

Q&A: Michael Whitehouse

University of Wollongong Masters student Michael Whitehouse combines academics with his role as manager of the services engineering team for the university's innovative Solar Decathlon project.



Michael Whitehouse

Ecolibrium: Can you tell us about the Solar Decathlon and about the project you're working on?

Michael Whitehouse: The Solar Decathlon project involved a university team designing and building a residential home that runs on 100 per cent solar energy. In August, the house will be taken across to China to compete against about 20 other universities. The competition is made up of a number of challenges that simulate real-world living, and the houses are measured and judged to determine a final winning international team.

My role in the project is managing the services, including plumbing, HVAC and electrical. Some typical day-to-day roles include liaising with team members, documenting the project in Revit MEP, writing specification, organising the managing trades on site, and completing site-work myself.

Eco: What do you bring to the project?

MW: My specialty is in design and documentation. I have a background in a similar role in industry, and I find the design aspects of the job easier than other aspects.

Eco: What are you passionate about?

MW: I came to this job with a passion for cost-effective sustainable design.

Things don't necessarily need to become overly complicated or expensive to achieve sustainable outcomes, and I strive to produce solutions that are both affordable and sustainable.

By coming up with solutions that address both sustainability and affordability, the transition to sustainable solutions will occur a lot faster. I'm also passionate about residential building design, and enjoy the smaller-scale projects where I am able to understand the project holistically.

Eco: Tell us about the challenges on this project

MW: The most challenging aspect of this project is working on a relatively small project with such a large team. Everyone in the team has been worked hard on achieving some great outcomes, but from the start it has been difficult developing solutions that achieve the desired outcomes of such a diverse group of people.

Eco: Do you have time for professional development – or do you make time for it?

MW: Along with my degree in mechatronics engineering, I have

also completed a diploma of business frontline management. I really enjoyed the concepts taught in this diploma, and continue my professional development by reading advice and literature focused on the management aspects of my career and life.

Eco: Do any words of wisdom inspire you?

MW: "Always reach for the stars, because even if you don't make it, you've still reached further than those who never tried."

Eco: What's your favourite destination?

MW: I have done a little bit of travelling around the world to different places, but my favourite places are right here in Australia, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast – Noosa Heads – and the Whitsundays.

Eco: Do you have a favourite building?

MW: My favourite building is the CLT (cross-laminated timber) apartment building called Forté in Melbourne. I did some work on the services of this building during my time with Lend Lease, and really liked the CLT concept, and some of the simple and effective services solutions. This is one of the few buildings that strived for simple, innovative sustainability along with affordability.

Eco: Where do you see yourself going?

MW: I would like to build on my 3D design skills across a number of drawing platforms, as well as what I've learnt from the Solar Decathlon and other residential building projects, and move towards a design and project management career at a residential scale. I am a keen property investor and would like a career that built off my understanding of sustainable property development and correlated with my interests in property outside of work. ■



The Forté apartment building in Melbourne.