

WUNGGURRWIL DHURRUNG - STATEMENT OF ACHIEVEMENT

This is Wathaurung Country. It has always been.

This project, **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung**, is in, and of, Country. Time, then, becomes both irrelevant, as well as the most important ingredient within the project.

This project demonstrates the importance of letting time run its course – a “natural” landscape would not be so with manufactured ground and manipulated systems, of earth, water and nutrients.

Equally, we clearly understand the importance of *taking* time. The time taken in working with Country and its custodians, the Wathaurung people. The time spent understanding the physical, environmental and cultural systems of place. The time dedicated to crafting responses both grounded in the site’s materiality and connected to its operations, natural and human intertwined.

Finally, we appreciate more keenly that unmarked time in which this project, intended to be embedded deeply within its community and its evolution, will become a key instrument in that progress, caring and uplifting, a vehicle embodying the Wathaurung and enabling their renewed vision for the future.

This project will be the *strong heart* of the community.

They have named it so: **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung**.

The Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre and Integrated Family Centre project has been in development for years, in discussions and deliberations between Wyndham City Council and the Kolling Wada-Ngal Committee. Its realisation was a productive collaboration between the Wathaurung people, the Council and the consultant team. This collaboration has manifest a culturally resonant place for Aboriginal people and their families, both protected and protective. This work has re-made a spiritual place, a strong heart, for the Wathaurung community.

Before colonisation, the Wathaurung led lives mediated by custom and lore, set out by ancestors in the Dreaming. The role of humans was to care for their Country - requiring constant movement across the landscape, and gathering in special spaces within that landscape. In these particular places, at particular times, spiritual, social and economic matters were managed through traditional rituals and ceremonies of place.

Discussions with the traditional Wathaurung owners challenged us to recover some of this sensibility, in a place where much had been erased or taken away. The site, on the margins of a traditional suburban subdivision, seemed featureless and barren. Wathaurung Elder Uncle Byron Powell though, noting birds gathering in a nearby

paddock, understood the site to still be part of a broader landscape of soaks in the endemic volcanic plain. This plain remains bio-dynamic in soil, water and plant communities, finely tuned to physical characteristics in the local geology.

Wunggurrwil Dhurrung grows directly from these characteristics. Its materiality derives from the basalt plains, with whole and sawn basalt boulders and crushed aggregations of stone across the ground plain, contrasted with the texture and colour of bluestone. This materiality extends into the building base, rising vertically above the plain. These primary elements create a human response within the landscape, reinforced by an emerging, re-established forest.

Throughout this landscape, the natural management of water is pre-eminent: water absorbed within the porosity of the solidified lava; collected in natural depressions in the rock, accumulating soils and propagating plants; and in the unseen soaks in the broader landscape recharging the deep hydrology and supporting diverse surface ecologies.

Water is framed as a defining ecology within the **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung** landscape - restored to the site, integrated into its operations and articulated as the life-giving force it is, and has been, for the Wathaurung.

Vicky Couzens' artwork at the centre of **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung** celebrates the magic and the profundity of water.

The remade landscape builds on these qualities, moving beyond the simple quantification of conventional irrigation regimes. All the water that falls on the site returns to ground through the landscape or is re-used within the building. Roof rainwater is harvested, decelerated, and slowly released into previously unnoticed depressions and pools across the landscape.

The built outcomes manage the water regularly flowing through the landscape in various ways: detention, saturation, infiltration, deep irrigation, and multiplying the levels of moisture to support a range of ecotopes and flora otherwise impossible to establish and maintain.

At **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung**, nothing is reliant on maintenance.

There is no engineered irrigation, and plantings are exposed to the latent conditions of water, sun and wind. The only managed hydrology is recycled water reticulated to the central courtyard where, alternating seasonally, a winter sunroom or a summer shaderoom provides protection from the endemic conditions of the western plains.

This is a protective landscape.

It is also a regenerative landscape.

Taking our lead from Uncle Byron Powell the landscape solution for **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung** is not intended to mediate, decorate or otherwise mitigate the impacts of humans on the environment. Instead, our aim has been to reintegrate, to re-establish, to regenerate. Specifically, we have worked to restore those qualities and conditions that preceded colonisation and its attendant mono-culturalisation, in both the land and the ways in which we regard it. Inspired by the intelligence of indigeneity and supported by our disciplinary capabilities, we needed to move well beyond sustainability. Instead, we engaged in a pro-active regeneration of the landscapes, systems and cultural spaces, aiming towards a co-existence with the land upon which we all walk.

This position also demanded an evolutionary process of continuing improvement and positive transformation. This encompassed ambitions as broad as the reconstitution of soil, (supporting wider biodiversity aims) through to reducing pollutants and recharging groundwater, producing healthier food, cleaner water and purer air, eliminating external inputs and, eventually, elevating social capital and ecological knowledge.

The regenerative landscape at Wunggurrwil Dhurrung is a response to process, of ongoing improvement and positive transformation, where food source plantings, craft and weaving plantings, woodlot and production plantings and ecologies of the west are expressed in a compressed landscape blurring the boundaries between soft and hard, internal and external, and materiality and space.

The centre allows community to connect to and care for Country.

It has become a healing ground, a 'strong heart' for the Wathaurung.

It is **Wunggurrwil Dhurrung**.