

AUNTY'Shome



ALL TOGETHER NOW ... sharing views from the national broadcaster's striking new South Bank headquarters are television and radio staff, including 612 ABC Brisbane Mornings presenter Steve Austin and ABC TV news presenter David Curnow. **PHOTOGRAPHS** • Mark Cranitch

foyer and somewhere to have coffee, and there'll be an interactive online presence. This building is saying, 'we are the public broadcaster, we are your broadcaster, and we're quite happy for you to come and have a look at what we do'."

State director and former foreign correspondent Mark Bowling, who has been here for just six months, says community accessibility is a priority.

"We will have a program of tours so people can see behind the scenes," Mark says. "I'd like to see every Queensland schoolchild come through here when they visit this precinct. They will have more of an understanding about how their national broadcaster works and some of them might end up working in the industry. They will hopefully recall the day they came to the ABC at South Bank."

Getting here has been a long road for the ABC in Brisbane, which was forced to evacuate its previous premises at Toowong after at least 18 female staff members developed breast cancer. Medical experts found women working in the old studios were six times more likely to develop breast cancer than women generally, but never found out why.

In late 2006, managing director Mark Scott ordered the site abandoned and staff were relocated to eight locations across Brisbane. A new HQ was mooted at Newstead, but possible contamination of that land forced a rethink.

Eventually, it was decided BAP would move to South Bank, between QPAC and the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University. The not-quite-finished building is looking good, which pleases Brisbane architect Richard Kirk.

He and the team at Richard Kirk Architect spent a year on a design for the Newstead site but had to change tack for the South Bank one, which he thinks is more suitable.

"The new site is fantastic," Richard says. "The ABC has the rare honour of being both a public and cultural institution, so the location is a great fit. We strove to design a building that was simple but one that lets a lot of light in and doesn't compromise views."

Down the side and at the rear of the building, which is rated as "5 Star" for office design under the Green Building Council of Australia Green Star Version 3, you'll notice funky steel sunshades that create light and shadow throughout the day. The front of the building features wall-to-ceiling windows offering the holy grail of real estate: city views.

One enthusiast for the urban vista is ratings-winning 612 ABC Brisbane *Breakfast* announcer Spencer Howson.

"In 19 years, I have never been able to look out a window when I was on air," Spencer says. "This morning, I was able to say, it's sunny, there are blue skies, welcome to Friday. Statistically speaking, there are eight foggy mornings in Brisbane each year—I would know that, wouldn't I?—and I'm looking forward to seeing the Brisbane River shrouded on those mornings."

ABC TV news presenter David Curnow loves his new studio, even if he's a bit baffled by the swanky desk he sits behind. It's the crop circle-like indentation in the middle that mystifies David, who is nonetheless thrilled with the national broadcaster's new \$110 million South Bank headquarters. Still, what to do with the desk?

"Weather presenter Jenny Woodward and I are thinking we'll get a game of roulette going in it," David says. "I've suggested filling it with M&Ms, but Jenny would prefer champagne."

As you can see, the mood is positively bubbly at Aunty's new digs, completed under the prosaic title of Brisbane Accommodation Project (BAP). David Curnow's enthusiasm is typical of the ebullience of staff. After almost five years in a small studio at Channel 10 on Mt Coot-tha, the nightly Queensland bulletin presenter worked out of Sydney for five weeks while the finishing touches were put on the ABC's new television news studio in Brisbane. Now he has a state-of-the-art workplace and loves it.

"It looks good, it feels good and it works well," David says. "It's good to be able to see the people in the control room even if they are running around and tearing their hair out sometimes. Of course, I have to ignore all that, which isn't always easy."

Jenny Woodward is equally enthusiastic, particularly about her new spot in the vast open-plan office.

"After 25 years, I actually have my own desk," Jenny says. "Coming into this building after working in the bowels of one on Mt Coot-tha for the past few years has been a huge change for the better."

"The studio here is gorgeous, the building is full of light and the view is beautiful. The other night, we had this line of storms coming through and I went upstairs and watched the clouds rolling across the city."

About 330 ABC staff will be working out of the four-level building when it reaches capacity in the coming months. Most are already ensconced, although Leighton Contractors is still completing a few small details, inside and out.

The BAP, at 117 Grey Street (corner of Russell and Grey), South Bank, will also be home to the 100 staff of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, which will have rehearsal rooms and a 600sq m studio that can also accommodate performances and audiences. It will be used for recording programs such as Q&A for ABC TV.

There will eventually be cafes and also a visitor-friendly foyer so the public can get a handle on what their eight cents a day is paying for (they reckon it's still about that per Australian taxpayer). Project manager and former ABC Queensland state director Mike McGowan says the punters will be welcome.

"We wanted this to be the complete opposite of previous sites because people didn't know where we were and didn't have access," Mike says. "This building will provide a welcoming

When it's finished, the building will be fantastic. There's a great sense of optimism



After a five-year exile, ABC Queensland staffers reunite riverside, writes **Phil Brown**

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