

### **Civil & Civic, Lend Lease and the genius of G.J. Dusseldorp**

In the early 1950s, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority invited numerous foreign companies to participate in its ambitious and imaginative plan to harness Australia's great alpine rivers. In the Netherlands, two Dutch firms — Bredero's of Utrecht and the Royal Dutch Harbour Company — were interested enough to send representatives to Australia. The man from Bredero's was a brilliant engineer who was only 30 years of age. His name was Gerardus Josef Dusseldorp. (The son of a Utrecht wheat farmer, he had gone to sea at the age of 14 before discovering his true calling.) Dusseldorp's enthusiastic report led to the creation of Civil & Civic by the two Dutch firms.

Civil & Civic's genesis in Australia was modest. In May 1951, Dusseldorp's hand-picked team of Dutch tradesmen flew to Sydney and then travelled to Cooma to erect 200 prefabricated houses. The 35 Dutchmen were soon joined by immigrant workers from around the world. In 1953, the Royal Dutch Harbour Company sold its Australian interest to Bredero's. In the same year, Civil & Civic helped to build the highest town in Australia; located in the Upper Tumut region and christened Cabramurra. Dusseldorp's men built the workers' houses and the town's power station.

The young Dutch engineer's eyes were soon focused on construction prospects in Sydney and Canberra. But before Civil & Civic moved from the mountains, Dusseldorp's team designed and built the beautiful alpine ski resort of Thredbo. Ultimately, it purchased Kosciusko Thredbo Ltd outright. A number of Dusseldorp's Dutch colleagues were to be intimately associated with the history of the town: Resort Manager 'Mr Thredbo' Albert van der Lee who arrived as Resident Engineer in 1962 and Site Manager Gerry van der Reijden who had been Field Engineer on the Sydney Opera House project.



*G. J. Dusseldorp, Chairman of Lend Lease, 1960. (Courtesy G. J. Dusseldorp.)*

In October 1954, Dusseldorp put in motion plans to develop the exquisite bushland heights overlooking Sydney's Middle Cove. He was to make the new suburb his home and pioneer the concept of the developer providing sewerage and other utilities, Dusseldorp was a firm believer in assuming responsibility for design and construction of a project from start to finish. The year that Civil & Civic began planning the development of Middle Cove was also the year in which Dusseldorp's team began work on Sydney's very first concrete skyscraper. The land that Civil & Civic acquired, with funds provided by the Reconstruction Bank of Holland, would eventually become the site of Caltex House. Established building firms scoffed at what they considered a 'New Australian's' naive view of local conditions, but the young Dutchman (with his flexible team approach to design and construction, firm approach to subcontractors and constant dialogue with trade union representatives) was to reap a rich reward. Caltex House was completed in October 1957. Dusseldorp kept his company's employees informed with the publication of an in-house journal, and his industrial relations policies even drew praise from the then Secretary of the New South Wales branch of the Builder's Labourers Federation.



In the years that followed, more innovative ideas began to crystallise in Dusseldorp's mind; he worked towards financing buildings for clients and offering them an efficient and economic co-ordination of design and rapid construction; and he saw enormous possibilities for lending and long-term hire-purchase of buildings for companies seeking to conserve their capital or soon to outgrow their premises. In April 1958, the Lend Lease Corporation was floated in Australia to finance Civil & Civic's operations.

Lend Lease's first project was the construction of Sydney's North Shore Medical Centre. In the 1960s and 1970s, the group had an enormous impact on the development of the nation's major cities. Its construction of the Russell Hill offices for the Defence Department and the prize-winning, domed Academy of Science changed the face of Canberra. In Sydney, Dusseldorp took on Stage One of the prestigious Opera House. Many other buildings, which today make Australians swell with pride, were to follow. They include such famous landmarks as Sydney's Australia Square and MLC Centre, Canberra's Monaro Mall and Melbourne's Nauru House.

Not all of Dusseldorp's innovations in Australia were purely technical or financial. He deserves recognition for paving the legal way for strata titles and the sale of home units. The Australianisation of Civil & Civic was a momentous development; so was the fact that by the late 1970s, the Lend Lease group was operating in every State in the Commonwealth plus New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, the Solomon Islands and the United States. Historian Mary Murphy summed up the style and achievements of the group in her book *Challenges of Change*:

Lend Lease has grown around Civil & Civic, the construction company where it all began. Out of Civil & Civic came the flat organisational structure, the principle of single accountability, and the task forces that have been used on a multitude of varied and challenging assignments . . . Seen from within, Lend Lease is a people-oriented organisation. Its success has been based on its own style of project management, on an enthusiasm for innovation, a conscious striving for excellence, and the investment made over all the years of its existence in what it recog-

nises as its most valuable asset — people. That investment has been channelled into five areas; training programmes, superannuation and health schemes, profit sharing, equity participation, and communications.

Civil & Civic has come a long way since the arrival of its first group of Dutch tradesmen in May 1941. One wonders how different Australia's cities would be had Bredero's thought their engineer Dusseldorp too young and inexperienced to evaluate its prospects in the Snowy Mountains of the Great South Land!