

CASE STUDY

Universal
Manufacturing



CATEGORY:
Manufacturing

LOCATION:
Melbourne, Victoria

The Art of Collaboration

Briefed to create an engaging centre piece in Federation Square for Melbourne's annual Light In Winter program, Canadian-born "light artist" Bruce Ramus collaborated closely with Bendigo-based Universal Manufacturing and BlueScope Distribution's Bendigo branch to create a truly brilliant work of art.

Formed from 12 tonnes of steel, standing 13 metres high, with spans 17 metres wide and featuring 21 curved steel branches illuminated with LED lighting which lit up in response to the volume and pitch of human voices, the Helix Tree was without a doubt the highlight of Melbourne's 2013 winter light festival.

Visitors to the Helix Tree, and various Melbourne choirs, "sang up the tree" every night throughout June, delighting in the finished artwork and blissfully unaware of the complex process that created it.

The 12 tonnes of steel was first rolled into 40 different radii and then had to be cut into over 1,000 pieces, twisted and re-welded to create the helical spirals of the tree,

with the 21 curved steel branches reinforced by a steel ring beam to provide the necessary structural strength.

According to Mr Ramus, the project was considered an “improbable” challenge which few companies wanted to take on, so he was thrilled when Universal Manufacturing’s Managing Director Aaron Cassidy eagerly took on the manufacturing and BlueScope Distribution put their hand up to assist Universal Manufacturing in bringing his creation to life.

“Not many steel fabricators can look at a complex project like this and say “we can do it”, but Aaron was so keen and so right for this,” Mr Ramus stated. “Universal Manufacturing has only just moved into manufacturing but they’re a fantastic company who really came to the party.”

Sourcing all their steel from BlueScope Distribution in a close working relationship spanning 10 years, Universal Manufacturing naturally turned to the Bendigo branch for materials and assistance in creating the challenging and extraordinary work of art.

“BlueScope Distribution put their hand up and said they’d also take on the intricate task of cutting the larger curving steel pipes into a multitude of pieces and that completely unlocked the project,” Mr Ramus said.

“After they joined in the process it really felt like we were all in this together - myself, Universal Manufacturing, BlueScope Distribution and the Bendigo community - and BlueScope Distribution played a really big role in that.

“As a company, Ramus Illumination is very interested in producing interactive public works that engage and connect people,” Mr Ramus continued. “The Helix Tree is a great example of how that process of community engagement and connection begins in the design phase and flows through the supply and fabrication of all elements of the project, allowing for the potential of community pieces that are grounded in co-operative and harmonious collaborations.”

Both Universal Manufacturing and BlueScope Distribution’s Bendigo team were also pleased to have collaborated in creating a work of art on this scale for such a high profile event, despite the many challenges.

“Previously only known as Universal Fencing, we created Universal Manufacturing to leverage off existing skill sets and perform more manufacturing-based work,” Aaron explained. “The Helix Tree provided the perfect project to get the new business name known and to showcase the skills and ability of our business.”

“On average we had about six people dedicated to the project 24/7, so there were a lot of long days, nights and weekends without much



The partially completed Helix Tree

sleep,” Aaron continued. “But whatever the challenge, we just overcame it and BlueScope Distribution provided excellent support, helping with sourcing and delivering materials and cutting around 20 per cent of the pipes.”

“It was a really interesting project that presented unique challenges,” BlueScope Distribution’s Bendigo Account Manager Noel Humphreys added. “We assisted with pricing, availability and logistics and also had to adapt our saw to cope with the complex task of cutting the larger pipes, but we have a strong working relationship with Universal Manufacturing and together we ensured Bruce Ramus’ magnificent design came to life exactly as he had planned.”

So pleased was Bruce Ramus with the collaboration on the Helix Tree that it may even bear further fruit.

“I’ve had a design in-studio for some time which I wasn’t sure how to achieve - now I know I can call on Universal Manufacturing and BlueScope Distribution and we can work together,” Mr Ramus said. “Working with the two companies has put steel in a new light as a flexible and adaptable product which can be used in all aspects of creation.”

For more company information visit:

www.universalmanufacturing.com.au and www.ramus.com.au

Phone: 13 72 82

www.bluescopedistribution.com.au

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