

# Into the fire

Not content with starting slowly, architect Robert Goodliffe's first project involved 32 apartments and making history.

**F**OR most designers, one house brings enough headaches. Architect Robert Goodliffe's first major residential project 10 years ago was to design not one house but 32 apartments.

Things went well enough until the roofing stage of the development when an arson attack sent Goodliffe's stress levels off the graph.

But back to the beginning.

After graduating from Melbourne University in 1981, Goodliffe joined the Fitzroy-based practice Clarke, Hopkins Clarke. Aside from two years off in the mid '80s to travel in Europe and the US he has been there since and is now a partner.

Until the apartment job – one of the first city office building conversions as part of Melbourne 3000, a major push to get more people living in the city – Goodliffe worked mainly in the commercial and education area.

He and founding partner Les Clarke were approached by developers to refine redevelopment plans for the historic city building, Fairfax House in Little Collins Street, near the corner of Queen Street.

The project was about to be scrapped but made better economic sense with 32 apartments, including six, two-storey townhouses on top of the five-storey building and using the high ceilings to create split-level studio apartments with the bed on a raised podium.

By December 1994 the building was almost finished and the apartments had been sold off the plan. "The roofing material was being delivered on a Sunday night when the fire virtually gutted the building," says Goodliffe.

The floors collapsed and all the packs of plasterboard fell into the basement, which was full of water from the fire hoses.



The two insurance companies paid up. Everything was started from scratch and the building was finished a year later.

The project cost \$2.85 million and the most expensive apartment was \$250,000, or about \$2500 a square metre, compared with about \$7000 a square metre today.

Goodliffe is now working on another historic city project, the adjoining Mutual Stores and Empire buildings on the corner of Flinders and Degraves streets, which will be converted to 78 standard apartments and 300 student apartments.



**1** Robert Goodliffe in an apartment in his first residential project.  
**2** The historic city building Fairfax House.  
**3** The interiors of one of the apartments.

PICTURES: NEIL NEWITT

