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# Ecolibrium

## Grand Slam

Can luxury and sustainability coexist?





Gold Coast University Hospital.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE DRAKE

Brisbane-based William Drake, M.AIRAH, is the Technical Director of Asia-Pacific Buildings & Infrastructure at Jacobs.

### Responsibilities

My title is “Technical Director, Asia-Pacific Buildings & Infrastructure”. This is a relatively new role within Jacobs for me. While I still retain a reasonable day-to-day project responsibility, this role is about fostering technical excellence within the Building Services Group here at Jacobs. The term “technical excellence” feeds into all aspects of our consultancy delivery, from development/mentoring of graduates to developing design/documentation standards.

Within Jacob’s structure, there is also a technical leader group that support me in this role throughout our various offices, each being a very experienced senior engineer.

I have great enthusiasm and ambitions for this role, and believe I can, with my now many years of experience, provide valuable development in strengthening the technical and even non-technical areas.

### Passions

In my working life, I’m passionate about engineering outcomes, integrated with good architecture. Generally, we are designers and builders of discrete parts of the overall building, and while it’s satisfying to have our part of the overall project work well, there’s an extra joy when all parts integrate correctly to produce both a functional and visually pleasing building.

There are many things to be passionate about, from family to the environment. I hold grave concerns for the environment. In the work we do, which involves significant energy consumption – including embedded – and other environmental impacts, I believe we can do a lot to assist limiting these impacts.

That said, there are more significant, major policy initiatives we all need to encourage through all the channels available, to support moving towards a sustainable environment.

My more egotistic passion, which my wife talked me into and I initially resisted, is ballroom and Latin dancing. We started in 2011, as we were departing on a cruise with some well-accomplished dancing friends. Despite two left feet, I seem to have achieved a level of acceptable dancing skill. I’ve discovered that engineers are well represented on the dance floor. Perhaps our ability to work out the turns and patterns helps. I still think I make a better engineer than dancer. Then there’s my beautiful titanium road bike.

### Finest professional hour

This is a challenging question, while I’ve been lucky to be involved in some significant projects, I’d have to nominate the new Gold Coast University Hospital. It was a great experience to be part of this large greenfield hospital, from site master planning through to completion, which adds up to almost five years. The final fire testing of the mechanical systems fell on a State of Origin night and was scheduled to be completed by 5pm, with Origin party to follow. Unfortunately, we all missed the first half of the game, but testing was successfully completed, to the delight of some nervous project managers.

These days I’m more involved with our graduates and young engineers in their development, which I am thoroughly enjoying. These young engineers are a great group and I hope my contribution to their development will be worthy of being considered a fine professional contribution.

### Important lessons

Having the correct experience and capability – either the designer or supervisor – from outset is a no-brainer, and I continue to see this obviously lacking. However, that aside, good communication in all its forms is what I consider the most important. I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve sat in “lessons learnt” sessions where the key contributor to project problems was identified as poor communication.

Our young engineers need not only technical development guidance but skills development in all aspects of communication and dealing with all the non-technical aspects of working in our industries.



William Drake, M.AIRAH

### Whom do you most admire?

My parents and grandparents who came from a working-class background. I am very humbled by the lengths and sacrifices they made to provide opportunities for me and my siblings. I'm sure this is true for many of us.

In my working life, the standout would have to be Ron Gray. I had the pleasure of being employed by Ron in his Rockhampton practice (RWJ Gray & Partners) between 1981 and 1984, during which time I completed my degree.

Ron has been the standout statesman and mentor in my career. I'll forever be thankful for all the training and career guidance he provided. Sadly, Ron passed away in 2015, a great loss but a great legacy as he mentored many besides me.

### Dream sabbatical

A study tour of hospitals and laboratories in Europe, taking in Vienna, Italy, Croatia and the Greek Islands in their summer would be hard to pass up and perhaps very enjoyable. With a short break to follow the Tour De France.

### What is your motto?

My wife and I have an annual motto or theme, which we use as a key focus for the year coming, a bit like a new year resolution, but more motivational. Family and friends chase us to find out each year's motto with interest and what we plan to achieve. Sometimes we have a public motto, as well as a private one.

Currently, the motto is "Get the house built" as we are building a new house, which has taken so long to get off the ground. If Grand Designs were filming, I'm sure Kevin McCloud would have lost the plot by now.

In case my wife reads this, yes, I know it's my fault and we should have hired her favourite architects. But it's good to always have our family and friends ask, "How's the house going?!"

Other past examples are year of living frugally, younger days and school bills, year of going out, my wife loves all sorts of theatre, concerts, etc., that year nearly killed me.

### Greatest personal achievement

This is an easy one for a proud parent: my children. We are lucky to have a couple of children – now young adults – who have flown the coop and are doing well for themselves out in the wide world. We recently took a holiday and visited our son who works in Darwin and had a marvelous two weeks with him and his partner touring Arnhem Land. Our daughter married last January, and the wedding was a standout highlight.

### Favourite book

I love my books and read across most genres from science fiction, historical, fantasy, spy, mystery, so there are many to pick from. So many books and having to pick one favourite is difficult. I have just finished *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas, (original English version), which I enjoyed; the movie only covers the first half of the book.

Growing up in the Australian bush and having my own horse, my first childhood favourite was *The Silver Brumby* (Elyne Mitchell). This was followed by *Magician* (Raymond Feist) and in recent times *Spitfire: Portrait of a Legend* (Leo McKinstry), this book covers the development of the plane extensively and feeds into both my engineering side and love of flying, with my early ambitions of being a pilot.

### Favourite film

Once when I was young I'd have said anything with John Wayne in it, but now looking back, while I still enjoy action movies, it's hard to go past an Aussie feel-good movie; I'd now say *The Dish*. My wife tells me it's actually *Strictly Ballroom*!

I'm passionate about engineering outcomes, integrated with good architecture

### Favourite website

This is an easier question. I'm currently setting up for my new workshop included in the house we are building, with the likes of Trade Tools ([www.tradetools.com](http://www.tradetools.com)) and C&L Tool Centre ([www.cltoolcentre.com.au](http://www.cltoolcentre.com.au)) being regulars. Closely followed by the SBS Tour De France site ([www.sbs.com.au/cyclingcentral](http://www.sbs.com.au/cyclingcentral)).

### Describe yourself

I'd like to think I am an average Aussie – hardworking, but also lucky in having been given great opportunities in this industry that have helped me in so many ways.

Added to that, I think I'm also a little bit obsessive-compulsive, which I've always considered a very admirable thing for an engineer.

### Define success

Success can be measured on many levels, but for me, it is the wonderful family and friends I'm so lucky to have. Many of these friends I've made through work.

A degree of recognition for my contribution in my working life also doesn't go astray either; it gives satisfaction to feel that you have contributed.

### What does AIRAH membership mean to you?

Membership of AIRAH and what it has provided has been a rock for the industry over the years. I'm also very happy to see the ongoing initiatives, including the inclusion of a Graduate Diploma in Building Services, which I think will be of great benefit to the industry. ■