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Probuild cements toehold in WA's construction industry

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Construction boss Phil Mehrten is now a regular commuter to Perth, visiting at least once a month from Probuild's head office in Melbourne, to monitor the company's expansion in to Perth's construction market.

Established in Victoria by Mr Mehrten nearly 25 years ago, Probuild expanded into NSW nine years ago and its Perth presence has made it a national player in Australia's construction industry.

As a relatively new arrival, Probuild has notched up some early successes, the most notable being the delivery of one40william, the office and retail tower in the heart of the CBD, ahead of time and on budget.

"We consider WA to be an important market and when we decided to make the move from the Eastern States, initially we started with a joint venture before going it alone," Mr Mehrten said. "We took on 140 William Street for CBUS, which went really well and we were thrilled with the result."

Probuild transferred a team of core people from Melbourne to head up the Perth operation, which began with several apartment projects. It has since built a Perth-

based team around the original core.

"We set up an office in West Perth and are now looking to relocate on the growth that we have already experienced," Mr Mehrten said.

"Initially we dipped a toe in the water to see how things would go; it's a good market, there's some good people here and we are enjoying the experience."

Completion of work on the CBUS tower dovetailed into Probuild's current project, the completion of what was then Luke Saraceni's troubled Raine Square, which had been abandoned mid-way through construction by the previous company because of legal disputes and later placed in the hands of receivers.

"Any project you pick up half way in has its complexities," Mr Mehrten said. "We started with one of Luke's companies and after it was placed in receivership we continued to work with the receiver."

"From our point of view the contract was negotiated in good faith among the parties at the time and we have continued to move forward and keep performing."

When Probuild's workforce of 200 started work at Raine Square, con-

struction of the building had been stalled for eight months.

"There were a lot of contractors in Perth that were anxious about what was going to happen with that project and we've been able to, in a lot of cases, re-engage those contractors and let them fulfil their contract for the project," Mr Mehrten said. "I think it's been a good thing for a lot of people in Perth that the job got up and going and it's fair to say we got it off the back of 140 William Street and our performance there."

Probuild intends to tender for Raine Square's fitout component and Mr Mehrten said the company was actively pricing more work in Perth.

"When the mining tax was bubbling around, things went very quiet but seem to have reignited again and it's fair to say we are pretty confident that we can find a nice position in the Perth market."

"We think there's an opportunity here. The bigger projects have been in Multiplex's realm for a long time, which is fair enough as it was born and bred in WA but we saw an opportunity for another player in the game and I think that's proved to be the case."



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PHIL MEHRTEN



Regular visitor: Phil Mehrten



Finishing off: Probuild is finishing off the Raine Square building after a dispute ended the contract of the original contractor.

Picture: Simon Santi