

JPE celebrates 160 years of landmarks

JPE Design Studio, Australia's oldest architecture design firm, responsible for more than 100 of Adelaide's buildings including the Adelaide Railway Station, celebrated its rich history in a public retrospective exhibition when it turned 160 in October.

The exhibition included hundreds of JPE's projects including Charles Moore Department store in Victoria Square (now Sir Samuel Way Law Courts Building), several Adelaide hotels such as the Stag, Maid and Magpie, and the Elephant and Castle, and the more recent, sustainable corner building office development, The Edge and The Wave.

Director, Adrian Evans says commitment to delivering sustainable designs is JPE's focus today, with recently completed project The Edge earning a 5 Star Greenstar Rating. The firm is busy.

"JPE Design Studio has a wide portfolio of projects which appear likely to sustain the practice at our current size of around 23 employees for the next 18 months," Adrian says.

"These include the 170 room CML Hotel Conversion project at the corner of King William and Hindley Streets, Marryatville High School New Science Building and refurbishment of other buildings and landscaping, Gawler Birth to Year 12 School, Lumina Apartments for Masonic Homes, Projects for Eldercare, Apartment and Industrial projects for MSP, numerous projects for bankmecu in Victoria and Queensland, Council projects including a Library and Civic Centre for The Town of Walkerville, a Community Centre for the City of Mitcham and Urban Design Master Plans for the Isaac Regional council in Queensland, an Apartment Building in Surfle Street, Cleve Area School Redevelopment, a Straw Bale house at Ceduna and a new Office Building for the CBD."



Adrian observes the architectural/design sector in SA is mixed with a few firms being very busy on a small number of very large projects and many firms having to downsize due to lack of work.

"We sit in the middle as we are not involved with the Adelaide mega-projects such as the new Royal Adelaide Hospital, the Riverbank projects or the Adelaide Oval Redevelopment but we have a good range of projects for a wide range of client sectors in our four disciplines of architecture, interior design, landscape architecture and urban design.

"It is also very pleasing to be sought out by interstate clients to work on their projects from Adelaide.

Adrian says SA's building sector has been "on a rollercoaster ride" for the past five years, with good growth enduring until the GFC hit in 2008.

"Like most in the industry we downsized at the end of 2008," he says. "The Building the Education Revolution provided work for many of us through 2009 and 2010. We suffered in the first six months of this year but have performed well since June 2011.

"There are signs confidence is returning to the privately funded construction market with more interest in investing in Adelaide from overseas and interstate than in the recent past.

"The Government has committed a lot of money to a few large projects and this has restricted other project opportunities. The prospect of large infrastructure projects associated especially with mining and transport has encouraged a number of interstate design and construction companies to open offices in Adelaide and they are also competing in the building sector.

"Overall this is an encouraging sign although, of course, the locals do not appreciate the competition, especially when they are paying SA payroll and other levies which most of the others do not."

Development sector reform in SA has brought mixed blessings.

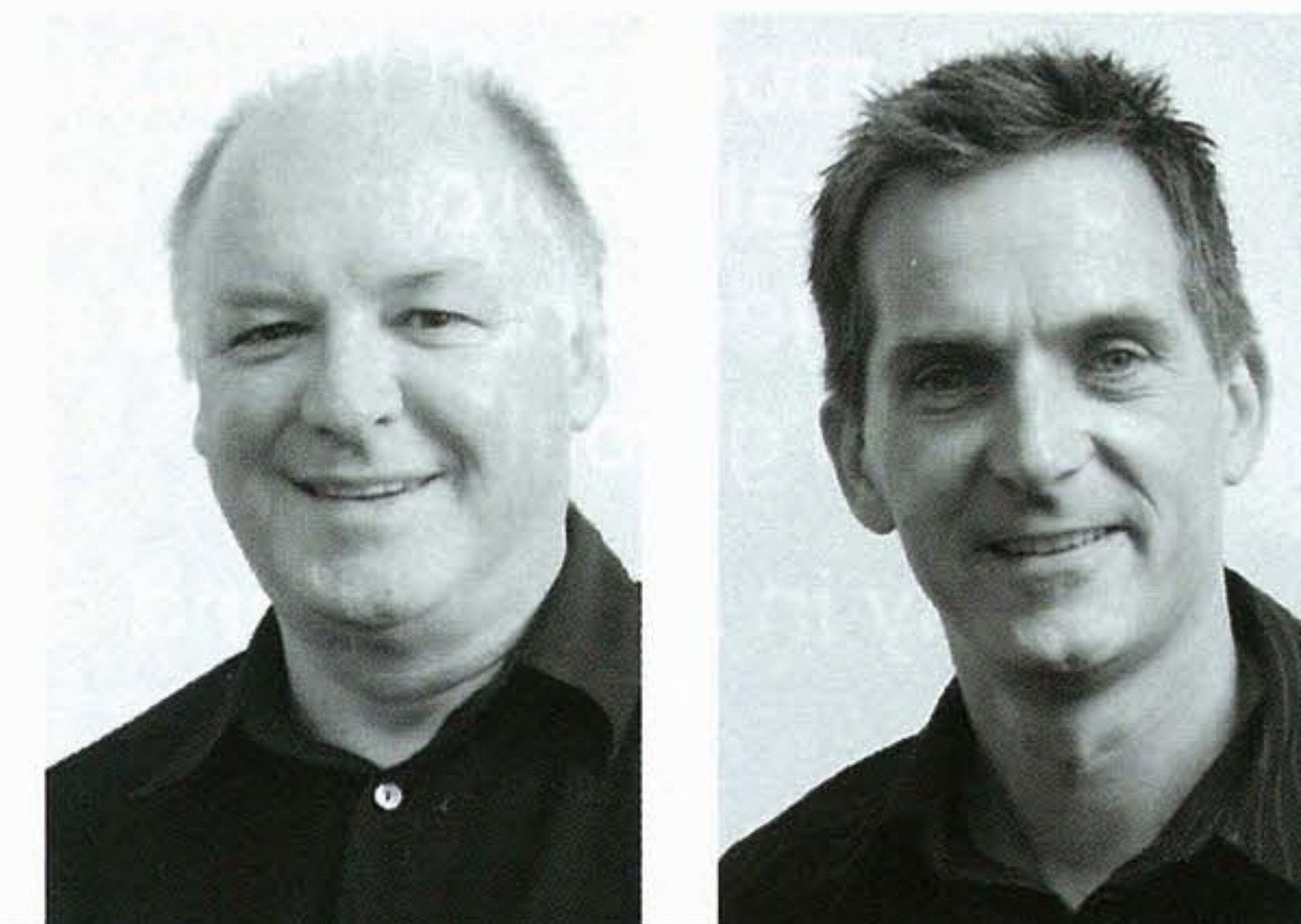
"The operating environment is becoming ever more regulated and controlled, often for no good reason and usually very inefficiently," Adrian says.

"On the other hand the creation of the Integrated Design Commission within the Department of Premier and Cabinet has given a renewed focus on the power of good design in our society and great expectations are held for its work.

"Quality professional people are not a problem for us at the moment but we are continually warned of future shortages and so we do need to continually improve our methods, technological systems and productivity.

"There has been a long-standing theory that architectural businesses will need to either be large national or international firms or small, boutique niche providers to survive.

"We believe there will always be a place for medium-sized design focused practices which are nimble and capable of meeting client needs on the ground without the bureaucracy of large organizations, yet with the skills and scale to undertake complex projects which small firms are not equipped to do.



JPE Design Studio principals, Adrian Evans (left) and Kaare Krokene

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