

# environ

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## magazine

Dawkins

*A sustainable tomorrow  
is designed today*



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The Australian Window Association has introduced WERS (Window Energy Rating Scheme). A 5-star rating system that ranks windows in terms of their annual energy performance and provides certified data. WERS will complement manufacturer's existing standards for wind, water penetration and safety. The beauty of this scheme is that it uses both a simple to follow star rating (just like the one found on a fridge or washer) for both heating and cooling.

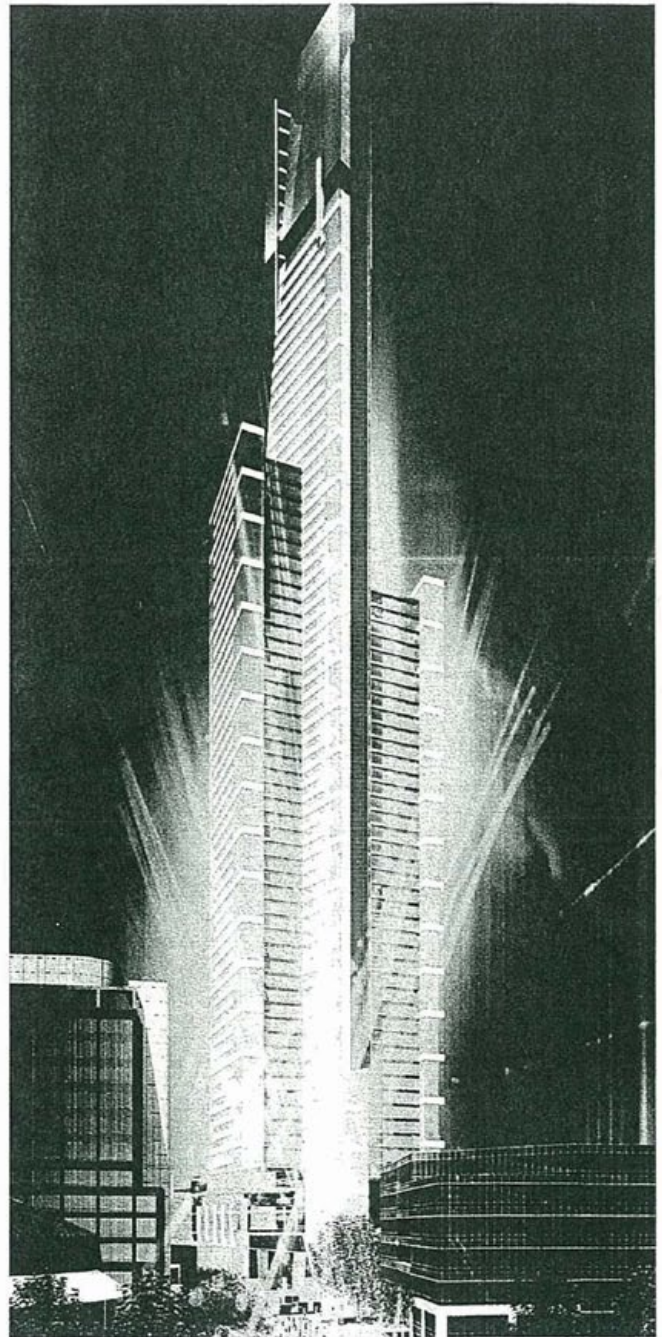
And when the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) entered into partnership with two ethical investment companies to develop a green commercial office building in the heart of Melbourne this was also undertaken with financial eyes wide open as well. This \$10m redevelopment of an existing office and warehouse building has set the stage for a serious look into sustainable materials and how they can be incorporated into commercial realities.

Back on the global platform, renowned Australian architect Glenn Murcutt, was the recipient of the Pritzker Architecture Prize for 2002, with its \$100,000 grant. As the *New York Times* earlier this year reported "his selection by the Pritzker jury can be seen as an acknowledgment that sustainability now overrides aesthetic criteria in the urbanizing world."

And the case studies and examples roll on! At least they could. But this should serve as more than plenty to illustrate that sustainable architecture is not a flash-in-the-pan. It is big and only getting bigger. In fact, understanding this snowball of movement is really the easy bit. Coming to grips with just what green architecture is and how that directly relates to building materials is another issue entirely. The dilemma for many is that "sustainability" is not some add-on. It is not a style. Not even an era or period. It is in fact the whole thing. All embracing.

Let us not enter the energy efficient element of sustainable building design — save that for another day. Let's simply consider materials. Buildings are made from materials. Fair enough, that is pretty straight forward. But are those materials sustainable? How do we find out? We ask a couple of questions.

Say the customer wants timber flooring, for argument's sake. What sort of timber is used: solid or engineered? If solid, is it recycled? If recycled but not solid what percentage is post consumer, post industrial or plant scrap? Is it native or imported? Is it rainforest, old growth timber or regrowth? Is the timber sourced from a plantation? Is the timber plantation hardwood or softwood? Is the plantation a monoculture or one that promotes biodiversity? What are the forestry practices where the timber was sourced — clear or selective felling? Is the timber covered by a chain of custody such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification? Kiln dried or air dried? Fossil fuel or renewable energy used to run the kiln? How much waste is generated in manufacture? If engineered timber, what sort of adhesive or binders were used? If engineered timber does the constant contain materials from a renewable resource (such as straw, rice, sugar-cane, soybean, etc)? Is there a formaldehyde content? If formaldehyde is present does it meet German stan-



Eureka Towers — set to become the world's tallest eco-friendly apartment block.

dards for particulate emission. How is it to be fixed in construction? Are adhesives used? Do they contain Toulene? Does the fixing method allow for deconstruction and reuse of the timber without undue damage? Does the timber need to be treated or maintained with a finish or coating? Does this finish emit Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)? Is a Materials Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) available?

Whoaa? Now we pause for a few seconds to have a breath or nick off to the loo. And we haven't asked how was the timber transported from source to us?