

community news

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Architect defends \$21 m memorials

By Naomi Fallon

THE architect behind the capital's newest war memorials has been forced to defend their construction.

Richard Kirk, of Brisbane, was in Canberra last week to take part in a consultation session about the controversial structures proposed for Rond Terrace on Lake Burley Griffin's foreshore.

The \$21 million memorials dedicated to the victims of both world wars would consist of two 20-metre tall granite pillars linked by a granite pavement inscribed with the number of fallen from towns across Australia.

Groups opposing the memorials, including the Walter Burley Griffin Society and Australia's Medical Association for the Prevention of War, say they are superfluous and conflict with Griffin's plan for Canberra.

But Mr Kirk, who describes the memorials as modest and discreet, disagrees.

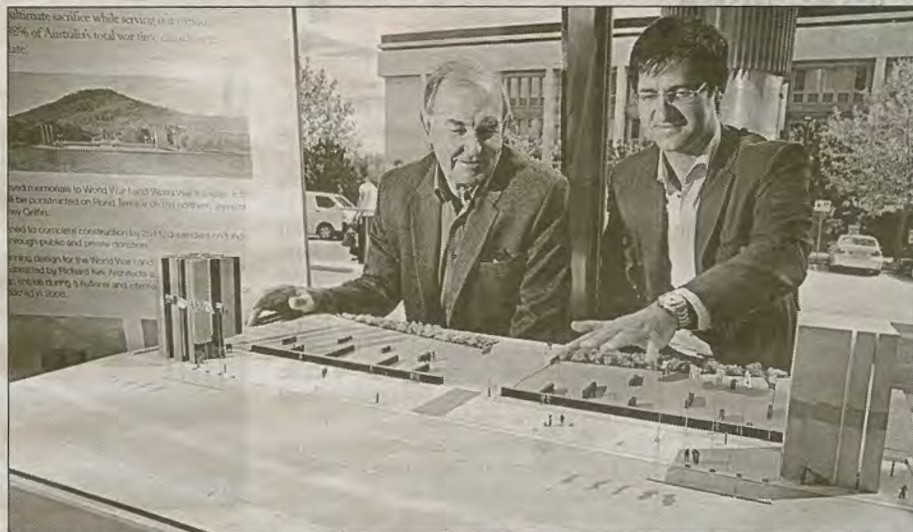
"We would never be involved in a project that impacted on what I think is a fantastic idea for a city," he said.

"I think once people start to access some additional imagery they will start to see that these memorials are actually very demure, they blend into the tree scape and that their placement means they're often not in the view of the land access at all, particularly from the war memorial."

The memorials focus on the impact that World Wars I and II, which account for 98 per cent of Australia's total war casualties, had on the community.

And as the grandson of a World War I digger, Mr Kirk said his family history contributed to the design.

"I've always had an interest in his experiences ... it wasn't the driving factor but it certainly was a consideration," he said.



Memorials Development Committee chairman Mike Buick and architect Richard Kirk observe a model of the proposed memorials. **Picture: Elesia Lee**

"That's always been a part of our family narrative and I think that's a fairly common experience for a lot of people that their families have been restructured as a result of these conflicts."

Chairman of the Memorials Development Committee Mike Buick believed some of the fears surrounding the memorials were based on misconceptions rather than information.

Despite some detractor's claims, he said the new memorials were not intended to replace the Australian War Memorial.

"The War Memorial is a memorial to all wars, so it's not specific," he said.

"We want to add value to the War Memorial, we want to do that in exactly the same way that everything on Anzac Parade

relates to the war memorial. We're not seeking to compete with, overwhelm, or take the place of the War Memorial, we're just seeking to add another layer of value, intention and understanding."

Once the community understood the memorial's points of difference and complex design, Mr Kirk said they would be more accepting.

"It's actually more than just a set of memorials about conflict ... it's actually about two major events which had a formative impact on our community and our culture," he said. "It's an inclusive project in that every town and every city gets to be involved ... it engages nationally in a way unlike other war memorials."