

# Eyesores no more: developers see

As public art is increasingly mandated, developers find benefits in extra costs, writes **Tina Perinotto**.

When upmarket residential developer David Smyth was planning the second stage of his family company's 700-lot Longyard golf course estate at Tamworth in northern NSW, he became one of the growing number of developers discovering the value of public art.

This is art with a vexed history — sometimes embraced, sometimes pilloried by the public it is meant to please.

Today, however, developers are being forced to become commissioning patrons, as more local councils and sometimes state governments make art a condition of development approval for major projects.

Smyth was not affected by any mandate but still, he was looking for something special to differentiate the estate and give its residents a sense of pride, and maybe even add to its financial viability.

"People talk about the triple bottom line," says Smyth, referring to the modern mantra of economic, social and environmental outcomes.

"We wanted the quadruple bottom line. A cultural outcome for the people on the estate." The answer was public art, but in a private setting.

Smyth had been heavily influenced by the concepts of new urbanism, which stress community-



In the public eye . . . this work in Pyrmont, Sydney, is operated by wind and wave energy.

building and social interaction between residents.

He was working on a commercial precinct on the estate — a coffee shop and day spa, a place where the residents would meet. And he decided to commission public artist David Humphries of Public Art

plaza and connects with the tail of a water feature that drifts down the landscape, signifying a river.

Humphries' work comes with a significant price tag of around \$200,000. To complete this cultural imprint, Smyth also commissioned a sculpture from Walcha artist Stephen King for more than \$30,000 and extensive landscaping by Jamie Durie for another \$100,000.

Smyth says it was worth every penny and has definitely helped sales.

For David Humphries, Smyth is an ideal client because he understands the value this type of work can bring to a public space.

But for most people public art remains a mystery.

First, public art is more challenging because it needs to address the general public, not the gallery-going public.

The artist also needs to know how to negotiate teamwork and often hugely complex bureaucracies, from the preconceptions of the developer or other commissioning client, to design competitions, selection panels and community feedback.

And that is all before they can even start producing the work and putting it in place, sometimes as part of a building's construction process.

Humphries reckons his background in various government roles has helped him, especially his time at the Premier's office in NSW during the 1980s, when, he says, NSW led the country in public art policy.

Sadly, Humphries says, that

reputation has fallen well behind other states, especially Victoria, and also Queensland, which mandates that all major projects allocate a portion of their budgets to public art.

In NSW, however, local councils such as Parramatta, Marrickville and Sydney City are picking up some of the slack.

Jack Bryce of Brisbane based design advisory Minala Bryce, says these days more developers are taking the initiative and installing public art in projects large and small. This is because they want to contribute something to the public domain or because they are influenced by the locals to do so, and not just because local authorities or state governments require them for major projects.

In the case of the Brisbane-based developer Citimark Properties, a foray into public art has made it a convert to the concept — mandated or not.

Citimark's director of development, Peter Morrow, says a sculpture the developer commissioned for an apartment project at the corner of Mary and Felix streets, has received very favourable feedback from buyers in the apartment building.

He describes the sculpture by artist Terry Summers as a larger than life "whimsical" sort of human character — "a cross between a medieval figure and a contemporary figure" standing on a corner with a mobile phone.

Far from feeling the exercise has been an added expense (at least