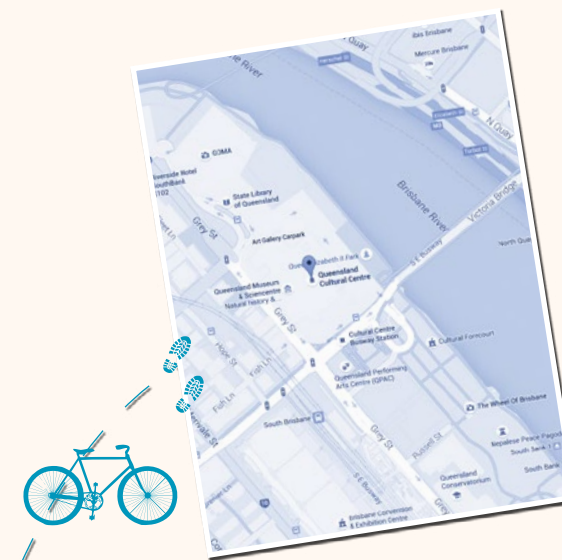


Through successful urban regeneration projects and the development of her own unique design and arts culture, Brisbane has emerged from the shadows of her two more prominent siblings, Sydney and Melbourne.

DESIGN DESTINATION: BRISBANE



For a few months late last year, posters proclaiming Brisbane to be Australia's New World City were plastered around the world. Designed to bolster her image on the heels of being the newest city to host the G20 Leaders Summit, they signalled that Australia's third most populous city and capital of the state of Queensland has arrived.

Proximity to top-notch beaches like Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, and some world-class nature sights like the UNESCO-listed Fraser Island, provide an all-rounded lifestyle most cities drool over.

Brisbane, with a greater metropolitan population of 2.3 million, is situated in southeast Queensland and is one of Australia's oldest cities. Named after the river that is the lifeline of her nascence – which in turn was named after Sir Thomas Brisbane, the New South Wales governor who ordered a new northern penal settlement to be developed there in the early 19th century – Brisbane became a city at the turn of the 20th century.

It benefited from subsequent mining boom in Queensland, which brought to it immense wealth and allowed for major urban development projects. But the 1988 World Expo and the 2014 G20 Summit undoubtedly propelled Brisbane to global attention.

The conjoining inner-city neighbourhoods of Fortitude Valley and Newstead, which together represent the cradle of Brisbane's creative scene, and the South Bank Cultural Precinct, the epicentre of Brisbane's most important arts institutions and venues, are among the city's prime design destinations.

SOUTH BANK CULTURAL PRECINCT

The South Bank Cultural Precinct, as its name indicates, hugs the south bank of the Brisbane River and houses many of Brisbane's top-tier cultural institutions and performing venues. This importance is now elevated on an official level as many of its neo-brutalist buildings make it to the Queensland Heritage Register as State Heritage Place.

The granting of this status means that the Robin Gibson-designed buildings will be protected from destruction, leaving an indelible stamp on Brisbane's unique cityscape. The heritage listed buildings, which include the Queensland Art Gallery, the Queensland Museum, and the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, were constructed in four stages from 1976 to 1988 after they won a 1973 design competition for the QAG.

The noughties ushered in two major additions to the Precinct seen as an effort to revitalise the area and to more actively engage younger Brisbanites in the arts and cultural scene.

The first of which is 'the new kid on the block' attached to QAG to essentially become its contemporary art wing. **The Gallery of Modern Art** (www.qagoma.qld.gov.au) was conceptualised by Sydney-based company Architectus to form a single visual arts institution has been remarkably steady in its ascent to the top echelons of Australia's most important arts institutions.

The head-turning masterpiece, completed in 2004, responds well to its neo-brutalist neighbour while awashing the precinct with a sense of rejuvenation and excitement, perhaps in the same way I.M. Pei did with the Louvre. Its masterful use of space within allows for massive works such as Eko Nugroho's 14-metre by 18.5-metre installation mural *It's all about Destiny! Isn't it?* for the Fifth Asia Pacific Triennial to be showcased in its full glory.

The notable addition of a first-ever in-house cinémathèque, the Australian Cinémathèque, allows QAGOMA to branch out into newer modern mediums and establish itself as a true gallery of the modern times. It has secured several exclusive or Brisbane-only exhibitions from the Andy Warhol and Valentino retrospectives to the recently-concluded David Lynch's retrospective, *David Lynch: Between Two Worlds*, which featured a especially-curated

programme of Lynch's short and feature films, television works, documentaries and online projects screened at the aforementioned Australian Cinémathèque.

There was also last year's headline exhibition of Cai Guo Qiang's spectacular first solo show in Australia, *Falling Back To Earth*, which saw two new commissions by the established Chinese-born artist. Lastly, it also hosts the highly regarded flagship event, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, which positions itself to be the only biennial or triennial exhibition series in the world to focus on the contemporary art of Asia, Australia and the Pacific.

It incidentally welcomes its 8th edition this year – from 21 November 2015 to 10 April 2016 – and if you get the chance to catch it, you will be treated to works from 80 emerging and established artists, filmmakers and performers from 25 countries, with under-represented countries like Mongolia and Nepal making their debut this year. Past-featured artists have included LN Tallur, the South Korea-based Indian artist, and the Vietnam-born American multimedia artist Tiffany Chung. This hive of activities and front-of-the-fore programming has ensured that this venerable institution remain consistently as the cynosure of Brisbane's arts and cultural scene, if not Australia's.

The second is the result of a three-year re-development project of an important cultural institution of another category, the **State Library of Queensland**. The building is designed by home-grown Donovan Hill (now BVN, one of Australia's biggest and most renowned architectural practices), in collaboration with Peddle Thorp. The re-development has resulted in a more expansive building that demands public engagement through its democratic interpretation of space and invention of programmatic elements. It is undeniably a 'Queenslander' with its consideration of the sub-tropical climate that it is situated in and its openness, which is in line with the laidback and friendly spirit inherent in its inhabitants.

As the two structural icons sit side by side each other to form an impactful architectural sentence, it surely puts the South Bank Cultural Precinct firmly on the map as one of the most important precincts of its category, arguably anywhere this side of the world.

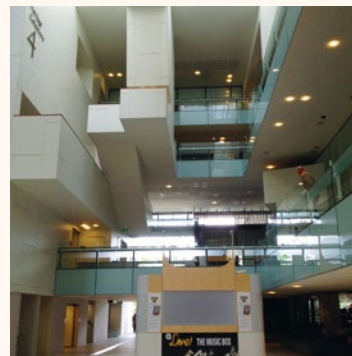




(This page, clockwise from top left) Gallery of Modern Art; entrance to Bakery Lane; bird's eye view of Brisbane; State Library of Queensland; Winn Lane marker. (Previous page) Brisbane skyline as seen from the rooftop bar of Spices on Balfour.

designers like **Easton Pearson**, **Lee Mathews** and multi-brand shop Digby's Menswear to continue the search for that perfect wardrobe. To refuel, dash into **Ribs and Burgers** (www.ribsandburgers.com) for a hearty lunch, or to **Jocelyn's Provisions** (www.jocelynsprovisions.com.au) for a homemade snack, with a caffeine-stop at **Merlo's** – voted as Australia's favourite coffee.

The Valley has always been the nest of Brisbane's more creative dwellers helped by its edginess and community feel. Several, if not most, of Brisbane's most respected architectural practices have set up shop here, while the many art galleries and even arts institutions have ensured that the Valley preserves its reputation for creativity. If a more subversive and avant-garde contemporary arts experience is up your alley, start off first with the **Institute of Modern Art (IMA) at the Judith Wright Centre** (www.ima.org.au). The IMA is a state government-backed, non-collecting contemporary arts institution focusing on the programming, presentation and circulation of contemporary art through



a constant rotation of exploratory exhibitions for artists at crucial points in their career. It celebrates its 40th anniversary this year and its year-long "IMA40" (moniker the writer's own) programme showcases 15 Australian and international artists. If you visit Brisbane by the close of the year, you will still be in time for celebrated Australian contemporary indigenous artist Gordon Bennett's first solo exhibition in Australia of Eurasian collective Slav and Tatars.

If a visit to the IMA has whet your appetite for some art buying, then a trip to **Philip Bacon Galleries** is a must for some of Australia's best contemporary art. Round off your arts experience with a visit to **Brisbane Powerhouse** (www.brisbanepowerhouse.org) just outside of the Valley beside New Farm Park. This 1971-decommissioned power station has been transformed into an arts landmark hosting an array of performance arts events that cater to everyone's tastes. It even recently hosted the Brisbane Festival in September, Brisbane's smaller scale answer to the Edinburgh Festival.

The Valley also offers archi-geeks a treat with a plethora of interesting architectural sights. For the modernist, there is **Cloudland**, the successor to the building once called the Luna Park and was the belle of the ball(rooms) when it was subsequently renamed Cloudland Ballroom – reincarnating itself as one of Brisbane's most lauded entertainment venues. Nic Brunner was brought onboard to revamp this once iconic site to mesmerising result. The entire front façade of concrete, steel, and glass is, in fact, a three-storey artwork that lives



up to its whimsical moniker by having concentric rings that spin and thousands of lighting channels to create a thrilling show reminiscent of swirling clouds. There are also the curvy wrought-iron planters incorporated into the façade to portray a lush garden in the skies. The building's retractable glass roof gives real meaning to having a drink under the clouds. For traditionalists, there is antediluvian beauty of the **Empire Hotel** right next door. The heritage-listed grand old dame in the archetypal late 19th-century Queensland style, together with a whole slew of hotels including the Wickham, were all originally designed by architect Richard Gailey and later refurbished at the height of the Roaring Twenties by his son. Original art-deco features, like doors with etched glass panels and sumptuously ornate projecting verandahs, can still be seen today.

For the Art Deco nut, saunter to the pedestrian-only section of Brunswick Street, where you cannot miss the imposing Art Deco McWhirters Building. From the same people that brought you the iconic Brisbane City Hall and the second major refurbishment of the Empire Hotel, this commanding structure with the unmistakable exposed brick façade donning ornate Art Deco features was once Brisbane's foremost retail destination housing one of Brisbane's most well-known retailers. These days, unless you own one of the apartments on the upper level, the only parts of the building accessible to the public are the ground floor eateries and a small splatter of humdrum retail.

(This page, clockwise from top left) Dining at Ribs & Burgers; Cloudland's façade; James Street precinct; inside Institute of Modern Art; Kunstler at Winn Lane; entrance to Spices on Balfour



Even the hotels in the Valley seem to represent a statement against brand name conformity. Spices Balfour Hotel (www.spicersretreats.com/spicers-balfour-hotel) only has nine suites each furnished in a mélange of vintage and designer décor. A sunset drink on its rooftop bar with killer views of Story Bridge and the city is a highlight. All this is contained in a gorgeously restored 1880s traditional Queenslander. Emporium Hotel (www.emporiumhotels.com.au), once on Conde Nast Traveller's Hot List as one of the world's best new hotels when it first opened in 2008, is a delectable marriage of the past golden age opulence and cutting-edge contemporary design. A dip in the rooftop pool overlooking the rest of the Valley is a nice way to imprint your memories at the end of a trip to this quaint neighbourhood.



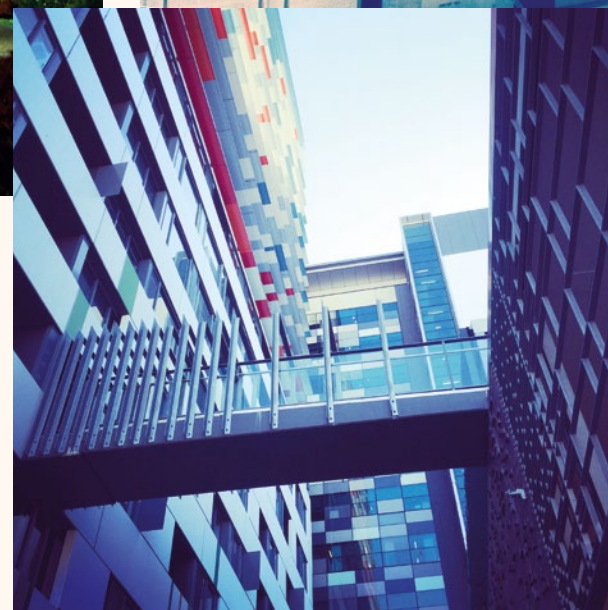
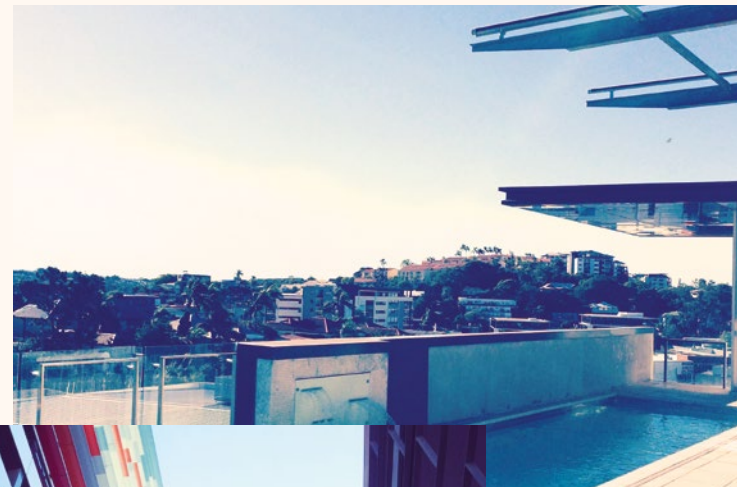
THE OUTLIERS

Of course life does not revolve around just the South Bank and Fortitude Valley. There are some places that are definitely worth a visit outside of these two areas.

For authoritative views over the whole of Brisbane and even all the way out to Moreton Bay on a clear day, Mount Coot-tha Lookout is the only place you need to visit. There is also a restaurant perched on one side of the Lookout to guarantee you that quixotic experience should you be going with a special someone.

The Eagle Street Pier precinct in the downtown core has

(This page, clockwise from top left) Victorian tracteries on the façade of Empire Hotel; brick-clad façade of McWhirters; Fortitude Valley as seen from The Emporium; Brisbane Power House on the river bank; Institute of Modern Art's façade.



two world-class restaurants not far from each other. Matt Moran's **ARIA restaurant** (www.ariarestaurant.com/brisbane) brings his two-Chef's Hats experience from the original ARIA in Sydney to Brisbane and to wide acclaim. Your sublime mod-oz experience is supplemented by lovely views of the Brisbane River and the Story Bridge in a space that reminds one of a more sophisticated Queenslander through the use of high quality natural materials, including timber flooring, bronze detailing, and leather wall panelling. The next one is Ryan Squire's Esquire (www.esquire.net.au), which often rivals ARIA for the title of best restaurant in Brisbane. According to Hassell, who collaborated with Squires on the design of the restaurant, the Scandinavian minimalist design is inspired by Squire's stint at Noma in Copenhagen. It is with this vision in mind that they "decided to strip the place back to the bare bones and create a raw, masculine style of luxury that reflects the crispness and honesty of the food."

While in the city, one might as well make a visit to the **Brisbane City Hall** (www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/facilities-recreation/parks-venues/brisbane-city-hall), one of the most important cultural and heritage buildings in all of Queensland. It has seen the peaks and troughs of Brisbane since opening in 1930 and was Australia's second largest

(This page, clockwise from top left) Lookout at Mt Coot-tha; rooftop pool at Emporium; modernism around Fortitude Valley; Aria Restaurant interiors.



construction project back then. It recently reopened after a three-year wallet-busting restoration project and its former glory can now be witnessed in its full splendour, especially taking it all in from the mighty King George Square entrance. It also houses the **Museum of Brisbane** (www.museumofbrisbane.com.au) within, which apart from educating tourists and Brisbanites alike, the stories of Brisbane then and now, also hosts contemporary art exhibitions by home-grown artists. A tip to anyone visiting Brisbane is perhaps to start with a free Brisbane Greeter tour, an initiative started by Brisbane Marketing. Tours are specifically catered to the precinct you want to visit, for example the South Bank Cultural Precinct, or you can come up with your own itinerary, subject to consultation with your greeter. You can book online at the Visit Brisbane website – at least seven days before your tour date.

Brisbane is no Melbourne or Sydney. However, this may not necessarily be a bad thing. A more in-depth embrace of Brisbane will reveal a city with more heart and personable charm. Those G20 posters with may prove symbolic – they show President Obama in the foreground, together with a few other of his counterparts, looking confidently and almost purposefully into the distance, perhaps personifying the new Brisbane that has truly arrived onto the world stage, and is seeing off its competition into the horizon with a determined gaze. ■