

# AUSTRALIAN plumbing

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# Hard work around the clock

**Founder and Director of Around the Clock Plumbing Christopher Unwin has been in the plumbing industry for nearly 18 years, starting as an apprentice of the Master Plumbers Group Training Scheme in 2004. From humble beginnings, his journey to a company owner and Master Plumbers National Council Member has been quite remarkable. Here Christopher shares his story with Kate Stephenson.**

'I would almost say I was destined to be a part of the Plumbing Industry. I've known it since I was very young. When I was only four, I remember putting on a tool bag and hard hat and passing my Uncle, who was a plumber, tools while he ran some drainage and water for a small renovation at my parents' house.

From Year 7 until I completed high school I spent every school and Christmas holiday working with a local plumbing company, who were happy to accommodate my request for free labour digging holes, washing the vans and sweeping the yard.'

## **My apprenticeship with Master Plumbers**

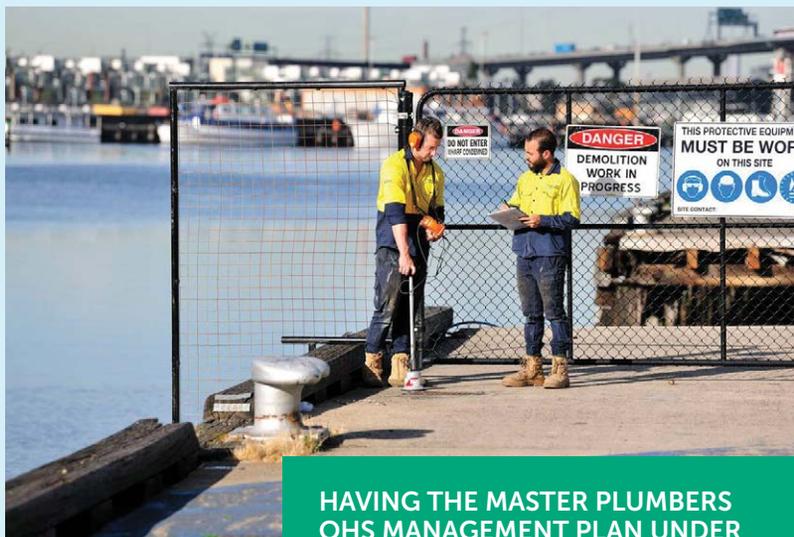
'I was always approaching plumbers and asking about apprenticeships and tips on how to go about gaining one. The more people I asked, the more I was told to 'try Master Plumbers'. I was told that gaining an interview alone would be a challenge, as there was a large gap between the number of applicants and the amount of positions offered. This did not deter me. The reputation of a

Master Plumbers apprentice was widely renown, which made me want to be a part of it even more.'

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'In my final year of school, I put together my resume and six months before finishing, I sent it off to Master Plumbers. I was put through a stringent interview process and was fortunate enough to get on the Pre-Apprenticeship course. I successfully completed the course under the watchful eye of the Field Officers, who frequented the school to enquire about our progress and attendance.'

'From my first week into the Pre-Apprenticeship, I knew I had a great opportunity in front of me and made sure I gave my all every step of the way. With the strictness from the Field Officers also came great mentoring, support and advice, both of which provided a crucial role in getting us ready prior to entering the work force and been placed with a Host Employer.'



**HAVING THE MASTER PLUMBERS OHS MANAGEMENT PLAN UNDER OUR BELT HAS PLAYED A LARGE PART IN OUR COMPANY BEING SELECTED TO UNDERTAKE THIS WORK**

'Due to the broad network of host employers, I was fortunate enough to gain a wide variety of knowledge and experience, working in a range of fields including large commercial plumbing sites, domestic mechanical services and domestic and commercial maintenance plumbing. Upon completion of my apprenticeship, I accepted a full time job as a qualified and registered plumber from my ex-host employer, where I stayed on for many years.'

### **The start of Around The Clock Plumbing Pty Ltd**

'My desire to strike it out on my own came from a need to have my own independent work schedule. It was my aim to work long hours for my own clients to make a profit that I could invest back into the business. I hoped one day to have a solid customer base and good reputation in the industry. Building relationships with clients is important to me and I have worked hard to cement my reputation as reliable and a provider of superior services.'

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complete private work, slowly building my client base. These came mainly from family and friends, but I also had the bright idea to contact domestic real estate agents. Before I knew it, I had enough work to keep me going for seven days a week.

'While still working full time, I constantly planned how I would go about starting my own business. Over this time, I purchased a drain cleaning machine, and started to

Most of my private clients requested I attend when they finished work or over the weekend, which I would happily agree to in order to keep expanding.'

'I had recently purchased a house and was nine months away from getting married when it dawned on me there was never going to be a good time to take the plunge to start working for myself full time. Determined to make my dream a reality, that week I decided to put in my resignation, with a supportive reception from my employer.'

'When I got home that night I thought it was time to advise my then fiancée and now wife that I had resigned and was now self employed. I'm not sure that Nicole shared my enthusiasm at that point in time, although she was always supportive of my ambition and determination.'

'The following morning, I quietly took the can opener out. It was time to open my large money tin. I took it into the bank and opened a business banking account. I wasn't sure what the difference to a normal account was at the time, except for the fees, although for me it marked the start of a new beginning.'

'I also purchased a new money tin on the way back to the car. I had my first week's costs covered, but wasn't sure how I would cover things moving forward. Despite the questions in my head, I knew with my training and the support available around me that I could make it work and turn my ambitions into reality.'

'I was hoping for at least one call out a day, and in the down time I was out chasing new customers. I wanted to specialise in commercial maintenance; shopping centres, schools etc. I soon realised it was not going to be as easy as I thought, although I kept moving and eventually old clients started to have new problems and the business started growing. Before I knew it, I was back to working 16 hour days during the week and 12 hour days on the weekends.'

### **Our most recent project: Working at the Pier**

'Working at the Docklands, we are required to view and assess plumbing pipes below the pier and on occasion gain viewing access via boat. Managing leaks, burst pipes, blocked drains and checking pump stations, we are required to be available 24 hours a day seven days a week.'

'The ocean is below and it is crucial that the plumbing is maintained to prevent any spillage from entering the water. There are a lot of OHS issues to consider when undertaking work on sites like this. Having the Master Plumbers OHS management plan under our belt has played a large part in our Company being selected to undertake this work.'

### **What kind of plumbing do we do?**

'Since starting the business, I stayed focused on the wide and challenging area of work I wanted to specialise in, which is a 24 hour seven day a week service to the commercial maintenance sector. That's where the name Around the Clock Plumbing came from. We have since built a strong foundation of clients, Government and private, that takes us all over Melbourne.'

'From blocked sewers to burst fire services in the middle of the night, we find ourselves attending a range of jobs at all time of day. We have put a lot back into the company to be able to have all of our own equipment on hand in order to be able to perform any job and any time be it drain camera, leak detector or demolition saw.'



'We have also branched off to provide a specialist service to tap manufacturers for any warranty complaints lodged, working together with manufacturers, plumbers, consultants and clients to resolve issues and determine the cause. I find this rewarding as while we are doing our job, we are also benefiting the industry by coming up with ideas and designs that are solutions to problems.'

'We are often engaged by other plumbers to provide our opinion on complex plumbing issues, which are frequently arising with the number of new products coming onto the market. Oftentimes, plumbers have unknowingly installed materials or products that are non-compliant to Australian Standards. Sometimes they have installed pipework and not taken into account that copper and plastic pipes may have different internal diameters which can greatly affect performance of tap ware. We are often engaged by these plumbers to work alongside them to resolve these issues.'

### What's on the horizon for 2018?

'I hope to continue to develop and grow Around the Clock plumbing as a company in 2018. We have long term goals to be more competitive and really show our points of difference in order to submit larger plumbing maintenance tenders. It is a process that for me is a journey and has been implemented over a long period of time.'

### What it means to be a Master Plumber:

'Master Plumbers has an approved Code of Ethics, which to me encapsulates exactly what it means to me to be a Master Plumber.'

'I joined the Association not long after starting the business. The benefits of being a Member for me were instant, I was going to employ my first apprentice and I was fortunate enough as a Member

'I've added in job management software, outsourced our Human Resources, attained certain certification to audit our processes and developed our OHS policies and procedures, Environmental Policies and Insurances.'

### Views on being a Master Plumbers National Council Member

'In recent times, I made the decision to dedicate time to become more involved with the Association and to do my part in helping to futureproof the Industry for the next generation of plumbers. I furthered this cause by being elected to be on the Master Plumbers National Council.'

'I know the issues that current plumbers are dealing with in today's world and realised that I don't want the future generations to go through the same issues and if nothing is done, it will only stay the same. If we can make a difference for the future generations of Plumbers and the Industry as a whole, why wouldn't we?'

'I am looking forward to continuing to do more with the Association and being able to contribute more as the years go on.'

that I had the support and advice from the Association to provide a contract that I could rely on, including all the required documents and paperwork completed for me. I've always found their apprentices to be reliable and look forward to hiring from Plumbing Apprenticeships Victoria in the near future.'

### The importance of Continuous Professional Development

'I am a strong advocate for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and am constantly upskilling not only myself, but my employees – it's extremely important in an ever changing industry.'

'Upskilling and getting up to date is also a lot about networking and growing your contacts list. I attended World Plumbing Day at the PICAC training centre with an apprentice and left with a whole host of contacts. The discussions had on the day contributed to the resolution of an ongoing issue regarding water flow, hot water units and star ratings. I walked away with knowledge that I didn't have walking in. I think this is a great example of CPD without having to do a course. Upskilling comes in numerous forms and does not have to be in a class room.'

'Moving forward I believe that CPD will play a crucial role in our ever changing industry and hope one day it will become a requirement for all plumbers in their careers.'

### CHRISTOPHER UNWIN'S ADVICE FOR WINNING A JOB

**'BE PREPARED, DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR ADVICE, PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CLIENT'S SHOES, ASSESS YOUR POINT OF DIFFERENCE, DO YOUR RESEARCH AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, DON'T BE AFRAID TO FAIL, LEARN FROM IT AND TRY AGAIN.'**