A legitimate art distinctive of Australia and Australia alone': the Griffins contribution to the formation of an Australian landscape design ethos

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Abstract

In his native United States of America, Walter Burley Griffin is remembered, if at all, as an obscure protégé of that nation's most celebrated architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. In Australia, however, Burley Griffin has received far greater professional and popular attention, stemming from his renown as the designer of its federal capital city, Canberra. Common to both nations is the perception of Griffin as primarily an architect and, to a lesser extent, a town planner (a title he never used). This perception is far too restrictive and varies significantly from fact: Griffin, in complement with and parallel to architecture, was educated in and practised landscape architecture. This paper examines his ideas and work within this lesser-known discipline, emphasising the transference and transformation of his ideas into Australia. Moreover, it provides an overview of the emergence of Griffin's ideas on an Australian ethos and national identity as expressed in landscape design and the central role played by the use of Australian flora. Attention is also given to the contributions of his architect wife, Marion Mahony, and the extension of Griffin's ideas to New Zealand, via the work of his partner Roy A Lippincott.
Australian English is a regional dialect of English which shares its phonemic inventory with Southern British English through the historical connection with the dialects of the British Isles (in particular London) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Cochrane Reference Cochrane, Collins and Blair1989, Yallop Reference Yallop2003, Leitner Reference Leitner2004). The Mitchell (Reference Mitchell1946) transcription system for vowels more strongly reflects a British rather than an Australian standard due to its historical origins (Clark Reference Clark, Collins and Blair1989, Durie & Hajek Reference Durie and Hajek1994, Harrington et al. Reference Harrington, Cox and Evans1997, Ingram Reference Ingram1995). The history of Australia is the story of the land and peoples of the continent of Australia. Aboriginal Australians first arrived on the Australian mainland by sea from Maritime Southeast Asia between 40,000 and 70,000 years ago, and penetrated to all parts of the continent, from the rainforests in the north, the deserts of the centre, and the sub-Antarctic islands of Tasmania and Bass Strait. The artistic, musical and spiritual traditions they established are among the longest surviving such Today Australia has a global, non-discriminatory policy and is home to people from more than 200 countries. From 1900 to 1914 great progress was made in developing Australia’s agricultural and manufacturing capacities, and in setting up institutions for government and social services. During the Second World War Australian forces made a significant contribution to the Allied victory in Europe and in Asia and the Pacific. The generation that fought in the war and survived came out of the war with a sense of pride in Australia’s capabilities. Post-war prosperity. After the war Australia entered a boom period. Millions of refugees and migrants arrived in Australia, many of them young people happy to embrace their new lives with energy and vigour.