



"This [*Boomburbs*] exhibition gives a fascinating bird's-eye view ... while putting Sydney's housing issue under the spotlight" ... houses in Woodcroft. Photo: Andrew Merry

## Photographs weave patchwork quilt from fraying urban fringe

**Kelsey Munro**  
URBAN AFFAIRS

CALL it McMansion land, suburban sprawl or the boomburbs – photographer Andrew Merry is fascinated by Sydney's spreading urban fringe.

His aerial photos of homes play with the striking patterns of new estates and roads, but also with the politics of sustainability, urban development and the city's favourite topic: housing.

"Fifty years ago the average house size in NSW was

110 square metres, today it's 270 square metres, almost 2½ times bigger," Merry said. "Yet at the same time the building sites have got smaller and families have got smaller as well. I think it's really interesting to ask what's happened there?"

The images frame tessellations of bright roofs, identical estate housing, looping overpasses and cul-de-sacs waiting for homes.

Some viewers react with hostility to the photographs, seeing the developments as

bloated and unsustainable. But Merry said he is fascinated by the "cartoon-like, miniature model" aesthetics of the new suburbs from the air and the questions this type of development raises about what society values.

The series of 48 photographs was taken on several helicopter flights in 2006, and will go on display at the Museum of Sydney this month.

Martin Bass, a former neighbour of the photographer, was the helicopter pilot who took Merry up to shoot the series.

"It is very topical, and evocative," Bass said. "You can't just look at those pictures and think nothing. It does look like a wasteland from up there. We did six or seven flights. Look at those photos and I defy you to find more than 10 people in the whole series, and this was Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons."

Some of the pair's favourite photos were taken at low altitude on take-off from Hoxton Park Airport, closed in late 2008 to make way for development.

The exhibition's curator, Annie Campbell, said it highlighted issues about housing shortage as the city's population grows.

"One of our ongoing themes at the Museum of Sydney is tackling contemporary urban issues such as lack of housing and sustainability and this exhibition gives a fascinating bird's-eye view of Sydney while putting Sydney's housing issue under the spotlight," she said.

The exhibition, *Boomburbs* is at the Museum of Sydney from October 16.