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PORTRAIT > KEVIN HUI  
WORDS > ANNE LATREILLE

# ROCKET MAN

HE'S ABOUT TO LEAP INTO THE BIG TIME. MELBOURNE ARCHITECT **ANDREW MAYNARD'S** GOAL IS NOTHING SHORT OF "COMPLETE, TYRANNICAL WORLD DOMINATION". HE MIGHT BE JOKING, BUT THIS YOUNG POWERHOUSE OF TALENT MAY INDEED BE CAPABLE OF SUCH A FEAT.



ANDREW MAYNARD, ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BRIGHTEST  
YOUNG ARCHITECTS, INTENDS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.  
HE WILL DO THIS ON HIS OWN TERMS.



His thoughtful comments about his young architectural practice are mixed with a dash of humour. “We started five years ago and it has been a patient rise in commissions and profile. We’ll keep up the steady pace until we achieve complete, tyrannical world domination.”

Maynard first looked at buildings as a child, shoehorned with his siblings into the back seat of the family station wagon as they drove around Australian suburbia in the late 1970s and 80s. He noted the monotony, even banality, of the suburbs. “They were flat, pancaked. Later on, when I knew I wanted to be an architect and when I started to see buildings that paid more attention to volume, this did something to me spiritually.” Architecture became an easy career choice, because he believed that through it he would be able to affect people even if they didn’t acknowledge that they were engaging with his work.

#### IN THE BEGINNING

The youngest of three children, Maynard and his siblings travelled around Australia with their sales

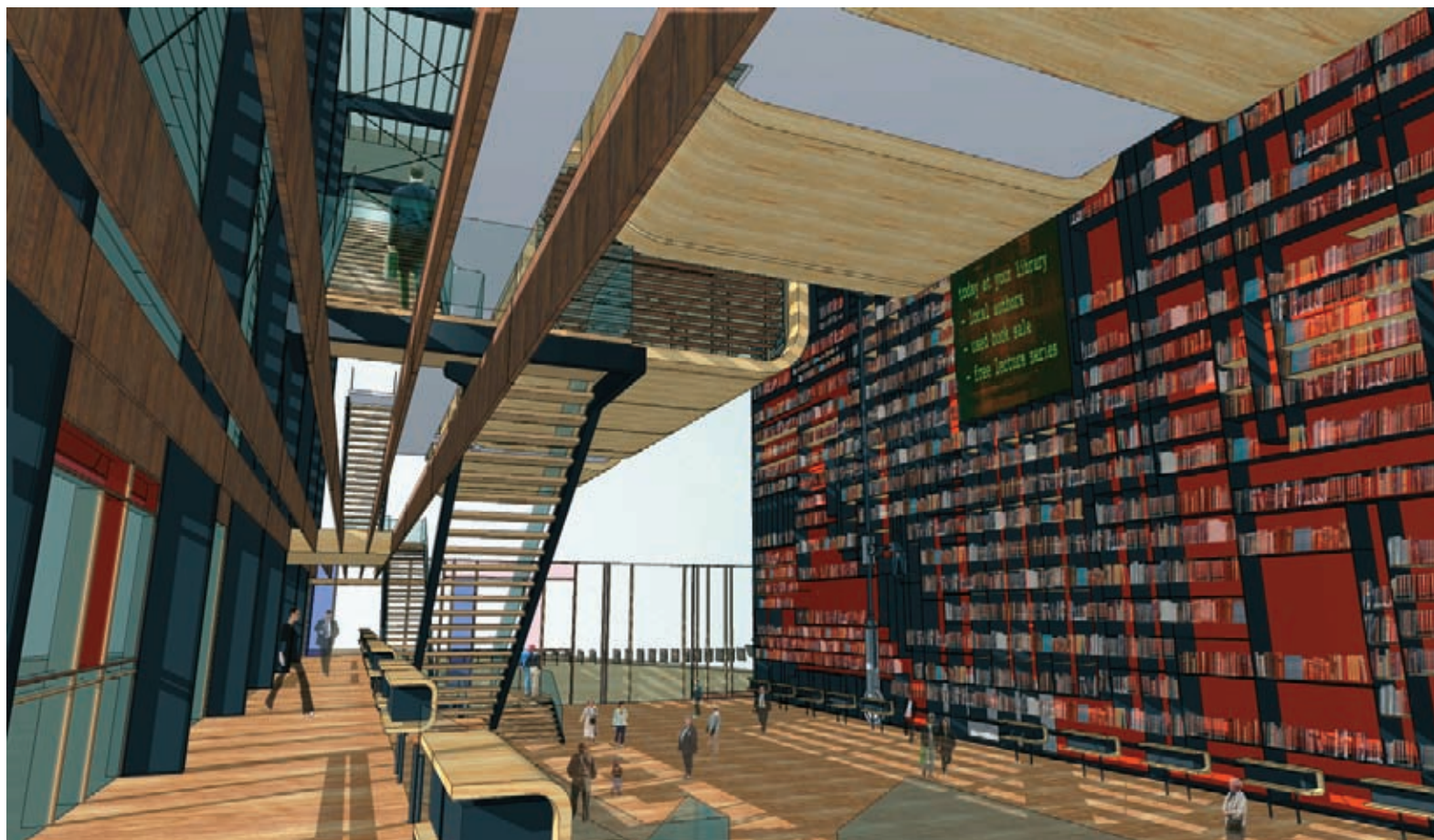
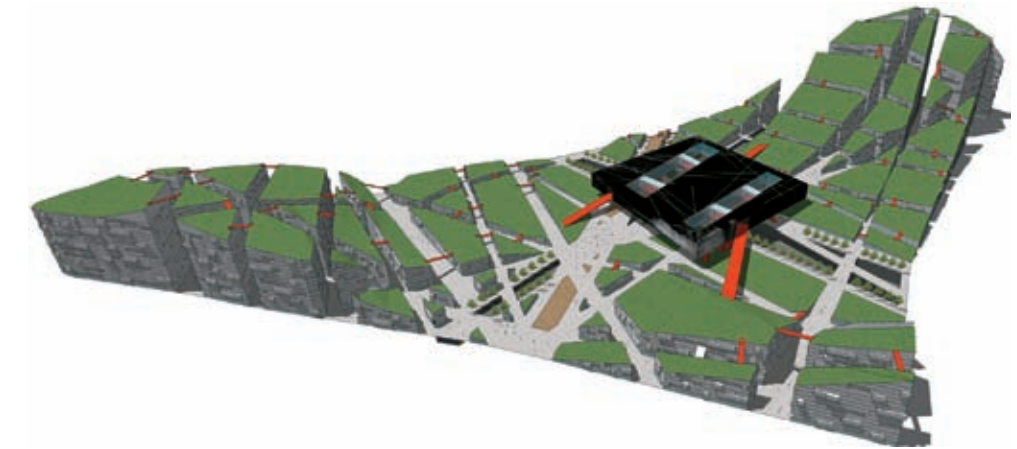
manager father, who followed job promotions that took them far from his native Tasmania.

Maynard became engrossed in the world of comic books, especially the *Star Wars* visions of George Lucas and the “incredible” detail of cartoonist Frank Miller. Creating his own sketchbooks – a practice that has stayed with him – he noted the three-stage procedure of the cartoonists (“pencil, inker and colourist”) and their play of texture, and absorbed the techniques that, later, he took straight into architecture. This was invaluable tuition in the clarity of vision, economy of expression and sense of fun that characterise his designs today. He found he could move easily between two and three dimensions whether drawing in a sketchbook, developing his ideas on a computer, building objects in his father’s well-equipped workshop. He credits the formative effect of Lucas. “He showed me the importance that design can have on your life, even if that design is only virtual. The virtual universe that he created provided an authenticity that I felt my suburban childhood had avoided.”

OPPOSITE Essex Street House, Brunswick, Victoria, 2005. This extension to a 1890s weatherboard house in suburban Melbourne explores Maynard’s practice’s interest in malleable and mobile space. Traditional walls were replaced by bifold garage doors, which open the interior spaces to the long backyard, blurring the distinction between inside and outside. PREVIOUS PAGE Skene House, North Fitzroy, Victoria, 2007. Like all warehouse fitouts, the challenge at the Skene house was to avoid filling the open volumes that had attracted the clients to the property. Maynard and his design team came up with the following rationale: “To ensure that we didn’t simply carve the space in small volumes for bedrooms and bathrooms, we divided all areas through sliding walls and joinery items. No fixed walls were added. Where spaces needed to be divided, we simply added a line of glass above joinery items. This allowed one to understand the volume of the warehouse without losing any privacy.”



OPPOSITE, ABOVE House 7, Elysium development, under construction, Noosa, 2007. The houses in the development are individually designed by some of Australia's best architects. House 7 is designed to catch sun in winter and shade in summer: "The vast majority of housing in Australia orientates itself to the street by default. Orientation should be dictated by elements that enrich our homes such as sun and view." OPPOSITE, BELOW Japan Library, Toyko, 2003. This competition entry for a library in Tokyo accommodates the move to mechanised sorting and delivery of library books while tipping its hat to traditional methods which reinforce and celebrate the library's role as a pivotal cultural institution. THIS PAGE Umeda Arts Precinct, Osaka, 2003. A competition entry for the Northern Osaka Station area, Maynard's concept imagined a contemporary arts precinct, rich in the energy and passion of the arts, surrounded by an economic engine of related retail, commercial and housing.



RENDERINGS: ANDREW MAYNARD ARCHITECTS

Maynard describes himself as left-wing, a leaning intensified by that early exposure to the suburbs and their "big fat middle class". He has a rebel edge; he remembers his father observing that "one day you will have to conform". Single-minded and independent, uncompromising and level-headed, in his own words he cuts to the chase. This attitude seems to have worked. It led him to early success in international competitions (the Graphisoft competition in 1998 in his final year of studies at the University of Tasmania; the grand prize winner of the Asia-Pacific design awards in 2000, Australia/New Zealand region). He got his first job in Melbourne in 1999 – "I decided I would nuke the scene with my folio, which I had always kept neatly collected, and knock on doors". He set up in private practice at the age of 27, having returned from Europe broke. Most recently it has brought him and his four staff members from the front room of his (rented) home into a mainstream warehouse space in Melbourne's CBD.

The aims of the practice are simple. "Not to be a slave to it. To stay small. To do work that is important [to me] and interesting – not the same

old same old. Most of all, each building should be an experiment."

He is similarly succinct with his personal priorities, shared with his partner Kylie Boucher, a mathematician, and their son Yosty (whose name is a play on Yossarian, the central character of Joseph Heller's novel, *Catch-22*). "To have one kid and spoil him rotten. To focus on the things we like doing. Not to get a mortgage. Never to own too much stuff – I try to convince my clients about this, storage is always the biggest part of a brief."

#### GOING GREEN

Maynard's environmental awareness is intrinsic to his professional work and personal lifestyle. "We dismiss sustainability as a theme. It is simply the right way to do things." It pervades his designs: a tree-house braced on spring-loaded pistons; a prefabricated house with modules sized exactly to the proportions of road transport; a recycled timber house extension designed to catch the sun in winter and shield it in summer, or a warehouse conversion which reuses as much as possible from what was there before. Maynard cycles

everywhere, finding it “awesome” to commute to work with a fleet of cyclists, hiring a car if he should need one. He abhors the incessant nature of road transport but regards cars as “great technology”.

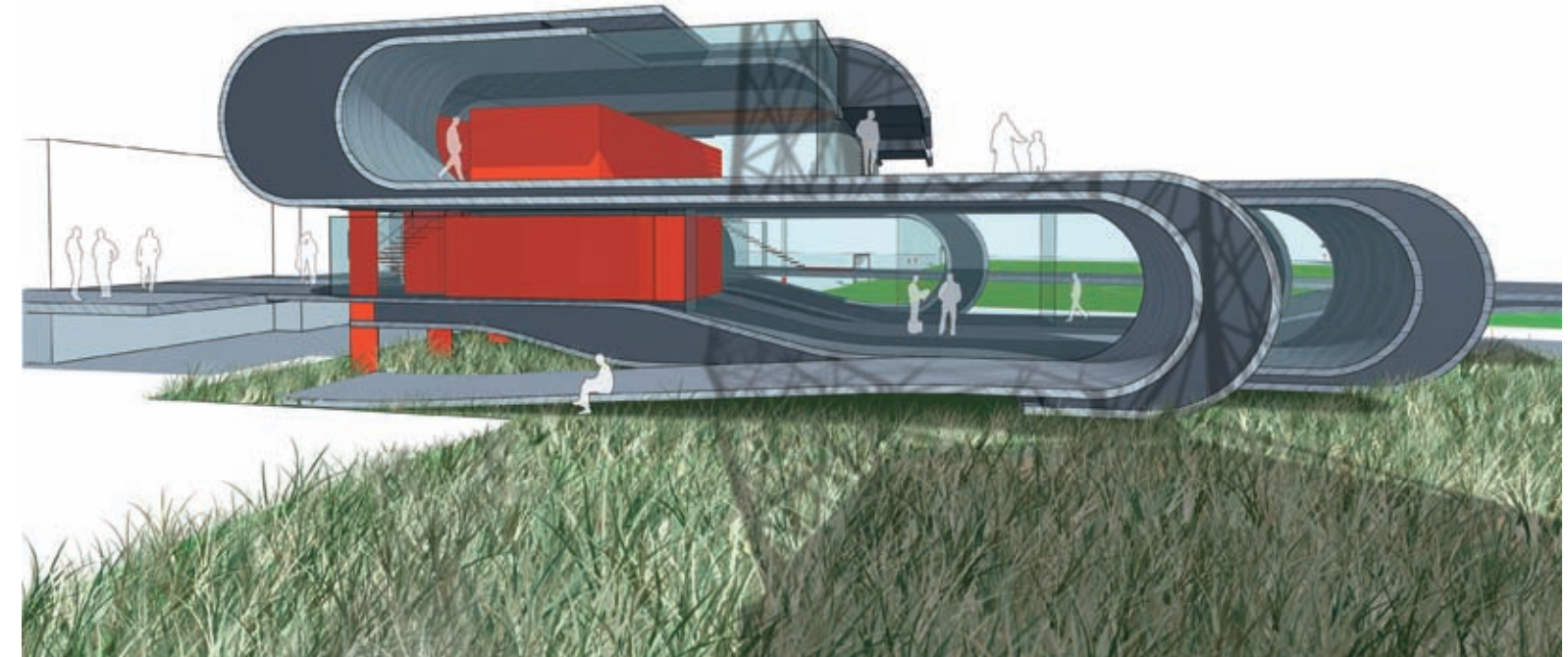
When Maynard is designing, there’s an excited urgency about him. He sketches initially and to clarify problems, but shapes up each design on the computer because it’s so much faster and more flexible. “I go through numerous, diverse concepts very quickly and produce a resolved design in a short energetic period. I often need a ‘nanna nap’ afterwards.” He hopes never to lose the freshness with which he approaches each new commission, and fears the day that he gets into a routine.

This enthusiasm, reflected in his dynamic website, endears him to his clients. It draws comments like “we immediately felt he would come up with ideas that were interesting” (Matthew Beachcroft, the Essex Street house), and “obviously, an imagination at work” (Mick Cahill, the Cahill-Mason house). Cahill says his warehouse dwelling, which is in progress, is achieving its aims of a more practical use of space,

a much larger kitchen – “I can fillet a shark there if the need arises” – a bit of drama and quirkiness as well. The bifold door that leads into the study is hinged in the centre. This delights him each time he enters the room and has to decide which side to use. The research and implementation also delighted its architect, who has a rare hand with materials and relishes technology.

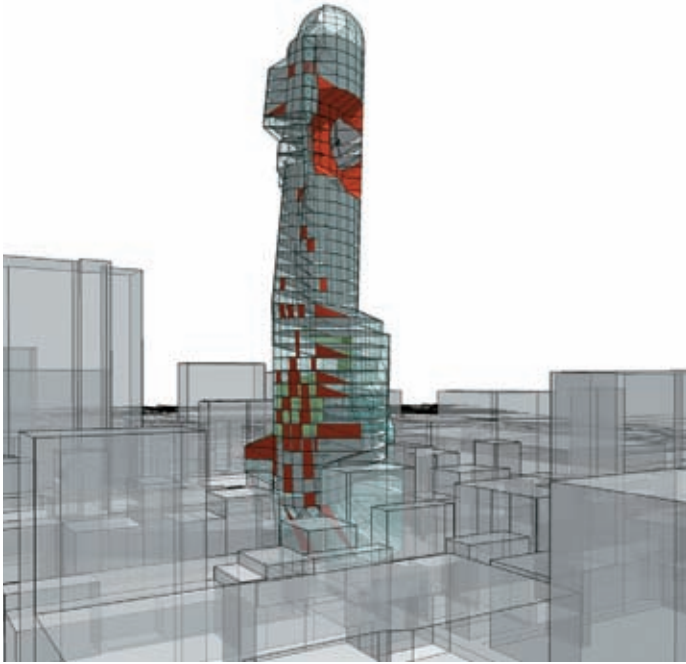
“I found a mechanism for folding doors, and doctored it so we could put it in the middle. It had to be balanced perfectly.” The aim is to make something for his clients that they love, but that also surprises and excites them – and him. “I don’t make any money, I reinvest everything in people but as long as there’s a certain level of fun in each project, that’s OK.”

Andrew Maynard’s practice is not just emerging, but on the move. Maybe only six projects have been built to date but there are plenty more in progress, including two million-dollar-plus houses in a luxury development at Noosa in Queensland. Here he has decided to provide “non-architecture”. “We have grabbed the site (which has no views), tilted it up to form



THIS PAGE Styx Valley Protest Shelter, concept, Tasmania, 2004. In an attempt to protect some of Australia’s tallest hardwood trees from logging, Maynard designed a ‘protest shelter’ which attaches to multiple trees. Each structure directly secures three trees and indirectly secures surrounding trees, which cannot be felled in case they fall on the structure (and the person inside it). In this way a small number of structures can secure a large area of pristine wilderness. OPPOSITE, ABOVE Parachute Pavilion, competition entry, Coney Island, New York, 2005. The pavilion design makes existing materials a focus point, assimilating harmoniously into the site – the timber of the boardwalks and bright painted steel of the tower can be seen throughout the new addition. OPPOSITE, BELOW Gyeonggi-do Jeongok PreHistory Museum, competition entry, Korea, 2006. Maynard’s design turned the concept of a museum as a home of cultural artefacts on its head by creating a design that made the museum itself into a cultural artefact. “Conceptually the museum is a long lost, partly unearthed artefact, entwined in tree roots ... While housing important cultural items, it too is a significant cultural object,” he explains.

RENDERINGS: ANDREW MAYNARD ARCHITECTS



THIS PAGE Sony Tower, concept, Guangzhou, China, 2007. Rumour had it that Sony was planning to build a new flagship tower at an unknown location in China's Pearl River Delta. Says Maynard: "We decided to send Sony a concept. We based it in Guangzhou, a city that is in constant flux. The concept was simple. The technological giant that is Sony has its humble roots entrenched in the delivery and amplification of sound. Many of Sony's first products were sound-emitting or recording devices. We decided to design a tower and then hit it with a wall of sound. Through computer modelling we manipulated a simple tower by hitting it with the sound 'SONY' to create the kinetic form that is Sony Tower."

the roof of the building, and wherever an opening is needed we just remove a chunk and lie it on the ground to produce a simple extrusion that adds up to a whole."

This spare, clean solution has a kind of inevitability about it. A more complex but no less inevitable solution, for a two-storey house extension in inner Melbourne, grew out of the local council's interpretation of the building regulations.

"The regs are written as if every Victorian is a potential pervert, and because of constraints on overlooking we end up with these funny-shaped houses. It's crazy. I wasn't going to use louvres or external shading devices on the rear [glass] elevation for this project, nor did I intend to alter its rectilinear shape, because 'the box' is the strongest form an architect can achieve at a bargain basement price. I decided to stick it to them, and went into the local park and took photographs of trees. These will be blown up into a large commercial graphic, applied to the glass."

Despite increasing demands on his time he continues to enter competitions in Australia and abroad, seeing their mind-stretching qualities as fundamental. As he notes in another sketchbook: "Everything is vague to a degree that you do not realise until you have tried to make it precise."

Asked to talk about notable influences (that is, beyond the virtual world of comics) he nominates an eclectic range. Bruce Goodsir, the Tasmanian architect who took a group of third-year students to Melbourne and pointed out that the void in the centre of I M Pei's Collins Place development was almost three times the height of Launceston's tallest building. Philosopher Peter Singer, whose writings inspire him to think rigorously about the effects of everything he does. Scandinavian and Japanese architecture – "I love its rationalism, so simple and pared-down. It simply says, 'This is the way I want to live' whereas here it is all about showing off to people." And last but not least, he names another philosopher – Socrates, who sought friends, freedom and a well-considered life.