

RIGHT NOW WHO

Words by TONY MAGNUSSON



Secret service

Sydney architects Archer+Wright maintain a low profile to shield their high-flying clients.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Lindy Wright and Richard Archer
at their Sydney office with a large
untitled artwork by US-based
artist Dragan Mrdja. Entrance to
The Hyde Penthouse, Sydney.
The morning room for a private
residence at Whale Beach. The
kitchen at one of the Bathers
Beach residences, Cronulla.

ARCHER+WRIGHT might be the most successful architectural and interior design practice you've never heard of. Flying under the publicity radar thanks to a bevy of high-profile clients for whom privacy is paramount, the Sydney-based firm's directors, Richard Archer and Lindy Wright, accept that much of their residential work will only be seen by those for whom it was created.

It's a shame, because the made-to-measure nature of these projects lends itself to spectacular results. "One home was budgeted at \$38,000 per square metre," says Richard. "It wasn't a massive house," adds Lindy, "but it was an expensive build. Generally we work upwards of \$10,000 per square metre for high-end clients." That might mean a \$35,000 feature wall for a shower, or bespoke back-lit panels to encase a ceiling full of Dale Chihuly glass sculptures.

It's no surprise that this category of client – from captains of industry to members of significant Australian dynasties – tends to be demanding. Cue phone calls at all hours, blizzards of emails and lots of general handholding. "You're dealing with highly intelligent, driven people who have multiple residences around the world and are used to the very best," says Richard. "When they walk into their own home it has to be better than anything they've seen. But they're paying for a bespoke service and that's what they get. I think we understand how people want to live – and want to be seen to be living."

The pair met in the mid-90s while running Cox Architecture's interiors division. Richard (who is also a registered architect) left to start his own practice in 1998 and Lindy struck out on her own shortly thereafter. They joined forces in 2003. "Stylistically we've been on the same page since day one," says Richard. Although they have different fortes – Richard does most of the architectural planning; Lindy focuses on materials, finishes and furnishings – they work collaboratively across each aspect of a project. "It helps to have that second opinion," says Lindy, "and we've never disagreed on direction."

Not all of A+W's toil is subject to non-disclosure clauses. Another mainstay is luxury multi-residential developments. A win at 2013's International Property Awards for Asia-Pacific should boost their profile. Bathers Beach Residences in Cronulla won Best Interior Design Apartment Australia, with judges praising its strong sense of place. And in 2011 A+W was highly commended for its transformation of the penthouse atop Sydney's The Hyde development.

With nine projects active – including the most recent, the redevelopment of a hotel into 126 apartments in Rushcutters Bay – the pair have expanded their headcount to eight. "We've been very fortunate but we work bloody hard," says Richard. Being lean and mean has its advantages. "We've never missed a deadline and we always come in on budget."

How do they define themselves within the design sector? "We're a modern practice with classical overtones," says Lindy. For Richard, it's about achieving an elegant simplicity that balances beauty with function. Hand drawing is key. "All our documentation is computer-based, but the design process is about the mind to the hand to the page. You work things out as you draw them."

For more information, visit archerwright.com.au