

COULD WE BE ON THE CUSP OF AN ENLIGHTENED, **GOLDEN AGE OF ARCHITECTURE** AND DESIGN – ONE THAT'S GOLDEN BECAUSE IT'S **GREEN**? CHRIS LARSEN SPOKE TO AN **ARCHITECT ON THE EDGE**.

Photography: Larry Irvin



Designing outside the

COMFORT ZONE

Misho is the architect behind Sydney's next zoo. He's a rebel with claws. And he wants to put the humanity back into architecture and design.

He admits he likes to push his clients out of their 'comfort zone'. Why? He says it gets better results because they're better able to consider solutions they would not normally have regarded.

Personal philosophies aside, I just thought it was nice to meet an architect who didn't wear a bow-tie.

The latest high-profile development

for Misho (and yes, it is just 'Misho') is the Australia's Animal World project, in conjunction with RIHS Architects.

Australia's Animal World will be a \$29 million, 7000 sq m fauna park on the Darling Harbour site of the existing Sydney Aquarium.

It is a fitting project for a man who cares a lot about environmentally friendly design, although it's hard to label him a 'greenie'.

When it comes to materials he's more of a miser and that, by itself, shows green credentials.

It's hard to be green

Misho is said to have been the first person in Australia to achieve simultaneous degrees in both architecture and interior design. That grants him a unique perspective on the design process for commercial buildings.

According to Misho there are three elements to good design – it has to look good, it has to be functional and it has to be environmentally friendly.

The environmental benchmark is the latest to be added to the architectural sphere – both internally and externally.

But sometimes that point can be a hard sell to developers. After all, what good is an environmentally friendly building if it doesn't pay? And vice versa.

"It's hard to get (some) developers to be green," Misho says, adding that in trying to convince developers of the benefits "I don't think it's going to be an overnight scenario."

"They will become aware of the long-term running costs of buildings. It will only come about through public education that developers will change their minds.

"(The era from) now until 2010 will be seen as a huge (impact) on how to design for the environment and building costs."

For Misho, being a green designer means lengthening the practical lifespan of a building. It's about recycling building materials, and exploring new ones.

Some of his work has been memorable. It has included work on the interior for Bambu restaurant at Sydney's Circular Quay.

There, he and Horst Kiechle used a towering white wave-like structure ▶

"The fundamental for me is to get the confidence of the client so I can challenge their notion of what they're used to, to push them out of their realm."

comprising 4500 separate pieces of reinforced cardboard.

"We shouldn't be a throw-away society in our building," Misho says. "We're running out of materials.

"If a building goes up, it should stay up, so you're not wasting materials in repairing it."

He says that, over time, it is the designers' role to convince developers to spend more money early in the project, in order to produce a greener and cheaper building in the long run.

"You can say to a client that (by) spending the extra 10 percent on a building now you can save millions per year.

"The bigger companies can see the long-term advantages. (Other) developers are going to be harder to convince."

Misho says the concept of buildings with short life spans should be discouraged, and that poor construction is "wasteful of materials" when it breaks and has to be repaired or replaced.

He talks to clients about long-term costs – the lowest bidder for construction is not always the best in the longer term life span of the building.

Sometimes it's a choice of spending an extra 10 percent now, or 300 percent in 20 years time.

The interior design of a building also adds a new consideration to the process.

Misho says we are heading for a scenario where buildings will be designed to stand up for 100 years, but their internals will be replaced a lot more frequently. The lifecycles of buildings are growing.

"Because everyone lives with an interior for a longer period of time ... where people are actually working often becomes something based on upgrades of five to seven years," Misho says.

As it happens, that period of time coincides with the average term of office leases.

"That's where I think some of the biggest wastage occurs," he says. "We need to think more cleverly about how we remove materials in internal spaces."

Pushing clients

Misho admits that he likes shifting perceptions of people, including those he calls 'client'.

"The client is the fundamental kingpin for good design," Misho says.

"The fundamental for me is to get the confidence of the client so I can challenge their notion of what they're used to, to push them out of their realm.

"So often a developer or building owner will see an image that will make money, but not know why it will make money.

"I never see a client as a battle – it's a challenge."

The politics of ego

When asked if he thought architects clung to past projects too much, Misho said: "I find that intolerable in our industry." They should learn to let go, he says.

"To try to hang onto every skerrick of the past is a bit of a joke.

"We get a bit too precious about design. Every architect has an ego. If they say they don't, then they're lying."

But architects must also face the divide between internal and external design. As one who does both, Misho advocates a truce between the two factions.

"Often the two (factions) don't talk, and protect their domains," he says. "Because a building's façade is so important to an architect, it's like an expression of their personality.

"You've got to try to change that whole culture that exists in organisations."

Buck Rogers architecture

Misho points out that we've been using concrete in one form or another for 3000 years.

"Fashion changes. Plans change. But look at the actual buildings and they haven't changed one iota," Misho says.

"The structure of the buildings hasn't changed. For some reason we can't shift out of that gear."

So where is the future of design to be found? Look no further than your local cinema.

"Look at sci-fi movies. That's often where change actually comes from." 