

Learning from Asian cities

Hot property Chris Johnson

Too often, when envisioning Sydney's future, politicians and planning experts wax lyrical about the cobblestone squares of Rome or the boulevards of Paris or the mid-rise six-storey street walls of Barcelona. The most liveable cities, according to the Mercer 2016 Index, include Vienna, Zurich, Munich, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Geneva and Copenhagen, all relatively small European cities with old quarters. Could it be that those measuring the liveability index also wax lyrical about the good old days?

Moving up the liveability index that measures 221 cities is Singapore at No.26 - located above Adelaide and Canberra. We need to learn more from those cities that are in the same time zone as Sydney, cities such as Singapore and Shanghai, which is also moving up the charts fast.

It is these Asian Tiger cities that Australian cities need to understand and learn from. Shanghai, for instance, has built 1000 kilometres of new metro rail in the last 25 years. Singapore has swung the transport debate away from cars to public transport, including metro rail.

These Asian cities have also taken a leadership role in bring-

ing greenery into the city centres, with boulevards of lush green trees and low landscape.

In Shanghai, the tall buildings disappear from view, screened by the rich tree canopies. In Singapore, the greenery grows up and over the buildings, such as the PARKROYAL Hotel by Australian architects WOHA, which has cascading balconies of green growth, or their sky-gardens that articulate tall housing blocks.

Many visualise Shanghai as a dramatic high-rise city but many of its 25 million people live in mid-rise six-storey buildings or the lower shop houses.

Both Shanghai and Singapore have very tall buildings but these seem to be mainly about making a spectacle. On a recent visit to both cities, there were multiple cameras focused on Singapore's Marina Bay and Shanghai's three elegant super tall towers.

Singapore's Marina Bay Sands has become a "must see" destination. In Shanghai, the 120-storey Shanghai Tower dwarfs the first super-tall building, the Jin Mao tower at only 88 storeys.

Australian cities must learn from our neighbouring Asian cities rather than fondly looking back to the comfort of Europe's ancient cities.

Chris Johnson is the chief executive of Urban Taskforce