

## LUBETKIN PRIZE



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1 & 2. Grimshaw's Mark Middleton (left) and Keith Brewis (right) after bagging the Lubetkin Prize

3. The award-winning Southern Cross Station in Melbourne



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# STAR TURN FOR SOUTHERN CROSS

By Max Thompson

Last Friday (22 June) Grimshaw Architects won the 2007 Lubetkin Prize for its Southern Cross Station in Melbourne, Australia. Grimshaw partners Mark Middleton and Keith Brewis talked to the AJ moments after collecting the prestigious award.

*Southern Cross Station pays homage to Waterloo International, but to what extent is it evidence of an up-and-coming new Grimshaw generation?*

Mark Middleton: The ownership of the company has changed and Keith and I are now partners. There are a lot of young people in the practice and the project, in terms of the future, is an interesting story.

Keith Brewis: Southern Cross is absolutely a Grimshaw building, but the energy for it has been derived from the next surge of people coming through,

and Nick [Nicholas Grimshaw] is also energised by that.

*The station's wave-like roof is striking but also functional. Can you explain the basics?*

KB: It's difficult to extract diesel fumes, but if you create a dome, they can't move laterally. As the wind speed increases across the roof, the wind goes up the side of the domes and across the Venturi caps, which either allow some air through, or suck it [and the diesel fumes] up.

MM: We have created an out-of-synch landscape, over which the wind goes really, really fast. It's like going through a valley.

*How tough was the project, considering the Spencer Street Station (which preceded Southern Cross) kept operating throughout the three-year build?*

KB: We built a major piece of infrastructure over another major piece of operating infrastructure. To go into that assuming that the construction will be straightforward is to go into it being very, very naive. Leightons [the Australian contractor] completely bought into the design ambition for the project. Their workers loved what they were building and ended up protecting it. Even if it was difficult to build, they wanted to build it. It was an amazing testament to them.

*The scheme was drawn up with Australian firm Daryl Jackson Architects and you have mentioned Leightons. How did the working culture compare with UK firms?*

MM: Part of the Australian psyche is that they really get into something. They supported the building and wanted it to

succeed, which perhaps isn't always the case in England. Something in the Australian mentality meant they were far more optimistic.

KB: All the workers said the station was Melbourne's Opera House, and they wanted to be part of it.

*The project was financed through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Tell us how this worked.*

MM: The competition was won by the Civic Nexus consortium, which was led by ABN Amro and also included Grimshaw and Leightons. It was the first in Australia and, although PPP has got a bad name in the UK, it gave us a good basis for our work there. The design included the naturally ventilated roof and rainwater capturing. All these sustainable things may

have had a capital cost at the beginning, but the running costs for the next 30 years, while Civic Nexus is still involved, will be the payback. They took the longer view and that was visionary.

*Keith, you are based in Melbourne now, but initially was it tough being so far from home?*

KB: In order to craft the building you need to work with the local subcontractors and you can't do that from a distance. On this project we spent as much time in steelyards as we did at our drawing boards.

MM: You can't design something in London and expect the local manufacturing workforce in Melbourne to buy into or to understand what you are doing.

*You worked with engineers Kevin Winwood and David Dexter. How integral was Grimshaw's relationship with the engineers?*

KB: A lot of what we look to design comes out of an engineering-led basis. There were two key pieces of engineering. Firstly there had to be a naturally ventilated roof which involved a lot of testing. A Sydney-based company, AEC, looked at how different gases work at different temperatures. We then adjusted the geometry of the roof. The engineers effectively moulded the form of the building.

MM: Once we got that to work, we moved on to the structural engineering. We needed the greatest degree of onward flexibility with the fewest number of columns touching the ground. We also

wanted the fewest number of construction lifts.

*How much work could be carried out during each shift?*

MM: Each shift was two-and-a-half hours long, with an hour to set up and an hour to set down. It was easy for me as I would be in English time. I'd stay and watch them lift a few bits until four or five in the morning, then go back to bed.

*Will your partnership continue?*

MM: Keith and I have worked together for many years.

KB: We are inextricably linked whether we like it or not. In fact, I've moved 11,000 miles to get away from him but, hey, the bond continues.

MM: Just pour me some water and shut your mouth!