

Sixties Classic Shops Set the Stage

George Clarke and Don Gazzard were Australia's foremost urban designers in the 1960s. Their avant-garde design for Dickson, Canberra's first district centre, had Dickson Library at its heart and blazed the way for a new people-centred approach nationally.

Hosting hula hoop contests and marching teams, Dickson shops' pedestrian-friendly layout and village feel have nurtured the community since opening in 1965.



Clean lines, sheltered walkways and simple seating allowed unobstructed pedestrian movement when the shopping centre was first paved. The post office, Woolworths supermarket, and JB Young's department store anchored the first phase of the centre, shown here in 1968.
Source: National Archives of Australia A7973, INT1049/39

Migrant families were the backbone of the earliest shops. They fostered a multicultural food focus that continues to flourish.

The initial milk bar with pinball machines, Delphi and Golden Phoenix restaurants, Acropole fruit shop, Erdman's delicatessen, Casian seafoods, Kathy's corner supermarket and Premier butchers, generated a loyal customer base that encouraged others to follow.

A Hungarian Club (1970-81) and Tradesmen's Union Club (1964) enhanced the centre's appeal. 'The Tradies' offered vintage trams, a bicycle museum and, together with local astronomers, telescopes.

By 1980, Golden Phoenix was joined by Rasa Sayang and Shanghai Chinese restaurants. These heralded the beginnings of Canberra's Chinatown.



Since opening in January 1965, Dickson Pool has been a major community asset. It occupied a greenbelt that stretched to Dickson College, enabling sporting clubs and fitness classes to get started: swimming, soccer, tennis, rugby, cricket, athletics, miniature golf, kickboxing, dance and yoga.
Source: National Archives of Australia A1200, L50110

Memories of summers spent at Dickson Pool (1964), holiday programs at Dickson Library (1969), gatherings at the clubs, live jazz at Hotel Dickson (1966-87), disco dancing at the Copacabana (1979-86), and congregations at Dickson Baptist Church (1964) all helped shape local culture.

Dickson Library (heritage-listed in 2008) faces a square that its visionary architect saw as the piazza. Taglietti Square now bears his name.



First Dickson Shops advertisements, 24 November 1965, The Canberra Times



Clarke Gazzard Yeomans were the Sydney-based specialists who prepared the planning framework for Dickson centre and, a few years later, Curtin. George Clarke (1932-2005) went on to prepare the Sydney and Adelaide Plans in the seventies, becoming internationally renowned as an expert consultant. Don Gazzard (1929-2017) became widely known as a talented modern designer, educator and writer. Peter Yeomans became Woolworths' property manager. Aerial view 1966
Source: National Archives of Australia A1500, K14340

The final element of the centre's master plan, the library, boldly showcased Modernism. The earliest civic building designed by Dr Enrico Taglietti (1926-2019), who designed other famous Canberra buildings including the Italian Embassy.
Photo: Peter Wille, 1970
Source: State Library Victoria Image a23427

