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MY

BRUNSWICK

OUR

BRUNSWICK

Acknowledgement of Country (AOC)

RMIT PlaceLab acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT PlaceLab respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, as the original and continuing Makers of Place.

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RMIT PlaceLab is an urban initiative connecting community, shaping place and taking a radically different approach to doing research.

Designed to free research from the campus and bring researchers street-side to connect with local government, industry and community groups, RMIT PlaceLab facilitates site-based research to support the co-creation of new ideas, partnerships, and systems that grow positive impact and opportunity.

Dynamic, actionable and accessible, RMIT PlaceLab research projects are bite-size and community-engaged, generating insights, ideas and solutions that can be implemented together with our government and place-making partners.

The **'Voice, Vibe & Vision'** Research Project is part of RMIT PlaceLab, an RMIT Initiative supported through the Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund (VHESIF).

To find out more about RMIT PlaceLab and our work, go to:

www.placelab.rmit.edu.au

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Voice, Vibe & Vision



This Research Project has been assessed and approved by the RMIT University College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN). Ethics Reference Number: 25586.

Research involving human participants is consistent with the guidelines contained in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct Human Research and Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.



Long Story Short

‘Voice, Vibe, & Vision’ is an exploration of what gives Brunswick its unique character amid ongoing transformative infrastructure change in the Brunswick Design District (BDD).

Voice, Vibe & Vision



What We Explored

Focusing on the Brunswick Design District (BDD), 'Voice, Vibe & Vision' gathered local perspectives on the sounds, images, words, stories, and imaginings that make Brunswick, Brunswick.

The Research Project engaged with community members, RMIT students, and local stakeholders, through a range of research activities, including a community survey, walking interviews, photographer trails, a collage workshop, and finally, a 'Voice, Vibe & Vision' exhibition.

Community insights and materials collected are consolidated in this book, as well as the digital data visualisations which can be accessed via the RMIT PlaceLab website¹. These are rich and practical research outputs that enable and encourage conversations about Brunswick now and in the future.

¹ www.placelab.rmit.edu.au

Image by Michelle Williams

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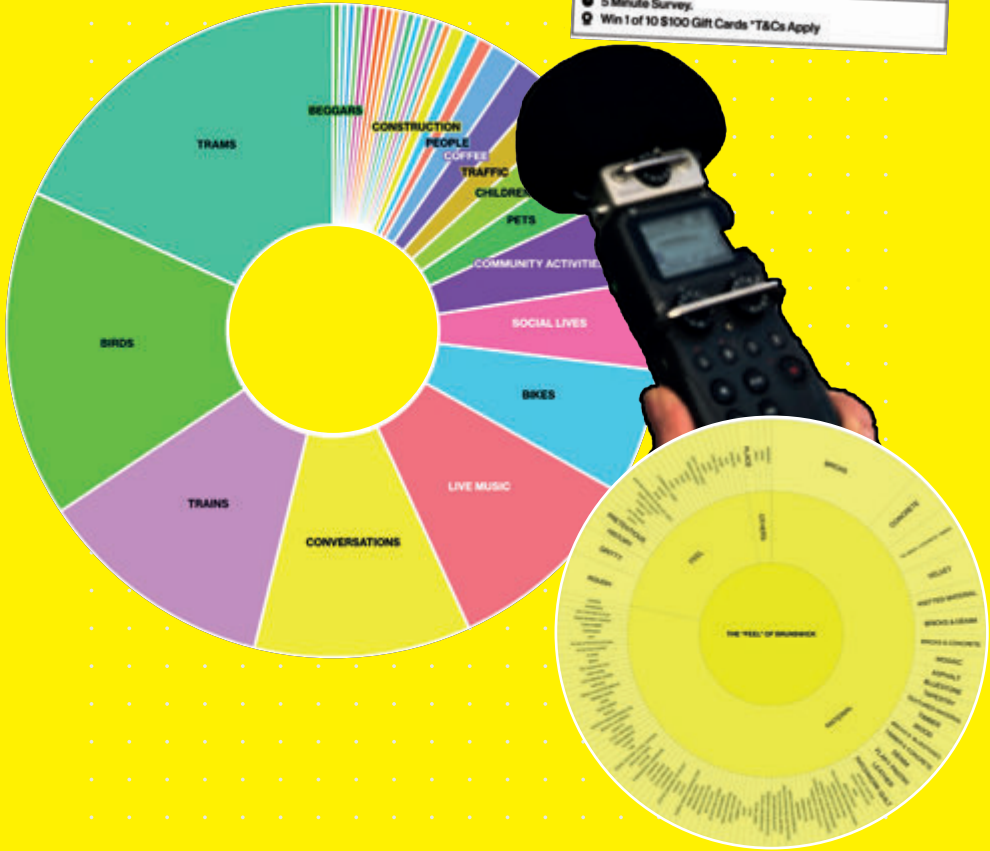
Voice, Vibe & Vision



to collect, consolidate and cultivate a shared
ling of what gives Brunswick its unique character
...native infrastructure change.

Research Survey
**What makes Brunswick,
Brunswick?**

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Collage created at PlaceLab X That Paper Joint 'Collage Brunswick' Community Workshop

INTRO DUC- TION

RMIT PlaceLab set-out on this research project with a seemingly simple objective: to understand *what makes Brunswick, Brunswick*. Our hope was to gather rich, personal, and shared insights into both local space-making and cultural practices, and stories (past, present, and emerging) that exist within the Brunswick community. In doing so, we aspired to make tangible the somewhat elusive and intangible notion of 'Brunswick's unique urban character'.

Our motivation to do this research was to provide a snapshot of Brunswick community reflections that might be of use as they confront transformative changes: many associated with major infrastructure projects, the climate emergency, and urban gentrification.

Academic research tells us that, given the social, economic, and environmental consequences of urban changes, the participation of communities in transparent and rigorous processes of community engagement is a critical determinant in achieving outcomes that are not just economically successful, but also socially – and environmentally – just. However, it is equally recognised that the implementation of effective processes and practices around community engagement remains a problematic fault-line.

In this context, we imagined that, by contributing to understandings of Brunswick's unique urban character, we might offer the community a useful mechanism to protect, preserve,

or enable things that are essential to the fabric of the area. It is to be seen whether we have achieved even small steps toward this goal.



Collage participants at Voice, Vibe & Vision 'Collage Brunswick' Community Workshop. Image by Suzanne Phoenix

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When talking about space-making practices, architects and urban planners are usually thinking about participatory planning and collaborative processes, often overlooking the ways in which the communities themselves can become their own agents of change. As the people pose an intimate knowledge of not only their environment, but also of social and cultural norms, the needs of their communities and latent opportunities within their surroundings, they are often the ones initiating actions, supporting their peers and contributing positively to their locality.

Maria-Cristina Florian

28 August 2023

www.archdaily.com/1006015/radical-rituals-studio-forty-five-degrees-searches-for-local-space-making-practices-across-europe

“

...projects that adopt local culture during their process tend to be highly successful and recognised by the community...

Victor Delaqua

Translated by Diogo Simões, Published on July 28, 2023

www.archdaily.com/1004081/contemporary-architecture-the-importance-of-local-culture-in-practice



The information and insights shared in this book are the results of the research we undertook with the Brunswick community over three months: July, August, and September 2023. This included an online survey that was completed by 237 people. While not limited to Brunswick residents, the survey reached 151 people who live in Brunswick, and another 38 who have previously lived or worked in Brunswick. The survey was principally promoted via Instagram, which means that most respondents fell within the age group of 18-29 years. In line with common trends within qualitative research, 146 of respondents identified as female, 48 identified as male, with 11 identifying as gender diverse, and 32 preferring not to say.

We also undertook walking interviews with eight local community members and commissioned eight Brunswick-based photographers (four professional, four RMIT photography students) to undertake photography trails to gather images. These activities focused on the area of Brunswick bounded by Sydney Road and the Upfield Rail Line.

Aside from our attempts at making meaning from what was shared with us

in the brief paragraphs at the start of each section – these serving a narrative function – and the photographs taken as we undertook the walking interviews, all the words and images shared in this book appear as they were shared with us in the survey, walking interviews and photographer trails.

Undertaking research with people is always a privilege, but researching with the Brunswick community has also been an immense joy.

Louise Godwin and Nhu Bui
RMIT Brunswick PlaceLab-ers

Walking Interview Participants

Max Malone enthusiastically replied to our very first walking interview invitation and, due to imminent travel commitments, a few days later we found ourselves at That Paper Joint – the local business that he and his partner Zoe run. After a quick sneaky route via the Brunswick Baptist Church site, Max, taking direction from Franky the dog, shared places, lanes, and spaces that comprise his story in Brunswick.

—Monday 17 July

Pablo Gonzales, Founder of the Brunswick Daily, graciously agreed to shift from story listener to storyteller for our walking interview. We found ourselves joyfully sharing thoughts and experiences, framed by the insights he has gathered through his life and contribution in Brunswick.

—Wednesday 26 July

We met **Haikal Raji** on a breezy day, and found ourselves, first, introduced to every food business in the vicinity of his family business, A1 Bakery, on Sydney Road. Next, we were in the backstreets on a shared journey of discovery, only to return to his home turf, walking through the Brunswick Market, the ghosts of past stallholders vibrantly brought to life. The spirit of the area held in his memories, past, present, and future.

—Tuesday 15 August

On our walk with long-time local resident and architectural historian, **Derham Groves**, a dynamic picture of Brunswick's colourful history came to life. From DIY letterboxes, to pubs, shops, murder and mayhem. Honest and funny observations. Rich architectural insights and knowledge. Everything framed by a passion for people and the everyday places and activities that they embrace.

—Wednesday 16 August

Joseph Norster, General Manager of SiteWorks, met us outside the Saxon Street building site, and immediately invited us into the story that he and his partner, Millie Cattlin, have crafted over their years building the SiteWorks community and operations. He generously wove together the relationship between Brunswick and what they have learnt about the care that is needed to build and support creative communities.

—*Wednesday 16 August*

Elizabeth Jackson is a long-time Brunswick resident and the current President of the Brunswick Community History Group. The day scheduled for our walking interview was grey and drizzly, but she declined our suggestion that we postpone the walk with an energy and commitment that mirrors her dedication to the local community of Brunswick.

—*Tuesday 22 August*

Maria-Luisa Nardella, long-time Brunswegian, offered us a real-time audio guide to the creative practices and industries of Brunswick. A passionate creative practitioner and creative industries advocate, she shared reflections that negotiated the aesthetic and the practical. Interspersed with sparks of observations, and invitations to conversations with people in their front yards.

—*Monday 28 August*

As **Jeremy McLeod** introduced us to the rewilders responsible for the rewilding along the Upfield Line in the environs of Breathe, the architecture company he co-founded, we found ourselves laughing with him as he joyfully shared his enthusiasm and passion for the urban community of which he is a part. In a manner that was unexpectedly honest and frank, he entrusted us with knowledge and reflections gathered through his years building Breathe, his collaboration with Nightingale Housing, and his thoughts on the challenges, complexities and opportunities associated with development in Brunswick.

—*Wednesday 20 September*



Collage created at PlaceLab X That Paper Joint 'Collage Brunswick' Community Workshop

VOICE

It's impossible to define what it is about Brunswick's urban character that is so unique. Perhaps it's the way that people take action upon the social fabric of Brunswick, whether this means planting plants along the Upfield Line, postering walls, starting a local paper, running a collage club at a pub, volunteering for a local historical society, or simply placing a chair on the footpath and waiting for a friend to join you. Perhaps it's that social rules here are held a little more lightly, creating autonomous moments in which something can happen (or not happen).

What has become clear is that there are as many ways of responding to this question as there are people who make up the community of Brunswick.

To recognise this, we must accept that there cannot be a single, collectively shared definition. Rather, anyone who knows Brunswick also knows better than to attempt a definition. And so, the question that started this research journey has been replaced by an intention to listen deeply to voices in Brunswick so that we might better understand what makes this place so special.

I used to get my hair cut here. It was an Iranian guy, an Iraqi guy, and a Lebanese guy and they all worked side by side.

Image by Louise Godwin



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The time-smoothed patina and feel, as contrasted to concrete-and-glass smoothness, is part of what makes Brunswick, Brunswick.

It's about weaving a rich tapestry of quality people, quality time and real experiences, out of nothing, or virtually nothing.

Brunswick is a collection of gems each with a unique character but also sharing a collective trait that ties them together.

Brunswick's Character Is...



A mixture of young students, middle class professional families, dog owning singles, and ethnic diversity makes Brunswick a place offering cultural treasures, eclectic architecture and a progressive local government.

The mix of cultures and cuisines, the art and the bogan, the music and the mayhem.

Community-minded, creative, mosaic, liberal, educated, cluttered.

Diversity of food, music, range of shops, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Coffee, bikes, bricks and bringing back grunge. Warehouses and second-hand things. Trading swapping borrowing.

Alternative, trendy, environmentally conscious, often ethically non-monogamous, socially conscious.

Variety, diversity, openness, collaboration.

Vegan capital of gender queer and live music.

Brunswick is the eccentric place that never gets boring.

Brunswick is a vibrant community hub close to the CBD where anything goes and everyone is included in its gritty, creative embrace. And greyhounds.

It's a VIBE like no other.

Brunswick is gritty, diverse and festive. It makes me feel alive!

Brunswick is relaxed, unpretentious, unserious yet absurd.

It's a collage, there's not one Brunswick thing.

Old Italian clubs, Trugo club, mosaic tile 50s buildings, sawtooth factory buildings.

There is a juxtaposed condition between industries, retail and residential. Sydney Road is that spine that holds all of them together and painting a larger picture for Brunswick. I think the liberty and expression of an artist in Brunswick makes Brunswick, Brunswick!!

Old school vibes mixed with modern artistic expressions.

A melting pot of smells and images. The character of the place is in its older shops, funny little grocers, cheap produce and delicious food.



Old historic suburb with a hipster revival.

What makes Brunswick, Brunswick is the busy, passionate and creative people who provide an upbeat energy to the area.

Brunswick is a bonkers place that continues to resist the gentrification that should have swallowed it whole years ago.

The diversity and resistance to gentrification.



I'm Not From Here, But I Am From Here

Excerpt from an interview with
Pablo Gonzales

Pablo



It's funny, probably in every culture that is passionate, things can get very contradictory. Because it's accepting other cultures, but at the same time being rebellious about trying to be something new. It's like "I'm Italian, so this is how things are done in Italy. This is how we cook our meals in Italy." And "I'm Lebanese and this is what it should taste like." And at the same time, "I don't care that I'm in a different country, this is the taste of what I'm bringing." But at the same time, it's like this is so Brunswick. No, it's not Italy, it's not.

Louise

I feel like it's a bit of a metaphor for what we were talking about when we were back at the silo (as part of the walk), that heritage, history and culture sit right up against, and sort of overlaps with, something that is assertively not about preserving things of the past. Maybe it's that tension that makes things work. I think about other suburbs where heritage is about getting heritage overlays on buildings so you can't knock them down, and they have to look the same forever. Whereas I don't feel that's the case here. The silo is here, but it doesn't have to look the same forever. The old bluestone buildings are



Image by Matthew Parsons

here, but they don't have to look the same forever. Whereas in other areas, that's what heritage is about. You know it's fixed and it's not permitted to change.

Pablo Ohh like it evolves, yeah.

Louise I wonder how much that's to do with migrant experiences and the fact that people have arrived, and they have wanted to hold on to culture, but at the same time, they've been running from culture.

Nhu If my dad moved here, that's definitely what he would say. There is the attitude of, "I'm so proud of this. I want to hold this." But at the same time, there's certain things that are outdated, that are not acceptable as part of the way the new society works. There are all sorts of conversations. That pride in being who you are, where you come from, but at the same time adapting. But how much adaptation is enough? How much holding back is enough? So, it's sort of a push and pull, isn't it?

Pablo Yes, definitely. And I think it is to do, heavily, with responding to the question that you're asking, but actively doing it. It's something that unconsciously happens when you have a community, a city, a country that is young and so embracing or finding that common bond that brings us together brings in that tension of "I'm not from here, but I am from here. This is not what things are like, but this is how they should be."

Nhu That's a beautiful way of putting it. Like, the sense of community kind of ties all these different identities together.

Pablo Yes. Because we are what we want to be, but we also are what we wear, yeah.



And something that I appreciate about Brunswick as well is that there's room to talk about the past and there's a willingness to acknowledge and talk about the Indigenous past of Australia more openly. Just the fact that the name of the Council was changed, I think it's a big statement. I sometimes feel like Brunswick is a place where you can experiment. Where you can have conversations with people. Conversations about topics that are a little bit harder to talk about, that are very sensitive.

For instance, for me, when I became an Australian, I also asked myself the question "What does that mean?" And with all the things that come along with that, "Am I less Mexican now? Am I more Australian?" That contrast is very obvious every time I go back to Mexico. Were you talking about this earlier? Like you said, when you are back to Vietnam?

Nhu



I didn't even think I was going to hear you sharing these sorts of things today, because I think only Asian, Southeast Asian people think this kind of way. And then from a very different background, from a different continent, you're saying the same things that I'm feeling and experiencing every day. But there's actually no clear answer because of our unique identity and background.

Pablo

No clear answer.

Nhu

Is it really like you are aware of a change that is happening in you, or is it something slowly seeping in?

Pablo

From my experience, there is a threshold. When you come as an immigrant, there's a threshold and once you cross it, there's no way back.

Louise

Do you know when the threshold arrives? Or would you just look back and say, "OK, it's already happened?"

Pablo

Well, it's like when I go back to Mexico, and something happens and I'm like "That's not the way." And they look at me like, "Please!" Sometimes it's not that evident, but sometimes it is. And I think, because it's not always evident, the more you live at a place, the more you become the place or the people around you. You just mirror what you see around you to be part of your community. So, when you go back to where you were or where you were born, yeah, it's like "Where were you man?"

Nhu

I think a lot of the Brunswick locals are like you. Coming from different backgrounds and becoming more Australian, somewhat they probably are feeling the same.

Pablo

I think many people are. Yes. Like the conversation we're having now. I've had it at different places with different people.



You Can Be Whoever You Want To Be

Excerpt from an interview with
Jeremy McLeod

Louise I've found my eyes drawn to the development above the street line, because at the other end of Brunswick around PlaceLab, there is a bit less of this development on Sydney Road.

Jeremy It's a bit of a train wreck. I mean, I don't think it's subjective. Objectively, it is a very ugly part of the city. Sort of aesthetically ugly, but there's something really kind of honest and beautiful about that. You can be whoever you want to be in Brunswick, which is kind of what I love.





Image by Laura May Grogan

People Taking Action

Excerpt from an interview with
Pablo Gonzales



Image by Matthew Parsons

Louise

I'm starting to get a picture that what you refer to as "stepping up" happens in all sorts of different ways in Brunswick. From tiny little grassroots activities that people don't even label as stepping up, all the way through to well-coordinated, strategically organised responses. It's very interesting: the variety of ways to step up. I wonder to what extent that is founded on this sense around Brunswick that you can paint a wall, or plant a plant on your nature strip. These little rebellions that are part of the area's identity that are also different ways of thinking and stepping up.

Pablo

Yeah, there's definitely a sense of revolution in the air.

Louise

I'm interested that you mentioned issues to do with First Nations peoples and issues that may not come up so much in other areas.

Pablo

Yeah. Like when in Adelaide, I wasn't exposed to those conversations that as much as I am here.

Louise

That's interesting. That could be time as well, because I think we're on a trajectory



Image by Theresa Harrison



Image by Stacey Wang

of awareness and conversations. But perhaps it's also to do with the things you were talking about the community's willingness to have these conversations. It's like Nhu's analogy of the push and pull. What's coming through the conversation is that it's accepted that this push will exist, and we're not all going to be on the same page. But the conversation can happen if you're not on the same page. I suppose it's an acceptance of difference that is, no doubt, shaped by Brunswick's migrant community.



Pablo Oh yeah, yeah, I agree. I think there is an openness to welcoming different perspectives. It is easier because everyone – or many people – here have experienced different perspectives rather than a single one.

Louise In terms of Brunswick's character, what does that suggest about the area's ability to respond to change? It's obviously about an area that responds to change because there's been so much change.

Pablo Yeah, I think it's an area that welcomes new things to a certain extent.

Louise Where's the line when you say "to a certain extent"?

Pablo Some of the things that are not very welcomed are – I feel that this might change, and this is only my opinion but – like big corporations. Things that are big elements or big game players in our society. Talking about capitalist society, if something big comes, like a big brand, and says "Boom, this is what hamburgers are like." It's like "If you keep bringing those things, I'm going to leave." I think it's a community that is very much against the inevitability of gentrification in a city that keeps growing and in a city that favours real estate as one of the major ways to make a successful living or to have an indicator of what success means. Big brands expanding or even little ones taking over. I think people are very protective of having a safe space to experiment and to try new things which I feel that gentrification can – I don't know if overcast is the right word – overcast. Because it's also a very comfortable way of living when you bring things that have been franchised, repeated. It's less challenging. It's like "I'll just go to work, then I'll go here to have a drink. Then I'll go there" rather than "I don't know what I'm doing today." People here are very, "If you don't give me something fun. A new music album, a new street art kind of style, a new business." It's like "No, no, no, no, no, no, I need that."



Louise



That's interesting. So, that makes the area a bit vulnerable, because these experiments can be in line with the values or ethos of the area, but they are also at risk of being opportunistically grabbed by larger organisations without recognising what they're losing in the process.

Maybe part of it comes back to this little – what was the term you used – "stepping up". We're surrounded by so many local, national and international problems and a lot of the time, we're left feeling somewhat powerless in our ability to address things at any level. So, there is this potentiality that exists in Brunswick to step up and gain entry to having a voice towards something that affects the world around you.

Nhu

It's like change is happening everywhere. You cannot stop it. You have to stop being too against it because you cannot stop it. But what can you do is make change that happens in a way that is more inclusive, slower, more considerate, better.

Pablo

I sometimes feel "How much can you do as a community member to be able to step up?" There are certain things from your daily life that just keep pushing you in a direction that is either "There's nothing I can do", or the possibility of "We can do this together, so how are we going to do it?", which I hope is part of Brunswick's personality for a while.

Louise

It's interesting to get to this point in the conversation and bring it back to that. It is what you're doing with Brunswick Daily.

Pablo

It's important to have ways in which we can tell our stories, our news, our ways of thinking, so it's not someone who came and said, "Ah. It looks like I could do something here." As you say, I think that's why it sometimes gets challenging. Because, if I start Brunswick Daily and I come up with an idea that I think can work, I'm just doing the work for someone else. Like, "He used the word community and it resonated with the people. I'm going to use it." For me that's the main challenge. What's the sweet spot between doing what I do as my passion, as my creative outlet, as the platform to let people showcase what they're doing, and monetising it and making a brand. Because on one hand, you want to make it fresh. You want to make it attractive. But you also want to make it sustainable. So, it's even a world challenge these days, to find purposeful things to do and staying alive financially and creatively.

