

Beyond the construction

No substitute for teamwork in building game

A unusual approach and business structure are paying dividends for this Australian-owned commercial contractor.

When new buildings combine creative architecture with technical detail and fine craftsmanship, they stand out for all the right reasons.

Kane Constructions, a privately owned commercial contractor, is firmly focused on such projects. It's an approach that has propelled the business from humble beginnings into a major and respected operator.

Joint managing director Richard Frisina says: "Our business was founded in Melbourne in 1973.

"We expanded in Victoria, then into NSW, Queensland and most recently the Australian Capital Territory.

"Today we deliver a diverse range of projects ranging from \$1 million up to \$200 million across all market sectors.

"In 2015, we established a new business unit that we have branded Arete Australia. Focusing primarily on fit-out, Arete allows us to further service our existing clients."

Arete has also opened the doors to new clients and introduced new staff, suppliers and subcontractors who bring with them new but complementary skill sets, Frisina says.

"While they are operating in a different space, there has been a very healthy level of cross-pollination which has benefited staff and clients."

During the past decade, the business has experienced steady, consistent and profitable growth, with revenue for this financial year forecast to exceed \$750 million. Employee numbers total more than 380 staff among the four offices.

Joint managing director Tristan Forster says: "We are very focused on the integration of our new employees and the development and empowerment of our staff.

"New starters are placed in established teams where they learn 'the Kane way', the bedrock of our company culture.

"The majority of our senior managers and leaders commenced with Kane as graduates."

A strong focus on a team approach is not only evident at a project delivery level – it permeates all areas of the business.

This year sees the culmination of an internal succession plan that was put in train in 2011 by chairman Jonathan Forster and former managing director Tony Isaacson.

The unusual succession model has enabled the transfer of ownership and control of what is now a large company to long-term Kane employees.

Frisina says: "The process has been seamless. The core of the next-generation directors have worked in the business for over 15 years and we



Kane Construction won the Master Builders Australia 2017 National Commercial/Industrial Construction Award \$50 million-\$100 million for the Arts West Redevelopment at the University of Melbourne. Joint managing directors Tristan Forster (left) and Richard Frisina. PHOTO: (MAIN): JOHN GOLLINGS

are a tight cohort. "Furthermore, in fulfilling the role of joint managing directors, Tristan and I are a team within a team," says Frisina.

Forster adds: "There is no greater demonstration of the Kane culture than the commitment by the outgoing directors to promote internal succession. We are immensely respectful of this."

Culture, people and a team approach are at the forefront of the business, evidenced by the flat management structure that has been in place at Kane since operations commenced more than 40 years ago.

The directors of the business are actively involved in all projects. Clients can pick up the phone and deal directly with an owner of the business, should the need arise.

"We have a company tagline: 'Our success is

recognised in the way we achieve, as much as what we achieve,'" says Forster. "This reflects the collaborative approach we adopt and emphasises that each project is a journey, and it's got to be an enjoyable one for all parties."

Collaboration and a focus on both the journey and the outcome have seen Kane secure repeat business with a number of important clients, including the University of Melbourne, the Royal Automobile Club of Australia, Epworth Healthcare, Techne Developments and the Geelong Football Club, as well as commonwealth, state and local government.

Frisina says this approach offers significant advantages internally.

"A key element enabling our flat management structure is the empowerment of our teams," he says.

"There is a very high level of autonomy and a strong sense of ownership.

"It's a team effort and our staff love that they can walk into a director's office and ask a question and get an immediate response."

With their internal succession complete, the new-generation directors at the helm and a strong focus on people and teamwork, Kane is well positioned for continued success.

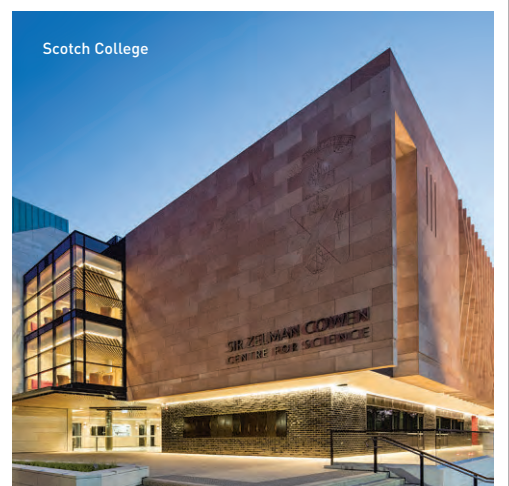
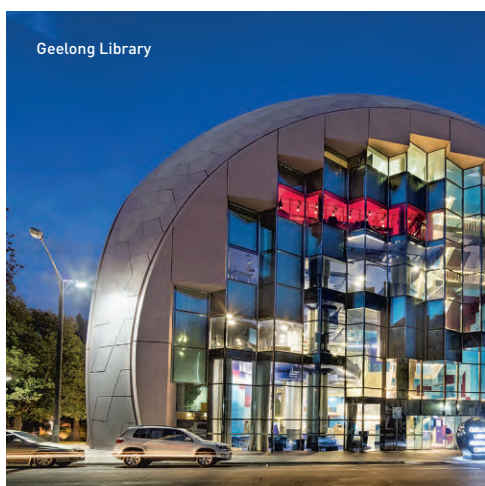
Frisina and Forster note: "We have an array of really exciting projects across all divisions with \$1.4 billion of work in hand to deliver over the next two years.

"We continue to target a diverse range of projects in both scale and nature, which provide a challenging and stimulating environment for our staff, as well as giving them the opportunity to grow with the business."

Kane Constructions was awarded National Commercial Master Builder of the Year in 2016 and Victorian Master Builder of the Year in 2016 and 2017.

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'Our success is recognised in the way we achieve, as much as what we achieve.'

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