



# Imagining the City: Brisbane Short Story Competition

## Information Pack

Fiction allows readers to relate to place in new and nuanced ways. Authors such as Peter Carey, David Malouf, Venero Armano, Nick Earles, Krissy Kneen, and Rhys McAllister have shaped the way readers connect with, and imagine, Brisbane.

Brisbane is a rapidly growing city. Spaces once associated with industry or recreation are being redeveloped into residential apartments or small housing blocks, particularly those in close proximity to the CBD. Inner city suburbs such as South Bank, Teneriffe, Paddington, West End, Kangaroo Point, Bulimba, Auchenflower, The Valley and New Farm are now being joined by The Barracks, Ballymore, the Albion Mill, Gasworks, and the Ekka grounds as residential opportunities.

In the wake of such changes, how will representations of Brisbane evolve? Will the traditional images of jacaranda lined streets and tin-roofed Queenslanders, with a mango tree and hills hoist in the backyard, make way for something else?

As part of a project investigating urban planning and the gentrification of inner city landmarks, QUT researchers<sup>1</sup> developed six characters to help inform the design of city apartments. The characters (described below) are grounded in data gathered from performance-based workshops that used creative character development activities.

**Your task is to imagine how one of the six apartment-living characters might inhabit the city of Brisbane.** Use the short story form to develop your chosen character: give them a name, a voice, a back-story and a narrative. Consider how your representation of Brisbane reflects changes in the city.

Be creative in how you respond to the character descriptions; allow them to inspire rather than restrict you.

Six winners, i.e. one per character, will be chosen by a panel of three judges. The winners will receive \$200 prize money and have the opportunity to further workshop and edit their story with the view of publishing as part of an anthology.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Research Council Grant LP0882274 Respecting the Past, Imagining the Future: Using Narrative and New Media in Community Engagement and Urban Planning.



The competition is open to anyone, but if you are a QUT creative writing student undertaking KWB101: Introduction to Creative Writing in semester one 2011, your short story can be submitted as an alternative third assessment item. A criteria sheet for the unit is available on Blackboard. Please be aware that judging will occur separately to marking in KWB101; for example, a winning entry may not necessarily mean a high distinction.

**Competition closes 5pm Wednesday 8 June.**

(Image by Bridgette McKelvey)



# Submission Guidelines

Your short story:

- Can be any genre;
- Set in the past, present or future;
- Based on one of the six characters described below;
- The character's residence should be within a five kilometre radius of Brisbane's CBD, and specifically mention and/or describe the city or surrounding suburbs;
- 1500-2000 words;
- Not published previously elsewhere (online or in print);
- Double spaced, with page numbers, 12 pt Times New Roman font.

Stories not conforming to the criteria will not be considered for the competition.



# How to Submit

*If you are enrolled in KWB101 Introduction to Creative Writing:*

Submit your story with relevant criteria sheet via Assignment Minder.

In addition, please send an UNAMED copy of your story, with a signed and scanned entry form as a separate attachment to [cifpg@qut.edu.au](mailto:cifpg@qut.edu.au)

OR

Send or drop off an UNAMED, printed copy of your story, with signed entry form to:

QUT Creative Industries PG office

Z6 101, Kelvin Grove 4059 Q

*If you are NOT enrolled in KWB101 Introduction to Creative Writing:*

Send an UNAMED copy of your story, with a signed and scanned entry form as a separate attachment to [cifpg@qut.edu.au](mailto:cifpg@qut.edu.au)

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If you have any questions, please contact Ass. Pro. Helen Klaebe ([h.klaebe@qut.edu.au](mailto:h.klaebe@qut.edu.au)).



# Characters

#1

## The Ongoing Home Decorator

The Ongoing Home Decorator considers a look temporary and is, subsequently, only temporarily satisfied with a look. The Decorator expects an apartment space to grow and change and to accommodate their current interests.

The Decorator both occupies and observes a space. Bowerbird-like and discerning, the Decorator absorbs ideas from films, magazines, cafes, art galleries, and friends' homes, and slots them Lego-like into the apartment. The Decorator thrives on the hunt for that perfect item to compliment and complete the look, particularly if it's on sale or comes with its own back story.

While the Decorators' apartment is a revolving door of design and they're not short of ideas, the Decorator is short of answers. They feel thwarted by labour- and finance-intensive roadblocks such as polished wood floors with a now too dark stain.

Entrepreneurial, and marketing and PR-savvy, the Decorator recognises this design flaw and market opportunity and wonders what it would take to achieve a changeable, swatch-style apartment, periodically brainstorming business plans and names for it. Like a clothes swap, they dabble with the idea of an apartment decoration swap.

This is not to say that the Decorator is unhappy—far from it. The Decorator relishes a full-time job and being either newlywed or in a long-term, live-in relationship. The Decorator is not displacing desires to have a child but simply nesting with youthful enthusiasm.

Until now, the impermanency and lack of control of renting and student life meant that the Decorator wasn't expected to complete the decorating puzzle and they are unsettled — perhaps subconsciously — by the permanency and scale of an apartment purchase. Until now, the Decorator has only had a few good outfits, a few good pieces of furniture. The Decorator has had only had a few pieces of the puzzle.

And while the Decorator isn't afraid of commitment, they are afraid of relinquishing control, of being stifled or stuck with something so large, so expensive, and so difficult to change as an entire apartment. Selecting entire colour schemes from palm-sized swatches both excites and strikes fear into the Decorator's heart. The Decorator is genuinely troubled by that fact that the white leather couch doesn't match the new wall white — that all whites are not equal — and that, unlike last season's fashion mistake, the apartment can't be sold off piece by piece at the markets.



# Characters

#2

## The Gardener

The Gardener defies the lonely old person stereotype. The Gardener is happy — very happy — and far from alone. The Gardener doesn't need a partner and is not missing company — the Gardener is missing hobbies which feed their soul.

Having aspired to and achieved a house and marriage, the Gardener never imagined living in an apartment. But circumstances have changed and, although the move was unfortunate and unplanned, the Gardener has been surprised at just how much they like apartment dwelling. The Gardener's main regret is the loss of a garden, which was both functional food producer and meditative sanctuary.

The Gardener's investigated and invested in indoor-dwelling plants and has crammed as many full sunlight-requiring ones as possible on the balcony. But shallow pots stationed on a concrete base isn't the same as tilling the earth with your hands.

Almost as though speaking aloud the Gardener's own frustrations, the otherwise lovely downstairs neighbours occasionally grumble about the drips and grit that descend. All the pots are in trays — matching or make-do such as foil cooking trays — and the Gardener takes care not to over water, but it's a fine line. Rain, in particular, pays no attention to neighbourly harmony. But the Gardener doesn't care what anyone thinks — that shackle was shed at the end of the marriage.

The Gardener doesn't entertain as much as in a former life, but is active and socialises regularly with just a couple of best friends.

The Gardener is the unobtrusive eyes and ears of the apartment complex. The Gardener is happy to play this role, but envisages an even more nurturing pastime that would benefit everyone: re-purposing and reinvigorating the area that's home to a disused communal barbecue. The Gardner fantasises about taking a sledgehammer to it and the surrounding concrete and instead building an English allotment-style community garden to feed the complex and their own gardening and nurturing needs.

The Gardener will most likely never be able to afford a house again, yet has found unexpected contentment in apartment living. Although content, the Gardener needs a fence to chat over, a neighbour to loan a cup or sugar or give herbs to — things that could be achieved with a community garden. The Gardener has the knowledge and the willingness. The Gardener just needs the go ahead to grow.



# Characters

#3

## The Nomad

The Nomad passes through the apartment as if it were a hotel room. Externally focused, the Nomad inhabits a suburb, not an apartment. The Nomad is impulsive, active, gregarious, and fun.

Arriving home, the Nomad's keys and wallet are disgorged with a clatter onto the marble kitchen bench and stay there until they are pocketed on the way out. And it's never long before the Nomad leaves. The apartment is a telephone box — the Nomad ducks in to change and then heads out to take on the world.

The Nomad circles the apartment, never straying too far from it. But this isn't a connection to home—it's a practical set up that allows the Nomad to return from work or the gym and shower, change, and go out again. It's the location of the apartment rather than the apartment itself that's attractive. Walking distance to cafes and clubs is crucial — the Nomad might not be home much, but the Nomad is not a suburb-dwelling, commuting kind of person.

The Nomad's apartment is not deserted but it's so sparsely, generically decorated that it's impossible to glean personal information from it. The Nomad returns to sleep there and sometimes not even that, but the Nomad has enough character that there's no need to imprint anything on the space. As it is, the space does exactly what it needs to.

The Nomad doesn't tend to entertain indoors; entertainment is external. The Nomad invests more in looking and feeling good than they do in solid objects. The Nomad is single or if their not, it's far from a serious, committed relationship. Like the Nomad's relationships, the apartment is not long term.

Being at home bores the Nomad — possibly, ironically, because by choosing not to create a home life, the sparse, functional space provides little stimulus. Friends don't drop by for cups of tea, but they do drop in for a quick drink on their way out or crash there after a big night.

It's never too late to go out for the Nomad — even on a school night — but it is often too early when the alarm goes off. Weekends are for socialising and sleeping and the sound of lawnmowers are foreign. In fact, the Nomad can't imagine wanting to own a house that saps time and effort with ongoing maintenance requirements — the Nomad's idea of maintenance is working out at the gym. As long as the Nomad has keys, phone, and wallet, they can go anywhere.



# Characters

#4

## The Flatmate

The Flatmate likes company but is tired of compromising. The Flatmate is on a tight budget and would like to see the rent better spent.

A seasoned student and share house dweller, the convivial Flatmate likes living with others, which is fortunate given the current poor housing affordability and the likelihood of Gen Ys being lifetime renters. The Flatmate is comfortable juggling work, study, and play. But the Flatmate is being driven slowly up the wall by the lack of availability of in-demand items.

Like power points.

Even the poorest student has enough power-sapping electrical items to condemn the earth three times over — TV, stereo, mobile phone, microwave, toaster, laptop, printer, scanner, iPod, kettle. Add to it the hubs of double and international adapters sprawling from one prime-location power point and it's an ugly, unwieldy mess.

Like most students, last minute is the Flatmate's motto. Living with other like-motto-ed students means that the wave of assignment deadlines — and with it, the spike in demand for coffee, textbooks, and study areas — leaves them all scrambling. Which is the personable Flatmate's forte: compromising, negotiating timeshare, or finding space to accommodate triplicates. Take study areas. They might sit vacant during semester break, but during semester a quiet, powered, ergonomically designed space is as highly sought after as a seat on public transport during peak hour. The early bird — or all-night bird who hasn't yet gone to bed — gets the desk while the rest of them commandeer the dining room table with laptops, printers, text books, and notes spreadeagled across it. The Flatmate can't remember the last time they ate a meal at or used the table for anything other than study. The Flatmate can't even recall what colour the tabletop is.

Having flatmates suits the Flatmate. The Flatmate has travelled widely and international student flatmates keep memories fresh and help the virtual journeys, even if budgetary and study circumstances will keep the Flatmate stationary for the next few years. While student-induced poverty is temporary, the Flatmate knows that a penchant for travel isn't. The Flatmate knows that they'll be living in share houses for years to come and is dreaming of one where the design is just right.

The Flatmate dreams of an apartment that facilitates their accordion-like needs: it contracts to bring them together for meals, beers, and profound, late-night musings, but expands to allow them space and silence to sleep, study, or retreat to nurse their hangovers.

# Characters

#5

## The Converter

The Converter loves life. The Converter loves the apartment.

Well, most of it.

Downsizing from a house was the best move the Converter ever made. And, contrary to commonly asked questions, the Converter doesn't feel cramped by apartment living. In fact, the Converter is incredibly relieved to be rid of weeding, mowing, painting, and gutter cleaning.

Yet if there's one thing the Converter hankers for, it's the flexibility and customisation that a house offers.

The Converter doesn't want to add another room or make major structural changes. The Converter isn't after a static, single-use space. Instead the Converter wants a more adaptable, convertible area that can be opened up and closed down as required to accommodate the shifting needs of a busy, social, apartment-based retirement.

Having been absolved of the day-to-day child-raising and pet-caring responsibilities that keep people tied to a location, the forward-thinking, self-funded retiree indulges a passion for travel. For the first time, the Converter has time and energy to invest in the incredibly middle class but incredibly enjoyable passions of painting, drawing, doing yoga, playing tennis, and reading.

The Converter and their partner compromised a near-perfect apartment with the perfect location when buying this brand new empty nest home.

The Converter creates spaces that people want to be in. And people want to be around the Converter. The Converter's living space is so spacious, and they are such a gracious host, that the Converter regularly receives unannounced visitors. The Converter loves cooking; there is invariably just the right treat ready to serve guests when they arrive. But the Converter dreads being caught mid-craft with a wet, unwieldy canvas and easel plonked in an inconvenient but perfect-painting-light location.

These days the Converter has the time, the means, and the money to plan out conversions. Rest assured, the converter will eventually find the best way to temporarily convert the space.

Or the Converter will find the apartment that, by design, does this for them.



# Characters

#6

## The Singleton

The Singleton won't tell you that they're successful and wealthy, but their goal is to exude exactly that.

The Singleton is a walking advertisement for capitalism and there is no greater advertisement than their apartment.

Arriving home, the Singleton dumps laptop, keys, and wallet on the coffee table, removes business clothes and pours a drink of aged scotch. The Singleton settles into the supple, L-shaped black leather lounge and turns on the flat screen dominating one wall, but pays more attention to checking emails on the phone.

Free from familial (or even pet) ties, the Singleton likes—and who knows how—to entertain. The Singleton is the first port of call for visiting business associates and is just as likely to do business over a drink as in the office. In fact, the Singleton sees romance and business in much the same clinical way and the Singleton is always alert to a new opportunity. Lovers are never given the key to the apartment, much less to the Singleton's heart.

It's not that the Singleton doesn't care about others; it's just that life and a failed marriage taught them that they are number one. The Singleton is uninterested in emotional baggage or any efforts to curb their ways.

The Singleton is a master at crafting appearances and you'll only see what The Singleton wants you to. Plenty of people have tried to crack the veneer without luck.

The Singleton downplays success and wealth knowing full well that that's exactly what the Singleton wants you to notice.

And the Singleton's expensive apartment is something that you will.