

Green marriage falters at altar

■ By Dawn Gibson

AN ALLIANCE between two Perth architecture firms to promote environmentally friendly design has broken up before it had a chance to get off the ground, leaving one of the firms in search of other partners to continue the project.

Cameron Chisholm & Nicol pulled the pin last week on an arrangement made about five months ago with smaller firm Baverstock Murphy & Associates to work together on Ecotect.

The project, the brainchild of Baverstock Murphy's Garry Baverstock, aims to win contracts to recycle old office buildings and design suburban subdivisions.

The companies have completed one joint venture — producing urban design guidelines for Menzies Court's Stirling Lakes subdivision on Karrinyup Road — and will continue to work together on an informal, project-by-project basis.

CCN director Greg Salter did not want to comment on the break-up. Mr Baverstock said he believed the alliance might not have appealed to some of CCN's more conservative clients.

Mr Baverstock will continue with the project and is hoping other big architectural firms are willing to become involved.

He said there were plenty of opportunities in cities like Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia to upgrade office buildings that had become inefficient and out of date but where the concrete was still good.

Recycling these buildings to make them energy-efficient would lead to huge reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Mr Baverstock is already in discussions with Sydney-based firm Liang Peddle Thorpe with a view to forming a joint venture to recycle buildings in Hong Kong.

"This can also result in savings for the owners of the buildings as, in some cases, the work can be carried out while the tenants are in the building, preserving cash flow while adding considerably to the value of the property," he said.

Ed Haysom, the national president of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), promoted the idea of recycling office buildings into more energy-efficient structures or new uses like hotels or apartments during a visit to Perth six weeks ago.

The RAIA is lobbying the Federal and State governments to have environmental design guidelines included in building codes.

Mr Baverstock said he had been interested in creating "green" buildings since he started his career in Perth in the 1970s.

He is the WA representative on the RAIA's national environment committee and the winner of several solar design awards.

His firm's refurbishment in 1986 of the three-storey Russell Centre on Adelaide Terrace, the WA headquarters of the Australian Pensioners' League, is an example of how a building can be upgraded to produce huge savings in



Partner wanted: Garry Baverstock is hoping other big architectural firms are willing to become involved in projects to recycle old buildings. PICTURE: TONY ASHBY

power bills. Windows were replaced with reflective glass to deflect heat, the air-conditioning system was upgraded to use night air to cool the building and a central atrium was created from a plumbing duct to create a feeling of space and light.

Another main focus of Ecotect is to encourage the developers of suburban subdivisions to design blocks so homeowners need less energy to heat and cool their homes.

"Basically we have to get back to what the Romans did, which was to have a grid pattern orientated toward a northerly aspect," Mr Baverstock said.

"Having blocks going around in cul-de-sacs may look good on a plan but it plays havoc with energy design and it also costs the developer more.

"Land developers are starting to take these ideas on board but what we are saying is that we need to get these concepts taken into consideration at the master plan stage so blocks have the right orientation, shapes and frontages.

"We need frontages to be wide when the north is to the backyard and nar-

rower when the north is on the side yard. There are two advantages: for the developer, more blocks can be fitted into a subdivision, and for the future home owner, they will end up with an energy efficient home because a builder is likely to design a house fitting the block that is orientated naturally toward the north."

Mr Baverstock said there was enormous potential to export energy saving concepts to Asia to reduce heavy pollution.

"We are currently discussing a seminar with a member of the Indonesian Government to initiate the establishment of a number of aged care 'eco villages' in Indonesia, aimed at attracting wealthy retirees from neighbouring Asian countries, such as Japan, where pressure is being put on governments to support ageing populations," he said.

"At the same time, we are looking to assist in the establishment of university courses to enable Asian students to gain practical experience with these projects and undertake part of their study in Australia."