CAIRNS STYLE DESIGN GUIDE

RETAINING AND ENHANCING THE DISTINCT TROPICAL STYLE AND CHARACTER OF CAIRNS



Cairns Regional COUNCIL

October 2010

MAYOR'S FOREWORD



Bordered by the World Heritage Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest, the Cairns region has a unique natural environment. The tropical climate and unique geography has lead to a vibrant tropical urban design that exhibits its own unique 'Cairns Style'.

The Cairns Style Design Guide describes the 'Cairns Style' in words, pictures and diagrams and draws on design philosophies and elements of traditional buildings throughout the region. From our character precincts to new multi-storey development, all built forms throughout the region have the opportunity to exhibit this wonderful Cairns Style. Enhancing our environment through native plantings, landscaping and sustainable building design will ensure the tropical feel and charm of our region is maintained and enhanced. Cairns Style applies to all forms of development and this guide gives direction on how to achieve a true 'Cairns Style' outcome.

When developers, home owners and Council apply these principles we can ensure that the style that is Cairns will be maintained and strengthened so that our region will remain a stunning tropical paradise.

Val Schier

Councillor Val Schier
Mayor, Cairns Regional Council

CAIRNS STYLE DESIGN GUIDE

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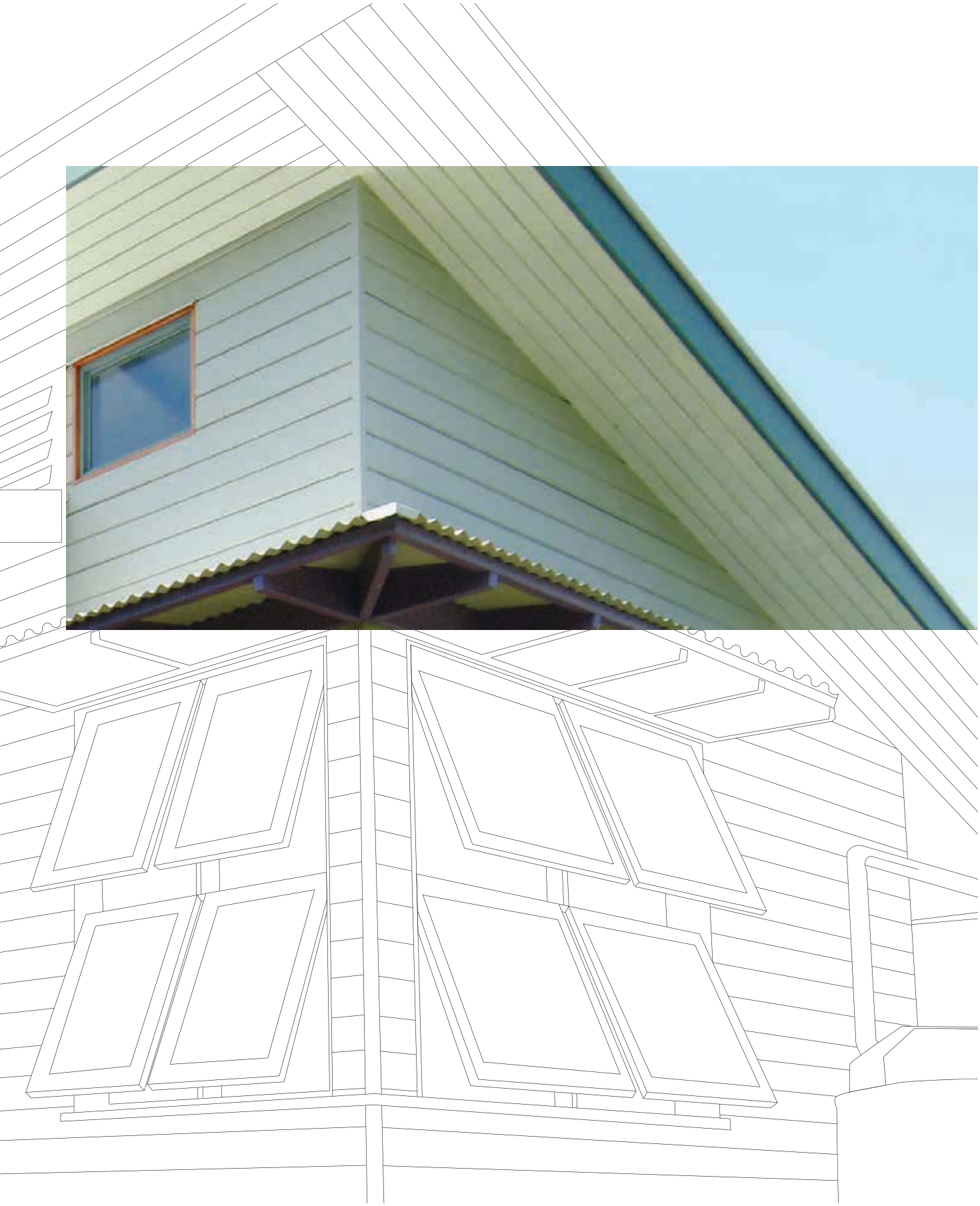
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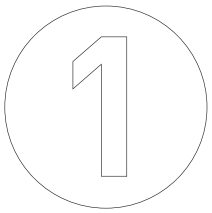
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INTRODUCTION

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WHAT IS THE CAIRNS STYLE DESIGN GUIDE?

The Cairns Style Design Guide describes, in words, pictures and diagrams, the tropical style that is the desired design direction for the Cairns region. Cairns Style is a broad concept ranging from the overall pattern and rhythm of streets to the detail of window awnings and balustrades.

Cairns Style is important for all building projects, from minor building renovations in the suburbs to new commercial projects in the city centre. Retaining and enhancing the distinct tropical style and character of Cairns will improve the aesthetics, amenity and liveability of the Cairns region.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CAIRNS STYLE DESIGN GUIDE?

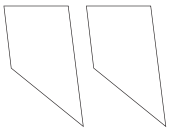
The purpose of the Cairns Style Design Guide is to promote a distinct tropical style for the region of Cairns in order to create a strong, cohesive and memorable identity. Cairns Style is not intended to dictate taste or restrict freedom of choice. Importantly the Cairns Style Design Guide does not suggest that all new buildings should 'copy' old buildings.

This practice is discouraged as it would result in a 'Disneyland', rather than a modern tropical region, and the older building types do not necessarily meet the needs of modern families and businesses. While it is important that a significant number of older buildings and the streetscapes they create are retained as the historic reference point for Cairns Style, new buildings, and even extensions of older buildings, need to interpret the key features and design elements found in the older buildings in contemporary ways. It is this rich mix of older and contemporary tropical building forms that will create a vibrant Cairns Style.

The Cairns Style Design Guide identifies and analyses the key elements of traditional built forms that contribute to the style recognised as being unique to Cairns. The Design Guide also includes strategies to incorporate those key elements through tropical and climatically appropriate design of new building works that will make a positive contribution to the desired style for the region.

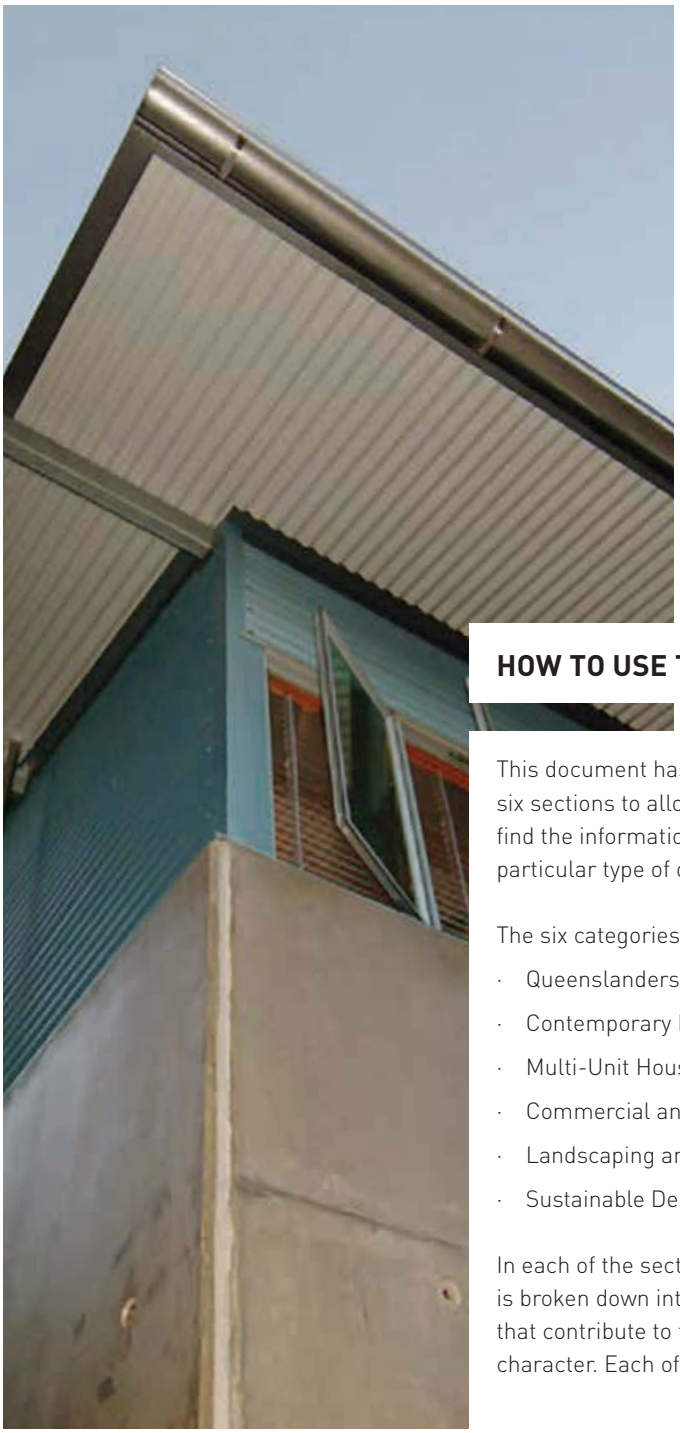
This Cairns Style Design Guide is intended to encourage the development industry to provide streetscapes, housing and building designs that are responsive to the environment, climate, local character and community needs.

At the same time it is intended to raise awareness in the community of the choices and alternatives available and the opportunities for an individual house, multi-unit development or commercial building to contribute to a collective Cairns Style.



Cairns Style is a broad concept ranging from the overall pattern and rhythm of streets to the detail of window awnings and balustrades.





HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document has been divided into six sections to allow the user to quickly find the information relevant to their particular type of development.

The six categories discussed are:

- Queenslanders
- Contemporary Houses
- Multi-Unit Housing
- Commercial and Civic Buildings
- Landscaping and Screening
- Sustainable Design

In each of the sections, the development is broken down into the elements that contribute to the development's character. Each of these elements are introduced with a brief discussion about the element in the context of the development. This is followed by a discussion detailing 'WHY' the element is important and 'HOW' you can incorporate this element in your development and contribute positively to the strengthening of Cairns Style.

Where a 'TIPS' section is included, further advice is provided on how to achieve a desirable outcome and what should be avoided. Images depicting desirable outcomes or good examples of what has been discussed are included. In some instances, a poor outcome may be included to clearly demonstrate what is considered inconsistent with Cairns Style.

GLOSSARY

Active Frontage	An active frontage facilitates a safe pedestrian environment and encourages increased pedestrian activity. Alfresco dining, glass shop fronts and activities spilling onto the street create active frontages.
Batten Screen	Narrow battens, usually of timber, positioned with small gaps in between, to form a screen that improves privacy but still allows breezes to penetrate. Battens can be arranged vertically or horizontally.
Connection with the Street	The popularity of the motor vehicle has resulted in the loss of society's connection with the street. Traditionally the street was used as a place of 'exchange' of information, friendship, material goods, culture, knowledge, insight and skills.
Cross Ventilation	The use of windows, doors or vents on opposite sides of a building to facilitate the circulation of air.
Human Scale	Proportional relationship between the human and the design of his/her surrounding natural and built environment. Design elements usually include height, distance, bulk and mass.
Liveable	Fit or suitable to live in or with. Liveability is usually affected by comfort and access.
Neighbourhood Character	Neighbourhood character is the relationship of built form, vegetation and topographic characteristics, in both the private and public domains that make one place different from another.

Passive Surveillance	Passive surveillance is the subconscious, ongoing, casual observation of the streetscape implied by such things as activity, front verandahs, windows or gardening.
Precinct	A distinct area with generally definable boundaries.
Rhythm and Rhyme of the Streetscape	The regular or ordered repetition of dominant and subordinate elements of the streetscape, for example, constant housing setback distances creates a repetition of a dominant element.
Setback	The required minimum horizontal distance between the building line and the related front, side, or rear property line.
Skyline	The outline of objects seen against the sky.
Social Interaction	Interaction between individuals within a community. Interaction may be by chance, planned or manufactured.
Streetscape	The visual appearance of a street, including the rhythm and scale of urban form elements such as the road, built form, street furniture, fences, vegetation and open spaces, that combine to form the street's character.
Vernacular Architecture	Architecture that is local to a region or area through use of local materials or design characteristics.
Visually Permeable	Able to be seen through.



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QUEENSLANDERS

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The Cairns Queenslander has stood the test of time and is testimony to the use of appropriate materials and climatically responsive design.



INTRODUCTION

As with many Queensland towns and cities, the 'Queenslander' house is recognised as an important element of Cairns Style. However, Queenslanders vary slightly across the State, reflecting the economy, climate and social conditions in different towns, and so the Cairns Queenslander has developed with its own unique style.

One distinctive element of traditional streets in Cairns is that individual lots had narrow street frontages and so houses were built close together, resulting in a relatively dense streetscape. Houses were also often built close to the front of the street, creating a sense of the street being 'watched' and leaving a large backyard area for fruit which today form a lush green backdrop in most streets.

The tropical climate of Cairns also generated a unique building response. Cairns Queenslanders were built high enough that the downstairs area could be used during the day as a cool retreat. This area was often enclosed with timber battens to keep out the sun. Upstairs, verandahs were usually semi enclosed with louvres, casements or lattice to admit breezes, keep out the rain and protect the central sleeping and living areas from the heat of the day. The verandahs were also used for informal living activities and as a sleeping area for children.

The extensive use of timber, due to its ready availability, is a distinctive feature of Cairns Queenslanders. Timber louvres, screens, lattice, battens and trims all contribute to the style of Cairns. The almost exclusive use of corrugated iron for roofing is also a feature of Cairns Queenslanders.

The Cairns Queenslander has stood the test of time and is testimony to the use of appropriate materials and climatically responsive design. Today the scale, form and style of the Cairns Queenslander is a key determinant of the style of Cairns.

Retaining character and streetscape is encouraged throughout Cairns with particular emphasis in character precincts, identified in the CairnsPlan. Many of these areas contain some of the best examples of traditional Queenslanders that define the character of the streetscape which contributes to the Cairns Style.



The repetitive use of a limited number of materials, in different ways, is also a unique characteristic of Cairns Style.



MATERIALS

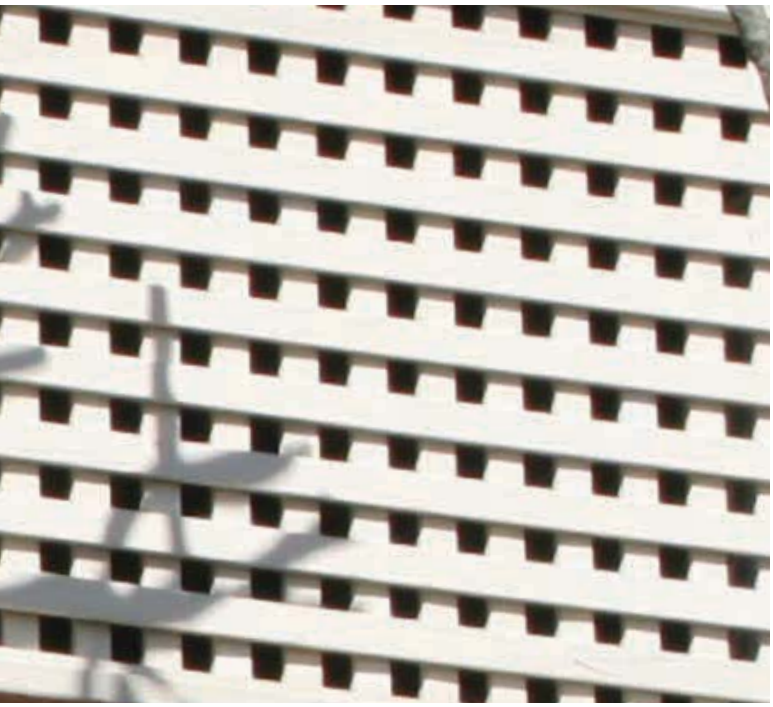
Traditional housing in Cairns demonstrates the materials that were readily available and affordable at the time, notably 'timber and tin'. Today these materials are recognised as distinctive elements of Cairns Style. The repetitive use of a limited number of materials, in different ways, is also an unique characteristic of Cairns Style. Typically a timber frame was covered with cladding that was milled from local forests, commonly cedar, hickory and kauri pine. Early houses were often constructed with timber lining or cladding to one face of the wall only, with exposed timber frames on the inner or even external face of the wall. This construction technique is referred to as 'single skin'. Timber was also used extensively for external and internal features and fittings including:

- Balustrades and stairs
- Vertical battens to enclose the undercroft areas
- Lattice and timber louvres to enclose verandahs
- Awnings over windows
- Fences
- Internal dividers and vents

Sometimes, to save on construction costs, ripple iron was also used for external cladding. This is similar to the product now known as Mini Orb. Roofs were also 'tin', being almost always clad with galvanised or corrugated iron. Patterned glass is another common product in a Cairns Queenslander, and this is discussed in more detail in the windows section.

Tips for renovating or extending a Queenslander

- *Try to retain the existing materials in an existing house. If they need to be replaced because they are in poor condition, explore options to replace existing materials with similar, sympathetic materials. For example, replace weatherboards with fibre cement boards that have the same profile.*
- *If older materials, such as timber louvres or screens have been removed in previous renovations, consider re-instating them, but find out details and forms that were used in the local area, rather than a timber trim from another place or era.*
- *When extending or renovating try to use materials that are sympathetic with the existing materials. However, it is not necessary to copy the older works, new materials can successfully be used and may give more value to the older building and materials.*

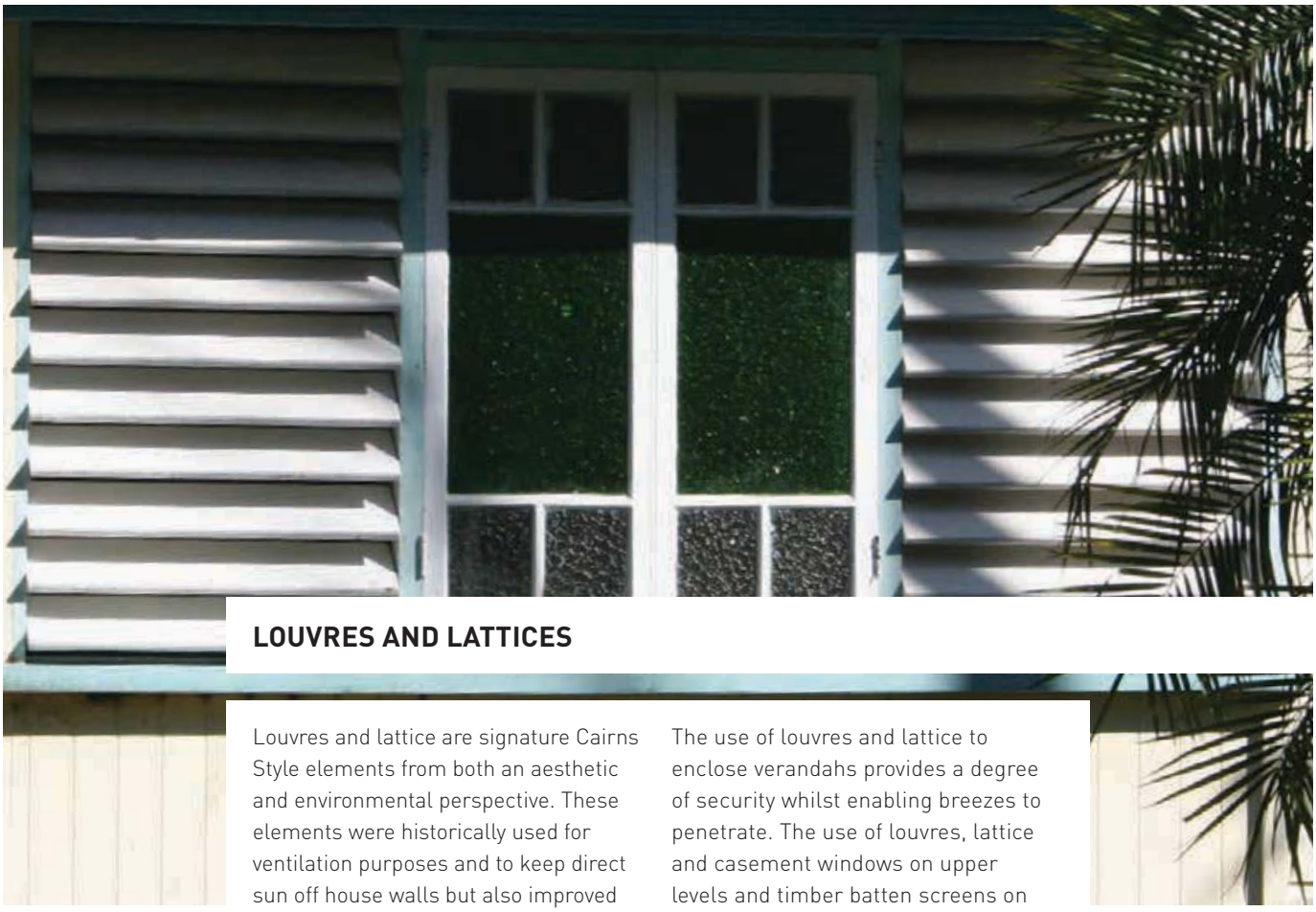






The use of louvres and lattice to enclose verandahs provides a degree of security whilst enabling breezes to penetrate.





LOUVRES AND LATTICES

Louvres and lattice are signature Cairns Style elements from both an aesthetic and environmental perspective. These elements were historically used for ventilation purposes and to keep direct sun off house walls but also improved security. Improved natural ventilation results in less reliance on mechanical energy sources.

The use of louvres and lattice to enclose verandahs provides a degree of security whilst enabling breezes to penetrate. The use of louvres, lattice and casement windows on upper levels and timber batten screens on the under storey of raised houses are very distinct features of Cairns Queenslanders.



ROOF PROFILES

Roof profiles contribute significantly to the character of Cairns Queenslanders. A variety of roof profiles can be found in Cairns houses including hipped roofs, gable roofs and a combination of the two. Traditionally roofs were constructed with corrugated iron however today galvanised iron sheeting is used for its similar appearance and longevity. The pitch of roofs varied but was usually greater than 30 degrees.

Why it is important

Roof profiles contribute significantly to the character of Queenslander houses and traditional streetscapes.

Gabled and hipped roofs create large cavities of roof space which provides some insulation against the heat to the rooms below. This cavity is often vented with a roof ventilator designed to extract the hot air which collects in there.

Although Queenslanders have narrow eaves, window hoods provide shelter to windows, and verandahs provide shelter to the internal rooms of the house.

How to do it

- *Retain existing roof profiles when adding extensions.*
- *When adding extensions or re-roofing, use traditional looking galvanised iron sheeting.*







› · *Include roof ventilators at the highest point of the roof and vented gables to assist in cooling the roof cavity.*

· *Traditional gutter profiles should be used in extensions and re-guttering. In Queensland, two styles of gutter were common: ogee and quad.*

A variety of roofing profiles are part of the charm in regional variations of old Queensland houses and should always be carefully preserved when re-roofing.

The National Trust of Queensland







Maximise the number of south and east orientated windows to capture the prevailing south easterly and north easterly breezes.



WINDOWS AND AWNINGS

The two most common window types in Queenslanders are casement windows and louvres, usually timber louvres. These window types can be angled to catch breezes whilst keeping out rain and can be left open during the hot wet season. Awnings positioned above windows provide further protection against rain and sun, particularly on gable end walls.

Through the use of patterned and coloured glass, casements are also used to regulate light without the need for blinds or curtains which block breezes. Double hung and hopper or awning windows are also used, but are less effective at catching breezes and keeping rain out, and so are less common.

Why it is important

Casement windows and louvres contribute to the distinct style of Cairns Queenslanders. In particular, the long rectangular shape of casements create a distinct architectural pattern, which is further enhanced by the light and shade effect created when the windows are open. Variety between houses is achieved by the use of coloured and textured glasses and a variety of arrangements for mullions and glazing bars. Louvre windows are of a similar rectangle scale to casement windows and, again, the open windows create interesting textures of light and shade that contribute to the overall style. Awnings made of timber and tin come in many different styles and give individual character to houses. Awnings also contribute to the style and character by breaking up the face of the building and casting deep shadows.

How to do it

- *Reinstate casement windows where these have been removed or restore damaged windows. Although second hand windows are becoming difficult to find, they can still be sourced. Alternatively, new casement windows can be purchased.*
- *Use window awnings that complement traditional elements.*
- *Use windows that can be left open in the rain and locate them where they will catch the breeze.*

Tips

- *Maximise openings to enable cross ventilation. This assists to naturally cool dwellings.*
- *Maximise the number of south and east orientated windows to capture the prevailing south easterly and north easterly breezes.*
- *Increase natural ventilation by reducing barriers to air movements through the house thus creating flow paths through the dwelling.*
- *Provide fans to improve ventilation and air movement in the absence of breezes.*
- *Look for detail of window awnings and casement windows in old photographs.*



VERANDAHS

Verandahs are a significant architectural element of traditional Queensland houses and were built at the front, sides and/or back of houses. In Cairns the verandah was usually enclosed or partly enclosed with louvres, lattice or casement windows creating deep shade and privacy for occupants.

Why it is important

Enclosing all or part of the verandah with lattice, louvres or battens provides privacy, refuge from the elements (sun and rain) and allows access to cooling breezes enabling the verandah to be used as an extended living and sleeping area throughout the summer months. Front verandahs contribute to a safer street and assist residents to make neighbourhoods more social and secure by providing opportunities for interaction and passive surveillance.

How to do it

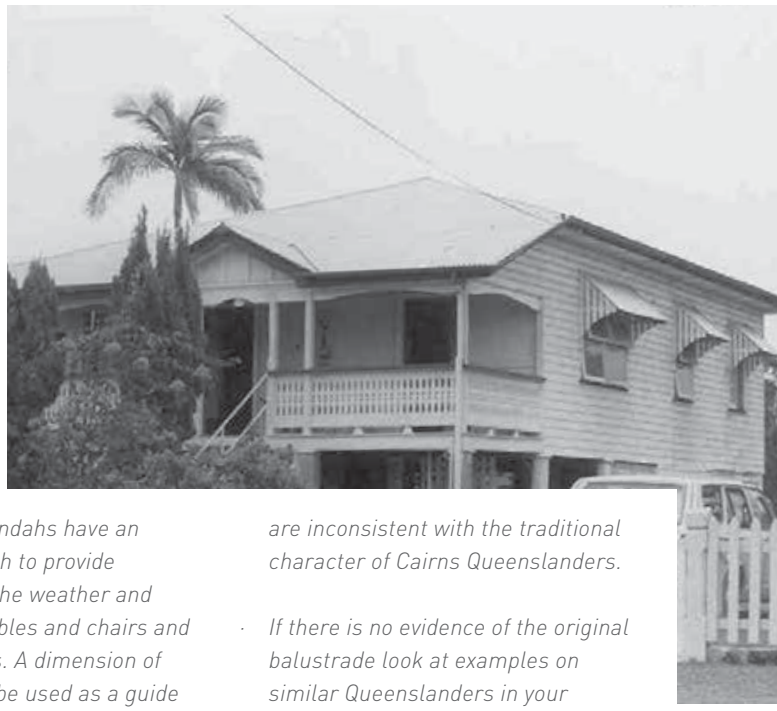
- *Partially enclose verandahs with a proportion of lightweight materials such as louvres, lattice or batten screens positioned to provide privacy from neighbouring developments and relief from the sun.*
- *Incorporate a traditional balustrade and handrails. Handrails were often simple curves or waist shapes.*
- *The addition of a ceiling fan/s and strategically positioned vegetation to shade the verandah will make the verandah more attractive and functional in the summer months.*
- *Include hanging planter baskets on the perimeter of outdoor areas.*
- *When designing a new verandah or deck consider summer sun positions and access to cooling breezes.*

Tips

- *Include ceiling fans and insulate roofs where possible to keep the verandah cool.*
- *Avoid locating air conditioning units on or adjacent to verandahs as this greatly reduces the verandah's liveability.* ›







› · *Ensure new verandahs have an area large enough to provide protection from the weather and accommodate tables and chairs and other furnishings. A dimension of 3m x 3m should be used as a guide to a minimum useable verandah.*

· *Avoid using contemporary materials such as wire rope and aluminium framed windows on verandahs visible from the street as these materials are inconsistent with the traditional character of Cairns Queenslanders.*

· *If there is no evidence of the original balustrade look at examples on similar Queenslanders in your neighbourhood or old photographs. 'The Cairns Historical Society' has a large collection of photographs.*











Garages and carports positioned at the front of Queenslanders often have negative impacts on the character of the house and upset the pattern of the streetscape.



GARAGES

Cairns Queenslanders were rarely constructed with garages or carports as private ownership of motor vehicles was not common at the time of construction. As vehicle ownership increased, cars were often stored in the open area underneath the house and in some instances garages were added at the rear of the property.

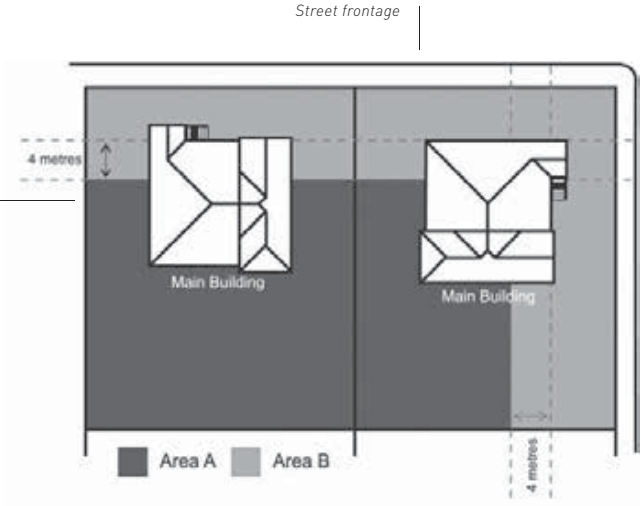
This ensured that the rhythm of the streetscape was not interrupted by outbuildings or garages.

Why it is important

When locating garages / carports it is essential to maintain the rhythm of the streetscape by not constructing structures that dominate, interrupt or detract from the character of the existing house. This ensures that the character of the Cairns Queenslander house is maintained.

How to do it

- *Garages / carports should be located either underneath the house or at the rear or side of the house.*
- *Where the construction of garages / carports is required in front of the house due to access or other constraints, solid walls and garage doors should not be included. Batten screening and lattice should be used as an alternative material.*
- *Design the structure with a low roof profile to avoid obscuring the view of the house from the street.*
- *Use lightweight materials consistent with the house.*
- *Effective landscaping and design can soften the impact of the garage on the streetscape.*



To maitain streetscape rhythm, garages and carports should be constructed in Area A of the diagram, or underneath the house where this is possible



FENCES

Front fences, gates and gate houses are important elements in the appearance of Cairns Queenslanders and traditional Cairns streetscapes. Front fences were approximately 1.2 metres (4 feet) in height and were constructed from a variety of materials including timber pickets, concrete, wire mesh and steel tubing. The design of the front fence often indicated the social status of the property owner and grander homes often featured fences constructed of stone or decorative iron work.

Why it is important

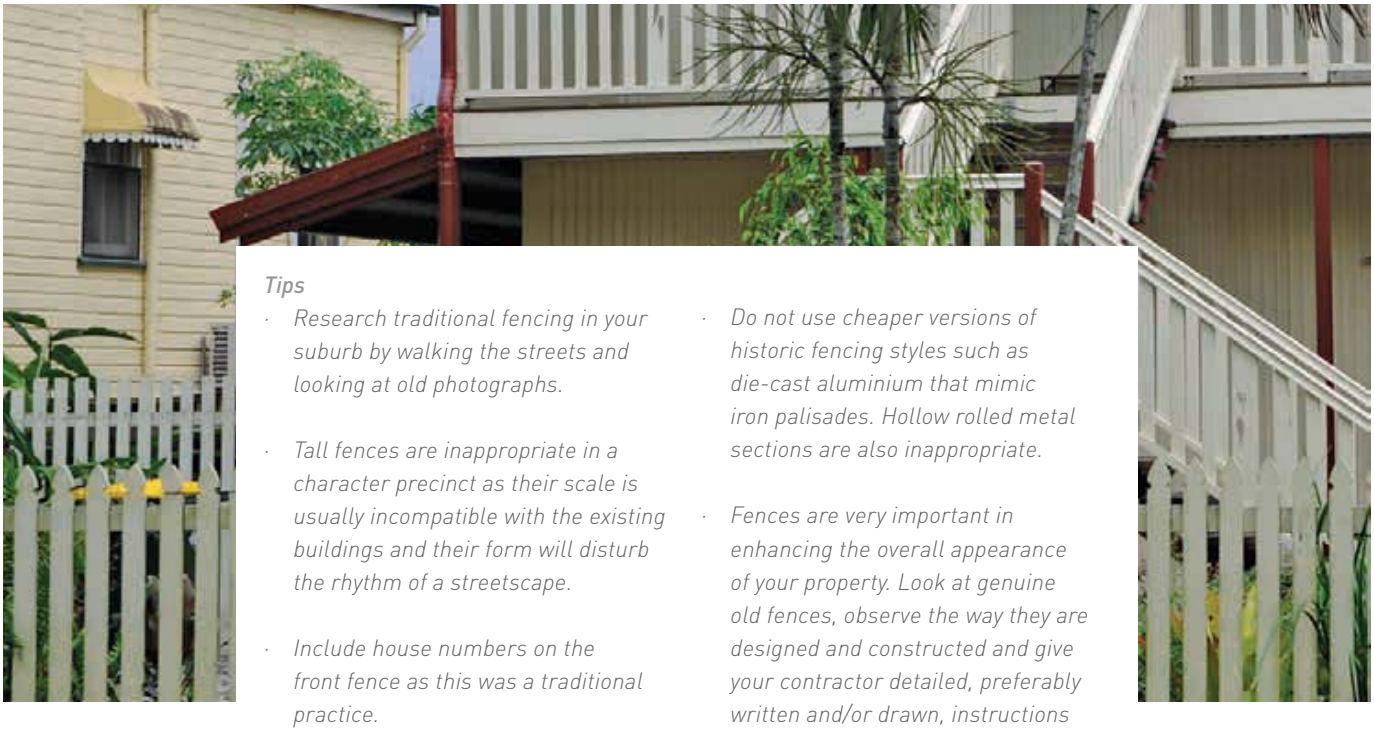
Traditionally, a front fence indicated the boundary of a lot. The fences were low and visually permeable ensuring front yards were visible from the street. Consequently streets were places of chance social interactions and subject to passive surveillance from residents working in their gardens and relaxing on verandahs.

How to do it

- *Select a design, colours and materials that are consistent with your house.*
- *Look at early photographs of houses in your suburb showing examples of fences to identify an appropriate scale and materials. Contemporary materials in the fence's design will diminish the character of the Queenslander and the street.*
- *The new fence should not be a replica of a fence from other regions.*
- *1.8 metre (6 foot) fences should be avoided on the front boundary as this greatly reduces the view of the house and has negative impacts on the streetscape.*
- *Where a 1.8 metre (6 foot) fence is required, the fence should have high transparency to ensure it does not detract from the streetscape.*
- *Effective landscaping is also a way to maintain privacy and amenity on smaller fences whilst not detracting from the streetscape.*







Tips

- *Research traditional fencing in your suburb by walking the streets and looking at old photographs.*
- *Tall fences are inappropriate in a character precinct as their scale is usually incompatible with the existing buildings and their form will disturb the rhythm of a streetscape.*
- *Include house numbers on the front fence as this was a traditional practice.*
- *Local fence shops supply a variety of picket and post types and other materials that are appropriate to use in new fences in character precincts.*
- *Do not use cheaper versions of historic fencing styles such as die-cast aluminium that mimic iron palisades. Hollow rolled metal sections are also inappropriate.*
- *Fences are very important in enhancing the overall appearance of your property. Look at genuine old fences, observe the way they are designed and constructed and give your contractor detailed, preferably written and/or drawn, instructions on your requirements.*

Increasing the height of a fence often detracts from the appearance of the place. Owners should research and establish the appropriate proportions.

The National Trust of Queensland







Traditional colours were simple and light. Variations of white and light pastel colours such as blues, purples and mint green look attractive in the bright winter sunlight.



COLOURS

Traditionally timber buildings in North Queensland were painted in white or light colours to reflect the heat. The use of these colours is a widespread practice in tropical areas. This creates a pattern of light and shadow when combined with the shaded recesses of verandahs and undercrofts.
Many rendered brick buildings were painted a light ochre or stone grey to emulate stone.

Why it is important

The 'tropical style' of Cairns is strengthened by a good and memorable palette of colours and materials. White remains a contemporary 'classic' and retains a popularity for residents restoring Cairns Queenslanders.

How to do it

Traditional colours were simple and light. Variations of white and light pastel colours such as blues, purples and mint green look attractive in the bright winter sunlight and can be invigorating in the gloomy wet season.

- *Avoid Southern 'heritage' colours including yellow ochres, trims of dark greens, browns and reds which originated in different climatic conditions. Dark colours such as grey and purples currently fashionable in the more urban settings of inner city Melbourne or Sydney can look very oppressive in the Far North's bright sunlight and gloomy in the wet season.*
- *Use a combination of pale colours on walls and bright colours to accentuate the trims. Southern Australian heritage colour schemes are not characteristic of our tropical region and diminish our regional style. These colour schemes should be avoided.*



BUILDING IN UNDERNEATH

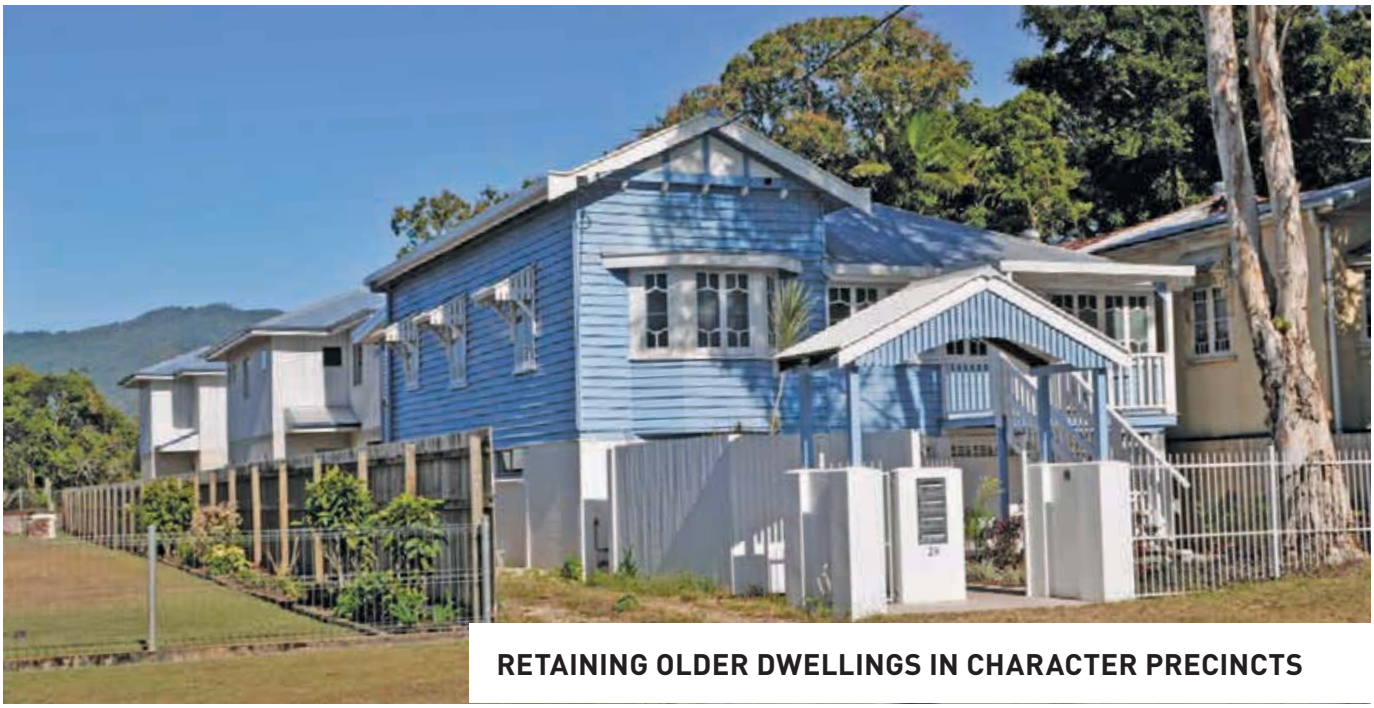
Cairns Queenslanders are typically single storey residential buildings, raised up to 2 metres off the ground with an open lower storey. Over time, it has become increasingly desirable to enclose the lower storey of these houses to cater for growth in family size and changing land uses.

Why it is important

As Cairns Queenslanders were not typically enclosed underneath, consideration must be made to the design of the house to ensure that the materials used and the design complement the existing building form. Inappropriate modifications to houses can have detrimental impacts on the character values of the house and the streetscape as raised buildings and under story mass can be out of scale and context.

How to do it

- *Setback lower level walls from the front plane of the upper level to reduce the mass of the building. This can be effectively achieved by recessing the lower level to a distance of at least one metre from the front plane.*
- *The use of materials that are consistent with the existing materials is recommended. If using masonry block or brick consider rendering it to achieve a flat painted look that is more complementary to the style of the Cairns Queenslander.*



RETAINING OLDER DWELLINGS IN CHARACTER PRECINCTS



The introduction of the Multiple Dwelling (Small Scale Development) Code in CairnsPlan in 2009 provides an opportunity to increase density in established residential areas, without having a significant impact on the streetscape and character values of the neighbourhood.

The code encourages the development of diverse housing options in both established and new residential areas and where in a Character Precinct, existing buildings are retained and reused. Maintaining existing character buildings ensures streetscape values are maintained through the retention of the existing character building to the front of the property, with new development to the rear where possible. This form of development offers an alternative to developing larger scale multiple dwellings and ensures the streetscape character is maintained.

The retention and sensitive management of character precincts assists in conserving living examples of the early character and architecture of Cairns.

