



## Where to now for the great Australian dream?

By Megan Hanney, Senior Strategist, Hoyne

*The world has evolved profoundly in the past few decades, so too have our lives and living arrangements. The ‘great Australian dream’ has moved into a new reality. What was once the quarter-acre block is now a block of units; the big backyard a shared playground. Has the dream really come to an end or has it merely morphed to reflect – and meet – today’s radically altered social and economic landscape?*



### DEFINING THE DREAM

The ‘great Australian dream’ has its origins in the reconstruction period post-World War II and continued to flourish during the 1950s and 1960s, thanks to the rise in Australian manufacturing, low unemployment rates and the removal of rent controls. The 1950s, in particular, was an era dominated by full employment, a good standard of living, family-focused values and the latest labour-saving appliances – boom economic conditions that paved the way for the continued growth of the Australian economy, plus an ambitious new migration program that included incentives for non-British settlers to migrate to Australia. Post-war refugees from Greece, Italy, Poland, Germany and the Netherlands also established significant communities with a preference for having their own home; an opportunity that was unavailable in Britain or Europe<sup>1</sup>. As a result, the detached, single-storey houses created cities that were extremely low-density and occupied large amounts of land.

Set in the sprawling suburbs, the dream is ingrained in Australia’s vernacular. Its legendary fame is coupled with fondness, partly due to seminal Australian screen depictions such as in television programs *Neighbours*, *Kath and Kim* and *Home and Away*, and films like *The Castle*. Although the addresses may be different, the scene inevitably remains the same: a brick home on a suburban Australian street with plenty of room to roam, colourful characters and a tight-knit neighbourhood.

Essentially, it embodied the idea that home ownership could lead to a better life for you and your family by adding financial security, as well as being a symbol of growth and prosperity for individuals, families and the nation as a whole.

Aside from the physical, the benefits to ‘living the dream’ are many. In 2004, the Productivity Commission drew numerous conclusions about the benefits for Australia and Australians through economic and social capital, revealing the stability that housing provides contributes to social connections, community, and control of one’s living

environment, along with educational, productivity and health benefits for the broader community.

### UNREAL ESTATE

A lot has happened since the 2004 Productivity Commission report into home ownership. At the time I was still at university, hadn’t travelled overseas as an adult, and the only city I’d lived in was Toowoomba, Queensland. My phone was a Nokia 3315, Facebook had just launched, the median Sydney house cost \$505,000<sup>2</sup>, and the average wage was \$50,0133.

By the March quarter of 2018, Sydney’s median house price sat at \$1,150,357, and the average wage was \$81,947 per annum. In fact, the city holds the (undesired) title for the world’s most unaffordable housing, second only to Hong Kong<sup>3</sup>, which means that for the vast majority of Australians, the dream remains exactly that. Wealth is making the great divide greater, and nowhere is this more evident than where and how we can afford to live.

With property prices rising faster than

our wages, the dream is dwindling as home ownership is in decline. Mortgage Choice and CoreData’s ‘Evolving Great Australian Dream’ study found that 63.2 per cent of Australians said, “Only people with a lot of money can hope to achieve the Australian dream<sup>5</sup>.”

### THE URBANISATION EFFECT

I’m a statistic. Growing up on a farm in north west NSW, I have witnessed the decline of regional centres, experienced the lack of job opportunities, the difference in lifestyle, and the social connection that being among a variety of people can provide. I couldn’t wait to move to a big city.

People like me are one of the reasons our cities are growing, fast. In 2000, then-NSW Premier Bob Carr famously said Sydney was “full”. As it turns out, he was wrong. There is still room to grow: it just happens to be upwards, not out.

Once a city of quarter-acre blocks and suburbs, today’s high-rise apartment living is booming. In Sydney’s urban area, 30 per cent of all households now live in apartments<sup>6</sup>.

*“Another reason the dream is on the downward is our collective desire to spend less time commuting. Sydneysiders currently spend more time and money getting ‘there and back’ than any other city in Australia.”*

No longer the domain of singles and couples, the family flat is becoming much more ubiquitous, particularly in suburbs such as Sydney’s ever-rising Parramatta. Over in St Leonards, seven kilometres from the Sydney CBD, Mayor Deborah Hutchens is trying to rezone the suburb to build up apartment living – “an opportunity which has been coming for quite a long time”<sup>7</sup>.

The increasing number of new Australians has also helped to shape our skyward living arrangements. The 2016 Census revealed almost four out of 10 Sydneysiders were born overseas, a total of 1.78 million, making it the highest proportion of Australia’s capital cities<sup>8</sup>. The rise in immigration has also brought demand for the ways people are used to living. With many having little to no expectation of residing in a sprawling suburban home, there’s an ever-increasing popularity for apartments in blocks of four or more storeys, as confirmed by the census.

In 1996, nearly one in five (18 per cent) of all Australia’s occupied apartments had this structural characteristic.

By 2016 this had more than doubled to 38 per cent of all occupied apartments (or 463,557 in number) within four or more storey blocks<sup>9</sup>.

Another reason the dream is on the decline is our collective desire to spend less time commuting. Sydneysiders currently spend more time and money getting ‘there and back’ than any other city in Australia, averaging 5.5 hours travelling to and from work per week<sup>10</sup>. All this extra commuter congestion means time spent away from our families and friends, preventing us from having a conversation, a social connection, exercising, or working on our health. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. The City of Sydney, the Greater Sydney Commission, the state of NSW and numerous other public and private partners are now working towards a “30 Minute City” by 2056 (see Lucy Turnbull’s essay in Chapter One); spreading urbanisation even further afield to provide residents with more of what they want, and need, to enjoy a greater work-life balance.

### **BLURRING THE LINES**

As our urban populations grow, our CBDs are following suit. Key contributing factors include the hubs developed around our railway network in Australia’s major cities during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Often connecting before the CBD, they’ve led to the creation of near-CBD ‘suburban hubs’.

These hubs are blurring the lines between suburb and CBD, with many making logical places to take on the overspill of CBD services. As they shift to the suburban hubs, the flow-on effect is the establishment of a greater ecosystem of services, retail, food, beverage and events. As a result, these burgeoning ‘suburbs’ are starting to look a lot like metropolitan environments due to the increase in population, accessibility to available land, and slightly greater affordability.

The Greater Sydney Commission, established to spearhead planning and development issues, says Sydney will need approximately 725,000 additional homes over the next 20 years to accommodate

a growing and ageing population. They’re also working through a plan to create a polycentric city – a metropolis of three major hubs into one: Harbour City, Parramatta, and the future aerotropolis at Badgery’s Creek. The spread of these hubs over 12,000 square kilometres means even more of these ‘commuter hubs’ will develop and change the landscape dramatically. As urbanisation encroaches on our suburbs, the ‘great Australian dream’ could be reduced to a cluster for the (very) well-to-do few.

### **STRIDING INTO THE FUTURE**

Another major influence on the suburban lay of the land is walkability. While the benefits of improved mental and physical wellbeing are well-known, walkable places have proven more attractive than their car-reliant rivals, generating community interaction, promoting healthier living, and financial and environmental advantages in the process. US international land-use expert Professor Christopher Leinberger’s 2016

**“Now we’ve  
moved into  
denser urban  
forms in our  
neighbourhoods  
nationally, the  
backyard is  
now in the  
public domain.”**

*Simone Dyer  
Fraser's Property Australia*

# The new expectations redefining the Australian suburb:

report, *Foot Traffic Ahead*, revealed that “for perhaps the first time in 60 years, walkable urban places in all of 30 of the USA’s largest metros are gaining share market over their drivable suburban competition – and showing substantially higher rental premiums”<sup>11</sup>.

Since then, walkability has picked up pace globally and locally. “The emerging equity issue Sydney needs to address is people’s proximity to walkable places,” says Mike Day, co-founder of urban-planners, RobertsDay. “By giving priority to walkable places as the new missing middle of Sydney’s density, the added value of improved health, happiness and productivity means everyone benefits.”<sup>12</sup> With 63 per cent of Australians over 18 years of age overweight or obese<sup>13</sup>, the role walkability plays in helping realise a happier, healthier nation can’t be underestimated.

Millennials are adding to its popularity, albeit inadvertently, with more and more young Australians turning away from car ownership. For the first time in history, young adults are less likely to get

a car licence than their parents, here and overseas<sup>14</sup>. Research into why is ongoing, however, stricter learner permits/licences and the suggestion the car has become less a ‘symbol of status and pride, and more a symbol of adult responsibility – a responsibility that not everyone is ready for’<sup>15</sup> are two contributing factors.

On a personal note, I haven’t owned a car in over 10 years, but that’s thanks to the close connectivity inner-city living in Sydney and Brisbane and many other cities provide.

At Hoyne, increasing the walkability of a place is very important, not just in terms of health, but also when it comes to encouraging the ‘bump into each other’ effect, thus creating a more connected community. Arkadia, a project by Defence Housing Australia (DHA), is located in the historically industrial suburb of Alexandria and features beautiful architecture by DKO. It manages to honour the area’s industrial past while also offering inspiration when it comes to the future of DHA. This project is notable on many levels.



*Proximity to transport.*



*Proximity to education and jobs.*



*Convenience.*



*Lifestyle and diversity of experiences.*



*Housing choice and affordability.*



*Low maintenance.*



*Sustainability.*



*Variety of outdoor amenity.*



*Walkable communities, including neighbourhood proximity, wider footpaths, less need for cars.*

It employs superior sustainability measures but it also has a very community-oriented nature of amenity on-site. The goal was to unite the combined community of defence personnel and civilian residents to create one cohesive community. Early on there were fears private purchasers might veer away from such a mix. However, by investing in a rooftop veggie garden, shared BBQ and dining pods, curved walkways and integrated greenery throughout, Arkadia presents an undeniably welcoming and inviting scenario. Cleverly, the design also blends with nearby Sydney Park. All these simple investments add up to an authentic and united community.

Ultimately, the above means reduction of the suburban sprawl, and the quarter-acre blocks that comprise it.

## EVOLUTION IS ALL

“The ‘great Australian dream’ used to be a paradigm about the quarter-acre block. I think that it has evolved

a lot in the last 20 years. Now that we’ve moved into denser urban forms in our neighbourhoods nationally, the backyard is in the public domain. And so, it’s a lot more social and a lot healthier, and it creates more vibrant and connected communities.” – Simone Dyer, Design Director, Frasers Property Australia.

At Hoyne, one of the things we inspire our clients to do is to think about the experience first, then design outwards using human insight.

*“Essentially, it embodied the idea that home ownership could lead to a better life for you and your family.”*



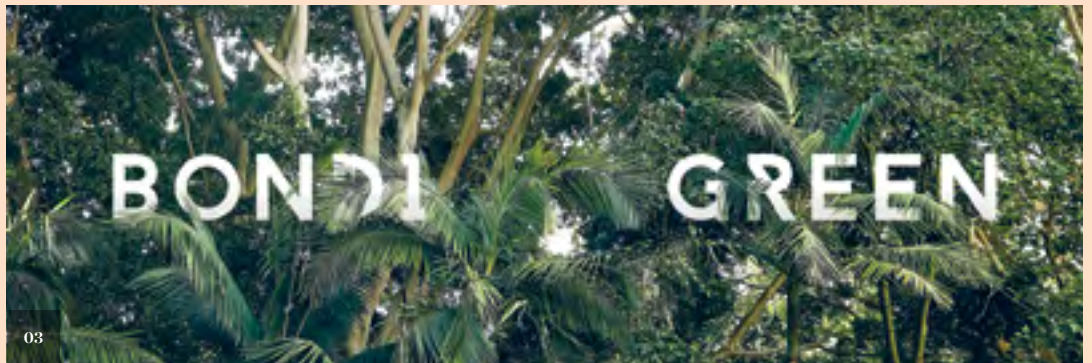
01



02



04



03

We follow a process of empathy-mapping, identifying key personas who engage with the place. We dive into their mindset and spend a lot of time on the streets surrounding the projects we're working on. By considering the many ways people experience somewhere, we gain a 360-degree perspective, while recognising our collective responsibility to design a magnet or series of 'anchors' that will elevate both resident and visitor experiences every day.

It's all part of the evolution of the 'great Australian dream'. By identifying what is and what is not in place, and getting to the heart of human wants and needs, we're helping to bring this new dream to life – in whatever form that may take.

Individuality and community, sustainability and technology, today's world is vastly different from 'back in the day'. And while there's no such thing as the ideal address, Place Visioning™ and placemaking can realise greater living and experiences for the greater good – on all sides of the proverbial fence.

**THE REALITY IS...**

It may be a very long time before I can buy my own piece of the (diminishing) dream in Sydney. I'm also a great example of the changing expectations of what our evolving suburbs provide. I rent so I can have a short commute, live in a nice suburb with a great outlook, and have access to great places to eat and socialise. With all this at my doorstep, perhaps I'm already living the new 'great Australian dream'. All that's missing is the mortgage. — ●

- 1 <https://ab.co/2v6j7AQ>
- 2 <https://bit.ly/2PXSp3F>
- 3 <https://bit.ly/2yCeOgn>
- 4 <https://bit.ly/2D6krra>
- 5 <https://bit.ly/2CI4FBT>
- 6 <https://bit.ly/2OS3mre>
- 7 <https://bit.ly/2yDt3S9>
- 8 <https://bit.ly/2SkLVxF>
- 9 <https://bit.ly/2uqbSRP>
- 10 <https://bit.ly/2AskL0C>
- 11 <https://bit.ly/2ELt5wU>
- 12 <https://bit.ly/2ELt5wU>
- 13 <https://bit.ly/2Smv6SG>
- 14 <https://bit.ly/2PX46Ib>
- 15 <https://bit.ly/2PX46Ib>



05



07



06

**01** DEVELOPED BY MIRVAC, DESIGNED BY SMART DESIGN STUDIO, THE MORETON BONDI.

**02** ALL BUT FOUR OF THE 190 APARTMENTS AND TERRACES SOLD ON THE LAUNCH WEEKEND.

**03** FOR THE BRANDING AND MARKETING OF THE MORETON, HOYNE CAPITALISED ON THE PROJECT'S LUSH SURROUNDINGS.

**04** PET FRIENDLY AND SURROUNDED BY GREENERY, THIS DEVELOPMENT APPEALED TO DOWNSIZERS AND YOUNG FAMILIES ALIKE.

**05** WHEN CREATING THE NAMING, BRANDING AND MARKETING FOR GARDEN HOUSE, HOYNE UNDERSTOOD THE PROJECT'S PROXIMITY TO WATERLOO PARK AND ITS UNIQUE COMMUNAL GARDENS WERE KEY SELLING POINTS.

**06** GARDEN HOUSE SOLD OUT WITHIN SIX WEEKS AND ACHIEVED A PRICE-PER-SQUARE-METRE RECORD FOR THE SUBURB.

**07** ICON, THE DEVELOPERS OF GARDEN HOUSE IN SYDNEY'S WATERLOO, WORKED CLOSELY WITH INTERIOR DESIGNERS HECKER GUTHRIE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, MYLES BALDWIN DESIGN, TO CREATE SOMETHING UNIQUE.

***Liked the article? You need this book.***

*The Place Economy Volume 2 is a resource book that discusses best-practice placemaking from around the world. Discover how smarter placemaking can lead to greater financial returns and happier, healthier communities.*

*100% not for profit, all proceeds from The Place Economy Volume 2 go to help Habitat for Humanity, providing appropriate housing solutions in sustainable communities.*

All images by Hoyne.

Every effort has been made to locate the owners of copyright and to ensure that the credit information supplied is accurately listed. Errors and/or omissions are inadvertent and will be corrected in future printings.

AN EXTRACT FROM THE PLACE  
ECONOMY BY HOYNE  
[WWW.THEPLACEECONOMY.COM](http://WWW.THEPLACEECONOMY.COM)