

It'll tower over

Gerard Castles says the bid to build a massive Singaporean skyscraper in Hobart is pure folly

DEBATEEBATE about Fragrance Towers is about many things.

But most importantly it is about whether we want to build a future economy based on our unique strengths, or whether we allow a developer to destroy something much larger than two oversized high-rise buildings — our future.

Sound dramatic?

It is.

The Fragrance Towers debate is about what Hobart stands for in this crowded world. It is about what we these days call brand.

I believe we must fight to kill off the proposal on the basis that if we do not, it is going to kill much of what we depend on for our future economy here in Hobart.

It does not fit our emerging, distinctive, highly valuable and fragile Tasmania brand, and in particular where Hobart sits.

Here's my thinking.

First, brand matters to a place like Hobart. Brand is highly valuable, ephemeral and yet it is immediately recognisable.

It is all about reputation and point of difference. We know this.

Hugo Boss, Caterpillar, Apple, BMW, Rolex, Mercedes and entities such as Mona stand for a brand and they fight to preserve it. They fundamentally understand the importance of brand.

Many companies talk about 70-75 per cent of stock price being directly or indirectly dependent on image and reputation.

As far as I know, no one has done the numbers on this for Tasmania, let alone Hobart.

But the Hobart brand is worth hundreds, if not thousands, of millions of

dollars, if you consider the value of Hobart's education, services, food and visitor industries now and into the future as medium-scale, highly liveable cities become more and more attractive.

The driver of this enormous value is having a point of difference.

Those organisations I have listed inhabit a strategic niche in their market and make an explicit promise about the specific value they offer to the people who choose to buy their products or services.

Companies pay millions and millions of dollars to define, build and communicate their brand proposition to customers.

This is not about a logo. This is about deeply understanding what you stand for, your promise, and living that in everything you do.

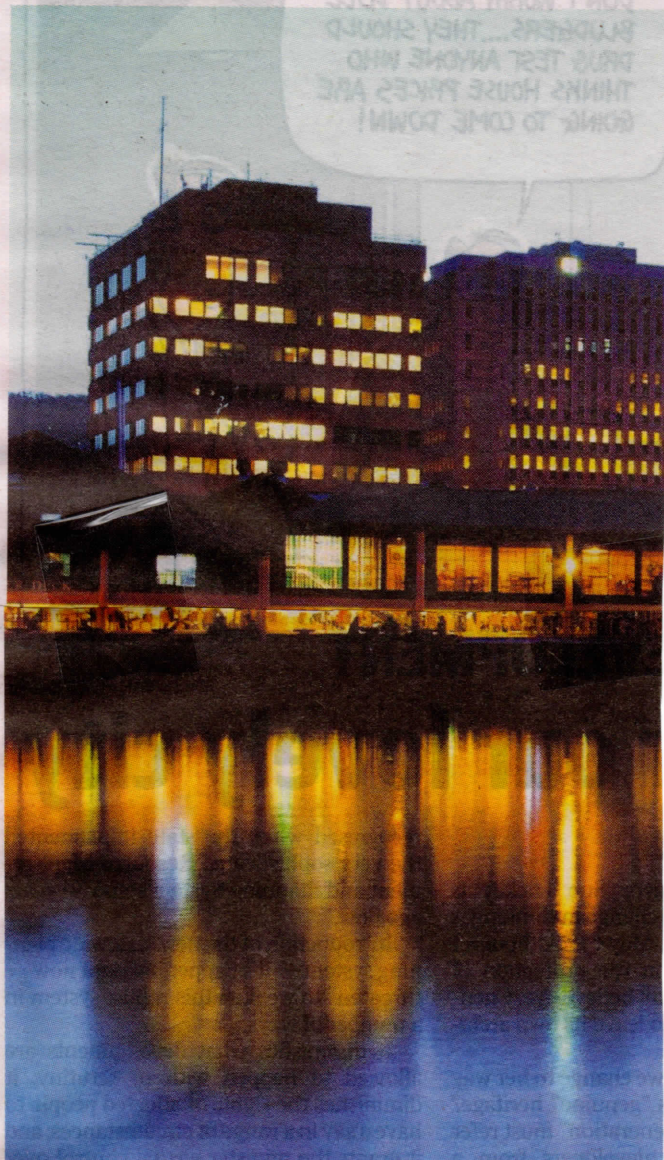
Corporations make decisions about where and how they will compete. Will it be cheap-and-cheerful low-cost like K Mart, or top end of the market like Hugo Boss? Is it cheap casked wine or is it Jansz?

The smart operators do not do this by chance, they do it by choice. They know where the value is and they go after it.

NOT long before he died, I spoke to the venerated local arts patron and winemaker Claudio Alcorso, the father of Moorilla.

I asked him which direction he thought Tasmania should take as we sat in the round room at Moorilla, now the entrance to Mona, which was then not even an idea.

Claudio said Tasmania must be different. The future, he said, did not lie in mimicking Melbourne,



Sydney or New York.

He said that what people in our ever-shrinking world valued about this place was Tasmania's difference and quality. The same is true for Hobart. Hobart has that difference in the interwoven threads that make our story. It is about the relationship between the people of this place and the river and the mountain and the city and the wild places beyond.

It is also about our past — our colonial past and before that into deep history.

Our brand is not about big buildings, it is about the small-scale feel and story of Hobart and its people. It is a place that has early colonial architecture on show, and it is a place unlike other cities in that it is not dominated by buildings piercing the sky.

What dominates here is the natural — mountain, river and sky. These are intertwined and should not be undone.

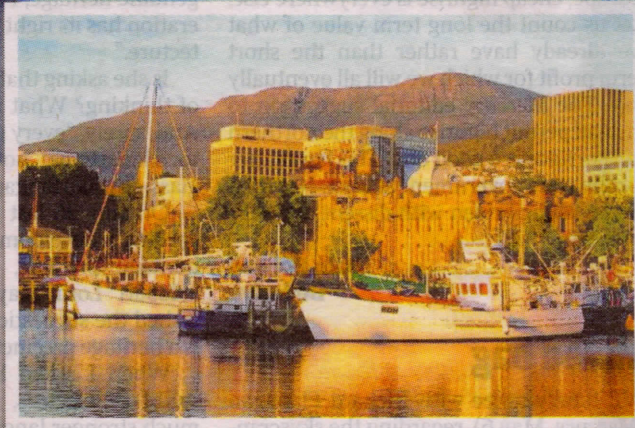
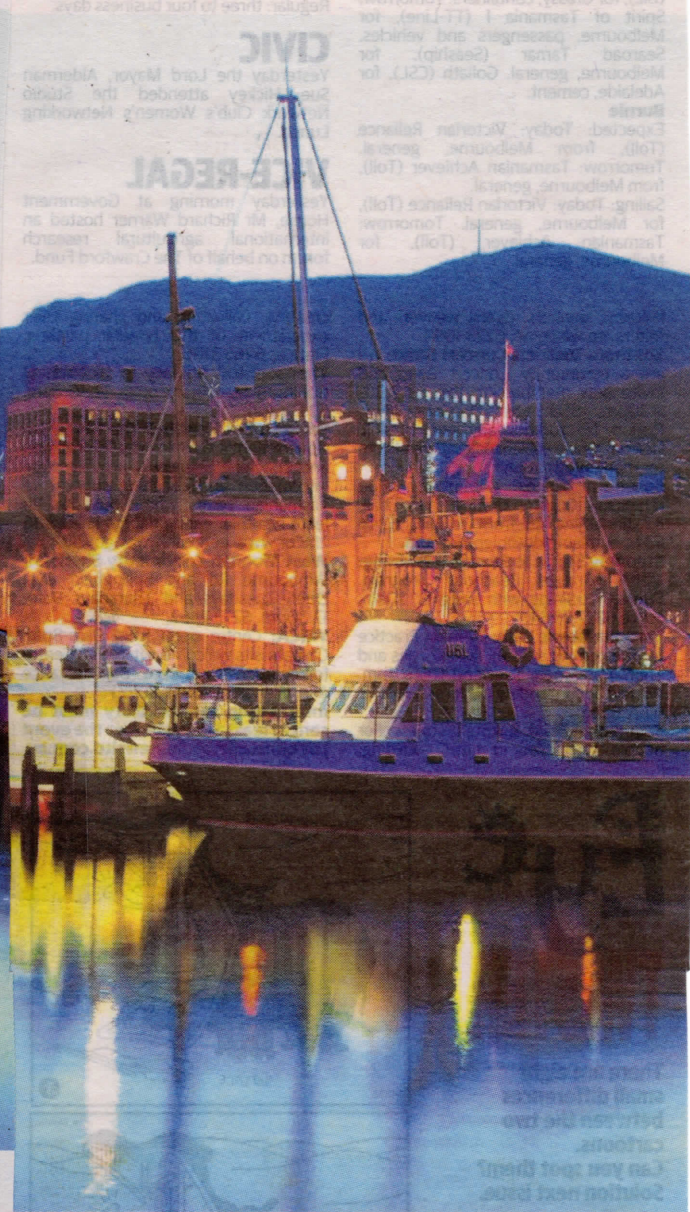
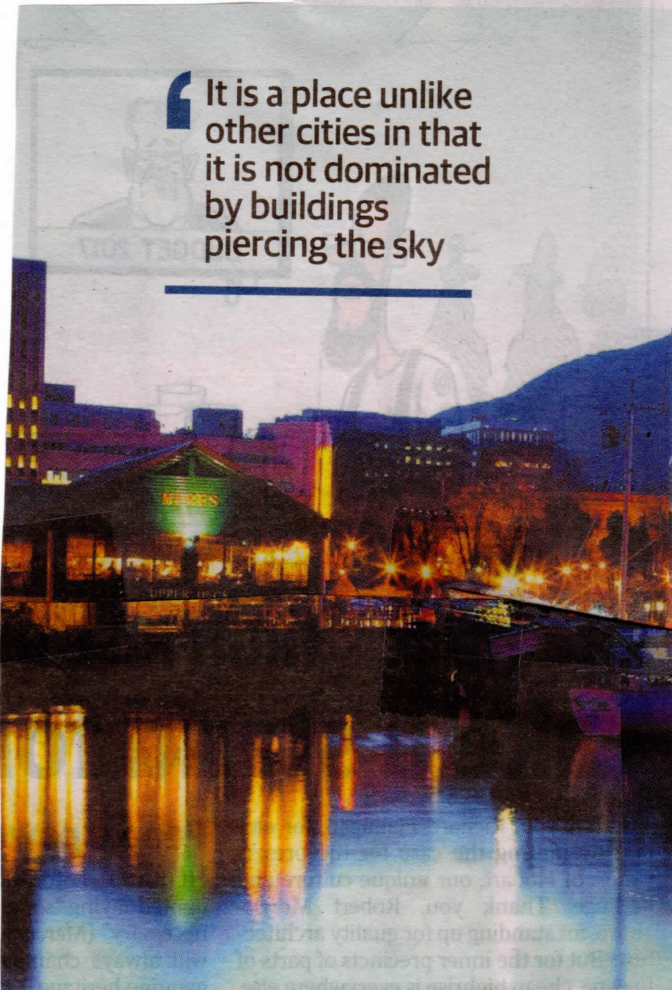
The proposed Fragrance Towers does not fit this brand.

First, it is too big. Others have made the architectural

our brand

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case better than me. The proposed tower is a giant (and I mean giant) finger of Singaporean Orchard Road kitsch inserted into Hobart.

Second, it says nothing, absolutely nothing, of us, our

story and who we might be.

It is a soulless steel, glass and concrete tower.

Through Mac Point the conversation has started about the story of our island and Hobart and how the two are

linked. The brand of Hobart is a living, emerging thing. It is about us as a community and our interrelationship with the river, the mountain, the wild places beyond.

It is about our colonial past, the Aboriginal story before that, and the vibrant, funky community emerging today.

Fragrance Towers speaks nothing of this story. It has no soul. It is conceived of and funded by those who know nothing of this place and are driven by the desire to cash in on our identity and not add to

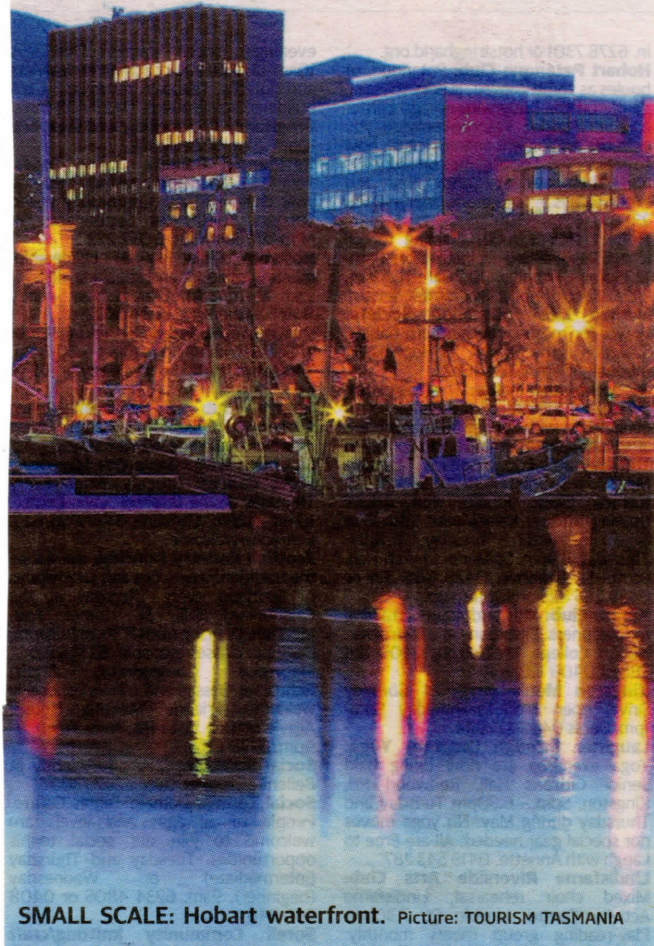
our community and the culture of this place.

Third, this thing screams commodity market, with half the development a four-star tower. Tasmanian entrepreneur Simon Currant named this up recently when he wrote about the strategy we should be following. He talked of us taking the high road towards quality, not the low road towards high-volume tourism. Fragrance Towers is on the low road.

So where does this leave us? There is an important

oint

power



SMALL SCALE: Hobart waterfront. Picture: TOURISM TASMANIA

difference between brand as it is conceived by corporations, and brand for states or cities like Hobart. That difference is about community and social licence.

Without our consent as a community, Fragrance Towers will not be built. Gunns learned about social licence with their mill. The fish farm industry is learning about social licence right now.

When societies withdraw support, governments and corporations fall. We know this to be true.

We have learned how Battery Point and Salamanca were saved by accident and how ugly eyesores like the Marine Board Building and Grand Chancellor were allowed to slip through. This cannot be so again.

We need to make choices about what we stand for and have the courage to say no to Fragrance Towers. People of Hobart, it is time to fight.

Gerard Castles is a Tasmanian building consultant who has worked in Hobart and overseas.