



Vince  
Frost

## The head of interdisciplinary creative studio Frost Design is enjoying Australia's more collaborative approach to design

**T**alking to Vince Frost on the phone at 9am London time, you can hear waves breaking in the background as he finishes his day on the beach. Frost has been living in Sydney for five years, after initially setting up his graphic design studio, Frost Design, in London.

As well as being an acclaimed name in graphic design, his work now has a presence all over Sydney, from the signage of its 400 parks, to the branding of its signature buildings and corporate builds. With the London office newly reopened, he is now ready to bring back a touch of Frost to our slightly colder shores.

The agency, which has grown to include an architect, interior designer and product developer alongside its graphic designers, employs 40 people. It is an "interdisciplinary" creative studio, working to briefs ranging from 2D graphics to built environments. For the Australian pavilion at the last Venice Biennale, the agency did everything from the exhibition stand to the literature around it, "taking care of the whole identity", explains Frost.

Since moving into 3D environments, Frost is surprised at how often companies' offices are missed off this "identity" list. "HQs that you imagine to be amazing, from the business cards and the website, often turn out to be shoddy," he says. "They are often ignored as an important touch-point for a brand.

"Walking around London recently, I noticed that things like the hoardings that wrap around development sites are left completely blank. This space could be utilised as huge billboards to promote the new building." In Asia and Australia, where it is a relatively new area of work, Frost says "people are more determined to get it right". ■

### Vince Frost CV

**1965** Born and raised in Canada

**1989** Joined Pentagram, London

**1992** Became youngest associate of Pentagram, aged 27

**1994** Started own studio, Frost Design, in London

**1996** Awarded designer of the year at Chartered Society of Designers

**2004** Set up Frost Design in Sydney

**2008** London office reopened



**Left** A huge flip-dot board was created for the entrance of Stockland's HQ

**Below** For American Express's Sydney HQ, Frost Design took Annie Leibovitz photos that had been commissioned for its ad campaigns and blew them up on to walls

**Bottom** For the Australian pavilion at the last Venice Biennale, Frost Design was responsible for everything from the exhibition stand to the promotional literature

But that doesn't define what Frost seems to enjoy most about the Australian way. "Here, it is about creative partnerships and collaborations. There is a strong relationship between architects across the industry and designers. Architects you are good friends with you tend to work with, doing graphic design on a project. These relationships – and mutual trust and respect – are important. When there is a multi-million-pound spend on a development, you can't afford for anyone to drop a ball.

"In London, from my experience, people can be more particular about their patch." For graphic design and architecture to come successfully together on a project, you really need to come on board at the beginning, to be part of the original vision and objectives, Frost explains. "It can't just be as an afterthought, to whack up some signage. Way-finding might be integrated into the fabric of the building, in the floor, for example. Often, when graphic designers come onboard later on, they end up putting a spin on a building that was not part of the original scope.

"Increasingly, architects are specifying us in their pitches, as part of the initial project team." Frost is equally keen to point out that graphic design shouldn't be put all over a project for the sake of it, or used to "obliterate every wall space".

"Sometimes people come to us for large-scale graphics and we end up doing some really minimalist signage. You can't treat interior graphics like advertising, which changes all the time. We have to think that what we do will stay for the next 10 to 15 years. You have to put yourself into the place of that person who sits next to that picture or will work under that sign every day."

Working with brands in the built environment is becoming a more sophisticated process. Frost's agency recently curated a photography exhibition for Commonwealth Bank's new HQ, sourcing images from well-known photographers who had shot everyday life in Australia, reportage style. "It was a lengthy process, but it is now a permanent exhibition in the building," he explains.

"Increasingly, we are decorating entrance areas or foyers with installations that express an organisation's approach to life and space. We often take inspiration from materials and shapes in the building, and use signage systems in a way that puts an identity on the building."

For the head office of Stockland, which is large property development company in Sydney, Frost Design created a huge flip-dot board for the entrance. "They wanted plasma screens, but it needed something less corporate, more playful," explains Frost. For American Express's Sydney HQ, they took archived Annie Leibovitz images commissioned for its advertising campaigns, and blew them up on to walls. The South Australia Water

Authority HQ in Adelaide involved Frost teaming up with one of his best photographer friends in London to take pictures of a huge tank of water using a row of Hasselblad cameras, to create images for a 60m facade.

"For us, moving from 2D [print, magazine, books, logos] to 3D [hotels, offices, swimming pools] was a natural extension of the Frost Design brand. We have a real passion in the area, and other people see that."

Frost spent five years at Britain's best-known design agency, Pentagram, before setting up his own agency in 1994. Not wanting to start from scratch

when he relocated to Australia, he teamed up with a company that had been established for 30 years. When things didn't go as planned on arrival, Frost bought the Sydney business, and in 2004, Frost Design in Sydney was set up. He concentrated on expanding the business, before sending some of his most trusted Sydney colleagues to head up the London office, which reopened last August.

"At first, the 24-hour working day turned me into an insomniac, but it actually makes people take more responsibility in the business, as it's no longer just me doing it," recalls Frost. And working from Australia to London is becoming ever less problematic. "How technology has geared up to allow you to work faster is phenomenal. I can remember 10 years ago doing design layouts for magazines on a holiday by fax and FedEx." This year, the third Frost Design office will open, in Dubai.

Frost also guest lectures on design courses in the UK, often at universities or colleges that turned him down when he first applied for an MA in graphic design.

"If you are determined to do good things, you can make them happen," he explains. "If making money is your priority, your values change. You have to produce good work, but enjoy the process at the same time.

"It is important to be positive about life and the opportunities you get, to create positive situations. By valuing friendships with other creative people, staying positive and being genuine, you really can move mountains." ■

