







▶▶▶▶▶‘So, after completing my second degree, 1985 was a hard time to find a job. Luckily, after six applications I was offered a job by TP Bennett. I remember then getting two or three calls from Bennett people offering me a place to live! I was sat in reception with other people when I met Terry Moore of Yannedis who said: ‘You’ve joined a great company’.

‘At the beginning, the Partner I worked for was Duncan Cardow. He hardly spoke to me for the first year. I wasn’t sure whether to hate him or like him, but as I got to know him I realised it was shyness. As a result of that experience I try to be approachable to the youngsters! Duncan influenced me in a couple of other ways. He came from a design-led background and showed me the importance of that. He also established the importance of the feeling we’re not in a blame game – everybody makes mistakes, it’s important to rally round.

‘We’re very clear about our culture at TP Bennett – we’re design-led, responsible, intelligent and collaborative. Design-led first! The collaborative element is critical because our projects are complex. We carry out a lot of surveys of clients and contractors – people like working with us, and I think we get the best out of people.

‘This last 12 months have been challenging, with a huge number of projects put on hold, I’m pleased to say right now there’s a bit more optimism. Recently we’ve won several new interiors projects and the fit-out side is picking up well. There’s a nice new project for a law firm and two projects for Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi. We’re also working on some higher end residential work too, as a result of our deliberately branching out into other sectors. Diversity is a big thing for us.

‘We’re probably known best for our commercial work, but about a quarter of our Interiors Division’s current workload is residential, ▶▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶with about 10% in retail, hospitality, leisure, healthcare and education. There's a bigger spread of work which of course makes us more resilient, but it also helps us learn from other sectors. For example, the design of a City office can learn a lot from the hospitality arena, and vice versa.'

Richard talks about this aspect of design enthusiastically. 'Pushing boundaries' is how he describes the TP Bennett approach, as seen in several recent examples.

'We've just finished a lovely project at Trinity Hospice. We tried to avoid the typical clinical approach, creating a warmer, more domestic feel. It was really uplifting to see how everybody loved it at the official opening. For Macfarlanes, a major law firm, we borrowed from hospitality design by creating a concierge style facility, a generously proportioned reception and comfortable hotel-like dining rooms – again we didn't produce the average lawyers' office. We're very proud of our work too for Guardian News and Media. They were very sceptical at first, worrying about our corporate background. By their nature, this is an organisation that is always questioning; they needed to innovate particularly because of the growth in their digital side. Our design grasps those drivers and is all about change in the way The Guardian works. It's a non-hierarchical design, based on sharing and hotelling. It's inclusive too – as typified by the informal amphitheatre approach to the editorial meeting space.'

We asked Richard how it was that an architect came to create and drive TP Bennett's Interiors Division.

'I worked my way up at TP Bennett – starting as a graduate, then an Associate, then a Partner. Though I'm an architect, I'm always pulling spaces together. I've always enjoyed working with the end users – so I started the Interiors Division 12 years ago. Before that, we had our interior designers working with the different project teams. I think it's important to bring the Interiors Division together as one unit – it blends skills and has the added benefit of developing a career path. The single unit also creates a critical mass.

'Some architects look down on interior designers. The reality is that it's important to recognise different skill bases in areas such as furniture and materials, and pull the whole together. Setting up the

Interiors Division was one of the most exciting times of my life – we had everything to gain. The first project was 500,000 sq ft for a major US bank, complete with due diligence – they thought our team was fresh, different and unafraid. We quickly followed that with two more big jobs for the FSA and Lovells. Amazing! We've grown consistently ever since with work for such names as IPC Media, Microsoft, Rio Tinto, Swiss Re, Morgan Stanley, Accenture and Oxfam. And there's a great core of directors who have been here since the beginning – Brenton Smith, Richard Jordan, Trevor Gale, Brian Phillips, Julian Sharpe and many other key team members too – I'm really proud of that!

'I love my clients! I try to spend three days a week with clients, with Monday spent on management issues. Friday is me time, working from home, contemplating, moving the agenda forward.

'I'm good at listening and I always try to look at things from the other person's point of view. It can be a burden and it doesn't mean you always do what they say – a client may say, for example, that he doesn't like glass topped tables when the actual issue was a bad acoustics association from some previous experience. The point is to listen with an open mind. I've always been like that – it probably comes from being part of a big, outgoing family. The house was always full of friends, with me aged eight running the bar at my parents parties, or having my own parties with 40 friends in the cellar!

'I don't think I've changed much – I've bought some land to build a house on the seafront in Bexhill. When it's done, and it's a long term project, it will be a place to have fun, like a mini hotel. The design brief includes holding weekend parties for 12!

'I've been with my partner Martyn for 10 years. We live in Clapham and have a little house on the South Coast which we use every other weekend. I travel a lot, long haul to the Caicos Islands, Malaysia, India, Mexico, Sydney, New York...as well as all over Europe. I love cities – and I particularly love walking across Waterloo Bridge, with views of St. Paul's and the Gherkin.

'And I also love leaving London on a Friday and waking up to the sound of seagulls or taking my favourite cliff walk to the pub for lunch!'