JOHN GOLLINGS
Learning from Surfers
Paradise
Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking south from The Shore, Surfers Paradise

Every Building on Surfers Paradise Boulevard East Digital composite from film negatives 1973-2013

Every Building on Surfers Paradise Boulevard East Digital composite from digital files 2011-2013

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking south from The Shore at night, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking south from The Shore, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking south from The Shore at night, Surfers Paradise

Panorama Tower on Watson Esplanade / Apartments on Palm Ave and Riverview Parade, Chevron Island seen looking south west from The Shore, Surfers Paradise

Budds Beach and Paradise Waters looking west from The Shore, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking north from Paradise Towers / with The Islander and Hotel Grand Chancellor looking north from Paradise Towers, Surfers Paradise

Pacific Ocean and Surfers Paradise Beach Latitude S27°59'51.15” Longitude E153 degree 26’15.258” Altitude 303m

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking South from Paradise Towers / with Mantra, Legends, Q1 and The Watermark, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Beach and Garfield Terrace / with Berkley on The Beach and Shangri-La Apartments looking south from the President, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Blvd looking south west from the balcony of the Centre Arcade, Surfers Paradise

Northcliff Terrace looking north to Allowah / Jade and Break Free Peninsular on Clifford St from The President, Surfers Paradise

Cavill Ave looking south between Surfers Paradise Boulevard and The Esplanade

Paradise Theatre / The Hilton Arcade view east from Surfers Paradise Boulevard

Travel Lodge / The Islands Resort looking west from the corner of Beach Road, Surfers Paradise

The Esplanade looking north from the beachfront at Hanlan Street, Surfers Paradise

Cavill Avenue looking north between Surfers Paradise Boulevard and The Esplanade, Surfers Paradise

Demolition site and Jeda Apartments / Drive way and gardens Q1 Resort and spa, Hamilton Street, Surfers Paradise

Laurie Wall Real Estate / JTP Travel

36 Cavill Avenue, Surfers Paradise

Paradise Island Surfers Paradise

17 Laycock Street / Cupania Surfers Paradise

Flamingo Motel / Beachcomber Resort

Cocktail Bar (Photo opportunity viewing platform) / Kidzcherch Here Salerno Street, Isle of Capri

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking north east east between Cavill Avenue and Elkorn Avenue, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Returned Services Club north side Beach Road between Ferny Ave and Surfers Paradise Boulevard, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Boulevard looking north east east between Cavill Avenue and Elkorn Avenue, Surfers Paradise

BP Service Station / Adidas Store view north west from the corner of Cavill Avenue and Surfers Paradise Boulevard, Surfers Paradise

Surfers Paradise Surf Lifesaving Club / Surfers Centro The Esplanade, Surfers Paradise

Collection of Signs

Guesthouse / Centrepoint view west from Surfers Paradise Boulevard near Elkorn Avenue, Surfers Paradise

Revolving Aquarium Restaurant / Hall Entrance (Holy Spirit Anglican Church) Salerno St, Isle of Capri
The Surfers Paradise re-photography project undertaken by John Gollings makes an important contribution to understanding the intense sequence of change in one individual city but it can also be read as a major contribution to urban studies and architectural research. The forty years of dramatic change, witnessed through this project, has rendered the experience of living in the city as akin to being part of a fluid state, where the conventional markers of human presence that have borne witness to life and history have altered so much as to dissolve memory and with it, for many, a connection to place.

At a time when a new generation of global cities are evolving rapidly in Asia and the Middle East, this work, like the study that originally inspired it by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, has new and urgent relevance. There are two separate projects presented here. The first are the images conceived in 1973 and shot in January 1974 as a direct response to the provocation of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's seminal publication Learning From Las Vegas. The second is an exacting re-photography project undertaken over a three-year period from 2010 as the Gold Coast languished at a low point in the development cycle and just before the construction of a new light rail system — the imminent opening of which now renders these latest Gollings images instantly 'historic'.

Although Learning from Las Vegas is now more likely to be read in the small paperback version that appeared as the second edition in 1977, Gollings and his collaborators, architect Tony Styant-Browne, planner Mal Horner and graphic designer, Julie Jame were looking at the large hardbound first edition Tony had obtained shortly after its publication in late 1972. Although such texts were not part of the curriculum at the University of Melbourne School of Architecture where they had all met, Tony had been avidly following the writings of Scott Brown and later Venturi through the late 1960s and it was with eager anticipation that he placed an order for this book from Jervis Manton booksellers in Collins Street Melbourne.

For these young Australians the allure of the book was both medium and message with the added factor of timing — it struck at a particular moment of major social change in this country's history, unfolding with the election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 with the slogan It's Time. With it came a robust skepticism for the retention of 'old world' values, and this was translated across all aspects of society; in architecture through a reconsideration of the relationship between built form and popular culture and in the visual arts, a new generation explored conceptual practices, particularly through the medium of photography.

Their decision to make an Australian response to the treatise and choose Surfers Paradise as their own laboratory, was based on long associations with the town; Styant-Browne having grown up there and Gollings holidaying regularly as a boy from the 1950s. Prior to their arrival, they corresponded with the Mayor of the city and local architectural firms and obtained historical maps and aerial survey photographs. They arrived in early January at a time of severe storm weather and left just before tropical cyclone Wanda hit at the end of the month. They needed to work quickly and purposefully, carefully documenting and mapping the language of signs on the strip and with a kit of three cameras and multiple lenses, Gollings had the cheeky confidence to sit on the bonnet of the car as it was driven down Surfers Paradise Boulevard shooting a sequence of images with a widelux camera to replicate the driver's view and experience captured in Learning from Las Vegas.

They went up to the roof tops of three of the apartment towers at the southern, northern and central points of the Surfers Paradise precinct and in order to express the strip city form, covered the Gold Coast Highway from Burleigh Heads to Labrador, a distance of approximately 20 kms. Just like the Yale students researching Las Vegas, and with limited financial resources, they hired a plane and took to the air and Gollings had his first experience of aerial photography — something which has become an essential part of his practice.

The book that was originally conceived to come from all this work did not eventuate, as professions and new opportunities called and the collaborators took on new jobs and directions. In bringing together these images by John Gollings now, in the new form of the re-photography project, Learning from Surfers Paradise, the legacy of the original work is only now being fully revealed.

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