

Podcast: The Placemakers

Episode: Jules – Tropical Streetscapes & Urban Cooling

Host: Stephen Burton

Guest: Jules, *Townsville Resident and Curator of “Townsville Streets” on Instagram*

Stephen Burton: Today we're talking to Jules as she's known to everyone. Jules is a Townsville Resident and Curator of “Townsville Streets” on Instagram. She has a passion for tropical urbanism, streetscape design, and creating cool, green, walkable spaces in what is a very hot and dry tropical climate. Jules has been instrumental in transforming some of Townsville's key streets and public spaces. Welcome to the Placemakers, Jules.

Jules: Thanks Stephen, great to be here.

Stephen Burton: Jules, Townsville is a unique place. It's in the dry tropics, it gets incredibly hot, and yet you're tasked with getting people out of their air-conditioned cars and walking on the streets. How do you approach streetscape design in such a challenging climate?

Jules: It is a challenge, Stephen. Heat is the biggest factor we have to deal with. In Townsville, we don't just have the heat from the sun; we have the radiated heat from the road surfaces and buildings. So, the number one priority for us is always **shade**.

We've moved away from the idea of just planting small ornamental trees to really focusing on large, broad-canopy shade trees. We're trying to create what we call “cool corridors.” If you can drop the temperature of the street by even a few degrees through shade and transpiration from trees, it makes a massive difference to whether someone is willing to walk from their car to a shop or from a bus stop to their destination.

Stephen Burton: You mentioned large trees. I imagine that comes with its own set of challenges, particularly with engineering standards, underground services, and cyclone resilience. How do you navigate that?

Jules: It's a constant negotiation! We spend a lot of time working with our engineers and civil teams. Traditionally, trees were seen as a risk—they drop leaves, their roots lift pavers, they might fall over in a cyclone. But we've had to shift that mindset to see trees as **critical infrastructure**. Just like a stormwater pipe or a light pole, a tree performs a function. It cools the city, it manages stormwater, it improves mental health.

We use structural soil cells and root barriers to protect infrastructure, but we also advocate for giving trees the space they need below ground. If you want a big canopy above, you need a healthy root system below. As for cyclones, we select species that are resilient—natives

that have evolved to withstand high winds. It's about picking the right tree for the right place.

Stephen Burton: One of the major projects you've been involved with is the revitalization of Flinders Street. Can you tell us a bit about that project and what the goals were?

Jules Flinders Street is our main high street, and for a long time, it struggled. It went through a phase where it was actually a pedestrian mall, then it was opened back up to cars, but it still lacked life. The revitalization was about finding a balance. We wanted to keep traffic moving but slow it down and prioritize the pedestrian experience.

We widened the footpaths, put in high-quality paving, and importantly, we put in *a lot* of street furniture and planting. We created little "nooks" where people could sit and have a coffee or just wait for a friend. We also engaged local artists to create integrated public art, which gives the street a sense of identity unique to Townsville. It's not just a generic street anymore; it feels like *our* street.

Stephen Burton: Do you think the community appreciates the effort? Have you seen a change in how people use the street?

Jules: Absolutely. You see it in the way people linger now. Before, people would rush from point A to point B to get out of the sun. Now, you see people sitting on the benches, eating lunch under the trees. The businesses have also spilled out onto the footpath with outdoor dining, which adds so much vibrancy.

It's also changed the perception of the CBD. It used to be seen as a place you only went to if you had to—for work or government business. Now, it's becoming a destination again. We have markets there on Sundays, events, and it feels like the heart of the city is beating again.

Stephen Burton: You work within local government, which can sometimes be bureaucratic. How do you maintain your creative drive and push for good design outcomes in that environment?

Jules: It can be tough, I won't lie. There are days when you feel like you're banging your head against a wall of policy and procedure. But you have to play the long game. I think what keeps me going is the small wins. When you get a tree in the ground in a difficult spot, or you see a design built that really works, it's incredibly rewarding.

Also, building relationships internally is key. I spend a lot of time talking to the maintenance crews, the traffic engineers, the planners. If you can get them on board and help them understand *why* we're doing this—that it's not just about making it look pretty, it's about cooling the city and making it liveable—then they become your allies.

Stephen Burton: Jules, the question I ask everyone: What do you think is the most important

ingredient for creating a successful public place?

Jules For me, especially in our climate, it has to be **comfort**. If a person isn't physically comfortable—if they're too hot, too exposed, or there's nowhere to sit—they won't stay. You can have the most beautiful design in the world, but if it's a heat island, it's a failure. So, shade, greenery, and seating are the non-negotiables for me. Comfort invites people, and people make the place.

Stephen Burton: That makes perfect sense, especially in the tropics. Jules, thanks so much for sharing your insights on streetscapes and urban cooling with us today.

Jules: Thanks Stephen, it was a pleasure.

Stephen Burton: Thanks for listening to the Placemakers.