



REIMAGINING

TAKING A WELL-KNOWN RETAIL DISTRICT AND TRANSFORMING IT INTO A MODERN URBAN SANCTUARY IS NO EASY FEAT, ESPECIALLY IN THE HEART OF A THRIVING METROPOLIS LIKE SYDNEY. RAKHEE GHELANI SPOKE TO ELITE ARCHITECTURE FIRM FRANCIS-JONES MOREHEN THORP TO DISCOVER HOW EASTLAKES SHOPPING CENTRE IS BEING REIMAGINED THROUGH THE LENS OF ITS LOCAL CULTURE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.



Forward-looking yet timelessly urban: that's the new vision for the long-awaited redevelopment of Eastlakes Shopping Centre. First opened way back in 1965, this humble retail village has always been one of Sydney's oldest and most diverse districts, but few would argue its lethargic composition has long been overdue for a transformation. And now, the person wielding that transformative wand happens to be Richard Francis-Jones, Design Director of architectural firm Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp (FJMT), which was tasked by Crown Group to take on the challenge of revitalising the town centre.

Envisaging an inspiring space

Just 10 kilometres from Sydney's CBD, and only three kilometres from the University of New South Wales, Sydney Airport and Green Square, Eastlakes is well positioned but in danger of being over-crowded. Which is why Crown Group and FJMT envisaged an oasis that transports the community away from the concrete jungle of modern life to a space that inspires them. It's also why the Urban Development Institute of Australia awarded *Best Concept Design* to this mixed-use retail and residential project in 2014. With one eye on the environment and the other on economical sustainability, it has been designed in line with the Greater Sydney Commission District Plan.

Eastlakes Shopping Centre now has all the hallmarks of becoming a modern urban sanctuary that not only sets the benchmark for retail excellence but brings together two focal points of inspiration: the surrounding natural environment and the diverse local community.

Creating harmony

The shopping centre is bounded by the greens of Eastlakes Golf Course to the south-east

and the eucalyptus-lined Eastlakes Reserve to its west. This backdrop informed FJMT's vision; bringing together "the best of town and country" in a unique retail experience, explains Francis-Jones.

"Our understanding of harmony, proportion, light, shade, colour and texture is constantly informed by the natural world—in this way we achieve both a timelessness and a unique sense of this beautiful setting," Francis-Jones says. "The generous adjacent parkland with its distinctive canopy of stringy-barked Eucalyptus trees has been an inspiration to us, the intricate bark and leaf forms the complexity of their warm tones combined with pearlescent silvers, coppers and bronzes."

Fusing interior and exterior

This harmonious collaboration between the natural environment and the community has been woven through the entire development.

"Creating inviting and welcoming public open space networks on the ground floor plane is very important. Drawing on the natural amenity of Eastlakes Reserve and the beautiful landscape that surrounds it, our primary architectural response is to create a great indoor-outdoor terrace or public 'verandah' that fronts the park," he continues. "This Western Terrace will have a beautiful timber-lined canopy soaring above it, creating shade and a grand sense of place. Hospitality in Sydney thrives on west-facing aspects, so this terrace will host a buzzing foodservice strip fronting Eastlakes Reserve in the form of a giant verandah."

Clever features enhance this fusion of interior and exterior, the skylight Oculus being case-in-point. "The concept of the Oculus is a ►



Richard Francis-Jones, Design Director
at Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp

From left to right:
Eastlakes Shopping Centre as it is now, and an artist's impression of the reinvigorated development.



glazed reflective pool in the landscaped gardens above, will bring a rich pattern of natural daylight to the shopping areas below, filtered through the gentle moving water,” describes Francis-Jones.

These design elements sit comfortably in the overall building, anchored by two supermarkets and basement parking for about 900 cars. The complex also includes residential towers that match a growing desire for opulence with lushly planted gardens, swimming pools and gymnasias. They also take advantage of striking views over the city and golf courses.

Reimagining multicultural living

At the core of any urban development is its community, and Eastlakes has a rich multicultural fabric woven from first- and second-generation migrants that hail from countries as far flung as China, Greece, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Turkey. In fact, Census figures show 83 per cent of the local population have parents born overseas. The redevelopment will complement and invigorate that diverse kaleidoscope of cultures.

“Our vision is to revitalise Eastlakes by activating a new set of exciting places for its diverse community to enjoy. The creation of a series of interrelated, activated spaces is key to creating the vibrancy and a sense of amenity that is eagerly anticipated,” Francis-Jones elaborates. “The cafe culture on Evans Avenue and the diversity of international deli offerings in Eastlakes Shopping Centre all highlight the existing community’s desire for food and shared dining experiences—so our vision for the new centre aims to satisfy that.”

But the local community won’t be the only ones to benefit from a reinvigorated Eastlakes. “We expect the development to be embraced by the broader Sydney community and become



a leisure, food and shopping destination in its own right,” says Francis-Jones. “The diversity of the local community will be reinforced and re-energised by new arrivals to a much enriched and enlivened Eastlakes Shopping Centre.”

Good design overcomes any challenge

Bringing together multifarious needs and interests is bound to have its challenges, but that’s where good design really comes to the fore. “The new concept for Eastlakes needed to be sympathetic to the local character and yet also create a new and exciting integration of landscape and architecture,” explains Francis-Jones.

He goes on. “Appealing to a very mobile car-oriented suburb is also challenging. This requires attractive and affordable retail, and dining and recreational offerings that are also competitive—that’s where good design plays the greatest role in this regard. We’ve also made it more convenient for people to access by creating a ‘traffic-calming zone’ between the north and south sites that enhances the connectivity between retail and hospitality. In addition, the design capitalises on the existing public transportation linkages.”

Reimagine. Reboot. Reinvigorate.

The final result will be a development that marks a new direction for Eastlakes Shopping Centre and its broader community. It breaks from tradition and redefines traditional notions of space and place by integrating external spaces into the retail complex and giving nature prime position. It sits in harmony, not just with the environment, but also with the diverse cultural village that it services.

Eastlakes Shopping Centre is ready to be transformed from an eyesore to a contemporary urban landmark. ●

OUTSIDE THE BOX

**Francis-Jones Morehen
Thorp has designed
opportunity for interactive
public open spaces to
be built in the future
to further encourage
community participation.**

The Village Green

This larger park will hold community sports games and gatherings.

The Western Terrace

This verandah will host a buzzing foodservice strip fronting Eastlakes Reserve.

Swings & Roundabouts

A fresh take on an old standard, this playground will harness a child’s imagination and provide a fun place to release their energy.

The Formal Green

Inspired by Australian space, this park will celebrate native flora in a carefully curated garden.