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• Article by Elisa Scarton

Amid the doom and gloom predictions for our economy and the A&D industry, Milieu director Shannon Peach advises practices to prepare for the “deferred activity” that he believes will come later this year.

In our latest virtual fireside chat with Australian architects and designers about leadership in the time of [COVID-19](#), the director of the [Melbourne-based property company](#) is forward-thinking and optimistic.

Milieu has collaborated with a number of architecture and interior design practices including Fieldworks, Breathe Architecture, Edition Office, Flack Studio and DKO, and Peach has experience managing multiple medium and high-density residential and mixed use projects across Australia.

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One Wilson Avenue. Architecture by Fieldwork. Interiors by Design Office. Photo: Milieu and Neometro.

How has your company adapted to remote work? How prepared were you?

Shannon Peach: Our business group is pretty diverse in that we run a sales and marketing business from our office. We also have a construction business and a carpentry business with full time site-based staff. This experience has really been a kick up the backside for us to invest in working remotely and in technological solutions.

How are you maintaining a studio culture and a sense of team?

SP: We've also got three restaurants that are part of our group. When these changes came into effect, immediate adjustments had to be made across those three venues where we had seen approximately 70 full time and casual staff stop.

One of the things we're doing is making a free meal available every day from one of those three restaurants, where any of our staff, not just from the restaurants, can go and pick something up.

Also, a couple of years ago, we introduced Monday stand up where everyone went through and discussed their week; what they were working on and what was interesting. Now we do a compacted version on a daily basis. It's a nice look into everybody's home life and there are always kids sitting on the laps or squealing in the background.

We also have a stretch club twice a day and we're trying to maintain that remotely by still all stretching at the same time together.



North Fitzroy by Milieu. Interiors by Flack Studio. Architecture by Fieldwork. Photo: Sean Fennessy

How are you communicating with clients during this period?

SP: Communicating in a predominantly digital way was something that we didn't feel was particularly in line with our genuine face-to-face style, so we had really kept our digital platforms to the bare minimum until now.

So we've jumped straight into filming a couple of display tours that will be available to anybody that enquires on one of our projects. They're probably not to the sort of production value we would usually expect from our business, but we're gonna follow that up with something a bit more resolved in future.

We've also been asking ourselves repetitively how can we communicate with our clients while staying respectful, considering the situation and the stresses people are going through. We've probably ramped up the frequency in which we have been communicating with our clients by telling them about initiatives like our virtual tours and telling them we're still here and we're creating different ways for them to be able to experience what we're offering without having to physically find the time to come here.

That might be one of the good things to come out of this experience for us. One of our biggest barriers to selling and to progressing an enquiry is people trying to find a time within their busy schedule to come in and bring the appropriate family member or friends. These virtual tours are a solution to the barrier.

What is your number one priority now as a business leader?

SP: I spent most of my day-to-day with about 12 office staff members, but our wider hospitality

and construction business team is probably nearly a hundred people, and my priority is making sure they're all okay and getting through this.

My other priority is making sure we have a strong business that keeps employing people and keeps everyone focused.



Dight Street. Architecture by Fieldwork. Photo: Dan Hocking

Are you exploring any new avenues as a business?

SP: Aside from trying to pull ourselves into a new technological decade, we've had a bit more time and headspace to concentrate on creative and strategic pursuits that were on the back burner.

I think there will be pent up demand in all aspects of the economy after this. People are dying to get back out there and go to a restaurant, go to a bar, do renovations on their house, buy an apartment. So I think while there will be some lost work and lost activity because of economic hardship, I think there'll still be a lot of deferred activity later in the year and next year.

What advice do you have for practices/studios that have had projects cancelled or postponed?

SP: If one of my design or architectural practice friends asked me this question, I'd probably just say concentrate on making it through to the other side. But also scale down to whatever you can to make sure that you get through, and, like us, spend as much time working hard after hours on those deferred priorities that you haven't had the chance to pursue previously.

Read our other leadership-during-COVID-19 Q&As with [interior designer and director Kate Challis](#), [Articolo lighting designer Nicci Green](#) and [Paul Conrad Architects principal Paul Conrad](#).

Stay up-to-date with our coverage of the A&D industry and coronavirus with our dedicated [COVID-19 resources page](#) and hear messages of love and advice from Aussie architects and designers in our [Working from Home video series](#).

Lead photo of Shannon Peach courtesy of Milieu.



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