

# CHAIRMAN INTERVIEW

SCOTT HUTCHINSON CHAIRMAN - HUTCHINSON BUILDERS

With over a century of operational experience, 14 offices around Australia, 1500 staff and a turnover in excess of \$1.5 billion for financial year 2015, it's no wonder that Hutchinson Builders is Australia's largest privately owned building and construction company.

Headquartered in Brisbane their multi award winning projects are as diverse as the locations—from commercial, residential high-rise, mining and resources infrastructure, industrial, sporting, health, government, retail, education, hotels, clubs, tourism, civil works and modular construction in most major capital cities to the Pilbara in remote north-west Western Australia.

Chairman, Scott Hutchinson discusses Hutchinson's uniqueness within the construction Industry.



TOP RIGHT : Hutchinson Honey Bee's Bottled Honey  
BOTTOM RIGHT : The Milton, constructed by Hutchinson Builders  
FAR RIGHT : Scott Hutchinson, Chairman for Hutchinson Builders and Hutchinson Honey Bees

## Hutchinson is now 103 years old, how and why do you think you've remained so successful?

Our flexibility. We can change very quickly. We're decentralised and our people are empowered, meaning people at the coalface can make large decisions and not be afraid to try things. Often these decentralised teams set their salaries and position titles. They can write whatever on their business card. We also don't have profit or turnover targets—the very opposite to publicly listed companies who can't do that. It's relationships that count with our employees and our clients.

## How did the Hutchinson Builders begin?

In 1912, when my great-grandfather won a government project at Fort Lytton in Brisbane. Through our centenary there's been six major phases:

1. My great-grandfather starting it.
2. My grandfather and his brother expanding in the 20's and 30's.
3. My grandfather running it down in the 1960's.
4. My father rescuing it and consolidating it in the 60's, 70's and 80's.
5. Me expanding it in the 80's, 90's and early centenary.
6. And the last 14 years belong to current Managing Director, Greg Quinn. He's taken it from a turnover of \$170 million and a balance sheet around \$60 million to a turnover in excess of \$1.4 billion and balance sheet of \$250 million, and made us a national constructor.

## What did you do prior to taking over as Managing Director from your father in 1992?

From age 13 I worked during my school holidays in the family business.

Due to school results, Dad insisted I study civil engineering. I worked for a civil and structural engineering design office for three years after university. When I had finished my three years' experience in a design office I went overseas and worked as a scaffolder. Then did my masters in Business Administration, returning to work at Hutchinson Builders in 1986.

## What's your area of expertise?

Human resources, company culture and people.

## What's influenced your style of leadership at Hutchinson Builders?

Studying organisational behavior as a subject while doing my MBA. It was two years full-time and quite intense. The ideas I got from there have stayed with me.

## Do you consider your style different to your family forbearers?

I've known all of them, even my great grandfather. Personally, I considered my grandfather and great grandfather dictators, but Dad just had an amazing way, a charm with people and they just followed him naturally. My style came from a more theoretical base but Dad and I agree on most things, so he and I are more similar.

## What's your approach to retaining good staff?

Retaining good staff is the whole game. My job now is to try and make Hutchinson Builders a place where people want to work. If it's not a place I'd like to work then I wouldn't expect anyone else to either. We have an open and friendly culture at Hutchinson Builders and it's our goal that



staff can talk to other staff at anytime about anything. All our numbers are available including Greg's and my mobile and home numbers. We try to have no secrets. Anyone can communicate to anyone without going through anyone else. It's a completely open organisation. Hutchinson Builders is a different organisation, a very family oriented place. We are very nepotistic. If you work at the company and have a relative that wants a job, we're happy to give them a start.

## What are your and Hutchinson Builders proudest achievements and most notable projects?

My proudest achievement is helping to produce our open culture. As for the projects, we've done some amazing work all around Australia and it's difficult to pinpoint just a few. I'm proud of all of them. Some of these include our expertise in building modular homes for Australia's outback resource industry with a world first creation for university accommodation in Tasmania, a variety of residential high-rise or multi-use developments in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, such as The Pacific — the redevelopment of the former Swiss Grand Resort into a mixed use development, The Milton — a 31-storey residential tower and also two new retail developments currently under construction in Darwin — the \$11.6 million expansion of the Jape Homemaker Village and the first stage of the \$300 million Gateway Shopping Centre development at Palmerston.

Our training is unique too. We own and run our own school (Gold Coast School of Construction) for over 150 apprentices. Due to

this we were named Employer of the Year by the Department of Education and Training in 2012.

## What is your long-term vision and strategy?

At Hutchinson Builders we're extremely opportunistic rather than strategic. We're running about 180 projects at present and we're very flexible, looking at where we can serve our clients. We don't have any grand plan for expansion, if it happens it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't. We are proudly overcapitalised. We (the shareholders) leave all the money we earn in the company and that gives us more opportunities.

We're very client focused. Some of our clients have been with us for 20, 30 and even 40 years. We're focused on what we can do for them. We're not going to turn into developers, or compete with clients, we're more into the building technology. We've had projects in New Zealand, Canada and Japan but we were following our clients, it wasn't a geographical decision. Clients stick by us because we don't rip them off. Everything we do is long-term, not short-term. We're in the relationship for the long haul and just want to make it over the next 20 years, for our clients, our employees, their families and ourselves.

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