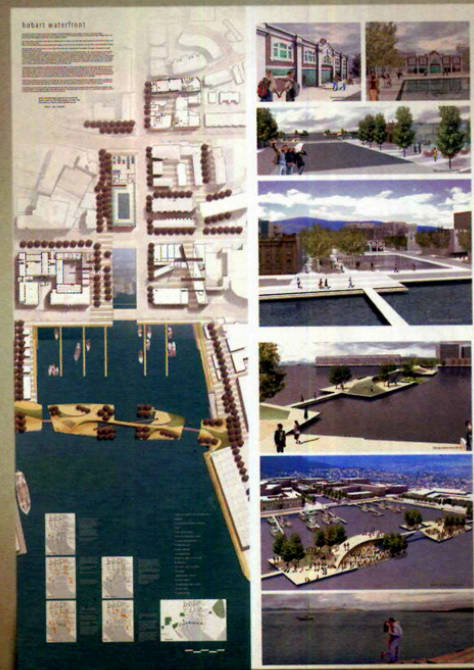
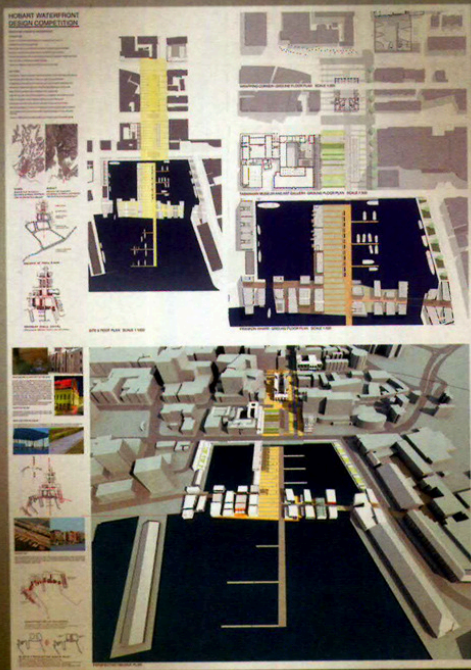


One of the competition's three equal winners was Tony Caro Architecture, Sydney, with an art theme.

Hobart, Scandinavian-style was the approach taken by winner Jeppe Aagaard Andersen of Denmark.

Local winner, Hobart's Preston Lane Architects with James Whitten Architect, focused on courtyards.



Hobart held an international design competition and all the world came. Not bad for a project that may never come to pass

— STORY BY **NATASHA CICA**
— MAIN PHOTOGRAPH BY **ANDREW QUILTY**

AS AUSTRALIA'S smallest and most southerly state capital, the remote port city of Hobart has long had a schizophrenic attitude towards the wider world. It wants to be friendly and open to that world, but also expects to stay protected from its harsher realities. Hobart's cosmopolitan 'yes' can really mean a parochial 'no'. That mix gets even trickier when you throw in globalisation, which has hit Hobart relatively late, but with force. In the past few years, it has delivered a dramatic and locally unprecedented real estate boom, driven by capital from offshore speculators and sea changers. A Hobart property is a cool jewel in the crown of investors from Sydney to Shanghai and further afield.

The coolest jewels of all adorn Hobart's unique mixed-business harbour edge, which sits under moody Mount Wellington and opens to the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, then to the sea. The waterfront, the focus of an international design competition, boasts elegant Georgian warehouses, Parliament House, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and the University of Tasmania's art school. The mix includes old port storage sheds and a handful of cruel carbuncles, pre-eminently, the blond brick mass of the Hotel Grand Chancellor, a 1980s folly from the days of Liberal premier Robin Gray.

There are exhibition spaces, commercial galleries, seal sculptures, seagulls and abundant car parking. The docks host a motley collection of fishing punts, pleasure craft, super-sized cruise liners, Antarctic research vessels and, famously each summer, Rolex Sydney Hobart yachts and an international wooden boat festival. A boat chandler sits cheek-by-jowl with boutique accommodation, and fancy eateries are a stone's throw from pubs, clubs, Salamanca Market and a 'greasy spoon' selling old-fashioned Tassie scallop pies.

A push is under way to capitalise on the potential of this special urban site, which some consider to be of world heritage status. As might be expected, local passions on this matter run high and can oscillate wildly. Steering a progressive path through these waters is the task of a quango reporting directly to Tasmania's Labor Premier, Paul Lennon.

The Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority was established in 2005 to look after the planning needs of the waterfront – a responsibility that was controversially stripped from Hobart City Council – including development of government-owned land. That's an intensely political role for the authority. Rumours of government deals with companies such as property developer Walker Corporation, timber giant Gunns, and the Packer gambling and media dynasty, regularly do the rounds of this town, which some disgruntled local businessmen have started calling Tazmanistan.

If any of that fazes Waterfront Authority chief executive Jeff Gilmore, he doesn't show it. In his airy office in a prime harbour-side position, Gilmore delivers a confident account of his organisation's brief. "In the past, a developer would decide to do something, then apply to do it, and council would

on the waterfront



“Measure is something that architects must know very well. You must make projects. But you don’t always need to make The Project.”

See what they want to do to our waterfront... Above: A panoramic view of the existing Hobart foreshore. Below: The rich creative cream the competition attracted included this offering from Lindle_Lindle Architecture & Landscape in

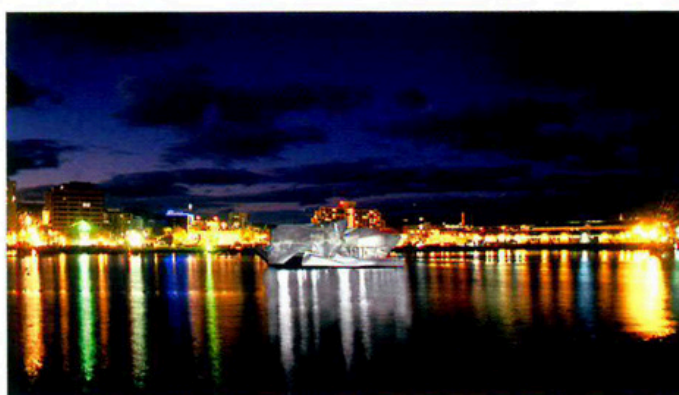
react. What we’re hoping to do by contrast is be strategically proactive. The Hobart community loves what it’s got here, and is very protective of its place. That sensitivity has been reflected in the way we’ve done public consultations – an open way that people in Hobart were not used to. This is the first time the Hobart community has been given the opportunity to say what it wants and needs. And we’ve wanted that vision to emerge rather than being imposed.”

The Waterfront Authority recently took the unexpected step of running an international design competition. From July 2006, ideas were invited for developing a narrow slice of the waterfront that traditional, grid-think planners call the City Hall axis. This includes key heritage sites as well as challenges involving pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Although no commission was promised to the winners, the competition attracted 280 entries from architects and planning professionals in 51 countries – a high number for an Australian event, although the bigger global practices were underrepresented.

A top jury was appointed, chaired by Western Australia’s government architect, Geoffrey London. Australian landscape architect Catherin Bull of the University of Melbourne – a Harvard graduate whose research interests include planning and design for open space in the 21st-century city – also participated. There were also two international jurors: Dutchman Wiel Arets of Wiel Arets Architects, whose sleek projects include Green Square in Sydney, and Carme Pinós of Barcelona’s Estudio Carme Pinós, in hot demand from clients wanting a more fluid, Latin style. All flew into Hobart in January to spend five days culling and judging the entries.

Three equal winners shared the \$150,000 competition prize monies. The Danish landscape architect Jeppe Aagaard Andersen, currently working on the public domain component of Sydney University’s major Campus 2010 development, and the son of the late modernist artist Gunnar Aagaard Andersen, offered a stylised Scandinavian reversal of existing land and water. Aagaard Andersen introduced a chain of harbour islands as public park, turned a central car park on the 1804 site of the first European landing into a reflective pond, and transformed City Hall into a mix of aquarium and public baths. His project team included architecture students from the University of Western Australia, where Aagaard Andersen funds a scholarship bringing interns to work in Denmark.

Another winner was Sydney’s Tony Caro Architecture, run by a protégé of Harry Seidler, whose entry featured a new art gallery wing, a sculpture court and a commercialised 24-hour pedestrian pleasure ‘spine’ stretching across the water. Last, but not least, came emerging Hobart-Melbourne practice



Preston Lane – so young they don’t all carry business cards but do use Skype – which utilised existing spatial types, such as courtyards, that have a proven track record in Hobart’s difficult micro-climates.

A selection of competition entries was exhibited in February in Hobart under the deliberately provocative banner headline ‘*See what they want to do to our waterfront*’. This attracted more than 20,000 visitors. Displayed entries featured giant kelp forest motifs, Japanese digitalised palm trees, a freakish fake iceberg, a dockside ice-skating rink, and Soviet-style towers that made the Grand Chancellor look attractive.

Letters to the editor of Hobart’s *Mercury* newspaper and entries on the Waterfront Authority’s blog ranged from the vituperative (‘awful pomposity’; ‘architects hiding vapid and irrelevant musings behind the veil of post-modernist jargon’; ‘relentlessly middlebrow’; ‘hopefully the people of Hobart will not be hoodwinked’; and ‘the competition owes all of its entrants a profound apology’) to the more constructive: ‘Please don’t build any more residential blocks and keep the space open for the public. We don’t need any more shops,’ blogged Margaret H.

THE PURPOSE of the competition was not to throw up any one grand scheme nor commit to buildings on particular sites, but rather to carry out a kind of research project skimming some rich creative cream. As juror Arets observed, “Sometimes you can learn more about what to do from seeing what is wrong.” The total competition cost of \$635,000 was great value in terms of forward planning for Hobart, according to Gilmore, not least because the creative mind tends to overinvest in this kind of exercise.

“On average, each team probably spent around 400 working hours on its entry,” confirms one participant. “At a conservative fee of \$100 per hour, that adds up to \$40,000. Multiply that by 280 and you get \$11.2 million, which is a

huge amount of resources directed at something that’s never going to happen.”

So what will happen? Coming months could see amendment of the waterfront’s urban design framework, released by the Tasmanian government in 2004, or to the planning scheme prepared in 1998 by Hobart City Council. The Waterfront Authority might also create a development plan for key waterfront sites. Premier Lennon wants change at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, having allocated \$30 million in the last state budget for redevelopment to create a precinct ‘that showcases Tasmania’s historic and contemporary cultural assets’. Development could involve demolition of the museum’s modest mid-20th century extension in favour of something more fashionably ‘iconic’.

There’s a review panel to help the Authority explore issues emerging from the competition. Both the competition’s Australian judges are panel members, with Barrie Shelton a veteran of Hobart’s waterfront planning. The panel is fleshing out 10 key principles identified by the jury. These include a reminder that clearing up and subtracting may be as powerful as building or adding. Plus a clarion call for fully considered, incremental change through ‘many minor moves’ rather than relying on a single, major new construction.

This injunction echoes the objection, strongly voiced by the international jurors, to the ‘loudness’ of the vast majority of competition entries. “Architects must understand the responsibility that we have,” emphasised juror Pinós at a masterclass event during her Hobart visit. “One action can destroy the whole city. Measure is something that architects must know very well. You must make projects. But you don’t always need to make The Project.”

“I really loved the three ‘m’s’ – many minor moves. It’s in tune with Hobart’s needs – to evolve but ensure we don’t become a carbon copy of other places,” comments Dick Friend, Hobart food and wine entrepreneur and current president of the Sullivans Cove Citizens Association and someone who, like many in Hobart, has his own preferences. “The criticism I do have of the judging process is they had so little time to get acquainted with the site, then on average less than two minutes to assess each entry. They can’t have given them all due consideration, and they missed the best one of all.”

According to Friend, that’s a joint effort by established local architect and waterfront resident Bevan Rees (also a member of Friend’s association) and award-winning Hobart firm 1+2 Architecture, with indigenous Tasmanian writer Greg Lehman. This submission uses the symbolism of the shining maireener shells traditionally strung on to sinew by Tasmanian Aboriginal women to make necklaces, in an attempt to develop the idea of establishing ‘strings across time’, of conciliatory gestures between generations and cultures.

“We’ve told the world that we’re open to new ideas and the world has responded in a big way,” Premier Lennon said, announcing the winning entries. Hobart has been handed perhaps its best chance to date to see its urban past and potential from a different angle – through a range of local and foreign eyes – and to become more confident and discriminating in its yays and nays. ■