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## Document 5: David Hatherly Transcript

Podcast: The Placemakers

Episode: David Hatherly – Landscape Architecture & Creating Community

Host: Stephen Burton

Guest: David Hatherly, Creative Landscape Architect & Urban Designer

**Stephen Burton:** Today we're talking to David Hatherly. David is a creative in the world of landscape architecture, urban design, and placemaking with over 30 years of experience in shaping some of Australia's most cherished public places. David has a knack for understanding community and turning ideas into vibrant places where communities can thrive. His work is all about making great places. David, thank you so much for being here today and welcome to the Placemakers.

**David Hatherly:** Thanks Stephen. Thanks for having me. Excited to be here.

**Stephen Burton:** David, I just wanted to begin perhaps by having you unpack a little bit the idea that landscape architects are somehow engaged in placemaking but some LAs don't necessarily think of themselves as placemakers. Do you, when you think of the word placemaking, do you think that that is what you do?

**David Hatherly:** No, I'm definitely of the camp that what we do as landscape architects is create place. So it is fundamental to what we do. It's interesting this term of placemaking and placemakers is something that sort of more evolved over the last sort of 10 years. When I first came out of university that terminology wasn't used at all. But as a landscape architect one of the first thing you're considering is how do you actually design place that's going to be unique to that place and going to encourage people to come and use it and to experience. So place is all about experience and I think it's sort of fundamental to what we do as landscape architects.

**Stephen Burton:** Pulling back the curtain a little bit for those who maybe experience public places but don't necessarily understand the challenges and the difficulties but also the joys and successes that go into delivering these projects... Can you tell us a little bit about what some of those ingredients might be?

**David Hatherly:** Huge. First and foremost you've got to have a **client** that's sort of passionate, willing to go on the journey, do the hard yards with you. Have a little bit of trust in their designers but also at the same time sort of keep their designers accountable because designers can go off on a bit of a tangent at times. So first and foremost you've got to have a client that you can build a good relationship with and is passionate about what they want to do. You've got to—and I find all great successful places ideally have the fingerprints and the DNA of the local **community** all over them. So if you have that benefit as a really key ingredient to engage with local community and bring them on that journey with you from the very beginning... not just at the end. It's not about "here's a design what do you think about

it?" It is about starting at the very beginning: What's your vision for the place that you want to sort of create with them? It's your place at the end of the day, it's what you're going to be using. You need to feel connected to this place. And what what's your vision for it?

**Stephen Burton:** You mentioned budget. Is budget a key ingredient?

**David Hatherly:** Sometimes budget isn't the be-all and end-all. Just because you've seen it where you can have a project that's got multi-million dollars in terms of budgets and the outcome is just a fail in terms of placemaking. And you got others where the budget is actually quite small and the result is amazing. It's a place where community come together, they thrive in that space and they love it and they have ownership of it, they connect into it. And that doesn't always sort of cost money. But certainly being able to use money wisely and that value is can be important as an ingredient.

**Stephen Burton:** When I read out the introduction today about yourself, we mentioned the word creative. I'm wondering what role does creativity have to play in this kind of work?

**David Hatherly:** It's an interesting word creativity isn't it? What what does it actually mean? And is it doing something different to what's been done in the past or is it just challenging what's been done? Is it understanding what works and what doesn't work and applying that methodology to what you do? But sometimes the creativity is in the **process** as well. It's not just the physical outcome at the end of the day. So we often talk about creativity in the process that we undertake and the way that we engage with community and key stakeholders and bring them on the journey and extract ideas and their visions and aspirations and how we are then applying that and then innovation in terms of how we sort of take those ideas and start to apply them to a physical outcome. So there's creativity at every step of the way I believe.

**Stephen Burton:** You've been running your business David for quite a few decades. What are some of the challenges that you've faced during that period of time running your business working in the field of placemaking urban design?

**David Hatherly:** Challenges can be different on different projects. Sometimes fundamentally it can be around fees and time. Having enough fees to be able to do the work and go to the depth that that project deserves in terms of sort of research and understanding and connecting with history and connecting with community to extract that. Timing is can often be challenging as well, especially if we're working in a political arena where it's sort of elected representatives at the the end of the day that want to get voted back in and want to do the right thing obviously by their community but then they're also thinking about what's their next election campaign. One of the big challenges now we find is trying to... not everybody is the same. Everybody is especially when it comes to design it is always subjective. Community feel like they know what's right for them. And sometimes they apply principles that aren't necessarily aligned to principles that we feel as designers are the ones that we sort of should be addressing. So that can be a challenge working with community but not everybody's going to like what we do. And when you're working with elected representatives they're looking for the popular vote as well. So sometimes it can be hard. And with social media at our fingertips it's really easy for the minority groups to have a really strong voice. So when there is a little bit of controversy in some of the projects we're doing politically it can

be really challenging to to get a clear decisive outcome that's actually from a design point of view the right outcome.

**Stephen Burton:** What are some of the tough lessons you've learned over the years?

**David Hatherly:** Every challenge is a learning too. So you don't look back and go "I wish that hadn't happened" or "I'd change that as an outcome" because you learn from every one of those and you start applying that. It can be little things like the selection of materials even. It could be not engaging with a key stakeholder as deeply as what you would have hoped or you may have overlooked a key stakeholder and you get further down the track to design and that key stakeholder goes "hey how come you didn't consult me and you haven't considered me in all of this?" And then you have to go back and chat to them and say it was just an oversight. So sometimes it's sitting down at the beginning and making sure we have all key stakeholders considered.

**Stephen Burton:** The workplace in the last 30 years has changed drastically. It seems to me that the workplace has become very political in terms of it's almost a site for social change, social experimentation around things like work-life balance, remote working, generational differences, cultural differences, gender differences, sexuality. How have you navigated some of that changing landscape over that period of time?

**David Hatherly:** Yeah it actually has been challenging. When I first came into the industry out of university and worked, the sort of expectation was that you just work to the work that needs to be done. And you work the hours that's required and you don't complain about it otherwise you don't have a job. And everybody else is doing it so you've got to do it too if you want to sort of advance. And sometimes that as a culture actually a lot of the time as a culture that's quite toxic and you find that people will sort of ultimately move on. But as designers landscape architects we're passionate about what we do so if we feel really strongly about the projects we're working on we always want to sort of do the best job that we can. Sometimes we can overdesign and overservice projects but that's what we do because we're passionate about what we do. So that work ethic... I wouldn't say that work ethic has changed but the expectation of the norms in terms of working extra hours has certainly sort of changed. And there has been this very much and rightfully so there's been this sort of shift back to ensuring that life doesn't revolve around work. Yes you can be passionate about it and what I always find work-life balance are really interesting like how do you define work-life balance because it's different for every person. It's individual. And then the second question you ask yourself when someone feels like they don't have the right work-life balance is well how are you measuring that? Once you've defined what work-life balance is how do you how do you define what's successful in terms of a work-life balance? And I find now that with everything uh with all the flexible working opportunities and we have flexible working policies and allowing people to start early finish early work from home work remotely that there is enough flexibility that that work-life balance is more of a sort of it's it's a blend now. It's an integration. So how do you comfortably sort of integrate your home life with your work life?

**Stephen Burton:** So last question for today David. Someone going into practice whether that be at a young age or perhaps a little bit more advanced in their career and they're

thinking about working in the field of placemaking however that's defined... What's your advice to those people?

**David Hatherly:** First and foremost you've got to understand what your passion is. You know as Simon Sinek if you know Simon Sinek always talks about starting with Why. It's understanding *why* you're doing what you do and and what that sort of higher purpose is for you. Whether that's you as an employee or you starting up your own practice and business. And then it's uh I think going to work in terms of understanding... there's been a lot of people that have gone before you. So if we're talking about sort of setting up your own design practice there's a lot of people that have gone before you a lot of people have failed and there's a lot of people that have been successful. And I I would highly recommend that if someone's starting up that they that they seek advice. They find themselves a mentor. Every successful business person should should have some sort of form of mentor or sort of coach to give you some direction. So there is lots of people out there that have got lots of experience. And then the other thing I would say is just sort of read. You know I've I've read a lot of books a lot of business books and uh some of them been good some of them have been wonderful you know. And I've got a number of books that I always recommend and some that I keep going back to and I've read you know four or five times over because it just sort of refreshes me. So yeah they're probably the main fundamental things.

**Stephen Burton:** Well I've learned a lot this morning David so uh thank you so much for your time and thanks for joining us today on the Placemakers.

**David Hatherly:** Thanks Stephen it's been a pleasure. Enjoyed it.

**Stephen Burton:** Thanks for listening to the Placemakers.