



Urambi Village Owners Corporation
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Controversial townhouse development celebrates 40 anniversary

Canberra's first—and, at the time, controversial—cooperative housing development will celebrate its 40th anniversary on 26 November.

Urambi Village, at Kambah, was officially opened in November 1976 by the then Minister for Territories, Tony Staley, and former Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Tom Uren, after an uncertain start and significant delays due to weather and financial and building difficulties.

Conceived during the early, heady days of the Whitlam government, which was encouraging new thinking in city and alternative housing design, Urambi village remains today a thriving community of 72 townhouses.

'The concept of a cooperative housing development in which people owned their own unit title and shared common facilities was considered rather radical at the time,' said early Urambi Board member, David Watson, who still lives in the village.

'Urambi was seen by many outsiders at the time as rather unusual—a sort of commune. But it was never that—though there was a strong sense of community spirit and idealism.

'A number of the original residents still live in the village,' Mr Watson said.

Designed by architect Michael Dysart, who also designed Urambi's sister development, Wybalena Grove, at Cook, Urambi Village was made possible after an amendment to the Unit Titles Ordinance in 1974 that allowed individual units in a cooperative to be sold before the project was completed.

'The proposed project initially met with resistance from planning authorities, which argued that Australians did not want to live in cooperative arrangements such as Urambi's and predicted the village would become a slum within five years,' Mr Watson said.

'Forty years on, and with a new generation of residents—some of whom were born in the village—the same strong sense of community that was established in the early days continues.'

Urambi Village won the Australian Institute of Architects CS Daley Medal for Housing in 1977, and in 2002 the institute gave the village the ACT Chapter 25 year award in recognition of the maintenance of the integrity of its original design for 25 years.

Along with Parliament House and the High Court of Australia, Urambi Village is now on the Australian Institute of Architects Register of Nationally Significant 20th century Architecture.

To mark the 40th anniversary, the village has organised a number of events, including an art exhibition of works by present and former residents and a party for residents and former residents on Saturday night. Architect Michael Dysart will be among the invited guests.

Further information:

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