

## ARCHITECTURE



Left, Terroir Architects design at Peppermint Bay; right, detail from Moana surf club, designed by Malloway Studio; and far right, The Victorian College of the Arts, designed by Minifie Nixon Architects. Photos courtesy Terroir Architects, Malloway Studio, and Minifie Nixon Architects

# Designs on the future

**Robert Bevan** profiles a selection of firms that are designing breakthrough projects.

## Minifie Nixon

Small house extensions, bars and shop fitouts are the bread and butter of most young architecture practices, but Minifie Nixon's big break was a competition-winning public building – the spectacular 2004 Centre for Ideas at Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts. Its faceted metal facade is the product of complex mathematical modelling that is the practice's forte.

"We've an interest in public space and the potential of buildings to contribute at the level of the city rather than being a

smug citadel," says Paul Minifie, 42, who founded the practice seven years ago with Fiona Nixon (who has since moved overseas). Minifie, and current fellow director Jan Van Schaik, 35, emerged from RMIT's internationally renowned architecture school, where they maintain academic ties, and have stayed in a city that gives architects chances.

"There is a genuine literacy about design among Melbourne's authorities and an interest in supporting young practices," explains Minifie.

Other public buildings have

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followed their initial success, including the Australian Wildlife Centre at Healesville Sanctuary and the Wetlands Discovery Centre in Edithvale.

The continuing redevelopment of Melbourne's CUB brewery is their biggest project to date, but their plan is to stay small: there are two directors and just five staff. Van Schaik says employing just 12 people would be their ambition over the next few years.

"We keep our practice small to focus on what we are good at – where we add value." The firm manages this by forming joint ventures with big commercial





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architecture practices that carry out the resource-consuming documentation phase needed to construct buildings.

### Mulloway Studio

"We have a love-hate relationship with residential architecture," says Anthony Coupe, voicing a not uncommon view among architects. "The demands of a [house] client can be very difficult to manage commercially – the financial constraints are acute and people are less willing to experiment, but it can be one of the most rewarding things."

Adelaide's Mulloway Studio came into being gradually during the late

1990s, rather than with a sudden flourish. The founding four partners, Coupe and his wife Felicity Sando (both 44) and 38-year-old Jen Smit with husband Steve Loo, 41, had scattered to the winds after their training. Coupe and Sando drove a Cadillac from Los Angeles down to Mexico to work with a sustainability group before the Zapata uprising got in the way. Loo practised in Western Samoa.

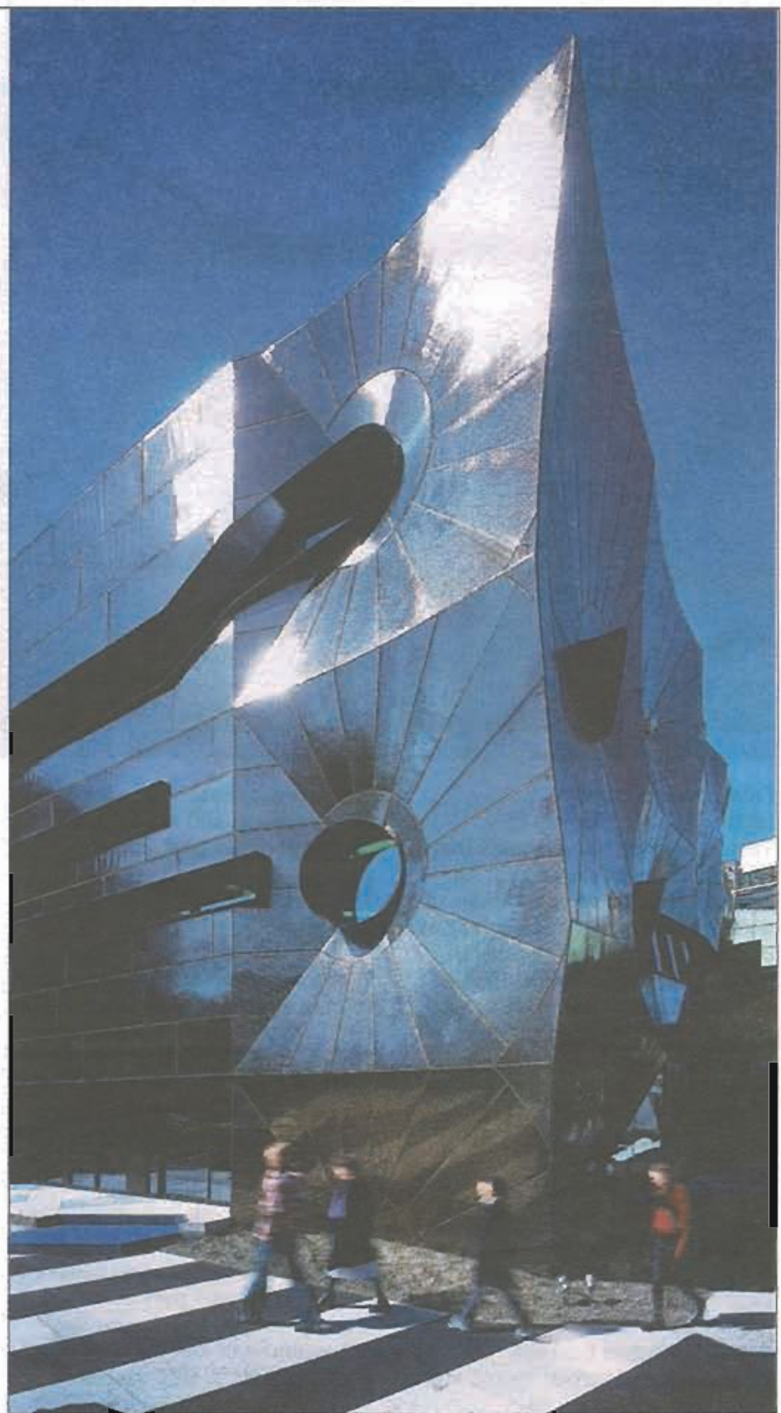
They came back together to form the studio – Coupe keeping it simmering while the others dipped in and out before formalising the arrangement in 1999 to specialise in community and sustainability

projects. Significant projects include the Moana surf club and an interpretation centre within the historic Glenelg Town Hall.

### Terroir

Since the simultaneous opening of offices in Hobart and Sydney in 1998, Terroir has designed at both ends of the project scale. From an architecturally dignified park toilet block to the new Czech national library in Prague, where they made the shortlist in an international architecture competition.

Terroir is Gerard Reinmuth, 37, Scott Balmforth, 36, and Richard



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Left, Watercube Swimming Centre in Beijing by Chris Bosse and PTW architects, and, below, a home rear extension designed by Iredale Pedersen Hook. Photos courtesy LAVA and Iredale Pedersen Hook Architects



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Blythe, 42. All grew up in Tasmania. The name comes from the French word describing the unique environmental qualities of a vineyard, and the particularities of place motivate the architects:

The firm now employs 10 staff in each of its offices, working on projects ranging from the new master plan for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery to the pleated lines of a heritage office building refurbishment in The Rocks, Sydney. It's a long way in a short time from Terroir's first scheme – a little house extension in the hills outside Hobart. Its first big break was Hobart's Peppermint Bay restaurant and gallery complex, built in 2003 for developer Simon Currant. The project won a tourism award and

was voted by fellow architects as one of the top 100 Australian buildings of the past 25 years.

## Iredale Pedersen Hook

It was orang-utans that brought Iredale Pedersen Hook together in 1999. Adrian Iredale, Finn Pedersen (both 38) and Martyn Hook, 37, all graduated from Curtin University in 1991 before heading off to all points of the compass. Pedersen went to work on projects in indigenous communities (still one of the practice's strengths).

Their first commission came from Perth Zoo – part of an ongoing project to rehouse the orang-utans in an environment more suitable to their habits.

Prototype elements of the scheme were tested out on the apes, who began moving around in a more natural way.

"It's been intriguing – you can actually see the benefit to the animal," says Iredale.

It's just one of many different schemes for the 12-strong practice based in Perth and Melbourne. "We try and keep it as diverse as possible," he says. "We don't want to be stereotyped to one kind of architecture." Affordable housing is a sector they've worked on in an attempt to raise the design quality bar: "In Perth, the city is going through rapid and massive growth. It is fast and furious, and part of the dilemma for architects is how to slow the process down so that we are not overwhelmed by the pressure to produce. At the

end of this mining boom cycle, we may be left with one or two great buildings and not a general improvement in the life of the city."

## Chris Bosse

German-born architect Chris Bosse moved to Sydney with his Australian wife in 2002 "because it is a fantastic creative base" – but he's set up so he can work anywhere in the world.

Bosse, 36, is known for his collaboration with big Sydney practice PTW, where his specialist knowledge of geometrical structures in the natural world led to the key concept behind the Watercube swimming centre for the Beijing Olympics.

Now his new wired-world office, LAVA (Laboratory for visionary

architecture) can have meetings for its six employees on Bondi Beach but engage online in major projects globally. It is part of a network of practitioners, 20 in Dubai and 10 in Stuttgart, called PNYG, whose work in Abu Dhabi includes a development 10 times the size of the Watercube, powered by one of the world's largest solar plants. As at Minifie Nixon, a project's documentation is subcontracted to big commercial practices.

"Instead of starting with a single family house renovation and then becoming big, we start with big and international projects," says Bosse. "We keep the upfront design core small to be manageable and stay at the top end of design." The aim is to create "the cathedrals of the new millennium".