

Books

■ Former development industry insider Geoff Burchill's first book is a comprehensive, sometimes controversial and always passionate account of the past and future making of the Gold Coast. **Michael Jacobson** reports

Shaping our city of Gold

With Queensland tipped to become Australia's second most populous state by 2041, and the Gold Coast inevitably expected to house a big chunk of that growing population, a new book by retired master planner and development industry consultant Geoff Burchill should be required reading.

Burchill, a prime mover and shaker in the development of the Gold Coast from the 1960s onward, whose book details the making, unmaking and remaking of the Gold Coast over the years, can provide intimate and invaluable knowledge and lessons for those charged with planning this city's developmental and infrastructural future.

Not that he is an objective voice. Rather, and not unexpectedly, *Passion, Power & Prejudice* comes down very much on the side of the developer.

Some of his views, always stridently put, will put many readers offside, this reviewer occasionally included.

However, the development of the Gold Coast has always invited robust debate, which is why Burchill's book – four years in the making and almost encyclopaedic in its attention to detail – is a welcome and worthy addition to that debate.

At more than 600 pages, it is not a volume many will tackle in one hit. It is a book that rewards dipping, and Burchill has been wise to divide it into seven sections tracing the transformation of a string of seaside villages to what is today Australia's sixth-largest city.

Among his subjects, Burchill covers the zeniths and nadirs of the city, including the visionary entrepreneurs and narrow-minded opportunists, the role and performance of various city councils, discussion of the Fitzgerald Inquiry and events leading to the current CMC inquiry, the damage done by cyclones, credit squeezes, social and

economic reforms, the rise and loss of foreign investment, the times when local vision and leadership were lacking and damaging and, much to his regret, the thwarting of the multi-function polis concept in the 1990s.

"Many events in my own career and in the life of this city over almost 40 years were memorable, each in their own way," writes Burchill.

"There were wonderful successes in times of great creativity and investment peaks; inevitably followed by long and longer periods of development-industry failures.

"Having to work harder yet smarter to survive while waiting for the Gold Coast's next 'trick' invoked lessons that could not be learned in any other place."

As for the future, Burchill fears the Gold Coast 'might be losing its past reputation for the development miracles that were a big part of its high-flying appeal'. He has little time for the anti-development lobby, bemoans the rise of mediocre leadership and questions whether the people of the city in the 2000s possess the kind of passion that once set the Gold Coast apart and is required again now.

"Arguments for the city not being able to reach a million people because there is not enough room will be sunk by the reality that it might grow to even greater numbers when creativity and invention by the Gold Coast development industry finds a way to replace the short-term, quick-buck thinking about housing that has dominated development in recent years," he says.

"The 2000s promise a next era of rapid growth in the city's development that will be magnificent. But this will require new kinds of creativity and talent to manage much greater potential impacts on the community than anything seen before."

"Crises will occur in a kind of future shock for long-settled neighbourhoods as the population sprints towards doubling its size within 35 years."

While the views of Geoff Burchill will not find blanket support, there can be no questioning the experience through which his views have been formed.

Burchill describes *Passion, Power & Prejudice* as his gift to the city and, whatever his motivations, it is a comprehensive, important and long overdue account of a much maligned, but remarkable location.

TITLE:

Passion, Power & Prejudice

AUTHOR-PUBLISHER

Geoff Burchill-Golden 12 Pty Ltd

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Local bookstores or by mail order from www.passionpowerandprejudice.com

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IN A WORD:

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