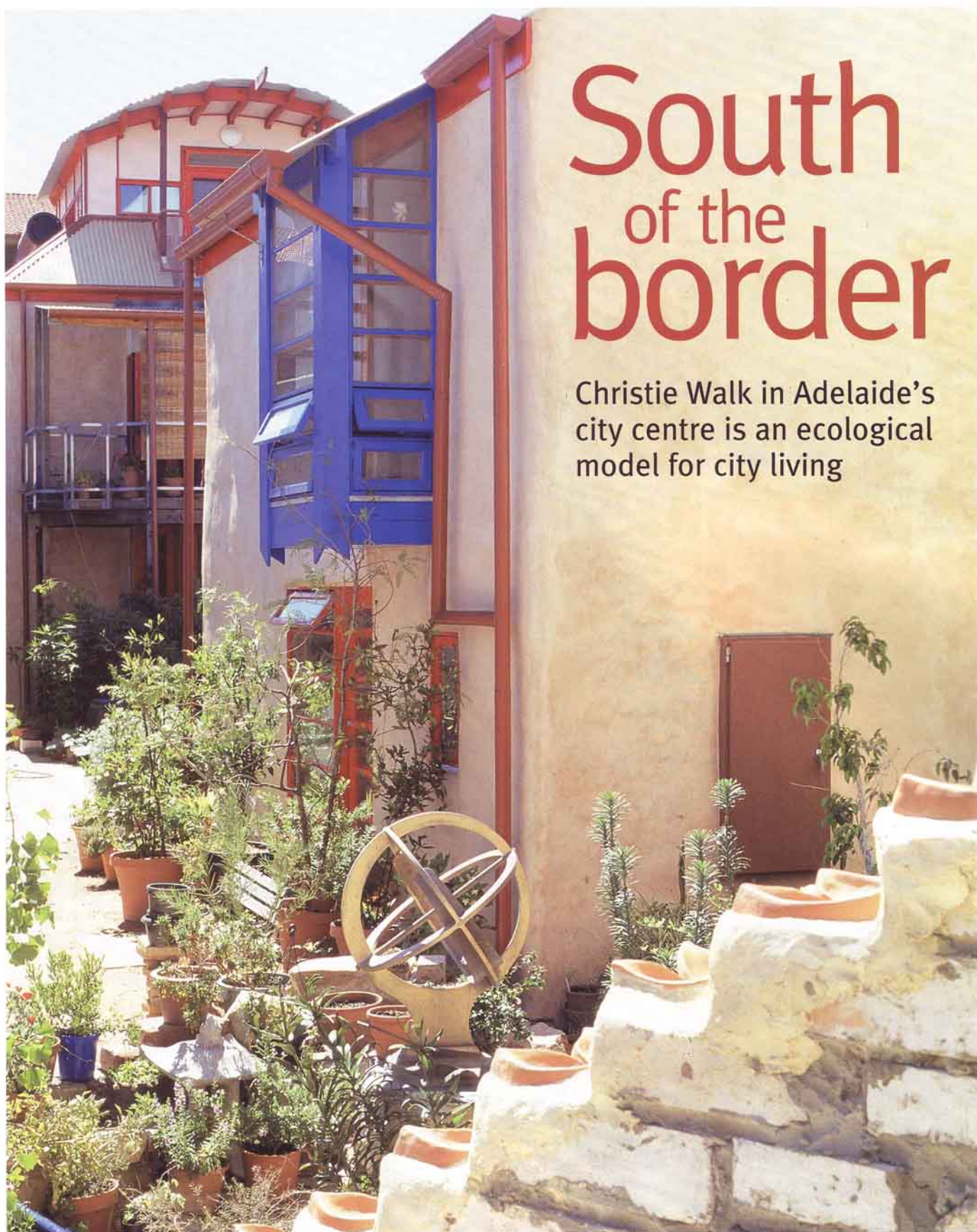


home

STORY > SUZANNE ADAMS  
PHOTOGRAPHY > ANDREW DUNBAR

# South of the border

Christie Walk in Adelaide's  
city centre is an ecological  
model for city living





**LEFT** Non-toxic paints and natural pigments were used for the rendered walls.

**RIGHT** Good solar orientation means lights are never needed during the day.

**FAR RIGHT** A window in a curved feature wall allows for natural light.

**BELOW** Splayed window reveals (a traditional building term for the edge of a window) soften the effects of the strong northerly light and reduce contrast.

**PREVIOUS PAGE** Christie Walk showcases a range of building types and styles.



**A FORMER BOTTLE-RECYCLING DEPOT IN THE** heart of Adelaide's CBD is being transformed into an environmentally friendly residential village.

Hidden behind a narrow, unassuming street frontage, the village's Mediterranean appearance is as striking as its goals.

The development is called Christie Walk after the late environmental and social activist Scott Christie, whose partner Joan Carlin, 72, lives on site and is one of the original residents.

Christie Walk began in 1999 when a small group of people from environmental

association Urban Ecology Australia joined forces to create an eco-village.

The first two stages of the three-stage, 2000sqm development have been completed, turning the site into a peaceful haven, complete with a stash of ecologically sustainable initiatives.

The 14 dwellings that have been completed so far are a mix of townhouses, apartments and stand-alone cottages. They have been constructed using either autoclaved aerated concrete (similar to Hebel) or straw bale.

Both materials were chosen for their

relative strength, cost-effectiveness and excellent insulation properties.

Other green features in the development include passive heating and cooling, non-toxic finishes, solar hot water and on-site stormwater harvesting and storage.

Community facilities include a roof garden that will have photovoltaic solar panels attached to the pergola roof, so in the future residents will be able to export electricity and sell it back to the grid.

The community has also trialled on-site effluent treatment using a sewer mine.

Architect and Christie Walk resident



## ESSENTIALS

- ...❖ **WHERE** Adelaide, South Australia.
- ...❖ **CLIMATE** temperate.
- ...❖ **ARCHITECT** Dr Paul Downton from Ecopolis Architects (Adelaide, SA, 08 8410 9218, [www.ecopolis.com.au](http://www.ecopolis.com.au)).
- ...❖ **BUILDER** EcoCity Developments (set up specifically for the project).
- ...❖ **HOUSING DETAILS** Stages 1 and 2 of Christie Walk consist of 14 dwellings: four linked three-storey townhouses, six apartments in a three-storey block and four stand-alone cottages. Stage 3 will be 13 apartments in a five-storey building and a ground-level community area, due for completion by the end of 2005.
- ...❖ **FEATURES** include straw bales and autoclaved aerated concrete to build the dwellings, passive heating and cooling, solar hot water, photovoltaic solar power, stormwater harvesting and shared public spaces.
- ...❖ **PRICES** homes in stages 1 and 2 sold for between \$220,000 and \$430,000 in 2002-2004. Stage 3 homes will start from \$285,000.

Dr Paul Downton says the idea behind the project was to demonstrate that ecologically sustainable urban housing could be created in almost every setting, regardless of the context.

"It's through the way we build things in our cities that we have the greatest impact on the environment," Paul says. "The simple solution is to build in a way that has minimal impact. If we're serious, we can address environmental issues in our cities."

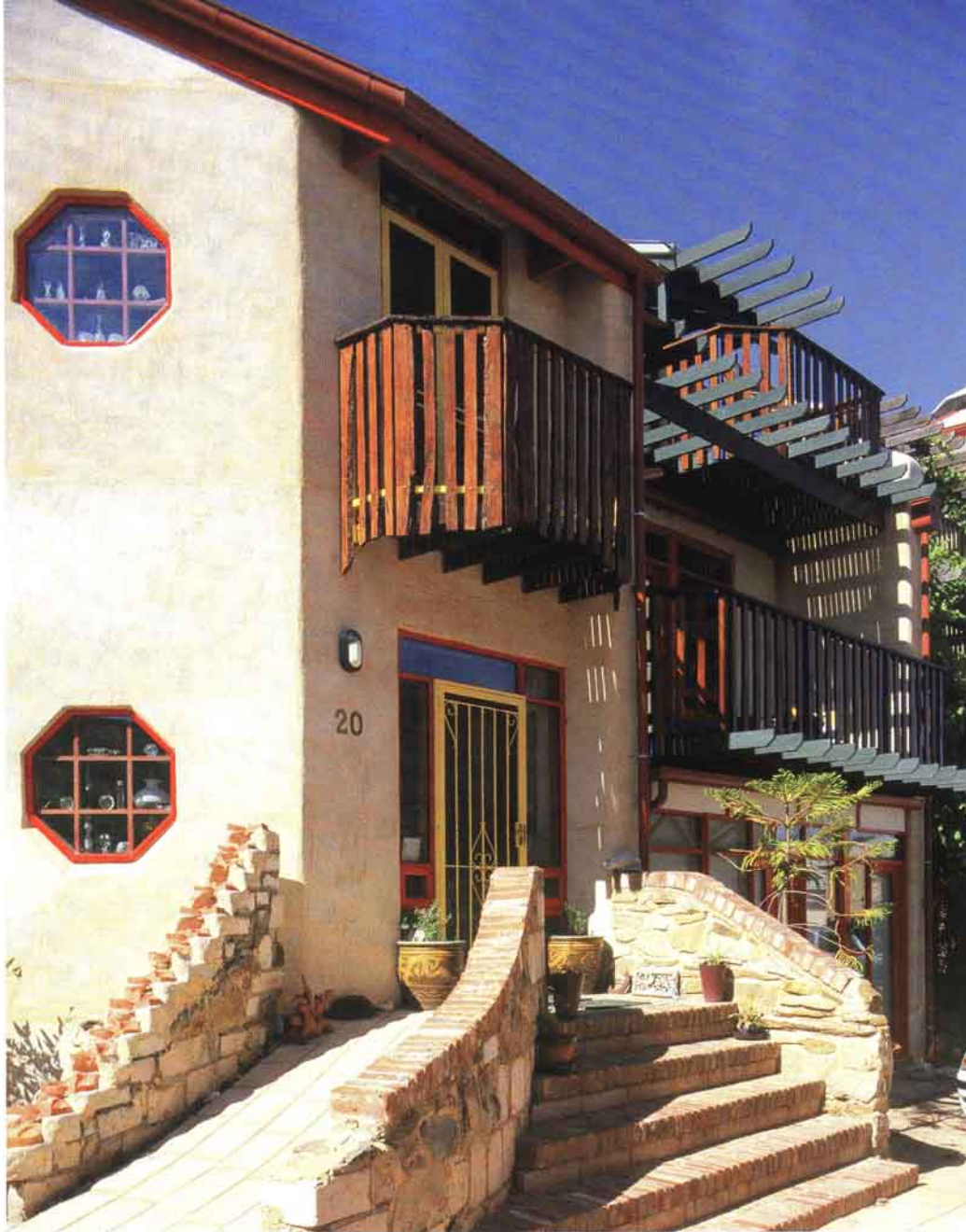
While some dwellings in the village face north to capture the sun, the awkward T-shaped block meant that others needed

to face east and west, making the design process a little more challenging.

"Christie Walk demonstrates that you can have a range of different-sized buildings, in a range of building types, using a range of construction methods, and still achieve the same outcomes," Paul says. "The main thing is to make the buildings do the heating and cooling work themselves."

The buildings have no additional cooling beyond ceiling fans, and use only small amounts of added heating in winter.

Resident Joan Carlin says she was motivated to be part of the project by a >



## WHY IT WORKS HERE

Christie Walk was designed for Adelaide's temperate climate but using green principles that are generally applicable. The idea was to demonstrate it is possible to create liveable, affordable and environmentally sustainable housing in almost any setting by focusing on strategies such as making good use of natural light, using appropriate materials and minimising the use of water.

**ABOVE** Recycled timbers have been used extensively in the development.

**ABOVE RIGHT** Bright colours punctuate the natural earthy walls.

long-held desire to conserve resources after working for organisations such as Oxfam.

She was also drawn to the chance to interact with "like-minded" people.

"Instead of trying to do things on a large scale, I'm trying to do something on a local level," Joan says. "I like the idea of community. I've since sold my car and am sharing one with another resident."

Paul admits that for the past few years the project has been an "all-consuming" steep learning curve. While he says that overall the buildings have performed mostly as expected, he acknowledges that some aspects need "tweaking".

"For example, the sewer mine hasn't performed up to expectations as yet," he says. "The plan was to capture effluent and reuse it for irrigation. As a strategy, it's a good idea, but our particular system has had a few problems.

"Design is a constant learning process and you find out what works and what doesn't along the way"

One striking aspect of Christie Walk is the attention given to user-friendly garden areas in the city, which Paul refers to as "semi-public, semi-private" spaces.

"The external spaces are as important as the internal ones," Paul says. "Everyone likes a nice garden but we're in the city. The typical solution is to build townhouses and squeeze things in as best you can. The outside spaces get neglected so you end

up living within your apartment; whereas ideally in urban living, you should be able to enjoy outside spaces – they're going to be smaller and perhaps shared rather than private, but you should have it."

While the community garden areas – like the rest of the village – are still very much a work in progress, Paul says work using reclaimed and recycled pavers has been completed by residents, and this has helped engender a sense of ownership over the project. The project's final stage is due for completion later this year. **GS**

## **i** For more information

Urban Ecology Australia organises walks: 08 8212 6760 or [www.urbanecology.org.au](http://www.urbanecology.org.au)