisbane will relink the city back to what is arguably the most important heritage site on the Brisbane River. This project will transform a part of the riverfront that has been marginalised and disconnected from the city centre since the introduction of the Riverside Expressway in the 1970s.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)

AUCKLAND WATERFRONT | AUCKLAND Taylor Cullity Lethlean and Wraight & Associates

Formerly an industrial maritime site, this linear space has been transformed into a vibrant public space. Built upon original port elements, the site creates an inviting public realm that encourages city life to engage with operational waterfront industries. The upgrades link seamlessly into the surrounding fabric of Auckland City Centre as if they have always been part of the wider public realm network.



08 CONFLICT WORKS

ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO STOP, INTERACT AND ENJOY KEY NODES

The beauty and activity at our waterfront spaces attract people for many reasons. Be it active recreation, family picnics or major civic events, our waterfronts need to be flexible places that can accommodate both the every day and the extraordinary.

To achieve this flexibility, and ensure that no one group dominates the water's edge, designing in conflict, in the form of shared vehicular and pedestrian nodes. Weaving cyclist and pedestrian routes and intersecting gathering spaces can provide the important opportunities to pause, gather and engage with the waterfront.

KEY FINDINGS

- Conflict at key nodes encourages people to slow down and stop, explore, meet and interact.
- Developing an events overlay at public domain hot spots along waterfronts will ensure opportunities for spontaneous socialisation.
- Introducing shared zones for pedestrian and cyclists at primary activity nodes often provides a win-win situation.





Image source: Alamy Stock Photo

THE CONNECTION, RHODES | SYDNEY Urbis (with Crone Partners)

The City of Canada Bay's new community precinct, The Connection is an optimistic, playful, open space for all to enjoy. Situated on the shores of the Parramatta River, the design includes a large amphitheatre that intersects with a linear boardwalk. This overlap deliberately ensures people moving and lingering intersect, creating a diversity of user groups and opportunities for engagement.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)

TARANAKI WHARF WEST | WELLINGTON Athfield Architects Limited

This project is the last piece of the jigsaw of Wellington's waterfront public domain. The design elegantly resolves a range of complex uses and connections. The result is an interesting space with points of overlap and interest.





09 EASE OF ACCESS IS KEY

CONNECTIVITY, PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND CAR PARKING ARE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Many waterfront spaces, particularly those in the inner-city, are regionally significant places and the level of investment, amenity and facilities attract significant numbers of visitors at all times of the day.

Whilst the ultimate objective should always be to create sustainable places that rely on public and active transport infrastructure, the reality of most Australian cities is that the density of population and infrastructure networks is not sufficiently developed to support renewal without significant car parking, at least in the short term.

Ensuring these are carefully designed and located to be sleeved by activity or buried by landscape is essential. Ease of access is critical, but not at the expense of the quality of the experience once there.

KEY FINDINGS

- Easy access from day one is absolutely critical to success.
- A mixed strategy of public transport and significant car parking is typically the best balance early in the life of waterfront precincts. This can be adjusted to be more public transport dominant as density and land values dictate.
- Be sure to provide sufficient accessibility infrastructure, but allowing it to visually dominate defeats the overarching purpose of unlocking the amenity value of the waterfront.

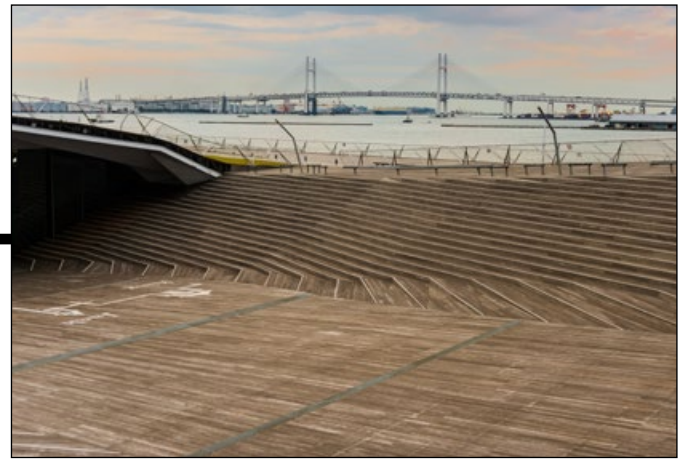


Image source: Getty

SUVA FORESHORE MASTER PLAN | FIJI Cistri (with Woods Bagot)

The master plan for Suva Foreshore centred around improving access to the waterfront itself. Hampered by built form that is perpendicular to the shoreline, the master plan creates a series of new connections and access routes to completely open up the waterfront and connect it seamlessly with the surrounding urban grid of Suva City Centre.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)

YOKOHAMA INTERNATIONAL PORT TERMINAL | YOKOHAMA Foreign Office Architects

This port terminal includes a significant transport interchange incorporating car parking, ticketing and connections to bus and rail. A series of folded surfaces sits on top of the terminal creating an architectural topography and dynamic public space.



Image source: Getty



ELIZABETH QUAY | PERTH **Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority**

This mixed use precinct will incorporate civic, residential, retail, commercial and cultural attractions set around a picturesque inlet that re-establishes Perth's historic link with the Swan River. The development occupies 10ha of prime riverfront at the base of the CBD and delivers a high-quality urban environment featuring promenades and boardwalks.

ISKANDAR MASTER PLAN | MALAYSIA **Cistri (with Kirk)**

Our master plan for the Iskandar waterfront in Johor Bahru strategically positions itself for outward growth from Singapore. The master plan leveraged the locational and lifestyle advantages of the region to promote growth, density and investment. Clear precincts and opportunities for highly programmed places are built on an outstanding waterfront.

► [Learn more about this project.](#)





10 HIGH PERFORMANCE PLACES

DENSITY AND ACTIVITY DRIVE WATERFRONT SUCCESS

The spaces and linkages associated with the water are obviously the key experience of waterfronts. However, they are often unable to reach their full potential as active places for people unless the density of residential development and intensity of commercial uses is sufficient to bring them to life.

For many years the idea of 'commercialising' waterfronts has been politically unpopular, perceived by some as diminishing the public nature of these spaces. This could not be further from the truth. Urban life, exchange, interaction, choice, and true public life are the result of development density.

Of course change is important too. A continual process of place management, tenant improvement and renewal is required to keep the 'mix' relevant and the public realm activated to the point that success is inevitable. Waterfronts must work hard and, in most instances, perform commercially to underpin their success.

KEY FINDINGS

- Development density and commercial activity are, in most cases, critical ingredients in creating vibrant, safe, interesting and engaging waterfronts.
- Like any successful place, management is required to ensure that every element is performing to its maximum potential.

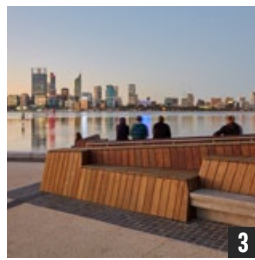
OUR WATERFRONT EXPERIENCE



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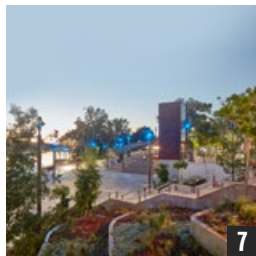
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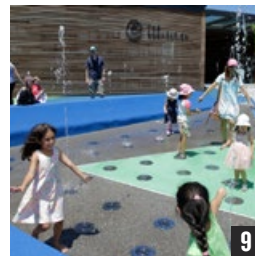
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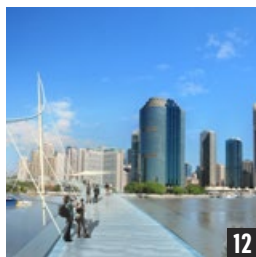
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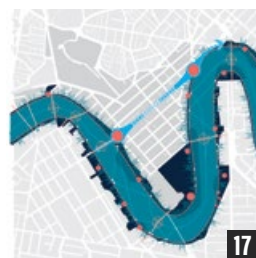
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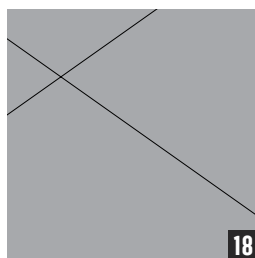
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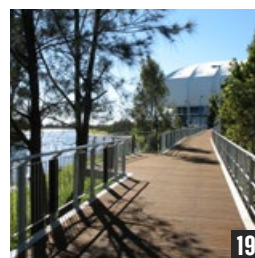
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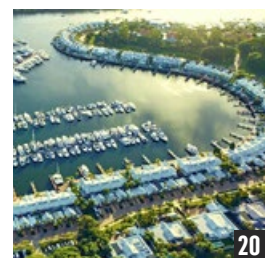
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- 1. **River's Edge Strategy** | Brisbane
- 2. **Howard Smith Wharves** | Brisbane
- 3. **South Perth Foreshore** | Perth
- 4. **East Shores Master Plan and Foreshore Parkland** | Gladstone
- 5. **Lusail Waterfront City** | Qatar

- 6. **Cultural Precinct Master Plan** | Brisbane
- 7. **Rockhampton Riverside Precinct** | Rockhampton
- 8. **Queen's Wharf** | Brisbane
- 9. **The Connection, Rhodes** | Sydney
- 10. **Suva Foreshore Master Plan** | Fiji

- 11. **Iskandar Master Plan** | Singapore
- 12. **Kangaroo Point Bridge Concept Design & South Renewal Strategy** | Brisbane
- 13. **Oceanside Town Centre Master Plan** | Kawana
- 14. **DaNang Central Square** | Vietnam
- 15. **Southport Broadwater Master Plan** | Gold Coast

- 16. **Ipswich City Centre Master Plan** | Ipswich
- 17. **Brisbane City Centre Master Plan** | Brisbane
- 18. **Townsville City Centre Master Plan** | Townsville
- 19. **Robina Boardwalk** | Gold Coast
- 20. **Sanctuary Cove** | Gold Coast



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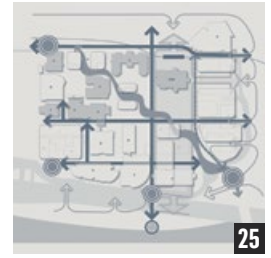
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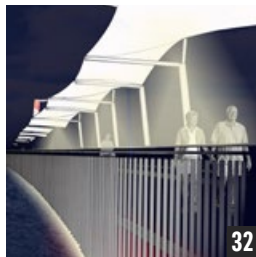
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21. **The Bays Market Ultimo** | Sydney

22. **Jeddah** | Saudi Arabia

23. **Port Douglas Waterfront Master Plan** | Port Douglas

24. **Kuendu Beach** | Noumea

25. **QUT 2033 Master Plan** | Brisbane

26. **Al Maryah Central** | Abu Dhabi

27. **Kawana Landscape and Public Space Strategy** | Sunshine Coast

28. **Mooloolaba Wharf** | Sunshine Coast

29. **Kurilpa Bridge Urban Design Guidance** | Brisbane

30. **Thuringowa Riverway Campbell's Stores** | Sydney

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33. **Darwin waterfront masterplan** | Darwin

34. **Dubai Maritime City** | UAE

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37. **Jupiters Casino Landscape and Public Realm Concepts** | Gold Coast

38. **Koombana North, Bunbury** | Perth

39. **What If, Langley Park** | Perth

40. **Cockburn Coast Public Realm Design Guidelines** | Cockburn

WHY URBIS & CISTRI?

With our expertise in everything to do with cities and how people want to use them, Urbis and Cistri are perfectly placed to help our clients shape vibrant, activated waterfront destinations. Working across the areas of planning, design, policy, heritage, valuations, transactions, economics and research, our expert teams connect their clients to a better outcome, every time. This multidisciplinary approach is well-adapted to the multiple layers of waterfront developments.

Fully understand what your site can achieve with the help of our social planners, economists, property professionals, geographers and researchers. We can help you connect with the community, read and reach your customers, create value and stay ahead of your competitors. Creating better waterfront precincts for the future, also requires looking at and learning from the past. This is where our heritage consultants come in, with advice on conservation of buildings and artefacts of historical value that may impact your site.

We'd love to talk to you about maximising your waterfront development.

To speak to one of our team, visit urbis.com.au/people or contact us on info@urbis.com.au and we'll put you in touch with the right people.







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**URBAN WATERFRONTS
AROUND THE WORLD ARE
BEING REIMAGINED AS HIGHLY
PUBLIC, POROUS PLACES
THAT DEFINE, INSPIRE AND
ENGAGE. THEY OFFER A
WHOLE NEW TYPE OF
AMENITY-LED DESTINATION.**

James Tuma
National Design Director, Urbis



