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A Sleeping Giant

A premium building complex since the 80s, Grosvenor Place is staying true to its past while making upgrades to ensure its success for many years to come.

Images courtesy of Grosvenor Place

In 1987, a prestigious building complex called Grosvenor Place opened its doors. Designed by Australian architects Harry Seidler & Associates, its foundations were inspired by Bob Hammond of Superannuation Fund Investment Trust, who decreed it must be an asset which would generate value for the long term. Located between Sydney's CBD and The Rocks, the building has remained a sought-after site for business thanks to its contemporary design, which sits harmoniously within the heritage setting. Grosvenor Place offers unrivalled amenities and services, while also having a focus on sustainable practices.

Grosvenor Place CEO John Derrick started working for the organisation in November last year and quickly became passionate about the premium

facility. "I very much saw Grosvenor Place as a sleeping giant," he says. "It is a marvellous building, but I think because it has been so successful in the past, Grosvenor Place has at times been taken for granted. What I want to do is make people understand what a remarkable building it is to locate your business in. In fact, that is one of my main challenges—to bring Grosvenor Place into the forefront of the public domain, significantly more so than it has been in the past.

"The challenge is that once a sleeping giant wakes up, you actually have to control the beast. You have to make sure the whole team understands where the journey is heading so that everyone moves in the same direction. By doing this, it doesn't overwhelm you. We are making sure that the building and all its wonderful benefits are marketed

well and presented in the best possible light.

"The other part of my initial strategy was to engage the internal team at Grosvenor Place. They are all highly experienced professionals and I wanted to ensure I grew to know them well over a short period of time. I believe I have earned their confidence and worked with them to build the dream of taking Grosvenor Place forward into the future. It was also about gaining the confidence of the ownership group. There are three owners here; all are dedicated owners, but as with any new kid on the block, they want to make sure that I am looking after their very valuable asset well."

Grosvenor Place consists of a number of buildings, including the iconic skyscraper tower and the heritage-listed Royal Naval House >



and Johnsons Building. Some of Australia's top financial and legal firms reside within the complex, as well as several leading boutique companies and retail tenants. Grosvenor Place is seen as a first-class operation, and John believes that it has great potential for even further success.

"While Grosvenor Place is one of the premium buildings in Sydney, I want to look beyond that," John says. "I would certainly like to investigate the world's best practice in buildings of this calibre and to make sure that Grosvenor Place stays at the forefront. It is inherently a beautifully designed building; the basic product is an innovative masterwork. It is also located in the dress circle overlooking the finest harbour in the world, coupled with efficient column-free floor space. However, beyond all those striking advantages, I think the areas that we need to make sure we keep developing are the customer service aspects. We do that very well at the moment, but since it is a constantly changing, highly competitive landscape, as a business we have to commit to improving and evolving and strive to be ahead of the opposition all the time."

John is well equipped to take Grosvenor Place on its journey forward with his extensive

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background in the property industry. Originally from the United Kingdom, where he worked as a chartered surveyor, John moved into the field of asset management when he arrived in Australia 20 years ago. His immediate past role was as the senior director of CBRE's asset services in New South Wales where he led a team of 150 people and managed major property assets across the state. There he learned how to motivate and guide large teams, something that has been hugely beneficial in his current role with Grosvenor Place.

He says the thing he has enjoyed the most about his career so far is the interaction he is able to have with people: customers, salespeople, owners, and the like. "That adds immensely to the satisfaction levels," he notes. "At Grosvenor Place, I have been able to bring all of my past experience together. The combination of working on a beautiful major asset while bringing all the various people and parts together is a highlight—starting from owner engagement right through to tenant and customer service and then on to team engagement. Making sure all that works together is very much one of the parts I enjoy, as

well as the technical aspect. It's about dealing with people and taking them on a journey."

When working with contractors and suppliers, John views them as partners and makes it a priority to develop and nurture relationships for the long term. He says there have been some "great partners" working on Grosvenor Place for many years and that "loyalty is a two-way street". "I have to say, all of our business partners possess the same passion for the building as we have," he adds.

John's leadership style focuses on empowering staff to run the building effectively. He sets a direction but gives his team the opportunities to grow and work together in order to achieve positive outcomes. "I have great people on the team, and if we all step onto the same bus, we will reach our destination easily," he says. "I think we have to constantly remember that we are in a customer service environment. We are not just providing floor area for a business to rent and run their operations in a premium product; we have to make that experience special.

"There is an awful lot that we can learn from the hospitality industry in making sure that our customer

experience is better than anything else they have experienced before in the city. That means that everyone on board needs to have that customer service attitude.

"How do I instil that in the team? Firstly, I think they inherently know it, but I certainly do try and empower individual team members to perform. I give them their own autonomy and authority to proceed. I believe very strongly in working collaboratively as a team. Recently, I instituted team workshops where I took the whole team offsite and we locked the doors and spent the whole day seeking team input. What was important was that they came up with very much the message that I was looking for anyway."

The basic design of Grosvenor Place is very forward thinking in that it was built to be environmentally friendly before sustainability was even an issue in society. The sunshades on the exterior reduce the effect of heat; the air-conditioning does not rely on traditional chiller technology but rather a thermal storage unit comprising eight large ice banks that use frozen water to provide cooling. There is a 60,000-litre rainwater tank, intelligent lighting to conserve energy in unused rooms, and photovoltaic cells on the roof to generate renewable energy from the sun. Furthermore, it has a 4.5 Star NABERS Energy rating and a 4 Star NABERS Water rating.

"The whole basic design philosophy of the building has a sustainable edge," John says. "The other activities we undertake are to track our electricity usage—we have actually halved that in recent years, which is a huge achievement on a building of this size. We make sure when we install new plant and equipment that it is of the latest and most efficient design, and ensure that the building is as well maintained as possible. Just by running a building well means that you're running it sustainably, and therefore economically. There's no silver bullet, but every decision we make has a sustainability aspect to it.

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"Sustainability is critical. You don't just throw buckets of money at it, but you must continually invest in sustainable practices and take a commonsense approach."

Technology is another aspect in which Grosvenor Place invests heavily. The building was one of the first of its kind to install an online tenant service response system, or TSR, so customers could easily log requests electronically, and this will be updated again in the near future. Additionally, Grosvenor Place is undertaking a website redesign and will install a new tenant portal.

"There is nothing groundbreaking about these elements in isolation, but you put all of those aspects in place, synchronise them, and it ensures you are constantly moving forward, constantly investing, and constantly staying at the forefront. Ultimately, it all comes back to that customer focus. We want to give

our customers the services they need in a building to enjoy the whole experience.

"Grosvenor Place truly is an iconic landmark and it is in a fantastic location on George Street. It has column-free floor plates which are among Sydney's largest. But more than that, it is such a magnificently designed building. Everyone who works here develops a passion for it. I hear so many of my customers say, 'We just love being in Grosvenor', and that is really something to be built upon. It is more than just four square walls to put your office in; it is a wonderful experience to be here.

"My aim is to make sure the whole team nurtures that philosophy and enhances the customer experience. Every time they walk into Grosvenor Place, I want them to know they are somewhere special and that they will be treated as a special individual." •

