



areas such as car parks. The podium might be overlooked by balconies or windows, and provides a landscape focus. This reorientation is positive insofar as it gives added attention and value to landscape in comparison to previous treatments.

As the baseline quality of multi-unit developments has improved, so too have the formal qualities of the landscape treatments. Just as the architecture has certain key formal elements, such as vertical or horizontal articulations, so too does the landscape. Viewed largely from above, these landscapes offer significant compositional opportunities, seized recently by Aspect Studios and McGregor and Partners in Sydney. Almost inevitably, these roofs become flat pictures: biomorphic Burle Marx; grids on grids in the manner of Dan Kiley; or, Parc-de-la-Villette-style, juxtaposing biomorphism and grids. This compositional approach is successful pictorially, and is a smart way of dealing with the thinness of podium slabs. Where depth is at a premium, limiting plant-growing possibilities, an emphasis on materiality, texture, and detail seems appropriate. However, this type of attention to or fetishization of detail begins to move the landscape architect into the realm of the garden designer, where a fascination with the qualities of material and fixing is of supreme importance. Here, composition and detail quality are considered along with an idea or spatial vision. How the view transfers from an aerial to a human perspective is the real test of the use of landscape in this type of development. Often, the compositional approach results in extrusion or little ups and downs in the surface.

Changes in the types of multi-unit developments being undertaken have provided some real advances in the formal aspects of their associated landscapes, as well as in the quality of residents' lives. The emergence of an interest in the spaces between units and the way that mass architecture shapes space is welcome, as is the

emergence of an interest in landscape that is worthy of viewing. The ways architecture configures space should be echoed by landscape. While landscape design is now stronger in formal terms, there seem to have been less advances in the fight to claw back depth of soil for vegetation, or, dare I say it, trees, than there was during the 1980s. In newer projects, the artificiality of the podium and the differential forming of concrete offer the possibility of completely dislocating what the ground is. Through using space rather than surface like this, spatial and experiential diversity, which in blocks of flats often happens by accident, can be planned to give residents greater privacy. Seizing the volume of the landscape space within the architecture is the next challenge for practitioners in this area, but will the developers let us do it? ■



above  
One of the McGregor + Partners-designed courtyards in the Nova apartments, Zetland.  
Photographer: Brett Boardman.