

# Enhancing the unique stories of Everglades

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The inter-war period brought an influx of ideas and migrants to Australia. Sydney was invigorated by the construction of the Harbour Bridge opening in 1932, a triumph in the face of the Great Depression.

The following year, in 1933, Belgian born Henri Van de Velde (1878-1947) purchased Everglades and employed Danish landscape designer Paul Sorenson (1891-1983). Together the two men produced a garden design that was the first to use Modernist concepts in an Australian context.

In 1962 the Swain family generously assisted the National Trust to purchase Everglades. For some years the Trust has operated the property as a house museum and garden. It currently attracts some 30,000 visitors a year who enjoy exciting events ranging from dramatic arts to family fun. In 2010, funding under the Federal Government's Stimulus Package allowed the Trust to plan upgrades to improve the visitor experience. At the same time they promote to a wider audience the heritage significance of this much-loved property with its breathtaking backdrop of the now World Heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains Area.

Guided by its 2009 Everglades Conservation Management Plan the National Trust prepared a brief for an interpretative master plan and new visitor centre. Lacoste+Stevenson Architects were commissioned to design the new centre as a pavilion, with Frost\* engaged to develop the interpretation strategy and way-finding signage throughout the Everglades garden. The aim was to give visitors a deeper understanding of the unique story of Everglades, while ensuring that designs were sympathetic to the 1930s Modernist concepts expressed in the landscape.

## A fresh sense of arrival recalling historical connections

Set back from Everglades Avenue behind existing mature trees and shrubs just north of the Sorenson designed garden precinct, the pavilion is designed as a contemporary glass and timber structure that not only functions as a visitor centre but references the history of the gardens and its built form. Receding into the landscape the glass mirrors the Modernist landscape in the changing seasons and light.

The expression of the ground plane and internal space of the pavilion is created by a folded form seen through and extending over the glass facade. Animated on the inner surface by a white floral motif the form provides a lightness and freshness to the visitor experience; a sense-of-arrival to the gardens. As a treated surface the fold is reminiscent of a patterned carpet enveloping the space. This reference to carpet recalls the business interests of owner Henri Van de Velde, Managing Director of Felt and Textiles, the makers of Feltex carpet.



The completed visitors' centre with nearby parking space



New interpretive signage. Photo courtesy Frost\*

Felt and Textiles was the first company to bring bright, soft floor furnishings to Australia from the 1920s.

As part of the brief, Frost\* was consulted to identify opportunities for identification, directional and interpretive signage. The 'leaf' in the National Trust brand inspired the signage colour system of pale green with a burst of bright green on the side profile of the sign posts. This signage system was used to strengthen the National Trust's brand and communicate to visitors that the site was a part of a collection of significant national sites.

## Telling the stories

A selection of beautiful black and white photographs from the National Trust archives was selected by Australian garden and landscape historian Colleen Morris, who provided the accompanying text for the interpretive signage throughout the garden. These stories contextualise the history of the garden and reveal the National significance of the place.

## As an example, at the Studio Terrace you will read:

Bold in concept, heroic in scale, the design of the Studio Terrace drew attention from its very beginning. It contrasted an architectonic garden framework with the Australian bush setting. The simple stark wall of the Squash Court confined the view to the north and was a perfect foil for an old sculptural eucalypt on a dramatically innovative plinth, removed in the early 1970s.

The Studio Terrace is of National significance as the earliest garden design directly influenced by European Modernism constructed in Australia.

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