

Office of Urban Management

Marriott Hotel Surfers Paradise

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Powerpoint available here

[SLIDE name] Firstly I want to thank y'all for having me at your conference here in Australia. This is the first time I have been down under and I am really excited to be here so I am going to act like a local and say g'day.

[SLIDE map] Yes, I am finally down under. I just love that term, down under. But I have to say that when I am back home in California I don't feel like I am up over. So since I am down under I am going to make the most of it by meeting Nicole Kidman **[SLIDE Nicole overlay wrong photo?]**, throwing a shrimp on the barbie **[SLIDE]** and drinking one of your wonderful **[SLIDE]** fosters beers.

OK, you are probably wondering who is this guy and what is he doing at our conference?
Not an unreasonable question.

[SLIDE name] As _____ said in the introduction my name is David Stephenson and I am founder president and CEO of the **[SLIDE nidecus logo]** Nidecus Group. Nidecus is the leading US...actually I would go so far as to say we are the leading global architectural consultancy firm. **[SLIDE consultancy]** I took over Nidecus in 1990 after being stuck in a cubicle at _____ one of the world's biggest architecture firms.

What I saw at the time was unlike now, there was a distinct lack of architectural consultants that use external resources. The advantage of that is the ability to cover a multitude of cultural and regional considerations when designing structures, in particular that most mystifying of all structures, the iconic building. **[SLIDE Queensland]** As you would know, in 2009 your state of Queensland is planning that there be an iconic building to coincide with your 150th anniversary since separation as a colony. We are assisting with the project as part of the "future" component of the Q150 infrastructure project.

[SLIDE logo] Nidecus has been so successful that we have grown into a formidable **[SLIDE dots on cities]** global network of around 450 professionals in locations all over the USA and the world. I am here to interview someone to become the first Nidecus consultant in **[SLIDE add Aust dot]** Australia. Well, when I say "first", I should qualify that with the comment that we did have one person **[SLIDE mug shot]** he didn't work out so we are starting the process again as though that awful experience never happened.

[SLIDE Australia] So what do we do that we would want to partner with someone "downunder"? Or anywhere else in the world for that matter. As I said, iconic buildings are our specialty. **[SLIDE logo]** Nidecus is recognised as **the** firm to hire if you want your building to be recognised locally, nationally and internationally.

Tonight I am going to cover **[SLIDE projects]** some of our projects, **[SLIDE issues]** how we deal with issues such as high density in an already crowded environment and the pressing issue of **[SLIDE sustainability]** sustainable structure within a non-sustainable infrastructure. But more importantly, I am going to cover the concept of **[SLIDE iconic in pm urban env]** iconic buildings in a post modern urban environment.

I think you can all see where this is heading. **[SLIDE Bris skyline]** Tonight you are going to be the first people outside an exclusive group to see the concept for what we believe will be Brisbane's first and long awaited iconic building. **[SLIDE Moreton]** No matter where you are from in the Moreton Metropolis as I believe it is called, we want you to come on board and share our vision...but first some background to the project.

[SLIDE logo] When I receive a call from a head of state who is considering the construction of an iconic building the first thing I tell them is that they have to give me free rein. More than

once we have come up with a proposal only to have so much **[SLIDE bureaucracy]** bureaucratic red-tape or tinkering take place that the core value of the building was lost.

To elaborate, the construction of an **[SLIDE iconic building must]** iconic building requires more than just something that **[SLIDE look interesting]** looks interesting or **[SLIDE unique]** unique and meets all the **[SLIDE codes]** construction codes. To really succeed it also has to capture the **[SLIDE imagination]** imagination of the people and of course a project needs to be helped along by **[SLIDE bureaucracy]** bureaucracy...that is one of the reasons why I have been invited by the Office of Urban Management. The slide may be amusing and satirical, but in fact, there is enormous government support for this project.

Since this whole paradigm is of interest to us all, lets start by investigating **[SLIDE >]** what makes an iconic building, look at some of our work and then move on to the big announcement.

I have just spent a fascinating day touring one of the greatest and first modern icons, **[SLIDE opera house]** the Sydney Opera House, designed by Jørn Utzon. As you Aussies would know, despite a turbulent construction period, upon completion it was instantly and internationally recognized as an **[SLIDE >]** Australian symbol. But the question I put to my CEO of the Opera House Trust **[SLIDE >]** was "a symbol of what?".

According to Charles Jencks, the author of *Iconic Building*, the white forms can be read as sails, waves, seashells, or copulating turtles. When you think of it, none of this has anything to do with music, but of course the truth is that in some vague way it seems just right for **[SLIDE harbour]** Sydney's harbour.

This is the conflict for architects that a lot of planners and legislators don't realise unless they have been suitably and extensively lobbied. **[SLIDE >]** Iconic buildings are delicate balancing acts between explicit signs and implicit symbols, that is, between an unusual, memorable form and the images it conjures up. In an increasingly homogenous world, multiple and sometimes even enigmatic meanings are precisely what turn a building into a popular icon.

Aha...it sounds like a formula for success doesn't it, but quite obviously it isn't that easy. As any architect will tell you, clients often commission an architect hoping for an instant icon. **[SLIDE Bilbao]** That was certainly the case when, hot on the heels of the Bilbao Guggenheim, Frank Gehry was hired by the Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen to design the **[SLIDE EMP]** Experience Music Project in Seattle. Here we have a proof that there is no such thing as an architectural Midas touch.

The EMP is confused and confusing, a mishmash of forms, materials, and colors that tries too hard to be a literal representation of rock 'n' roll and falls flat. They even have staff dressed too look **[SLIDE roadies]** like roadies in a desperate attempt to create atmosphere. If you ever visit the place, be sure to keep an eye on your daughter.

[SLIDE EMP] But overall, the architectural concept feels as forced as the whole idea of a museum dedicated to the history of popular music. And given some of the **[SLIDE rock montage]** recent images associated with popular music it is not surprising that it is hard to compartmentalize.

[SLIDE dome] London's ill-starred billion dollar million Millennium Dome, a celebration of technology and progress, was likewise meant to be iconic. Apart from loading a building with such an unrealistic expectation, its failure was due in part to accompanying political scandals

and in part to its lackluster contents, which failed to attract anything like the expected number of visitors.

But the architects, the Richard Rogers Partnership, should not get off scot-free. Rogers, who is responsible for two architectural icons, **[SLIDE Pompidou]** the Pompidou Center in Paris and the **[SLIDE Iloyds]** Lloyd's Building in London, must have seemed the perfect choice. **[SLIDE dome]** But while the structure is impressive from an engineering standpoint, its iconic quality is minimal if non-existent. Being objective, it looks exactly like what it is: a tent. The real and unexpected British millennial icon turned out **[SLIDE eye]** to be a giant Ferris wheel beside the Thames, the London Eye. You have one on The Spit that I understand is called The Eyesore.

Similarly Leo Ming Pei succeeded in Paris but stumbled in Hong Kong. The headquarters of the **[SLIDE BOC]** Bank of China was the tallest building outside the United States when it was finished in 1990. While the triangulated 72-story skyscraper was dramatic, it had the misfortune of being built only a few blocks from—and only four years after—a masterpiece: the **[SLIDE >]** Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Headquarters. Foster Associates' 47-story building is considerably lower than Pei's, but it represents a radical rethinking of the high-rise office building, while the less-adventurous Bank of Hong Kong is merely an accomplished exercise in geometry.

One last one. For better or worse, **[SLIDE WTC]** having lost an iconic building, New York recently opened a new one. And since New York has so few buildings that, like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao, seek originality at any price, **[SLIDE hearst]** the arrival of Norman Foster's Hearst Tower at 57th Street and Eighth Avenue, compels our attention. But the new Hearst headquarters feels like a failed icon.

Failed iconic buildings are caused by weak belief, because clients don't have strong enough conviction to say to the architect, "This is what the icon should be about." Up to the Nineteenth Century, the client always imposed their taste, iconography, and meaning on the architect. Or they shared that with the architect, so they wouldn't have to impose it.

Today, clients are insecure and society is completely pluralist and insecure, and doesn't know what it wants. **[SLIDE opera house]** But both society and clients do know one thing, they want a landmark.

[SLIDE >] Strong belief **[SLIDE >]** plus the desire to have a landmark, **[SLIDE >]** plus celebrity culture, **[SLIDE >]** plus globalized capitalism, **[SLIDE >]** plus the art market's desire for the new - all those factors together produce iconic buildings. This is why we're in an iconic building era, not because we want to be – in fact, people don't want to be but society can't help itself

[SLIDE opera house] If there is one thing that iconic buildings **are** good at, it is looking iconic. Although many are formal and artistic failures, at least they successfully mark their territory and, through some bold use of computer generated, gravity-defying design, represent something truly new. **[SLIDE Hearst]** Clearly, the Hearst Corporation was after something that would signal to the city and the world its aspirations to cutting-edginess. The problem is that, while the new building is unique, it is not especially bold by the standards of other iconic buildings, or even by the standards of what Norman Foster has pulled off elsewhere in the world.

[SLIDE Bucky] So we arrive at the point of, while not quite confusion, it is certainly what Buckminster Fuller described as **[SLIDE >]** "a moment of tension that often precedes the revelation that design is an autonomous process that fluctuates within the regions of

conscious and subconscious confounding riddles of knowledge". If anyone can explain that I look forward to hearing from you.

[SLIDE >] Consider the Birmingham Selfridges, themed on the "tits and bums" of those trying on the clothes inside. It was built next to a church, which it overpowers, and is a perfect symbol of the way sexy-shopping has replaced religion.

But the poignant truth about the Selfridges store is that it has appropriated the position of the church, both literally and metaphorically. {SEXY TALK} Here, an all-over skin of glistening discs bumps and grinds its way to the lips of a big site, spread as widely as possible and determined to suck whatever pleasure is possible from the situation. Meanwhile, squashed low in the background, are the darkened bones of an unloved church--dirty, miserable and in the shade. Selfridges, as its architects grant, is meant to be sexy and remind one of a Versace dress, body-hugging clothes, sparkling sequins, tits and bums and, on the inside, yet more intimate parts.

And why not? Just as society loves an iconic building, global capitalism venerates a perfect body image. **[SLIDE destruction]** at the same time we aren't supposed to pay attention to the fact we are seemingly intent on destroying the "perfect body image" of our very planet.

[SLIDE >] Where do these images come from? We don't invent them, though they are invented by someone. But then the concept and apparent acceptance of a new image must be conveyed to a society hungry for a hook onto which they can dangle their insecurities. We can thank the media for creating a belief system out of nothing, maintaining it for as long as it serves its purpose and then moving on to the next one when it is convenient.

[SLIDE phd] I recently was fortunate enough to be able to sponsor a very bright young woman's PhD thesis looking at the complex relationship between the expectations of society for the environment, both built and natural. This paper considered how people look to the future and how it is affected by messages put out by the media.

Her results were most illuminating and somewhat alarming. **[SLIDE graph]** Looking at this graph it is clear how there is an indirect but compelling argument for an analysis that includes a number of factors that are not being taken into account by planners when looking at issues that will directly affect the sustainability of a project, whether it be an iconic building or a new housing development.

That is one way of seeing the data, but the trend becomes more obvious if we visualise the it in a different way. **[SLIDE spider graph]** Any intelligent person can see what I mean when I say that a graphical representation clearly speaks for itself and if delivered well, can knock 10 minutes off the length of an after dinner speaker's address.

[SLIDE push the system] The question I put to you and ask you to consider is how far are you willing to push the system compared to how far you are actually able to go. **[SLIDE sensitive]** Architects are naturally sensitive people who need to be in tune with the landscape in which they will be placing their structures.

[SLIDE ferrari] On the one hand there is the desire to earn a decent living by having as much work come through their businesses as possible, on the other hand **[SLIDE crossroads]** most are desperate to not compromise the very standards that attracted them to the profession in the first place.

Planners are trying to squeeze as many people into the horizontal landscape while architects see that the obvious solution is to go up in areas that have already been sacrificed to urban

sprawl. **[SLIDE crazy]** Is it any wonder that architects form the highest percentage of professionals with mental health issues.

So, What would an ideal world look like if architects also had control of planning issues? For a start we would be venerating and treasuring our natural environment instead of seeing it as an exploitable opportunity to build build build. Given the choice of **[SLIDE packed development]** this or this **[SLIDE good high density]** we obviously should choose the high density with a smaller footprint every time.

It is into this context that we must fit our iconic buildings and the exhaustive study of **[SLIDE brisbane]** Brisbane found that this is the perfect city in which to start the process in Australia.

Whether the successful iconic buildings, in a decadent age, make up for the many environmental and sexual failures felt by members of a society is a matter of opinion, but the attempt to quash them with building codes and committees will not be fruitful. **[SLIDE >]** Creativity and pluralism are too strong for the architectural police.

Rather, the policy might be to demand more thought on the iconography behind the buildings, more coherence in the use of metaphors, and the careful interweaving of many codes to neutralise those embarrassing mistakes that come with any high-risk venture. **[SLIDE paperwork]** In short, what we need, what we yearn for, what is missing in the industry is more paperwork. Unless we are drowning in paperwork we do not feel as though anything productive is happening.

It is a useful metaphor, drowning in paperwork because it leads into my final point. No matter what it is we are constructing or deconstructing these days one of the most important things we have to factor into the base consideration are **[SLIDE climate change]** the predictions based on climate change worse-case scenarios.

I must assume that you are all up to speed on this pressing issue. So I am going to cut straight to the chase. **[SLIDE Antarctica & Greenland]** If all of the western Greenland's ice-shelf melts or all of Western Antarctica or just half of each, we are looking at ocean level rises of around 20 feet or 7 metres in your language..

[SLIDE pray] Events like this might actually create the long awaited religious and sexual revivals but we are not here to explore that. But we must investigate what the ramifications of such changes are when planning in coastal areas.

Where do we start? Lets look at a few maps and see what you are facing locally. **[SLIDE]** The Sunshine Coast as it is and **[SLIDE]** with 20 feet of water. **[SLIDE]** Right here on your Golden Coast as it is and with **[SLIDE]** 20 feet of water. **[SLIDE]** Brisbane as it is and with **[SLIDE]** 20 feet of water. **[SLIDE]** Toowoomba as it is and with **[SLIDE]** 20 feet of water. Ok...maybe it isn't such a problem in Toowoomba.

Given all the existing water and the possible new water it became an obvious decision to base our Brisbane concept building around an aquatic theme.

[SLIDE] Nidecus did this successfully in Dubai with our award winning The Palms and **[SLIDE]** The World developments. Destined to become iconic developments for all the wrong reasons, they are great examples of taming the environment.

[SLIDE brisbane] Similarly in Brisbane we are going to create an iconic structure that will combine the trend towards environmental symbology along with judicious use of space in a rapidly growing urban society located alongside a sensitive environment.

It is my pleasure to unveil for the first time in public the proposed new iconic building for Brisbane. Situated on the banks of your beautiful river its iconography will be appreciated by both environmentalists and religious leaders.

[SLIDE long board] Ladies and Gentlemen I give you The Long Board

This building is destined to be both a social and a religious icon for surfers and the general public. It is planned to rise 287 metres above sea level, although that is expected reduce as the oceans rise in the initial phase of the building's existence.

When the earth's climate has changed so much that it has reached what is known as the tipping point, in a miracle of structural engineering, so will The Long Board.

[SLIDE flat board 1] The Riverside Expressway will be opened up, bolts will be blown and with the gentle grace for which surfers are renowned, the building will slowly lower so that it floats on the water instead of standing partially submerged in it

[SLIDE flat board 2] In a final act of homage, a previously concealed sculpture will emerge completing the process.

So, who is in on it with us?