Landscape and Building Design for Bushfire Areas

by Caird Ramsey and Lisle Rudolph


In the past few years a number of books dealing with bushfires and their impacts on plant and animal communities have been published. However, until now, they all have avoided dealing with people and their buildings as an element in the bushfire landscape of Australia. Landscape and Building Design for Bushfire Areas addresses this and should be essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the relationship between bushfires and the factors influencing whether or not buildings catch fire.

For many urban dwellers, it seems self-evident that houses ‘in the bush’ will be destroyed if a bushfire occurs, and to them it is often incomprehensible that families deliberately choose to live in fire-prone environments. What most Australians find hard to accept is that bushfires have predictable behaviour, which people can modify, and that house survival or loss is not just a chance event but can be influenced by careful design and maintenance of dwellings, their gardens and other vegetation surrounding them.

Landscape Building and Design for Bushfire Areas develops these two themes in a way that is easy to follow and makes it possible for building designers and existing householders to choose design options that reduce the vulnerability of their dwellings during a bushfire. Section one provides a concise explanation of how bushfires spread and what causes buildings to ignite. This section is prefaced by a number of factual explanations for some of the ‘bushfire myths’ or misconceptions, that are in widespread circulation, about how buildings respond in fires.

The second section deals with the principles behind the design and construction of buildings and the design and maintenance of the surrounding gardens that reduce the vulnerability of buildings to ignition. The chapters in this section adopt an ‘objective-design principle-design option’ approach. This illustrates that, once the factual background to buildings and bushfires is understood, effective individual solutions can be developed by designers for achieving a higher level of building security.

The text throughout the book is clear and easy to follow. The use of images of real buildings and real landscaping solutions could have added greatly to the reader’s understanding of the text, but there are numerous diagrams to illustrate the general design principles discussed. Landscape and Building Design for Bushfire Areas is excellent value, and is guaranteed to leave the reader with a better understanding of how one can improve house survival in bushfire prone-areas.

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