

By Ben Wollen

Two wheels ARE BETTER THAN FOUR



An Austinmer home on Ben's Archibike tour. Photos: Anthony Warry

Last year I invited one of my old Uni mates to come join my archibike tour that runs as part of the Illawarra Festival of Architecture & Design (IFAD for short). He jumped on an early train and met me and bike mayor of Wollongong, Edward Birt, in Stanny for what was a stunning October Spring day. One of 12 only participants, he was completely stoked to see some of the incredibly diverse architecture that skirts the escarpment. At the end of the day we went back to my place for lunch and en route we travelled up Asquith Street, Austinmer.

On our climb up and as we were passing the waterfall towards the top, he couldn't help but to exclaim "Oh, stop, I can't believe this place!" You see, while he's not immune to beautiful landscapes (he's done the lap around Oz), he couldn't believe that just cruising up through what, for all intents and purposes, is a suburb, that you'd be in the canopy of a rainforest and pass by a waterfall.

Of course I looked at him strangely and replied "Yeah – it's nice isn't it". After he left and I reflected

on his comment, I thought that I was totally taking where I live for granted. After all, it's not uncommon for me to ride to work and on the way have to dodge lyrebirds crossing the road. There's not many commuters out there who can claim that!

Furthermore, I get to enjoy it all on two wheels breathing the fresh forest air, nodding to the walkers out for their morning constitutional and feeling the wind beneath my wheels. There's no better way to experience our terrestrial world than the freedom two wheels offers.

This leads me back to the Archibike tour that I host every year in October as part of IFAD. It took me many hours of exploring, research, trial tours and a painstaking culling process to select the houses on the tour. We only get to see them from the outside, but I have collected as much information on each of them as I can and have a folder with plans, pictures and stories that I relay at each of our stops. As it stands, the tour encompasses 10 houses spanning from Stanwell



L to R: Ed, Ben and Florence stop to feed rainbow lorikeets



What's On at the Illawarra Festival of Architecture & Design

Saturday, Oct 18: A cycling tour, led by Ben Wollen and Ed Birt (pictured above), plus house & studio tours and a classical music evening at Wollongong Art Gallery.

Sunday, Oct 19: Panel discussions at UOW's Innovation Campus from 12–5pm, with kids entertained by fun archi-activities while you relax with food, drinks, and great conversation.



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Park in the north, down to Austinmer where we finish. Along the way we get a bit of history, a chat about the various approaches to Architectural design, we see two round houses (one that used to rotate), a house by Australia's only recipient of the International Pritzker prize for Architecture and enjoy arguably one of the best bike rides available in New South Wales.

At the end of each tour, I feel so energised and enthused to find out that it's not just me that loves architecture!

At the time of this printing, we will be only one month away from IFAD 2025. This year we are delving into the world of landscape, food fairness and how it all relates to our local architecture – be that at an urban scale or even a balcony. At the curatorial helm, we have Landscape Architect Stuart Scobie and Interior Designer Margie Rahmann, both directors of local architecture firm Edmiston Jones. Holding the torch for all things food fairness is Dr Lina Engelen, chair of Healthy Cities Australia.

They've put together a stellar line-up of discussions to be held on Sunday, October 19 at the remarkable Sustainable Buildings Research Centre at the University of Wollongong's Innovation Campus. It's one of the only full Living Building Challenge certified projects in Australia and they've kindly offered to take tours of this building and both of their solar decathlon winning houses – the Illawarra Flame Tree and Desert Rose house.

Our ever-popular open house tours will also be on Saturday, October 18, for your chance to see some of the best residential designs the Illawarra has to offer.

This will be followed by our charity classical music concert in the evening at the Wollongong Art Gallery. This year all the profits to this event will be supporting the newly constructed Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre (designed by curator Margie Rahmann). This will be where we announce the winners to the Illawarra Architecture awards for new best home and new best alterations and additions.

Apologies – I didn't mean to gloat in this article! But, I think we're all probably pretty guilty of taking for granted the incredible place in which we live. These days it only takes watching the evening news to trigger feelings of gratitude. It's time to celebrate all that is local, pitch in to a local charity and learn all things living landscapes.

If you're an architecture and design enthusiast or you just love getting around on two wheels, block out the weekend of 18/19 October and come along for the ride! Better still, head over to our website and buy yourself a ticket before they're all gone.

Visit www.ifad.net.au for tickets 🌸