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## spowers architects apollo bay resort

### reflections on the design process

The concept for the Apollo Bay Resort is driven by Spowers' **design process** that is comprehensive in scope, iterative and adaptative.

As with all good design thinking, this process has involved **identification of the initial design problem**, together with critical analysis and research to shape an understanding of what is needed in a coastal resort development. The next phase of **design conceptualisation** explores ideas divergently and then converges on preferred options for detailed assessment. What then follows is a **verification** phase the opportunity for challenge, testing of the options and revision. Spowers have consistently applied this methodology together with the view that several iterations of concept, verification and amendment produces excellent architecture.

### defining the design problem

Spowers' design analysis, ranges from understanding the thrust and detail of **client requirements**, researching the broad resort idea with its key point hotel and an array of resort villa clusters, focused on a range of guest experience, anticipating the scale of development and the ultimate financial outcomes.

Problem analysis focuses on **community needs and outcomes**, the economic benefits to town and region from employment, subsidiary and service enterprise development and visitor input. Blended with a determination to build in the hinterland, thereby reducing pressure on an already stressed town and in a manner that is visually unobtrusive and ecologically sound and sensitive to rural heritage, links the problem analysis with Spowers'

philosophy that social sustainability is achieved through good design.

Naturally the **reality of the site** was a critical part of the problem analysis phase. Recognition of the opportunities and problems attaching to the site are fundamental to Spowers' thinking. Geo-technical surveying and mapping determined a risk approach to site zoning. Topography, vegetation, climate, aspect and view suggested a tiered and layered development where hotel and resort villa clusters are located to maximize amenity and harmonise with landscape, preserving the rural order of the site.

The complex of planning policy, site overlays and regulation, restriction and guidelines are seen by Spowers as constraints that, interpreted creatively enhanced design analysis and assisted concept development.

The problem analysis phase of the design process embraces in an **architectural narrative characterized by Earth, Sea and Sky** and suggests mooring an architecture embedded in the landscape and a user experience open to the prospect of coastline and sea and the intimate experience of rural culture.

## conceptualizing the design

Spowers approach to **conceptualising design** integrates the ESS narrative with the client brief and architectural program, research into global rural and coastal resort typologies and precedents, collaborative thinking with a range of critical perspectives from related professionals – a process which generates options for spatial disposition, place-making and integration of building and landscape.

Assisting in this process Spowers' use of in-house **digital analytical, modelling and visualisation technologies and animations** enabled a rapid iterative design process in which options were generated by merging a range of key drivers, including....

**Geotechnical condition** and key areas, mapped according to risk. Spowers accepts that areas of land fall risk would not be developed, but considered for remedial and preventative treatment. Areas of moderate risk would be subject to minimum excavation and the footprint of buildings and other infrastructure would be as light as possible, given the facilities and scale required.

**View and the prospect of Bass Strait** is Spowers' inspiration for building orientation, sometimes embracing wide-angled view, albeit with slight differences in aspect and angle; other times glimpsing views through landscape corridors, through and over copped vegetation, with other views more contained, intimate and suggestive of views beyond.

**Views into the site** from the town, the GOR and approach roads and pathways, Spowers considers as virtual journey making. From these distant vantage points the resort buildings and infrastructure are framed as glimpses - distant day and night scapes.

On site, the **prospect of the resort complex** is slowly revealed, reducing the apparent scale of the hotel complex, exposing it sequentially, in layers and as articulated elements, rather than suddenly. Villas, some of which are hidden, others more apparent, are introduced gradually, glimpsed and masked sequentially, by nestling into part hidden areas and niches in topography and landscape.

Thus **journey making**, an essential element in Spowers' design ethos, embraces a balance between exposure to and protection from an often times harsh coastal climate. Architectural form that is tiered and relatively low slung, distributed and articulated and embedded in the landscape with sheltered niches, structured links and pathways that open and close view dramatically stepping down from the social hearth of the hotel to the more subtly from the protected contemplation spaces and micro winter gardens of the hotel rooms and suites, that open to view yet protect from harsh climate.

**Rolling contours are reflected** in Spowers' tiered and linear form of the hotel and its extended wings; this together with the use of green roof systems, berms and mounded landscape is used to embed the potentially dominant hotel into the landscape, reducing the impact of scale, fracturing yet articulating wings and landscape elements. Taken together, what emerges is an integrated and themed architecture that responds well to the design narrative.

**Site contour and section emphasise the difference landscape zones** - between undulations of valley and meadow, escarpment and saddle – all suggest architectural response for hotel villas; some bedded into a constructed water environment, others perched on escarpments and others nestled into more contained and protected meadows. All embrace view, either open or framed the seascape or oriented to more contained valley and hillside landscape .

**Water-carved and eroded landscape** sections the site into semi-discrete zones and is the inspiration for internal response that shapes journey making, architectural motif and user experience, particularly carving pathways through the main hotel redolent of dry, eroded creek bed; creating and the user experience; and external response that creates new water bodies around which hotel villas are clustered and forming gully pathways and elevated walkways that structure journey making around the site.

**Materiality of buildings and introduced landscape** is influenced by the natural setting with a fairly minimal palette, essentially of timber and glass, with hints of stone, brick and corrugated steel. Colour spectrum is subtle and reflective of rural landscape and ultimate to weathering and ageing.

**Naturally the client brief drives design and the emergent architectural program.** The resort concept of a sustainable hotel complemented by an array of resort villas of different configuration is well tested; although the scale, quality level of accommodation and service and the user experience combine uniquely with coastal location and the GOR as a rapidly developing tourism market. Spowers' focus on a spectrum of user experience, cultural difference, tailored to season, reflective of

town and region and the particular qualities of site have resulted in landscape and architecture that is diverse, yet unified in character.

Whilst **global in scale and amenity the hotel affords guests a regional and rural experience** with variety of accommodation options, from the proximity of being close to amenities and the social hearth of the hotel core to the more disparate experience of wings in the landscape, a different balance community and privacy.

The **resort villas, distributed in clusters, relate to the different needs and predilections of guests** – families, singles, tourist groups, conference delegates et.al – and the qualities of different landscape zones. Some villas are co-linked, their strings intertwining, balancing privacy with access to the distributed social hearth; others are more identifiably individual, linked by boardwalks over water bodies or as pavilions in more dramatic landscape. All though benefit from the common design theme relating to transitioning from inside to outside in which the glimpses of wide vista landscape counterpoints with contained and protected courtyards, decks and sunken areas giving guests options according to mood and cultural moray.

## verifying the design concept

**Spowers' focuses strongly on Verification** in a design process, that subjects the preferred concepts to rigorous critical review. This ranges from public presentation and debate, collaborative critique from trusted peers and more formal government institutional analysis in order to facilitate stakeholder understanding of the design proposals, garnering pertinent comment and critique. This also assures that critical commentary is considered seriously, leading to revision of concept, where warranted.

A range of **public presentations illuminated concerns, which are addressed**, either by incorporation into design thinking, by moderation or adaptation of proposals or adoption of new ideas brought forward by public discussion. When critique simply opposed even the idea of the resort per se, Spowers, the client,

their consultants and public supporters have been at pains to make known the economic, social and intercultural benefits flowing from the resort development. In the light of this public critique Spowers with seeks to make resort development as sensitive to community and as unobtrusive in the landscape as possible.

**Collaborative critique is part of Spowers' verification process,** reaching out to key peers across a range of professional specializations, challenging design proposals, identifying problems and latent opportunities, bringing forward adaptations and amendments, sharpening and refining design. Equally, Spowers engages a close collaborative group of specialist architectural and landscape firms to contribute directly to design, drawing on their particular areas of expertise. In all cases this specialist input has offered critical review and disruptive ideas that have modified and reshaped aspects of the design significantly.

**Spowers engages with public agencies and groups** as the design proposal develops, particularly around themes of indigenous heritage, tourism futures, local history and heritage, geo-technical analysis, fire risk, emergency and service access among others; all to inform and satisfy those responsible and to shape and adapt design in accord with regulations, the latest technical thinking and community and cultural sensitivity.

Clearly the most significant public exposure and an integral part of the **design verification process comes as Spowers seeks planning approval,** determined by local authorities and ultimately the Victorian Government. The level of critical review at the level of the Colac Otway Shire has seen support and opposition, as expected. Working with shire officers and liaising in the town and regional community identifies the need for design modification. Responding to reasonable criticism is vital to verification. The calling in of the project by the State Minister and his reference to the Office of the Victorian Government Architect OVGA for advice has proven a useful process of critical review and verification. Several iterations of OGVA peer review has illuminated a range of opportunities for further refinement of design proposals - resulting in a convergence

around a design proposal that is mutually verified. Again, resulting from this process Spowers is making significant shifts and clarifications to the scale of development by effectively removing a controversial second stage, reducing environmental impact without impacting financial feasibility.

In the light of **OVGA critique** Spowers reformulation of a more consistent narrative, refines and links built elements that harmonise more effectively with the landscape, improves access, sharpens a more consistent architecture and develops a more common thread to the user experience and sensitivity to cultural background.

**Spowers looks forward to the next phases of the design process** in which design development simulations and prototypes, detailed spatial planning and refinement of materiality and architectural detail, development of technical systems will be brought forward for review, challenge and adaptation, a process pointing to an excellent outcome for client, community and visitor alike.

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