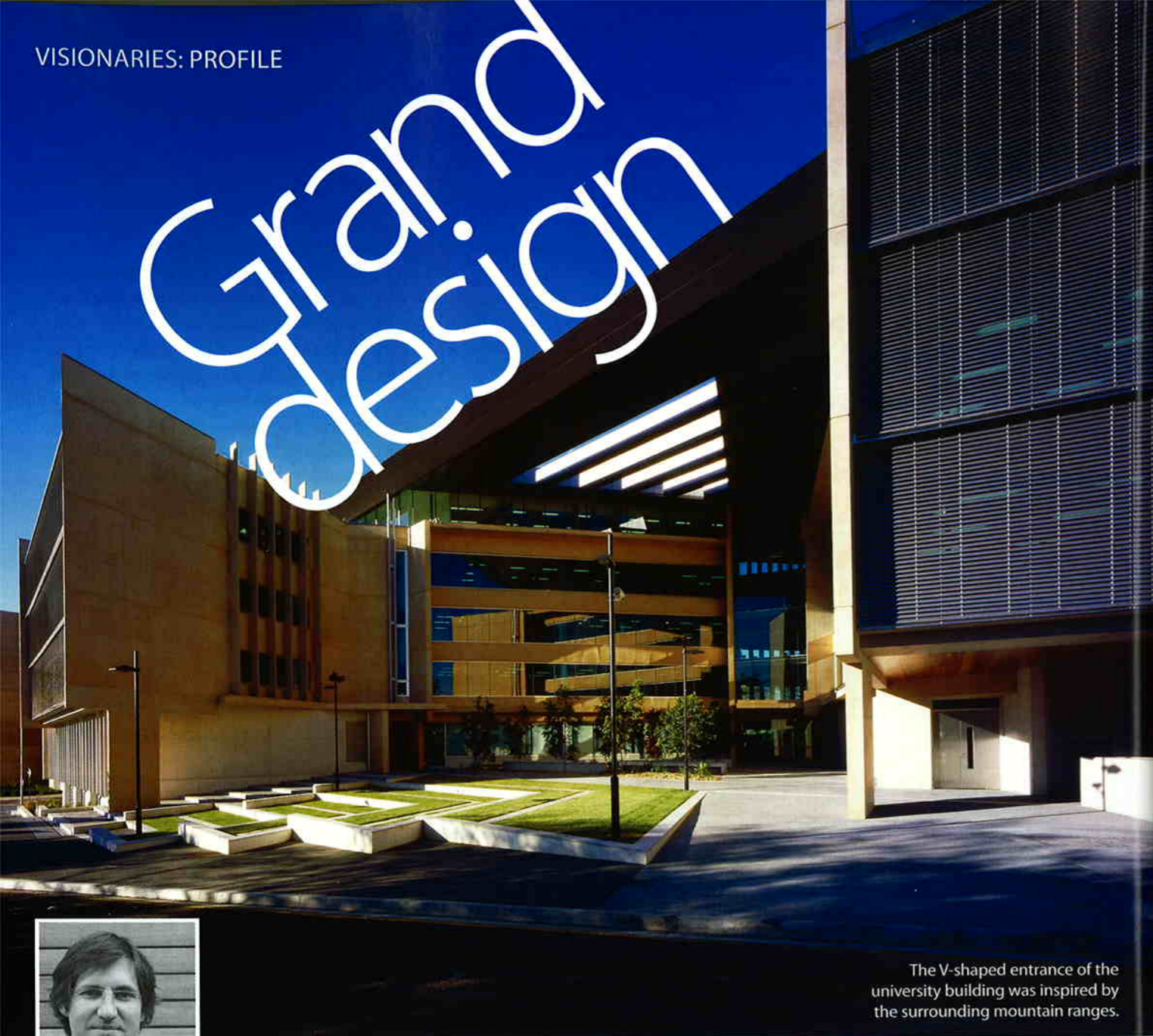
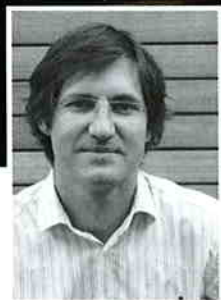


Grand design



The V-shaped entrance of the university building was inspired by the surrounding mountain ranges.



Award-winning Brisbane architect Richard Kirk links sites to their past without compromising the future, writes Virginia Laugenson.

Since establishing his practice in 1995, Brisbane architect Richard Kirk and his team have won numerous industry awards, nominations and commendations. That recognition has brought the practice rewards, and more work. However, it has always been the aim of this ambitious young architect to treat every design, regardless of scale or purpose, as a landmark building. Perhaps that's why Kirk is hailed as one of Brisbane's best 'next wave' talents. In 2004 his Cutting Edge film and TV post-production house on the Brisbane River won the RAIA Regional Commercial Building of the Year and Interior Architecture awards.

The striking four-level building constructed in white concrete delivers on the client's brief for lots of open space, height and heavy-duty surfaces. "Media organisations are very industrial, but instead of moving palettes around, they move large chunks of data and that has implications for the way the interior works," says Kirk. "It's the first building we did where the technology budget was two or three times the construction budget. So these buildings become a facilitator to the technology which is an unusual phenomenon."

The Cutting Edge project considered the environment before Green Star Ratings and environmentally sustainable design became

popular in the commercial realm. It sports one of Brisbane's first 'green' roofs; has active facades (cool rotating fins that follow the sun); and natural ventilation.

Higher learning

Kirk's next challenge was winning the design competition to build the \$54m General Purpose North 4 (GPN4): the first new building at the University of Queensland (UQ) in 30 years. The brief for the English language school was to create a building with a competitive and openly business purpose. Kirk met the brief, and his V-shaped GPN4 opened its doors mid-July.

"The commercial aspect meant we had to look at it very differently," says Kirk. "A lot of the buildings at UQ are very defensive, closed and internalised; GPN4 had to be more inherently welcoming, open and transparent so people would be encouraged to enter."

The mountain range backdrop ignored by many other contenders for the project actually gave Kirk a major clue on how to direct the design. "In every project you try to let the site influence what the design is about. The views and a point of entry were very obvious things to us. Simply by orientating the building the right way and keeping the facade very transparent we were able to offer Mount Coot-tha to the University."

The five-storey, V-shaped, glazed public frontage opens wide and welcoming for those entering, and affords grand views for occupants. Solar panels, underground rainwater tanks, movement sensor lighting, air conditioning and the utilisation of natural light are just some of the building's sustainability features. As with Cutting Edge, new technologies complete GPN4's functional operations, with students and teachers able to plug in to electronic learning facilities throughout the building.

Vintage advantage

Recently approved for mixed use development, FKP's The Mill at Albion will be Kirk's largest scale design and greatest heritage challenge, but he insists the new urban village will "feel as if it has always been there".

Built in 1930 and operational until 2004, the heritage-listed mill building will be central to the future residential community. The iconic flour silos, built in the 1960s, were not required to stay. However public reaction to Kirk's concept, which kept the structures, changed all that.

"We felt the silos were very important," Kirk adds, "and the scheme got a lot of public support through the DA (development approval) process. We also had a plan where the silos were filled with apartments, but unfortunately they're too small to occupy." Instead, the ground floor will be retail premises.

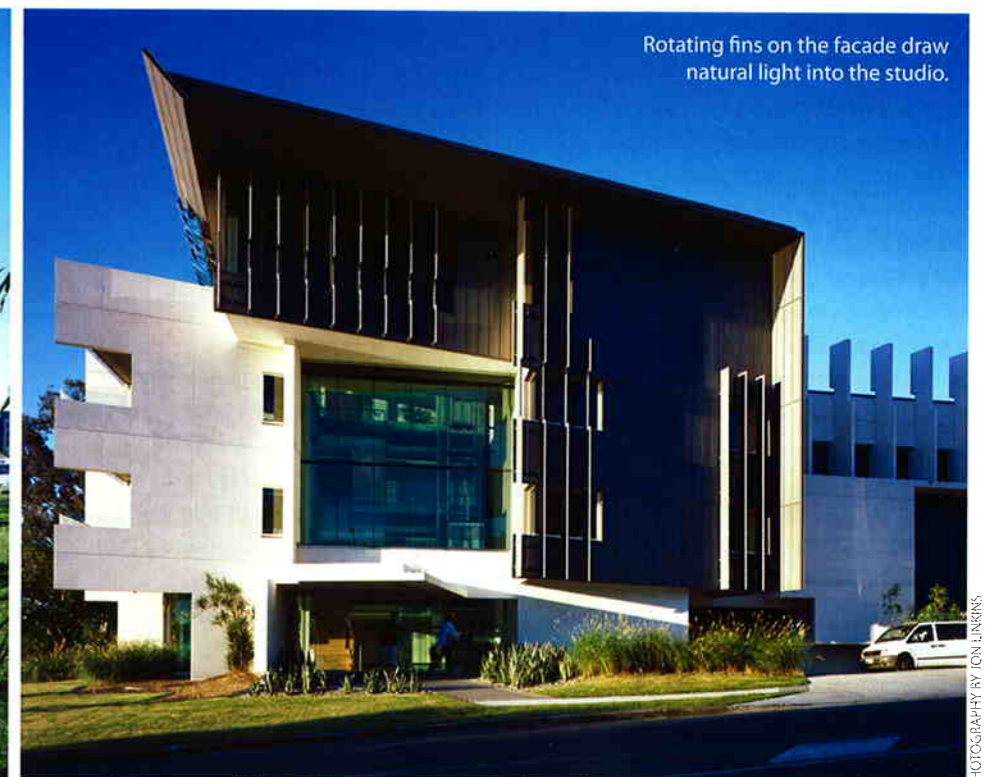
The silos not only retain the strong physical presence of the Mill, which saw Brisbane's workers through the depression and WWII, they also bookend the property's construction story. The Mill and the silos represent the 40-year development of that site and, for Kirk, the silos are "most profound, because they clearly demonstrate what the site was used for".



GPN4



Cutting Edge studio merges seamlessly with the landscaping.



Rotating fins on the facade draw natural light into the studio.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON LANSING



IMAGES COURTESY OF RICHARD KIRK (ARTIST'S IMPRESSIONS)

The Mill redevelopment has the distinction of being the first Transit Oriented Development (TOD) approved for Brisbane, a council planning initiative welcomed by Kirk. "Other cities around the world have a long tradition of public transport, but it's been neglected in Brisbane and now the government has suddenly realised the benefit of increasing density around existing transport systems like railway and bus stops."

Kirk says that while traditional city centres were formed logically around street 'hubs', Brisbane lost its way. "In the 50s and 60s the private car confused some of these fundamentals in urban planning. TODs are a very 'green' idea; it's about getting people out of cars, getting them to walk and providing fast public transport from point to point around the city."

Good foundations

The limitations of working within a heritage infrastructure are only part of Kirk's design story. The Mill's shape and proximity to rail was a challenge, so Kirk took a basic and holistic approach. "When jobs get more complex they need to have a very simple, strong idea," he says.



Some apartment interiors will feature exposed brickwork.

"With The Mill, we emphasised the importance of the ground plane and the quality of all the public spaces. In these projects it's really fundamental to have a clear idea to work with throughout the project, so you don't lose your way, so to speak."

Interestingly, when it comes to achieving a 'green' construction, Kirk says: "Older buildings tend to give you a very good starting point. Anything built in the 1920s and 30s was built without reliance

on substantial artificial lighting or air conditioning, so you're working with fundamentally good elements. Buildings like The Mill are made of brick and often have very thick walls, so thermally they're very efficient."

To further localise The Mill's design and environmental initiative, the Albion redevelopment will retain a substantial supply of its original timbers. "The older the building, the better the bones – it's just a matter of tweaking them," says Kirk. ■

JOIN MELBOURNE'S NEWEST
BAYSIDE COMMUNITY.
REGISTER YOUR INTEREST TODAY.



Claim your piece of the coast, just 20km from Melbourne.

Your home at Saltwater Coast will be just a short drive from the city, and a short walk from the beach. You'll also be close to nature with more than 120 acres of parks and open spaces within the estate, plus pristine coastal parklands fringing your neighbourhood.

Your community will sport great facilities.

A healthy lifestyle will be easy all year round, with impressive sports facilities adjacent to the neighbourhood

shopping centre. A primary school is planned, to welcome the next generation and every home will be wired for the future, as a Telstra Smart Community®, to provide faster communication services to your home.

Dip your toe in the water.

To find out more about the exciting plans for Melbourne's newest bayside community, created by award winning developer FKP, register your interest by calling **1300 357 000** or visit saltwatercoast.com.au today.



CALL 1300 357 000 saltwatercoast.com.au



Where living comes naturally.