

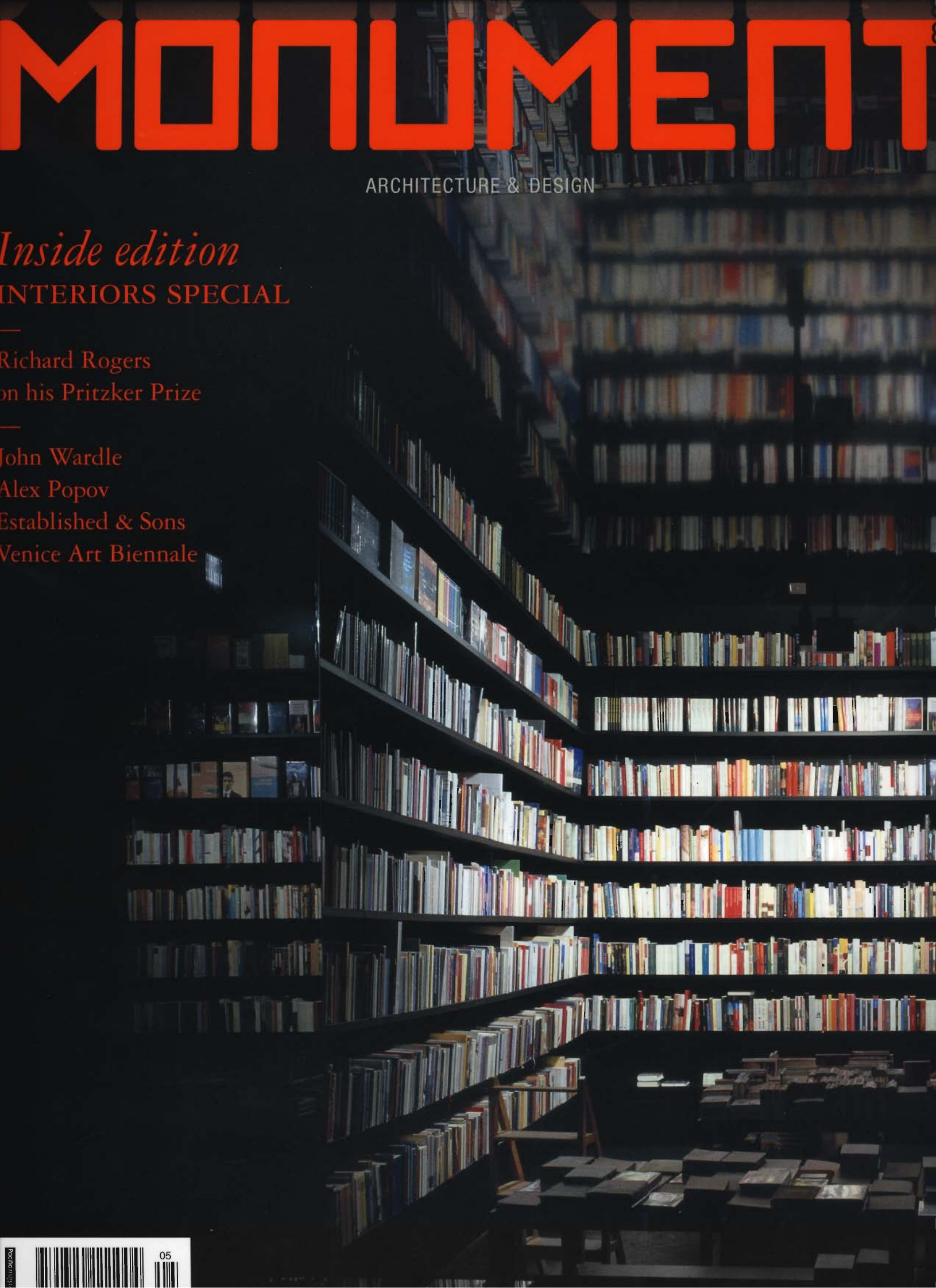
MONUMENT

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

Inside edition
INTERIORS SPECIAL

Richard Rogers
on his Pritzker Prize

John Wardle
Alex Popov
Established & Sons
Venice Art Biennale



HARBOUR MASTER

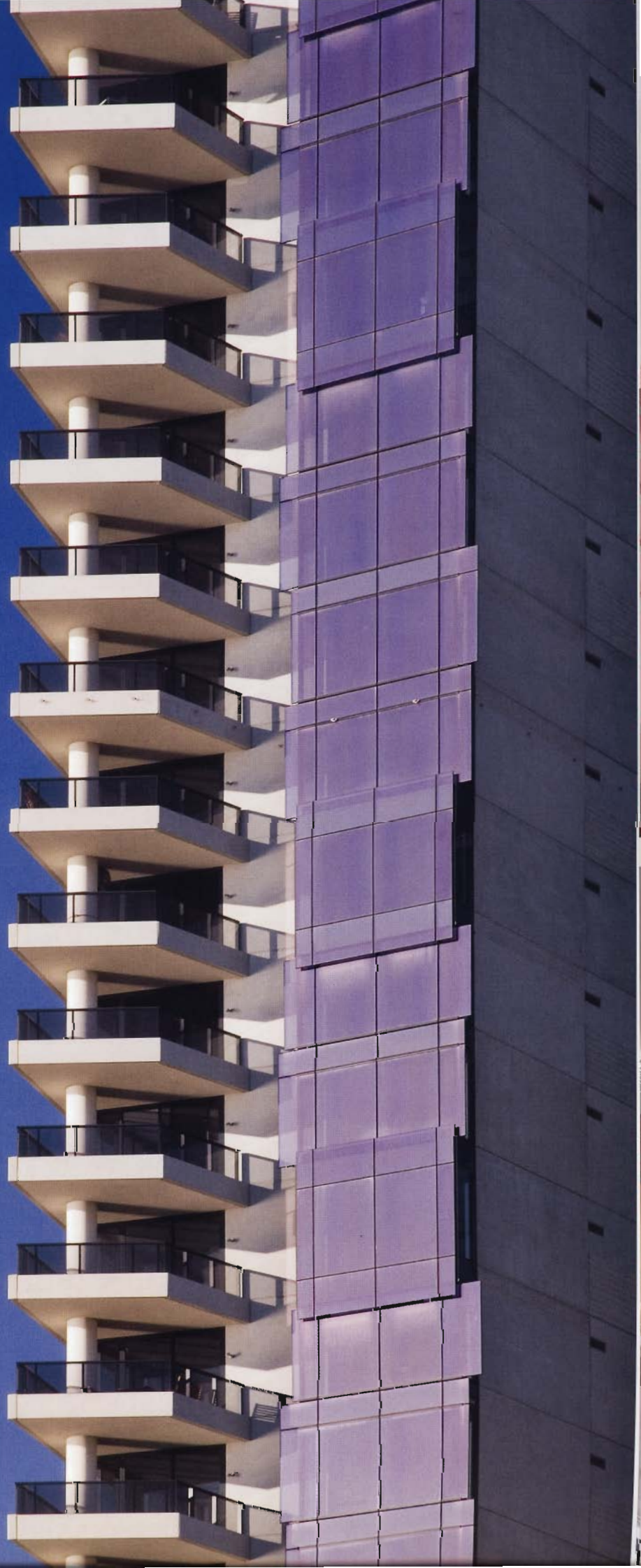


John Wardle's reputation for finely detailed homes is brought to bear in a joint venture with Hassell: Dock 5 apartments at Docklands. The result demonstrates an equal fastidiousness at high-rise scale.

Review SHELLEY PENN
Photography JOHN GOLLINGS



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On any project, an architect designs through the scales from big picture to detail, getting closer and closer to 1:1, the real scale of built form and experience. It's inevitable that the first lines will be relatively crude when viewed at the next scale up. For some, the design review process continues beyond traditional design phases right through construction, but this is rarely possible. In the commercial market in particular, design is more likely to suffer a much earlier abandonment, with the detailed design stage being skipped altogether. Occasionally this is because an architect lacks the passion and tenacity to work more than absolutely necessary. More often it's the result of inadequate time and fees, where the 'bottom line' is everything, and client vision is short term. Under such conditions it's quite easy for an architect to tailor their work to fit the fee, by abbreviating the design process. And the differences show in the quality of the final outcome.

At an urban scale, Docklands itself looks a bit like it missed out on detailed design. The early concepts of its layout on a virtual 'blank page' still dominate, but some of them were flawed and as a whole they lack the refinement afforded by review and resolution at closer scale. This is perhaps a product of the decision to develop precincts concurrently, rather than allowing them to grow from the establishment of a smaller centre. For the time being, Docklands is a bit like an oversized display ground where each new tower that pops up is vulnerable to scrutiny, lacking the mitigation of older, finer, city fabric and activity. Buildings can be compared; degrees of design quality and sophistication assessed; speculations can be made – about client vision, about architectural application and integrity, and the shortcomings of the more common, more commercial approach.

Designed by John Wardle Architects in joint venture with Hassell, Dock 5 is the most recently completed of residential towers in Docklands, and one of the few that displays a thorough approach to design in detail. It employs the usual elements of podium, tower and cap, but it does so with greater complexity and application than most of its neighbours. Each component and level has been considered in 3-D, not merely extruded from plan. The elements interlock and overlap, and although there's a lot going on, they draw from a relatively tight palette of kinked lines, planes and forms, so there is an overall consistency that ties the pieces together. It is also an authentic sensibility, a particular response which distinguishes it from the predominantly generic residential towers around it.

Dock 5 is the western-most tower at Victoria Harbour, though not for long. The podium is sited at a reduced setback from the water's edge, responding to the promenade which widens at this point. This allows the tower to come right up to the main setback line, and in doing so it ensures clear access from the tower to views east and west. It also shifts the promenade, creating more dynamic spaces and drawing pedestrians to the areas between buildings rather than reinforcing the corridor effect so evident across the water at New Quay.

The podium is highly articulated, with various forms stacked and sliding across one another; these are glass boxes (drawn conceptually from shipping containers), or concrete balconies for linear expression with their corresponding depth and shadow. As a whole they are both dynamic and coherent, creating a





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01, 08, 10 Dani Marti's pre-cast concrete wall in the Dock 5 foyer 02 The highly articulated podium with stacked forms recalls shipping containers 03 Shimmering Rimex cladding with purple indents 04, 06 A palette of kinked lines, planes and forms ties the pieces together 05 The podium's reduced setback responds to the promenade which widens at this point and allows the tower to come right up to the main setback line 07 Residential entry graphics by Garry Emery





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series of ground-level spaces that are unusually diverse and fine-grained for Docklands. In addition to the predominant retail and hospitality uses proposed, the podium also integrates small residential apartments that overlook the intermediate areas, encouraging greater natural surveillance and pedestrian activity. For the time being, these spaces are unoccupied, stage-like, waiting for drama.

The main tower aspect is to the north, and four out of five apartments on a typical floor have excellent access to sunlight and expansive views. The fifth apartment in each case has its own, more diffident character, housed in a vertical annex of sorts that is grafted to the rear of the tower. The shift from four to five units was a late development, but the formal expression, with its exaggerated 'shadow-line' recesses against the main tower, facilitates terrific views and a very private atmosphere. Apartments here face south but their outlook encompasses 180 degrees from the city at east around to the Bolte Bridge at west.

The tower itself uses the same ingredients as the podium – expressed concrete floor plates, glass curtain wall and concrete shell, though the colours and details vary from those below. The play of form versus plane versus line also continues upward, with line dominating as balcony edges, behind which the envelope slithers, unevenly. The complexity here is toned down, and includes some very subtle adjustments, but even these small variations are important. For instance, a shift in plan dimension of 150mm in the eastern edge of apartment balconies is played out across 19 floor levels. It is barely legible but contributes to the finer scale and dynamism of the form, both at close range and from a distance. The capping 'piece' reinstates form as dominant over line, and, in an old tradition, is more flamboyant. Oversize cantilevers, an almost misfit, idiosyncratic logic and the use of Rimex stainless-steel cladding with purple indents means this roof element changes with the sunlight, and the forms seem to shimmer and morph with it.

In some ways, the building form reflects the obsessive attention to detail which marks John Wardle's architecture. It is a bit like a very large piece of sculptural joinery, a trademark element in his work. On the other hand, the actual detailing appears a little less refined in the exterior of the podium forms – a slight disappointment around window frames and junctions. Internally the detail is there, though pared back. Small interventions in plasterwork around lift-call buttons and wall-lights demonstrate an ease with localising spaces through thoughtful detail. The foyer space integrates several artworks, the main piece being a beautiful pre-cast concrete wall by Dani Marti. Garry Emery's residential entry graphics are also exceptional.

There are few buildings at Docklands that demonstrate a really considered, authentic development of design in detail. Tower 5 at Yarra's Edge by Wood Marsh does it, and so does Dock 5. These buildings stand out in this fresh new field, for their delicacy and their authenticity. In contrast most of the other residential towers here are bulky, crude and generic, and these differences are evident up close and from afar. As Docklands develops, we need more of the former, and preferably none of the latter. **M**





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