



IREDALE PEDERSEN

LEFT TO RIGHT: Adrian Iredale, Finn Pedersen and Martyn Hook

Borrowing a motto from a comedy trio – “We Do Anything, Anytime” – is not standard practice in architecture, but iredale pedersen hook architects (iph) is no ordinary architecture firm. Adding “anywhere” to their mandate, these architects have created an enviable partnership and a varied collection of built works across Australia.

Adrian Iredale, Finn Pedersen and Martyn Hook share many common attributes apart from being architects. Two were born in Britain and they all grew up in Perth, one of the most isolated cities in the world at the time. They studied at Curtin University together, where they maintained a friendly rivalry. But they exhibit a lot of differences too – in personality, interests and temperament – and when they graduated, they all headed off into the wild blue yonder to pursue their own passions.

Adrian went into architecture with an artist’s sensibility, although he didn’t study art at high school, choosing to focus on technical drawing instead. “I was sketching all the time, particularly sketching buildings, and it was a natural progression to go from sketching buildings and drawing buildings to designing them,” he says. “Being able to sketch connected

to me to my artistic side.” His watercolours still inform the firm’s work at conceptual stage. After completing his degree, Adrian undertook post-graduate studies in architecture at the famed international art academy The Stedelschule in Frankfurt, Germany, under luminaries including Sir Peter Cook and the late Enric Miralles.

Finn Pedersen also came to architecture via an interest in art: for five years during high school, Finn participated in a special art program that included classes after school and on Saturdays. When he was considering a career path, Finn followed the advice of a favourite Danish uncle, a structural engineer who specialised in building bridges. “I really loved the tectonics of construction, particularly of large construction objects, but my uncle discouraged me from engineering because I had a romantic view of beautifully engineered bridges,” Finn recalls. “He said there was very little art and aesthetics in engineering, but I could do architecture because it would satisfy both realms.” After university, Finn travelled north to Western Australia’s remote Kimberley region, where he dirtied his hands designing and constructing buildings in rugged conditions.



N HOOK

With offices in Melbourne and Perth, and built works across the country, iredale pedersen hook architects combines diverse skills to create locally responsive buildings.

Words **Rachael Bernstone**



The West Kimberley Regional Prison project with TAG Architects won plaudits worldwide for its sensitive design

“When we started, we thought we were the Beastie Boys, but now we are probably more like The Goodies”

In contrast, Martyn Hook’s father and grandfather had both worked in aircraft factories in Britain, and there were architects in the family’s social circle, so design and building were highly influential during his formative years. “Whether there was a blinding moment where I knew I wanted to be an architect, I’m not exactly sure: in year 11, I wanted to be a marine biologist,” Martyn laughs. “I kind of landed in architecture – not necessarily by design – it was something that emerged in the final year of high school, the idea of being able to push these two interests of design and building together. When I was in first year, I was actually surprised that I enjoyed architecture so much.” Once he’d finished his undergraduate degree, Martyn returned to England to complete a Master of Science in Architectural Design at the Bartlett School at University College, London.

The trio regrouped and established iph in 1999 with offices in Melbourne and Perth and, like a lot of young people, they had tickets on themselves in those early years. “When we started, we thought we were the Beastie Boys, but now we are probably more like *The Goodies*,” Martyn laughs. “There’s the guy in the tweed (Adrian), the guy with the wacky hair (Finn) and me, the guy in the suit. There are various ways that we play that up, because it was a nice narrative when the practice began, but these days it’s far more complex in the way in which the complementary skills actually begin to interface.”

If *The Goodies* stereotypically identified themselves as working class, middle class and upper class, a cursory characterisation of iph’s principals might be dreamer, doer and thinker. Or surfer, bushman and city-dweller. But over time, their roles have ↗

shifted and morphed as their individual and collective skills have evolved, and they've gained more crossover in their experiences so that it's impossible to easily pigeonhole them now after 15 years of joint practice.

"Unlike other triptych practices – where there's the guy who does the accounts, the guy who can talk, and the designer – we don't do that," Martyn says. "It used to frustrate people that they didn't know which iph director they were going to get, depending on who picked up the ball. Were you going to get the 'straight' one, the wacky one or the sensible one? I think that continues to click through the work."

Their output so far certainly suggests that they are interested in exploring and developing certain themes and types – remote buildings, aboriginal projects, beach houses – but the practice can equally turn its attention to hospitality projects, civic buildings or their most recent challenge – Perth's new public realm, Yagan Square.

Despite their different approaches and the fact they live in different cities on opposite sides of the country, as well as Martyn's full-time role in academia, they



agree there is an underlying quality that underpins the practice. When interviewing Adrian and Finn together in Perth, before speaking with Martyn later at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, all three asserted that the foundation of their practice is "mutual respect".

"From day one we respected each other as designers," Martyn says.

"At the early stages of a project, it's very dynamic. Ideas are flicked around among all three of us and at that stage the field of ideas is very open," Finn says. "Then there comes a point to lock down, to meet the milestones.

"That's when we decide which director will take charge of the project," Adrian adds.

"But there is still a horizontal strata within the design process in terms of ownership and ideas," Finn says.

Martyn compares their method to a bicycle peloton in a race such as the Tour de France. "There will be a point in time [in the early part of a project]

"So many of our projects end up with a particular quality of a twisted roof or curved roof, but each one finds its logic through different circumstances"

when we know that one of us really wants that project," he explains. "A good example was our competition entry for the Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club.

"We kicked around a series of ideas and it became obvious that Adrian wanted to lead," Martyn recalls. "It's almost as if a mutual decision is made, then we fall into a trajectory whereby we follow and pursue that agenda, and speculate along the way as to how it might begin to shape or evolve as a project."

The firm has explored the use of steel across many of its projects, and the material appears equally at home in holiday houses in bush settings (see Nannup House in *Steel Profile* 119) or at a prison in the desert (West Kimberley Regional Prison in *Steel Profile* 116).

"So many of our projects end up with a particular quality of a twisted roof or curved roof, but each one finds its logic through different circumstances," Adrian says. "For example, in Perth suburbia we've produced a range of twisted and folded roofs, such

as the Dunedin Street and Swan Street Houses, which aim to find a way to integrate into an old Federation-style building. The pitched hip valley roof is used as a catalyst to find a new form of space, where the space is reflective of the folding roof, so the two work together.

“The beauty of steel is that it enables us to achieve complex experience and form,” he continues.

“The trick is to bend the right bit,” Finn laughs. “If you have a curved wall in plan in a steel-framed building, it is of course more difficult to achieve than a straight wall so becomes less economical, but if you can curve steel by bending or folding a roof or column it’s a low-cost thing to do and it adds delight, and expresses the capacity of steel.”

Their ongoing curiosity about materials, detailing, design and the nature of practice – and the inner workings of their own practice, specifically – led all three to complete further studies by invitation under

Leon Van Schaik at RMIT in 2008: Martyn attained a PhD while Finn and Adrian both earned Masters of Architecture qualifications.

Running a dual-city practice has always necessitated a lot of plane travel, although the introduction of smartphones made communication much easier: the partners talk to and email each every day. “Those advances in communication technologies mean that Perth is not so isolated anymore. You don’t have to make such an effort to keep in contact. Also, the iPhone® is a good tool for collaborating, and we use the time on planes to sketch and draw,” Adrian says.

Breaking down that isolation means that iph’s work has begun to attract the attention of a broader audience in recent years: the West Kimberley Regional Prison (completed in association with TAG Architects) won several Australian Institute of Architects National awards in 2013, including a Public Architecture Award, and garnered international acclaim for its humanist approach.

At the 2015 WAF awards in Singapore, the firm’s Walumba Elder Centre at Warmun in WA [see *Steel Profile* 121] won the Health category award, adding to a slew of gongs collected in Australia.

Naturally, as the practice has grown and matured, the partners have shed some of the friendly student rivalry that initially brought them together, and of course their boyish enthusiasm has mellowed with age and experience. But their shared curiosity about the world – and underlying respect for different viewpoints – continues to shape and define their work.

As a result, every project – whether it’s a new courthouse in Kununurra, a beach house down south, or a major civic square in the heart of Perth – is unique and profoundly responsive to its brief, site, climate and end-users. Like *The Goodies* – three comics who played up their individual differences to create a convincing collective entity – the iph partnership thrives on diversity. **SP**



OPPOSITE, TOP: At the Roeburne Children and Family Centre, delicate bent steel columns give the building a playful appearance

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: The Swan Street House (left) features an angular two-storey addition, while the Reynolds House (right) boasts softer curves: both are wrapped in COLORBOND® steel

THIS PAGE, LEFT: The Walumba Aged Care Centre at Warmun won multiple awards, in Australia and overseas

BELOW LEFT: The Dunedin Street House addition is an early example of a folding steel roof

BELOW RIGHT: The steel roof of the Kununurra Courthouse responds to folding ranges visible from the town centre

