



Brakes on for Dubai market

PROJECTS ON HOLD AND DEFERRED IN DUBAI

BY GEMMA BATTENBOUGH

Far from saving Australian firms from the global financial crisis, the lucrative Dubai property market is in for a bumpy ride.

This week has seen fears grow over the Dubai market as projects hit delays. Three schemes from **Dubai Properties**, the state-owned firm behind grandiose developments such as Business Bay and Jumeirah Beach Residence, have been put on hold, it emerged on Friday, at least one because of market concerns.

Culture Village, the \$21.6-billion leisure, arts and residential development, has stalled owing to concerns about the global financial meltdown. Due to launch three weeks ago, it could now be Christmas before the project eventually completes.

Australian firms could suffer if development dwindles in the Middle East. Studios should expect a "significant drop off" in work, said Robert Hopton, principal and director at Woodhead. "It's been a red-hot market. People have been saying for years it just can't keep going on like that," he said.

Whether we are seeing a dramatic



The Dubai bubble looks set to burst.

panning of property in the Middle East or simply a cool in what has been a booming market remains to be seen.

IF WE HAVEN'T GOT WORK, WE'LL BE LAYING OFF.

In contrast to the quadrupling of Dubai property prices seen in the past five years, reports *Bloomberg*, we are likely to see static prices until 2010.

The affect on Australian firms could be significant. "We've got a couple of major projects in Dubai and obviously we've got staff," said Hopton. "If we haven't got any work we'll be laying

them off – as simple as that."

And a price fall could spell disaster for Dubai – with so many property developments wholly or partially government owned or funded by banks, which themselves are partially government owned, Dubai institutions could find themselves at the mercy of the international credit market.

This comes shortly before Australian darling Kylie Minogue is to be paid \$6.75 million to officially open Nakeel's Atlantis Hotel on 20 November, in her first performance in the Middle East.

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Architect 'canaries' lose jobs

MAJOR ARCHITECTURE firms, regarded as the industry's "canaries in the coal mines" have been axing staff with vigour. Melbourne job losses tally more than 100, with firms such as John Wardle, Hassell, Bates Smart, ARM and Hayball wielding the hatchet.

Woods Bagot has cut 20 to 30 positions across its Australian studios, a representative told *Architecture & Design*, with cuts occurring "across



Architects across Australia lose jobs.

the board". Confirming that the job losses were due to the worsening economic conditions, the source said: "a lot of our projects have been put on hold by clients, so that's basically the reason. We had a lot of things forecasted and clients get jittery in this kind of climate and put everything that's non-essential on hold."

Plus Architecture has cut a quarter of its staff, reports *The Age*.

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QATAR PROJECT WINS PROJECT

The "living oasis" created by **Woods Bagot** for Qatar Science and Technology Park has picked up Project of the Year at The Middle East Architect Awards in Dubai. Judges praised the way that the building mimics its surrounding landscape, they said, with an undulating veil-like roof that is reminiscent of the rippling desert sand.

WATER CUBE ARCHITECT TALKS

If you've always admired the Watercube, head over to the American Club in Sydney on 13 November to hear John Bilmon, managing director of **PTW Architects** speak. Covering issues including the process that led to the watercube design, the ways in which green issues influenced the development, and the difficulties of working in a foreign country, the event will be attended by more than 100 architects. For more information and tickets, visit www.kiteservices.com.au

ARTY TYPES ON THE BEAT

London's Scotland Yard's Art and Antiques Unit is topping up its bobbies with part-time volunteers offices. ArtBeat special constables have been recruited from museums and other organisations to right organised crime in London, particularly art theft, forgery and fraud.

POOR SAFETY CLOSSES EVELINA

A 'loose' bolt which fell from the roof of Hopkins' award-winning Evelina Children's Hospital in London has forced the atrium to close. This comes one month after 'non-compliant' glass used in the building's four-storey atrium needed to be replaced.

MULTIMEDIA ARTIST REWORKS

Swiss artist **Pipilotti Rist** has been commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York to rework the 7,354m³ Donald B. and Catharine C. Marron Atrium. The resulting installation is a lush immersive landscape shaped by images, sound and sculptural elements.

YOUR COMMENT...

NUMBERCRUNCH

\$6,000,000

the estimated figure **Damian Hirst's Beautiful Artemis** will reach at auction next week

1.5

the millions of dollars of funding earmarked for climate change projects in the Pacific

\$31,000

the nightly price of a suite at the soon-to-open **Atlantis Hotel** in Dubai

Spongy September home sales reported

Home sales failed to rebound after September's quarter-percentage-point rate cut, according to the latest New Home Sales Report from the **Housing Industry Association (HIA)**. Weak sentiment and the negative impact of higher rates through 2007 and 2008 took their toll.

"There is cause for optimism that the worst may be behind us," HIA Chief Economist Harley Dale said. "With interest rates on the move down and a tripling of the First Home Owners Grant for new dwellings, we would expect to see a bottoming out in leading housing indicators over the December 2008 quarter."

In September, new home sales increased by 19.5 per cent in Western Australia and by 4.6 per

cent in NSW. Sales fell by 10.6 per cent in Queensland and were down by 9.7 per cent in South Australia. Figures released on Saturday by the **Real Estate Institute of Victoria** found that median house prices in the September quarter fell by 3.3 per cent.

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ART OF THE FRONTIER

BY GEMMA BATTENBOUGH

Andrew Rogers, one of Australian art's most-famous exports, talks about his relationship with architecture, his new Gerhy commission and the changing nature of land sculptures.

"If we don't have memory, we don't have anything," said Australian sculptor Andrew Rogers. When contributing to the environment, whether through monumental geoglyphs or building design there is a history of space that must be addressed, as well as a legacy.

Land art is a movement that emerged in the US in the late 60s and early 70s, in which sculptures are not placed in the landscape, rather the landscape is the very means of their creation.

The landscape and topography of the land is indivisible from Rogers' art. The land art always integrates with the land rather than scars it, he said. But there are two views on whether this makes good design, "for me it is always harmonious", said Rogers "but there is a view for structures that they need to stand out".

Fresh from the completion of his 12th site on the Rhythms of Life project, a project which has spread over a decade, across 12 sites, 32 structures and employed 5,000 people over five continents, Rogers' next challenge is a project with Frank Gehry in California. "I'm not allowed to tell you where, or what, but I'm excited about working with an architect," he said. He's also working on a project in Chile in which building structures interact with land art, of which he's similarly cagey, but has so far failed to capture the interest of Australian architects.

The challenge of working with Gehry doesn't phase him. "I take architects with me all over the world to work on these projects," he said. "I like people who can think and read plans and understand my drawings. I take up to five architects with me to these remote places. I've got one architect who's been working with me on 23 of these structures - he's been with me for years."

The relationship between land art and architecture is a natural one, which can bridge the gap between structure and landscape. "I choose land with some special significance, either in terms of vista, history or heritage," said Roberts. "The work changes over time and that's the beauty of it. You see desert sands build up among structures, flowers develop, goats setting up home in them, but 10 years isn't a very long time in the scheme of things."

Achieving the much-needed permissions for such giant sculptures is not an easy process. The checks are similar to those needed for a new building, said Roberts, and the structures need to be built just as carefully. "We do a lot more environmental and impact studies than are used in building structures because the art is going to be there for a very long period of time and the landscape is normally very pristine," he said. "In the Mohave Desert we had to do a study to make sure we weren't encroaching on the habitat of the desert tortoise or the burrowing owl so we're very careful that what we do fits into the environment. We bring nothing foreign onto the site so that in time, depending on what your view of time is, it will disappear back into the landscape."



Roberts' giant land art sculptures include a series of 12 that spans five continents.

