

## China tech ambition a mission impossible

CHINA'S president has called for technological self-reliance in the escalating rivalry with the US, but experts believe Beijing's late start on tech and relatively backward capabilities could make that a mission impossible.

China has no doubt made an amazing transformation, from a former basket case wracked by mass famine and political upheaval to a highly connected society marked by growing use of renewable energy, a space programme, and bullet trains criss-crossing the country.

But a closer look reveals that while China is adept at assembling foreign technologies into commercially successful products at home, its ability to innovate remains deeply hampered, tech experts said.

Take semiconductors, the building blocks of the global digital architecture. China's government has poured money into an effort to develop its own semiconductors and chip designs but has not been able to close the gap with US, Japanese and South Korean rivals.

"One way to look at (China's situation) is that someone may be able to make beautiful designs out of Legos, but they don't know how to make the Legos themselves," said Gabriel Chou, Asia chair for World Semiconductor Trade Statistics, a grouping of semiconductor-product companies.

"(China) is aggressively attacking the end-market, such as mobile phones or other consumer products. But semiconductors require many very fundamental science skills that China struggles with."

The risks are now clear following last week's move by Washington to ban Chinese telecom giant Huawei's access to critical American chips and other technology.

The ban has thrown the company's future into doubt, causing a number of Huawei partners around the world to bail on the company and emphatically illustrating US tech clout.

# Breaking ground with new SA brand



DEVELOPING: Urban Habitats managing director Jock Merrigan and director Josh Semmler.

### GIUSEPPE TAURIELLO

ADELAIDE home builder Urban Habitats has marked its 20th year with the launch of a new brand focused on delivering small-scale renovations and extensions.

The company has recruited one of its former plumbing contractors Tom Brown to oversee the new Nest Built brand, which will tap into Urban Habitats' design-led construction philosophy.

Urban Habitats managing director Jock Merrigan said Nest Built would take on many of the small-scale jobs that were inefficient under Urban Habitats' previous structure.

"As Urban Habitats has grown and found a niche for ourselves in the more boutique end of the design and build and

even architectural market, we found that there were clients coming to us with budgets that were at the lower end of the market, which Urban Habitats wasn't necessarily able to best provide for," he said.

"We were passing all that stuff off and not really having anyone to give it to, because we didn't feel anyone was doing a good job in the market. "Through speaking with some of our peers in the industry that have succeeded in having a smaller works business, we thought it was an opportunity worth exploring."

Urban Habitats was established by Mr Merrigan in 1999, with business partner Josh Semmler joining him as a director in 2014.

Mr Semmler said the company had recently re-entered

the development market, with a focus on completing townhouse and infill projects with development partners.

It's currently completing a \$4 million luxury townhouse project on Halifax St, in the CBD, with other projects in the pipeline.

"We have been over the last eight to ten years predominantly extension renovation work, with some really nice big iconic new homes mixed in there," Mr Semmler said.

"The market's still tough in development but money's cheap and so we've got private investors wanting to form part of that. Where money in the banks is giving them 3 per cent, we can offer them more than that." Urban Habitats employs ten staff, and while it has traditionally engaged external ar-

chitects to lead its design work, the company is currently recruiting for an in-house architect to support its in-house interior architect.

Mr Merrigan said key to the company's longevity was its history of being "conservative and risk-averse".

"We haven't been someone that's wanted to go from nothing to being the world's biggest builder overnight," he said.

"I think some of the builders that have fallen have probably got lost in their own self belief and realised at some point that there's no money to pay the bills. Unfortunately people get burnt through that experience."

"Having a good reputation as a builder, both for the quality of your work and the way you conduct business, is very important."

## New brand push into interstate markets

GIUSEPPE TAURIELLO  
BUSINESS REPORTER

PREMIER Steven Marshall says the State Government's new approach to promoting the state will focus on interstate markets rather than campaigns targeted within South Australia.

Speaking at an Urban Development Institute of Australia lunch on Friday, Mr Marshall said the State Government would pursue a renewed branding push in interstate markets.

"There's been a bit of talk recently in the media about the promotion of our state - it's fair to say the former government had a major focus on promoting South Australia in South Australia," Mr Marshall said.



"I personally think that every person in the state knows this is a great place to live - we made a conscious decision to spend more of our money, in fact more of your money, in promoting South Australia interstate."

Mr Marshall's comments came days after the State Government decided to cut its funding to Brand South Australia.

Brand SA, which designed the state's marketing logo, will shut its doors on June 30 after having its annual funding of \$16 million pulled.

"We will, in the coming weeks and months, be announcing precisely what we're going to do in this area," Mr Marshall said on Friday.

"But (it will involve) an increase in promoting South Australia in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth - talking to people about the changed narrative in South Australia, speaking to people that came from South Australia that might want to return to South Australia, and talking to people about the great turnaround that we're having here in our state at the moment."

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