

# SINGAPORE GOLD

STORY **MARK HILL RYDE TAFE SYDNEY**

**SECOND IN THE AILD M STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION 2006**

As a student you always carry that little bit of hope that something special will happen, not only to propel you into the real world, but something that gives you the chance to look back on all your hard work and know why you pushed yourself. I, thanks to **AILD M** and **BORAL** was given that special thing.

Before I met **Jim Fogarty** I expected that he was going to look at me and think, time to play baby sitter. I had done my research and knew that he was a highly successful international designer well known for his show gardens.

Arriving in Singapore, I hitched a taxi to my hotel and sent him a message, "I'm at the hotel, I'd love to drop by, should I bring my boots." He replied, "Bring your boots, you will be very useful to us."



Mark Hill, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Jim Fogarty (far left) 'One Country' (left) Photos Jim Fogarty

This was the first **Singapore Garden Festival**. It was held on the 6th floor of the **Suntec City Convention Center**. I made my way on up and Victoria, Jim's wife, was there and introduced me to Jim. To my delight he was actually keen to see me and he threw me straight in the deep end. He started me out supervising a team of Bangladeshi workers and I soon became aware how primitive Singapore construction techniques were. I was a little surprised to see the workers gather in numbers to do a simple job and with only the most basic of tools. There was no questioning their work ethics, but things might have been so much easier if they had an angle grinder or a wheel barrow.

After a while it wasn't hard to notice that things weren't going quite as Jim had planned. The plants had been delayed at customs and the walls had to be repainted. So I grabbed a tatty old brush and dug in. Jim chose an iron based paint that we coated in acid to give a rusted iron look. This seemed to be slowed by the air conditioning which altered the weathering effect. We worked late that night trying to make up time and get prepared for the plant delivery the next day.

Walking back to my hotel on the first night I was buggered. Looking back on the day, it occurred to me that I had spent it surrounded by the some of the world's top designers. People like **Julian Dowle**, who had conquered Chelsea 26 times, **Christopher Bradley-Hole** also from the UK, **Nico Wissing** from the Netherlands, **Stephen Caffyn**, a Singapore based UK designer, **Jamie Durie** and of course Jim. Now if someone had told me this 2 years ago I would have laughed. This was going to be a special week.

I filled myself at breakfast the next morning knowing what we might be in for. Walking to the show, I was lucky enough to spot the workers truck driving past and managed to hitch a ride in the tray. We didn't understand a word that each other were saying but there was plenty of laughter.

After another hectic morning the plants arrived and I could see the relief on Jim's face as things came to life. It was like working with a conductor. He would stand back and visualise, then pass on the orders. The garden came together like music. It must have been the adrenalin because I've never worked a 17 hour day and it felt like 8 hours. One thing that stood out to me about Jim's garden was the use of views and vistas allowing many different

focal points to be capitalised on. He also showed great design sense in his balance of the hard and soft elements.

Jim's **Design Brief** read, this show garden, '**One Country**', aims to depict Australian design in a contemporary garden setting which shows the strong influences of this diverse country. In this garden, the three principle geographical elements of Australia are represented:

1. water (the oceans and rivers)
2. the forests
3. the outback

Jim had been working on this for nine months and he confronted each decision with care. Right down to the tiny details. Watching the garden evolve was a great learning experience. On the final day of construction we were treated with a visit by the Singaporean Prime Minister, **Lee Hsien Loong**. Jim explained to him the significance of the 3 Wollemi Pines that were used to help represent the Australian forests.

We were kicked out around 1 pm for Judging. I went back to the hotel and had a beer by the pool. The feeling of completing the garden after all the dramas was such a high. That night I waited for the phone call from Jim to see how we had gone. He messaged me from the award ceremony, 'Gold medal, we're going to the bar'. We partied pretty hard, finally hitting the sack around 6am.

The Judges also awarded Jim a **Royal Horticultural Society Award for Excellence**. The first of its kind to be awarded outside the UK.

Later that day I woke up buzzing. I took a stroll through the Botanic Gardens to recover, then caught up with the group and headed down to the river to soak up a bit of the culture, followed up with dinner, a chance to relax and have a laugh.

Before I flew home the next evening I had the chance to watch Jim handle some media commitments. He proved to be a total professional and someone to look up to.

As I said my goodbyes I knew this wasn't the end. I'd taken the opportunity and it had paid off more than I had imagined. Working with Jim has given me a whole new set of goals to strive for and the inspiration to drive me.