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**PROFILE:  
JOBURT BETADAM**

HEAD OF BUSINESS,  
CHINA THE BUCHAN  
GROUP

Joburt Betadam is no stranger to doing business in China. Originally from Melbourne, the Australian architect first visited China in 2002, moving to Shanghai full time with his family five years later.

In that time, Mr Betadam has undergone all the usual rites of passage to doing business in China, setting up two wholly-owned foreign enterprises from his base in Shanghai and working on a wide range of projects from masterplans to residential projects, schools, office towers and office fit outs, and working with a cross-section of China's building sector with clients in government, the private sector, and developers.

He had first arrived in China to capitalise on his niche architectural expertise in sustainability. But at that time, he says, "there was an interest in sustainable design, but not a desire."

He has noticed over time, that while the sustainability edge may have diminished, developers in China are placing a higher emphasis on quality and brand.

Recently Mr Betadam joined Australian architecture, master planning and interiors firm, The Buchan Group as the Head of Business for China.

The firm's international reputation for designing iconic malls including Westfield Stratford City in London (one of Europe's biggest retail malls) and Chadstone, Eastland and Highpoint shopping centres in Melbourne, has led to huge success in China working with developers to design malls and retail plazas, in addition to advising developers in ways to increase foot traffic and develop the malls into entities beyond retail.

Mr Betadam says Chinese developers today have travelled widely and know exactly what they want.

***"We are finding a lot of developers coming to us with maybe two or three existing old malls and telling us they are not working and can we help," he says.***

"So it is not just about design, they are selecting us to add value to their property in order to achieve a higher yield. So the expectation is not just design – but a solution."

There are 3,500 malls in China. Mr Betadam says the successful ones factor in 'the total experience' – including entertainment, food, ice rinks, cinemas, access to good public transport hubs, and often with a hotel and office tower attached.

"The more of those integrated venues, the better for the developers. Mixed use with high-rise are the hottest developments at the moment, and then with a subway line and a hotel to support the mall," he says.

Mr Betadam says the big opportunities down the track in China for Australian design firms will be in the areas of aged care and health as China prepares for its already burgeoning ageing population.

"Connections are more important than ever – the Chinese today have so many more choices, so unless you are offering something really niche, they won't come to you."



**PROFILE:  
PING CHEN**

EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR,  
HUGE  
ARCHITECTURE  
OFFICE, SHANGHAI

Ping Chen is the executive director of Shanghai-based architecture firm HUGE Architecture Office. His firm reflects the changing face of China's architectural landscape – bringing western influences and western clients into China through a partnership with a Dutch company. Mr Chen himself, brings to the firm an Australian edge – having completed a Masters degree of Urban Development and Design at UNSW, Sydney, and work experience with two big Australian design firms.

His decision to study in Australia was prompted by his desire to improve his professional standing in marketing and as a leader in design planning in China.

During his time in Sydney, from 2009 to 2011, Mr Chen made new friends, especially fellow professionals in urban and architectural design areas who gave him opportunities to work and cooperate with Australian firms when he returned to Shanghai, including HASSELL and Woods Bagot.

"This provided a lot of challenges and opportunities for my career," he says.

Using his professional background in architectural design and real estate consulting as well as his skills in urban development and design, business development and project management, Mr Chen is helping overseas firms develop connections in China while also providing architectural services of an international standard to his Chinese clients.

HUGE is a multi-disciplinary architecture company, with offices in Amsterdam, Shanghai and Hangzhou, specialising in architecture, interior design and master planning services for clients all over the world, including Australia.

Mr Chen says the main obstacle for foreign architectural firms coming into China, is connections.

***"I think the China market is still very big for global investment and development – but it's how well Australian firms can find those opportunities, and how they sell their brands in China, or how they promote their knowledge and previous successful experiences into the right areas and to the right people," says Mr Chen.***

He says overseas firms still have an edge in China, such as creating and generating new lifestyle options for China's responsive younger generation.

"In terms of the future for foreign architects in China, I believe that foreign firms have a bright future here based on Chinese social demands – population growth and the improvement of life quality," says Mr Chen.

However, he says foreign firms need to confront the reality that as more and more professional and sophisticated clients in China, including government and developers look to reduce cost but enhance quality, foreign firms will face increasing competition from Chinese local design institutes committed to improving their standards by investing in foreign partnerships or benefitting from overseas-trained Chinese architects. \*