



Reviews...

RetroSuburbia

The Downshifter's Guide to a Resilient Future

David Holmgren

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retrosurbia.com

REVIEW BY KIRSTEN BRADLEY as published on the Milkwood Permaculture Blog, www.milkwood.net

This book is dangerous. In its essence, *RetroSuburbia* invites and inspires us all to stay right where we are. Turning our suburbs upside down, to make the world we want. No need to be moving to the country, to the coast or to the hills for a happier, greener life. That idyllic community? It's probably where you already are. It's potentially all around you – you just need the tools to make it happen. We do this here, in the suburbs. And we do this now.

In his long awaited new book, David Holmgren throws out a challenge to all of us – can we adapt in place, and thrive? Can we imagine a resilient future for our street? How do we make that happen? Is it even possible? Well, yes, it is. And *RetroSuburbia*, alongside being a handbook, includes many case studies of people already retrofitting their homes and communities to live well with far less, just to prove it IS possible.

This book is enormously optimistic. As in, you can't help but grin while you read it. The strategies within *RetroSuburbia* are also enormously do-able. For all home owners and renters in south eastern Australia and beyond, there's many parts of this book that can be used at your place to make things better.

Alongside a lifetime of permaculture design and systems thinking, David is a pragmatic sort. And the fact of the matter is, David recognises that most Australians live in towns or cities. We have the most urbanised population per capita in the world – we live near each other.

And so it follows that this book was bound to happen – an extremely excellent permaculture design handbook for Australians who want to create resilient DIY futures. For both their household and community, wherever they already are.

RetroSuburbia is a large collection of patterns. And it's also a handbook of skills. And it's also a design manual for thinking about and re-jigging our behaviours and needs and wants, just as much as re-designing our roof cladding.

You know what? There's just so much good stuff in *RetroSuburbia* that, rather than try and find more words to explain why we at Milkwood think this book is so wholeheartedly great, let's just go through the contents.

RetroSuburbia as a manual is built around three fields – the built, the biological, and the behavioural. Of course, all three of these are entwined in any resilient system, but pulling them apart is very useful. At the end of every sub-heading is a small 'vision' section – a possible future scenario of how a retrosuburban example of what could be – whether it's aging and disability, or preventative strategies for soil contamination, or water harvesting. I loved these little sections – they're part idealism, part very possible reality.

Also woven throughout the book are case studies of existing retrosuburban households putting these methods into practice. Some call it permaculture and some call it something else, but they're all seriously inspiring.

Living as we do on the property where this book was conceived, written and published, we're also very aware of what a team effort this book was – with Richard Telford (designer, project manager), Brenna Quinlan (illustrator), Beck Lowe (chief text wrangler, project manager), Oliver Holmgren (photographer, photo editor) and Su Dennett (publisher) as well as David Holmgren (author, publisher) – not to mention the crowd support campaign that helped get the first edition over the line... Do you know how much cost and effort it takes to get a big book like this printed ethically and locally, without going offshore? It's a tonne of work. But with years of hard work and the help of generous supporters, team Melliodora did it.

And so even the act of writing and publishing this book speaks back to the retrosuburbia ethic – solar-powered and home-written, fuelled by homegrown food prepared on a woodfired stove powered by a local woodlot, with support and exchanges for work from many people near and far, to help make this collective effort happen. Which is exactly the point. Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.

Daring to adapt in place, rather than heading for the hills, might just be the most radical, anti-capitalist, dangerous thinking this side of the suburbs. But this is exactly what *RetroSuburbia* invites you to do. This book is a hefty invitation for you to create the world you want, right where you already are. ♦