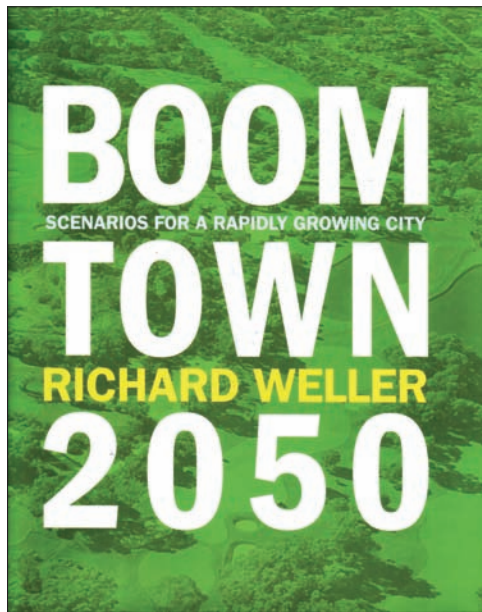


BOOMTOWN 2050



THIS important book is about how Perth can house a population set to either double or triple from its current 1.5-million inhabitants by mid-century. It's the product of the University of Western Australia's Landscape Architecture program, led by Professor Richard Weller, the author, and is funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). The book is organised sequentially to follow two years of research – it discusses its subject, Perth, quantifies and documents it, and designs its future as a series of landscape and urban propositions – drawn strategies for how hundreds of thousands of extra people might live in this already 100-kilometre

long city. In this respect it is critical contemporary research, but, perhaps to broaden its reach, it has been packaged in the form of a chunky hardback with a catchy title.

Perth is a very low density, car-based suburban city – like many Australian cities, but even more so. I recall Perth architect Simon Anderson (who is also featured in the title) once writing that Perth has moved from being a town to being a metropolis without ever being a city. This condition of suburban expansion is one treated objectively here. 'Can we just have more of the same?' the book asks. The answer, in many ways, seems to be 'Yes'. There's enough room, and it's the general will of those in the development industry – but the 'business as usual' model is very unsustainable, and will be even more so in a future world subject to increasingly high energy costs. So here lies the book's agenda – to show people (assumedly those in Perth) that there are other ways. These alternatives are expressed through drawings, mainly as map and aerial landscape images, that clearly illustrate a series of ideas – from a 'Food City', where agriculture is intermixed with new residential; to 'Surf City', where a series of lighthouse-like skyscrapers follow the coastal plain ridge line up and down this very linear metropolis. The book comes to a brief conclusion of sorts: that in fact a combination of these methods might be the way to go. One of best drawings, in a book full of great drawings, is an image of this super-Perth seen from space at night.

While large, city-scale urban schemes form a big part of the book's substance, it also features case studies of smaller design research projects produced

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by the author and UWA, in conjunction with others. One example is Wungong Urban Water, a new suburban subdivision classified as a better version of an existing density, and one of the strongest projects published in the book. Another 'real' project is ARM and Weller's Perth foreshore scheme, which may or may not end up as yet another unrealised scheme for Perth's big front lawn – its lifeless waterfront.

The book successfully introduces various concepts to a wider audience, design-by-research in particular: the idea that design projects can serve as tools of investigation as well as traditional research. The book's method and form owes much to the Dutch 'data-scaping' of firms such as OMA/AMO and MVRDV, and is sized in a similar way to the seminal *S,M,L,XL* (1996) by Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau. This is a book of distinct sections, and while all fall under the banner of the central research question (Perth's population growth) they are at times unlinked. 'Reading' the book in a traditional way can be a disjunctive experience – written text gives way to the many stats and quotes not long after starting. This perhaps focuses too much attention on the context rather than the real strength of the book, which is the propositional discussion via the design of large urban projects. These propositions will hopefully, as is no doubt intended, stimulate more interest in the subject of Perth's population growth – and packaging this discussion as a serious book which is both attractive and rigorous can only help in this respect. **ar**

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review

Stuart Harrison

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