

US design expert ELLIE SCHNEIDER was a special guest as Geelong celebrated its designation as a UNESCO City of Design. From Detroit, Ms Schneider co-ordinates the 31 Cities of Design in the network. She shares her reflections on the visit.

Vision engages all parties to inclusive future

I FELT very much at home here. Geelong shares a lot of traits that I see throughout the cities in the Creative Cities Network — post-industrial cities that have faced their share of adversity, but are building on their local identity and leveraging their creative and collaborative spirit to reinvent themselves.

There are three things in particular that stood out and made me optimistic about where Geelong is going.

1. Geelong is proud of who it is.

I was immediately struck by a sense of pride among everyone I met here. From your native roots to your manufacturing legacy, to newer developments like the library, Geelong is full of authentic people and places. It was inspiring to see the welcome to country at the start of the launch event and the emphasis on acknowledging original landowners. This is not something we're good at in the United States and it was moving to see.

I was also inspired to see how much of your past has been retained in your historic architecture. I was blown away by the Federal Mills and Power Station projects and how you are imagining new uses for historic spaces, and the emphasis on mixed-use — that is so important to ensure balance and sustainability moving forward.

I was also blown away by Dr Yolanda Esteban Bort, and the work that is happening at Deakin University's School of Architecture and Built Environment. As a native

Detroit, I felt a strong connection to Yolanda as someone who is knowledgeable and passionate about their home town and making it a better place for more people — people like her are absolutely essential to building an equitable and sustainable city.

2. Geelong is thinking about the future

This word "future" came up so many times in my trip, and I saw this effort in action. From rethinking the possibilities of what a library can and should be, to the Manufutures initiative at Deakin University, Geelong is redefining the boundaries between public, private and academic space to create more collaborative environments for learning and growth.

This does not mean getting rid of the past, but building on it and pivoting in a new direction. Manufutures, in particular, is an exceptional example of innovation and I am excited to see what develops from the research and incubation already taking place there. I was also impressed by what I saw at Deakin University's School of Engineering and Design.

3. Geelong is bringing everyone along:

While many cities take pride in who they are and are making advancements in education and technology, oftentimes the benefits are not experienced by all.

Cities around the world are experiencing a growing gap between those who have and those who do not have, and true, sustainable growth is not possible without



CLEVER AND CREATIVE: Geelong Mayor Bruce Harwood hosts US guest Ellie Schneider at the Geelong Library and Heritage Centre.

addressing this head-on.

Efforts such as the Grow initiative, which challenges local businesses to think about procurement and opportunities to invest in their own backyard, as well as the small business festival, which celebrates the role that entrepreneurs and SMEs play in a vibrant city, indicate that Geelong is thinking about an economy that is not

dependent on one or two industries, but relies on people at the end of the day.

This is why I was most excited about efforts to include everyone in Geelong's future. Our engagement around the UNESCO designation really began after we received it, and while I am proud of who we have been able to include, I recognise how much more we could have done with more

time, resources, and direct support from the city. What is amazing about Geelong is that so much work has already been done to engage residents around a vision for a more clever and creative city — a vision that falls squarely in line with the UNESCO designation.

I know that Geelong is very early in this process, and I stand by the advice I gave to

take your time, get everyone around the table and build a vision collaboratively, but I see so many good things to build on and I am confident they will make the most of this opportunity.

Ellie Schneider is the director of advocacy and operations of Design Core Detroit. She also represents Detroit in the Cities of Design network.