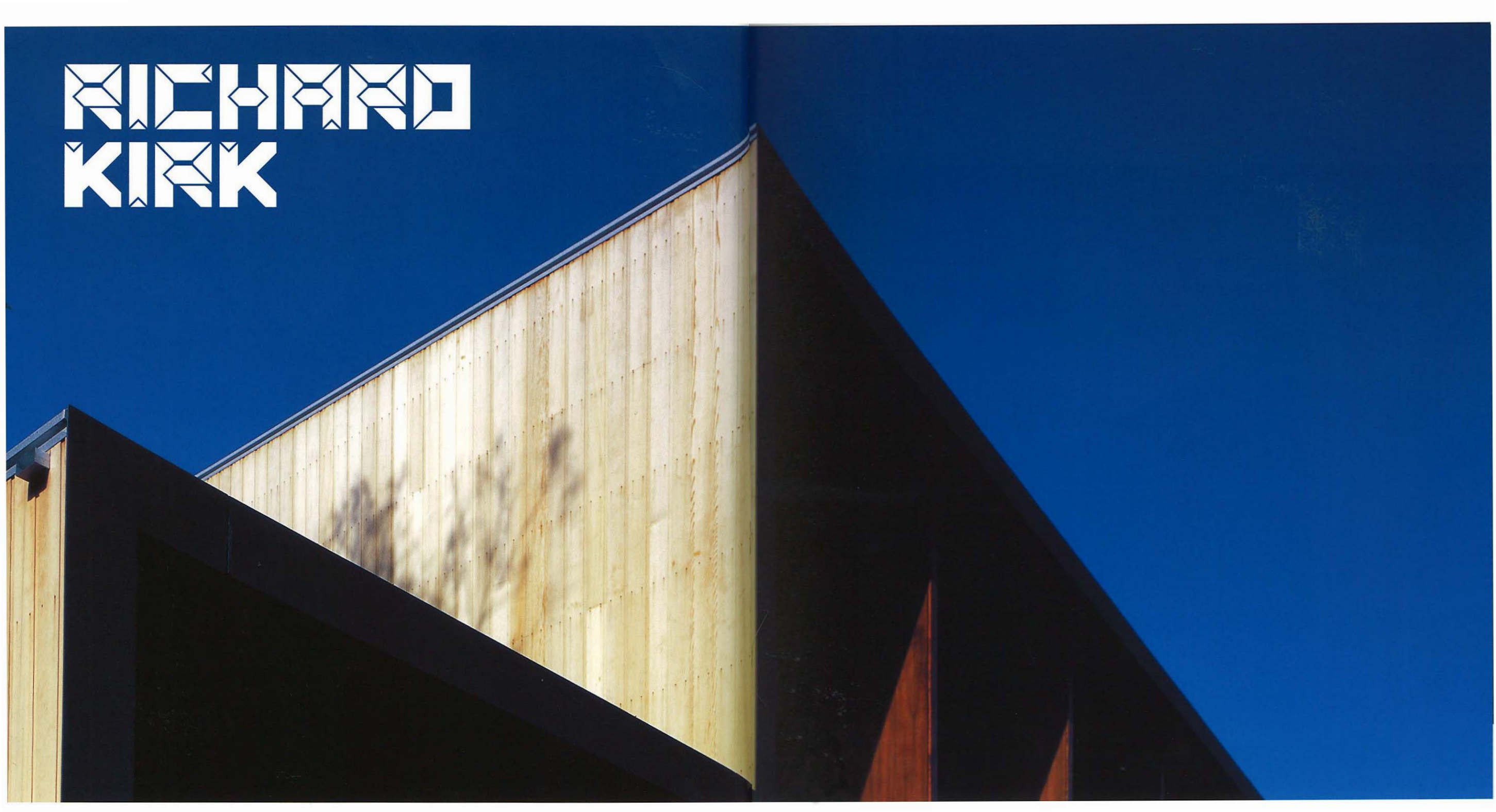


RICHARD
KIRK



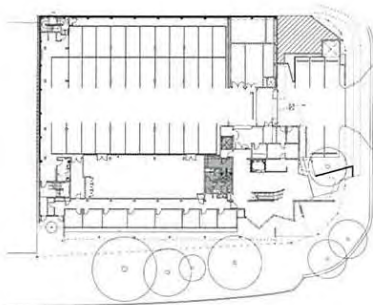


Educated through one of Australia's most progressive architecture programmes of the 1980s – at Brisbane's University of Queensland while it was strongly influenced by imported teachers spreading the ethos of London's Architecture Association – Richard Kirk graduated in 1991 with first class honours and several awards for being the state's top student of his year. Although he was promptly recognized locally as the most focused and articulate intellect of his generation in the north of Australia (the top half is normally recognized more for hedonism than cranial intensity), Kirk only now, aged forty, is becoming well known nationally for his architecture.

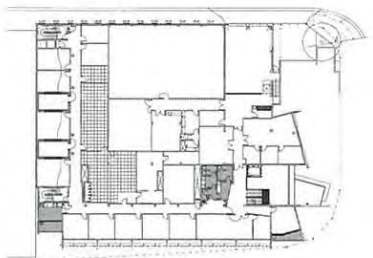
He manages a mid-career Brisbane practice of around ten staff – and the work appears to be in transition from modest suburban house renovations in the 1990s to substantial residences and educational and commercial buildings and interiors. All of these are strongly pragmatic and humane in their programming of internal functions (reflecting Queensland's culture generally) but also incorporate singular gestures and formal elements which demonstrate his creative calibre.

So far, the most substantial project is Cutting Edge, a television post-production facility built in a rapidly developing former industrial wasteland beside a park on the edge of the Brisbane River. Four storeys high, with a large terrace for entertaining supplementing a staff cafe and hospitality pavilion on the roof, it appears externally as a highly fragmented three-dimensional jigsaw of white concrete panels, fine steel balustrading to stacks of balconies, screens of horizontal external louvres shading windows along the north-west façade, and wide eaves projecting from the shallow-hipped roof. The concrete is cast in situ without the fillet moulds often used to create chamfered edges for corners; the resulting square ends create sharp shadow lines under Brisbane's blazing sun.

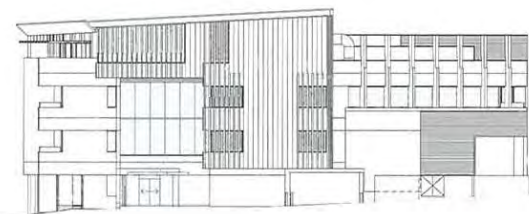
In its formal responses to subtropical sun, winds, rains and humidity, Cutting Edge generally alludes more to old British colonial homesteads and some contemporary



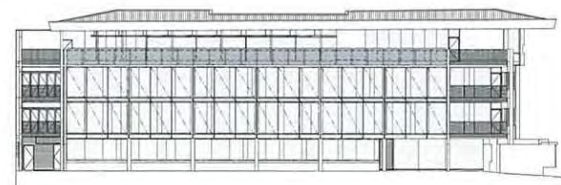
Cutting Edge Television
Post-Production Facility
Ground floor plan/



Cutting Edge Television
Post-Production Facility
Level 1 floor plan/



Cutting Edge Television
Post-Production Facility
South-west elevation/



Cutting Edge Television
Post-Production Facility
North-west elevation/







commercial buildings in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur than to most Australian projects of this type. In detail, however, he has responded to this site and its surroundings by subtly rotating certain critical walls, especially around the key corner, to orient windows to specific viewlines across the park and river. And although much of the building interior comprises dark, enclosed rooms, he adroitly has exploited local climate nuances to create naturally delightful common spaces.

Externally, Kirk's fragmented composition seems reminiscent of extensions to the Netanya resort hotel at Noosa, one of the mid-1980s works of his early employers, Lindsay and Kerry Clare. For several years after graduation he worked for Lindsay Clare at sleepy Buderim, while he was becoming recognized internationally as a second-generation stalwart of a Queensland regional modernism approach known as 'the Sunshine Coast style'. Although this was mainly exemplified by light timber, fibre cement and glass pavilions hovering above idyllic semi-rural sites, Lindsay and his partner Kerry occasionally built multi-storey commercial projects with white concrete expressed as floating panels intersecting a palette of various lighter materials.

Neither the Clares nor Kirk seem comfortable to employ concrete to create weighty cubic monuments. In this respect they share both a modernist lineage back to Frank Lloyd Wright's earliest 'destruct the box' Chicago residences of 1906–9 – and an aversion to the ornament-stripped masonry cubes built by Adolf Loos in Vienna around the same time. Certainly Kirk would have been exposed to the Clares' 1990s disgust for the Georgian and Greek casa-style masonry houses that were being built on the Sunshine Coast to please escapees from chilly Melbourne.

Internally, Cutting Edge is a stack of small, black boxes – editing suites, meeting rooms, offices and recording studios – arrayed around a towering white void – the sun-filled central atrium, which incorporates a transparent lift cabin and substantial timber staircase.

Kirk's Plywood house and Dekker residence in Brisbane showcase another of his common aesthetic strategies – installing sequences of substantial timber fins projecting from certain upper façades. These seem to be conceived not only as dramatic devices but also to protect interiors from excessive sun and edit views out from the windows they frame.

Less Sunshine Coast in style and more likely to have been inspired by UQ teacher-practitioners Brit Andresen and Peter O'Gorman, he also designs emphatically harmonic structural rhythms – especially in his arrangements of timber poles, slats, bracing beams and battens. This is exemplified in his Plywood House – especially in the matchstick mannerism of the roof and wall screens that shade the rear verandah – and in the impressively relentless repetition of verandah posts along the butterfly-roofed west façade of the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School.

Both of those Brisbane projects incorporate faint influences from Andresen and O'Gorman's appreciation of the ancient Greek concept of harmonica – which they have defined as being 'a structure so perfect that the removal of one component would cause the whole to collapse'. This worthy ethic doesn't seem to apply literally to either their architecture (especially their historically brilliant and widely influential Stradbroke Island house of 1997) or to Kirk's projects. In most cases, many elements of a structure – including most of the verandah posts at Kirk's school – could be removed without any fear of instability. However, that would spoil a nice line of art.

Cutting Edge Television
Post-Production Facility
Previous/Roof terrace
at entertainment level/

Aboriginal and Islander
Independent Community
School, Brisbane/
Previous and opposite/
West façade/

RICHARD KIRK/
BRISBANE



Plywood House
Brisbane/Below/
North sundeck
and shade trellises/
Opposite/
North façade/

