

## **They call it progress - But sometimes I wonder.**

I love a leisurely walk around the neighbourhood, especially when I am walking somewhere new. I am a real sticky beak, I look at their gardens, the way the house is laid out, and the state of the house/ garden and make mental notes of what I like and don't.

Not that it matters to anyone but me but a walk around a neighbourhood can tell you so much about the changing world we live in. Maybe I could call it a walking history tour instead of a sticky beak session.

Whilst walking around the coastal town I am currently house-sitting in, it is sad to see the change that has taken place. Interspersed between the budding new estates are the wonderful old single-level beach shacks some verandas painted in vivid blue, just so you know it's got that beach vibe. These simple little homes would have been all the rage in bustling summers long past when it was just a sleepy getaway township, a well-hidden secret.

It would have been all panel vans, chicko rolls strawberry Big M's, surfboards, bikinis and freedom that came without anyone ever recording your moments to put up on Snapchat.

Some of these wonderful old-style houses are worse for wear and if you look really closely you wonder how on earth they passed the compliance test. But then again that is the beauty of it all, isn't it? The two-storey homes built in that era were built in the excitement of having a sea view to maybe check the waves for the day, never mind the strange slope of some of the stairs or the wonderful rickety balustrades.

As I walk past them now you can see them losing their sparkle, the mission brown or ocean blue paint flaking away, the years of sea spray and storm eroding their simple old grandeur.

Sadly, many of them have now been built around and swallowed up, their once magnificent view blocked by the concrete townhouses of the new age.

It has always seemed strange to me how these quiet little seaside towns are a welcoming getaway from the big city life and then the very people who love that lifestyle buy-in and change the township to recreate the life they were holidaying away from. Look at any old seaside town in Australia and you will see the change and silent destruction of simplicity.

Air B&Bs now dominate, destroying the community fabric, but that's another story for another day!

You can tell the old homes by their wonderfully huge backyards where in the day you could play a game of cricket, the children could scream and play to the heart's content and God forbid the cats and dogs wandered free. Some of these old homes still retain their space but sadly many are getting sold out due to an aging local population and the once beautiful big backyards are replaced with two or three townhouses, all with perfectly compliant balustrades in clear glass and blocking the view of whomever they wish.

No noisy kids to play with here, and definitely no dog space. Sad really.



As I walked around the streets looking at these huge houses, I marvelled at how they managed to get their heavy garden pots and furniture on the balcony, the balconies of old would be lucky to hold half a dozen wet towels swinging in the wind. These new mega houses hold a complete living space up there.

Everything is so neat and manicured and precise, whilst the OCD in me appreciates it, it still feels just a little soulless and unlived in, I want to see the love and chaos of family life screaming out of the walls, bikes strewn across gardens, totem tennis poles rusting away, surfboards standing against the side wall.

I wonder what stories these new houses hold or are they so busy working for the house they do not get to enjoy it, bring it life?

Wandering the streets on this Autumn morning it is obvious many of the homeowners have gone away to return at the summer peak. So many empty houses just sitting their perfectly manicured.

But then I am once again filled with warmth as I continue my walk and see some of the old seaside shacks still alive with their bright red geraniums flowering in old tyres, the lace curtains beautifully positioned in the window, the garden ornaments possibly gifts from family over the years proudly taking pride of place in their eclectic gardens and I desperately want to go inside and see what it's like. I can almost imagine the lack of open plan living, just cosy little rooms where people had their own space, and the bookshelves were filled with games and books. Out the back there would be a veggie garden and an old-fashioned clothesline, and for the old surfies at heart there would be a few surfboards hanging around, Big M's no doubt replaced by a cup of tea.

They call it progress, and everything has to change eventually but this morning's walk reminded me of another time, a gentler time and the possibility of all the stories these old beach shacks hold and more importantly how all these stories remain just that, a story not an insta post of staged beauty.

Next time you are out walking take note of the changing face of your community, marvel at the old homes still hanging in there fighting progress , close your eyes and feel their stories.

And if ever you see me walking by, I am not going to rob you I am just a sticky beak and making mental notes of all the best bits of your home and creating stories.

xxx Jann