

Urban Developer presents a new regular feature profiling UDLA members doing things a little differently with fantastic results. Look out for more Rising Stars on these pages in the future.

THE ARC of design



As the global financial crisis shook the world and the spill over effects continued in Australia, Scott Peabody and Cathy Murphy were launching Arqus Design. Their plan was to offer a boutique design practice based on a collaborative approach to masterplanning, architecture and interior design, and, of course, to thrive and grow.

Nearly two years on from its April 2009 start, the Fortitude Valley-based design practice has secured a diversity of work within each field, including heritage building redevelopments, interior design, prominent multi-residential projects and high-profile masterplanning work. The Arqus Design team has grown from just two to 10, and its employees hold a range of experience and skill sets across architecture and interior design.

While success was always part of their plan, the pair says it has exceeded even their own expectations.

'Some people have said it was probably the worst time to start a business, but for us it was the right time to start Arqus Design,' Scott says.

'It was a standing start. We've gone effectively from Cath and I and built the business from there. One of the undercurrents of success over the last 20 months is the fact that we have been able to build our diverse project portfolio and respond to our clients' needs and project requirements seamlessly.

'We're delighted that we have been able to exceed the expectations of our business plan in a period of global financial uncertainty.'

Scott (the director of Arqus Design) has more than 20 years' experience as a design architect working across the eastern seaboard and internationally on a variety of projects ranging from significant masterplans, resorts, high density residential developments, commercial, retail and education facilities.

Cathy, the general manager, is a chartered accountant with more than 20 years' experience with KPMG and within the design industry – 10 of those years in strategic management and as the financial controller for an architectural practice in Queensland.

Arqus Design takes its name from the acronym of the Spanish word for

architecture – 'Arquitecto'. The 'us' refers to the collaborative approach the practice takes to its work, clients and staff.

'We saw Arqus Design as a great opportunity to create a design-based consulting business that focuses on masterplanning, architecture and interior design – a boutique consultancy that brings together a team with a collaborative approach,' Cathy says.

Arqus is involved in a number of high-profile masterplanning projects across South East Queensland and beyond, including infill development and greenfield sites. Projects include Australand's Hamilton Reach project in Brisbane, which will offer a diverse variety of residential living options to more than 850 residents in a unique inner city riverfront location; ongoing stages of Harridan's Bayside Business Park in Cleveland; resort development in northern NSW; and a number of medium density residential enclaves.

The practice's architectural portfolio is diverse, ranging from commercial projects, retail development, industrial, medical, university and heritage projects to residential developments. Notable projects include Heritage-listed Yungaba House, which is being converted into 10 luxury riverfront residences, as well as a range of commercial and industrial projects within South East Queensland including Bayside Business Park, the initial stages of Hamilton Reach and a number of luxury residences.

The interior design branch has grown over the past year as an extension of the business's architecture projects, along with being independently commissioned for projects including the fit-out of the Queensland Multicultural Centre for the state government and a number of other office fit-out projects.

Among the challenges Arqus has experienced is balancing project delays, as uncertainty continued to ripple through the

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marketplace during the early part of 2010.

"This period reinforced to us the importance and benefit of maintaining diversity in our projects and market sectors," Cathy says. "We treat every project with equal value and worth, irrespective of the scale or complexity. I think this approach has helped us through the market challenges of 2010."

"We've also gained an appreciation for the benefits of direct marketing in regards to expanding our network and securing new project opportunities, which have helped us meet those challenges."

According to Cathy, Arqus Design aims

to be "an employer of choice" by offering a flexible work environment, greater employment benefits and the chance for professional growth.

"We've brought together a competent and incredibly skilled team and we recognise the need to offer them an environment that offers true opportunity for professional development," she says.

"We offer a flexible work environment with additional leave benefits and incidental leave. When our staff have put in the hard yards on a project, we want to be able to thank them by giving them a day off paid. Additionally, we pay overtime and offer

flexibility in terms of allowing staff to turn up earlier and leave earlier.

"We have other leave provisions for parents who may need to occasionally take a few hours off to watch their kids at a school or sporting event. Likewise, with our undergraduates and students, we offer them flexible arrangements so they can balance their university and project commitments.

"We think it's important to give people from all walks of life and at all life stages the opportunities to be part of our progressive design team. We mentor our staff and have a formal professional development scheme



Hamilton Reach on the Brisbane river

to ensure we can assist in their personal professional growth."

Scott, who is part of the UDIA State Conference committee tasked with identifying key industry issues and challenges which should be discussed at the next conference, believes affordability and accessibility remain a key factor for the industry to address. In addition, he believes the industry should be addressing new and developing trends to ensure Queensland remains at the cutting edge of the development industry.

"Architecturally and development-wise, project sustainability (social, financial and

environmental) and ensuring that projects can meet the market will be key – and that's across all project typologies," he says.

"There's a big shift in the way people now live and the industry needs to respond to this. More people are moving into high and medium density living, and first home owners now buy apartments, not land. People are gravitating towards lower scale, boutique residential enclaves, which have a greater sense of identity."

As for the future of Arqus Design, Scott and Cathy plan to "grow conservatively", nurturing their relationships with existing clients and expanding on their network

within the local and interstate markets.

"We think we've established a very good grounding for the business," Cathy says. "We've got some great projects and a great team around us so we would like to grow our business conservatively by responding to our clients and the market."

"On a community level, we want to be an active contributor in our industry by sitting on committees, mentoring at universities and encouraging students to join us for valuable industry experience. We are optimistic about 2011 and look forward to the year ahead." ■