‘With each project, we work to make evocative places and buildings that are memorable and clearly legible in terms of how they are spatially organised and constructed.’

Brisbane-based architect Richard Kirk studied under Brit Andrewes and Peter O’Gorman at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, graduating with honours in 1989. After spending several years working for Lindsay and Kerry Clark at Buderim on the Sunshine Coast, he established his own practice, Richard Kirk Architecture (RKA), in 1996. Like the Client, Kirk’s impressive body of work demonstrates his respect for craftsmanship — particularly in his use of timber, although the heroic forms and visionary aspect of his buildings also show his admiration for the work of twentieth-century European architects such as Carlo Scarpa or Álvaro Siza.
Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School

The Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (or Murri School, as it is more commonly known), located in the southern Brisbane suburb of Anzac Ridge, is one of the few indigenous-owned and operated schools in Australia. Stage one, completed by Richard Kirk Architects in 2004, is the first of a five-stage master plan proposed to be realised over a ten-year period. It comprises four separate buildings: two general learning buildings for students in years one to five, a kitchen and amenities building, and an arts and science facility.

The site was previously a state-owned public school that comprised a collection of older timber-framed two-level buildings, the earliest of which was constructed in the 1930s. A substantial fire and the subsequent destruction of one of the large timber buildings in 2001 was the catalyst for the project and provided the opportunity to completely reconsider the function of the school environment and its built form.

Indigenous students remain among the most educationally disadvantaged in Australia. Part of the philosophy underpinning the Murri School is to address issues surrounding this disadvantage. The project to redevelop the school's facilities was a rare opportunity to respond to these issues in built form.

The new buildings are well grounded and provide a sense of openness and transparency. Over time, the site planning, building forms, materials and details will work in conjunction to give the school its own identity as an important benchmark facility for the area's Indigenous community.

'We wanted the school to demonstrate the core values of the school, the relationship to the community and to build and promote.'
[W]e wanted the school to demonstrate the core cultural values of the school and its relationship to the culture it is endeavouring to sustain and promote.
1 & 2. Views of the library and amenities building.

3. A louvered colonnade, covered with a butterfly roof, marks the southern terminating point of the arts and science building.

4. Covered outdoor rooms are used as teaching spaces.

Photographs: John Liddicoat.
Cutting Edge
Site area: 2172 m²
Gross floor area: 2750 m²
Location: West End, Brisbane
Completed: 2004

The Cutting Edge studio is a 4500-square-metre film and television post-production facility located on the Brisbane River with frontage to Bessell Park in West End. The four-level building contains a wide range of work spaces including edit suites, studio rooms and control rooms, multimedia and visual effects suites, a theatre for 60 people, and a large staff restaurant on the top level with an external lawn and roof terrace.

The area of South Brisbane and West End in which Cutting Edge is situated was once dominated by light industry, with warehouses and rowing sheds lining this stretch of the Brisbane River. Only in the past 10 to 20 years has the potential afforded by the area’s proximity to the city been recognised by property developers, and the precinct is being radically reshaped. Many residential developments offer luxury apartments with extensive river views. The location of Cutting Edge—a technology-driven commercial enterprise that serves the entertainment industry—in the midst of this urban city area indicates how integral such business is to contemporary life, and also exemplifies the vastly different social and economic circumstances which now determine the built landscape of the urban city.

This building’s design responds to the site by addressing its largely landscaped setting. The building is glazed for views and natural light on the river- and street-facing elevations. Most glazed areas are protected by external screening, and motorised steel blinds on the riverfront elevation automatically change angle and open or close according to the time of day.

In addition to dealing with a diverse functional brief—the varying design requirements of editing suites, sound recording studios and meeting rooms—the interior also needed an inherent degree of flexibility to enable it to change along with future advances in technology and media types. In response to these requirements, as servicing is exposed to allow ease of modification and retrofitting.
The building responds to the its largely natural light and void conditions. A dynamic axis screening, and on the mezzanine level or close of day.

With a diverse and varied design, sound and meeting also needed an ability to enable future accessibility and media requirements to allow ease of integration.
‘There is a faith here in a kind of regional modernism that can accept the context of climate and local architectural idiom as a base for thinking rather than an ideology to be propagated. What appears as modelling of the exterior form of the building is in fact driven by a holistic logic of organization, structure, spatial experience and lighting conditions.”

1. Views from roof terrace across level 1st. Vertical frameless glass walls for perspectcive office spaces from the overlooking pool while enabling unobstructed views to the park approach.

2. All spaces are linked by a fourstory void — with both stairs and lift for circulation — which includes the reception area on the ground floor.

3. The rooftop staff restaurant and outdoor entertainment areas on roof areas.

4. The four-level building has a three-story wall of steeltrapez, in the northwestern elevation, which open and close according to the angle of the sun.

Photographs: Joe Leppik
1. Roof plate reinforces the dining geometric line of the roof.

2. At the rear of the garden, the roof steps down to become the back wall.

Photography: Jim Linna

NORTH ELEVATION
The Dekkers Residence project involved the addition of a simply free-standing structure to an original 1900s-residence located in one of the older inner-city suburbs of Brisbane. This unorthodox 'extension' incorporates three children's bedrooms, a playroom, and a large living and dining space and kitchen. A stairwell connects to the old building and makes the transition from the relatively small-scaled traditional Queensland house to a substantially living pavilion in the back garden.

The original house was stripped back to its core by removing all of the additions that had been made over time, allowing its formal qualities and the manner in which it engages with the street to be retained. Its internal spaces were reconfigured to include a more formal living area, the main bedroom space and a study, although there was little physical intervention into the structure of the building itself.

The new building is treated as a pavilion and is placed in the existing garden space at the rear of the site, which has an east-west axis. All spaces in the new building have a northerly outlook and a strong visual connection with the surrounding garden. The sunroom facade is presented as a piece of timber joinery, with Western red cedar and New Guinea rosewood contained within a dramatic roof line, wrapped down midway to form the walls. This facade addresses the garden space, which becomes an outdoor room, edged by the pool, deck, and shed. The living space has an unobstructed two-meter-wide opening, with fully retractable sliding doors, and the threshold is flush with the lawn, allowing a seamless visual and physical transition from inside to out. The functional differentiation of the various glazing systems — sliding doors and series of casement windows — articulates the main building form.

The folding walls and roofs are clad in Western red cedar, tinted to slowly weather to a silver-grey colour, and are edged with steel plate. Beneath the roof, the protected bedroom walls are clad in teak veneer, treated so that they will maintain their rich colour and figuring. These materials will allow the building to age within the surrounding landscape. The combination of the bold, geometric building form and the varied hues of the timber cladding seems oppositional, yet the resultant building possesses both grandeur and warmth, creating a memorable setting for family and social life.
1. The seamless transition from inside to outside is made more dramatic by the ability to extract all sliding doors to create an unencumbered ten-metre-wide house.
2. The address at the rear of the site, glimpsed from inside the front boundary.
3. Casement windows run the length of the living area.
4. Street elevation, in which a new garage and entry add a contemporary element to the traditional facade.

Photographs: Joe Lowsley
Highgate Hill Residence

Site area: 201 m²
Gross floor area: 420 m²
Location: Highgate Hill, Brisbane
Completed: 2007

In response to the dominance of the landscape, the house is clad in timber or has glazed facades with timber mullions. Each timber type is selected to age in response to its orientation and weathering conditions. Like the Oak Tree Residence, over time that will turn from red and brown to silver and grey.

The steepness of the site, and a desire to connect the house to an outdoor ground plane, has resulted in a house with two distinct identities: from the northern and eastern aspects (from the garden and street respectively) it is a diminutive, floating, single-level volume hovering over fine steel piers. From southern and western aspects (which are distant views from across the river) the vertical and monumental character of what is in fact a tall three-level residence is revealed.

Highgate Hill Residence is located on a south-facing site adjacent to one of Brisbane's oldest ridge line roads. The steepness of the rectangular site has resulted in a verdant and mature landscape consisting of a mixture of native and exotic plants providing Richard Kirk Architect with the opportunity to place the house within a richly vegetated landscape.

The upper level contains all the bedrooms and a void that is located over the dining area. The middle level comprises living and dining spaces and also the point of entry from the street. A series of constructed plinths at this level supports a lawn, timber decking and swimming pool, extending the living area outdoors in a seamless transition. The lower level contains a guest room and a media space.
The void that is located at the point of entry extending the living is a seamless lower level contains and a media space.

1. Pine vertical timber battens screen the building’s upper levels providing a public facade of a series of timber elements that work as a series of steps laid over the building volume.

2. The northern facade featuring glazed vertical timber materials on the upper level.

Photography: Jim Linne.
1. Large-scale openings on the middle level integrate the landscape with the living spaces.

2. The stair is an important organizational reference between the levels, and it nests as a structural element that loads slightly on the piers, thus visually linking all levels.

3. The glazed upper level of the northern wall opens the interior to the landscape and views, and light filters through lush vegetation.

Photographs: Sue Finchen