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Urban sprawl could swamp Gold Coast

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Profile

THE Gold Coast's tourism industry is being sacrificed "on the altar of urban growth", according to a book to be released today.

"Gold Coast City planners have not got a clue about what makes tourism work," author Geoff Burchill said.

Further conflicts between the Coast's increasing numbers of permanent residents and its tourism industry were inevitable, he said, and a new vision was needed to replace the "creeping mediocrity" that overtook the area's planning in the 1990s.

Passion, Power and Prejudice is Mr Burchill's self-published 600-page memoir, history and "encyclopedia" on the Gold Coast development industry over the past 40 years.

The engineer, consultant and entrepreneur has seen it all when it comes to the flamboyant people and deals that have characterised the glitter strip's property industry in that time.

Mr Burchill has played key roles in many of the Coast's biggest development projects — particularly in land subdivision and integrated tourist resorts — since he moved there from Brisbane in 1966.

He was among the many who rode high on the 1980s flood of Japanese investment, before it receded abruptly in 1990.

Mr Burchill put together sites and master planned and consulted throughout the development of the Sanctuary Cove, Hope Island, Royal Pines and Palm Meadows resorts.

It was a rough ride for the early-stage developers on these big projects and many "looked for a long time like they were complete duds".

But Mr Burchill said he felt vindicated to see that, over time, under subsequent owners and developers, all had begun "to look like the bonanzas that we always said they would be".

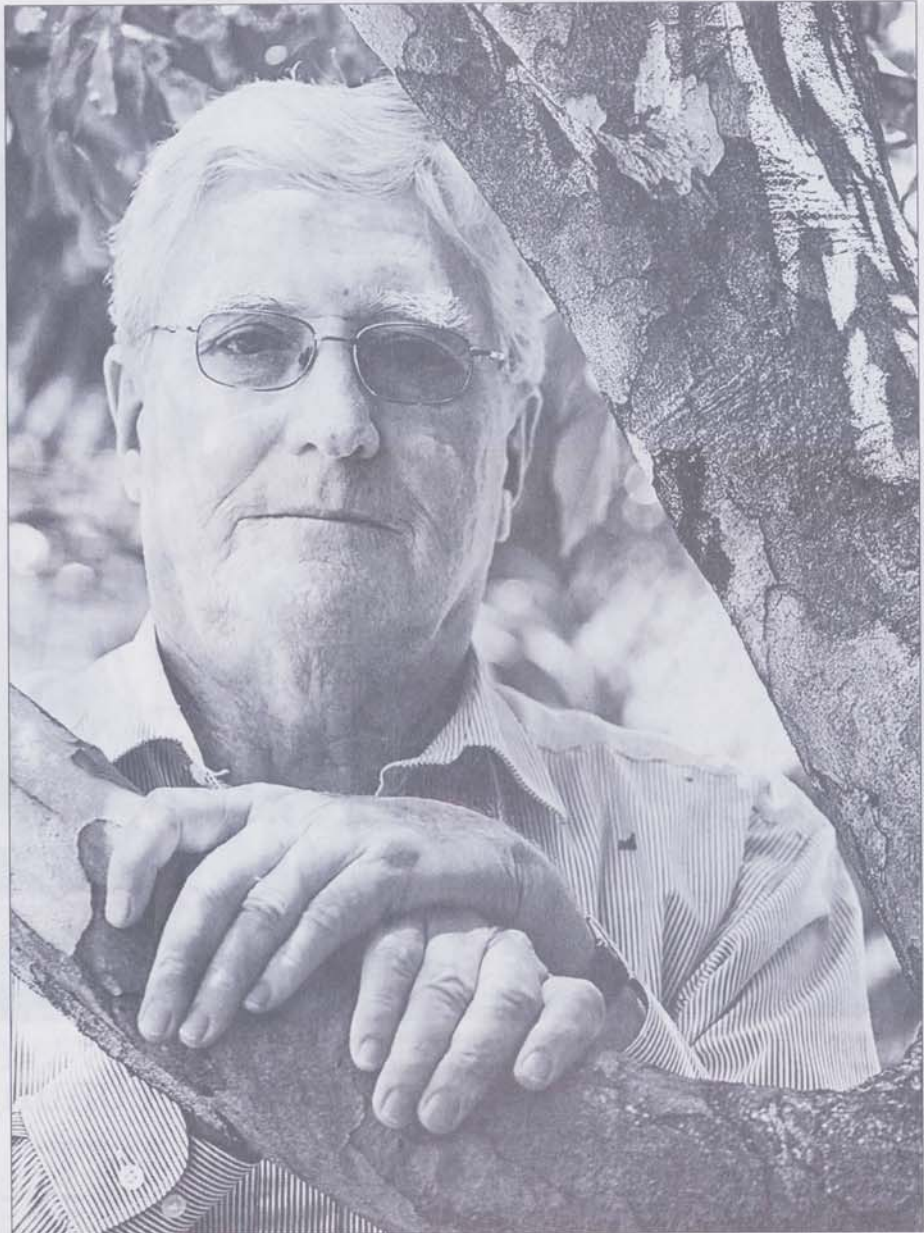
Mr Burchill was a key player in the doomed Multi-Function Polls proposal of the late 1980s, and his book details other grand plans that never came to fruition. These include a "Yellow Brick Road" concept that would have linked the big theme parks at Coomera into a Disneyland-type zone, and a now-lost opportunity to take the Gold Coast Highway through an underground tunnel in central Surfers Paradise.

But the Gold Coast was still a "magic city", Mr Burchill said.

Its developers were still trying to live down the "mythical" white shoe brigade label.

"It is as spurious for the Gold Coast as it is sinister," he said.

All the big and peripheral names in Gold Coast tourism and real estate in recent decades come together in the storyline of Burchill's book, ranging from former Queensland minister Russ Hinze to Christopher Skase, Eddie Kornhauser (with whom Burchill worked very profitably), Alan Bond, Jim Raptis, Soheil Abedian, Brian Ray, Arthur Earle, Ron McMaster, Gordon Douglas, Keith Williams, Jim Cavill, Sir Frank Moore, Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Mike Gore.



Conflict: Geoff Burchill says planners must solve the stresses caused by tourism versus residents

Picture: Patrick Hamilton

Mr Burchill recounts a tale of Christopher Skase speaking at a lunch, where Skase "piously" told the crowd that he would "never do business with anyone who had been mentioned in the Fitzgerald Inquiry".

Of the late Russ Hinze, Mr Burchill writes that their first meetings were when Mr Burchill was on the committee of the Surfers Paradise Golf Club and Hinze

would visit as the member for South Coast. "He would get so full of beer that he could hardly stand upright," he said. "I thought he was bad news."

"One of the strong things I saw him do later as a minister was to get off the beer."

The future image of the Gold Coast was a serious issue that called for debate, Mr Burchill said.

Many, including the council, saw the city's "rich, glitzy" and froth and bubble image as a negative when it came to drawing serious business investment and government funding.

But Mr Burchill said that in all his dealings with foreign investors, it was this very aspect that attracted them.

"They wanted to come here because it was what it was," he said.