

## AUSTRALIAN RETAIL CENTRE HISTORY

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The first modern shopping centre in Australia opened in Chermside in Brisbane in May 1957 with 25 retailers, including a department store. This new American phenomenon was described by a local newspaper as “an island of retailing in a lake of parking”. Within a few years similar shopping centres had opened in suburban Sydney and Melbourne.

The choice of the suburbs of our metropolitan cities was no accident. The post-war immigration and construction boom, combined with cheaper cars and more convenient public transport, meant our cities began to spread. The pioneer shopping centre developers, and the major retailers, recognised that it was more sensible to go into the suburbs, where their customers lived, rather than expecting the customers to continue to come to them in the central business districts.

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A new era of retailing was born. These new shopping centres combined both major retailers and small retailers to deliver a ‘one-stop’ shopping experience, in air-conditioned comfort, under the one roof. As our cities continued to sprawl, and the services and infrastructure needed to support the growing population were installed, the number and size of shopping centres multiplied. These new shopping centres were not confined to the cities. They are now an important part of rural and regional Australia.

Shopping centres developed rapidly in Australia because they met consumer needs with ample, convenient and free or low-cost parking, comfortable shopping experience away from the noise and pollution of the main streets, a wide range of retailing choice; combined shopping with leisure and entertainment; and a safe and secure place for shoppers. Not surprisingly they also became a popular community meeting place.

On average, around 24 shopping centres have opened each year in Australia since 1957 and existing shopping centres have expanded through redevelopments. Perhaps the best illustration of the growth and development of the shopping centre industry can be gained by looking at that very first shopping centre in Brisbane. Nearly sixty years later that centre, now called Westfield Chermside, is home to 391 retailers, including three department stores, three discount department stores, three supermarkets, 16 large speciality stores (‘mini-majors’), 383 speciality stores, a 16-screen cinema and a major food court. The “lake” of parking has become an ocean, with space for 6,500 cars.

Shopping centre owners and developers in Australia have continued to innovate, constantly ‘reinventing’ the shopping centre format in a manner which is the envy of other countries, including the USA, the inventor of the modern shopping centre. These innovations include the introduction into shopping centres of supermarkets and discount department stores, fresh food, entertainment and leisure facilities and restaurants. In addition, working co-operatively with local and state governments, shopping centres have incorporated public facilities as

part of their developments and redevelopments, including bus interchanges, libraries, child care, community facilities and other improvements to the public domain.

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