Book Review

Greening Cities: Sydney, Singapore, Tokyo, New York, Vancouver, Chris Johnson (illustrations by Mark Gerada), Government Architect's Publications, 2004, Sydney

URBAN DESIGN *International* (2005) 0, 000–000.
doi:10.1057/palgrave.udi.9000147

The illustrations by Mark Gerada in this book are superb. Pencil-drawn in grey and green, they remind one of the illustrations that did so much to make Ian McHarg's *Design with nature* (1969) the most influential landscape book of the 20th century. McHarg's told us how to plan a region. Gerada's drawings show us how to design green buildings and their surroundings. They demonstrate that, for sustainability too, the God must be in the details. Too many sustainability proposals are tawdry-Heath-Robinson – a serious hindrance to public acceptance. We live a style-conscious age and people will not build or buy cities that remind them of beards, sandals, chopped cabbage or mad inventors.

The author, Chris Johnson, is a New South Wales government architect and adjunct professor of architecture at the University of Sydney. His text is short and to the point, providing an enthusiastic and readable narrative. The book resulted from a talk to students on 'greening Sydney in 2002'. Johnson modified a photograph of a tower block with a series of green atriums. It was published in the Sydney Morning Herald with the caption 'No, it couldn't be... a re-imagined version of the much maligned UTS building'. This led to a series of conversations with green luminaries, many of them concerned with the cities mentioned in the title.

The first noteworthy recent project is by the President of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Penny Allan. It is a scheme for 'water-sensitive landscape design' on the expanse between Sydney and Botany Bay (Johnson might have explained its relationship with Woodlands in Texas, McHarg's most successful built project). Singapore has declared its intention to become a 'model green city' and published a *Handbook on Skyrise Greening* (available as a pdf document on the web). New York held a symposium on *Greening Gotham's Rooftops*. Friedensreich Hundertwasser, a true innovator of green buildings, is saved until Chapter 5. A sketch of his Vienna house is followed appropriately by a section on Ken Yeang's idea for 'bioclimatic skyscrapers'. Many related ideas are also illustrated, and it would have been useful to have had a little more in the way of technical information and bibliographic references.

However, the author and his illustrator have produced an attractive book for the general reader, which should be widely circulated to municipalities and environmental groups throughout the world. With luck, and much hassle, the municipalities will then be persuaded that city greening is something which can be done – and must be done!

Tom's most recent book is: *Garden History: Philosophy and Design 2000BC–AD2000*, E & FN Spon, London, 2005.

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