

LIVEABILITY

The place must feel like home, writes
Kate Robertson.

The right turf

Whether you're upsizing, downsizing or simply taking the plunge and buying for the first time, the decision to look for a new home begs the question: "Where do you want to live?" And while you may know your little patch of Melbourne intimately, if finances or a sense of adventure are making you look further afield, how do you find a new stomping ground?

Susan Stirling, from Relocations in Melbourne, has been moving people to Melbourne from interstate and overseas for 12 years. Her clientele includes Germans, French, Canadians and Dutch, most of whom have never been to Australia and have no firm ideas about where they would like to live. "It's a series of eliminations to narrow it down," Ms Stirling says and the principles apply whether you are moving within a city or from another country.

Proximity and access to work are obviously key factors in choosing a suburb and, Ms Stirling says, it is easier if children are involved as choosing a school can help focus the search. "If they decide they want a private school we make contact to see if there are any vacancies. Often, if their children are older, they want a school that teaches the International Baccalaureate; a year 11 and 12 program that is recognised throughout the world."

Ms Stirling asks her clients what they like to do on weekends, if they are keen to be able to walk to the local shops for a coffee or would rather drive to a big shopping centre. "If people have an interest or hobby it helps to find an area to live, and they can settle into life a lot faster."

As for Melbourne residents who feel lost outside their home patch, Ms Stirling suggests spending time in various areas to see if you fit in. "Go and sit in the local shopping centre and watch the people go by — do they look like your sort of people? You can pick up quite a bit by watching the passing parade."

Buyer's advocate Peter Rogozik says those looking for a new area usually fall into one of two categories: empty-nesters looking to downsize,

or those with a family, or planning a family, who need a larger home. "The empty-nesters, whose children have left and they have more time on their hands, might want to be closer to inner Melbourne — to sporting venues, cinemas etc. A lot of people say they want to be close to cafes and local shops. Sometimes transport is an issue; others want to be close to parks and gardens."

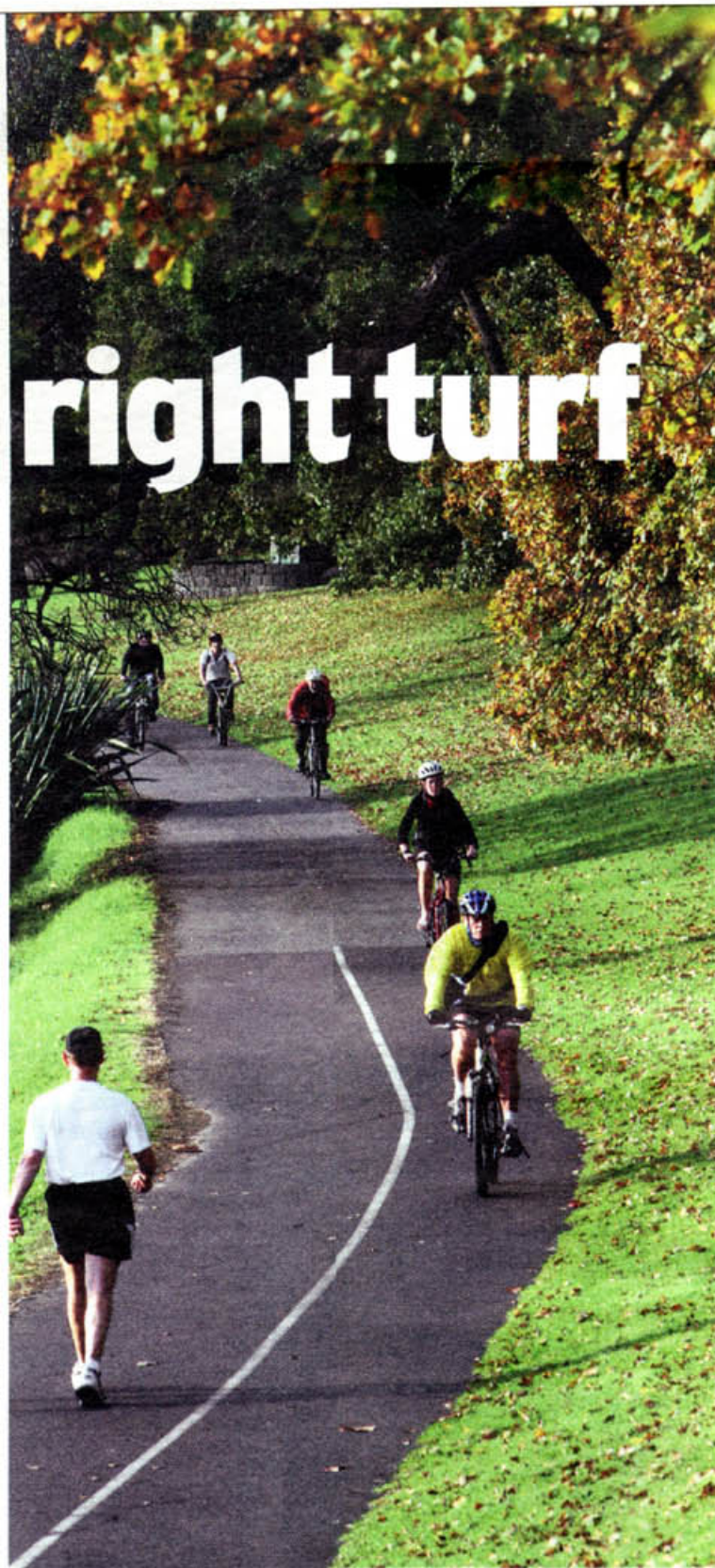
Narrowing down your suburb search by working out budget, type of house, land size, transport options, and proximity to schools, friends and family is essential, particularly when looking for a larger home. Mr Rogozik says it's often a balancing act between how far you are prepared to move from the city, and how large a property you want.

In his experience, status often comes into the equation. "We are absolutely snobs," Mr Rogozik says. "People want to live in the right name suburb; there is no doubt about that." But, he says, people need to be a bit more open to the idea that suburbs have evolved. "Suburbs that once upon a time were considered low on the snobby scale, like Thornbury and Preston, now all of a sudden it's OK to live there. They are being gentrified. Yarraville-Seddon 15 years ago was considered very unfashionable. Now it's becoming trendy, and property prices have been doubling every five years."

"Another suburb is Footscray. Once it was considered not very prestigious but it's the last of the affordable inner-city suburbs," Mr Rogozik says. Within 10 kilometres of the CBD, with period homes in picturesque tree-lined streets, "you could feel you are in the southern suburbs. The great thing about Footscray is it's very affordable. And we are just starting to see attitudes changing."

But RMIT school of environment design adjunct professor Graeme Gunn thinks attitudes should change even more. As rising prices push more people to the outer suburbs, Professor Gunn says, Melbourne residents need to think more laterally about where they would like to live. "The more we add to the edge of Melbourne, we are not helping anyone," he says. "There's a whole group of people and geographical zones that are not well served. An hour out (in the suburbs) and you are not getting the benefit from the things the people get in the city. If there's only one car and one person working, that means one person is stranded or needs public transport."

Within an hour's commute to the CBD, Professor Gunn says, are country towns such as Macedon and Gisborne that are superior to suburban Melbourne, with a clean environment, open space, good schools, transport, and great services. "Why not get out of town and live in the country?" Professor Gunn says.



PICTURE: ANDREW DE LA RUE

THE DECIDERS

- **Budget**
- **Housing style** (bedrooms, land size etc)
- **Schools**
- **Proximity to work**
- **Sporting facilities**
- **Transport**
- **Parks and gardens**
- **Cafes and restaurants**
- **Shopping**
- **Environment**
- **Family and friends**

RESOURCES

- Melway (includes a transport map)
- Links to council websites (sport and recreational facilities, community groups, community activities, arts) and blurbs on areas including residential and industrial mix and parkland are available at www.dvc.vic.gov.au
- Suburb profiles at domain.com.au and reiv.com.au
- Government school profiles and links to non-government schools at www.education.vic.gov.au/schoolsonline



CASE STUDY

With the booming property market preventing his 26-year-old daughter buying a first home, Glenn Mitchell decided he would buy a two-bedroom unit to help her on her way. But with a figure of \$400,000 in mind and the competing demands of his investment criteria and her lifestyle preferences, it was difficult to know where to begin.

"Initially we thought Port Melbourne or St Kilda as my daughter seems to socialise a lot in those areas and it is close to the city but we quickly found it (\$400,000) just wasn't going to deliver what we are looking for," Mr Mitchell says.

With his daughter ruling out the inner west, a buyer's advocate was called in and the search spread to Hawthorn, Armadale and Carlton. Finally, Mr Mitchell bought a two-bedroom unit in Brunswick. "It's in a block of six, fully

refurbished with security. There's public transport, shopping and you can get around easily."

We looked at all the aspects of the location — would you feel comfortable there?

It's a really nice area with a lot of older homes and good street parking. Most of the people who have purchased in that block are in their mid to late 20s, so that's good from a social aspect."

Mr Mitchell says his daughter and her partner were fully involved in the decision-making. "It was good experience at looking at what you could or couldn't get."

He plans to keep the property for the long haul, renting it out when his daughter moves on. In the meantime, he will enjoy the peace of mind of having good tenants. "There will be a lot of trouble if there's any damage to the property," he laughs.