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Asymptote & Drome  
Lacoste + Stevenson  
Neil & Idle  
William Lim  
Michael Viney  
Brasilia  
William Smart  
Daniel Libeskind

## Reflections on the Virtual

Redefining traditional notions of 'unbuilt' work,  
extending the parameters of navigable space,  
venturing into the virtual world of  
architecture in cyberspace...



Architectural Review Australia 074



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# Industrial Diversion.



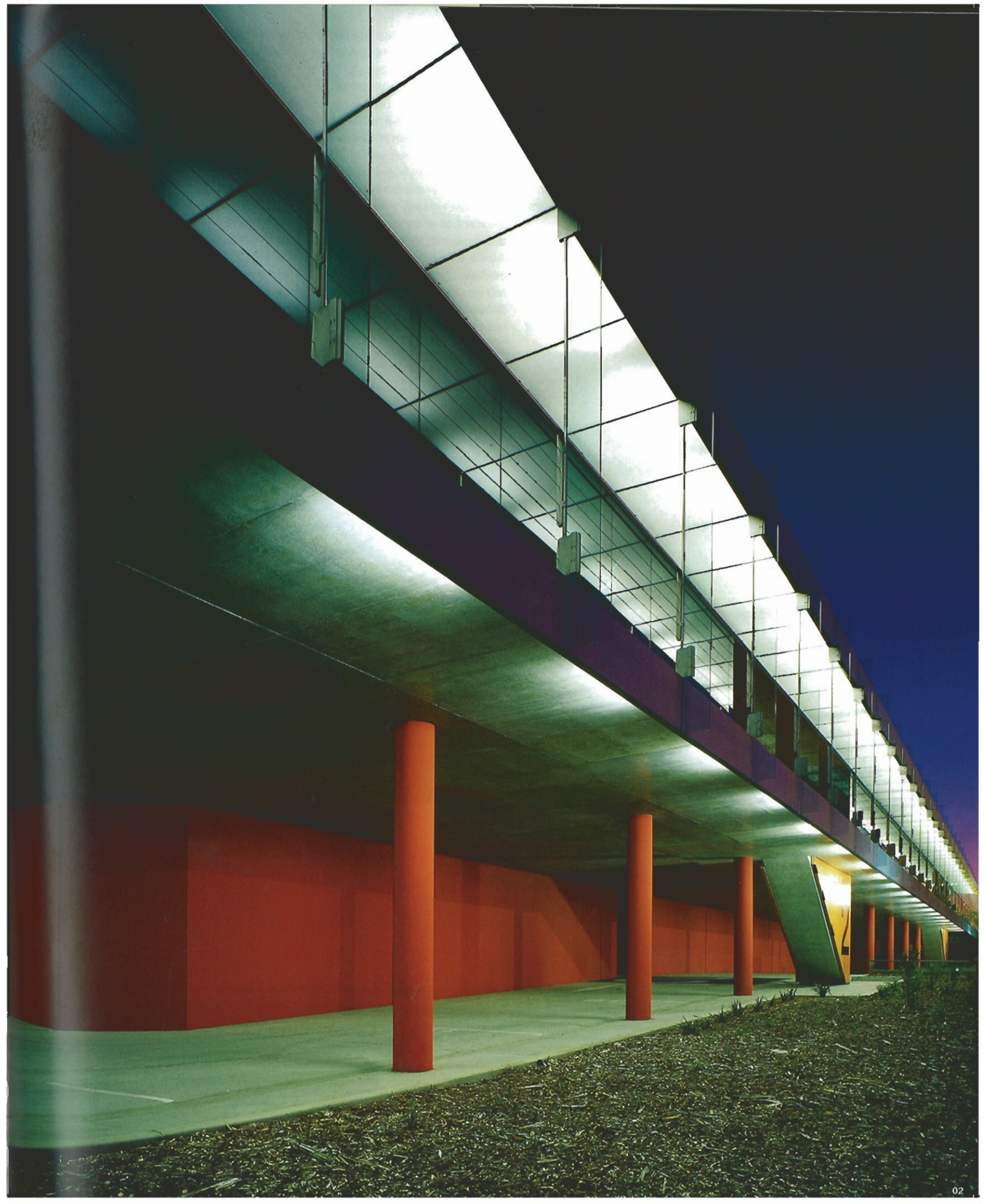
01  
What began as a speculative warehouse commission, has transpired into a glowing structure that realises the potential of the commercial type.

062

**Port Botany Industrial Estate.** Matraville NSW  
**Lacoste+Stevenson.** Architects

**Gerard Reinmuth.** Review  
**Brett Boardman.** Photography

01 Perspective view along the 100-metre glass facade of the Military Rd elevation  
02 The Bunnerong Rd elevation.



■ **Sydney's unique topography offers numerous alternative paths** through the city – a ridge route, a coastal route, or traversing the harbour. Travel within Sydney takes the form of alternate 'processional' routes that give form to each day or event. For instance, grabbing someone off a plane and heading over the Harbour Bridge, roof down, wind in the hair, night-lights, is a great introduction to the city and its geography. However, I have to admit that my 'architectural' colleagues have recently had to endure a far less glamorous introduction to Sydney, chauffeured home from the airport via a detour along Bunnerong Road – an industrial artery heading south toward Botany Bay.

■ **Why?** (and I know you're asking). The answer is found in Lacoste + Stevenson's recently completed warehouse project in the industrial area at Military Road, Matraville. On approach at twilight, this vast complex announces its presence via a massive horizontal band of light glowing on the horizon. This unplanned, yet exceptional response to such a relatively non-descript landscape suggests a modern temple, marking a change both in the topography and road direction as it heads further south. Moving closer, the true scale of the building becomes apparent, a single, 100m-long glass facade turning the corner to run for another 80m before terminating at the building entry. The considerable size of this large, blunt object has

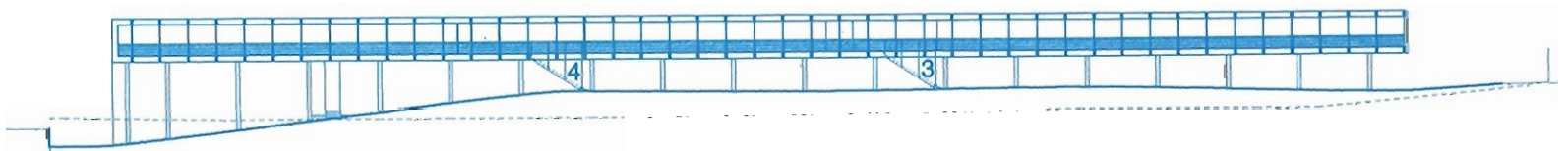
been amplified by a red paint finish, resulting in an advancing concrete hulk upon which brightly-coloured graphic 'wedges' further amplify the scale.

■ This is somewhat unexpected from a Sydney practice – remember, this is the city where one does not err from the 24 shades of white in the Dulux 'fandek'. Such a distinctive response reveals the unique genealogy of the practice. Lacoste + Stevenson formed as a result of Thierry Lacoste's arrival in Australia in 1997 – a long discussed move from France to enjoy some time living in his wife's country of birth. Having made this decision to emigrate, Lacoste contacted David Stevenson, an old friend, met in the Sydney practice of Schwager Brooks James some ten years earlier. The two had remained in contact over the years, with David staying with Thierry in Paris while enjoying a short stint in the office of Jean Nouvel. The decision to open a practice was made immediately.

■ Lacoste had experienced the rigours of new practice before, having operated in France for some seven years as Lacoste Robain, completing a number of well-executed projects, the most notable of which is the award-winning National Overseas Archives Centre in Aix-en-Provence. The partnership dissolved in 1996 when Lacoste formed a new alliance with Vincent Hubert. Despite the move to Australia, Lacoste has strategically maintained links with his French projects in the form of Lacoste



03



Bunnerong Rd elevation

064

03 Night light exaggerates the structure's bold palette and reinforces the building's presence from the street

Stevenson Hubert – maintaining an inroad to the French competition system open to European Union nationals only. The practice has been short-listed in three invited competitions, including the new restaurant for the Centre Pompidou. Another French project – a new toy factory in the Jura – was won in competition and is currently in the design phase.

■ A pleasant side-effect of Sydney's robust economy and the accompanying plethora of good design opportunities is that younger practices often receive their 'first break' courtesy of more established firms. Lacoste + Stevenson is the latest practice to make the most of such generosity – in this case via Brian Zulaikha and Tim Greer, who were approached in 1997 for the project but were unavailable due to other commitments. Also, it must be said that, for a practice like Tonkin Zulaikha Greer, the prospect of a speculative warehouse in Sydney's south isn't necessarily a 'dream commission'. Lacoste + Stevenson was promptly appointed and designed the complex over the next few months, until the commission stalled in mid 1998 due to financial reasons. When David Stevenson assisted the client by introducing another financier to the development in 1999, the project recommenced.

■ The site had been purchased along with an accompanying sketch that suggested a development potential of 5800 sq.m. However, for the project to 'stack up', the

developer required 7000 sq.m of warehouse and office space. Some '20 or so' design options later, the final diagram emerged, eschewing the generally favoured 'courtyard' plan for these buildings – resulting in a major carpark and turning circle at the street. Instead, a perimeter block model was designed with offices facing the main road while all warehouse functions are focused around an internal courtyard. This more 'urbane' solution also serves to eliminate much of the anticipated industrial noise at the street, allowing the architects to dispense with a 5m high sound wall that usually ensures an internalised plan and a blank street frontage. This model has now become the recommended strategy by Randwick Council for similar new developments in the area.

■ It is difficult to draw the architects into a discussion of their architectural position. Both partners maintain that pragmatic concerns drove the final design, with the design development and documentation process focused on the need to draw as much impact as possible from the basic parti. While, in some ways, this recalls Denton Corker Marshall's design process – where development criteria result in a ruthlessly efficient diagram, elaborated upon via the now-familiar dots, sticks, blades, and so on – DCM's town planning focus and urban mission is absent in Lacoste + Stevenson's approach.

■ To ensure a level of impenetrability perhaps, the two will not even be drawn on their



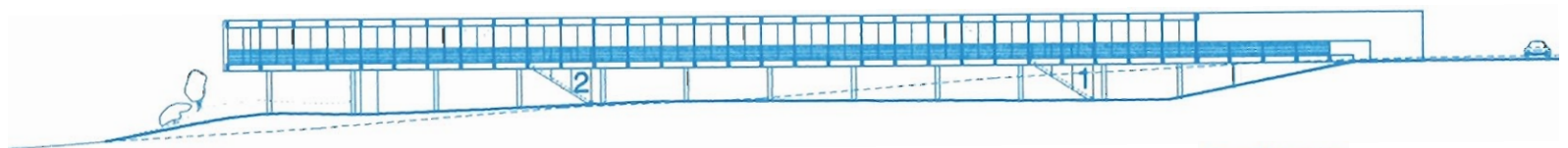
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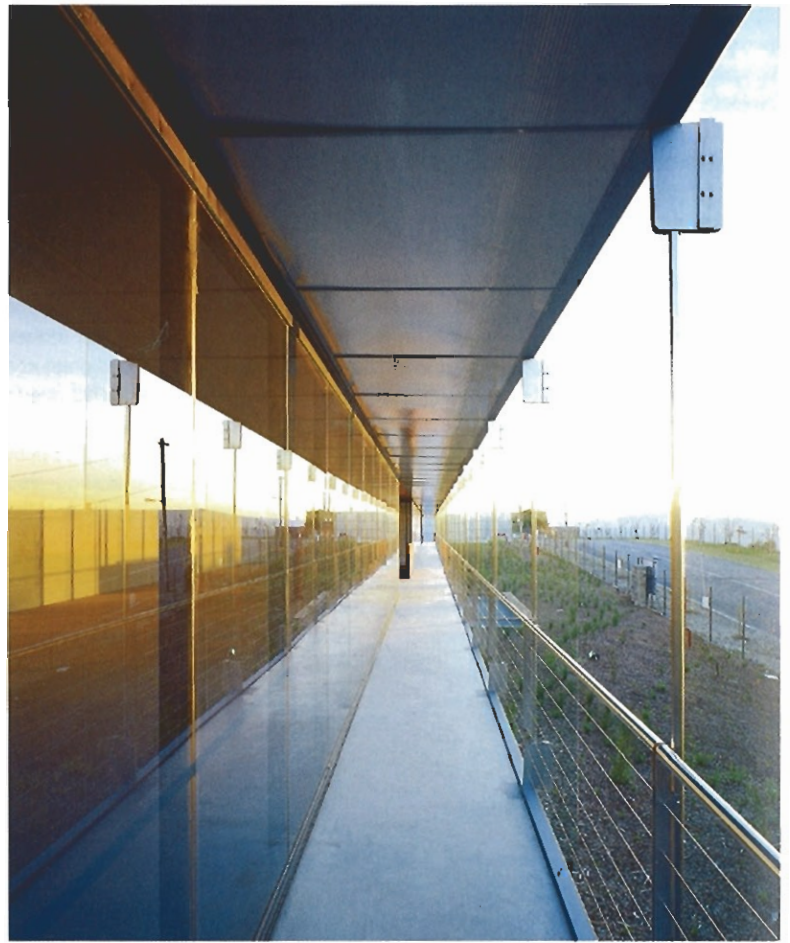
Military Rd elevation

04 Graphic signage treatment heralds a departure from the industrial norm and exaggerates the scale of the building.

05 & 06 Stair 'wedges' punctuating the length of the two street elevations are also signalled by bold graphics.



07



08



09

This level of flexibility and latitude is most unusual in the Sydney context, where product and detail fetishism reigns supreme. In this case, the 'belt and braces' approach befits an environment where trucks hurl in and out of loading bays, and the primary experience of the building is from a car.

# 066

07 A stair 'wedge' leads to the perimeter offices.

08 The simplicity of this built form, though at times crude, results in moments of softness -- here the view down the length of glassed office fronts.

09 The vibrant face of rear courtyard/warehouse entrances

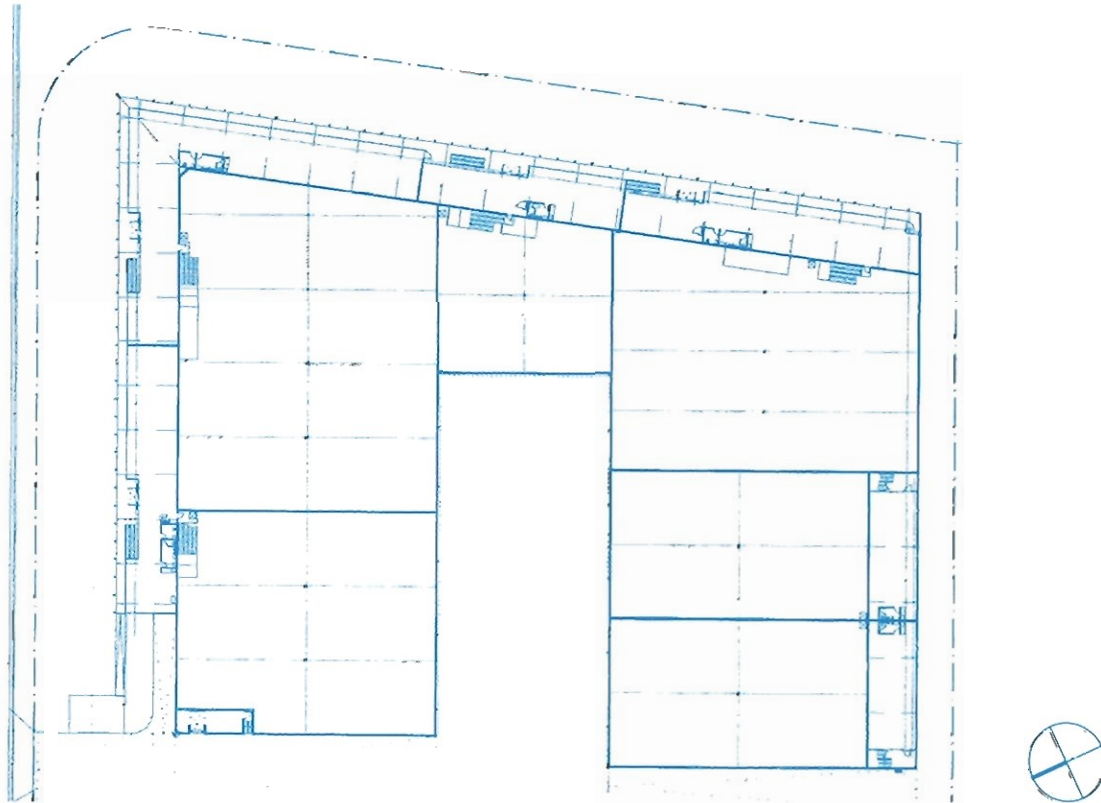
favourite architects. Despite this, some key references are certainly evident. The direct analysis and diagramming skills found in the work of Koolhaas, MVRDV and other Dutch practices cannot be ignored, while the ruthless minimalism of Sejima's Pachinko parlours – also designed for maximum effect at night – is present in the work. Moving in from these fine precedents to the detail, the constraints of tight development criteria are evident. As in many of Koolhaas' earlier commercial projects, the quality of construction is fairly crude, the detailing experimental, and not always successful. In particular, the structural glass fins designed to support the handrails (to ensure a completely horizontal read) has been reduced to a decorative appliqué in the drive to save costs. Another detail – the timber edge-strip to the coloured stair 'wedges' – sits incongruously in the tough, commercial palette.

■ That Lacoste + Stevenson has let these issues pass indicates a level of maturity in their understanding of the commercial parameters that accompany such projects. This is not to say that the practice 'let things pass', but rather that a level of prioritising was required, given the tight constraints of time and budget, and unique complications such as the subcontractor for the glass fins – who also happened to be the client. Unlike the more aggressive approach to builders that is adopted by some

design practices, David Stevenson's 'life is too short' mandate ensures that problems are addressed in a collaborative, non-adversarial way where possible. Stevenson maintains that the builder 'did a good job without realising what they were building until the end!' This level of flexibility and latitude is most unusual in the Sydney context, where product and detail fetishism reigns supreme. In this case, the 'belt and braces' approach befits an environment where trucks hurl in and out of loading bays, and the primary experience of the building is from a car, speeding past.

■ This robust project heralds a welcome new addition to Sydney's architectural milieu. Assuming Lacoste + Stevenson continues to build on themes established in this work, the practice may offer a refreshing alternative to Sydney's 'white knights'. In particular, a key aspect to the project's success – an 'unromantic' commercial brief – may lead to further commissions of this type, ensuring an investigation freed from the pressure to become involved in the apartment glut. And besides, these industrial projects provide an excellent vehicle for the demonstration of the necessity of architecture – and its potential to enrich even the most prosaic environments.

**Gerard Reinmuth is the Sydney-based partner of Reinmuth Blythe Balmforth TERROIR and tutors design in the B.Arch degree at the University of Sydney.**



First Floor Plan

■ **Project Summary** Port Botany Industrial Estate ■ **Principal architects** Thierry Lacoste, David Stevenson ■ **Project team** Thierry Lacoste, David Stevenson ■ **Project manager** Coffey Projects ■ **Engineer** van der Meer Bonser ■ **Electrical** Vos Group ■ **Hydraulic** Thomson Kane ■ **Landscape** Jane Irwin ■ **Builder** St. Hilliers ■ **Size** 6000 sq.m. warehouse; 1200 sq.m. office space ■ **Time to complete** 10 months ■ **Council** Randwick City ■ **Client** CIBD Prestige Property Holdings ■ **External materials** ■ **Walls** Tim-up concrete panels ■ **Roof** BHP Trimdeck Hi-ten, Colorbond in 'Heritage Red' ■ **Guttering** Custom-made, Colorbond in 'Heritage Red' ■ **Paint** Granosite Grano Impact in "Rolana" (smooth) texture (colour: 'Savage') ■ **Windows** Capral Series 400 Narrowline ■ **Doors** Thomson roller shutters ■ **Glazing** 'Hunter Flushglaze Framing System' from Aluminium Specialities ■ **Interior materials** ■ **Ceiling** 'Pebbled Climaplus' from USC Interiors ■ **Internal wall partitions** Plasterboard ■ **Paint** Dulux 'Stowe White' ■ **Bathroom fixtures** Caroma ■ **Hardware** Boyd ■ **Signage** Black signwriting paint, designed by Lacoste + Stevenson