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14 NOVEMBER 2019 - 22 MARCH 2020

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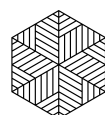Good design,
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(Future) Legacies

It was impossible to walk out of the train station. The crowd was so thick that it created a human tide, its sway slowly carrying us out, towards Brandenburg Gate. The Fridays for Future protests against climate change, inspired by Greta Thunberg and organised by children around the world, had culminated in a global strike for climate – which now adults were joining. In front of us, a group of kindergarten teachers were helping tiny, tiny children out of the station. One of them was carrying a sign that said "small – but not too small to make a difference."

Earlier that day, the climate strike had brought out a crowd of 300,000 across Australia, and more than 2000 firms – including our own – shut down in solidarity. Could this ever be enough? The events of this year have made us think about what we are leaving behind. We must think seven generations ahead with everything we do, says the Great Law of the Iroquis – roughly 140 years. How can we embed long-term considerations into our architecture, urbanism, thinking? What we make today is our future legacy.

This issue, we go around the world in the search of inspiring people and projects. We visit the country that invented playgrounds – that quintessential infrastructure of childhood – then also stop to admire its marvellous legacy of co-operative housing. In Fitzroy Crossing, we look at a painting that demonstrated traditional land ownership over the Great Sandy Desert; meanwhile, from the US, Mabel O. Wilson reminds us that design can and should be a participant in the struggle for a just world. The tricky legacy of Cold War (and its prefab embassies!) is untangled in *Ex-Embassy*, while the Chief Design Officer for Los Angeles introduces us to the real effects of building a metropolis around a dream factory. We reckon with the transformative potential of recycled shopfronts in Bangkok, and a single, visionary museum in Hobart. We look at how artists can work with emergency workers to better prepare us for climate disasters. Finally, in Melbourne, we slow down to consider Australia's oldest tape manufacturer, and beautiful, community-oriented architecture – our past and future inheritance.

This issue has developed in partnership with MPavilion, and coincides with the unveiling of Glenn Murcutt's design for the Botanical Gardens, celebrating the 50th professional anniversary of Australia's most environmentally conscious architect. One of Glenn's favourite quotes comes from Henry David Thoreau: "Since most of us spend our lives doing ordinary tasks, the most important thing is to carry them out extraordinarily well." Let's bring that ethos to everything we do. ●

WORDS BY JANA PERKOVIĆ
ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE OEHR

ASSEMBLAGE

The cultural fabric of cities, covering people and projects across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

Refuge

When Art Meets Emergency

WORDS BY GEORGIA SYMONS
PHOTOS BY BRYONY JACKSON

Floods. Heatwaves. Pandemics.
When we think about climate catastrophe, the images that come to mind are of overwhelming natural phenomena. But how do we imagine ourselves, and our human responses, within these disasters?

Here in Melbourne, as in many places, our existing disaster relief plans are military in character: a top-down chain of command marshalling the passive masses. But these catastrophes ultimately happen to communities, and the social destruction wrought by disasters can be as devastating as the physical. So perhaps there is room for communities to lead their own unique and creative responses to catastrophe. This is the inquiry at the heart of Refuge, a five-year project initiated by Arts House in North Melbourne, and led by artists, local residents, emergency services staff, and a smattering of business, research and community partners.

The Refuge project was seeded by then-artistic director of Arts House, Angharad Wynne-Jones, in 2016. Angharad tells me that the initial idea was very personal: over the past ten years, she found, held and then slowly lost the conviction that artists working together with scientists was all that was needed to solve climate change.

Once she realised that disaster was inevitable, Angharad says, "I felt very personally motivated by feeling very unsure about my own capacity to respond ethically under pressure. I thought that, potentially, rehearsing some of those moments of ethical choice in a situation of crisis might mean that I might train myself to do the right thing."

From this intensely personal intent has grown a five-year commitment from Arts House, Emergency Management Victoria, Melbourne University, Red Cross and, perhaps most crucially, a dedicated group of local artists and community members.

But what exactly is Refuge? In terms of its public-facing outcomes, it is an annual event at North Melbourne Town Hall, inviting anyone – but especially North Melbourne locals – to imagine themselves into various climate-related disaster scenarios. 2019 will mark the fourth of the five planned events, with each year taking a different catastrophe as its theme: floods in 2016, then heatwave, pandemic, and the final two years will consider displacement. Artistic propositions across the life of Refuge have included shared meals, escape rooms, human-powered electricity generators and audience-run emergency call centres.

Beyond this simplistic summary of outcomes, defining Refuge can be devilishly difficult. Various collaborators are careful to call it "a process, not a project" or "a methodology, not a model", and all are initially overwhelmed when I ask them to define the work. A number of participants, including artist Hannah Donnelly, comment on the commitment that the Refuge community makes to working in/through uncertainty, and to piecing together a radically interdisciplinary approach without knowing the exact future of the work. Hannah says this approach "felt more like what I would call, not world-building because it was very localised, but building-across-disciplines to make a new world."

Emily Sexton, current artistic director of Arts House, is well-practised in distilling all of this complexity to communicate the core of the project. She defines it this way: "Refuge is a five-year project exploring the intersection of art and emergency. It's been grounded in North Melbourne, so community connection has been very important when we're thinking about how we might prepare for climate change crises.

We believe that you need to start with your neighbours and the people closest to you, to look around and think through what preparedness looks like for the inevitable crises that will continue to come our way as the climate is changing."

The Refuge program works on an annual iterative cycle. Artist Jen Rae articulated the three stages of this cycle as 'lab', 'rehearsal' and 'evaluation'. The lab is a time for the artists, emergency services workers, local residents and other responsible parties to come together and consider the theme and approach for the year's work. Angharad described the first-ever Refuge lab in 2016 as being somewhat clunky. "Artists [typically] have very low status in the hierarchy of disaster management. So we were pretty careful in how we structured the labs to ensure that the artists got to speak about their practice... [the first lab] was curated to within an inch of its life." But this first lab set the foundations for a first 'rehearsal' that exceeded expectations.

The rehearsal is also referred to as the 'performance' by some. Essentially, this is the part where the public are invited in, with an invitation to rehearse the catastrophe. And while the initial lab had generated some terrific energy, the team still didn't know quite what to expect. Jen told me: "I think there were about 600 or 700 people that came through in those 24 hours. I remember being in the stairwell with some of the other artists, going up and down, and going, 'Oh my god, there are people here!' It was exhausting, but it was absolutely exhilarating." Hannah, who was responsible for leading a sleepover at the Town Hall, could also feel the significance of the work on the night. She had noticed, in the lab and the lead-up to the rehearsal that, between the artists and the emergency services staff, "our ways of thinking were very different. But when it came to [the 24-hour public event for] Refuge, they understood immediately, when they saw everything happening, what we were trying to do." This first public event took the trust and

investment of all the disparate parties who had come together for the lab, and successfully consolidated that energy into a unique event.

After the perceived success of this first rehearsal, on to 'evaluation', in which the team dive deep into what they learned and how they can each carry this learning forward – both into the next Refuge process and into the rest of their practice. A participant from the disaster management sector recalled a turning point in this first evaluation. He could see around him that many of the contributors thought that the project was a great success, and that they were keen to turn the actions and events of this year into a repeatable model. "I just said, 'Please don't create a template. This needs to be authentic and genuine every time, so that if you've never been involved before, you're welcome to join.' The [emergency management] sector is good at creating templates. This is often done to be efficient and effective in learning from previous events, but can turn what was great into a simple checklist and process to tick a box."

And so, while the basic building blocks have remained relatively stable (a yearly lab, a public rehearsal event, and an evaluation), all participants have approached each year with openness to new approaches, considerations and voices. And in this way, a community of practice has developed. As this community has grown stronger, so have the imagined catastrophes grown greater. Floods (2016) are usually temporary, and there are measures one can take to keep out or mitigate the flows of water. Heatwaves (2017), however, are harder to avoid. One can try to keep cool, but if one is not lucky enough to live in an air-conditioned building, the heat is inescapable. But at least it is temporary. North Melbourne resident and artist Lorna Hannan, who has been involved in the project since its inception, spoke to me about a wobble in the third year, looking at the theme of pandemic.

"Refuge takes the form of calling out to the community to play a game," says Lorna; however, **"Pandemic – now, didn't that make you stop writing for a moment?"**

And she was right – my hand had involuntarily wobbled. It's not as easy to 'play' with pandemic, as with the tangible phenomena of floods or heatwaves.

But even here, there were things to be learned. Over the past few years of Refuge, Lorna's contribution has been the 'Ruth Crow Corner', where visitors are invited to the simple yet meaningful activity of sharing a cup of tea and a conversation with friends and strangers. In the first two years, Lorna had found her approach quite effective – by simply holding a space and providing the refreshments, she was able to foster meaningful exchanges between participants. But

during the 'pandemic' year, something shifted. Lorna discovered that the gravity of the topic of pandemic prevented people from opening up in the same easy way that they had in the past. The solution Lorna found to this problem was the idea of keeping people busy. She introduced an activity to the space, inviting people to decorate a face mask. She found that, with their eyes on their work and their hands busy, people were more readily able to open up and discuss the difficult topic of that year's conversation.

Insights like Lorna's abound in the Refuge process. But how do these insights flow through to change beyond the project? For Hannah Donnelly, the insights that came from her involvement in Refuge have impacted not only the rest of her arts practice, but the way she lives. "I was really interested in looking at the preparedness that different Indigenous stories and knowledge can provide; preparedness that is 60,000 years old, because the stories in the place are preparedness. Refuge changed my thinking, to [ask], 'How, in anything I do or write, is it contributing to being prepared for climate traumas?'"

In talking to everyone from community members to artists, producers and emergency services personnel, it's clear that the impact of Refuge as an action research process has less to do with hard data and hastily written policies, and more with culture change. "I don't see Refuge as an intimate or small project," says Emily Sexton. "I do see it as a deep project that has quite lasting implications. I don't think we need to see audiences of tens of thousands. That would be a very odd measure for the kind of work we're doing [that concerns] how we look after each other." And a staff member from an emergency management organisation told me that Refuge "has become quite a practical action research project.

"The emergency management sector is not only listening and participating, but starting to commit to something else that is far different from what a normal hazard and risk [program] might look like."

There are no clear answers just yet as to whether the program will continue beyond its five-year milestone next year. But, while groups around the world have been inquiring into the Refuge 'model', much is made by all involved of how this process has been specifically shaped by and for North Melbourne. I felt a little sceptical and uncertain of this – surely the lab–rehearsal–evaluation model could work in many places? – until I spoke to Lorna, who has been a resident in North Melbourne for 50 years. She told me about the specificity of the North Melbourne Town Hall, how it's still called 'the Town Hall' despite not having served that function since 1907. She told me how the building

was built to be a "fortress of government" at a time when the local area was quite unruly, and how important it is to people now that the building is being used in more open ways, including its use as a registered emergency refuge centre. And then there is the matter of North Melbourne's distinct urban cultural properties. "North Melbourne has got these really clear, distinct boundaries," says Lorna. "But the suburb is not self-sufficient. Its dependence on the outside world – for instance, for food – is serious."

So, while similar approaches would work brilliantly in many places around the world, the key to the success of a project like this is to start where you are. In this sense, the work of Refuge is only just beginning. With the local community welcoming a growing number of

newly arrived citizens, the Refuge team has begun reaching out to these new residents, slowly forming the kinds of sustained relationships that matter in a crisis. Angharad mentions to me that, looking back on the project, the actual content of each year's Refuge project (almost) didn't matter. "The thing that came through in some of the evaluations was that connection between people was the critical element of resilience… If connection is the thing, it doesn't matter how that happens. It doesn't have to be named as something that is directly connected to the crisis of climate change… [I learned] not to be precious; to understand the value of that connection, no matter how or where it's created, or for what purpose." ●

PP.8–9 Refuge 2019: Displacement. Flotilla by Jen Rae and Giant Grass. P.10 Coffee Ceremony by Letina, Mitselal and Kidan as part of Ruth Crow Corner by Lorna Hannan and guests (2019). PP.12–13 (top) Hg57 – Urban Heat Island by Latai Taumoepeau (2017: Heatwave); (bottom) Ruth Crow Corner (2019). PP.14–15 (background) Apitherapy Quarantine by Jen Rae, Fair Share Fare (2018: Pandemic); P.14 (inset) Refuge 2016: Flood. Fair Share Fare by Dawn Weleski and Jen Rae; P.15 (inset) Lorna Hannan in Ruth Crow Corner (2018). P.16 Nest by Kate Sulan (2016). P.17 Opening welcome for Refuge 2019 with Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elder Uncle Dave Wandin.

The cultural fabric of cities, covering people and projects across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

Rachaporn Choochuey

The Art of Living Lightly

WORDS BY EMMA MCRAE

Bangkok-based architecture studio **all(zone)** describes itself as "a group of happy design professionals who joyfully collaborate with specialists across the borders of their fields and country". Director **Rachaporn Choochuey** seems to embody this spirit.

When I meet her in Melbourne, where she is visiting as a guest of the 2019 Living Cities Forum, she is full of joy, radiates enthusiasm, and is exactly the kind of person I would want designing somewhere I might live. "If you are not happy yourself," Rachaporn asks me, "how could you design a place where people could be happy?"

For Rachaporn, architecture is always about people. "I'm more interested in how people live than the physicality of architecture. We have architecture because we have people." Since starting all(zone) 12 years ago, Rachaporn has designed permanent and temporary structures including houses, office spaces, markets, festival pavilions and contemporary art museums. Each project begins as an experiment to test new ways of living, working or playing in the city, and they all express a lightness in materials and atmosphere that reflects the joy at the heart of her practice.

Rachaporn studied architecture in Bangkok, New York and Tokyo; however, she quickly became disillusioned with the long timelines and rigid experience of working in a large architectural office. Looking for a more responsive way to work, she moved away from traditional architecture and began working on temporary projects. "I was having great fun. We did a lot of small exhibitions, which allowed us to try new things and test new materials. That was my starting point."

With all(zone), Rachaporn continued this methodology of research and experimentation, in search of solutions to Bangkok's housing shortage. "The centre of Bangkok looks quite dense, but we still have a very serious housing problem. All the high-rise buildings are expensive. They are apartments and condominiums, partly for investment, and you have to be extremely rich to live there. I started my practice as an architect out of necessity, trying to understand if there is an alternative way for middle-class people to live in the city." Rachaporn's first experiment was the transformation of some abandoned shophouses into the all(zone) office, with a residence for Rachaporn on the top floor.

Shophouses – the mixed-use, multi-storey buildings that are such a recognisable architectural feature of South-East Asian cityscapes – traditionally had a family-run business on the ground floor and a residence upstairs. But, over the last few decades, urban expansion, traffic congestion and lifestyle changes have left these buildings abandoned. Many cities in the region have seen them restored, but in Bangkok they were left to ruin, while the city was populated with high-rise buildings, embodying Bangkok's transformation into a major finance and business capital.

In these abandoned buildings, Rachaporn saw an opportunity. She purchased two adjacent shophouses in a central district and, as she says, "started the experiment to see if we could make this very outdated typology a reasonable place to live". By knocking off the front and back walls of the building and replacing them with glass walls and breeze blocks, the solid exteriors and dark interiors were transformed into a series of open, flexible spaces that allowed for maximum sunlight while retaining privacy, security and shade. "Living in a tropical climate, people usually close the windows and have the air conditioning on all day. We extended these front and back spaces as an opportunity to live outdoors a little. If the weather is good enough, you can open it up completely and get natural ventilation."

Using cheap, local building materials such as breeze blocks – which, Rachaporn says, "no architects would use at the time; they were considered too normal, very uncool," – they built a multi-storey residence and work space for less than half the cost of a newly built condo in the same area.

Bangkok's rapid population growth since the 1960s has created an urban area that is now home to an estimated population of 13 million people. There has been little urban planning, resulting in great gaps in housing affordability and inadequate transportation systems. The chaos of daily life in Bangkok is, Rachaporn believes, an opportunity for architects. "Bangkok has a lot of problems, but it's actually a great place for architects. Everywhere you look, there are things that can be done, things that can be improved."

Thinking about the environmental impact of constant building led Rachaporn towards an architectural approach that she calls 'living lightly'. The concept was sparked by some tents she saw at a demonstration. "People were camping for months in very fragile mosquito nets on the brutal streets of Bangkok. That is perhaps the minimum condition of living in this tropical climate." These temporary structures inspired the idea for a more nomadic living space, resulting in an experimental project called Light House. As semi-permanent or temporary structures, the light houses are intended for young professionals living in a tropical metropolis. Rachaporn says, "In Thailand, becoming an adult and beginning to work results in your living conditions becoming worse. These people cannot afford to live in a normal apartment, so we imagine this as a place for them to stay during their early career, for one year, half a year, or a few months."

The structures are made from lightweight metal grid panels usually used by street vendors, which are then wrapped with mosquito netting. Each house costs US$1,200 and measures 2.4 m x 4.8 m x 2 m providing

a minimum living space of 11.52 m². One Light House can be installed by two people in about four hours. As a proof of concept, all(zone) created two prototypes and installed them in a car park in central Bangkok. "We have many abandoned structures in Bangkok, never completed after the financial crash of 1997, which already have running water and electricity. We set up our two prototype houses in the car park of an abandoned 20-storey hotel in the heart of Bangkok, and had two people living there for several days." They documented the project and produced a film called *The Art of Living Lightly*, which was presented at the Chicago Architecture Biennial in 2015. "We imagine these houses could be placed in abandoned structures where there is already a roof. There could be many of them together, and eventually it could become a community. That is our dream."

Projects such as Light House reflect Rachaporn's belief that architecture needs to be more casual in nature. "Thailand is very messy, but at the same time it offers you casual opportunities. There's room to behave in different ways."

She contrasts this to the more structured style of Japanese design, where "the space has a connection with you, but in a way that lets you know the space is superior to you. As a designer, I love Japanese spaces because they are very crafted – they think of everything. But they are not spaces where you feel at ease." Rachaporn is sensitive to the subtle effects architecture can have on our behaviour, and she believes that there is not enough allowance for spontaneous human behaviour in professional architecture. "Creating a casual space depends on human interaction, and that is missing from many spaces in our modern cities. I believe that space should enable communication. It doesn't need to be perfect: a space should be something people can manipulate; somewhere they may even have to negotiate with the person next to them."

Examples of such casual spaces designed by all(zone) include the open-air market, SZL Market (2008–2012); *Act Naturally* (2011–2012), a temporary installation that defined a flexible, outdoor dining space for visitors to Jim Thompson Farm in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand; and the Marmalade Sky pavilion (2017) created for the zero-waste Wonderfruit Festival in Pattaya, Thailand. In material and form, these projects are whimsical and welcoming, and they

create spaces that leave the possibilities for behaviour, interaction and participation open to the people who inhabit them. Referencing the open-air pavilions of traditional Thai architecture, Marmalade Sky and *Act Naturally* both use semi-transparent fabrics to define communal gathering spaces, while SZL Market – the most permanent of these projects – combines solid structures with temporary elements to encourage casual interactions. Drawing on tent typology, the elevated roofline of the market's permanent structure creates a light, ventilated space for long-term vendors and organised events, while the adjacent umbrella stands expand the space and contribute a dynamic, flexible space for short-term stall holders.

In their largest public project to date, all(zone) radically transformed an old warehouse in Chiang Mai into the MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum in a remarkably short timeframe. The museum is a gallery and event space that houses a private collection of contemporary Asian art. "It was the client's idea to do it quickly," Rachaporn says. "They didn't have much money, but they were very eager – and this is very much in tune with the context of Thailand." The museum is not MoMA, Rachaporn says, "but, if you wanted a well-equipped, super high-standard museum in Thailand, it would cost at least three times as much and would take another ten years. MAIIAM is the first contemporary art museum in Chiang Mai, and is a platform where a lot of artists can show their work. At all(zone), what we are trying to provide in many cases is the short- or mid-term solution."

Rachaporn's desire for responsive solutions results in spaces that remain open to interpretation. "I don't mind if people change what I design. I think that, as architects, we try to have this frozen image of architecture, because we've decided that it has to look a certain way, but how could we anticipate every new condition for a space? The nicest moment for me is when we've just finished a building, especially a house, and the owners start to occupy the space." Returning once a building is inhabited is always a source of joy for Rachaporn. "You can see how the people really use it. Sometimes it's the way you imagined and sometimes it's not – but that's even better. In most cases they give me a surprise, and I love it." ●

PP.18–19 Light House, a prototypical minimal house for a person living in urban Bangkok. P.20 Rachaporn Choochuey in Melbourne. Photo by Tom Ross. P.22 (main) Marmalade Sky pavilion (2017); (inset) *Act Naturally* (2011–2012). P.23 MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai (2015–2016). P.24 (main & inset) S49 shophouse transformation, Bangkok (2013–2016). P.25 Light House interior. All photos except p.20 courtesy of all(zone).

RACHAPORN CHOOCHUEY

Christopher Hawthorne

The 'Third'
Los Angeles

WORDS BY ANDY FERGUS

Chicago has the **Chicago Architecture Center,** New York has the **Municipal Art Society,** and Melbourne has countless public and non-profit institutions such as **Open House, MPavilion** and the **National Gallery of Victoria** to raise awareness and public literacy around design in our built environment. However, says **Christopher Hawthorne,** "There is no city that needs that conversation more than **LA,** and there is no city that has fewer of these institutions and platforms than **LA.**"

As Los Angeles enters a new phase of intensification described as 'post suburbia', design leadership is as critical as ever. With a once-in-a-generation opportunity for significant public investment, the progressive Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti sought out not a seasoned bureaucrat, but a public commentator. Enter Christopher Hawthorne: the lead architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Times* from 2004 to 2018, joining the City of Los Angeles as the chief design officer.

The creation of this new type of advocate speaks to the politics of the built environment in Los Angeles, a city with a history of strong union representation, cowboy developers, and NIMBY and tenant organisations. What the mayor saw in the critic was a track record of engaging with a broad spectrum of the community outside of the design industry, but also a passion for generating public conversations, rather than technocratic solutions.

Los Angeles is a city under significant stress: climate risk through urban heat effects, fire, and sea-level rise; and lack of equity of access to housing and transit, employment and services.

Christopher describes this as the failure of the 1967 image of the 'second' Los Angeles, which had replaced the early 1900s tram-driven urban expansion with a laissez-faire city of cheap fuel, subsidised highways, and single-family houses within a short drive of manufacturing jobs. "1967 was the golden age of second Los Angeles, when it did work for a broad cross-section. The freeways were broad enough that you could get from any point to any other point within half an hour. A working-class family could buy a house. You could come to LA as an immigrant family and you could buy your way into that suburbanised dream."

Los Angeles invented that combination of suburban amenity within a metropolitan scale, Christopher points out. "It was a radical and in many ways successful experiment, but it began to run its course by the '80s and '90s". By then, tensions flared in significant civil unrest, teamed with industrial decline and economic shock, and the dream began to fail those who couldn't buy their way out of difficulty. Los Angeles during this period is said to have lost its economic 'middle', leaving instead a polarised city with the ultra-elite in the knowledge and entertainment economy, and a supporting casualised workforce, heavily dependent on exploitative migrant labour.

Los Angeles parallels the transition of many American cities, which entered a regeneration cycle after 50 years of hollowing out caused by government policies that incentivised 'white flight' to the suburbs and concentrated more vulnerable and ethnically diverse populations in areas flanking downtown

business districts. However, where in many cities urban regeneration has been driven from the top down by the state, the impetus for the current 'third phase' of Los Angeles development has come from the citizens themselves.

"The voters told us before the policymakers had articulated it," Christopher says. "In 2008, we had the most important moment in the emergence of the third LA: a transit tax measure on the ballot in LA County, that asked if voters wanted to raise the sale tax by half a penny for 30 years, which required a supermajority (two-thirds vote)." Against the expectations of commentators, the frustration with congestion converted to a 67 percent 'yes' vote, sufficient to achieve the supermajority required. (The tax measure was extended in 2016 with an increased majority.) This nominal sales tax, projected into the medium-to-long term, enabled a dependable method to fund major infrastructure, amounting to $200 billion over two generations.

However, as long as the built environment is car- and parking-centric, public transport ridership will remain low, with limited impacts on the quality of life and carbon footprint of the city. With the 2028 Olympics looming, how can a design-led conversation refocus efforts from a transit-only approach towards the total design of the urban environment?

As a writer and a critic with a broad understanding of the city outside of the traditional conception of 'architecture', Christopher is deeply interested in the questions this new phase of regeneration poses for Los Angeles identity, one of the world's most photographed and self-conscious cities: "Is there an LA sensibility and what does that mean? It's a more complicated or different question in LA, because of our history of reinvention and not looking to the past, and being the centre of Hollywood production of simulacra, unreal cities. The question of authenticity is different and much more shaded in LA."

Christopher is adamant that post-suburban Los Angeles doesn't need to shed the best aspects of its 1960s' identity for a generic global model of urban regeneration.

This is where Christopher is to focus his efforts, with a portfolio of small and large public realm initiatives, along with a design-led approach to infill residential development, and the procurement of design excellence in public works. Through the establishment of a 'Committee on Memory' with artists and key thinkers in the industry, he hopes to explore urban issues within an authentic, place-based conceptual framework.

A specific catalyst project is sited along the infamous Los Angeles River. The 80-kilometre-long concrete culvert was once the lifeblood of the region, connecting mountains to the ocean for its First Nations people, before becoming the scene of countless Hollywood crime and car chase shoots. The conversion of a former riverside industrial site, Taylor Yard G2, as part of a larger contiguous public space either side of the river, now provides an opportunity to reconnect Angelenos to their invisible river landscape. As a basis for public discussion, three distinct design concepts are being developed; meanwhile, Christopher has commissioned a temporary viewing platform from which the public can oversee the long construction phase.

Another example is Los Angeles's 'right of way' project, a city-wide attempt to reconfigure the design of major streets through a systematic 'kit of parts' approach, to incorporate shade trees, more generous pedestrian space, a reduction in space for private vehicles, and high-quality lighting and street furniture. Given the extensive distribution of these neglected arterial roads, this offers an immense opportunity to have a large-scale impact on the pedestrian environment as well as contributing to urban cooling (in a city where 80 percent of the tree canopy grows where 1 percent lives). With a complex web of siloed departments variously responsible for lighting, bus shelters, road surface, footpaths and shopfront awnings, Christopher is required to engage in organisational redesign as much as spatial; he is charged with bringing together a framework to bind diverse stakeholders into a singular coherent vision. In an attempt to open the process up, the lighting fixtures and street furniture will be tendered through a competition process, and supported with media to engage a broader audience beyond City Hall.

The magnitude of Christopher's challenge is formidable, given the scale of the City of Los Angeles jurisdiction: an area of 1,300km^2 and a population of near to 4 million, nested within the larger metropolitan area of the County of Los Angeles with a population of around 10 million. (Comparatively, the City of Melbourne has a population of 140,000 and an area of 36km^2.) This gives significantly more design opportunity, but brings with it the significant question of the 'economy of effort'. How can design energy be invested in prototypes that remain place-specific, while having the maximum impact on the infrastructure of the city at large?

Perhaps the most political project that Christopher hopes to tackle is housing supply and affordability. Owing to decades-old zoning restrictions, a significant proportion of the city is restricted to single-family dwellings. Very limited growth in new dwelling stock (only 80,000 dwellings a year, well short of the 3.5 million required by 2025), teamed with high demand and associated prices, is resulting in displacement of lower-income residents. According to the National

Association of Home Builders, 92 percent of Los Angeles homes are now considered unaffordable to median-income earners. Senate Bill 50 in the State of California aims to address this shortfall through an upzoning across the state, which would increase allowed building heights and densities across all metropolitan areas. While seemingly sensible, this top-down-fits-all approach has been challenged on many fronts: researchers argue that restrictive setback requirements imposed by municipalities will prevent density increases, while tenant and NIMBY groups have rallied together around the strange bedfellows of preserving rent-protected properties and high-value single-family areas.

In a city without any noteworthy legacy of public housing construction, Los Angeles is heavily reliant on private rental protection measures to preserve low-income homes. Protection applies to properties older than 1995, many of which are low-rise duplexes, townhouses or low-rise apartments. The fear of eviction cannot be dismissed. In the three months prior to July 2019, applications were filed to remove rent control from 657 apartments, with owners buoyed by rising land value and the possibility of sale on the open market for luxury redevelopment. Increasing the development potential on these properties immediately heightens the pressure on protected tenants. The Bill aims to protect these areas through exempting properties that are or have been recently rented, though activists argue this doesn't go far enough.

While Christopher supports the Bill, he sees the opportunity to introduce more palatable forms of infill density, such as two to four dwellings on a single-family site, which can be planned in partnership with local communities. He is working closely with planners on regulatory changes, as well as a 'missing middle' design competition (similar to recent examples in Queensland and NSW), with the opportunity to follow up with the creation of a series of small catalyst projects. Rather than abandoning Los Angeles's character, Christopher suggests that this model of infill can draw upon the "modest medium-density housing of Irving Gill's Santa Barbara Horatio Court terrace homes of 1919 or Koning Eizenberg's Hollywood Duplex of 1988."

One year into the job, consistent throughout Christopher's emerging portfolio is the desire to "look first within our own backyard", rather than importing fashionable concepts from abroad. Far from the 'city architect' in the Robert Moses mold, Christopher's is a more nuanced role, focused both on embedding design processes in public office, as well as generating broader public discourse. His background as a public critic, with a remarkable depth of knowledge about Los Angeles's social and political history, brings a degree of sensitivity and awareness to the role. In a city where 'good design' can be viewed with suspicion as a tool for displacement, this sensitivity is critical. Christopher's challenge is to buck the trend of many North American cities, where good design is a luxury for largely white, gentrified, higher-income urban neighbourhoods, and instead generate a public belief in the value of design for all Angelenos. He says, "One of the things that makes this moment unusual is that we are remaking the public spaces and the infrastructure of the city in fundamental ways." ●

PP.26-27 Sunset over Los Angeles. Photo by David Keller. PP.28-29 Christopher Hawthorne in conversation with Andy Fergus. Photo by Tom Ross. P.31 (top) One of the projects funded through Mayor Garcetti's Great Streets Initiative was Welcome to Western installation in Koreatown by LA-Más, an urban design non-profit that advocates 'beautification without gentrification'. Photo courtesy of LA-Más; (bottom) Taylor Yard River Park Project Site Planning Workshop with the local community. P.32 Los Angeles River. Photo by Matt Gush.

Ex-Embassy

WORDS BY SONJA HORNUNG AND RACHEL O'REILLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOANNA KOSOWSKA

In August 2018, the **former Australian embassy to East Germany** in Berlin's northeast suburb of Pankow hosted **Ex-Embassy,** an exhibition of six artworks and five texts, and an open research archive. Instigated and hosted by the artist **Sonja Hornung**, and researched and assembled with writer and artist **Rachel O'Reilly** as curatorial advisor, it included the works of Aboriginal and European artists, and a program of talks, tours, discussions and events — questioning the **Cold War relations** between Australia and East Germany, and their ongoing spatial legacies.

SONJA HORNUNG

In early 2017, an email circulated among Berlin artists calling for applications to sublet spaces in the former Australian embassy to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). I knew the building, located in the north-eastern reaches of Pankow. In a previous artistic project, I had looked at the extraterritoriality of the embassy form – an embassy is not legally part of the country where it is located, but instead is under the jurisdiction of the country it represents. I brought together a number of friends, and we joined around 25 other artists to establish a studio complex in the heritage-listed building under a temporary-use contract.

I moved to work in the former embassy with the explicit intention of digging deeper into the site. As an artist-occupant of the studios, I was well aware we were placeholders, or even value enhancers, for the building's anticipated future as luxury flats. So, parallel to *Ex-Embassy,* together with the other studio artists, I was heavily involved in attempting to establish an alternative, collective ownership structure for the site in order to extract it from the speculation cycle.

As my research for *Ex-Embassy* expanded erratically in several directions at once, it quickly became clear that the story of the place could not be reduced to the past, or to one location. I began thinking about an exhibition format in which the building could be considered as a non-neutral frame, accountable to the inquiries of artists and researchers external to our studio community.

RACHEL O'REILLY

When Sonja first approached me with the project, I was less interested in the architectural site than in the inherent incompleteness of the archive – which included building plans, diplomatic communiques and research texts – and the revisionism that comes with this. There is a lot of nostalgia around the Cold War, not only because of the pressure socialism asserted upon democratic ideals in the post-WWII West. There have been key exhibitions re-reading this period as one of soft power trafficking between normative spaces of politics and internationalist art, such as *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2018). Less attention has been paid to the role of colonial law in defining Cold War paradigms of autonomy, peace and war set up by liberal 'international(/ist) relations'.

I was conscious of the fact that Germany in the 1990s also played host to game-changing Aboriginal-controlled exhibitions such as *Aratjara* (Kunstsammlung Nordhrein-Westfalen, 1993), which followed in the wake of *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989), and has been a destination for transnational diplomacy before, after, and on both sides of the Wall. Such practices build on a truncated legacy of politics and art that refused post-war

'business as usual', and that did not always tactically coincide with state projects. Australia did not participate in the Non-Aligned Movement, while indigenous land rights and decolonising movements in South East Asia challenged the imperial legacies of the liberal international governance and legal system.

In Pankow, we considered specific stories which offer an insight into the under-documented leveraging that took place during the Cold War: Faith Bandler and Ray Peckham, for example, both instrumental in the campaign for the Aboriginal vote, travelled to East Berlin in 1951 under surveillance by the recently formed ASIO, performing as part of the World Youth Festival for Peace and talking to factory workers on Aboriginal equality and citizen rights. Members of the Aboriginal rock band No Fixed Address were effusively received in the 1980s on two occasions by East Berliners, including in Berlin's famed Volksbühne, as 'proof' of the cruelties of colonial capitalism. Our invitations to host artists Megan Cope (Quandamooka, also of the proppaNOW collective) and Archie Moore (Kamilaroi) came through interest in connecting renowned and current-generation Aboriginal artists into local conversations on the inheritance of post-war and post-Wall artistic movements.

SH In December 1972, following Gough Whitlam's election, relations established between the GDR and Australia were among the first to be negotiated between the socialist GDR and a Western capitalist state. So East and West Germany's acknowledgement of one another in 1972 represented a clear turning-point in the Cold War, making it far less complicated for Non-Aligned and Western states such as Australia to set up formal diplomatic ties to the GDR.

Because of this, there was a sudden demand for new embassies and diplomatic residencies in the GDR, which were rapidly rolled out, largely in Berlin's northeastern suburb of Pankow. Four variable models became the basis for 135 uniform diplomatic buildings – the largest of which hosted the Australian embassy. The designs are almost entirely bereft of national signifiers. The technical legacy of this 'experiment' lies in the art of prefabrication, which the GDR first implemented in mass housing projects: a one-size-fits-all approach specific to socialist modernist architecture, manifest in a grid-like formal efficiency.

SH + ROR The exhibition itself took as its starting-point the building's standardised (but by no means 'neutral') form. Drawing on British geographer Doreen Massey's approach to space understood as the "simultaneity of stories thus far", including all that does not formally or legally fit into the modernist grid, we wanted this form to immediately be traversed by further narratives.

For the exhibition duration, we kept the building's more monumental main entrance locked shut. Signage

directed visitors to instead wander through the overgrown garden, encountering two outdoor works: Archie Moore's *Image* (2018) – a physical barrier projecting an illusion of freedom via a fake garden space – and German artist Sonya Schönberger's *Clean Square* (2018), a reflection on the forceful re-construction and containment of specific (urban) spaces. Video documentation of Sumugan Sivanesan, Carl Gerber and Simone van Dijken's onsite 'tennis-performance', *Ex-Pat Cash* (2018), as well as a photocopied archive of research materials (which continued to be expanded after the exhibition opened), and the printed commissioned texts, were available to visitors before they finally entered the building via a back balcony door.

The ostentatious, wood-panelled conference room was dominated by two works destaging that central meeting space: Archie Moore's *Text* (2018) – which presents parliamentary records dating back to 1901, emphasising Australian politicians' historical use of the phrase 'swamped by...' ('...Asians'; '...the Aboriginal vote'; '...Communists' etc.) – and Megan Cope's video work *The Blaktism* (2014), in which a Quandamooka woman undertakes a ceremonial anointing in order to have her status recognised in a 'white phantasy' (as Romaine Moreton has called it) upheld by ever-present cultural authorities in the Australian landscape. The last work in this reversed tour, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll's *Embassy Embassy* (2009–2018), brought together nearly a decade of artistic research on the former Australian embassy and its architectural 'twin', the Iraqi embassy, including a slide projection onto the inside of the closed entrance doors.

ROR The exhibition attracted visitors from outside the fields of art and architecture. Many visitors (whether local or international) did come with the simple motivation of viewing a building which had long been restricted to access, but then encountered content that expanded their expectations, and stayed for a longer conversation about unfamiliar parts of the archive. It was important for us to be physically present during opening hours, accountable and available for questions and comments.

Contributing writer Sarah Keenan drew links between racialised property law in the settler colonies and the question of access and ownership globally, in financialising housing markets. Here, there is an ongoing connection between property and belonging: citizenship gives you property rights, while various forms of collective property ownership were extinguished in settler colonies with the invasion of indigenous lands. The reward for participation in the colonial project was not just white citizenship but private property protections – the ability to become upwardly mobile through exclusive use and exploitation. Keenan's work opens towards an emphasis on belonging as a

malleable process negotiated via use, membership and social movement, and not just via the modernist ownership framework (whether private or collective).

Another contributor, cultural studies theorist Ben Gook, argues that post-1990, Cold War ideological conflicts were reduced to "the politics of real estate". During the 'transition' to capitalism, Treuhand – which was the major federal trust agency set up to manage the GDR's former assets – privatised not only land and housing, but also firms and institutions, resulting in massive infrastructural and social upheaval. Gook argues that despite its clear failures, privatisation here formed the testing ground for processes more recently imposed by the German state elsewhere via the European Central Bank – in order to claim new markets within European Union borders after the 2008–2009 crisis, most famously in Greece.

SH In cities like Berlin or indeed Melbourne, the more democratic local governments and communities are scrambling to reclaim a fraction of previously privatised assets – either via community land trusts, public–private partnerships or straight-out remunicipalisation – on the back of widespread popular resistance. Yet calls for communal ownership structures set to counter financialisation should be attentive to the fuller play of continuities, imbalances, exclusions and violences.

And what of the embassy? Post-1990, the site became the temporary parking place for the GDR's Deutsche Handelsbank, which originally handled the state's foreign dealings and assets. The bank amalgamated into the Spanish conglomerate Santander, while the embassy itself continued to be held by Treuhand, then the Federal Institute for Real Estate, before finally being put up for sale in 2010. Over the next decade, the building changed hands three times and increased in price more than tenfold. At this price, the collective attempt to secure collective ownership of the site for permanent artistic use fell through – as did its planned transformation into luxury apartments. Both ventures proved to be too risky, an illustration of financialisation's failure: here, even luxury apartments were no longer profitable. The Berlin Senate considered, and then rejected, a plan to recommunalise the site. Then surprisingly, in August 2019, the German Humanists' Association acquired the embassy. It plans to develop a private, socially oriented school there, if the building's substance – which urgently needs renovation – can be salvaged.

ROR + SH Thinking with Sarah Keenan, we must ask: by whom, and for whom, is property structured? It is a matter of some urgency that these structures of belonging are resilient and malleable enough to accommodate the 'simultaneity of stories thus far'. ●

Practical thinking on urban design, from the physical to the psychological space of cities

Lived Solidarity

Housing Co-operatives

WORDS BY MANUEL LUTZ

In 2012, the **United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon** stated: "Co-operatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both **economic viability** and **social responsibility.**" Increasingly, they are considered a suitable – even necessary – approach to address global challenges, and achieve sustainable development.

Since 2016, the German co-operative model has been recognised on the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. There are many forms of co-operatives, ranging from food trade to artisans, wineries and housing. The basic idea is to pool the small resources of many into a non-profit company, whose sole aim is to provide products to the benefit of its members. This rationale is of particular interest for housing. One could say that housing co-operatives prioritise the use value of housing over its exchange value: profit is not the objective.

Historically, housing co-operatives emerged in the 19th century as a self-help response to the housing crisis: workers, craftsmen and employees set up co-operatives, often supported by local governments, philanthropic organisations or socially responsible employers. This model of housing production has received renewed focus in the German-speaking countries.

In the current crisis of housing affordability, co-operatives show potential to square the circle of affordability and quality, combining low cost with high quality of living.

In a very pragmatic way, housing co-operatives combine the best of the dominant forms of tenure, offering lower entry costs and flexibility of rent, but also the stability and autonomy of home ownership.

Members acquire shares in the co-operative, and in turn receive a lifelong security of tenure, which can even be passed onto children. The rent is set to cover the costs of building and maintenance, but nothing more; in practice, rents are not only secure, but likely to decrease over time. Members can exit and sell their shares, but only to other members; the value is paid back with interest, but speculative profit cannot be individualised. This marks a defining difference to homeowner associations like the popular model of Baugruppen (building groups). Although Baugruppen similarly pool resources and self-govern shared property, they emphasise individual ownership and individual gains over community interest. This makes them more vulnerable to neglect or loss of common interest over time. In contrast, co-operative members are shareholders of the housing company that they produce, use and manage together – and each member has one vote only, irrespective of how many shares they acquired. Housing co-operatives, therefore, have an inbuilt emphasis on democracy, equality and solidarity within a long-term, stable community.

Housing co-operatives are by now a well-established form of tenure in the German-speaking countries, acknowledged for producing durably affordable rents (on average, below market rent) and stable neighbourhoods. Governments consider them alongside rent and home ownership as the third pillar of housing policy. Statistically, however, although co-operative housing is a form of home ownership

it is commonly counted among rental housing. Co-operative housing, therefore, contributes to the strong role of rent as a form of tenure in Germany (55%), Switzerland (62%) and Austria (43%). In Germany, cooperative housing makes up 10% of rental housing units and 5% of total housing units, providing housing for circa 5 million people. Similarly, in Switzerland, co-operatives make up 5% of all housing units. The relative share of co-operatives is even higher in Austria, where 15% of all households live in co-operative and similar non-profit housing.

In all three countries, co-operatives are a predominantly urban phenomenon, made up of mostly multi-storey buildings. In cities, co-operatives can play a strong role in the housing market: in Vienna and Zurich, they comprise almost one quarter of the housing stock. The share is lower in German cities (14% in Hamburg, 10% in Berlin, and 4% in Munich), though some come close, like Dresden (at 20%).

Amid a widespread affordability crisis, the German federal government has recently declared housing co-operatives an indispensable partner in realising affordable rents. This political expectation is shaking up a market sector that has been somewhat dormant for the last 20 years, as many policymakers considered it negligible. In Germany, housing co-operatives had lost their special legal tax-relevant status as 'non-profit housing for the common good' in 1989. As a result, the majority of the 2000 German housing co-operatives have since focused on maintaining, rather than expanding, their stock, and have been preoccupied with ageing buildings and ageing tenants. Today, most old (so-called 'stock') co-operatives are a closed shop, with long waiting lists. Of all the new housing units built in Germany between 2009 and 2011, only approximately 6% have been built by co-operatives.

At the same time, small housing co-operatives [equivalent to co-housing projects in Australia – ed.] have emerged in many cities, usually initiated by local groups eager to collaboratively create affordable and sustainable housing. However, these new, small co-operatives face rising building costs and scarcity of available land, especially in big cities, where the demand is the strongest. In addition, newly built housing is expensive, even for co-operatives: rents in such new projects are usually equal to the market average.

Unlike stock co-operatives, new co-operatives lack capital, and, as non-profit companies, they cannot compete with for-profit developers. The need for extra support is recognised: Germany offers some forms of funding, such as subsidies for social housing and specific loans for co-operatives, and – most importantly – access to land. Some cities have already started to allocate public land either with quotas for co-operatives, or according to the quality of the concept instead of the highest price. Overall, however, such promising policy

interventions are still the exception, rather than the rule. Building new co-operative housing remains a challenge.

Despite these not-too-favourable conditions, some recent projects, such as Spreefeld in Berlin, wagnisART in Munich and mehr als wohnen in Zurich, offer a glimpse to how co-operatives can use the available resources from the state and their members to achieve state-of-the-art housing. Their shared aim is to provide *mehr als wohnen* – more than just housing.

These projects have all received prominent architecture awards for their innovative design, the ambitious and comprehensive process of participatory planning, and high quality of the neighborhoods created. They emphasise collectivity and dialogue in all phases of the project, planning, building, managing and living together.

All three feature a wide range of shared facilities: from gardens, laundry rooms and community spaces, to workshops, art studios and a sauna. They offer a variety of innovative apartment types that address changing lifestyles beyond the standard nuclear family; all three projects have pioneered the development of so-called cluster apartments, large apartments that balance the need for privacy with the desire for community and sharing. This holistic approach makes them considerably different to the bulk of mainstream market housing, which is shaped by profit expectations, leaving little space for experimentation.

Andreas Hofer, co-founder of mehr als wohnen, underlines the advantage of the co-operative model: such ambitious projects, he states, are feasible and sustainable only "when the investors are also the users". Co-operatives rely on the accountability, engagement and capital of their members, who in turn receive affordable, sustainable and socially diverse housing, catered to their individual and collective needs. To build new housing affordable even to people on low incomes, the challenge is to find ways of reducing costs without reducing quality of living. A key strategy in these projects has been stronger emphasis on shared spaces (for instance, within cluster apartments). However, there are limits to how much (individual) space residents are willing to sacrifice. The co-operative structure is paramount for balancing tensions between collective and individual use of space.

Similar tensions need to be resolved around the question of how much the members are willing or capable to pay, in order to subsidise lower-income residents' inclusion in the project. The financing model shapes the extent to which a co-operative can be socially inclusive and affordable, or has to be exclusive in order to be economically viable. All projects aim to

purposely integrate social and low-income housing, but the overall aim is to ensure equality of members irrespective of their purchase power. In wagnisART rents range between 5.65 to 13 Euro per m², but all units are of the same quality – be they social housing or privately financed by members.

Co-operatives are based on the core principles of self-help, self-responsibility and self-governance; the essential binding element is solidarity. Overall, these housing projects illustrate how noble principles are transformed into a viable practice of planning, financing, managing housing and living together. Offering a diversity of high-quality, affordable housing, these new housing co-operatives show what housing can be when it is developed by and for communities of users. ●

P.40 Private balconies and shared rooftop terrace in the Spreefeld housing co-operative, Berlin. P.41 balcony view to the central courtyard in wagnisART, Munich. P.42 (main) View from the central square in mehr als wohnen, Zürich, to two cooperatives, left to right: Genossenschaftsstrasse 13 (The Mountain) and Hagenholzstrasse 104 (The Gatehouse); (inset) Spreefeld seen from the other bank of the river Spree, the former Bar25. P.45 (top) Letterboxes and (bottom) an entry into a cluster apartment in wagnisART. All photos by Friedrich May.

The cultural fabric of cities, covering people and projects across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

Mona

Skin in the Game

WORDS BY EMMA MCRAE

"When **David Walsh** said all art is about sex and death, what he meant was that art is either about showing off or leaving a legacy," says **Jane Clark,** senior research curator at **Mona (Museum of Old and New Art).** But sex and death alone doesn't account for the incredible success Mona has had, attracting over three million people to a museum on the edge of Tasmania in only eight years. Mona's appeal includes a distinctive tone, multiple voices, plus a willingness to take risks and interrogate challenging ideas.

Combined with the freedom of financial independence, this approach has produced a genuinely experimental institution that attracts a broad range of people, many of whom wouldn't usually set foot inside a museum. They come for the irreverence and the sensationalism, sure, and also for the architecture, the art and the wine. But most of all, they come for the experience.

"Mona is an immersive experience," says Robbie Brammall, Mona's director of marketing and communications. "That terminology is quite in vogue now, but David was doing that from the start, instinctively." From the moment you board the giant camouflage ferry on the River Derwent, everything works together to create an experience. "There are no signs anywhere, you're confused and disoriented and slightly frustrated," Robbie says. "You descend five stories into the abyss and the first thing you see is a giant bar that has Australia's earliest happy hour and a beer vending machine. You get an experience when you come to Mona. I think that's what we pioneered and

what makes us different."

Since opening in 2011, Mona has become a major tourist attraction and a significant employer in Tasmania, helping reinvigorate the economy and, many argue, the way Tasmanians, and Australians more generally, view the island state. "It is legitimising, encouraging and facilitating what is already present in Tasmania," says Elizabeth Pearce, Mona co-director. "I don't know anywhere else that has such inherent contradictions. Tasmania is a place of extremes; it's 'both/and'. Mona is 'both/and' as well, which encourages and legitimises that position as something that can be inhabited confidently and happily."

Robbie goes further. "The entire personality of the state has changed: there's a confidence and irreverence, a sense of humour and tone that comes from being a bit more comfortable in your own shoes. There's now an expectation that you do something different, something you can't get away with on the mainland." He says many former employees of Mona are now doing

just that. "I think the lesson you get from Mona is: if you do something well and different, don't box-tick and try to pander to the audience. As much as 'the Mona effect' is an economic legacy, I think the more valuable legacy is a cultural one."

The secret to the museum's success with the audience – over 400,000 visitors a year, 70 percent coming from outside of Tasmania – "is that we don't care too much about our audience," Elizabeth said at a talk in 2016. The museum's brand relies on honesty, admitting they sometimes get things wrong, and not talking down to people. "We established a strategy that stands true today," Elizabeth said. "We should describe the events and products as we would to our most intelligent friend." Mona, Robbie says, is not trying to tell anyone what to think. "We present things for discussion but don't have a pointed social conscience or a political direction." This 'say it like it is' approach, combined with the multitude of opinions available on the handheld O device, denies any authoritative voice and invites visitors to have and share their own opinions of the art, the exhibitions and the museum. "Mona is for everyone," says Robbie. "That's why there are no labels on the work."

Like Mona founder, professional gambler and art collector David Walsh, Elizabeth and Robbie are both born-and-bred Tasmanians. Robbie left for 18 years, working as a creative director for companies including DDB and Saatchi & Saatchi, in Melbourne and Auckland, before returning to Hobart in 2016 to work for Mona. Elizabeth became part of the core Mona team prior to opening, when a friend introduced her to David in a Hobart bar. During an argument about postcolonial literature, she says, "I just happened to sass the right person at the right time." Jane was also part of that core team: David poached her from her role as director of paintings and deputy chairman at Sotheby's Australia.

These key staff members, with their professional longevity and understanding of the Tasmanian context, all agree that, as Mona has matured, it has become more embedded within, and consequently more accountable to, the local community. Having started with a team of around ten, Mona now employs approximately 2900 people during the peak Dark Mofo period. "That is a big organisation with a big responsibility," says Robbie. "We've got a lot of employees that rely on our success."

Aware of Mona's position as a significant cog in the Tasmanian economy, David is now planning a 172-room, 5-star hotel ("Gloriously impractical," says Robbie), possibly including a casino, to support the operations of the museum. If the museum's core principle is 'be yourself', everyone I spoke to was aware that it's much easier to be yourself when you are financially independent. "David Walsh was rich enough – and therefore free enough – to take on an enormous personal and financial risk, and to not care if it failed,"

Elizabeth has said. "I mean, he cared. But he was prepared for it to fail." Since the 1990s and the beginning of what Richard Sennett calls 'the new capitalism', many individuals and companies have learned to fail fast and move on. But most large museums, despite their talk of embracing failure, are public institutions and therefore publicly accountable in ways that David never has been.

At Mona, the ability to act with freedom is combined with a hedonistic appeal to have as much fun as possible, despite an uncertain future.

The ability to live and act within uncertainty, says Elizabeth, is the most accurate way to conceptualise David Walsh as a person, and by extension Mona as an organisation. "His mathematical approach is reflected all the way through," she says. "He has a very particular attitude to risk-taking and decision-making that is much less to do with meaning and death than with how to inhabit uncertainty. How to deal with risk, know what you don't know, and place yourself in a position to get the most out of uncertainty, as opposed to trying to master it."

In a time of overwhelming social, technological and planetary uncertainty, Mona's ability to inquisitively and irreverently inhabit uncertainty feels liberating. Descending into the museum, as though arriving on an archaeological dig, visitors encounter objects ranging from antiquities to contemporary artworks, presenting a material history of humanity as an evolving process. As a constantly expanding structure – including tunnels signposted 'To be continued' – and a labyrinthine layout that can bamboozle even the staff, Mona does indeed feel both old and new.

Mary Lijnzaad, Mona Library manager, has lived through the evolution of both the museum and the collection longer than anyone else at Mona. Having started in 1999 (in the days of David's first museum of antiquities) working one day a week to catalogue David's extensive book collection, Mary – a trained librarian – soon found herself cataloguing also the antiquities, and then the growing collection of contemporary art. She taught herself museum cataloguing along the way and instigated, with Art Processors, a collections database that eventually became the CMS that runs the O. It wasn't until 2006, when David started employing curators again, and also conservators, that Mary was able to shift her focus back to the library. For Mary, the mix of old and new at Mona is both liberating and inspiring. It breaks out of the dusty old museum stereotype and encourages visitors to feel that history is alive and constantly relevant. Or, as Mary put it, "Everything is contemporary."

For local Tasmanians who are doing it tough, though, Mona is not offering the same existential respite from the present moment – despite free entry to the museum. Kate Booth, a lecturer at the University of Tasmania, was part of a recent ARC funded project studying 'The Mona Effect' and has written that, while there is generally good feeling towards Mona, "The high cost of food, drink and items in the gift shop, and other signs of the institution's wealth, can act to tell visitors with lower socioeconomic and cultural capital that these places are not for them." Culture-led regeneration projects have been shown to contribute to increases in gentrification, rising house prices, unemployment and displacement of the local population. Over the past five years, Hobart's house prices rose faster than any other capital city in Australia. While this boom is apparently coming to an end, many people I spoke to in Hobart attribute the sudden increase in homelessness over the last few years to the growing number of Airbnb rentals that reflect increased tourism and make accommodation unavailable, or unaffordable, for locals.

There are also mixed opinions on the impact Mona has had on the local arts industry. Many locals celebrate the increased reputation Hobart has gained as a hub for creative industries, and credit Mona with boosting this recognition. Others, however, such as Scott Rankin, creative director of Big hART, and Bill Hart from the University of Tasmania's School of Creative Arts, have noted that there was always a rich arts ecology in the state, and that the Ten Days on the Island festival, which began in 2001, must also be recognised as significant in transforming the creative reputation of Tasmania.

It's important to remember, however, that Mona wasn't built as part of a culture-led regeneration project. It's a private museum created to house a private collection. It was, and still is, an experimental project that genuinely tries to subvert the idea of museums as staid institutions in order to create something new. Its economic effect on the state has been unintentional. The museum's unusual approach has its critics, but, at the same time, it offers a point of difference on the Australian cultural landscape.
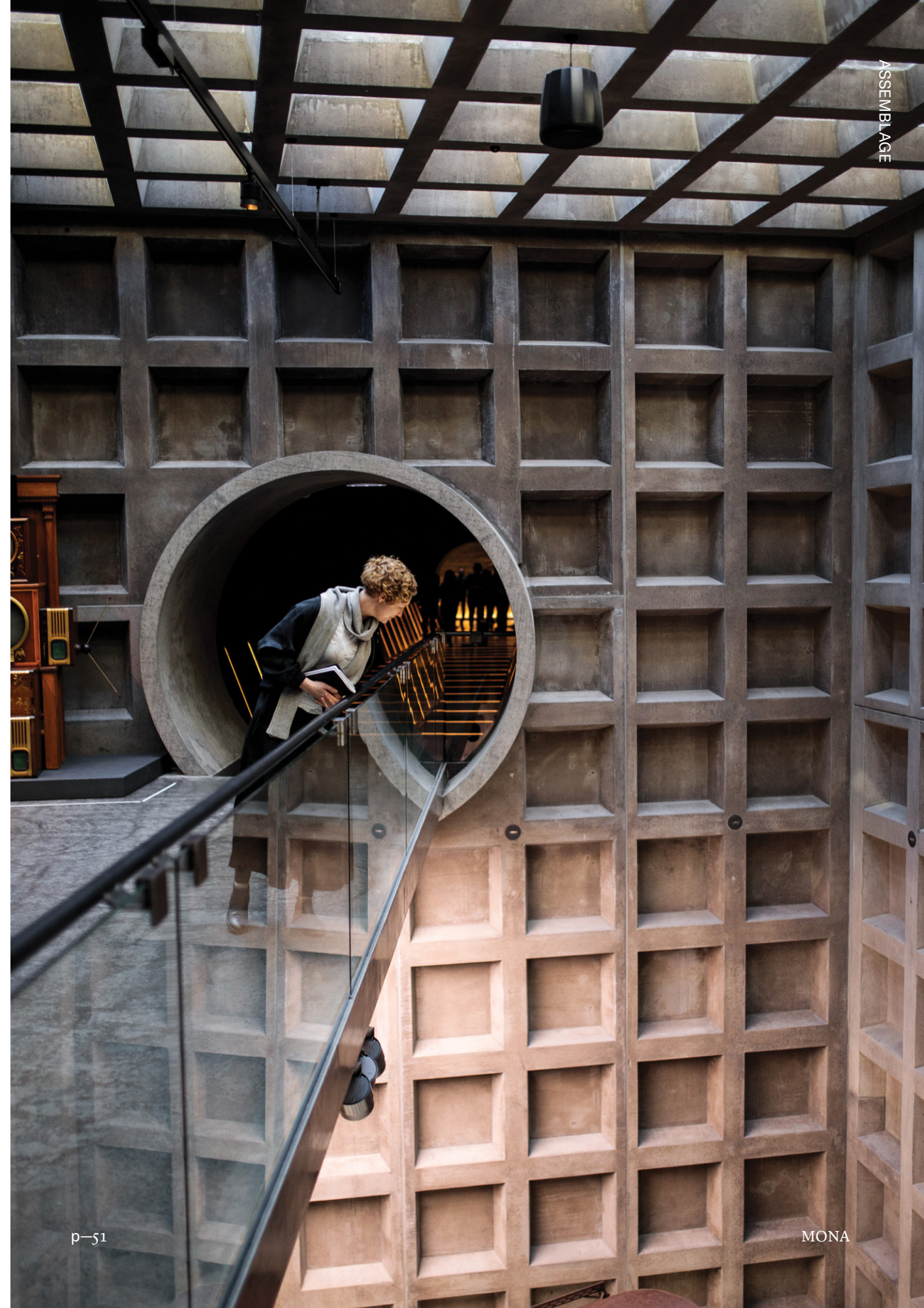
> "We are hopefully providing a counterpoint in some key ways – not in every way but in some ways," Elizabeth says. "Having a point of difference gives you an opportunity to think more about why you're doing things the way you are."

The idea of critical self-reflection lies at the heart of the museum. "One of the things David wanted Mona to do was make people open to ideas," says Jane. The ethos of change, reflection and experimentation is the essence of the cultural legacy Robbie spoke of, and it continues, Elizabeth says, to guide Mona into an uncertain future. "Built into the fabric of the place is change, and letting go, and moving on to something else, and David's completely aware of that.

We can't lock Mona into being one particular thing – that would be a betrayal of Mona's fundamental value of growth through learning. Ultimately," she says, "that's our legacy." ●

PP.46–47 James Turrell, *Beside Myself* (2017). Installation at Mona. PP.48–49 James Turrell, *Event Horizon* (2017). Installation at Mona. P.50 Mary Lijnzaad (right) talks to Emma McRae at Mona Library. P.51 Looking at *Lincoln* by Nam June Paik (1990), Emma McRae at Mona. P.52 View of Mona from River Derwent. All photos by Jesse Hunniford, courtesy of Mona.

The cultural fabric of cities, covering people and projects
across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

Glenn Murcutt

Touching the
Earth Lightly

WORDS BY JANA PERKOVIĆ

ASSEMBLE PAPERS

"The government essentially accepts that people will air-condition buildings," architect **Glenn Murcutt** tells me, "even though, until 15–20 years ago, most people did not have any form of air-conditioning. That means you have to make the building airtight, so you don't lose cold air in the summertime from the cooling, or the warm air in winter from the heating. Sealing of buildings is unbelievably unhealthy, and yet it's required under our laws."
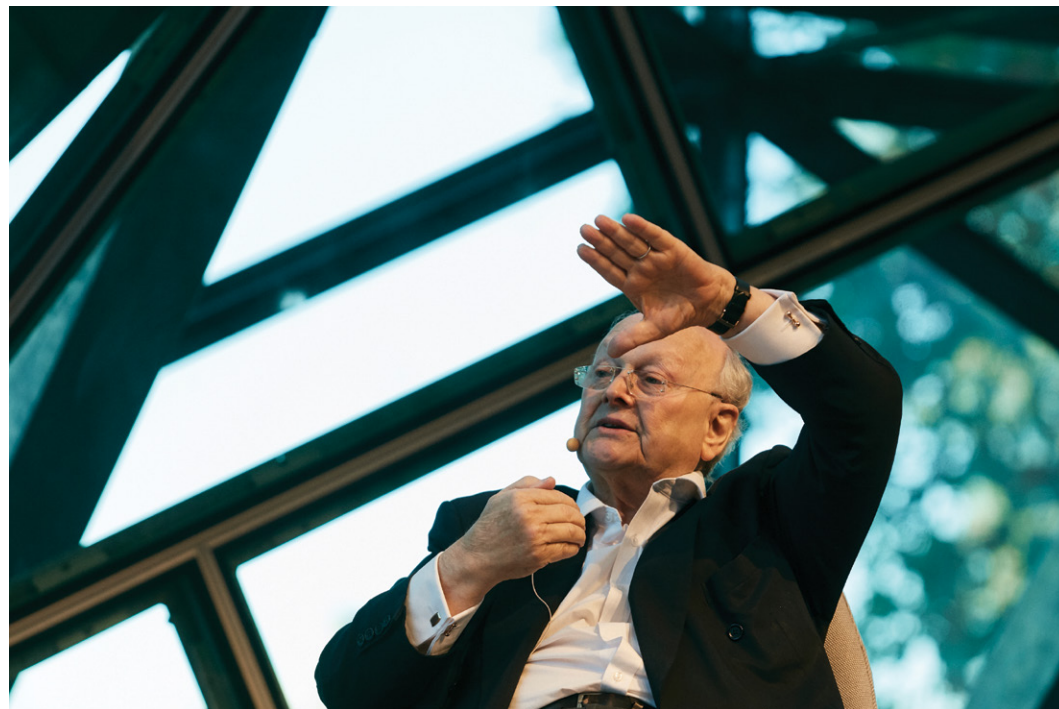
Glenn's houses are the antithesis of sealed: houses with shutters, blinds, slats, and gills in the roof to let the hot air out; buildings lifted off the ground so that the air can circulate underneath – these are buildings that breathe deeply in Australia's heat. None require air-conditioning. They are world-famous, too: among Glenn's many international accolades is the coveted Pritzker Prize. He was awarded the 'architecture's Nobel' in 2002, the only Australian architect so far. Unlike most other winners, heads of major international firms, Glenn works as a sole practitioner, at a minuscule scale, and has never built anything outside of Australia.

Unmistakably refracted through Glenn's architecture is a childhood in Papua New Guinea, with two remarkable, adventurous parents. Arthur Murcutt ran away from home at 13 to work as a sheep shearer, bootmaker, saddler, and other odd jobs, before gold prospecting took him to New Guinea. He almost sailed across the Pacific with Errol Flynn (the boat sank shortly after being launched). He spent a year living in Japan. In 1936, Arthur and the heavily pregnant Daphne Murcutt flew to Berlin for the Olympics: Glenn was born on the way, in England.

Arthur was a practical man, a quintessential maker. "My father was really interested in design," says Glenn. "He designed and constructed his own buildings. And all the houses had louvres, insect screens and ventilated roofs. Fresh air was considered to be the most critical thing."

Arthur instilled in his children a discipline in everything they did, from studies to exercise, sports to music. A fan of Henry David Thoreau, he raised Glenn to

be a curious, hands-on child, approaching engineering and composition from first principles. "When my father returned from the war, he brought *Architectural Record* and *Architectural Forum* in from the United States. I was required to read certain articles – particularly on the work of Philip Johnson, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright. I was then examined! And all the questions were about principles: 'why is this building off the ground?' 'Why are these buildings hugging the ground?' 'Why is this cantilever like it is?' 'What about the sunshine? How is the sun being resolved?' These questions brought a rationale to me: it was like composition in music. There was a poetic component to it, and also a rational quality." From the age of 12, Glenn was in his father's joinery shop, carrying bricks and bending reinforcing (with some help). By the time he was 18, he was building sailing boats.

These are the values Glenn Murcutt would later bring to his remarkable architecture: a marriage of beauty and logic, a pragmatic engineering that leads to the most beautiful of resolutions, and a willingness to learn through making. It is a sensibility that finds resonance in the humble sophistication of Scandinavian and Californian regionalism, Wright's Prairie style and mid-century Modernism of Mies and Jørn Utzon. Glenn's appreciation of craft has led him to develop long relationships with European builders who migrated to Australia post-World War II, "many of them great craftspeople, marvellous at producing concrete, carpentry". He is fond of paraphrasing Thoreau: "Since most of us spend our lives doing ordinary tasks, the most important thing is to carry them out extraordinarily well."

However, Glenn Murcutt added something quintessentially New World-ish to this crafts-led architecture: an industrial roughness, use of outback station materials such as corrugated iron, and a willingness to build as little house as possible.

This vision has brought to life a series of remarkable – though at first glance unassuming – buildings. The Marie Short House (1975) in Kempsey, NSW, built from local timber, post-and-beam like an Australian wool shed, with adjustable steel louvres and on stilts to let the airflow through. "[Glenn Murcutt] has created an architecture that's both true to the place and unexpectedly rigorous," wrote Jim Lewis in *The New York Times*, "like a bow and arrow made out of titanium." The iconic Magney House (1984) on the NSW South Coast, with its curved corrugated iron roof that collects rainwater, a shipping container-like structure that has come to represent contemporary Australian architecture. Touching the earth as lightly as a tent, it was described by the Pritzker jury as a "testament that aesthetics and ecology can work together to bring harmony to man's intrusion in the environment". Or the prefabricated, tin-roofed Marika-Alderton House (1994) in Yirrkala, Northern Territory, with walls made out of removable plywood panels, and no windows whatsoever – a simple shelter resembling an Aboriginal hut built from long sheets of bark. The main considerations in all his designs are airflow, orientation to the sun and prevailing winds, and locally available materials.

Now, Glenn is in Melbourne to create a quintessentially urban project: the new MPavilion, a temporary structure for Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens. "One of the dangers of doing a project like this, for an architect, is to want to produce a fandango – to do something just mad," he tells me, with characteristic bluntness.

"Melbourne has some of the maddest buildings in the world already. I think that what we need is a level of sanity."

The origin of a pavilion is a tent; specifically, a decorated tent, made of canvas and placed in a garden. The image of a tent facing the city was the starting point for his MPavilion design: a lightweight, temporary structure, its method of construction evident from the outside, its roof translucent canvas, letting the light through and turning it into a lantern at night time. Glenn tells me of a trip he took to Mexico, many years ago, to see the Yaxchilán ruins: the small party flew to Yaxchilán in a little aircraft, and had a picnic under the wing of the plane, covered in aircraft fabric to provide shade. "It occurred to me, this pavilion is like sitting under the shade of the wing of that little aircraft in Yaxchilán, with a marvellous view of the ruins: a lightweight moment of place-making."

Glenn's practice, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, began at a time when the Australian national identity was at the fore of everyone's imagination – an attempt of a generation born and raised on this continent to unearth an original soul to the white settler nation. Glenn, however,

sees that project as inadequate: "We have to be careful. It's very easy to structure a romantic image of Australia. If our architecture is too self-conscious, too self-referential, it is likely to be a pastiche. One has to look elsewhere: what does this climate mean? How do we work our culture together with the climate? And what is the craft nature of this nation?" He is also adamant that post-war migration has made Australia into a much more interesting, diverse and culturally rich country – and with comparatively few social problems. One of his most cherished projects has been designing the Australian Islamic Centre in close collaboration with Melbourne's Muslim community: "I don't have any faith after this life; but the Imam came to me one day, put his arm around me and said, 'But you are a very spiritual man.' I made very, very significant friendships on this project – and I don't make friendships easily."

His generation defined a distinctive national architecture, leaving an impressive – and daunting – legacy. But the tasks left to the next generation of architects, Glenn says, are very different: dealing with catastrophic climate change, and learning to manage natural energy systems (sun and shade, cool winds, thermal mass) to improve the sustainability of the built environment. "As we learn to manage water, as we

learn to manage food – we could learn to manage power consumption in buildings. And if we learn to manage how the power comes to us through natural energy systems, rather than through coal, we will be able to use the power appropriately and reasonably."

The rules young architects will have to face in the future are going to get even more stringent, he says. "For example, and reasonably so, they're going to have to work with the lifetime cycle of a building's effect on the environment, which includes consumption, and how much the building is going to be using natural energy systems, such as orientation, materiality, insulation, the earth and the ground systems. They are going to have to deal much more with environmental issues, because the environment is going to change vastly. We're starting to see it already, in very profound ways. And we've got to accept that we are the cause of the environmental changes."

As we are parting ways, Glenn stops again to emphasise the inseparability of aesthetics and rational design, of pragmatism and beauty: "If we design buildings really well, the chance of them having to be redeveloped is reduced. And the important thing about the longevity of the building is that it is worth keeping. If it's worth keeping, then you have the beginning of sustainability in a true sense." ●

P.54 Facade of Bowali Visitor Centre (1993), Kakadu National Park, by Glenn Murcutt. Photo by Luke Durkin (CC). P.55 Chris Connell's red stools, designed to complement the industrial materiality of Glenn Murcutt's MPavilion. P.56 Glenn Murcutt speaking at 2019 Living Cities Forum. Photo by Tom Ross. P.57 Marie Short House (1975). Photo courtesy of the National Archives of Australia. P.58 Donaldson House (2016). Photo by Anthony Browell. P.59 Magney House (1984). Photo by Anthony Browell.

The cultural fabric of cities, covering people and projects across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

Mabel O. Wilson

History is Invented

Mabel O. Wilson is a New York–based designer, academic and activist exploring issues of race and the built environment, with a focus on politics and cultural memory in **black America.**

WORDS BY NINA TORY-HENDERSON

ASSEMBLE PAPERS

At **Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP)** she is a professor of architecture, associate director at the **Institute for Research in African American Studies** and co-director of **Global Africa Lab (GAL).** GAL was awarded an American Academy of Arts and Letters Architecture Award this year, where the jury said that its work "reminds us that architecture and design can and should be a participant in the struggle for a just world".

In this struggle for a more just future, Mabel turns to the past. In contrast to Western modernism's universal 'progress', which masked and eradicated histories, Mabel calls for a direct confrontation with our murky present–past; in order to realise a more equal, just society we first need to face our difficult histories. It is a project where the reality of our past and present become the very material through which we imagine our futures. We met with Mabel after her lecture 'Future Reckoning' at the 2019 Living Cities Forum, to discuss history, race and reckoning.

NINA TORY-HENDERSON
As a trained architect and cultural historian who undertakes scholarly, advocacy and design work, could you talk about what binds your ways of working together and how you came to work in such diverse ways?

MABEL O. WILSON
Architecture is already multi-disciplined. You have to deal with so many things just in the logistics of putting a building together – I feel I've been able to adapt that multi-disciplinary training to other kinds of work. I still work on architectural projects, but it's been a while since I've been involved in the nuts and bolts of building, which I miss. There are so few people working on questions of race and the built environment that it has become the consuming topic in my work.

I've been interested in race since I was an undergraduate in architecture, but at the time there was no way for me to conceptualise how to work on those issues. I think that to write and work on issues around race and its history you have to work across disciplines. Western history is narrow and problematic. So how do you deal with this problematic archive of colonialism or the archive of slavery? You have to invent new ways of working and new ways of looking at things. I feel like my practice has been invented in order to be able to work on the things that I do.

> I knew that I was always going to be operating at the margins, that I wasn't going to be in the mainstream of the field.

I ended up in academia and realised that that was one way for me to do the kind of work I have been doing. Projects like Who Builds Your Architecture? (WBYA?)[1] have given me ways of getting these ideas out there, to diversify the ways in which I work.

NTH Race and history are a thread that binds your ways of working together. Could you expand on the relationship between the two?

MOW We think of history as natural – we think we have to have a history – but history is invented. Which isn't to say that there isn't something called a past, and that people don't have ways of understanding past-ness, but history – in the particular Western framework – is problematic, already productive of racial difference and racial hierarchies. Hegel's introduction in 'Lectures on the Philosophy of History' is a kind of geo-politic of civilisation, where Africa has no history – claiming history isn't possible or historical consciousness is not possible in Africa.

Inequalities are baked into history through erasure, through silences, through histories that have been removed. For example, at the University of Virginia we know almost nothing about the enslaved – over 4,000 people, with little to nothing known about them.[2] At the same time, there's this view that we can't remove a statue of Thomas Jefferson, who we know almost everything about[3] – that's what I mean about the inequalities being baked into our way of understanding history.

NTH Architectural history is problematic in the same way: it is a selection, a construction, a curation of some history and not others.

PP.60 & 61 Mabel O. Wilson in Melbourne. Photo by Tom Ross. P.63 In the National Museum of The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, National Museum of African American History and Culture.

MOW There's the history of the profession and then there's the history of architecture. I always say that 'architecture' is the Western, European art of building, via Vitruvius, via Alberti. People have built everywhere, all of the times, all over the world. There is always building. But architecture is a very specific set of practices. When its historians started building taxonomies and organising, only some cultures were written into the history of architecture. You have Greek, Roman, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and then something called Modern. So you build a vertical history, and then there's all this other 'ethnic stuff' that's to the side. The production of the discipline of architecture is already building hierarchies of cultural – hence also racialised – differences.

One of the canonical essays of architectural history, 'Ornament and Crime' by Adolf Loos, is laden with really problematic colonial language. It's a narrative of racial progress, but it's never read that way; architects don't read that at all. It's the birth of the pure, white, ornament-less form that Loos was famous for, but no-one understands that its conceptualisation is based on a rationality of white superiority.

There's also the emergence of the discipline in and of itself. Bryan Norwood is a scholar looking at the formation of the American Institute of Architects and the professionalisation of architects. In the profession's own discourse, in Norwood's research, the architect is specifically racialised as white and Protestant. This impacts who goes into the field, which is one of the whitest and least diverse in the US.

NTH Much of your design and research focuses on monuments and museums. Could you talk about how they play a part in these inequalities within historical narratives?

MOW If you look at the Smithsonian Museum, an institution that established American history, it didn't collect anything by black people at all, nothing, until maybe the mid-20th century. When there was a push to do an African American museum in the 1960s, they didn't have anything to put in it! How were they going to have a museum when they deliberately didn't collect anything; when they deliberately omitted a history?

But on the other hand, as part of its formation in the 19th century, the Smithsonian developed an archaeology and ethnography of the continent, to try and understand who the indigenous populations were. The museum sent out scientists with military parties (who were staking out land for railroad and telegraph) to collect every 'primitive' artefact possible. So, when the Native American Museum was launched, they had more than was needed for the museum! They had had to understand who had been here first, in order to build the myth of the nation in formation. So, on the one hand you want to construct the myth of the 'primitive', but on the other you deny a history of the African American. Part of the project of the Smithsonian was creating a racialised historical narrative.

NTH And monuments?

MOW Monuments mark histories and claim power. They are a historical form, adapted by Western societies, particularly nation-states, as ways of expressing collective values; so, they have a lot of purchase in the public sphere. However, they are often exclusionary, gendered and racialised. In New York City, I contributed to a public commission called She Built NYC[4] to point to the absence of place names and memorials dedicated to women in the city. How do you rectify that? How do you reckon with that? Who has the power?

NTH Yes, what are the new forms of collective memory and representation when we move beyond the modern Western monument?

MOW The example of the *Ngurrara Canvas* (see interview with Adrian Lahoud, p.65) shows that there are other ways of representing land and history. Alternative forms do exist, but the question is: when does an alternative representation rise up to recognition? 'Recognition' meaning it has some kind of validity and value in a mainstream political, social and cultural arena. That's difficult: these systems are inherently unequal, because they are conceptualised to be so. It could be productive to try and push those systems, maybe even tear them down. ●

1: WBYA? is a collective of architects, activists, scholars and educators that advocates for fair labour practices on building sites worldwide. The project examines the links between labour and architecture, confronting the ethical, social and political questions that arise from the building of buildings: from workers' rights to construction practices to design processes.

2: Designed by Höweler + Yoon Architecture, in collaboration with Mabel O. Wilson and others, the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia is currently under construction. It seeks to formally acknowledge the labour and work of enslaved African American men, women and children who built and sustained the everyday life of the university.

3: The statue has been the target of multiple protests over the past three years, with the call for its removal, as Jefferson was a slave owner. These protests are part of the Charlottesville historic monument controversy, a public discussion on the racism laden in local monuments.

4: She Built NYC is a public-arts campaign that honours pioneering women by installing monuments that celebrate their extraordinary contributions to the City and beyond. The project addresses the absence of female statues in the city's public spaces, ensuring that New York's full story is told for generations to come.

Adrian Lahoud

The Legacy of Empire

Adrian Lahoud's practice interrogates the intersection of architecture, climate change and colonisation. His curatorial strategy for the forthcoming Sharjah Architecture Triennial, 'The Rights of Future Generations', is the culmination of decades of research into the spatial consequences of conflict.

Adrian's earlier work on 'post-traumatic urbanism' was a reaction to the experience of being in Lebanon during the civil war. "It was about really trying to look beyond the rubble and the obvious materialisation of conflict. The way social groups reorganise, the way neighbourhoods contracted, the way demographics were sorted – those things became really interesting to me." This fascination with conflict has evolved to encompass the greatest geopolitical threat we face as a species. "Since climate change," he says, "it's now a prerequisite for everyone to think in a much more systemic way."

The contribution to, and experience of, climate change is not equally distributed among the world's population. It is inextricably linked to colonisation, as "climate change is not a problem of humanity – it is a certain extractive mode of being that has overcome the earth". Its violent effects will be felt relative to race, geographic location, social class and a mass of other determining factors; yet, when we are talking about "almost-certain extinction… it suddenly becomes a whole-species problem".

It's these vulnerable sites and people that constitute both the subjects and authors of the forthcoming Sharjah Architecture Triennial (9 November 2019–8 February 2020). Adrian defines the intention as "bring[ing] to attention spaces of alternate modes of existence that struggle to survive against the

prospect of extinction". After almost a decade focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, the process of identifying these spaces has widened his sites of intrigue to include others dotted throughout the Global South: Ethiopia, Chile, Palestine and his birthplace, Australia. This singular Australian case study, of *Ngurrara: The Great Sandy Desert Canvas* by the Ngurrara people, formed the core of his presentation at the Living Cities Forum this year. *Ngurrara Canvas* was a vast painting undertaken in 1996 by members of the Walmajarri, Wangkajunga, Mangala and Juwaliny language groups. *Ngurrara Canvas* was their claim to nomadic occupation of their own territory – a region of more than 78,000 km² near the Kimberley in Western Australia – for thousands of years; it's a physical map of their country. The decision to grant land rights affirmed a previously non-existent commensurability between the Western conception of property and Indigenous relation to country.

LAUREN CROCKETT
You align climate change with an 'extractive' mode of being, playing out at a planetary scale. How can this be understood at the scale of the individual?

ADRIAN LAHOUD
The simplest example is the way we increasingly instrumentalise social relationships to gain credit, whether it's financial credit or social credit. More and more things that were really intimate about human relationships become exposed to financialisation in ways that just didn't exist before. Your likes and dislikes are monetised by major corporations – that's the most obvious example.

One of the alternatives to this mode of being is reciprocity. Primitive societies often functioned by subsistence – a perfect equilibrium between the amount produced and the amount consumed. A White reading of this economic system would say that it was underperforming, as it did not produce a surplus. But there are societies and communities that don't see human beings as a resource to be exploited; some of these appear in the Sharjah Triennial.

LC Could you elaborate on your own understanding of the Global North and Global South, and how you deploy the terms in your work?

AL I use it in quite a broad way to refer to conditions in which there is a legacy of colonialism or of 'empire'. Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia were at one point or another the outposts of empires. They were used to supply labour, for the slave trade, their resources were exploited and extracted, and so on. So, there's a kind of geography to former empires or former colonies. But it's also a consequence of many, many different things like migration and the slave trade, and a continued form of inequality and

racism within cities in the Global North – especially in the last few decades. You'll find conditions in cities like London, New York, Sydney, Melbourne, in which the Global South appears within the Global North.

In a context like Australia, we can think about it in so many ways. The beat-up around Sudanese gangs that's been happening here for the last few years is just the latest in a long line of outbursts of xenophobic rage in this country towards outsiders, whether they're refugees, economic migrants – there's no real nuance to it. The Sudanese are bearing the brunt of it now, the Lebanese bore the brunt of it in the early 2000s, before then it was the Vietnamese, and you can keep going back. Then, of course, there is the scandal that is Australia's relationship to its First Nations people.

LC Being an Australian working in London, as Dean of the School of Architecture at the Royal College of Art, but directing much of your focus towards Africa and the Middle East, what is your own relationship to the history of colonisation here?

AL My relationship to being Australian is really complicated. I was born in Sydney, my parents were born in Lebanon and emigrated to Australia in 1956 and 1968, but I also grew up in an inner-western suburb in Sydney, where who was and wasn't Australian seemed to be decided by white Australians. When I am introduced as Australian, I have to double-take, because on one hand I am, but I am also Lebanese.

My interest in issues surrounding Indigenous Australians is an elaboration of the last nine years of my work, looking at the impact of climate change on Sub-Saharan Africa, and thinking about the way different systems of knowledge production interact. It's important to understand that interaction if you want to try to come to terms with climate change.

I read these two incredible books – *The Biggest Estate on Earth* and *Dark Emu* – that were a complete revelation to me. Like probably many people, I felt this overwhelming sense of humiliation for being part of this culture for so long – having been born here – and yet being incredibly ignorant about the history of this continent. To use Mabel O. Wilson's phrase (see p.60), it's me trying to reckon with that sense of 'stupidity and ignorance about Australia's own history.

With the Ngurrara people, I got a profound sense of the importance of this project to the artists and the community there. What was really important about it was how open and trusting people were, when they had no reason to be; in fact, they had every reason to be distrustful. We're all tangled up in the project together now, and we've both come to it in completely different ways – I mean, I discovered it only years ago, but it's a project that goes back to the '90s.

a claim for historical ownership over the landscape. Those kinds of things really quite fascinate me.

LC Could you expand on your method of decolonising the curatorial process?

AL The first thing is that many of the architectural conditions that we're interested in at Sharjah Triennial involve people who stand to gain almost nothing from being involved in an architecture triennial. And that's curious. Normally, everyone stands to gain something from involvement in a major international exhibition. So, you have two choices: either the project is only directed towards people who stand to benefit from being in a major architectural exhibition, which is actually a pretty small group of people; or you try to expand it. If you expand it, then there has to be reciprocity. If you invite an architect from Beirut to participate in the Triennial, then there is already an exchange; but if you're working with someone who is a forest conservationist in Ethiopia, you need to find a mechanism for some kind of mutual benefit.

It changes completely the structure of how you curate work. *Ngurrara Canvas* is just one project out of 40, and I hope you get a sense of how invested we are in that project.

We're always thinking in those terms: 'what is the legacy?'; 'What is the sustainability of the model we're putting in place?'

LC How does the vision for the Charter for the Rights of Future Generations allow an alternative legacy?

AL The Charter is intended to be the legal legacy and political provocation that emerges from the Triennial. There are 12 to 16 senior figures who all convene to meet with participants and architects at the opening of the exhibition. Three months later, at the close of the exhibition, they'll deliver a draft Charter on the Rights of Future Generations. It's an ambitious and important project: it's the vehicle that will try to connect the work happening at the scale of the exhibition with the level of state and intergovernmental politics. So, as a curator, one starts to assemble these different sides of social struggle and give them a common language, but also give them a vehicle so that that language can resonate among governments and intergovernmental organisations. I think that's really exciting. That project is as big as the exhibition itself. ●

LC The project of the *Ngurrara Canvas* was eventually validated in the eyes of the White legal system, despite operating in a completely different medium. What have you learned about the efficacy of Indigenous storytelling?

AL Imagine what kind of social structure is required to accurately transmit a story between 300 to 700 generations. That's just astonishing! Within the society that we're more familiar with, if you pass on a message two or three times, by the time it gets to someone else it's completely garbled. Of course, Indigenous storytelling is a far bigger, deeper social structure. All of the processes of initiation and verification that would need to be in place suggest incredibly strong sets of social relationships, interpersonal rules, and forms of conduct – the social structure has become a kind of machine for transmitting stories. The other incredible thing is that, if writing and language were invented 6,000 years ago, and these stories are between 7,000 to 18,000 years old, they are signals that have come to us through the deepest time. They have survived colonisation, massacres, all the violence that came with

it, and they can still reach us clearly. That's just mind-blowing.

LC You've spoken at length of the invisibility of Indigenous land cultivation to Western eyes. In July, the Budj Bim cultural landscape in south-western Victoria was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. How critical is institutional recognition in rendering these sites more visible?

AL Yes! The eel traps. I think institutions have a role, absolutely. UNESCO listings have all kinds of problems, but I think you use whatever institution or form you have at hand. For example, one of the other projects in Sharjah is looking at Andean geoglyphs. They're tools that help the [descendants of those travellers in] caravans that moved throughout the mountains of the Andes to recount their own histories and their own ancestry, which they would narrate as they moved through the landscape. In Chile, where effectively the entire state is organised around resource extraction – mainly copper and lithium mining – UNESCO-listed artefacts are really important,

because they're one of the only tools you can use to stop mining companies. There are different ways of empowering oneself using archaeology, whether it's a UNESCO listing or whether it's just developing a tourist economy that produces another value around those places. Of course, archaeology is also a site of struggle.

Another project we're doing in Sharjah is looking at the history of archaeology in Palestine, working with [architect] Dima Srouji. In archaeology, there's something called the 'rule of superposition', which basically means that the oldest stuff is lower and the newest stuff is higher, but of course that assumes that the land has never been manipulated. What you find in occupied Palestine is a kind of manipulation of the ground, in order to create different political effects in the present; for example, displacing artefacts, stealing Palestinian artefacts so that Palestinians would not have a claim to the ground, or even inserting Israeli artefacts into the archaeological record as a way of trying to make

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p.66 Adrian Lahoud presenting at the 2019 Living Cities Forum. p.69 *Ngurrara: The Great Sandy Desert Canvas,* a collaborative work painted in 1996, hanging in the First Australians gallery, National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Photo by Richard Poulton.

Play Matters

The Style and Substance of the Berlin Spielplatz

WORDS BY MITRA ANDERSON-OLIVER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAILYA BIKMURZINA

ASSEMBLE PAPERS

It should come as no surprise that the playgrounds in Berlin are incredible: **playgrounds were invented in Germany.** But somehow, with every new wondrous, adventure-filled visual delight that my son and I stumble across, I am amazed anew.

And now, after six months living in Berlin, what surprises me is not the good playgrounds, but the crappy ones. If you look really hard, you can find them – forgotten spaces with not enough trees, maybe the swings are broken or the arrangement of the equipment is just a little too sparse to be truly inviting – but they are few and far between. For every famous *spielplatz* that scores a write up in the *New York Times* or *Monocle Magazine,* there are a dozen just-as-good paradise playgrounds that locals flock to.

Our enduring favourite is a 'pocket park' adjoining the neighbourhood house Kiez Oase, about 150 metres from our back door. It's small by Berlin standards – only about 500m² – but most afternoons has upwards of 40 kids and their parents getting busy in the sand, queuing for the swing, serving make-believe ice-creams out of the window of the play house, or monkeying about on the more challenging beams and ropes. It's shady, there's a co-op café that opens out onto it, there are dozens of sand-play toys permanently scattered about

for all the kids to share (most Berlin playgrounds have sand as their base – but this one also has a dedicated pit), and it's right on one of Schöneberg's main village shopping strips. So, basically, perfection.

Just around the corner is Hexenspielplatz ('Witches' Playground'), a much bigger playground with a zipline, two-storey slides, a complex-to-get-into and fun-to-slide-out-of 'witch hideout' and many other exciting semi-dangerous bits of play equipment long removed from, or never even imagined in, Australian playgrounds. Another gem on our regular route is the Feuerwehrspielplatz ('Fire Station Playground') in Kleistpark, which features an epic slide and an intimidating mesh climbing tunnel. Once, I was chided by a local parent for helping my toddler cross the three-metre-high metal bridge: "He can do it!" The parent was right, of course. Then there's Gleisdreieck's trampolines and *wasserspielplätze* ('water playgrounds') at the southwest edge of the epic railyard rejuvenation project and a lovely forested number in the heart of Kreuzberg, with hillocks and bridges, water pumps and wooden crocodile balance beams. All of these are within easy walking or public transport distance from our front door. We are absolutely spoilt for choice.

In addition to all the benefits to children, extolled as far back as 1870 by the 'inventor' of playgrounds (and also of kindergartens), Friedrich Fröbel, come the benefits of the parents having a safe place to go with their child during the day. Somewhere to enjoy the outdoors, each others' company, and – most importantly, I think – just feel like a part of the city. This is huge salve to the isolating effects of early parenthood, where it is all too easy to feel like all the loveliness of adulthood (independence, agency, a social life) is on the other side of an impassable Lego wall.

As a parent in Berlin, I don't just feel like a part of the city in its playgrounds, I feel like a valued part of the city. I feel that my experience, and that of countless other parents, carers and children, is important. The *spielplatz* should be fun. It should be adventurous. There should be lots of sand, some water pumps for making messy, intricate dams and rivers, and some quite dangerous-looking climbing apparatuses, fit for all ages and stages. It should be shady with ample seating. There should be a kiosk or café nearby selling affordable snacks, ice-cream and beer (yes, beer). There should be variation. There should be beauty. And they should be free, all 1853 of them.

It's important to understand that Berlin's playgrounds were no accident. There are some key moves that we could start to make in Australia to bring a little more wonder and beauty into the daily lives of kids and their minders.

Of course, some of the factors behind Berlin's generous playgrounds are specific to the city's history and cannot be replicated, such as the sheer amount of empty space that used to exist as a result of World War II

bombings. The subsequent emptying out of the city was compounded by the Berlin Wall, dividing the city population into East and West for over 40 years, condemning the German capital to a centreless, half-speed economy that struggled to regain its 1939 population high of 4.3 million. Berlin's population growth is picking up pace now, with 3.6 million inhabitants at last count, putting major pressure on housing availability and affordability – and the remaining free space in the city.

However, courtesy of the 1979 Children Playground Law, there are 220 hectares of 'usable playground space' reserved in Berlin; a sizable figure, falling just short of the prescribed 1m^2 per inhabitant (though the city is meeting its planning target of 6m^2 of green space per inhabitant). This incredible, long-standing law also includes requirements for where playgrounds are located (near dwellings, adjacent to green spaces, sports and leisure facilities, protected from exhaust fumes, and in sunny rather than permanently shaded locations). They are to be planned, developed and managed by district "playground commissions", which involve "parents, pedagogues and other professionals". The law stipulates a "play offer that is varied, ideally usable in all seasons" and attentive to the needs of different age groups and abilities, all with the aim of "giving children the opportunity to develop psychological and physical capabilities, and promoting socialisation". It requires the regular inspection of playgrounds, and that infrequently used playgrounds and play equipment be "improved or replaced". The size of playgrounds and the type of equipment is also covered: from the minimum of 150m^2 for a playground for children under six years, to the vast 2000m^2 multi-functional spaces for older children and young people, which are to include skating and cycling ramps, table tennis and similar attractions.

Once these multi-purpose designs are in place, falling and getting hurt is not going to land anyone in court: as a rule, public liability in Germany is very limited. Independence, personal responsibility and a corresponding belief that exposing kids to a certain amount of 'acceptable' risk is a really important part of their development are values deeply embedded in German society – and this is reflected in their legislation around play spaces. This frees up playground designers and city authorities to be more daring, challenging and playful in their designs.

While these regulatory settings may seem a long way off in Australia, there are other things we can get started on immediately. For example, proactively seeking out partnerships with state and local governments to reserve space for, and participate in the making of, playgrounds. One such initiative is Raum für Kinderträume ('Room for Children's Dreams') by the Berlin district Spandau, which builds and renovates

playgrounds with the local community, and Drachenland ('Dragonland') in Friedrichshain, which was planned together with residents and children and completed in 2002. A children's design competition was held to determine "the most beautiful dragon": a huge, coloured wooden beast which now watches over the children as they play.

There are also many examples of direct action, with the community taking over neglected civic spaces or common areas and fundraising for the building of

playgrounds themselves. This has resulted in some of the most fantastic and popular playgrounds in Berlin, such as the adventure playground Kolle 37 (only allowed to be built by children themselves!), and the renovation and doubling in size of the play area at Lausitzer Platz in Kreuzberg. Community-created and -managed playgrounds go that extra step of building a sense of ownership and belonging to place that so many of us crave in our oftentimes disconnected and atomised urban life.

When designing new public playgrounds, we could also support and advocate for local companies that make beautiful, modular structures with sustainable materials. In Berlin, two major suppliers, SIK-Holz and Merry Go Round, rely almost entirely on wood for the construction of playgrounds; sustainable, carbon-sinking, easily-arrangeable-into-so-many-exciting-variations, lovely to touch and climb on, wood. They source much of their timber – *robinia pseudoacacia* or 'false acacia' – from the Black Forest, and assemble it onsite in bespoke variations, sometimes based around a theme (such as at Hexenspielplatz), an age group or activity set. A special quality of robinia wood is its natural strength and elasticity, meaning that it requires no chemical treatment before being used in playgrounds. Irregularities in growth, grain, growth rings, knots and roots are celebrated, and are said to "give the impression that it has been designed by children". There are many fantastic playgrounds in Australia – such as the wonderful Wombat Bend playground on the Yarra River, Agency of Sculpture's stunning 'Eddy' on Mount Beauty and Playce's Valley Reserve in Mount Waverley (all in Victoria), and the community co-designed 'Train Park' in West Hobart, Tasmania. It's about picking up on these trailblazers and supporting their efforts to introduce greater variety and quality into our play spaces; not just for a single feature project, but as the standard across our cities and towns.

Living on the other side of the world with a young family, I've missed my friends and family, as well as my local haunts. But when I do finally come home, it's not going to be the long Berlin nights (rare for me these days!), fresh falafel or the incredible public transport system that I'll miss the most. It will be these abundant, exciting, inviting *spielplätze*, and all the love for people that they embody. ●

P.70 Enjoying the swing at Schöneberg's popular Hexenspielplatz. P.71 (main) Challenging climbing equipment for older children sits above a permanent collection of sand toys and Bobby cars; (inset) a children's footbridge at Waldemarstrasse, Kreuzberg. P.72 There's only one way to get down at Hexenspielplatz. P.73 The children's playground at Park am Gleisdreieck. P.75 (top) A battering ram swing at Hexenspielplatz; (bottom) trampolines at Park am Gleisdreieck. PP.76–77 A huge climbing complex at Park am Gleisdreieck. P.77 (inset) Bright colours and difficult climbs at Feuerwehrspielplatz, Schöneberg. P.78 Children enjoy the roundabout and a rope bridge at Hexenspielplatz. P.79 Braving the tunnel climb at Feuerwehrspielplatz.

A leisurely look at the good, the bad and the ugly of apartments throughout the eras of apartment architecture

122 Roseneath St

Starting with Community

**WORDS BY ELIZABETH CAMPBELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM ROSS**

ASSEMBLE PAPERS

On a quiet street, in the leafy suburb of **Clifton Hill**, stands a strong, black-and-white-banded apartment building. It consists of 49 apartments flanked by 18 townhouses, allowing for a **diverse mix of residents** at any stage of life, and stands in place of a former **brutalist warehouse**, which was partially retained.

This is the first building developed by Assemble [the publisher of *Assemble Papers* - ed.], in collaboration with Wulff Projects and Icon developments, and served as testing grounds for putting the company's ethos and philosophy into built form. The development of the project started with the community. Mid-2016, the team at Assemble started organising multiple rounds of design presentations, with the purpose of conversing with potential future residents, to ascertain exactly what they wanted in a multi-residential development. A series of questions, conversations and online surveys assisted the architects, Fieldwork, to understand their needs when designing different aspects of the building, both communal and individual. This process has now set a standard for many community-focused housing developments throughout Melbourne.

CAMILLA & GUS

Camilla is an architect at Breathe Architecture and Gus "always has a few different projects on the go". Currently, he is working for High Hopes Wine Co., a Sydney-based wine importer focusing on natural wines from small producers. Gus also co-founded an online radio station called Skylab Radio, which has been broadcasting for a year and a half. "My studio is located in Brunswick East – I split my time working between there and the apartment. I love working from home, it's super quiet, which is a respite from the noisy studio. It's also nice to look out across the treetops while working."

They first got to know the location through an event called the Brutalist Block Party. "It was serendipitous," says Gus. "I was running the Otis Armada dining events at the time, and Assemble got in touch with us to do some activations of the old warehouse on this site, with a month of pop-up events. It was incredible to have this huge space handed to us. We pushed the envelope. That's how I fell into the Assemble fold." Now that he lives on the same site, he appreciates the location for other reasons: "We spend a lot of time down at Merri Creek."

Camilla pipes in: "Walking to the farmers market is the dreamiest experience: we walk for ten minutes and we're in another local community!"

She adds: "We had been thinking about purchasing something off the plan and it all just fell into place at the right time. I had been to one of the drop-in sessions where the building was presented, and had been involved in the surveys online. After coming to the site so much during the period of the Brutalist Block Party and Otis Armada period, we felt like we knew the site well. It's crazy to think that was over three years ago now."

Camilla enthuses about having conscious, like-minded neighbours in the apartment below, across the hall and next door. "The community was the drawcard initially for me. Knowing the people who we would live with in close proximity was really important; and those relationships have eventuated. Everyone who lives here is a conscious neighbour, everyone says hi to each other. We know everyone on our floor by name, which is so nice. We had a roaming dinner recently: everyone on level three left their doors open for the evening and people popped in and out of their neighbours' apartments to say hi, have a chat and a bite to eat.

"We have also had some great dinner parties in the communal room. We had a Christmas party last year with about 25 of our friends, and a couple of large dinner parties there since. It's a part of the building that is really unique, and a big asset. It also hosts a weekly yoga and pilates class – not something you would get in a share house. There are also many amazing dog and cat residents within the building. We have dog-sat for our neighbour a number of times. Pets stroll up and down the hall."

I am interested in other changes to their way of living since they've moved from a house to an apartment. Camilla tells me that they sold a lot of stuff before moving: "The downsizing made us really selective about what we kept – even our mugs have become really precious. The coffee table is from Gus's grandparents. We also bought two new pieces of locally made furniture a few months after we moved in – because we didn't need a lot, we could spend a bit more," she says.

Gus says to Camilla, "I feel like you had furnished the apartment years before we moved in."
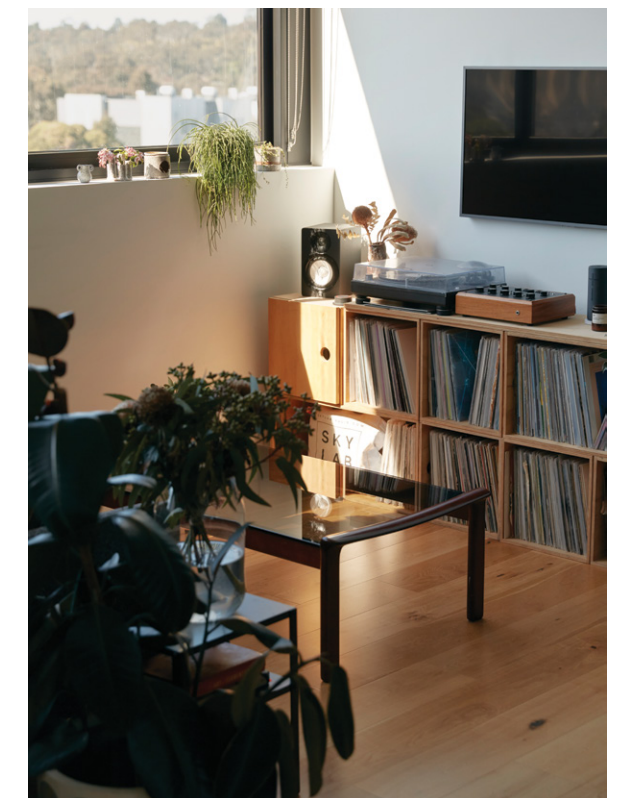
JESSIE & CAMERON

Jessie's work includes developing strategy for activating public spaces, curating public programs for the City of Melbourne and artwork for the Metro Tunnel, along with a collection of side projects "on the boil". These projects include beekeeping with the Honey Fingers collective; investigating the uses of seaweed with a group of enthusiasts as part of Seaweed Appreciation Society International (SASi); and a series of ethics workshops in partnership with Bakehouse Studios co-director Helen Marcou AM called 'Hypotheticals: A moral dilemma', which are designed to help communities navigate future challenges. Her partner Cameron works as a doctor and does some research in neuroscience and neuropsychiatry.

"I initially became interested in the building through the Assemble team, who I've known and admired for a while. Rachel Elliot Jones, a close friend of mine, was also interested in buying something in the building. We were both unsure how achievable it would be, but, after seeking some financial guidance, we were able to proceed.

"Buying off the plan typically involves a lot of risk, but knowing who was designing and developing the building gave me a lot of confidence," Jessie continues. "Half the team working on the building moved in – that's a pretty big vote of confidence! The area was also a huge drawcard: it's such a nice part of Melbourne, I can ride my bike everywhere, my family are here, and Merri Creek is amazing. We can walk for about five minutes and we're completely in the bush – we see frogs, hear so many different birds. And the fact that the suburb isn't going to be super-developed in the future is also great. Clifton Hill is really lovely."

The journey from the street to Jessie and Cameron's apartment is via stairs and a planted communal walkway: "We don't need to walk down a hallway to get to our front door. It's almost like living down a green alleyway. I've always lived in houses with a street frontage; I love it," Cameron says. "We also really enjoy having a bit more of a garden."

Jessie is particularly fond of the spacious kitchen design: "Having a good amount of bench space is really great." She also made changes to the original plan of the apartment. "It was meant to be a one-bedroom with a study nook, but I worked with project architect Briony Massie to move a wall to fit larger storage in the bedroom. Jane Caught from Sibling Architecture designed the wardrobe. It was lovely to work on such a custom [project] with Jane, and that the Fieldwork team were able to accommodate these changes during the build. When the wardrobe is shut completely, it transforms into a beautiful object," says Jessie.

Having friends in the building seems to be a common experience for the residents at 122 Roseneath St: "It's amazing to start your day by bumping into someone familiar as you leave for work," Jessie says.

"I was really encouraged by the fact that everyone has only a few degrees of separation from most residents, so it doesn't feel like we live with a bunch of strangers. It doesn't feel like a huge complex where everyone is living different lives with no interaction. At the same time, the building is designed so that you can have privacy when you need it."

Jessie adds: "I've been delving into Lynn Margulis' concept of the holobiont, which describes an entity made up of an individual host plant or an animal, alongside the multitude of other symbiotic microbes. A development of this theory contributed the term 'hologenome', to reflect microbial contributions to animal and plant DNA. The fact is that humans are considerably made up of the microbacteria that we host.

"These concepts gave me access to the idea that buildings, and the people, animals and plants that live in them, are like that too. This building wouldn't be the same if it was totally different people living here." ●

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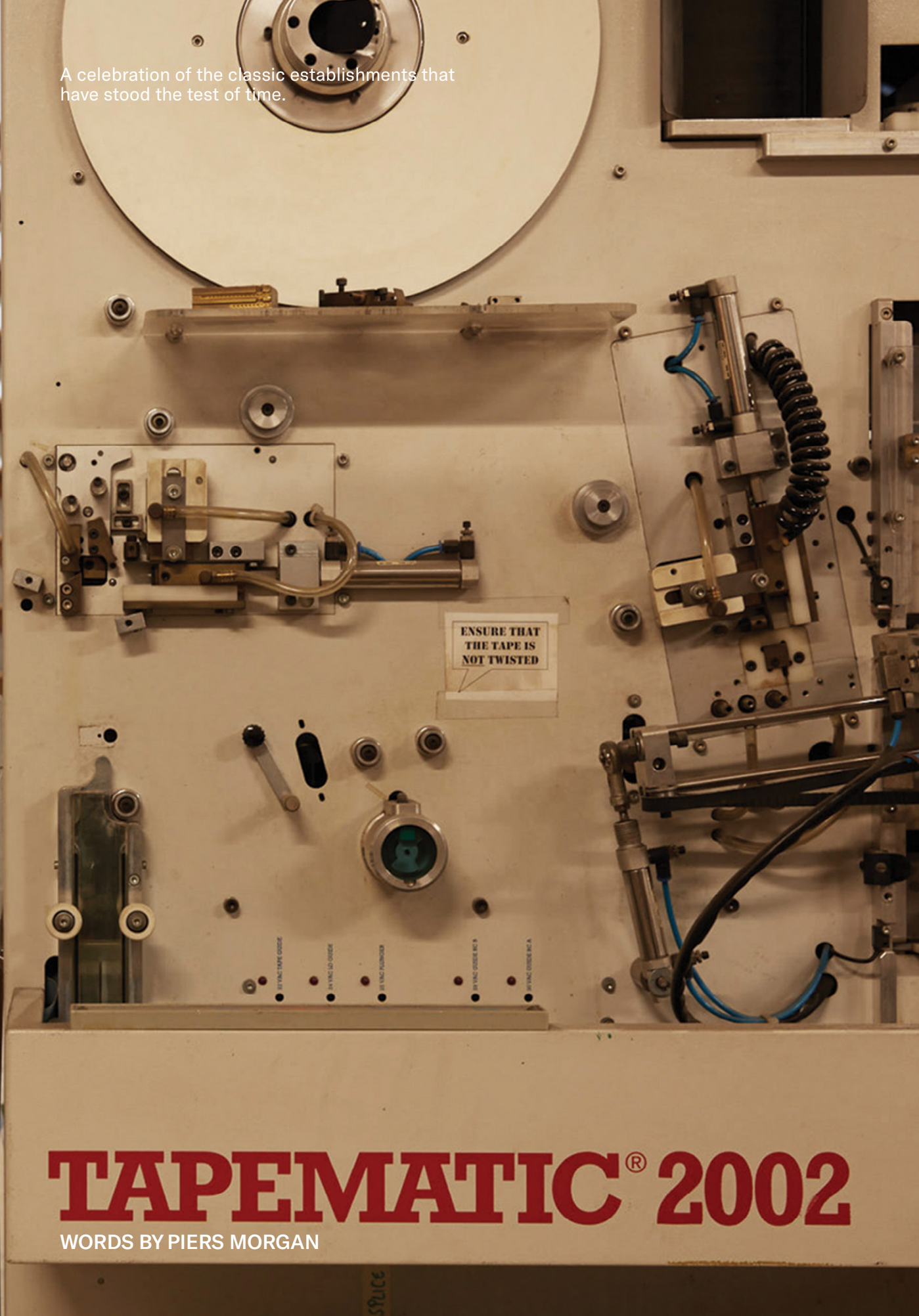
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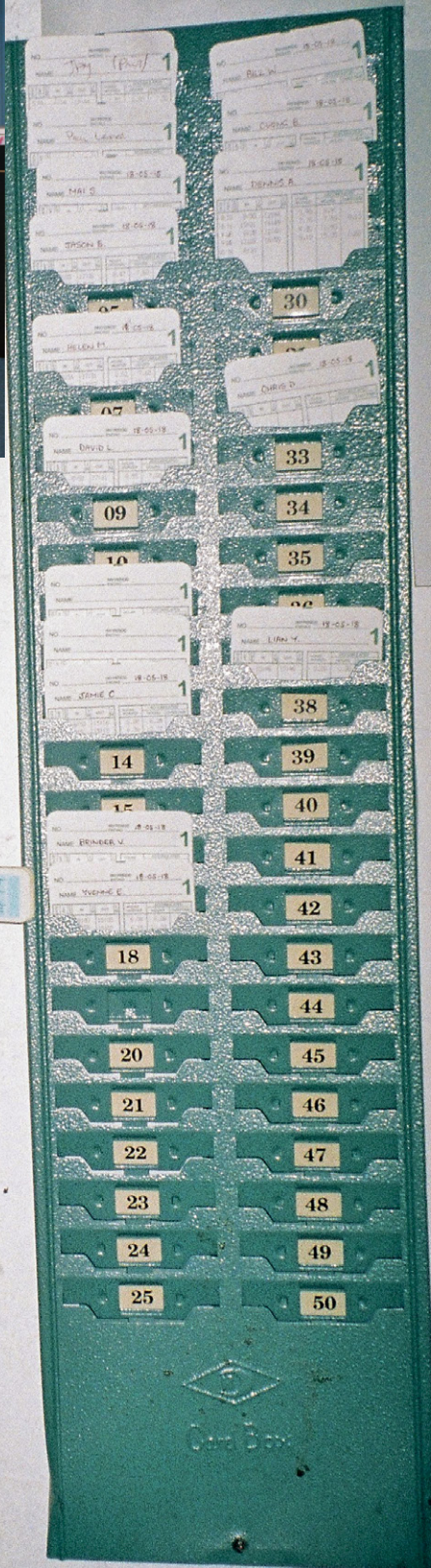
The offices and sound studios of **Dex Audio** look out over Macaulay Road in Kensington. I'm talking with co-founder **Greg Williams,** and he gestures at the footpath out the window where an impromptu crowd would gather to watch the 'gig' on the odd Saturday afternoon back in the 1990s. When Dex Audio was commissioned to produce an outdoor sound system, the audio engineers would have to test the rig in open space – so they would pull up the roller door and blast music out to the street.

The factory buildings that Dex Audio has occupied over the years had been used variously as wool stores back in the 19th century and an icing sugar manufacturing plant in the mid-20th century, before the cassette tape, CD and DVD duplication facilities which became some of the busiest in the country. At one point they were producing 400,000 tapes per month, later it was a million CDs per month. If you've grown up in Australia, there's a good chance you've handled a Dex Audio recording.

The business began when Greg, having left his job as an audio equipment technician, needed to come up with the rent money. He started repairing his mates' broken guitar amps that were lying around his house in Hawthorn. He and co-founder Daniel Desiere would start their work day around lunch time, and keep the repair shop open until after midnight so that bands and roadies could drop their busted equipment around straight after their gigs. From there they started building PA setups, studio monitoring installations,

and developing audio hardware. Greg tells me that Dex Audio developed the world's first active DI box. When I confess that I have no idea what this means, he tells me that it's a device similar to a preamp used when plugging a bass guitar directly into a studio mixing console. Their device dramatically decreased noise and preserved the full spectrum of the bass guitar tone. They had orders coming in from around the world and couldn't build them quick enough.

Their big break came in 1982 when they were asked to build the sound system for Australia's first IMAX theatre, and from there the business expanded to nearly all aspects of audio production.

Around this time they had a small recording studio and also maintained the equipment for a tape duplication company in the neighbourhood. There was

a quid-pro-quo arrangement whereby Dex Audio would get tapes produced for their recording artists. The usual wait time for tape duplication was four weeks; "In four weeks, in Melbourne, bands could form, do their first few gigs, and break up." The manufacturer would get stuck with the tapes, and eventually they went bust. Dex Audio took over the lease on their duplication equipment, and began producing all orders on a five-day turnaround (and a 50 percent deposit). They still keep to this schedule, regardless of format.

 As Dex Audio got more orders – from universities, government, big business – the studio took on more equipment and more staff, often hiring local musicians when they were between tours. Greg says, "They struggled with the early starts, but it was nice to be able to throw them a bit of work when they needed it." In 1990 the business purchased the red brick building on the corner, 393 Macaulay Road, and, in 1992, expanded to the property next door.

Dex Audio continued manufacturing cassette tapes long after the market had shifted to CD audio, as it had a contract with Victoria Police for their interview recordings. The cassettes had to have particular anti-tampering features to ensure the authenticity of the recordings to be used as evidence, and few manufacturers could meet the exacting standards.

Kensington has changed considerably since Dex Audio moved in. On the high street, there wasn't much more than a pub and a hamburger joint. There used to be more light industry in the area, which was great if Greg needed to get a part manufactured to service a piece of equipment – he could just walk around to a nearby fabrication shop.

In the 1990s, Dex Audio produced the sound system for the slice of Melbourne suburban architectural history, the all-you-can-eat, dinner-and-show restaurant, Smorgy's. Greg worked closely with architect Peter McIntyre, who imposed very strict conditions on the equipment, wanting to keep it out of sight. One of the few places they could install the subwoofers in the Polynesian-themed restaurant was hidden in the vaulted ceiling, which made for a natural bass horn. It was so effective that children would become frightened when the floor shook at the dramatic crescendo of the evening as the volcano 'erupted'; they had to dial it back a notch.

Dex Audio doesn't need as much space in Kensington for its equipment, so it's moved out of 393 Macaulay Road, but remains just next door. Greg shows me the audio mastering studios they're currently fitting out. He's constantly experimenting and testing ideas. The bundled straw panels that will line the ceiling have an incredibly low environmental impact, and work very well acoustically – the irregular texture disperses high frequencies. The cable tray covers are affixed with magnets, they simply pop off for easy access. The audio is distributed over standard blue network cables, a system he employed in the fit-out for a local community radio station: much of the work was done by volunteers. These cables can be installed by anyone with an electrical or IT background, without requiring specific audio-wiring expertise. The studio spaces are visually connected by windows to each other and to the office and (unlike most sound recording rooms) are flooded with natural light. This makes for better communication and a more comfortable, collaborative work environment. He's not happy with the external double-glazing: it functions well thermally, but the gas-filled chamber is causing the panes to resonate. He tells me this is why he tests ideas in his own studios before deploying them in installation for others.

The responsible, environmentally friendly practices that their new factory in Derrimut has instituted also make good business sense.

The excess polycarbonate from the CD manufacturing process becomes a high-value waste stream as it is optical grade, and better quality than most virgin polycarbonate. They have a 30,000 litre underground rainwater tank, and do not use any tap water for their manufacturing processes. The 100-kilowatt solar array on their roof provides 100 percent of their standby power and 25 percent of their operating power, and will pay for itself in around four years. Greg would like to see the nationwide energy grid upgraded to support small-scale power generation, so that Australia's energy needs could be fully supported by renewables, but an upgrade like this requires leadership on a federal level and would take 20 years to roll out. "But we have to start today, in order to be able to make a difference in 20- or 30-years' time."

 As well as catering for the renaissance in cassette tape production, Dex Audio is now going back to its roots, working with guitar amps. Greg bemoans the fact that many new amplifiers are not designed to be serviceable, and are simply thrown out when they break. Dex Audio is bringing out its own line of amplifiers, designed to last, and able to be repaired when necessary. The engineers are restoring vintage microphones and analog recording equipment, drawing on the trove of equipment Dex Audio has kept as a museum to vintage recording technology.

There is clearly still a place for manufacturing in Melbourne's rapidly changing inner-suburban industrial areas such as Kensington. Greg has considered moving the premises to the outer suburbs, but his current location is convenient for his clients and employees, and he'd rather stay put, adapting to changes in the industry and the area. ●

PP. 87–86, 88, 92–93 Tapes and spare parts in Dex Audio's old site at 393 Macaulay Road in Kensington. Illustrating Greg's point about changes in the local area, the building Dex Audio recently vacated has been acquired by Assemble for the first Assemble Model project. The site's important industrial heritage is central to the design by Fieldwork. Photos by Tom Ross.
P.91 Greg Williams at the new Dex Audio sound studios, currently being fitted out, in Kensington. The insulation visible in the background is made from wool and straw. Photo by Piers Morgan.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Andy Fergus is an urban designer at the City of Melbourne, co-director of Melbourne Architours and studio leader at the Melbourne School of Design. Andy currently works in the design review of major projects and the development of design quality policy in central Melbourne, in addition to his role as urban design collaborator and a licensing committee member of Nightingale Housing.

Sonja Hornung is a visual artist who grew up in Melbourne. She moved to Berlin in 2012 to study at the Berlin–Weißensee School of Art. In her artistic practice she attempts to insert forms aspiring towards emancipation into pre-existing orders, working in urban contexts. She is active in struggles for spatial justice in Berlin.

Manuel Lutz is a scholar with degrees in spatial planning and political geography based in Berlin and Potsdam. Interested in both policy analysis and community, his research traces the top-down and bottom-up changes in housing, from homeless tent cities to innovative forms of collaborative housing.

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Alice Oehr is a designer and illustrator from Melbourne. Her distinct colourful style incorporates her love of food, pattern, collage and drawing. Many of Alice's ideas have made their way onto textiles, homewares, magazines, books, and even once as a series of 6-ft-tall Ancient Egyptian statues for a marquee at the Spring Racing Carnival.

Rachel O'Reilly is a writer/poet, artist and curator born in Gladstone, Queensland and working in the Netherlands and Germany since 2009. She teaches How to Do Things with Theory at the Dutch Art Institute and is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths.

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Nina Tory-Henderson is a designer, writer and researcher of the built environment. Practising in architecture both in Australia and Denmark, she has worked at many scales, from landscape and urban design to exhibition design and research. Her interests lie in the social, cultural and political narratives of the built environment and the city.

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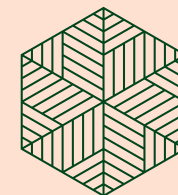
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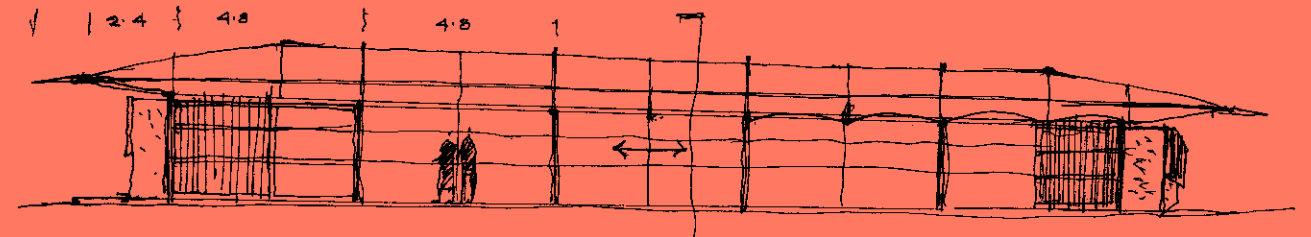Learn more at
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"After lunch, I put my rucksack against the aircraft's undercarriage and lay down, and there above me was a beautiful wing, lined with aircraft fabric - which led me to the MPavilion's roof. There was my beginning of the pavilion."

GLENN MURCUTT AO, MPAVILION 2019 ARCHITECT

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