

REVEALING THE SPIRIT OF PARSONS STREET

Concept outline intended to shape pedestrian amenity and create balance in the cultural order of the street.

As part of a CBD renewal programme, I was commissioned to provide creative direction for the eastern end of Parsons Street, a linear pedestrian zone of 145m X 7.8m. The proposed walkway expands and formalizes an east – west link to and from the Todd River and nearby retail areas that are experiencing a severe economic downturn. Improvements to pedestrian amenity in Parsons Street are linked with plans to re-introduce traffic into the northern half of the 450m Mall.

Local government and private investment is virtually at a standstill and calls by Mall traders for action on “anti-social behaviour” are echoed throughout the community. In the centre of Parsons street an ancient red gum is surrounded and obscured with exotic plantings. These choke off a dramatic sightline that once connected the Todd River and a range feature 9km distant. The tree, a registered sacred site is also part of a song-line stretching from Mparntwe (Alice Springs) to Larrakeya (Darwin).

Alice Springs is a troubled and polarized town. Beyond the media stereotyping of stabbing deaths and racially motivated assaults, this is also a place of hope and promise, where inter-racial respect and friendship has persisted against a backdrop of violence. This untold story of Alice Springs emerged gradually and grew unexpectedly through my research on Parsons Street and its namesake, Hon.J.Langdon Parsons, the most senior government official in the Northern Territory from 1884-1892.

I’ve presented an informing philosophy for designers, architects and artists who intend to work in Parsons Street. There are few drawings or plans because I’ve tried not to be overly prescriptive. Conversely there is a lot of history and ecology in my entry ‘boards’ derived from a paper I prepared for Government.

This work would not have been possible without the guidance and consent of my long-term Arrernte friend and colleague Doris Stuart, senior custodian responsible for sacred sites in the Mparntwe area (Alice Springs).

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