

Melbourne's Revitalized Laneways

Melbourne, Australia

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Degraes Street (above) is a revitalized laneway in Melbourne's city center.

photo: Alistair Campbell



Centre Lane (left) is a popular shopping destination.

photo: Jonathanpoh
via <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathanpoh/383009708/>

In an ongoing effort to transform Melbourne into a place of thriving public spaces, the city has gradually revitalized its extensive network of laneways and arcades. This rejuvenation of the city's laneways has contributed to an increase in comfortable, engaging provisions for pedestrians within the urban core. The newly activated laneways also offer better connections between larger public hubs, and have enhanced the character of the city by serving as lively, dense, and human scale spaces.

The developed network of Melbourne's laneways and arcades present a range of opportunities for pedestrian access through the city. Lined with a diversity of small cafes, boutique shops, restaurants, and unique street art, the laneways provide a variety of experiences for the public. Some laneways have been redesigned to afford safe, attractive entries to residences, increasing use of these once neglected or unsafe spaces, while others have continued to serve as access points for necessary services.

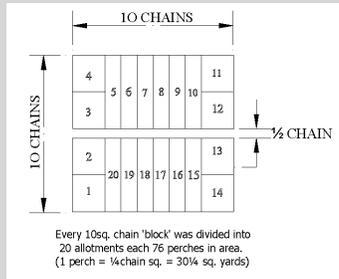


Centre Place Lane

photo: Dean-Melbourne
via <http://www.flickr.com/photos/deanmelbourne/619545745/>

Laneways provide high quality street environments, pedestrian safety and comfort which are critical to the community's positive perception of the city. –Hansen Partnerships

Melbourne's Street Grid



Robert Hoddle's 1837 block layout.

Image: EAWarbuton
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/b7/Block3.png>



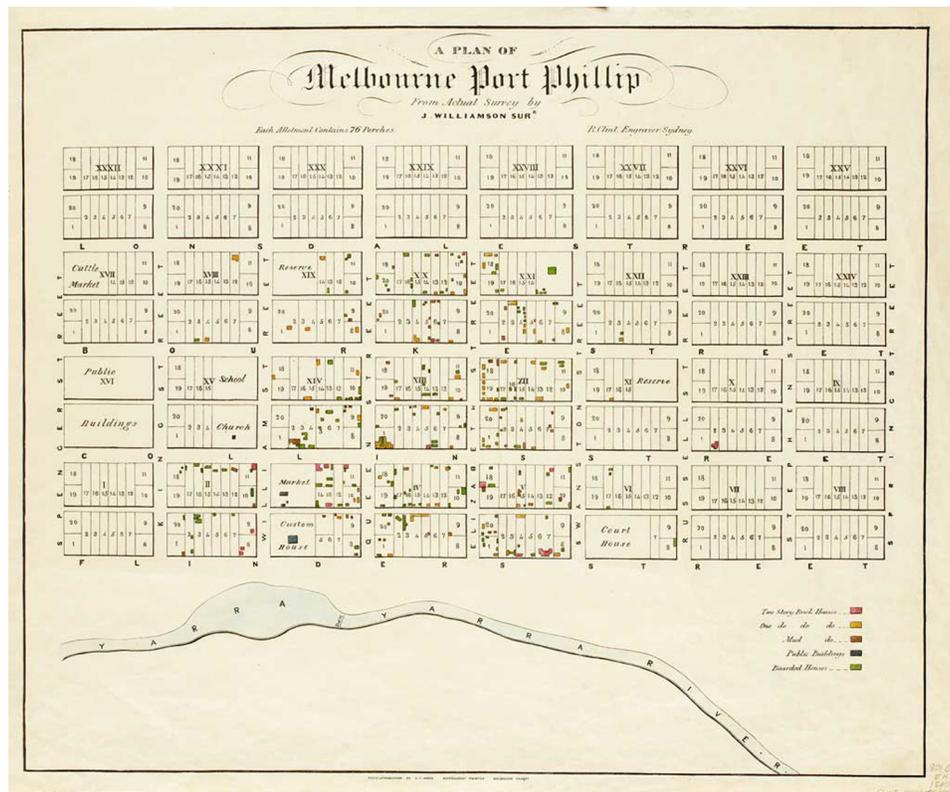
Flinders St., 99ft width
 Photo: google



Little Bourk St., 33ft width
 Photo: google

Historical Development of Melbourne's Laneways

Most of Melbourne's lanes were never really part of the plan. The city was originally laid out on a gridiron plan designed by the surveyor Robert Hoddle in 1837. The Hoddle Grid, as it has come to be known, features large, regularly sized blocks divided into parcels that were intended to facilitate the quick sale of land. Main streets in the grid run approximately north-south or east-west and are 99ft wide. Street blocks are 660ft squares, but are divided east-west by smaller 33ft wide streets to provide rear access to the parcels.¹



http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/ergo/uploads/images/2.3.2.3_00_full.jpg

It was thought that the wide streets and large lots would prevent the formation of slums like those found in Sydney or London. Samuel Perry, the Deputy Surveyor General of New South Wales at the time, advocated strict adherence to Hoddle's layout and warned that any subdivision of lots or development of unplanned paths would mean that "the houses will be huddled together, so as to impede a free circulation of air ... and Melbourne will be ruined before it has risen to maturity."²

From the beginning, however, property owners recognized that it was in their interests to increase access to all parts of their parcels and a system of smaller, unplanned lanes were inserted into the grid. By 1895, there were 264 lanes, 158 of them with names and signposts. "(The) lanes were the product of the colonial land market. Most began as tiny streets giving access to the necessarily small subdivisions within Melbourne's great blocks."³

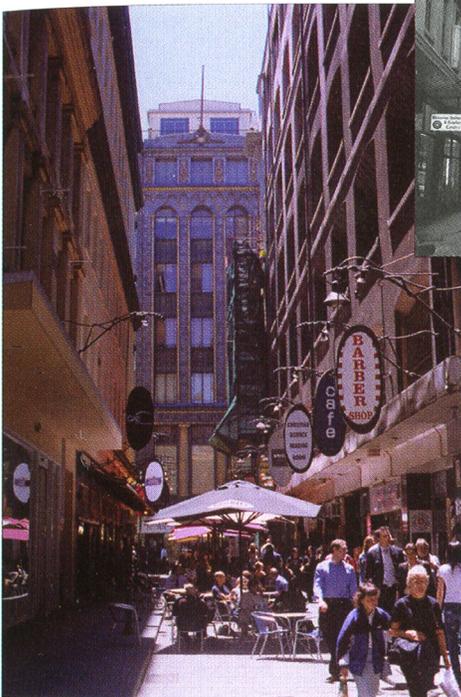
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Though they served an important economic role, the lanes did confirm Perry's fears that they would facilitate "serious mischief." "In terms of the social geography of the nineteenth-century city, the little streets and the alleys and lanes which developed off them became associated with a social pathology of deviant behaviour."⁴

Despite, or perhaps because of their reputation, many of the lanes have long been popular places in Melbourne, but suffered neglect in the latter half of the last century along with many other urban areas. Over the last 20 years the city has set about undoing these years of neglect with the aim of turning its lanes back into vibrant urban spaces.⁵

Melbourne's Lanes are still strongly associated with fringe culture, but the city appears to be making efforts to bring them into the mainstream. For instance, applications may be submitted (even retroactively) to register "street art" on the side of buildings.

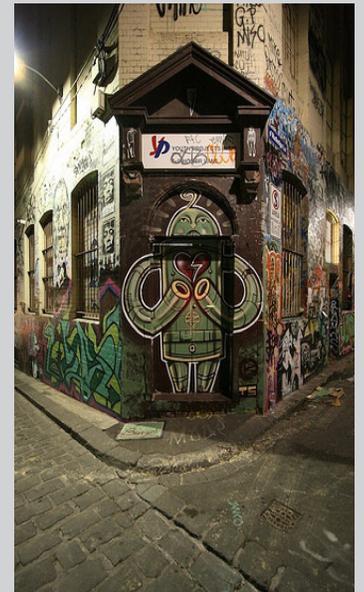
2004



1987



source: *Places for People: Melbourne 2004*. Gehl Architects & The City of Melbourne



A graffiti mural on Hosier Ln.
photo: Hellblazer!
via <http://flickr.com/photos/dogmatic/2354674226/>



The city has also decided to name a lane in honor of the Australian rock band AC/DC.
photo: blueblankut
via <http://www.flickr.com/photos/blueblankut/2420455858/>

"As well as bars, cafes, retailers and galleries, our laneways have become forums for artistic expression, offering unique, challenging and fascinating artworks to captivate and surprise visitors." - Lord Mayor John So, 2006

Planning Approach and Implementation

Since 1994, the city of Melbourne has increased the amount of active and accessible laneways and arcades from 300 meters to nearly 3.5 kilometers⁶. The laneways throughout the city center host a variety of experiences, from cafe and restaurant hubs, public art installations, boutique shops, thoroughfares, and residences.

The implementation of various city policies regarding development has ensured the transformation of previously under used, unwelcoming laneways into spaces more accommodating of pedestrian activity. For example, the Melbourne City Council adopted a planning policy (Lanes Policy 22.20 within Amendment C105) in September of 2007⁷. The policy calls for the preservation or enhancement of connectivity, 24-hour public access, views, active street front-ages, service functions, and pedestrian amenities. This policy, which applies to all laneways within the central city, states a number of different objectives⁸:

- To enhance the valued built form and character of laneways through sensitive and innovative design
- To encourage activity, vitality and interaction between public laneways and adjacent private uses at the ground level
- To enhance pedestrian amenity of the laneway
- To reinforce the primary function of laneways as key pedestrian, service and access spaces within the central city.

Among the policies listed within the amendment are⁹:

- Provide safe, direct, secure, accessible and attractive pedestrian routes
- Encourage diversity at street level
- Maintain and enhance traditional street pattern
- Development should minimise adverse microclimate effects and visual bulk of tower forms on laneways.

The City of Melbourne also established the Laneway Commissions Program in 2001, in an effort to renovate neglected lanes and entice people into the space, transforming the laneways into contemporary art galleries. This annual program accepts proposals for temporary artworks by individual artists or groups of artists, and provided grants for those accepted artists to produce and install their artworks¹⁰. According to Melbourne's Lord Mayor, John So, the program "has become so popular that these artworks attract thousands of additional people into the darker, quieter areas of the city, making our city even safer."¹¹



An example of a mixed-use laneway that provides several pedestrian amenities.

photo: craftaroo
via: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/craftaroo/397379874/>



"There are a few facts I think you ought to know..." by artist Louisa Bufardecì, an example of temporary public art from the Laneway Commissions Program.

photo: Alastair Campbell

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Melbourne is famous for its varied street art, which is sanctioned by local councils as well as by the public majority. Though the city maintains a policy to remove illegal (or unpermitted) graffiti and tagging, it has granted permission for hundreds of areas of street art and murals, often contained within the city laneways, and takes an active role in preserving these artworks. Street art is permissible throughout the city, as long as the owner of the wall and local councils grant permission to the artist. In 2007, the City of Melbourne hosted a “mentoring program” in which young people worked with professional artists to create vast murals along Union Lane¹².

Some events held within the laneways help to attract huge crowds of people to the city center. One of the most popular events is the St. Jerome's Laneway Festival, an annual music festival that last year attracted over 5,000 people, which takes place in Caledonian Lane and sometimes spreads to adjacent alleys. Started by a music developer and the owner of St. Jerome's, a popular laneway bar, the festival is essentially a big party that attracts fans of indie music to the narrow laneways where the bands perform. With support of the Melbourne City Council, the festival helps to develop and celebrate the laneway culture of the city¹³.



Degraives Street, one of the popular laneways filled with street art and public art.
photo: jeangenie
via: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jeangenie/2594792360/>



Thousands of people are drawn into Caledonian Lane for the St. Jerome's Laneway Festival.
photo: lists&diagrams
via: <http://www.flickr.com/search/?q=laneway%20festival&w=83318717%40N00>



A mixture of commissioned and gorilla art is dispersed throughout many sites such as Hosier Lane.

photo:Oskrivna Linger
via: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/7769723@N07/769607164/>



Less developed spaces, such as Union Lane, have a unique character of street art that attract tourists, artists, and photographers. Though often seen as vandalism, the graffiti found in Melbourne is often cherished and seen as an amenity.

photo:avxyz
via: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/avxyz/2309317563/>

Design Features

Active Frontages

- Range of types attract different crowds: restaurants, cafes, boutiques, art installations, clubs, bars, residences
- Policy implemented to focus on designing for pedestrian experience

Building Form

- Addressing second-floor building facades
- Retention of heritage streetscapes

Connections

- Provide important North-South connections in the dense city center
- Expands the city's pedestrian network

Entrances

- Alleys provide entrances to retail and residential facilities
- Gateways to lanes appear discrete and invite exploration

Pedestrian Affordances:

- Some lunchtime lane closures reduce vehicular traffic
- Provide opportunity for increase in outdoor cafe seating
- Variety of seating, benches, awnings, paving

Scale

- Awnings and seating establish a human scale in the narrow lanes
- Setbacks reduce downdraft

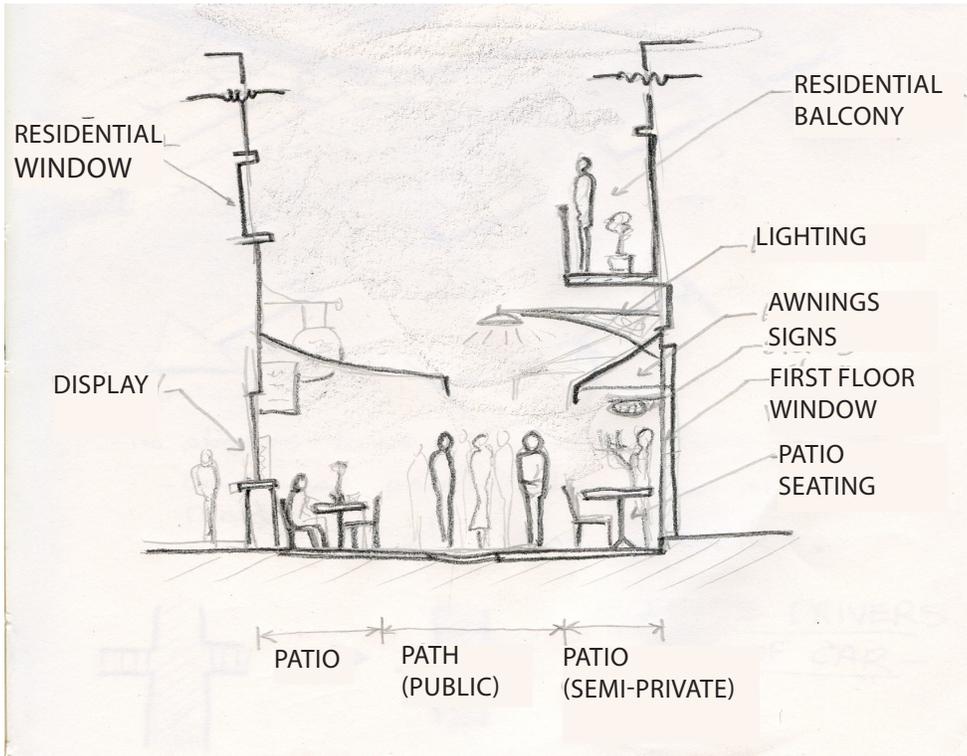
Signage

- Visible signs coincide with existing character of lane
- Laneways have unique names and corresponding signage
- Generally, business signs along alley are same size and height

Sustainability

- Facilitate increased density by stacking functions
- Expanding business without making new roads¹⁴

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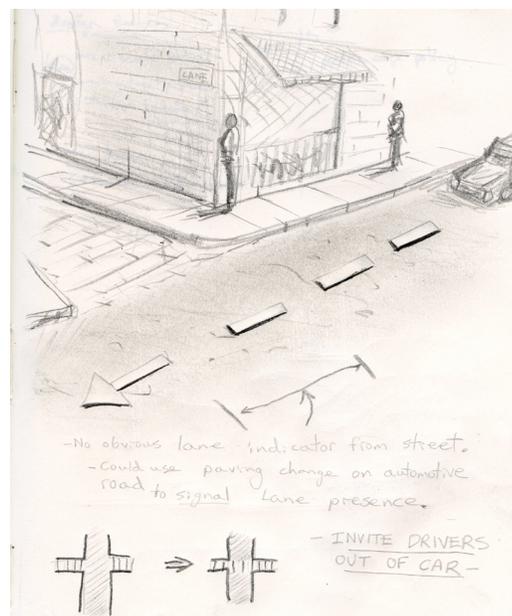
Arcades add another type of pedestrian experience. The mosaic flooring and glass canopy of the Bock Arcade canopy provide a rich shopping experience that contrasts some of the other typical laneways of Melbourne. photo: John Steedman via: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/14958189@N06/2326479088/>

Design emphasis of the lanes is placed on the pedestrian experience. Windows, lighting, awnings, and paving provide a rich sensory experience with climatic comfort. The section drawing shows the general character of a Melbourne pedestrian laneway. The experiential qualities are varied and diverse to allow discovery and exploration.



Scattered crates show evidence of adaptation where seating is not provided. photo: ToranasaurusRex via: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/toranasaurusrex/2448377857/>

Laneways are not obvious to automotive traffic. Changes, such as paving in the street, could signal drivers to exit their cars and explore the area on foot.



Sources:

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