

HunterBUILD

Excellence in Commercial Building

Issue One

Eclipse Is A \$45m Vote of Confidence

Three Bedroom Demand Proves Concept



Warwick Miller firmly believes that the rush by Newcastle developers to erect properties with harbour or ocean views has overlooked a vital fundamental, the “liveability” of the resultant apartments, an oversight he is addressing with Eclipse Apartments.

The city’s waterfront ribbon of developments necessitates residents undertaking an

expedition to the shops, usually involving the car, for just about every necessity.

When Warwick was first introduced to the former Bimet Lodge site opposite National Park in Union Street, Newcastle, he knew he had found the answer. But he had no idea how right he was until prospective buyers began streaming into his Eclipse Apartments display.

“We opened the display unit in November

last year and it was immediately apparent we weren’t attracting investors, but people who intended living there.

“Accordingly, we had an even larger demand for three bedroom units than we had expected,” Warwick said.

“We were looking at 102 units for that site but

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After investing more than \$60M in Newcastle, Warwick Miller is convinced he has found the secret to successful development projects – a small, tight professional team of capable people.

Integral to that team for four of Warwick's local developments, starting with the \$8m Darby Apartments, has been Graph Building, a multi-award winning Newcastle builder whose other well known credits include the Honeysuckle Hotel, Caves Beachside Hotel, Newcastle Grammar School and the Gateway Inn to name just a few.

Warwick, who returned to Newcastle from the rough and tumble of Hong Kong, didn't select Graph on the basis of its awards alone.

"Basically I spoke to their former clients and to the banks," Warwick said.

"To a man the clients all made much of the absolute integrity of the company's principals while the banks all held the firm in high regard, which speaks to Graph's efficiency.

"That was enough for me and the firm has never given me one moment to doubt that decision through the course of developments of varying complexity," he said.

"Their quality, the attitudes of the key people, their construction techniques and their ability to complete a first class job on time and on budget with no later issues or problems...it is all a developer could wish for."

The latest and largest Graph project for Warwick is the 94 unit Eclipse Apartments development opposite National Park in Union St, Cooks Hill.

Stage I of the development is valued at \$45m and has been well received with around 75% of the units sold prior to the start of building.

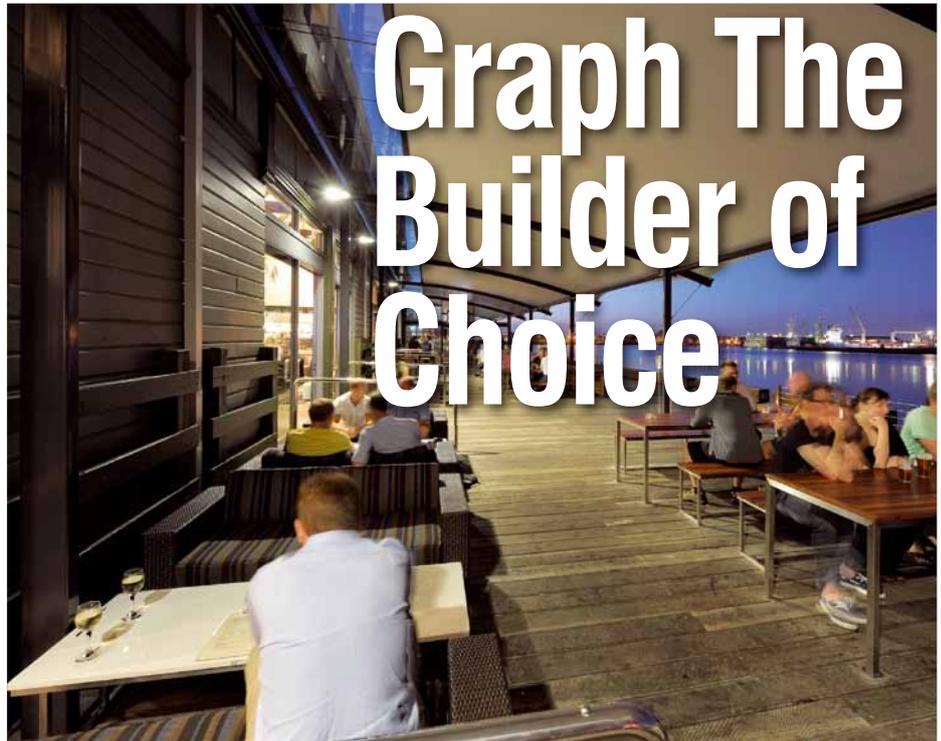
Demonstrative of Graph's versatility is that simultaneously with the Eclipse project, the company is also managing the civil construction stage of Warwick's 23-lot residential land subdivision, Glenrock Grove, at Kahibah.

Few wholly locally owned companies have this in-house capability in both building and civil engineering construction.

Warwick said that his relationship with Graph is far more than that of builder and client. They have been involved right from the planning stages and their input at every stage is constructive and highly valuable, particularly through the DA process.

"In every project we've had them involved right from the design stage.

"Before we have even exchanged contracts on the land, they have been involved with



Graph has built many of Newcastle's best known projects including the Honeysuckle Hotel (above) and numerous facilities for the Wests Group (below).

the engineers and architects to help develop feasible site specific solutions - the right number of units of the appropriate quality.

"Having them sit alongside the architects, bringing a practical eye to proposals and considerations, saves us a lot of money. It's what they do and they do it very well."

For Warwick, who elected to develop projects in Newcastle "because I didn't want to deal with all of the crazy people in Sydney," business partnerships are important and with Graph it is very much about the people.

"Ross Howard (Graph's hands-on Managing Director) is one of the most astute and honest human beings I have ever known," he said.

So far the Graph-Miller relationship has been responsible for:

- The Darby Apartments - an \$8m project of 33 apartments on three levels above a ground level of five commercial spaces and 57 car spaces.
- Silk House Apartments - an \$8.5m project at 200 Hunter Street comprising 14 units on five levels above a ground level of four commercial spaces.
- Student Accommodation in Brown St, Newcastle with a project value of \$0.6m.

At \$45m for Stage I, the current Eclipse Apartments project is by far Warwick's biggest but he sees it as very much a natural progression following The Darby Apartments.

"The Eclipse site is a hectare, making it the largest level site in Newcastle. It is a site crying out for a sympathetic, medium density, family oriented, quality development, particularly given its location opposite National Park's open spaces."

To do justice to the site, right from the outset the building and design team concurred that they should take a low density approach allowing for gardens and open space, resulting in a floor space ration of just 0.9:1. Subsequently they reduced the number of apartments from 102 to 94 in order to cater to market demand for three-bedroom apartments.

Construction work is now underway and Warwick is confident that like all of the other Graph projects it will be finished on time and on budget.



Quality The Mantra

Social Responsibility Guided Designers

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because of the demand for three-bedders we sat down with the architects and builders and did a re-design to change 16 one bedroom units to eight three bedroom units, effectively reducing the development to 94 units.”

As a result of the changes, more than 75% of the properties have been sold at pre-development prices, with a great many of these the larger apartments.

“The site just makes so much sense,” Warwick said.

“Residents are opposite National Park, a short stroll from the beach and within two blocks of The Junction Shopping Village in one direction and Marketown in the other.”

When HunterBuild spoke with Warwick, work on the site was due to start within weeks and he admitted to being more than a little excited and immensely proud of what was to be erected.

“I’ve never built anything that wasn’t quality and with Eclipse we have a beautiful design and quality finishes. You only have to look at the work of our multi-award winning builder, Graph Building, to realise that quality is their mark.

“That’s why I have used them for my other projects such as the Darby Apartments and the Silk House development.”

Warwick’s belief in the Eclipse project is underscored by his perseverance, staying on when many would have walked away in the face of misinformation by a small, vocal nimby group that effectively delayed the project more than 18 months.

“I firmly believe we really are doing something very good for this city, and Cooks Hill in particular,” he said. “In terms of the inner city economy we’re potentially bringing 250 people into the community in this \$45m Stage 1.

“To ensure the design was right we have used a young, vibrant firm, CKDS Architects, who were chosen by the father of Newcastle architecture, Brian Suters, to design his own home.



“Brian is well regarded for his commitment to heritage and he has been very kind in his comments as to the way the modernity of the building sits with the heritage around it.

“We’re very concerned about that. In fact, at every meeting the project team has ever had I have always asked the question: ‘Is what we’re doing socially responsible – the right number of units, the right quality, the right style?’

“The answers are ‘Yes’. You only have to look at the floor space ratio of 0.9:1. The 94 units sit in two thirds of a hectare. In Sydney a site of this size would be 15 stories with 400 units.”



While Warwick shies away from the term “iconic development”, there’s no denying he has a track record of creating stylish icons, both in Newcastle and internationally. His first Newcastle development was the Castle Tavern in 1974, by any standard a venue that ushered in a new level of sophistication for a Newcastle then dominated by pubs and clubs.

After selling The Castle he went to Hong Kong where his company designed and manufactured Guess Watches. After 13 years the design and manufacturing operation was sold to Timex in 1997.

“I like to think I do things right and the market is already telling us that Eclipse Apartments are right for the site and the city.”

Warwick’s commitment to “doing it right” will also be seen in Stage II of the Eclipse development.

He and his design team have taken onboard all feedback for the Corlette St site and have rejected an original proposal for a boarding house development.

“I don’t think a boarding house is the best use of the site. We’re going to re-lodge a DA, either for more home units or town houses, whichever best meet our ethos of quality developments.”



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