

## london, harris, brisbane, geneva

As regular readers are well aware, the editorial team here at *Mix* has never been afraid of a spot of travel. Whether it means navigating the UK's idiosyncratic rail network, or putting our lives in the hands of low cost airlines whose wardrobe consists entirely of orange, we're always happy to pack a bag and go chase the story.

But there's no way we can even contemplate competing with Mackay + Partners' Serono project team. It's one thing to enjoy a weekly jaunt up or down the country, coupled with the occasional trip into Europe, but commuting into Geneva on a regular basis, over a number of years, is a completely different prospect.

Not that this phases Partner Gavin Harris in any way, shape or form. To start with, Gavin is Australian, therefore little hops into Europe barely register when compared to the 1,000s of miles almost any city-to-city trip in Australia entails. Secondly, he's more than used to travel anyway. 'I grew up in Brisbane,' Gavin confirms. 'I was state educated in Australia. At the age of six my family lived in England for two and half years. We did a lot of travelling due to my father's work; this also enabled us to visit many parts of Europe and America from East to West.'

'Then at the beginning of high school we came over here again, living in Edinburgh for a year, again the family did many trips through France, Italy and then from Florida up to New York – which was all great experience, seeing and learning different cultures.'

'We then returned to Australia, and I went to university at QUT in Queensland and studied interior design. I was always interested in drawings and films – they were a big inspiration, Star Wars and the likes. That is how I started sculpting. I originally went for two courses before starting university – as well as doing the interior



Serono image courtesy of Murphy/Jahn

profile



quickly was that it was quite simple – you took the dollar sign away and put in a pound sign in its place!

'I came to understand the main processes and that a few of the words and terminologies are different. Ken was a very big help with all this.'

Happily settled into London, Gavin continued to work on a number of diverse projects, ranging from hotels to offices, and from Delhi through to the South Bank – London's South Bank that is, not Brisbane's. The practice then went through a number of changes, and, as we all know, re-emerged as Mackay + Partners, where the aforementioned Serono project in Geneva came to light. 'We've been working on Serono now for two years,' Gavin tells us. 'At the same time we have re-developed this office, we have been working on the Clerkenwell Workshops and also completed a number of apartments at the Barbican.'

We ask Gavin to tell us a little more about the fantastic Horizon Serono project. 'The client was given our name from a supplier in Geneva. The architecture was already in place and it was well documented and was already out of the ground. They wanted a different feel for the interiors and had seen our work, style, our use of colour and detail. We were requested to develop schemes for three areas – the Restaurant, the CEO area and a general office floor. So we presented a number of times to the CEO and project team and were offered the project. I remember we presented to them and afterwards asked whether we should stay close or head back to London. They suggested we stay close – which we guessed was a good sign.'

'We're over in Geneva every two weeks for a few days at a time. It's an amazing project, with six interlocking buildings, which are a

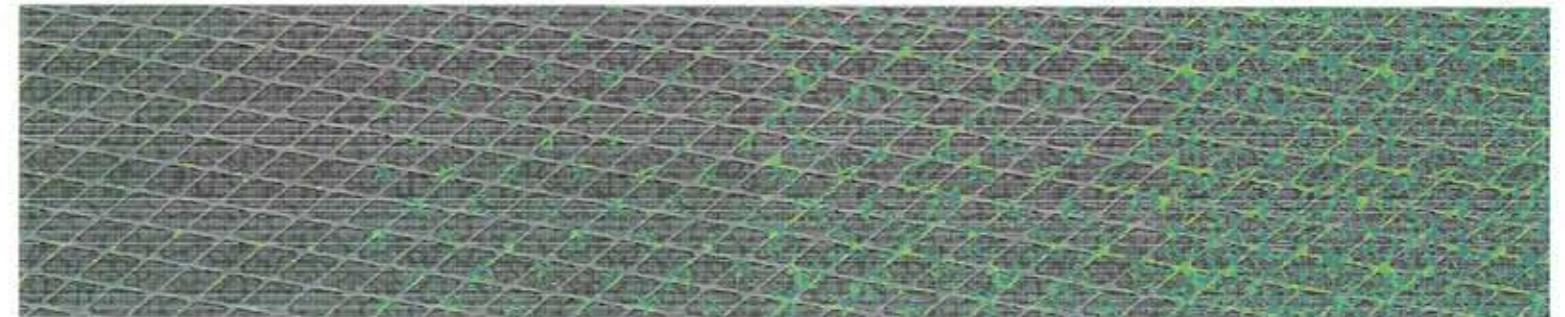
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mixture of three historical buildings and three new build. We are due to complete in August/September.'

As we touched upon a little earlier, Gavin is a multi-tasking kind of guy, who also has a talent for product design. 'I've recently designed the White Collection for Allgood – which includes door levers, door pulls, cupboard-handles, door stops, coat hooks and coat stands, so it is a complete collection. The doorstops are called Stop It! and are a sub-range which I designed back in Australia. It's very exciting to see elements like these become product for specification by other designers.'

Gavin shows us a number of his product designs, including laminate designs for the Formica Design-a-Laminate Competition that he has developed in conjunction with his wife (and *Mix* regular) Henrietta Reed, and cool, contemporary carpet designs.

Gavin has to prepare for yet another trip – this time to Milan for the fair – so we wrap things up, but not before a brief chat about *Star Wars*. For what it's worth Gavin, we totally agree – the prequels were rubbish and didn't make a lot of sense ●



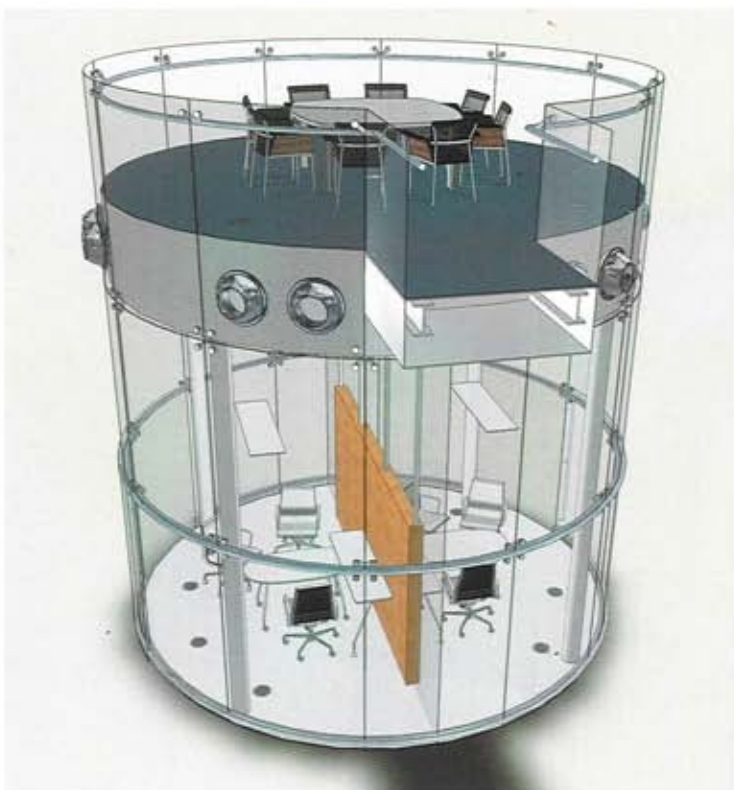
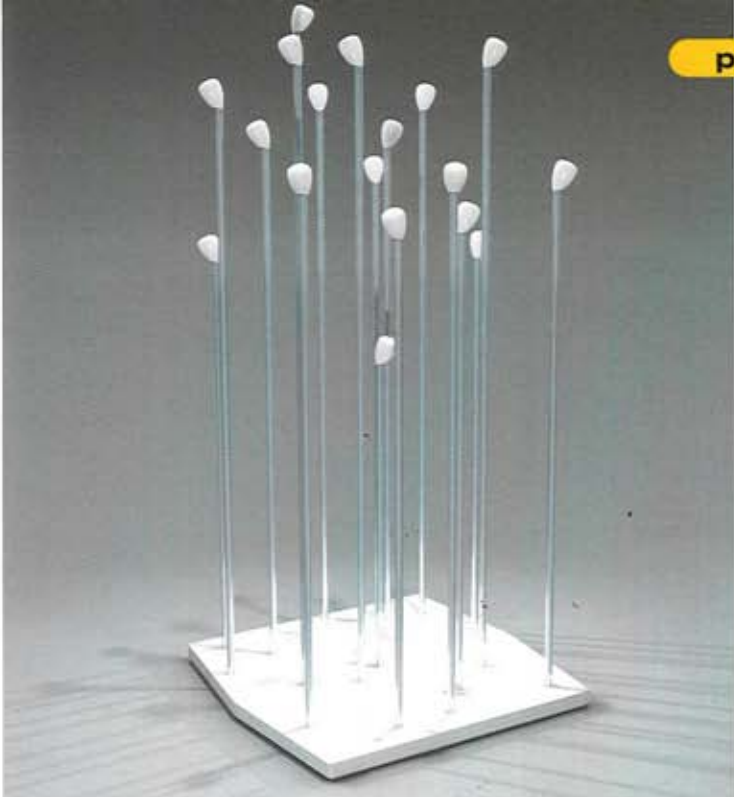
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\*\*\* design course I was offered an arts degree, studying animation and sculpting. That's something from childhood that has always stayed with me – and came back into my career a little later.

'As I said, I opted for the design course. I was always interested in architecture but didn't have the grades, so came across a new course in interiors within the architectural school. I thought it would suit me because of the level of detail involved.

'When I completed the course I found work in Brisbane with a company called Indesign DDP – an architect's group who had just started an interior division. So myself and a counterpart oversaw the department with the assistance of the MD.

'It was a good time. Interior design was growing in Brisbane and being seen for the first time as professional. We had some large commercial projects – the first project I did was worth Aus \$1 million, which doesn't sound a lot over here but was very big for Brisbane at the time.'

Gavin then suffered at the hands of the economic climate, and with work becoming increasingly hard to come by, was made redundant. Fortunately he soon found a position with a large Australian practice called Bligh Voller Neil, where he worked on an interior fit out for PriceWaterhouse. With the market still depressed however, six months later Gavin again found himself out of work. 'I wasn't very impressed with the industry at that point,' he smiles.

With disillusionment still running close to the surface, Gavin then decided on a change of tack. 'I came across a company called the Joffe Group. Their background was design and construction of museum displays, exhibitions and theme parks. This tied in to the sculpting and model making work I spoke of earlier and so I was offered a job after a two-hour meeting with David Joffe – we had a mutual interest in dinosaurs. They had a major project called Gondwanaland – which was built in the redevelopment of the South Bank in Brisbane after the World Expo '88. It was a massive rock structure that was covered with netting with an internal aviary. It combined live animals with robotic animals and sound systems. I was the project designer and worked with architects Guymer Bailey. It was amazing, we had taxidermists, fibreglass makers, rock manufacturers, casters – you name it. For the last six months we were working two shifts, 18 hours a day – it was full on. We even had an on-site zoologist.'

Having avoided the reptiles but not the after-effects of massive over-budgeting, Gavin moved on, sculpting and model making dinosaurs for a museum in Canberra. After a stint with a company called Exhibition Design, he joined an Adelaide practice that was opening a new office in Brisbane called Woods Bagot. 'I was there for seven years, doing numerous fit-outs,' Gavin recalls. 'We did commercial fit outs, hotels, restaurants, retail, and through all this I also did product design. This wasn't part of the core business, but it added interest to the projects for me.

'Then I thought it might be time to go overseas – this was 2001. I knew Ken (Mackay) through Tracey Wiles, who I knew from Brisbane. I had met Ken a couple of times over here while I was working with Qantas. So I decided to ask him for a job – fronted up with my portfolio and was offered a job. My first project was Deloitte Consulting, which I worked on for the next two years and delivered, hopefully, with some success.'

We ask Gavin if there wasn't just a little trepidation at the prospect of crossing the globe and relocating in London. 'There was – although English speaking made it easy. I was a little concerned about understanding process and value. My role back in Australia was as a Senior Associate, overseeing the interior design studio, so I understood values of projects and budgets. What I found out very