

The Social Stigma of High-Rise Development
or

A "CAN DO" Approach
to Higher Density Housing
in Western Australia

Dr Wendy Sarkissian FPI A



HOUSING AS IF PEOPLE MATTERED



SITE DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR MEDIUM-DENSITY FAMILY HOUSING

CLARE COOPER MARCUS AND WENDY SARKISSIAN

Housing Issues

2

LIVING IN PUBLIC HOUSING



A report on a Tenants' Evaluation
of Medium-Density Public
Housing in Suburban Sydney

Wendy Sarkissian and Terry Doherty

The Social Stigma of Higher Density Housing

- High-rise housing itself does not cause social problems
- High-density development **poorly designed** can create resident dissatisfaction
- High rise *per se* is not a problem
- The problems are perceptual and about housing **quality**
- How buildings **perform** is an important contributor to resident satisfaction
- Residents, not buildings, often cause problems
- It's cultural: people need to **learn** how to live in high-rise housing.

Good design always
yields good results.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE CONFERENCE . . .







A Model for WA



C:
COMFORT

A:
AFFORDABILITY

CAN DO

N:
NATURE

O:
OPEN SPACE

D:
DESIGN

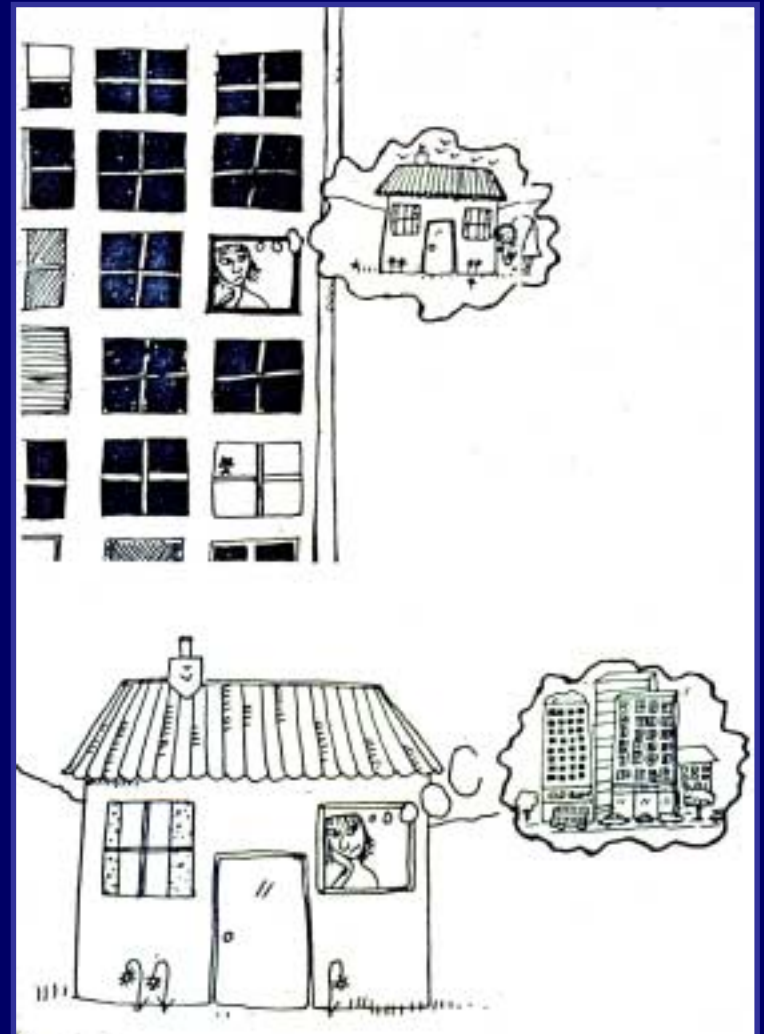
**What everyone's
afraid of**



A question of quality

High density
or "good" density?

(Brendan Gleeson)



21 Lessons From Recent Australian Research into Higher Density Housing



Lesson 1:

Meet or exceed standards

- Statutory environment may be inadequate for delivering social design:
 - Universal Design (accessibility)
 - children's play
 - shared and private open space

Lesson 2:

Coordinate the vision

- Perceived lack of a master planning in identifying requirements
 - site location
 - site size
 - site planning
 - specific design features of dwelling and open space
 - social requirements of future occupants
 - Integrate developments into a wider planning framework



Lesson 3:

Start out as you intend to end up

- Problem may start with unavailability of appropriately sized sites for shared open space and on-site facility requirements
- Difficult to assemble large sites

Lesson 4:

Engage in education and awareness to decrease negative perceptions of density

- Lack of community understanding about medium- and higher density housing
- Few good examples
- Building community and consumer support requires planning, design and marketing input
- Sophisticated community engagement strategies needed

Lesson 5: *Stay abreast of new information*

- Higher density housing is being targeted toward narrow range of households

BUT

- Wide varieties of households with differing lifestyles are likely to choose this form in the future

(Change in product in Pymont...)

Lesson 6:

Ask Does it fit in here?

- Building form can dramatically affect area's population and types of households likely to move in
- Need to fully analyse local context and markets:
 - existing housing styles
 - resident preferences
 - emerging trends
 - unsuccessful housing models
 - changing household requirements in neighbouring areas

Lesson 7:

Take ageing seriously

- Older people not a homogenous group
- Needs of older people and ageing in place not widely considered in:
 - site selection
 - site planning
 - building design
 - interior design or
 - on-site facilities and amenities

Lesson 8:

Know your markets

Stock presently caters for specific households:

- Double I ncome with No Kids (DI NKs)
 - Single I ncome with No Kids (SI NKs)
- Wide range of households not adequately catered for

Lesson 9:

Build housing close to or with community infrastructure

- Higher density housing developments often located in inappropriate places
- Do not meet accessibility and community infrastructure requirements of residents and surrounding community

Lesson 10:

Design for diversity

- Most developments targeted toward narrow range of household types
- Ignores cultural diversity and life-cycle changes
- Some “features” in high-price developments inappropriate for range of household types

Lesson 11:

Pay close attention to acoustics

- Noise attenuation poorly handled
- **Acoustic problems:** important negative characteristic of this housing form
- Diminishes marketability of higher densities to people currently living in lower density housing

Lesson 12:

Take accessibility seriously

- Universal Design not evident in nearly all properties examined
- Industry appears to be waiting for regulation rather than showing leadership
- Senior Brisbane architect: no regulations requiring accessibility when housing was designed



Lesson 13:

Accommodate predictable homeworking options

- Trends toward **hybrid** home/work arrangements not acknowledged
- Unsophisticated handling of homeworking requirements
- Little more than a small "home office" room
- Little understanding of working beyond traditional retirement age
- Few other facilities for homeworking

Opportunities for “housebound” residents
to socialise without being forced to do so:

The “Magical Mailbox”

Grouped mailboxes

- Mail often delivered to grouped mailboxes
- Failure to maximise socialising value
- Well designed and carefully located grouped mailboxes help combat loneliness, especially older women
- Focusing a social space around grouped mailboxes also supports resident safety

Lesson 14:

Design in opportunities to reduce crime

- CPTED principles **virtually absent** in most examples reviewed - except locked common entries
- We innocently breached perimeter of one high-security Brisbane development

Lesson 15:

Support socialising with on-site community space and facilities

- Poor provision of community facilities
 - on-site provision
 - those located within surrounding community
 - many sites poorly located

Lesson 16:

Provide generous on-site shared open space

- Sites often too small for shared open space and on-site community facilities
- Problem if gaps exist in host neighbourhood
- Inexpert design in most cases
- Privacy and territory problems

Lesson 17:

Orient buildings to maximise solar passive benefits

- Poor delineation between private and shared outdoor spaces
- One exception: SY21 in Melbourne
- Poor handling of siting and design of buildings to achieve solar access
- Some south-facing units: high masonry walls block light into yards or units for most of the day



Lesson 18:

Take children's play needs into account

- Apparent ignorance of children's outdoor play
- Young children (2 to 5) play within sight and calling distance of home
- Doorstep play much valued by supervising adults and children

Lesson 19:

Don't let one solution become another problem

A problem:

- Large underground parking garages
- First habitable dwelling or building entryway situated above ground level (accessible only by stairs)
- reduces excavation costs

BUT

- creates significant accessibility problems

Lesson 20:

It might be innovative, but does it work?

- Design aspects featured in promotional materials, advertising or industry literature may not always translate well to smaller units at higher densities

Laundry

Matusik Property Insights (2004)

- People in smaller dwellings require more space for laundry than is provided
- Laundry arrangements often little more than a tiny “cupboard”
- Need space for equipment, some soiled clothes storage and clothes sorting space
- Not appropriate in kitchen
- In smaller dwellings: laundries often source of resident dissatisfaction

Lesson 21:

Embrace appropriate technology

- Some technology for dwellings with or without “home offices”
- Rapidly changing technology
- Perceptions of “basic requirements” changing quickly

My Guess at 10 'Universals'

It's all about quality

1. Accessibility



- Location, location, location
- The price is right
- Value for money
- Accessibility features
- Acknowledges potential for illness, housebound times

2. Space (inside and out)



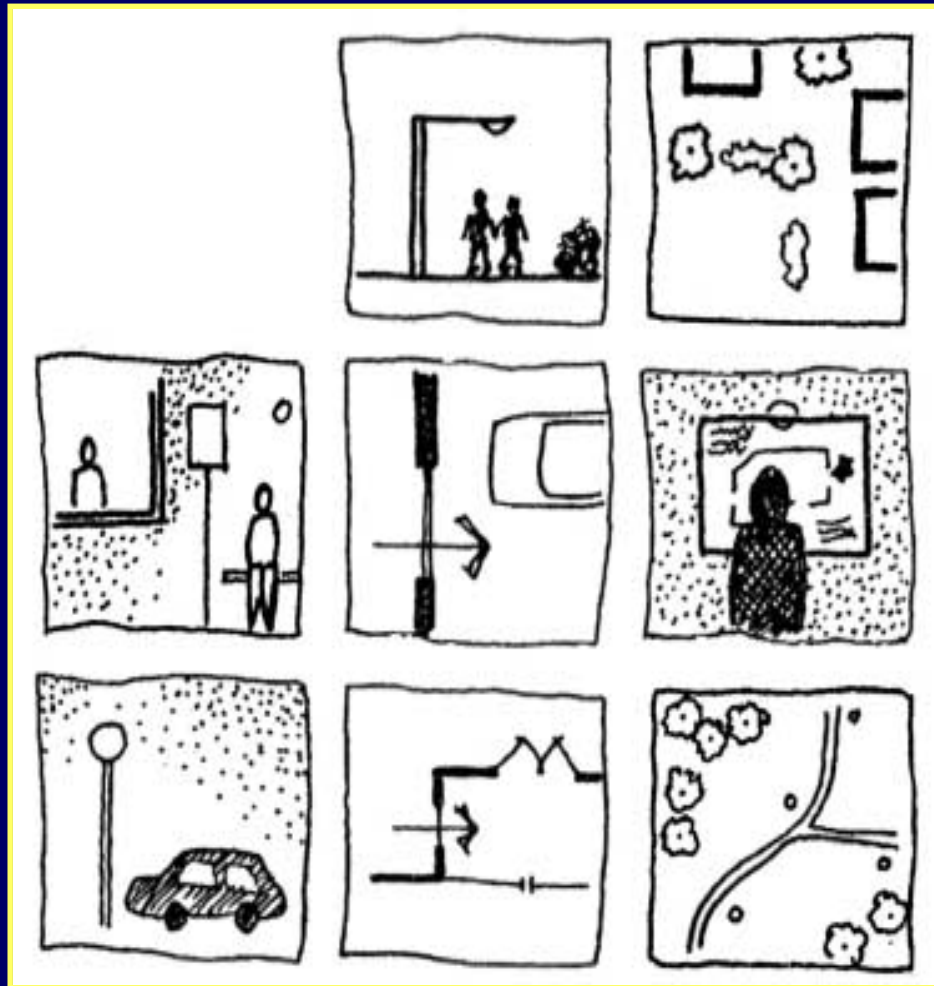
- The illusion if not the reality
- Space and light
- Views out
- Spaciousness
- Spatial opportunities
- Privacy for different activities

Open space in award-winning private housing in Brisbane

Shared or public?



3. Safety and Security



- Person, property, dwelling, vehicle
- The car in the lounge room
- Safe community
- Accessible public realm
- Not 'defended'
- *CPTED with Care*

4. Storage



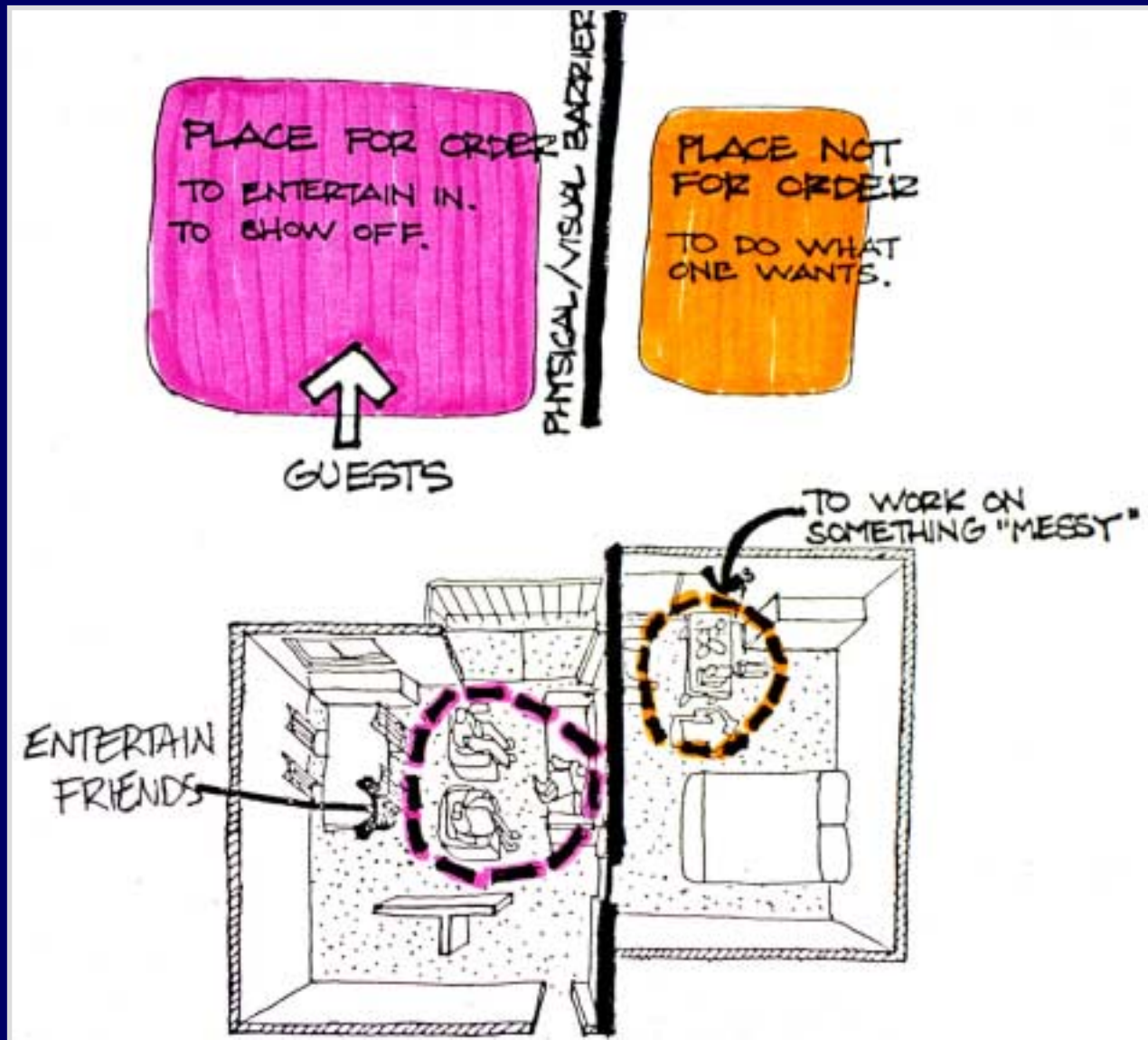
- The spaces people needed in their detached dwellings
- Seasonal items
- Bulk storage
- Accommodating household changes, changes of use

5. Support for Activities



- Working from home
- Study
- Illness
- Outdoor dining/entertaining
- Culture-specific activities (cooking on balconies)

Frontstage and Backstage

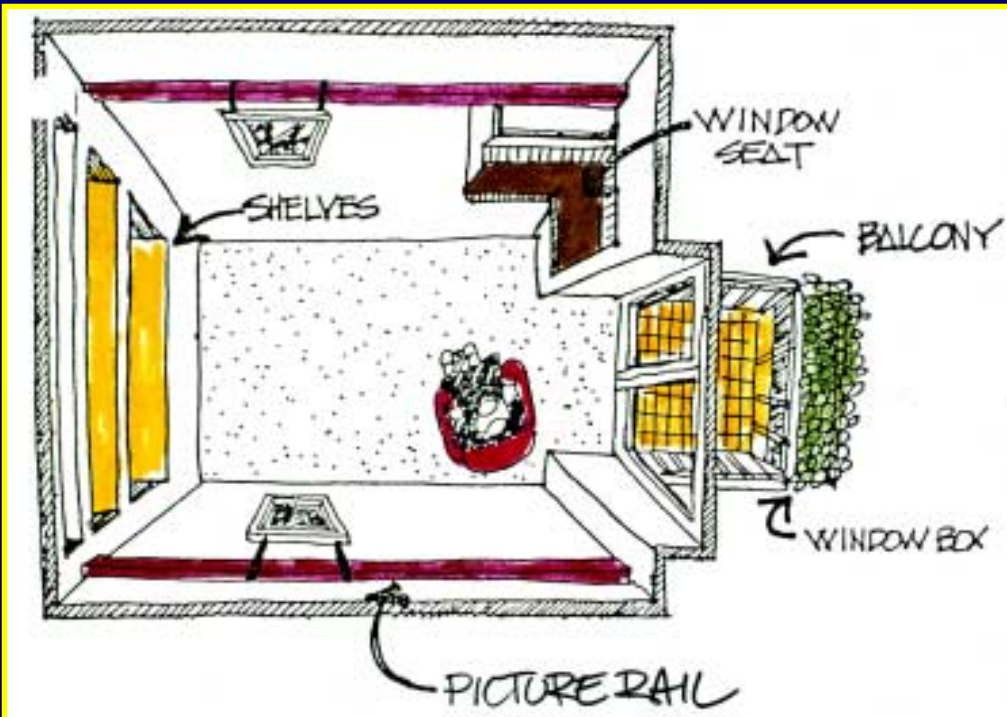


6. Furnishability



- Things fit in
- Furniture does not have to float in space
- Glare and TV set location
- Conversational furniture grouping
- Standard shapes and dimensions
- Balcony furnishability

7. Personalisation and Display



- The mementoes of a lifetime
- Shelves, niches that double as altars
- Ease of hanging pictures
- Modification opportunities
- Display outside the dwelling?

8. An *Individual* Home



- Qualities of a house on its own land
- Individuality at higher density
- Gracious and identifiable front entry
- Transitional interior entry spaces
- Respectful of cultural differences (**frontstage** and **backstage**)

9. Health and Comfort



- Increasing concerns
- Natural ventilation and views
- Indoor air quality
- Children's health
- Non-toxic materials and finishes
- Buildings that breathe
- Wider sustainability issues

10. Sustainability



- Wide range of environmental concerns
- Mandated by government policies worldwide
- Durability
- Energy efficiency
- Life-cycle costing
- Local and regional suppliers
- Public transport; car dependence

To conclude. . .

THE "CAN DO" MODEL

for

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
DEVELOPERS

for higher density housing

C:
COMFORT

A:
AFFORDABILITY

CAN DO

N:
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O:
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D:
DESIGN

C: COMFORT

- Privacy
- Territory
- Furnishability
- Storage
- Space
- Thermal comfort
- Flexibility
- Predictable activities

A: AFFORDABILITY

- Finance
- Size
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Able to finance
- Appreciating asset
- Resale
- . . . all those factors you know about!

N:

NATURE

- Solar passive
- Lifecycle costing
- Energy efficiency
- Durability
- Healthy housing
- WSUD
- Location re: ESD; automobile dependence

D: DESIGN

- For predictable activities
- Children's needs
- Older people
- Hybrid housing (homeworkers)
- Beauty and charm
- Image of "home" (not factory or hotel)

O: OPEN SPACE

- Clear messages
- Hierarchy of open spaces
- Privacy from overlooking of back yards
- Front yards as display spaces
- Predictable functions of front and back yards
- Transitional buffers
- Reduce excuse-making (CPTED)

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To reiterate . . .

- High-rise housing **itself** does not **cause** social problems
- High-density development poorly designed can contribute to resident dissatisfaction
- The problems are perceptual and about housing **quality**
- It's cultural: you need to **learn** how to live in high-rise housing
- Education is required.

- The stigma of high-rise housing is probably not deserved.
- But poorly designed, poor-quality high-rise housing will certainly contribute to further stigma.

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wendy@sarkissian.com.au

0402 966 284