

Sunshine Coast Industrial Park

By John Mongard

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The following article is a review of contemporary industrial landscapes and corporate parks, focussing on the recently completed Sunshine Coast Industrial Park on the Sunshine Coast by Gamble McKinnon Green.

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Industrial estates are the parts of our cities which are normally the ugliest and most polluted. In Australia, our industries first claimed our waterfronts for transportation, and then the outback for our resources. As cities grew to make their own things locally, factories established themselves in flat lowlands near transportation.

The notion of the corporate industrial park was one of the suites of ideas popularised by the 'American Dream' modern city: areas of productivity and mobility removed from the homes and open spaces of the suburbs. They were to reflect the changes in society as power moved from agricultural production, to industry, and then onto the cleaner and sometimes virtual industries of IT and human services. Global capitalism created a demand for larger, cleaner and more efficient clusters of production. Industrial estates thus began to have a more public, retail function: a combination of factory, warehouse, showroom and eventually shopfronts.

Sunshine Coast Industrial Park is a model example of the evolution of industry toward a clean and green future. It is located on the outskirts of Caloundra, north of Brisbane and comprises 215 hectares, of which 38 hectares is valuable remnant heath wetland. The estate has been developed by the Queensland State Government and landscape architects Gamble McKinnon Green (GMG) have been involved from the planning through to construction administration, which alone lasted over 6 months.

Only a few factories have been established to date so one could be forgiven for thinking that it is more bucolic than it will be as it develops. Bushland is sprouting up along all the perimeters and lowlands of the site, its fast growth preceding industry thanks to the global financial crisis. It may also be that the tougher environmental demand on industry here is creating a low take up. By the time it gets going in two or three years, the site will have the appearance of being reclaimed and stitched into its vegetated backdrop.

One can imagine the surprise of the workers from a machining factory or from a vitamin distribution plant when they walk out for smoko and stumble onto walkways through wetlands. They can bird watch while they sit under the shelters and eat their lunch.

There is more to this site than the reappearance of nature. The defunct pastures and remnant pine plantation have been carefully restructured around the movement of water. A large wedge of reclaimed and preserved wetland splits the industrial estate into two. Waterways channel, polish and filter stormwater from road and lots into a complex series of wetlands, bioretention ponds and detention basins, before passing onto the creeks leading to pristine Pumicestone Passage. To get under the main boulevard, there are well considered fauna and stormwater culverts which allow the movements of small animals such as the endangered acid frog and there is even a skylight in the central median to encourage animals to move in light.

The main constructed wetland is impressive in a La Notre kind of way: massive earthworks to drop the land to a wetland level with rectangular vegetated terraces which lend the early landscape a curiously formal air. Soils have been retained onsite to raise the lots, as has the compost material created from chipping pine trees.

Whilst aiming for an environmental outcome this landscape is way beyond nature. It is a carefully orchestrated manufactured system. Led by Greg Thomas from GMG, we climbed into the massive chamber which is the gateway for stormwater arriving from the southern roads. This scary catacomb is the trash trapper which allows water to pass on to the reeds and rushes which will further filter the waters.

There is some aesthetic ground yet to be claimed in these wetland constructions. The environmental engineers claim the drawing board for these landscape systems and their heavy touch shows through the planting and earthworks. Perhaps this engineered formality could have been strengthened further to contrast with the natural wetland to the north, thus making the manufactured ecology even more evidently expressed. In this instance, the engineering of the waterway has created an unresolved formalism which is at odds with the naturalism applied elsewhere on the site.

The remnant wetland areas comprising most of the remaining triangle of waterways appear to be re-establishing well and walking alongside the heath, the birdsong here is rewarding. The streetscapes are very generous with their close tree cover and wide perimeters of bushland. The intended function of these green strips as fauna corridors for birds seems imminently achievable.

The obligatory corporate entry statement has been well done. The boulevard leading off the entry has missed opportunities to harvest water in its median and verges which is a shame because the conventionality of the civil works does not match the innovation of the green landscape. Despite this, the native trees have fared well and the tubestock trees have nearly caught the bagstock trees after a few years.

This corporate industrial park succeeds in creating bush inside industry, a complete reversal of conventional development. Its State Government client has sought and created a very green hybrid of the industrial park typology. Where it has failed relates not to its landscape qualities but to its urbanism: this work cluster is located next to a freeway but distant from any other supporting functions. Workers will drive many kilometres to get a paper, a pie, pay a bill or go home. The industrial estate should have been placed within walking distance of some other existing centre. Its walkways and bikeways would then have somewhere to link to, instead of ending at the estate entry and boundaries. The Sunshine Coast is quickly morphing into a low density suburban sprawl which by its very planning is creating a carbon footprint failure.

We need industry to be as green as this, but we need it in the right places. We need ecology to be a key force in every site. As Timothy Morton reminds us in his challenging book, *Ecology without Nature*, we no longer need the concept of 'nature' to drive our contemporary ideas and forms of ecological expression. Places such as these industrial parks are intentional manufactured ecological systems. How we express them as places for contemporary living is our ongoing challenge.

John Mongard is a landscape architect and urban designer in Brisbane. He writes about contemporary culture and sustainable design.

For a full version of the article including images, refer to Landscape Australia, Issue 129, 2011

For further information contact:

John Mongard Landscape Architects

Ph: (07) 3844 1932 Email: mail@mongard.com.au