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James Stewart, Partner  
ALT-254



## Well-Connected Hong Kong Nurtures Growth of Small Architecture Company

**ALT-254 has been doubling in headcount annually since it was founded three years ago and this is just the beginning**

Architect Vincent McIllduff, from Ireland, and project manager James Stewart, from New Zealand, were both brought to Hong Kong by work, but it was through a triathlon event in Australia that they met. While training together, they started sharing stories about work and realised they had a common view: that oftentimes architecture projects involve too many consultants and contractors, making costs unnecessarily high and accountability difficult to track. They decided to combine their respective areas of expertise to form ALT-254 as a one-stop solution.

And their business kicked off in a somewhat unconventional fashion.

“We met our very first client at a bar. We told him what we were looking to do and exactly why we wanted to do it. He took a gamble on us, gave us a large budget to build a ski house in Japan, where we had never worked before. We delivered the project on budget, on time and got a bit of press locally - that was a great starting point,” McIllduff recalled.

“I always say to people we couldn’t start this business anywhere else in the world. There are all the opportunities that you get just by being in Hong Kong. Everybody is willing to help you out. They might give you an opportunity on a house, an introduction or a business referral. There is a lot of work here; you just need to go out and look for it,” Stewart said. One of the specialisms of ALT-254 is designing and redesigning retail spaces, and it counts global fashion houses among its clients. It also has ongoing projects in Lombok, Indonesia and Niseko, Japan, building holiday homes for investors. Other markets in which ALT-254 has done projects include Shanghai and Beijing as well as Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

McIllduff and Stewart are constantly looking to improve their company’s competitiveness, and one of the means is technology. Recently, they have developed an application that allows clients to modify the look and feel of their dream houses in a virtual reality environment.

“Last year, almost 60 percent of our designers’ time was spent rendering and drawing different options, and that’s something we are actively trying to reduce. Within one to two weeks, we can build this virtual reality model, and the client can go away on the weekend, choose all the materials and finishes, and give it back to us. We can cut a huge portion of our resources off a project and pass the savings on to the client,” Stewart said.

ALT-254 currently has a staff of 12, consisting an even mix of locals and expatriates. The company’s headcount has been doubling every year since it was founded three years ago.

### ALT-254

- Formed as a one-stop solution to architecture projects
- Has been doubling its headcount annually since it was founded three years ago
- Specialised in retail space design and residential projects

[alt-254.com](http://alt-254.com)