

**Will Deague**  
33, CEO, Asian Pacific  
Building Corporation

## Will the builder

The youthful Melbourne developer brings together boutique hotels with the best in Australian art.

Words Michael Pickering

Perhaps it's the impetuosity of youth that gave 33-year-old Melbourne construction executive Will Deague the chutzpah to build three theme hotels in his home city during the 'GFC'.

Whatever it was, the bold initiative of developing the Art Series Hotel group alongside his father – the sometimes controversial veteran Melbourne builder David Deague – has enlivened the southern city's hotel scene.

The genesis of the idea for the hotels, which currently comprise The Cullen, The Olsen and The Blackman (named respectively after Australian artists Adam Cullen, John Olsen and Charles Blackman), lies in a remarkable 2001 trip to William Creek in South Australia organised by David Deague. Seeking to revive the art of Australian landscape painting, Deague staged a lavish outback gathering, inviting 10 artists to bush studios near Lake Eyre – which had flooded for the first time in 50 years – to paint for a week. The resulting works would become features in Deague's family home and the HQ of his company, the Asian Pacific Building Corporation. Will and his three siblings were also on the now legendary trip.

"Our family has a big passion for the arts and we've been involved in them for a long time," says Will

Deague, who assumed the mantle of APBC CEO in 2008. "We got a lot of art work out of that [2001 trip] and also got close to a lot of the artists like John Olsen, Tim Storrier and David Larwill. About the same time we started getting into the development of hotels. We then started seeing this explosion of boutique hotels in New York and Paris and London – a big move away from the standard corporate hotels towards these smaller, more personalised properties.

"We just thought it would be a great mix to have a boutique art chain and name them after Australian artists."

A fifth-generation property developer, Deague was involved in the family company's building projects since his early teens, starting full-time work at 17 as soon as he left school. His relative youth, says Deague, has never been an impediment to his progress.

"I've experienced being younger than everyone else all my life," observes Deague. "From the age of 13 I'd be on development sites or golf courses building and learning how much you can ask and expect from people. I guess [being young]

meant I tried to work with people a bit more. You can't be a 20-year-old kid just telling people what to do."

Reflecting the concerns of his peer group, Deague has brought environmental sensitivity and technological sophistication to the development of the Art Series group. Patrons can rent Smart cars and

Fairfaxphotos



'I COULD STOP RIGHT NOW BUT I GUESS I'M NOT BORN TO SIT BACK.'



pushbikes to get around Melbourne, while Deague hopes to develop an app that allows guests to check into their room from their phone.

"We've got a pretty young team so that puts a different spin on things," he says. "The older statesman in the company think the only way to advertise is in *The Age* but we're moving almost completely to Google, Facebook, and the like."

Favoured as a destination by younger corporates, creatives and entertainment industry types, the Art Series properties not only feature the striking paintings of the eponymous artist but books, in-house curators, gallery tours and other information on the artists for interested guests.

Capitalising on a gap in Melbourne's leasing market, Deague introduced the Art Series Residences, whereby people on longer-term projects can live in the hotels for extended periods. Art Series hotels are now planned for Sydney, Brisbane, and possibly Perth.

Away from construction Deague is married with two young children. Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula is a frequent weekend getaway and they holiday in Bali once a year. Any other spare time is taken up by his role as President of the St Kilda Road Precinct Committee, attempting to improve the area through beautification. Life, in other words, is extremely busy.

"I could stop right now but I guess I'm not born to sit back," he says. "I guess while I'm this age and I'm enthusiastic I might as well go for it. I'll slow down one day but I hope I can drive around with my kids in 50 years and say that we developed some great buildings." ❖

## 5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT...

### Steven McQueen

( 1 )

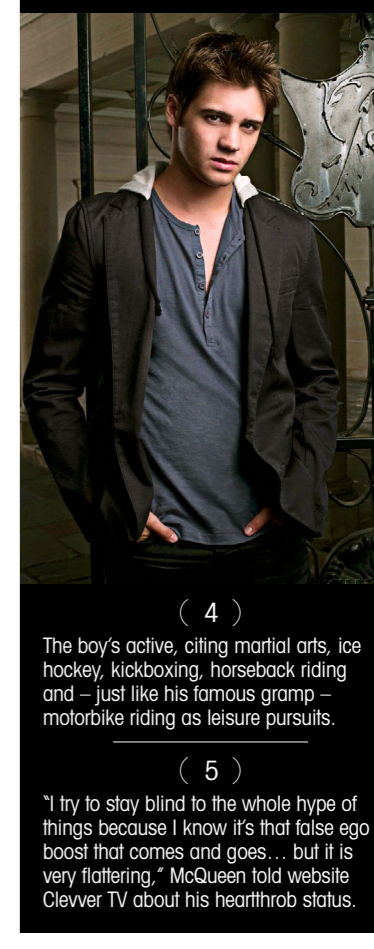
He's the 22-year-old actor grandson of favourite *Men's Style* icon Steve McQueen, though bears not even a passing resemblance. McQueen is the son of Steve's son Chad and actress Stacey Totten. His step-father is Luc Robitaille... a former ice hockey star.

( 2 )

McQueen's biggest role to date is playing "troubled teen" Jeremy Gilbert in the eye candy TV series *The Vampire Diaries*. His character is described as on "a dangerous and self-destructive path since the death of his parents".

( 3 )

He's also appeared in guests roles on *CSI: Miami*, *Without a Trace* and *Numbers*, and had a recurring role in TV drama *Everwood*. His role as 'The Kid' in indie film *Club Soda* won him the long-winded Beverly Hills Film Festival Audience Award for Best Actor award.



( 4 )

The boy's active, citing martial arts, ice hockey, kickboxing, horseback riding and – just like his famous gramp – motorbike riding as leisure pursuits.

( 5 )

"I try to stay blind to the whole hype of things because I know it's that false ego boost that comes and goes... but it is very flattering," McQueen told website Clevver TV about his heartthrob status.