

A special place: Urambi Village at 40





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*Thank you to all those who contributed their time, energies and words
to create this volume for this special anniversary.*

Editor: Allan Sharp

Graphics and Layout: Paal Burnett

Cover design: Paal Burnett - Flight of the currawong

How it all began

It was the early 70s and there was a feeling of change in the air. The Labor Party, led by Gough Whitlam, had been returned to power in December 1972 after 23 years in opposition, bringing with it the expectation of social change and fresh ideas.

New ideas for cities and housing were among the government's priorities. The Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) under minister Tom Uren was charged with the ambitious program of coordinating the allocation of urban resources by all levels of government.

A young officer in DURD, Jim Batty, had had a longstanding interest in the development of housing clusters with complementary architectural styles.

'I was always struck by the incongruity of quite different architectural styles which were built side by side,' Jim wrote at the time of Urambi's 10th anniversary.

'Occasionally, three or four houses of complementary architectural style would be built side-by-side and the result, to my mind, was always impressive.'

With changes foreshadowed to allow cooperative societies to develop community housing, Jim saw an opportunity to advance his ideas.

Jim discussed his ideas with a group of like-minded friends, some of whom also worked in DURD, and in early 1974 the Urambi Association with 10 founding members was formed.

The group had firm ideas on how a future Urambi should look and feel. It would have a village feel that engendered a sense of belonging; be of high architectural quality; have common facilities available to all; and would limit vehicle use within its boundaries. However, the road to fulfilling this vision was to prove bumpy at times.

Securing a site

The first priority, to secure a site, met with some early bureaucratic obstacles.

'The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) had to be convinced that our concepts wouldn't become merely another blot on the face of their beautiful city,' recalled early Urambi planner and resident Alistair Christie.

And the Department of the Capital Territory had to be convinced that changes to the leasing and unit titles ordinance were both necessary and workable, while potential financiers, in their usual flint-eyed way, were concerned about financial feasibility.

Finally, the Urambi Association accepted an offer from the Department of the Capital Territory to buy our present four hectare site at a cost of \$151,000.

In late 1974, the long-awaited changes to the Unit Titles Ordinance were made. The changes were significant and key to the future development of Urambi in that they allowed the progressive sale of individual titles before the whole development was complete.



Selling Urambi

Michael Robbins atop a sale sign. A number of early members of the cooperative spent weekends helping to sell houses in the developing village.

Cooperative formed

To undertake the project, the Urambi Association agreed to form a cooperative society—the Urambi Cooperative Community Advancement Society. One of its first acts was to engage a rising young Sydney architect, Michael Dysart, to design the project.

Work began on the site in August 1975 and, in November 1975, Stocks and Holdings was chosen as the builder. The total cost of the project was estimated at \$2.75 million.

In late 1975, the whole project was thrown into doubt when the Whitlam government was dismissed from office.

'The dismissal was the single event which, by far, caused the greatest difficulties,' said David Watson, who was also involved in early development of the village and was a Board member of the cooperative.

Many people's presence in Canberra was tied up with the Whitlam government, and the building industry was in an overheated state because of the strong public service growth at the time.

Many people walked away from the Urambi project in the ensuing months, resulting in great administrative, building and architectural difficulties.

Dark days

'By July 1976 there were only 42 firm contracts to purchase houses, and by this time there had been a loss of confidence in the building industry as the slowdown in public service recruitment started to bite,' he said.

To keep the project afloat amid increasing construction difficulties and delays caused by bad weather, and by financial pressures and increasing housing costs, volunteers from the cooperative spent their weekends in mid-1976 helping to sell houses when it was realised word-of-mouth would not be enough. Even so, Stocks and Holdings would have to assume control of 16 unsold houses in 1977.

However, perseverance and an undiminished belief in the vision prevailed, and on 18 November 1976, the Minister for the Territories, Tony Staley, and former DURD minister Tom Uren, officially opened Urambi Village.



The grand opening

from left, Steve Shann, Alastair Christie at the microphone, Jim Batty, and former DURD minister Tom Uren.

A month later the first families — Steve and Margaret Shann, Christopher and Annie Lang, and Margaret and Terry Healy and Jim and Cynthia Batty and their children — moved in. Urambi was described at the time as *'still part dustbowl and part building site'* — but *morale was lifting*.

The rest, as they say, is history. Because of the financial difficulties, some of the major features planned for Urambi, such as the spine path and the landscaping, were left to the early residents to complete through regular working bees and a lot of hard work. Other projects, such as the swimming pool and the ball court, were completed later.

Something to celebrate

The Urambi of today is a tribute to the vision and commitment of our early planners, architects and residents to an ideal that persists 40 years on. For them, our 40th anniversary is, indeed, something to celebrate.

It's also an opportunity for a new generation of Urambi residents to look forward to building on that vision — and to ensuring that Urambi continues to be a very special place.

A town house in a country setting

Urambi Village Crozier Circuit, Kambah

You are cordially invited to visit this highly imaginative 72-house village at the western extreme of Kambah. Each house has uninterrupted views of the Grindabellas and surrounding hills, and yet is only 5 minutes from Uoden Town Centre, and is also handy to schools shops and bus services. Designed by architect Michael Dysart, the houses are grouped in clusters of 3 to 7, in a traffic-free environment landscaped with predominantly native plants.

There are still a limited number of soon-to-be completed houses available. They are contemporary tri-levels with raked ceilings, natural timber finishes, private balconies and courtyards. The emphasis is upon personal privacy within a community setting.

Type U2 - Two bedroom and mezzanine study	\$34,300
Type U3 - Three bedroom, with extra laundry	\$43,000
Type U4 - Three bedroom plus study plus separate playroom	\$51,000

The 3-Bedroomed House - U3

Inspect weekends 2-5 p.m., phone Alastair Christie 317585
or write to P.O. Box 666, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608.
URAMBI CO-OPERATIVE COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT SOCIETY LTD

A town house in a country setting - Advertisement late 1976

Alastair Hay (house 71)



On the site of #21

From left: Jan Robbins, Michael Robbins, Pat Ryan, Andrew Kay and Arminel Ryan.

Standing the test of time

- Michael Dysart AM LFRAIA

As architects Peter Bell* and I are very proud of the success of Urambi and very privileged to have had the opportunity to design this special place. Urambi was an exciting and eventful part of our lives, and an opportunity to develop new and innovative housing ideas.

While we had designed an earlier cooperative in Sydney called Baranbali, it wasn't comparable, being a high-rise apartment complex. The broadacre site at Kambah gave us the freedom to experiment.

Apart from broad social goals our aim was to create a sense of community by grouping dwelling units to encourage interaction, maintain privacy and make the communal aspects far more positive than current suburban and medium-density solutions.

This meant relegating cars to the perimeter, creating an internal pedestrian street with improved child safety and less road crossings. It also gave us the opportunity to determine the community fabric, directly with the residents, providing a choice of house, a community centre and the means of determining their own community thereby ensuring significant cost savings.

The planning philosophy of Urambi was a group effort with all 72 residents in agreement on the final plans. We submitted our proposal to the National Planning Development Commission but our brave experiment was rejected by a hostile NCDC.

Their argument was that Australians do not wish to live this way and that Urambi would become a slum in five years.

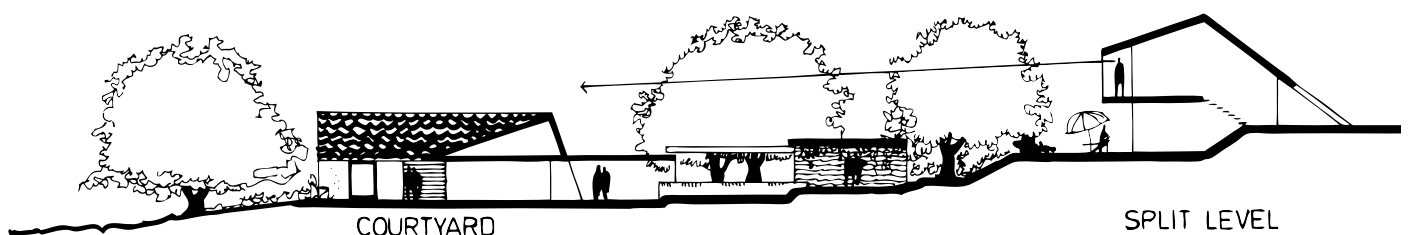
Our argument that 72 of their own Canberra residents wished to live this way fell on deaf ears.

The NCDC's blanket refusal was finally overridden by the minister Tom Uren.

In retrospect the final and delicious irony was the awarding to Urambi of the ACT Architectural Award, the CS Daley Medal in 1977. Even more significant was the ACT 25-year award in 2002 for a building that has stood the test of time.

Urambi has stood the test of time and we should congratulate ourselves on an extraordinary achievement in the face of all the obstacles and difficulties.

*Peter Bell took over as supervising architect in June 1976.





The best possible of virtuous circles

- Nic Brown

The depth and breadth of community participation in Urambi is—and has always been—remarkable.

All annual general meetings have had a quorum of residents attending or providing proxies. Our executive committees have met monthly almost continuously for 40 years.

Over the years, the EC has been assisted and complemented by many dedicated groups and remarkable individuals. The result has been the best possible of virtuous circles, with these contributions building Urambi's distinctive sense of community and continually inspiring others to contribute.

I can't remember there ever not being people willing to come forward to take on EC responsibilities, look after the swimming pool, keep the lights on, care for and manage the community centre, clear the bins, assist with landscape planning and maintenance, produce Urambi News each month and assess and advise on our finances. Our managing agents have always been astounded, and at times somewhat perplexed, at how much we insist on doing for ourselves.

Getting the balance right between the needs of the community and the rights and diverse needs of residents is often tricky.

ECs have been confronted with some difficult issues over the years—the use of common land by owners, structures proposals contested by neighbours, burst pipes and sewerage lines close to unit title borders, the handling of insurance claims, and the rights and responsibilities of residents with animal companions.

We can't claim to be perfect, but to date we've managed to sort out solutions among ourselves, and hopefully we can continue to do so.

My dozen or so years on Urambi's executive committee, spread over nearly 30 years, have all been rewarding. I've just begun my fourth stint and have quickly and happily discovered that the purpose and sense of enthusiasm on the committee and in supporting groups is as strong as ever.

We've a terrific blend of the newer arrivals and the not so new, turning their minds to the never-ending challenges of maintaining, updating and augmenting our infrastructure and attending to other community needs.

We must be doing some things right. Urambi is as sought after as a place to live as ever. Especially pleasing has been the arrival in recent times of young families and others from diverse walks of life, many of whom are already contributing importantly to our community.

For a while we were ageing even more quickly than the rest of the country. Now, once again we're hearing the laughter of children playing up, down and around the spine path. Urambi is more than ever a vibrant and welcoming village community, in tune with our times and young at heart. May it always be thus.



Nic Brown is Urambi's current convener and has served in that role on two other occasions.



Early days

For the early settlers their enthusiasm and passion for the Urambi project was undimmed by the often difficult conditions. Mud, rubble, duckboards, a barren landscape and an absence of paths were challenges they set to overcoming through long hours of working bees to begin building the village we know today.



Mary Murray - first chair of the Urambi Body Corporate

As the first chair of the Urambi Body Corporate, Mary and her committee had all kinds of headaches.

'It was 1977 and excitement was high,' she recalls. 'We had most of the residents in their houses and therefore a real live community. But how were we going to live together? Make decisions together?'

In the first year, the committee struggled with whether to be a bit laissez faire or come down hard with clear rules and guidelines.

'We went with guidelines on several fronts, but as chair, I was firmly on the side of allowing things to develop slowly,' Mary said.

'One of the outstanding memories of the first years was the community spirit that grew around our communal working bees to landscape the village. The landscaping committee came up with plans, sourced materials like kiln bricks for the paths, megatons of pine chips, and native plants.

'Foot by foot we established the path, working from each end of the village. There came the glorious Sunday where we joined them all up!'

Dog control became a big issue. And what should be the rules about a communal vegetable garden?

'The structures committee was busy trying to facilitate resident desires for pergolas, sheds and other needs within the overall design ethos of the village. Mission brown was our religion then,' Mary said. 'We got through the first year with a community still intact and even enjoying our space, the best indicator being lots of groups forming around shared interests—play group, cooking clubs, babysitting club.'

'This is surely the greatest sign of democracy and a cohesive community—even if it has rough patches along the way.'



Michael and Jan Robbins - house 21

Urambi pioneers Michael and Jan Robbins moved to Canberra from Sydney in 1974, joining their close friends Arminel and Pat Ryan, and Andrew Kay.

At first, the friends rented adjacent apartments in Mawson and shared meals and resources.

Arminel had first heard of plans for Urambi in 1973. Instead of renting adjacent apartments, the friends saw an opportunity for living in three houses connected around a common internal living space.

But would the Urambi planners agree to such an arrangement?

The group put the idea to Jim Batty and his planning committee. They agreed to the arrangement, so the Robbins, the Ryans and a then single Andrew Kay signed up with the 'originals' to help turn the concept of Urambi into a reality.

'We had a major part in organising and running a weekend at Weston Creek High School which set out many of the village's goals and agreements,' Michael recalls.

The Robbins, Ryans and Andrew moved into Urambi in mid-1977—into houses 19, 20 and 21.

'It was very satisfying to be living close to many people who had become close working-bee mates and friends,' said Michael.

'Many of us—owners and tenants—heavily involved ourselves in village life with working bees, the babysitting club, and as ad hoc social arrangers for events like Christmas parties.

Most of the goals set by the Urambi "originals" have been reached. Some, like the swimming pool, took longer to achieve than hoped, and others were probably always a little too optimistic.

'Over the years, the village has continued to attract residents who help it to continually renew itself and maintain a great sense of community,' Michael said.

'For Jan and me, however, the hallmark of the village is—and, we hope, always will be—its sense of community.'



David and Heide Watson - house 25

David and Heide arrived in Canberra in March 1975 with their two young children, Angus and Tanja, to be part of the Whitlam idealism—to create a better Australia!

‘When some work colleagues from the Department of Urban and Regional Development explained the Urambi Housing Cooperative, we were immediately attracted,’ David said.

‘We joined the cooperative and soon found ourselves at meetings with 60 or so people who were to be our future neighbours.

‘Heide was a fulltime mother, lonely, and appreciated social invitations from these people.’

David was invited to join the board of the cooperative, and for the next two years it almost became his second job.

‘The sacking of the Whitlam government in November 1975 was a huge setback for the cooperative, because many prospective purchasers soon left Canberra, and the bottom fell out of the overheated housing market,’ he said.

Unsure of how the overall project would be completed, the Watsons moved ‘enthusiastically’ into their unit in February 1977, three months after the official opening of Urambi.

‘The site was a dust bowl,’ recounts David. ‘A thunderstorm created havoc when it swept mud through some front doors, and gutters overflowed inside newly carpeted houses.’

After establishing a garden in their immediate surrounds, David and Heide joined the regular working bees to plant lawns and hundreds of native plants.

‘This early period was formative to the village as it is today, in a number of ways’, David said.

‘Living in Urambi is a richer experience because the community still manages its own affairs to an unusual degree.

‘The sense of community is perhaps the most important point of difference about living here. It’s a precious thing to be nurtured.’



Noel Pratt - house 29

(Noel and partner Geoff Pryor in their garden)

As a ‘fancy free young woman’ with no great aspirations for home ownership, but an attraction to a different way of living, Noel was drawn to Urambi 40 years ago.

‘It was the Whitlam era. We believed we could change the world. And so why not housing?’ she said.

Although a long way from a commune and far from many of the intentional communities today, Urambi was still not the average suburban site.

‘Our privately owned strata title units were to be supported by common land and common facilities like the community centre, the swimming pool and a ball court’, Noel said.

‘Art shows, Christmas celebrations, meetings, pot luck dinners, milestone birthday parties, weddings and wakes have proven the community centre’s worth, and in the pool, Sue Foster’s wonderful swim school thrived for a while.

‘Reflecting changing times, replacement of other common resources like the trailer and the lawn mower is, however, today judged by some as unnecessary and community vegetable garden interest is limited.

‘The golfers with their shouts of ‘fore!’—or other stronger words—on our boundaries reveal a different age replacing the Kelly’s farm sheep that once ravaged our struggling new gardens,’ she said

Noel and her partner of 35 years Geoff Pryor brought up their daughter Fabia here and now look forward to seeing granddaughter Aila in the green spaces where her mother used to play.

‘Not only a beautiful setting, Urambi is a place to discover friends; a safe environment for children, for sharing with companion animals and for enjoying wildlife,’ said Noel.

‘While this year has seen the sad passing of friends and neighbours, others moving in bringing new ideas.

‘A final question: why has this housing option not been taken up more widely?’



Robyn Lawson - house 48

(Robyn and husband Allan Sharp in their lounge room)

When Robyn arrived in Urambi as a tenant in December 1977 the village was still in a state of development.

'There was still lots of clay and rubble, no golf course but paddocks of golden grasses around a dam,' said Robyn, who had first come to Canberra to take up a schoolteaching post.

Robyn had been enticed to the village by the Golski family—Kathy and Alex and their three children Jan, Mishka and Nadia—who lived at 34.

'I was teaching the Golski children and Kathy insisted I come and live in Urambi,' she said.

Robyn was entranced by the bohemian atmosphere at the Golski house.

'It was like an Aladdin's cave, presided over by Kathy, an artist, and husband Alex who, sadly, died in a road accident soon after I moved in. There was a constant stream of unusual and entertaining characters—not least Richard Dowe [one of the founders of Urambi] who was a font of amusing anecdotes about the early days.

'I felt I'd stumbled into a new and extraordinary world.'

After renting in Urambi for a while, Robyn bought house 66.

'Later, after marrying Allan, we bought unit 48, where we've been for the last 33 years,' she said.

'Kathy's influence inspired me to give up school teaching and go to art school to do ceramics. We built a pottery studio at 48 and I had several exhibitions at the Community Centre and elsewhere,' she said.

'I loved Urambi when I first saw it—and I love it still.'



Maureen Mutton - house 30

Maureen and Bill Mutton had just moved into a new home in Hawker when Bill [who died in July this year] read about a new alternative housing project at Kambah.

'We'd always been interested in architecture and new developments and decided to go for a Sunday drive to Kambah,' Maureen said.

'We saw Richard Dowe (a Urambi founder) standing by his car in Crozier Circuit with the boot open. He offered us a drink and a tour of the village.

'There was clay and mess and duckboards everywhere—it was just like a bombsite. Number 30 had just a concrete floor and was surrounded by clay. But in the courtyard there was a huge gumtree,' Maureen said.

Undeterred, Bill and Maureen returned to their new house at Hawker and thought: 'We really like this [Urambi] house... We talked and thought, even if we hate the community, we still like the house. We fell in love with the whole idea of living in Urambi,' Maureen said.

They returned to the village and talked to the newly arrived David and Heide Watson.

'We sat in their lounge room and looked out at the view, then returned home and put our Hawker home on the market.

'We never regretted coming to Urambi, As a stay-at-home mother I appreciated the support Urambi provided.' Maureen said.

'There were no grandparents in Canberra in those days, and Urambi friends and neighbours served in the role of aunts and uncles to our children, Melissa and David.

'The architecture of the house also met the expectations Bill and I had for it when we first looked at it 40 years ago—from pre-schoolers playing, to 21st parties for 90 people, to family staying for extended periods.

'Growing up in Urambi had a great effect on Melissa and David in the way they interact with people and it has given them an understanding of what a community can be.'

The second wave

The second wave of Urambians—those who arrived within a few years of the village’s opening—adopted their new home and the Urambi lifestyle with the same enthusiasm as the early settlers.



Richard and Penny Jones - house 18

(Penny and Richard with daughter Laura)

The Joneses perhaps have the distinction of having lived in more Urambi houses than anyone.

‘We came to Canberra from the UK with our four children in January 1980 on a short work exchange,’ Richard said. ‘Laura, our youngest, who now owns her own house (#14) here, was just 10 weeks old.

‘We first heard about Urambi in 1979, from Mary Murray. She and her late husband, Bob Hodge, who were living at #42, spent a weekend with us in London.

‘When we arrived in Canberra in January 1980, we rented a house (#22) in Urambi that Mary had found for us,’ Richard said.

‘We, and especially the kids, were swept into the Urambi scene of working bees and children’s play group.’

‘We all made lifelong friends in that 15 months, many still living here.’

The Joneses then returned to the UK, having seen, what they thought, the last of Australia.

‘Then I was offered a position with a small Australian software company for two years. We could go where we liked. Where else but Canberra—and of course Urambi,’ Richard said.

Returning to Urambi in January 1984, the Joneses rented in quite rapid succession houses 26, 16 and 17.

‘When it seemed clear we were staying on for a bit longer we bought #18 from Tony Pratt and Blanche d’Alpuget in 1986. And we’re still here. Never lived anywhere else in Australia—and don’t intend to.

‘The Community Centre has seen many of our family’s significant celebrations—a wedding, 18ths, 21sts, 50ths; it’s felt like an extension of our house,’ Richard said.

‘We love the sense of community, our views of the mountains, especially evenings, and memories of glasses of bubbles on the deck with family members from the UK. Long may it continue,’ Richard said.



Suzanne Davey and Nic Brown - house 36

(Nic and Suzanne with daughters Anna, left, and Julia)

For Nic and Suzanne it was love at first sight when they saw Urambi.

‘I was smitten by the magnificent view from house 36 across to Mount Neighbour, straight out of a Hans Heysen painting’ Suzanne said. ‘Within 24 hours Nic and I had purchased our first and only home.

‘The love affair hasn’t worn off!

‘As a new mother, I really appreciated the Urambi layout of shared garages and the spine path, facilitating me getting to know so many of my neighbours.

‘I was part of the second wave of Urambi mothers, all older mothers as it turned out, and we provided a great deal of support and friendship for each other, having a lot of laughs along the way,’ Suzanne said.

‘I remember our two little girls running up and down the spine path and in and out of our surrounding neighbours houses, as “it takes a village to raise a child” played out before my eyes.

‘The memories of hundreds of shared tables in Urambi over more than a quarter of a century give me so much pleasure.

‘But most of all I appreciate the tapestry of friendships built up over 30 years in Urambi, from my neighbours who have also become my best friends, to those with whom I merely exchange a friendly greeting in passing,’ she said.

‘These friendships have multiplied with each successive set of new residents. All contribute to a life that has been greatly enriched by having been lived in Urambi Village.’



Ellen Shipley - house 72

(Ellen and husband Lee Kear on their deck)

Ellen first saw Urambi as a 21 year old, fresh from the US, and remembers it as being in a completely rural setting – before the golf course was built.

‘It was to be another 25 years before she became a Urambi resident.

‘I’d spent a year looking for a house of my own, and when I drove down Crozier Circuit and saw Urambi, I felt like I was coming home,’ she said.

‘For a busy bureaucrat, Urambi was heaven-sent – a stunning setting, like coming home every day to a resort. It provided a (mostly) green oasis and a chance to live among the trees and enjoy the wildlife and the views.

‘I bought a house I thought would be my own, but which has generously expanded to be home to my husband, and at different times, several daughters.

‘And importantly, there was the community.’

Having grown up in a planned community, Bayberry, in New York state, community was important to Ellen.

‘Bayberry had reserved green spaces, and crescent streets that slowed traffic. We played safely in-and-out of all the neighbourhood houses; everyone knew everyone else,’ she said.

‘Bayberry celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, and only recently have I realised how similar the two are.

‘Like Urambi, Bayberry depends on volunteers for many things. As a former member of the executive committee, I’ve also come to realise how different Urambi is from other strata titles. We do so much for ourselves, and have done from the beginning,’ Ellen said.

‘Urambi is many things—generous, contentious and flexible; a supportive community that also offers privacy and a retreat. And always the setting ...

‘Like so many of us, there’s nowhere else I’d rather be.’

Later arrivals

A new generation is moving into Urambi, establishing their own networks and friendships, and eager to contribute to the life and spirit of the village.



Philip Clacher and David Hobbes
- house 42

David and his partner Philip moved into house 42 in January 2011.

'We first became aware of Urambi when researching a move to Canberra in 2003, although it took us a few years to feel ready to move out of the inner city,' David said.

'When the time came I asked Alastair Swayn to keep an eye out for a courtyard house for us. Our house came up for sale quite quickly after that and we snapped it up.'

David and Philip both grew up on Sydney's North Shore in the 1960s and 70s and knew many iconic houses of this period, notably the Pettit and Sevitt and Habitat project houses, many of which were designed by Michael Dysart.

'I subsequently became an architect and developed a passion for Sydney School architecture for its human scale, intimacy and the use of natural materials,' David said.

'We've renovated our house as a backdrop for our collection of midcentury furniture, ceramics and textiles and have spent many hours developing our garden to blend into the Urambi landscape.

'We love the simplicity of the house and its relationship to the exterior environment.'

'We also love being part of the Urambi community and have made many good friends here. This is surely our forever home.'



Claire Conti and Kleber Osario - house 53

(Kleber and Claire with children Felix and Saskia on their deck)

Urambi has always been a great place for families. Soon after the first residents arrived, a playgroup was formed and casual child-minding arrangements among Urambi mothers were quickly established.

Young families like the Conti-Osarios have continued to make Urambi their home and watch their children grow up here.

Claire Conti and Kleber Osario arrived in 2010 as a young engaged couple fresh from overseas travel.

'A first home will always be memorable, and we feel very fortunate that ours was a little "tree house" tucked away in a village,' Claire said.

'The enormous upstairs windows framed a treetop vista that won us over instantly.'

'In our first year, to our delight, we would watch the seasons change from our lounge room. Living here feels like we're plugged into nature.'

Claire and Kleber brought both their newborns, Saskia and Felix, home to Urambi.

'As babies, we pushed them in prams around the village; as toddlers they learnt to walk on the spine path; and now they scoot at increasing speeds on various "trails" around the village,' Claire said.

'We've met many of our neighbours on these wanders around the village and enjoy the sense of community that stems from these casual meetings.

'We often think how lucky we are to be a village family.'



Azure Peacock and Mark Hermes - house 52

(Azure, Mark and Winston)

When Mark and Azure first saw what was to become their Urambi home, they decided it wasn't for them.

'It wasn't exactly love at first site,' Mark said. 'The property needed major renovations, and we were initially overwhelmed by the prospect of how much needed to be done.'

'Fortunately, our real estate agent persuaded us to have another look. It was a beautiful spring afternoon, and as soon as I stood on the balcony I felt calm and at peace here.'

For Mark, moving into Urambi was the fulfilment of a long-time dream.

'I grew up in Kambah and remember fishing for yabbies in the pond behind Urambi, and the bike-tracks and hideouts in the surrounding grasslands.

'I'd come to birthday parties at Urambi and remember how interesting in design and outlook the houses were,' he said.

Mark moved away from Kambah in the 90s, ending up in Darwin, where he met Azure. They returned to Canberra a few years later, got married and started saving for a home.

'The whole time I'd been talking to Azure about Urambi and how, when it came time to buy, we should seriously consider the area,' Mark said.

'Eventually we saved enough to put a deposit on an off-the-plan townhouse in Harrison, but when that fell through we saw that house 52 was for sale.

'We've been here now nearly 12 months—and we're still renovating,' Mark said.

'As first-time renovators with a budget we've done a lot of the work ourselves, with the help of family and friends.

'We love living here. It's been one of the best decisions we've ever made—and we look forward to spending our lives here.'



Zoe Johnson - house 67

(Zoe at her recent exhibition in the Community Centre)

Over the years, tenants have made a valuable contribution to village life.

Zoe moved into Urambi in 2014 with son Ronan and dog Frankie after fleeing from domestic violence.

'We initially had nothing but clothes and a few boxes and slept on an air mattress in the loft for three months until we could get furniture,' Zoe said.

'I remember those first nights in the loft feeling safe and secure high up in our "nest", and listening to the rain on the roof soothed my soul.

'I began to work in the garden, and it wasn't long before neighbours started commenting on my progress with it. I soon struck a friendship with several of them.

'I believe working in my garden was a gateway into this wonderful community.'

Zoe soon began taking a more active part in village life, organising a Halloween barbecue with trick or treating.

When the pool opened for the season she and Ronan became regulars.

'Ronan made many friends and soon I had a regular posse of boys either at home or at the pool. I began to meet other residents and make friends.'

When the pool closed for winter, Zoe decided to build on the friendships she'd made over the summer by organising regular drinks by the fire at the Community Centre fireplace.

'As part of my recovery, I began painting and recently held my first exhibition at the Community Centre. Many villagers attended and I sold eight paintings,' Zoe said.

'Many of my paintings depict Urambi, as it has special meaning for me.

'By moving into Urambi I got more than a house. I got a whole community. Neighbours have become friends, and some friends, family. I love living here.'

Growing up in Urambi

Many of the children who grew up in Urambi have fond memories of their early years in the village.



Emma Field

(Emma with husband BJ and their children Oscar and Sam)

For Emma—daughter of Mary Murray and the late Bob Hodge—growing up in Urambi ‘was the best’.

Emma recalls the freedom and safety Urambi allowed, riding her bicycle up and down the spine path collecting friends as she went.

‘We children were always outside,’ she said. ‘Along with the spine path came the caring and watchful eye of so many. Close to dinner time, many a phone rang to piece together when and where the children had last been seen.’

Emma remembers longing for the pool to open in summer.

‘I willed it to be warm enough as I’d just turned 12 and could swim on my own—only to return home rather cyanotic two hours later to defrost in front of an electric heater.’

Then there were the pool parties, ‘drowning-bug rescue missions’, underwater breath-holding races and diving competitions—and finally ‘mum coming in the gate saying I’d been in the pool for five hours and was late for dinner again’.

Before the golf course, there were endless BMX tracks through the grass, frequent snake sightings, more hide and seek, and catching yabbies in the dam.

‘After the golf course was completed, this changed our game to sneaking out to run around on those unbelievable green carpets when the golfers had finished, being blasted by automatic sprinklers and seeing who could collect the most golf balls,’ Emma said.

‘The friendships made in Urambi are strong ones. I felt a close link to our neighbours as they watched us grow—they all felt like extended family.’

‘Now, as a parent, I realise just how special and lucky we children of Urambi were. It’s a truly special place to be allowed to grow up.’



Ellen Lloyd-Shepherd

(Ellen with her children Owen, Pippa and Hugh)

Ellen, daughter of Richard and Penny Jones, was seven when she first moved to Urambi in 1980.

‘Childhood in the village in the 80s and 90s was unlike any my friends experienced,’ Ellen recalled.

‘We knew all the neighbours and the open-door policy meant you were never sure who would be found in which house, but you knew that someone always had an eye on you, and any mischief would surely get back to your parents!’

‘After school we ganged together to play various impromptu games, both at the pool and along the spine path.’

Long before the golf course was there, Ellen and her friends would trek down to the dam to catch yabbies, build tunnel systems in the long grass and cubbies and tyre swings in the trees behind the village.

‘We were often treated to various parent organised activities too—pottery in the clay studio, tennis, basketball and handball in the ball court and numerous parties and events at the Community Centre,’ Ellen said.

‘Halloween was always a big hit, too. Christmas involved carolling along the spine path and the amazing children’s Christmas party. Santa always made an appearance.’

As teenagers Ellen and her friends found Urambi a great haven for enterprise. Early unionists in the making, Ellen and her friends Sam Fox, Brooke Edwards and Jacqui Christie formed a village babysitting cooperative, in which they distributed leaflets to every house stating their terms, rates and hours ‘to ensure no-one was undercut’!

‘More than 30 years on I am still very close friends with all of those girls,’ she said.

‘As we had no relatives in Australia, the families of Urambi became our surrogate grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and we shared—and still do—many significant occasions with them.’

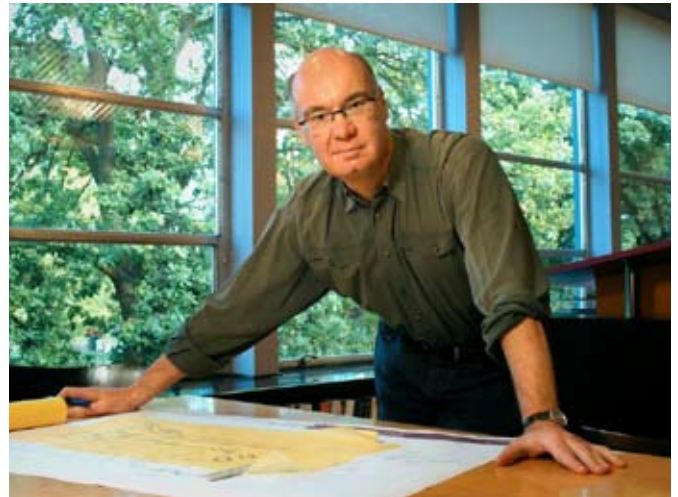
In memoriam

Urambi was saddened by the deaths of three longstanding members of the community this year.

Alastair Swayn was very active in village affairs as a long-serving member of the executive committee, including as convener and treasurer and on various subcommittees. He was deeply committed to the concept of Urambi and, after many visits to similar communities overseas, truly believed Urambi was the best he had seen. Alastair will be missed by his many friends and for his outstanding contribution to the village.

Bill Mutton had a deep commitment to the village, especially its landscaping, and was an eager participant in early working bees when hundreds of tree and shrubs were planted. Bill served on executive committees and was strongly respected as a conciliator on occasions that contentious issues arose in the village, and for his wise advice. He will be sadly missed by his many friends in Urambi. Bill is survived by wife Maureen and children Melissa and David.

Michael Burton contributed to village life, serving on the executive committee as structures officer and overseeing a major review of the structures guidelines. He maintained a keen interest in Urambi affairs and took delight in the environment and lifestyle of the village. Michael was a man of broad-ranging interests and his friends in the village will miss his convivial company and humour. Michael is survived by his wife Cecilie.





A special place: Urambi Village at 40
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