

Streetscape

Streetscape is the term given to the collective appearance of all buildings, footpaths, gardens and landscaping along a street. We have tended to think of streets primarily as roadways for traffic rather than places where walking is pleasant and kids can play – but this is changing. The streetscape is the visual identity of a neighbourhood and plays an important role in facilitating interaction between residents and creating a community.

Houses can be diverse in age, shape or style yet combine to create a community identity. At the same time, a development that is not sympathetic to the existing streetscape can significantly detract from the character of the neighbourhood.

Well designed streetscapes encourage connection, understanding and community spirit among residents.

By taking emphasis away from cars and putting it firmly on pedestrian movement, a process of 'traffic calming' can make a street a place for people rather than just a transport corridor.

Community, streetscape and planning

When designing a new home or renovation there are a number of ways to contribute to an improved community identity and sense of place:

- Understand the character of your local area, and design your home or renovation accordingly. Your home should look like it belongs in the neighbourhood. Use characteristic attributes (e.g. building height, street setback, form, materials and construction details) to compose your innovative design solutions.
- Face houses towards streets, parks and open spaces to allow improved surveillance and access. This encourages better use of public space, promoting safety and community spirit. The orientation of the house should still account for solar access considerations and compromises may be necessary, particularly on west facing blocks.
- Limit the width of driveways and share them where possible. This allows more of the street frontage to

be landscaped and provides a better environment for pedestrians.

- Present the house rather than the garage to the street. Generally, set garages and carports beyond the house frontage to minimise their visual impact. Where possible, use secondary streets or rear lanes for car access. This allows more landscaping at the street frontage and establishes a direct visual connection between the house and the street for security.
- Plant trees to enhance the quality of the street. Good tree cover increases property values and provides improved shade, habitat, windbreaks, air quality and appearance.
- Avoid high walls and hedges on the front boundary as they isolate the home from the neighbourhood. They create a perception of isolation and impede observation of the street.
- Accommodate your neighbour's field of view. Use appropriate building setbacks and building height to retain your neighbour's view while maximising your own.



Credit: Paul Downton

Look for signs that a street is pedestrian-friendly.

What to look for in a street

Streets should be part of our living space and a common area for the community, equal to the park and the footpath. The road itself is more than a racetrack. A good street is one in which you can chat with your neighbour without having to shout over traffic noise, or worry

about your safety and that of small children. Effective traffic control measures can make the difference between a street that merely looks attractive to one that is genuinely pedestrian-friendly.

The following features make streets more livable – safer, cleaner and more attractive:

- unique houses that still fit together in a consistent pattern so that no single house is dominant
- fairly consistent alignment of house frontages
- regularly spaced tree planting on both sides of the street to give it identity
- well-lit streets in urban areas
- active street frontages, particularly in urban areas – shops and businesses that are open and trading
- private garden landscapes that complement the street planting
- streets that give pedestrians and cyclists priority and are designed to discourage speeding
- streets in which the width of the carriageway relates to traffic volume and is not wider than necessary
- garages that don't dominate the street frontage
- driveway crossovers of minimum width
- fences and walls of an alignment, height and style consistent with others in the street
- pavements that are porous or modular where possible to encourage stormwater infiltration
- clear sight lines between house entrances and the street, providing visual surveillance of the street to maximise neighbourhood safety
- underground services, to remove unsightly power lines and not impede street tree growth
- solar street lights, which indicate local council commitment to sustainable infrastructure.

Streetscape's value

Attractive and functional streetscapes increase residents' quality of life and their property values.

Understanding the value of streetscape means thinking outside the block.

The streetscape should encourage community interaction and exchange. People who feel isolated from society are more likely to behave in a manner detrimental to the needs of the community. The idea of community is not just about a feel-good factor. During the next few years the value of community will be reflected in industry rating tools. This will provide another measure to help home buyers make choices about where they live.

An effective streetscape should convey a sense of openness and sharing while offering a degree of privacy.

Elements like trees and footpaths encourage pedestrian activity, which reinforces social interaction and provides casual surveillance of the street.

A streetscape that looks inviting is more likely to encourage people to live there, increasing demand and property prices.

The same principles apply whether you look at a conventional street with buildings lined up along a road, or clustered housing where homes are arranged around a central space. Streets do much to define a neighbourhood and a well-designed street can create a 'pocket neighbourhood'.

Good streetscape design

Creating a sympathetic building design and additions to fit in with the streetscape does not mean that neighbouring house designs must be imitated. It implies being conscious of the area's natural environment, heritage significance, density, style and social and cultural mix.

Good house design allows individuality without detracting from the character of the street or the amenity of neighbours.

Creating a good streetscape has less to do with individual building designs than how the different buildings relate to each other.

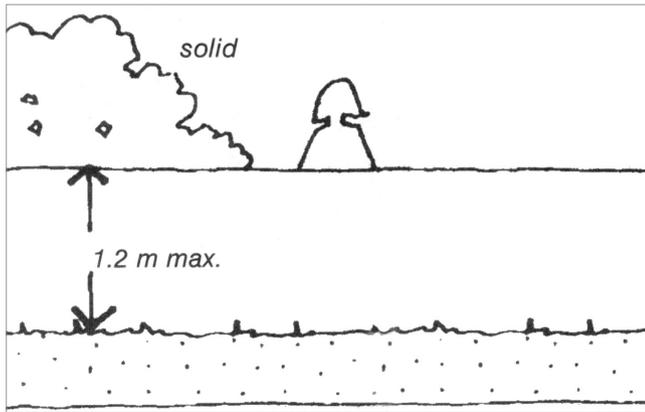
Visit your local council for guidelines specific to your area. Council planners understand the features that give a precinct its individual character and are trained to help you find solutions that meet your needs without destroying that character.

Solutions include:

- complementary materials and colours
- roof pitch to maintain consistency with the neighbouring houses
- bulk, form and height sympathetic to the character of the street
- passive visual surveillance to discourage crime – provide outlook over the street and public space from at least one room other than a bathroom or bedroom
- consistent street fencing, which does not isolate the house from the street – balance privacy requirements with the need for a visual connection with the street in new fences and walls

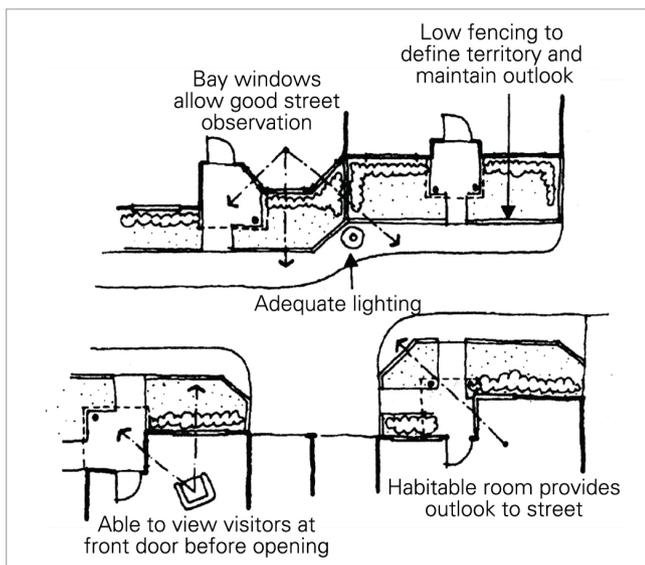
Appendices

Streetscape



Fences should not be so tall that they isolate a house from the street.

- low walls to integrate mail boxes and shield bins and recycling facilities from the street
- landscaping to enhance the quality of the streetscape; use plants to screen or direct views, provide shade, clean the air and give visual identity to a street
- garden planting which considers the rhythm and proportion of existing street planting (intervals between trees, height and spread); plant fewer big trees rather than many small trees
- planting species that won't damage footpaths, structures or drainage or invade adjacent bushland
- planting native species which require less water and provide a habitat for native animals. Many local councils and natural resources/catchment boards provide lists of local indigenous plant species. (see the appendix *Landscaping and garden design*)



Low fences, screening planting and well-placed windows allow casual surveillance of the street from inside.

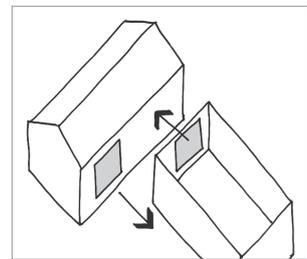
Places to avoid include:

- isolated, physically segregated residential developments or 'gated communities' that use a 'fortress' approach to neighbourhood design
- areas that have poor pedestrian visibility such as pedestrian underpasses that reduce opportunities for natural surveillance and footpaths lined by dense vegetation or high walls
- streets with blank walls and fences, car parks and service areas that separate the fronts of buildings from the street, and excessively wide garage doors fronting streets
- neighbourhoods cut across by heavily trafficked roads.

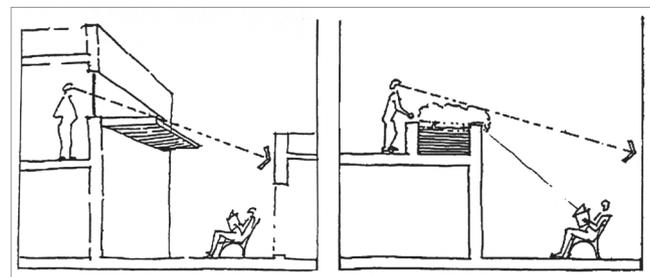
Be a good neighbour

The many ways to be a good neighbour include:

- offsetting windows to ensure maximum privacy
- using landscaping and other devices to selectively screen views
- protecting acoustic privacy by careful siting and internal planning — locate bedrooms and private open space away from noise sources such as service equipment, busy roads, driveways or active recreational areas
- avoiding directly overlooking your neighbour's main living areas or garden space by careful location and design of windows and balconies.
- not building in a way that significantly overshadows the main living areas or garden space of neighbours
- not locating noisy areas (e.g. pools, driveways, and service equipment) near the bedrooms or living areas of neighbours; locating driveways and parking areas at least 3m from bedroom windows
- protecting as much as possible any significant views enjoyed by neighbouring properties.



Offset windows to ensure maximum privacy.



Don't overlook your neighbour's living and relaxation areas.

► Pocket neighbourhoods

Pocket neighbourhoods are groups of around a dozen households that provide a sense of place and territory. They can form the building blocks of much larger neighbourhoods. Instead of standing alone, a larger, shared backyard becomes part of a home domain that includes friends and neighbours.

Shared outdoor space is a key element of a pocket neighbourhood. Neither private, like a backyard, nor public like a busy street, shared outdoor space becomes a space that eases the transition between the private and public realms. This can make interaction with neighbours easier and facilitate the formation of friendships.

Pocket neighbourhoods accommodate cars but have a core area where individual homes face onto a shared, car-free space where people can sit and chat and children can play — opportunities not available in conventional subdivisions.

Streets can be transformed into pocket neighbourhoods, or designed as community-friendly places from the outset.

This kind of development is rare in Australia, but recalls the ambience of old villages. They can be rural or urban. One urban example is Christie Walk in Adelaide, where shared outdoor space and the resulting pedestrian streetscape help redefine the nature of inner-city living.

References and additional reading

Contact your state, territory or local government for further information on streetscapes: www.gov.au

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