

What They Say About Glass “Down Under”

Energy Efficiency Means a Big Push for Australia’s Glass Industry

by Ellen Rogers

The glass industry in Australia is not all that different from North America’s. Both areas are dealing with similar issues: the global economic downturn; impending requirements for increased energy efficiency; evolving standards and building codes. So in Australia, as in North America, glass producers and processors join together annually to discuss, debate and work toward bettering their industry. With the theme to “Aim Higher,” the Australian Glass and Glazing Association (AGGA) did just that at its annual meet-

ing in September in Queensland. Close to 300 attendees from the Australian glass industry, as well as a handful of representatives from other countries, gathered for the three-day conference.

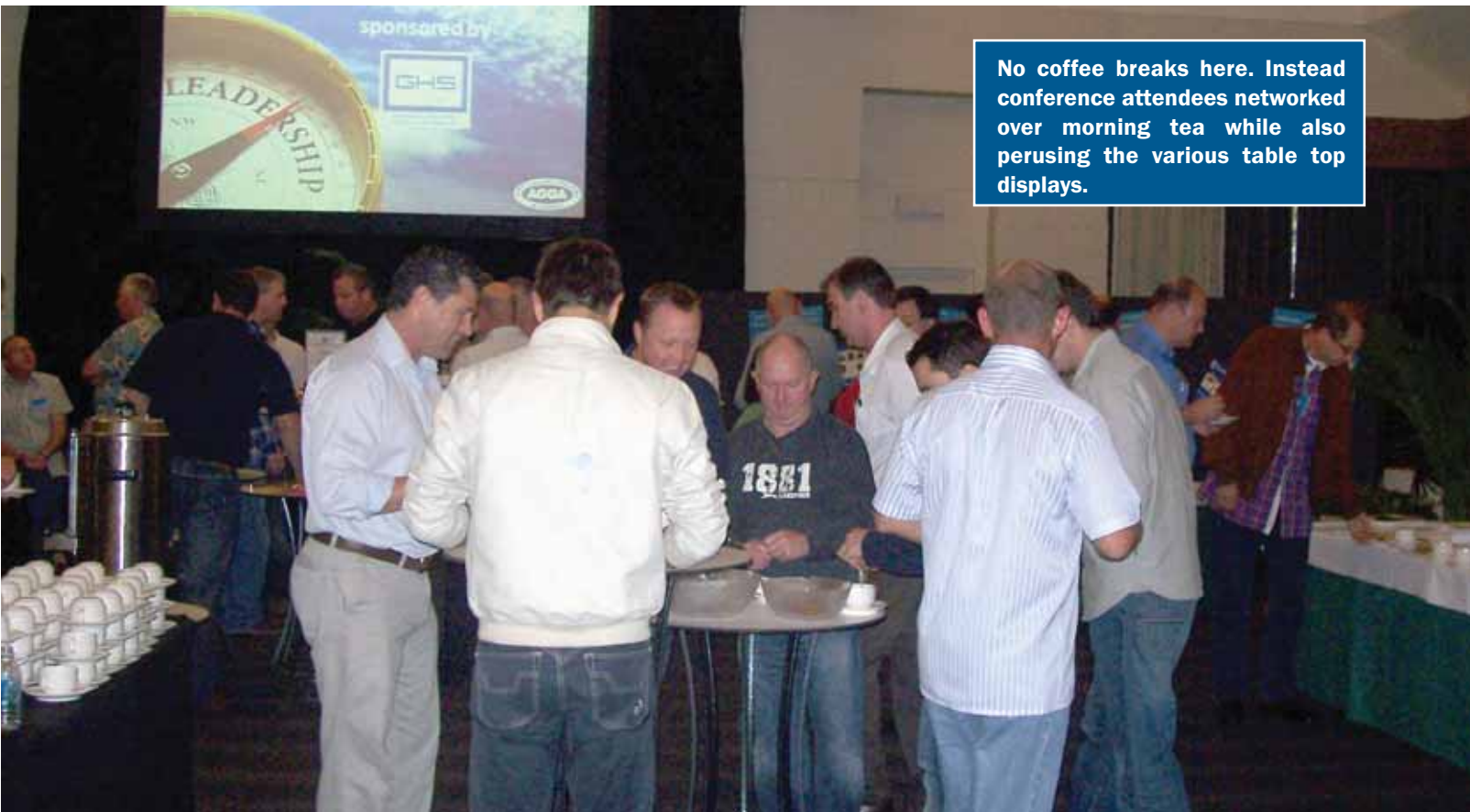
Chris Barker with the Australian Glass Group and Howard Wigham with Viridian provided an overview of the Australian glass market as a whole.

“Australia is less impacted than other economies [by the global downturn], but globally glass has not been spared,” said Barker, noting that global capacity is down about 20 percent since last year.

“In Australia glass demand is a function of building activity . . . we are starting to see some positives.”

Barker predicted some residential recovery moving forward, but added that the commercial side is still experiencing a “reasonable decline.”

One topic that got a bit of discussion was the government’s Six Star regulation (similar to ENERGY STAR® for residential buildings in the United States). The Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) is striving to increase the energy efficiency provision in the 2010



No coffee breaks here. Instead conference attendees networked over morning tea while also perusing the various table top displays.



The AGGA Conference drew around 300 attendees, all focused on finding ways to better their industry.

edition of its building code, which has placed significant emphasis on glass, having stated: “With most other building elements at practical limits of thermal performance glazing is the remaining pathway to better ratings.”

But Australia still has a ways to go to get to where it needs to be in terms of energy-efficient glazing usage. For example, according to one chart Barker showed, low-E glass is used in only about 5 percent of new residential construction in the state of New South Wales; the expectation is to reach 25 percent by 2012.

Barker added that the use of value-added glass in the residential market as a whole is forecast to grow about 45 percent by 2012.

“A goal well worth aiming higher for,” he said.

Wigham continued that discussion of energy efficiency.

“It’s a great opportunity and [represents] an enormous impact on glass and windows—and it’s more than just IG, as it’s dependent upon where you live so it could be solar control, etc.,” said Wigham.

Much like the North American market, Wigham also emphasized that the types of glass and windows that will be required will be dependent on the climate zone.

“The answers are different depending upon the location, but it’s becoming driven by regulation; this won’t happen unless we all do our part,” he said. “We want the right windows specified for the right problem.”

In addition to the views of the Australian economy and market, conference presenters also discussed worldwide perspectives, as did Henrik Reims from Finland’s Glaston Group. Reims’ presentation took a look at glass and energy trends, “Europe and Beyond.”

According to Reims, by 2020 Europe is forecasting significant changes in regard to energy consumption and renewable energy, i.e., a 20-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a transition to renewables.

“Glass has a big role to play in this,” said Reims, who explained that one of the latest trends they have seen is the “plus energy house,” one that actually provides energy.

“You are not only balancing energy, but producing it as well,” he said.

Reims also provided a look at some of the architectural trends Europe is seeing currently. These include new and unique geometries.

“These are very open with glass all around,” Reims said. “Houses and buildings are getting more light and

that enables us to have lots of glass, natural light, as well as energy savings.”

He also noted the trend toward “twisted buildings.”

“[We’re seeing] different shapes ... and that’s putting lots of pressure on the quality of glass,” said Reims.

Some of the other trends he discussed were screenprinting on facades; increasingly larger glass lites (up to 12 meters); as well as using glass as a structural element. “[Here] the glass is not an add-on piece, but an actual part of the structure,” said Reims.

In addition to these trends, Reims also talked about the opportunity for solar glazing.

“There’s no better material than glass to be integrated into these many different solar applications,” he said.

For example, with the Desertec program in the Sahara, if one percent of its geographic area is established as a solar farm, it could provide all of the electrical needs of the world.

“A lot of glass [would be] needed,” Reims added. ■

the author



Ellen Rogers, a USGlass writer, reported on this event from Australia.

For more information, visit www.agga.org.au.