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WORLD-CLASS Quality

Hertel Modern prides itself on producing high-quality results in every project it undertakes. The company never compromises on workmanship or safety, which is why the Western Australia-based organisation is an industry leader.

Images by David Phillips

Steve Skea, Managing Director of Hertel Modern, started his career at 16 as a sheet-metal apprentice, working for Billingham ICI. His experiences offshore and onshore in the oil and gas industry led him in 1976 from the UK to working on major contracts in Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, and finally Australia. "I have spent more than 40 years on petrochemical plants in many parts of the world. I am a 'hands on' person who leads from the front and wouldn't ask anyone to do something that I haven't done myself."

In 1997, Steve commenced on the painting, insulation, and scaffolding contract at the hot briquetted iron (HBI) plant in Port Hedland. During this time, the company of which he was managing director, RJ Southey, acquired part ownership of Cape Modern, a longstanding insulation, painting, scaffolding, and fireproofing company in Western Australia.

During his time at Cape Modern, Steve went over to Malaysia with the Cape Modern management team and, in conjunction with Cape East, managed the MLNC Tiga project, which consisted of

the scaffolding of the LNG trains 7 and 8 and the cryogenic insulation of the run down and loading lines. "Our peak manpower was 1,750 people on the Tiga project, which consisted of 1,100 scaffolders and 650 cryogenic insulators. The project took four years from 2000 to 2004, and we achieved more than five million man hours without a lost-time injury."

Since 2004, Steve has been resident project manager and director on some of the biggest projects in Western Australia, including the BHPB Ravensthorpe nickel project, the BHP Port Hedland HBI plant, the Burrup >





fertiliser plant, the Woodside train 3 exchanger, and the Napa Napa refinery in Papua New Guinea.

During this time, Cape Modern became Modern Industries. In 2010, Modern Industries was given the opportunity to bid for the painting, insulation, and fireproofing (PIF) for the Gorgon project—knowing that without the backing of a major international insulation company, Modern Industries would struggle to finance a massive contract such as Gorgon. Hertel Beheer bought a major stakeholding in Modern Industries, and in November 2011 the newly named entity Hertel Modern was awarded the Gorgon PIF contract. “I have now worked on this project as project director for three and a half years, based at the Australian Marine Complex in Perth, and just recently relocated to the Barrow Island site. We are the principal contractor for the PIF contract for the whole of the project.”

After several name changes and acquisitions, Hertel Modern has emerged as a leading insulation, painting, and scaffolding company in Western Australia. However, this expansion has brought its own challenges. “The biggest challenge that I’ve had with Modern is the fact that we’re a Western Australian-based company and we were basically up against all the multinationals. Now with our newfound financial muscle, we are more than capable of mounting successful bids for the bigger construction projects like the Gorgon project that come our way.”

Hertel Beheer is a multinational company that is in turn part of a major conglomerate of companies. “The strength and longevity of Hertel Modern is a testimony to the people working for the company,” Steve says. He notes that Hertel Modern is the company of choice for employees, which helps build loyalty among the staff.

“We’re a bit like the old ICI in the UK where if you hadn’t worked for ICI, you haven’t been involved in the petrochemical industry. We are pretty much the same: if you haven’t worked for Hertel Modern at some point, then you really haven’t been in the insulation business in Australia.

“When we were about to be awarded the Gorgon project, we were asked, ‘Can you get the experienced manpower?’ Unlike other companies, that was the least of our worries. People would rather work for Hertel Modern than work for anyone else because we run a family-type company where we deal very personally with people. We have instances where not only the fathers have worked for us, but the sons are working for us now. We have guys who have worked with us for 30 to 35 years. In fact, thinking about it, in the senior management on this job that we have, the minimum level of years

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- Steve Skeea

that they’ve worked with us is between 11 and 20 years.

“Although we’re a construction company, people tend to come to us and not leave, and that’s pretty extraordinary in this industry. I would say that the majority of all the supervisors and managers have been tradesmen and even apprentices with us. If you get a job with Hertel Modern and you have ability, you will get promoted. And you will be trained; we have a dedicated, fully staffed training department at our Malaga facility where we have apprentice sheet-metal workers and boilermakers.”

Steve goes on to note the importance of training and development within the organisation. “We have a training structure in place for apprentices. The size of our apprentice workforce based at our Malaga factory by far and away exceeds the minimum quotas or ratios for apprentices for tradespeople that



other factories may utilise. We have recognition from the established training providers for that: from TAFE, Polytechnic West. We even bring into our workshop the kids from the local high schools for career

orientations and work experience, so it starts at that level and goes all the way through to our managers, where we send them to do supervisory/managerial-type courses we require for our business.” >

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Good training helps Hertel Modern develop best practice, which is then exported to the other branches of the business. Steve adds, "At the end of this month, we're sending people over to Singapore to share some of our safety knowledge and experience that we have here in Australia and pass it on to the group. We're actually exporting our safety methods and culture to our partners in Europe as well."

Hertel Modern is dedicated to quality in everything it delivers. "We have dedicated QA people on our jobs, which comes back to our training from the shopfloor upwards," Steve says. "We pride ourselves on the quality of the outcome of the work we produce. It comes down to the pride our employees have in the manufacture, the onsite fitting of the product, and even the packaging and transporting of our product, all the way through to handover to client. We just don't compromise on quality."



Another point that Hertel Modern never compromises on is safety. Steve says, "We've always had a fantastic safety record. In fact, we've just been given the IFAP Platinum Safety Award for the fifth year in a row. You can't get any higher. You've got to maintain and adhere to the ISO 9001 quality management systems to achieve these awards, which are independently audited and

assessed. These assessment criteria are very stringent and onerous. But then to achieve the platinum safety achievement award for five years in a row is outstanding and is a testament to the commitment of all our employees and the dedication of the safety department."

Steve highlights that the company's most recent project has helped bolster the company's

unrivalled safety record. "The reason for that is basically because we 'Hertelise' people. Before we bring anybody onto this job, they all go to Malaga for a comprehensive safety induction and safety training. Our supervisors work with our new employees and instruct them in the Hertel way. The supervisors are the first form of defence for any company where there is a proactive culture in safety; then the workforce will adhere to it. You can't do it from behind a desk; you've got to be out with the guys. It's our supervisors who are totally committed to it.

"I get asked this question every time I go to a safety steering committee meeting: 'How come Hertel has the best safety record on site?' I always tell them it's because of our long-term service people that are training the guys who come into the business. The younger ones follow the habits of the supervisors, who are everpresent working with them



and helping them to identify and eliminate unsafe behaviours."

Steve sees expansion and diversification in Hertel Modern's future. "Now we have an international arm, and the projects we are currently on provide us with an excellent opportunity to expand our footprint in Australia. One of the

industry opportunities we will be continuing to expand is to increase our scaffolding arm. We obviously want to offer our major clients a one-stop shop from greenfields construction to brownfields maintenance. We have been operating in Australia for more than 30 years now, and we only see great opportunities for Hertel in the future." ●



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