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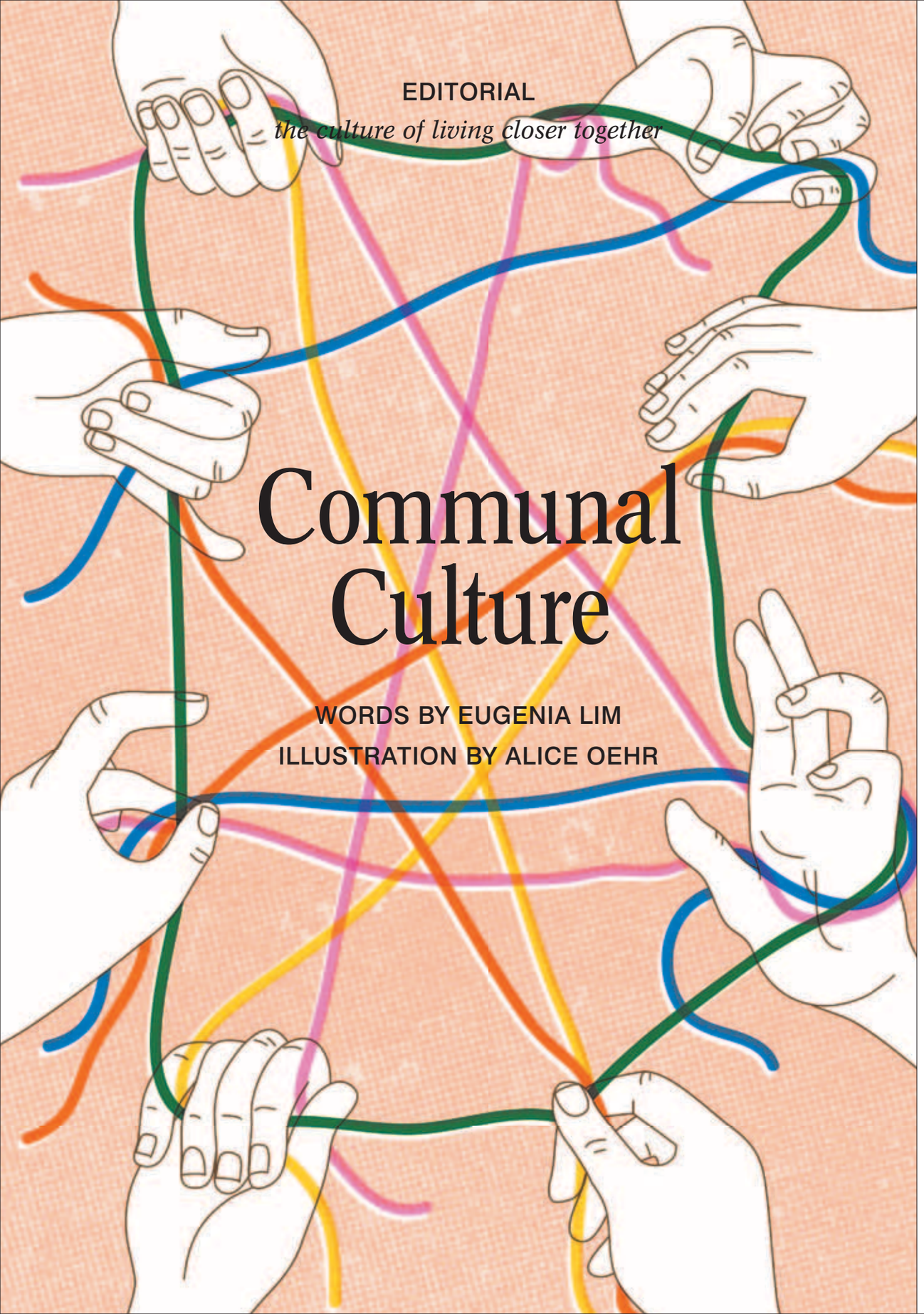


EDITORIAL

the culture of living closer together

Communal Culture

WORDS BY EUGENIA LIM

ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE OEHR

Welcome to issue three of Assemble Papers in print. Themed 'communal culture', we take an expansive look at collective and collaborative living – from the wintery depths of Scott Base, Antarctica, to the flood-prone community of sub-tropical Awaran, Pakistan; from DIY backyard bungalows to neighbourhood-defining architecture in Copenhagen. What has crystallised for me over the past few years, while editing this publication, is that our world contains many centres, cores and communities.

So, the culture of living closer together has come to mean much more than a dense, more 'liveable' city, or the protection or beautification of one's own backyard. At this tipping point – of climate and urbanisation – a truly meaningful culture of closeness is about understanding your proximity, sameness or difference to other centres and peripheries – the symbiotic and far-reaching relationship between social and environmental sustainability.

We explore biodiversity and environmental activism through the cross-species creativity of NY-based, Australian-born artist-engineer Natalie Jeremijenko; and the relationship between architecture and activism with filmmaker and journalist Ana Naomi de Sousa (following on from our *Rebel Architecture* screening and Q&A earlier this year). On a local front, we visit Clare Cousins at her Blackwood Street Bunker; we map out the future of Australian cities with the Grattan Institute's Paul Donegan; and we feed our heads, hearts and hands in the aisles at Casa Iberica, the veggie patches of the North Fitzroy Community Gardens and the brandy-fuelled French Onion Soup of slow recipe queen, Julia Busuttil Nishimura.

From Melbourne, we travel to the Tohoku region of northeast Japan to look at two distinct yet related projects fostering greater connection and community in the wake of the Great Tohoku Earthquake of the 11th March 2011: artist Tsubasa Kato's cathartic *Pull and Raise* public artworks (featured in our poster insert); and designer Keiji Ashizawa's Ishinomaki Laboratory, the "world's first DIY label". 8000 kilometres away in Berlin, a kindred project – CUCULA – is building a new future for refugees through furniture (with Enzo Mari's seal of approval).

When my friend Tim told me about his work with remote Aboriginal communities across the vast Kimberley region of Western Australia, it brought home just how little I know of my own country. As a city dweller, I'm better-versed in coffee culture and artist-run initiatives than I am in the contemporary life of the oldest living cultural history in the world – and that seems off-kilter to say the least. Stories about remote indigenous communities in mainstream media are almost always filled with reports of violence and social decay. Yet, as Tim reflects in his evocative photo essay *Ngurra*, *Wanga*, "the reality is far richer and multi-faceted. If you ask the young people we work with, they would not have it any other way."

This is real life – not a 'lifestyle choice' – and it's worth understanding and fighting for.●

ASSEMBLAGE

the cultural fabric of cities across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

The Science of Citizens: Natalie Jeremijenko

WORDS BY EUGENIA LIM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GIL LAVI

Global climate specialists have a way of banding together for Natalie Jeremijenko. But, instead of hailing from chemistry labs or policy offices, they live in water, soil and the air we breathe – and they dance the biochar-cha-cha.

These unconventional collaborators are the mussels, microbes, amphibians, trees, fish and other 'cross-species' Jeremijenko so admires and whose behaviours are fundamental to her work.

A prolific artist (The Economist dubbed her the 'thingker') – the Queensland-born Jeremijenko is always working, innovating, agitating – projects within projects are buried on websites within websites. In the time it takes me to organise an interview, Jeremijenko has traveled between her home base in New York, then onto London before I finally find her (on Skype) in the Hague for 'Yes, naturally', a group exhibition featuring international contemporary art stalwarts such as Ai WeiWei, Francis Alÿs and Olafur Eliasson. In covert, or in Jeremijenko's case, explicit ways, the artists approached a thorny question – can art save the world – by unmooring the anthropocentric hierarchy that places the fate of the entire ecosystem in our shaky, carbon-hungry hands. For Jeremejinko, who always looks to the natural intelligence of animals, plants and organisms, this somewhat radical approach is home territory.

'Convivial' is a word Jeremijenko employs time and time again in our conversation to describe the atmosphere she seeks to create in her public works. For 'Civic Action' at Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, Jeremijenko threw a series of summer-time Biochar Barbecues (she is Australian after all), inviting the local community to bring down their waste materials (junk mail, old magazines) to be turned into soil-enriching biochar, while a salsa DJ provided the soundtrack for biochar-cha-cha dance festivities. "You know, I call it the five thousand year urban plan", says Jeremijenko. 5000 years is the conservative estimate for the carbon sequestering capacity of biochar, but the range could be anywhere upwards of a million years. "*That's* the sort of timeframe we need to be thinking of. You create inside the char all these kinds of high-density apartment buildings with different microbes that you are housing". In addition to microbial real estate, in true over-achieving form, Jeremijenko created not one, but a series of artworks for Civic Action, including the aforementioned nine-metre-long biochar 'X'; a Tree Office (an outdoor work space with high-speed internet, managed and operated by the tree itself); Farmacy (vertical urban agriculture, edible plants and flowers in tyvek 'AgBags'); and the poetic Moth Cinema, a silver screen habitat designed to nourish the much-maligned yet important pollinators-of-the-night, while providing nocturnal shadow play for human visitors to the park. Jeremijenko's insatiable need to question and experiment manifests in connected, yet evolving artworks that blur the line between art, environmental remediation and animal rights. Open-ended and just a bit chaotic, projects are tested and restaged over several years in various locations and environmental contexts. Each project represents a leap into the unknown, eschewing lab for field, with Jeremijenko as the conduit for hitherto unimagined collaborations and knowledge transfer between humans and non-humans.

"You need the strategy of public persuasion – for example the salsa night and having a barbecue. These are all different ways to engage and discuss what works and how well it works. It's legible to diverse people while it might also be playful". In this

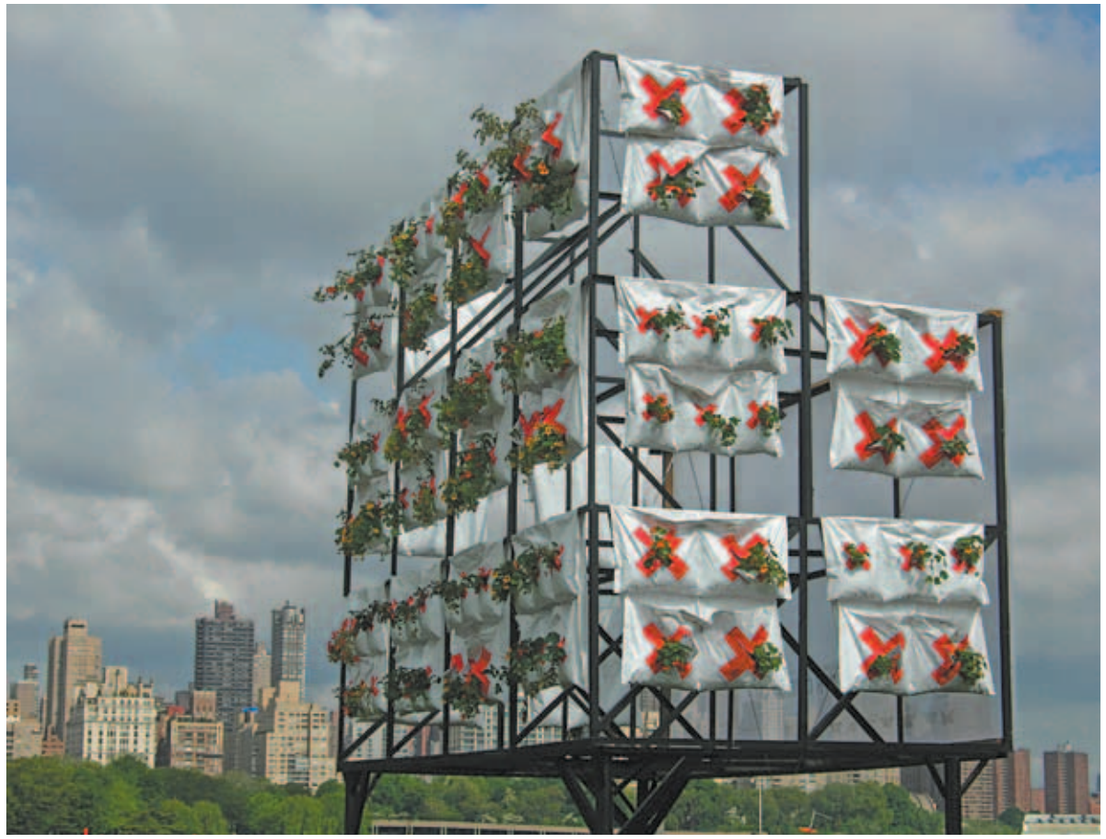
spirit, Jeremijenko has served edible cocktails at her Cross-Species Adventure Clubs; assembled Mussel Choirs and listened to the wisdom of fish in her water-remediating Amphibious Architecture project in the East and Bronx Rivers. Jeremijenko served a 'Wet Kiss' to Danish royalty, a potent purple confection containing violaceum (a substance produced by wetland soil bacteria found in the skin of amphibians that have survived the deadly chytrid fungus (batrachochytrium dendrobatidis). "There's considerable research on it for anti-tumorigenic properties and because it's a powerful anti-fungal it's particularly important in the wake of the amphibian extinction crises, the largest since the dinosaurs. When you bite into the edible cocktail, your lips are inoculated with the violaceum and j. lividum, which equips you to kiss the frog and save it from the deadly virus". What's good enough for amphibians is good enough for Princess Mary, who quipped, "he was a frog once too", of her husband Frederik, before downing a shot of violaceum.

But don't mistake playfulness for a lack of rigour – there will always be activism and an element of chaos theory in Jeremijenko's approach. To her, conservation, or what she terms the 'Sierra Club' approach is not enough: the 'natural' and the 'man-made' are now entwined in an age of the Anthropocene – the era of human activity on earth. "Experimentation is not the realm of professional scientists. They don't have a monopoly. In fact, in a participatory democracy, these sorts of experiments are skeptical engagements in what is possible. This is the civic duty of each one of us. I would argue that this position is more true now than ever before".

While Jeremijenko has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and the Venice and Whitney Biennales, she remains a proudly alternative figure. Conventional curators and critics don't know how to place her whimsical yet pointed social and environmental commentary – you can almost hear the snooty refrain 'but is it art?' echoing through hushed white cubes. Jeremijenko's participatory artworks may be too 'eco', too 'sciencey' or even too joyous to an introspective art world that often mimics the financial speculation associated with futures trading. The foundation story is that Jeremijenko discovered the power and possibility of art when she began creating large-scale installations for "inebriated" twentysomethings as co-founder of Brisbane's Livid rock festival in 1988 (what hasn't she done?). Jeremijenko's first intellectual home was in the sciences (she holds degrees in biochemistry, engineering, neuroscience and the history and philosophy of science); but you suspect she's a bit conceptual for the average biochemist. Skeptical of the ethical pitfalls inherent in the traditional design and architecture 'client' model and without an existing framework for her defiantly non-commercial, cross-pollinated projects, she terms what she does 'experimental design' or 'xDesign' for short. "xDesign is a nod towards experimental film and conceptual art practice – you ask the questions and it's about the accountability of the artist as opposed to the values of the client".

"The greater part of the soul lays outside the body… treatment of the inner requires treatment of the outer"
Hippocrates – Airs, Waters, and Places

As a professor of visual arts at NYU, Jeremijenko is also the self-appointed director of the Environmental Health Clinic. As a way to extend the artistic practice of institutional critique beyond the museum or gallery, Jeremijenko approaches health in an expanded and ecological sense. Rather than fronting up for a cure to an individual ailment, say a gammy leg or sore throat, 'imPatients' book a free appointment to discuss pressing environmental concerns. Instead of walking out with a prescription or an individual health plan, they leave with a call to action to improve their community's shared external environment: relevant data, tactical urbanism ideas and referrals to other specialist artists, designers and thinkers; a holistic but unconventional remedy. "Rumors of death prevented by medicine are greatly exaggerated. Yet, the power of the medical model can explain and produce health. Anyone knows how to use it. You don't have to be an environmental activist or a contemporary art collector. You can just make an appointment because of the familiarity of the clinic as a form". Whatever the label, Jeremijenko is focused on building habitats for biodiversity, playing the long game and inspiring collective action on environmental concerns. For her, xDesign and the Environmental Health Clinic address "the fundamental concerns of what I call a crisis of agency. You know, contemporary agriculture, where and how we eat and produce our food… all the social and environmental issues we face, where there's a sense of tremendous incapacity. I would argue that urban agriculture is the space race for the 21st century, a really complex and important systems design challenge to address. It's not just about a kind of nostalgic 'introduce children to where carrots come from'!".



Above: Natalie Jeremijenko and xClinic's *Farmacy*, part of Civic Action at Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City. Photograph courtesy Natalie Jeremijenko. Opposite: Natalie Jeremijenko prepares an experimental zipline above New York.

Before she races away to install at the Hague, Jeremijenko reflects further on the need for agency in the face of climate crisis. "I think you draw on whatever resources you have to make sense of an issue – if it's question driven, it doesn't matter if it's cultural, historical, scientific or biochemical. So the question of what to do about my waste is not a question of 'here's a discipline I know well' but about figuring out what makes sense for you, the questions that are compelling to you. You know, how do I stop my child from getting asthma? There's this idea of citizen science, which sees every day people working with real scientists. I am much more interested in the science of citizens. We all lack expertise in many fields… So it's about formulating the question and feeling like we can start to answer these questions". When I ask her whether xDesign can save the planet, she baulks at the black-and-whiteness of the question and begins a rapid-fire recall of her recent experiments in emission-less zipline transportation. "In Long Island City, there's this Tom Kat Bakery which has seventy-six diesel-fuelled trucks deliver fresh, artisanal bakery to New York each day. Instead of having these trucks idle diesel exhaust all across the local community, you could zipline goods the three blocks to the waterfront. Even for most people who think ziplining people and goods is unlikely and ludicrous, once you see people using and enjoying it, they observe the system. People start to understand the feasibility and 'get beyond the bike lane' in reimagining what urban mobility could look like and the kinds of resources we have to radically improve the environmental performance of our built environment. It creates a public memory of a possible future".●

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Social Architecture & (un)Sustainability:

NORD Architects Copenhagen

GENEVIEVE MURRAY IN CONVERSATION WITH JOHANNES MOLANDER PEDERSEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM MØRK

Johannes Molander Pedersen and Morten Rask Gregersen, founding partners of Danish architectural firm NORD, met when working and studying in London. Returning home in 2002 to a stagnant construction industry and economic crisis in their native Denmark, they began practicing without buildings, running participatory design workshops for local councils and organisations – a social architecture in lean yet progressive times.

From these humble beginnings, NORD has gradually matured into an award-winning architectural innovator; yet Johannes and Morten remain dedicated listeners, collaborators and 'process designers'. According to Johannes, "the things that drove our practice when we started are still the things that drive us now".

NORD is now a multi-disciplinary office employing urban planners, architects, landscape architects, process consultants, and academics. NORD is still grounded in real-world social engagement and fine grain; its commitment to dialogue and interaction with the people, organisations and communities who it designs for keeps an honesty and simplicity to its work. NORD prides itself on challenging the very notion of architecture, not just in built form but in terms of our modes of social interaction and organisation, reinventing new institutional models for an ever-shifting economic and social landscape. As the inaugural DROGA Architects-in-Residence, an initiative of the Australian Institute of Architects, Johannes and Morten are currently tag-teaming their stays at DROGA, a Surry Hills apartment designed by Sydney firm Durbach Block Jaggers. Walking down from her own nearby studio, Genevieve Murray sat down with Johannes after a recent lecture at the Sydney Opera House to talk about NORD's collaborative and socially-engaged architecture.

GENEVIEVE MURRAY
NORD is over ten years old now. How does the firm of today compare to your original vision?

JOHANNES MOLANDER PEDERSEN
We met in London while studying and working before both moving back to Copenhagen. Our belief in the ability of architecture to affect real change developed in our last years of study. We started at a time when there was an economic crisis so there was not much building work going on. Open processes, user involvement, community engagement – these were all things driving our work at the outset and were ideas suited to the climate of the time. Our first project was as consultants working on public involvement in design processes. Then, slowly we got projects that were closer to buildings… so it has really been an organic process in terms of the development of the practice. Really, the things that drove our practice when we started are still the things that drive us now. Working with content, organisations and people.

GM *Tell us about the atmosphere and politics back in the early 2000's – when firms such as NORD, BIG and COBE were formed…*

JMP What is great about this time is that a lot of companies were starting up. We have seen this again now, since the most recent crisis. Before this, architecture had been reduced to additions to existing structures. But then [after the crisis], we were able to get back into the machine room of forming society. Government had a lot of pressure to develop in new ways, so they looked to younger practices.

Previous page: the welcoming mountain range rooftop of NORD's Health Care Centre for Cancer Patients. Opposite page: welcoming in the sun – framing views and skyline at the Health Care Centre for Cancer Patients. Above: a communal dining table greets visitors at the Health Care Centre for Cancer Patients.

GM *Institutional critique is normally associated with contemporary art, not architecture. Yet, NORD often interrogates the purpose and function of the institution or organisation it designs for. What do you learn from this?*

JMP Well, really we see that our institutions have a very complex public interface. What we began to do was to ask institutions about their core task and performance and how that was changing. Then we analysed how this content should interfere and communicate with the space – before translating this into architecture. So, in a sense, we work towards developing a concrete interface and a clearer message through the architecture. For example, this comes down to details, such as the reception area in our Cancer Centre that is actually a dining table. Visitors are welcomed by a volunteer before they are invited to sit around the table together. The environment is welcoming and soft, stretching the boundary between public and private.

GM *You recently spoke about your Natural Science Centre project and how the building itself was designed to attract more women into the profession. Can you talk a bit more about this idea?*

JMP Traditionally, lab spaces and research centres are fairly daggy – dark, closed-in spaces that seem closed or exclusive. This image is a problem for the sciences, so we turned the building into a modern educational laboratory with modern spaces including all the latest gadgets and materials displayed really beautifully and professionally. What we found was that the students came into these spaces with their lab coats on and really began to take a sense of ownership over them, and particularly the girls or young women enjoyed this kind of role-playing. Yet, the building did not patronise the students by looking like a playground. [Students] could engage with the content and imagine themselves as professionals, acting equally. We could say that the spaces are 'un-gendered' rather than having some particular characteristic that attracted women.

GM *Your project 'City X' is a remarkable piece of community engagement. How do you see this process impacting on the design of the city?*

JMP City X involves kids and youth in the city at sites of urban development projects. The aim is to improve the projects and to support, educate and create a sense of ownership amongst local kids. We got the idea some years ago and now it is a fully-integrated secretariat embodied in the municipality of Copenhagen. I think that through City X, we've engaged several thousands of kids in qualifying the development of Copenhagen. One of the most innovative results has been the opening up of several schoolyards in Copenhagen, avoiding fencing and turning them into combined urban community spaces.

GM *In the article you wrote for 'Can We Design a New Country' you introduced the notion of (un) sustainable architecture. How does this relate to crisis, be it economic or environmental, and how do you see this shaping practice?*

JMP Sustainability should be implicit, of course. When we wrote this article, we were surprised that we got such a response. We went on national radio to answer lots of questions, because it really challenged current thinking. What we were saying, or asking of architecture, was how do we define and manage the concept of sustainability in a constantly shifting world?

Of course the goal of sustainability in construction is to make buildings with the longest possible life-cycle. But, what we found in practice was that there just isn't the budget for this anymore.

This led us to thinking about the notion of (un) sustainability. The problem with architecture is that it lasts too long. Perhaps we can design things that are not designed to last forever, that have a life-cycle related to say – in the case of our institutions – the four-year political term. Or, for example, urban spaces that are designed to last for three months in relation to the passing of the seasons. An architecture that then adapts to new or shifting demands and contexts. It goes back to this notion of us architects getting back into the machine room, and our understanding of the power of architecture. If we are to embrace a notion of (un)sustainability, where breakdown is integrated into architecture, then there can be ongoing innovation and development of skills. It is a content-driven architecture that will always be reflective of the times.●

Above: a serene setting for scientific learning – NORD's Natural Science Centre in Bjerringbro, Denmark.
Below: a panoramic view from a laboratory within the Natural Science Centre.

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CUCULA: All Together Now

WORDS BY EUGENIA LIM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VERENA BRÜNING

Worldwide, our treatment of asylum seekers and refugees leaves much to be desired. As the Guardian's Ian Traynor writes, "immigration is one of the most toxic and incendiary topics in the national politics of so many countries… 'European' immigration policy is a mess, a patchwork of 28 hugely varying national systems constrained by national politics, shaped by culture and history". As Julian Burnside notes, our own reputation internationally is one of 'tiny hearts' and 'balls of steel' thanks to the Abbott government's hardline approach to asylum seekers and our detention of men, women and children. As hopeless as it might seem on a macro level, at a micro level, collectives such as Berlin's CUCULA: Refugees' Company for Crafts and Design *are countering the hostility through collaborative design. Eugenia Lim speaks to co-founder Corinna Sy about crafting a culture of welcome.*

According to the UNHCR, in 2012, the number of people displaced by persecution and conflict was an estimated 45.2 million: 28.8 million internally displaced persons, 15.4 million refugees and 937,000 asylum seekers. In late April, over 900 asylum seekers lost their lives when their 20 metre-long fishing boat capsized 177 kilometres south of the Italian island of Lampedusa. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi called for an emergency summit of EU leaders, stating, "it has to be a priority. We cannot remain insensitive when every day there is a massacre in the Mediterranean". Our identity is shaped not only by those who we welcome into our country, but by the treatment of those who we leave out at sea.

Locally, there are signs of a heartening trend – the formation of small, grassroots collectives who aim to empower those they work with to transcend the narrow categorisation of 'refugee' – to achieve self-determination in their new country.

Here in Australia, the Social Studio, the Welcome Committee and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre are some notable organisations bringing hope and purpose back into the lives of some of the most vulnerable yet resilient members of our society. Halfway across the globe, a kindred project is shaping the future of a small group of refugees in Kreuzburg, Berlin.

32 year-old German-born designer Corinna Sy is one of the co-founders of CUCULA, an association, workshop and place of learning that works with refugees to 'build their own future' through the crafting of premium-quality furniture. 'Cucula' comes from the Hausa language in western-central Africa, and means 'to do something together' or 'to take care of each other'. Launched as a pilot in late 2013, CUCULA was founded in the wake of the government-led dismantling of Oranienplatz, an ad hoc refugee protest camp in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Moving quickly, Schlesische27, an international youth, art and culture house, installed a 'shelter against the cold' for five displaced young men from West Africa. Corinna joined her friend, product designer Sebastian Daeschle, in working with the men to make furniture for their makeshift rooms at the gallery, until, as Corinna recalls, they said, "we are refugees, we don't need things for 'interiors' – we don't know where we will be tomorrow".

"We started working with these guys and then we realised the dramatic situation they are in – that there are no answers, no solutions – they are in a completely parallel world with no way to break that circle. On the one hand, there is this huge complex discussion, really theoretical; and on the other, these are real people with personalities and potential – and they are not allowed to do anything". Rather than getting mired in the toxic political debate around immigration and asylum policy, Corinna and the CUCULA team initiated a quick, active response to the burgeoning crisis. "[CUCULA] is actually a utopia… since these guys are not allowed to work or earn money, we've turned it around to imagine a refugee-led company and what that might be. We began from this point".

As a non-profit company, the proceeds from the sales of CUCULA pieces are invested directly back into the education and cost of living for the twenty-plus refugees involved in CUCULA's programmes.

Over the course of a one-year cycle, five furniture 'trainees' work half-a-week in the CUCULA furniture workshop before joining another fifteen refugees for the rest of the week in undertaking basic German language and education classes. In a beautiful yet shrewd fit, the renowned and influential socialist designer Enzo Mari's 1974 book of utilitarian DIY furniture *Autoprogettazione*, provides the blueprint for CUCULA's pilot collection of premium, sustainable pinewood furniture. The CUCULA model demonstrates that it is possible to advocate for both social good *and* good design – recent showings at the Cologne and Milan Furniture Fairs and Berlin and Dutch Design Weeks have enjoyed great critical success amongst continental design aficionados.

Of particular popularity is the now sold-out Ambassador *range, which incorporates driftwood wreckage from refugee boats off the coast of Lampedusa into poignant, bittersweet pieces.*

As Corinna explains, "it all started because we collected wood from their protest camp. We took some pieces and we wanted to integrate the wood to tell their stories, through the material. The guys really hated the idea at the beginning. Malik was like 'no, this is old wood, it's bad wood, you don't want to take it'. I said, 'just give it a try'. And then we showed it in Milan and everybody was focusing on this furniture, on the old wood… and the guys realised that through it, they were able to tell their histories… 'this is wood from Oranienplatz. I had a house, I'm a refugee'. Then Malik asked, 'why aren't we taking wood from the [refugee] boats?' At first, we resisted – it seemed too controversial. But in the end, we decided to try it, to see. The guys made a video that we took to Lampedusa (it was too dangerous for them to travel with us in case they couldn't get back into Germany). We were invited to a conference and we discussed the project with the people there. [The locals] really liked the idea and said 'if it helps them with their future, go ahead – take something'. We collected the wood with the people from the island together, and we sent it by FedEx to Germany, from this 'boat cemetery'. We want to keep [the Ambassador range] a limited edition because it is very strong and controversial… but so many people are still asking for this furniture".

When asked about the career aspirations of the trainees, Corinna says that CUCULA acts as a vehicle, "a space for possibilities", rather than the endgame. "We had to build up the whole company. It is like our Trojan horse, more or less". While the five refugees have learnt practical skills, and at least one trainee hopes to continue to work in carpentry, Corinna sees CUCULA as the beginning of a new, self-sufficient life, not just as refugees, but as members of society. Of the current trainees, Malik aspires to become an engineer, Ali wants to study business and Maiga wants to work as a cleaner, his most recent profession while living in Libya. Wood, craft and design act, for the time being, as tools for self-empowerment, tactile means for the trainees to "figure out what kind of perspectives they can build on their own, or what chances they would have in the German system. And also to bring them back into a structure. They've been refugees for six or eight years. In that time, they've never had the chance to ask themselves 'what are my interests? What am I good at? What are my chances here?'"

The project has attracted some high profile 'ambassadors': from artist Olafur Eliasson to choreographer Sasha Waltz and Dieter Kosslick, the director of the Berlinale Film Festival. Having activated the city's grassroots community around its pragmatic and humane approach to refugee resettlement and employment, Corinna and the team now hope the support of Eliasson, Waltz and those in the upper echelons of society and culture will provide the government with an unequivocal argument – that Germany can benefit socially, economically and pragmatically – from the CUCULA model. Enzo Mari himself endorses from afar.

When asked about her own experience of working and collaborating with refugees through CUCULA, Corinna feels she has learnt as much as she has taught. "Working with these guys – we are family, we are friends, we are work, we are everything. These guys, they don't have much hope beyond the project, of staying in Germany. They lost their hope during all those years of being refugees. But they are really trusting us and seeing the value of being together and what it means – sharing time, listening and eating together – all things which are very important for them. What I have learnt through the guys is to not accept things which seem to be a given and to fight for my ideas. And through the whole project, I think I've learnt that there is always a way to do it differently… I've become braver and more self-confident. To do what you think is right and what you believe in".●

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Pull and Raise: Tsubasa Kato

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY TSUBASA KATO

On the 11th of March 2011, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami struck the east coast of Japan. The earthquake was the fiercest in Japan's history, shifting the main island of Honshu 2.4 metres east and the earth on its axis an estimated 10-25 centremetres. In the face of a devastating chain of events – the Fukushima nuclear disaster and tragic loss of life and livelihood – Japan's tightly-wound social structures unravelled in surprising ways. New communities formed under the weight of this collective event.

Across regions, professions and economic lines, disparate parts of society came together in support of one other. A younger generation of Japanese artists, designers and architects responded to this new sense of community, venturing beyond their city studios to the tsunami and nuclear-affected north-east of Japan. New, collective modes of creative production blurred the lines between art and community action, making 3/11 one of the most important affirmations for socially-engaged contemporary art practice in Japan.

At first, traveling on weekends to the region to deliver food and clear debris, artist Tsubasa Kato grew frustrated by the distance between his everyday Tokyo existence and the epicenter of the crisis. Moving to Fukushima for six months, he lived alongside survivors in the social and economic fallout, continuing to volunteer in the clean up while making connections with local residents. Little by little, he began to think about making art – and what art could do to transform and unite. Since 2008, Tsubasa has been working on the *Pull and Raise* series – large-scale architectural structures he assembles with local communities out of found debris or locally-sourced materials. Once built, Tsubasa and his collaborators use ropes to lift up the structure as a symbol of what is no longer – and what could be. In Fukushima, he worked with "the power of five hundred people" to raise-up a thirteen metre-tall model of a lighthouse that was devastated by the tsunami. Here, Tsubasa Kato shares some insights on his *Pull and Raise* project:

"That earthquake was a big turning point for me. Born in 1984, I hadn't been confronted by so many major social problems. So, when I was confronted, I started thinking about the power of art, and what art can do. At the time of the earthquake, I was in Osaka doing a project. Prior to the earthquake, I pulled and overturned objects. I was scheduled to do an event in front of Osaka Castle on the day after the earthquake, and the motif I was using for the structure was a house. It was planned that everyone would pull together to overturn the house. But after the earthquake, that seemed really imprudent, and inappropriate. I mulled over what to do, and as a result, decided to ask everyone to pull the structure without making a crashing sound. Slowly, in a ceremonial way, like a requiem to the earthquake. At the same time, I decided on the action of 'pull and raise'.

Originally I was thinking of laying things on their side, but then I thought of bringing things back upright. The Japanese word okosu *can be translated as 'raise' – it does not only refer to the raising of objects, but also has an abstract meaning – bringing something into being that wasn't there before.*

I went up to Fukushima for half a year to make a new project. I set the project up with the local community. We collected debris from the tsunami for about half a year, and built a [model of a] broken lighthouse, and organised an event to raise it. I started to think about issues related to distance. If there is distance, there are things that one cannot perceive – yet they still exist. For example, I have recently done a project with the indigenous peoples of North America. I knew about their existence, but there are a lot of things you can't know until you actually go to their communities and do a project. When I do an event, place has significance.

Distance is involved. For example, there is little distance between my mother and me. People have various points of view, and depending on their point of view, people tend to gather together in groups. For example, the family unit, ethnic groups, and also random groups formed by being in a certain place at a certain time. Groups have a point of sharing of place and time. In my early works, the point of sharing was created primarily by place and time. For example, people who were in Ueno Park, where our university was located, at a certain time of the day. But for the Fukushima project, the point of sharing was not related just to the time of day and place, but also the era in which it occurred. The project cannot be separated from the events of 2011. Also, for the native American project, the project would be different if it had been done 50 years ago rather than now. I have started to choose the theme of the project to capture a particular period in time.

One rule I have had right from the start for the *Pull* project is that it has to be something that cannot be accomplished alone. So a relationship has to be formed with others. I involve others, and this involvement is not just for pulling the actual structure, but also is related to how the situation and context is included in the artwork.

In one sense, I mix in with, and stir up existing communities, and create new communities through the positioning of my artwork. I draw close to existing communities, and also try to change these. I enter lots of communities, different to my own. That is interesting to me.●

The original conversation between Tsubasa Kato and Linda Dennis appears in the catalogue for 'Come Close: Japanese artists within their communities', an exhibition of recent work by Japanese artists curated by Emily Wakeling, exploring collective practice in post-Fukushima Japan. Many thanks to Emily for her generosity in granting permission to publish this edited extract. Huge thanks must go to Tsubasa for permission to include images of his poetic, site-specific works.

Previous page: Tsubasa Kato, *They do not understand each other*, 2014, Tsushima Island, Japan. Photograph by Keiichi Sakakura. This page, top: Tsubasa Kato, *F.F.H.* (*Fukagawa, Future, Humanity*), 2011, Kiba Park, Tokyo. Middle: Tsubasa Kato, *SEYA Calling*, 2012, Inokashira Park, Tokyo. Bottom: Tsubasa Kato, *Abandon* (*Monument Valley*), 2013, Monument Valley, Arizona.

Modesty and Materiality: Keiji Ashizawa

WORDS BY
RACHEL ELLIOT-JONES

Keiji Ashizawa's hats are many. As an architect, product designer and erstwhile steel fabricator, his work spans vast luxury residences to tiny tealight holders. There's a common vernacular no matter the size or context – a lightness and conciseness informed by Japanese simplicity, modernist pragmatism and a deep understanding of his materials.

Among Keiji's triumphs in the built environment is the award-winning Wall House – an ocean-side oasis for the high priest of Japanese fashion, Issey Miyake, which he designed in collaboration with Australian architect Peter Stutchbury. His furniture and lighting has been exhibited all over the world, and recently he was commissioned by Scandinavian DIY behemoth Ikea to contribute a space-saving design to their PS collection. Among his many plaudits, Keiji is the founder of the Ishinomaki Laboratory – a community DIY workshop he initiated in the wake of the Great Tohoku Earthquake, where local people could come together and begin to build their post-disaster future – one red cedar 2×4 at a time.

I visited Keiji last autumn, finding him in the "real-Tokyo" Bunkyo area of the megalopolis, where ramshackle row houses bunch up around Edo era gardens and shrines, barely a humming neon in sight. His studio is a tiny crammed-full monument to past and current endeavours – houses in miniature form, waves of steel lighting billowing overhead, the meeting nook encircled by families of pipeknot furniture and sliding box drawers, while clusters of Ishinomaki stools and benches huddle just outside. Every sill and shelf is overflowing with samples of timber, steel, stone – materials waiting to be written into a story.

Keiji creates his language through practice. He advocates a singular materiality wherever possible, forming a relationship with the material by applying the same idea, iteratively, to different shapes and situations over time. Three welded steel pipes led to the pipeknot, a simple joining system Keiji first used to construct a three-pronged standing timber hanger, then a table, then a coffee table, until finally informing his design for Ikea. "If it's a good design, somehow I have to design everything."

Of all Keiji's projects, the one that compelled me to track him down is the Ishinomaki Laboratory. Last year the initiative proudly celebrated its commercial incorporation as the "world's first DIY label", with many international designers having now contributed designs to the collection of pleasingly utilitarian furniture. When we last spoke, Keiji was freshly returned from this year's Salone del Mobile in Milan, where he had exhibited Ishinomaki Laboratory products alongside German designer Sebastian Herkner and Czech blown glass manufacturer Verreum (of which Herkner is art director).

Above: Keiji's studio is a tiny crammed-full monument to past and current endeavours. Photograph by Rachel Elliot-Jones.
Opposite page: the Keiji Ashizawa Design team. Photograph by Paul Barbera. Previous page: Keiji in his Koishikawa, Tokyo studio. Photograph by Rachel Elliot-Jones.

The Ishinomaki trajectory began with a phone call from a friend and former client, 10 anxiety-stricken days after disaster struck. “I had no idea if he was alive or dead,” says Keiji. “Even in such a modern city, everything is lost in such a big tsunami. There is no connection, no way of contacting.” Ishinomaki, on the Miyagi coast north of Sendai, was one of the most severely affected cities – battered repeatedly by tsunamis up to ten metres in height. More than 29,000 homes were destroyed and, of a population of 163,000, more than 3,000 lives were lost, with a further 2,770 still not accounted for.

When his friend finally got through, it was to ask for help in rebuilding, and Keiji immediately sprung to action. He assembled a force of architect and designer friends to join him in Ishinomaki, forming a small committee with local business owners, city planners, researchers, digital strategists and students dedicated to dreaming up Ishinomaki 2.0. They met daily above a restaurant that had been destroyed by a rogue boat, working to establish the blueprint for the city’s urban renewal strategy.

To Keiji, design is the ultimate “survival skill”, one that has helped him solve numerous ‘problems’ in everyday life – a new studio with no desks; an impromptu dinner with no table; an international exhibition that needs to be installed in a day. Whatever needs doing, he does himself (or with his colleagues), using the materials he has lying around.

In Ishinomaki, Keiji could see that those people who were DIYing their houses and shops were rebuilding faster than those waiting for government assistance, but not everyone had the skills or the confidence to build and make. His idea was that an all-welcome community workshop could inspire more people to get hands-on by providing simple techniques and ideas for furniture that might “make life easier or nicer”.

Before it could offer a utility, the Ishinomaki Laboratory first set about coaxing the community out to connect with one another again. Fragile after the loss and wreckage of the tsunami, many people had retreated to private spaces and needed a specific reason to congregate. A free open-air cinema was the catalyst to explore the first product – the Ishinomaki Bench, a sturdy (yet easy to assemble) two-seater made from outdoor-appropriate red cedar. Making en masse required multiple hands on the job – Keiji enlisted the help of local high school students, whose enjoyment of the task then carried up through the generations. “When we invite young people, at the same time, older people come because they really want to help in our mission.” More than 40 benches were made in two days.

Encircling the cinema screen, the seating created a new social topography that encouraged interaction and enjoyment. Volunteers (young and old) were proud of their handiwork and excited to share their experience with others. Acknowledging the scarcity of furniture in government-issued recovery housing, the benches remained after the festival – a nudge to townspeople to come back and take them home. Before long, the Ishinomaki Laboratory stamp had its place (and was excitedly talked about) around tables and on curbs all over town.

The Ishinomaki Laboratory formed swiftly – hanging the sign on their first workshop only four months after the quake – and products were designed and made at breakneck speed, responding with urgency to the needs of the city. Keiji’s initial ‘in’ with the locals was a crucial kick-start, but the long-term efficacy of the workshop depended on co-opting the community as ambassadors of its purpose. The affable Chiba-san – handyman enthusiast turned official lab leader – was and still is a huge part of this process. A former sushi chef who tragically lost his mother (and his restaurant) to the tsunami, Chiba’s post-disaster outlook is philosophical: “If you survive by luck, you must live, as you are not dead,” he insisted, when interviewed for a short documentary made about the workshop. Chiba’s new way of living meant leaving sushi behind, becoming the chief custodian of the workshop’s communal culture and a conduit between lab founders and the townspeople.

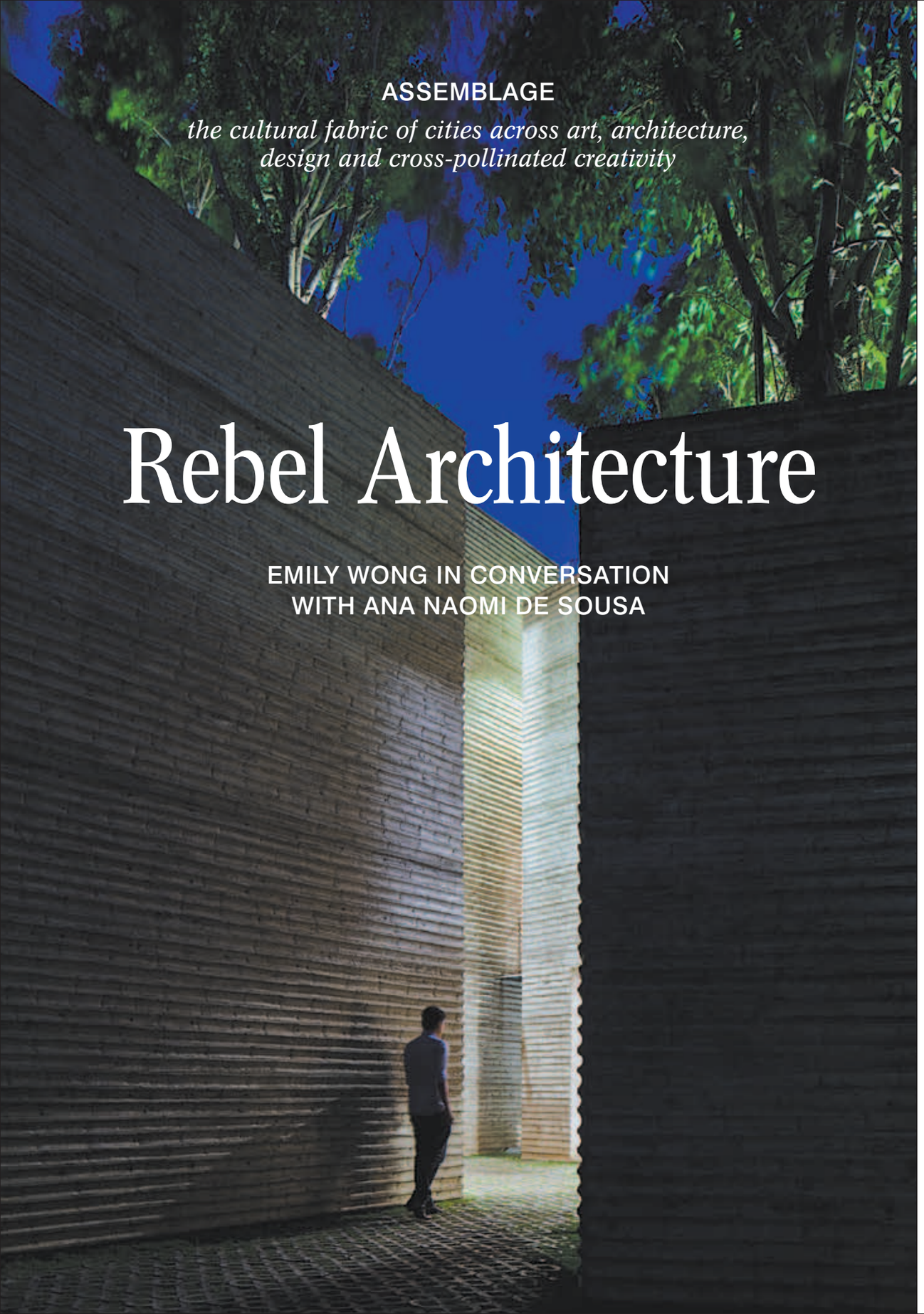
Opposite page, above: the Ishinomaki Laboratory public workshop. Photograph courtesy of Ishinomaki Laboratory.
Below: the first Ishinomaki Laboratory project – Keiji enlisted local high school students to help build more than 40 benches for an open-air cinema. Photograph courtesy of Ishinomaki Laboratory.

Above: ‘ma’ series by Tomás Alonso. Photograph by Fuminari Yoshitsugu.
Below: lean-to shelf by Julian Patterson. Photograph by Fuminari Yoshitsugu.

Four years since its inception, Keiji says the Ishinomaki Laboratory now “almost perfectly fits in the local area” and is well on its way to self-sufficiency. Many local people are employed, with an ongoing exchange of people and ideas between Tokyo and Ishinomaki. Next month, Keiji will visit with a group of Japanese and Swiss designers in tow, to run talks and workshops for the community. The workshop is still free and open to the public, supported by a stream of fit-out commissions from local businesses and the international success of the ever-expanding repertoire of everyday furniture.

“A good design is modest, has a long life, and works in any situation,” says Keiji. The Ishinomaki products were born out of a local emergency, but their ultimate mission – to create enjoyment through everyday use – resonates far and beyond. Keiji’s Flamingo stool that encourages a casual lean; TORAFU architects’ skydeck that affixes to hand rails to create an instant perch; Tomás Alonso’s ‘ma’ set of stools and table that slot comfortably within one another; Julian Paterson’s lean-to shelf; Tomoko Azumi’s carry stool – all are portable expressions of social scenery that first found their voice in Ishinomaki. They are familiar fixtures – hinting at objects already at home in sushi restaurants and izakayas and public parks – but in many ways, it’s this familiarity that makes them so distinct. Each seat and surface is embedded with stories of townspeople working together; conversations shared while imagining a rosier future.●

Inset: workshop chief Takhiro Chiba (left) guiding Ishinomaki locals in their craft. Photograph courtesy of Ishinomaki Laboratory.
Background: the Ishinomaki Bench, the first Ishinomaki Laboratory product, designed by Keiji Ashizawa. Photograph by Fuminari Yoshitsugu.



Rebel Architecture

EMILY WONG IN CONVERSATION WITH ANA NAOMI DE SOUSA

Launched by Al Jazeera last year, Rebel Architecture *is a six-episode documentary series that explores the work of six socially-engaged architects who use the built environment to effect change in their own regional context. British journalist and filmmaker, Ana Naomi de Sousa, produced the series.*

She visited Melbourne earlier this year as a guest of Link Festival, and we were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to present a public screening and discussion of *The Architecture of Violence* and *Guerilla Architect*, two *Rebel Architecture* episodes that Ana Naomi also directed. Following her return to London, Emily Wong tracked Ana Naomi down via email to get her reflections on the background and motivations behind *Rebel Architecture*, and her ongoing obsession with architecture.

EMILY WONG
How did you decide which architects to feature in the series? What criteria did you apply in order to reach the final six?

ANA NAOMI
From the very start, Dan Davies (the series producer) and I knew that we wanted to create a series about the possibilities of architecture, which reflected certain values that were very different from what we saw elsewhere in the architecture press and mainstream media. 'Rebel' was perhaps our first criteria, though we realised early on that there were different ways of interpreting what is meant by that.

Certainly, we knew that we were looking to tell a different architectural story – rather than to produce more coverage of 'starchitecture' celebrity architecture – or luxury housing for the 1%.

We were also looking for architects who were seriously socially or politically engaged. There are lots of beautiful, creative projects out there that don't necessarily need to serve a practical purpose. But, bearing in mind that we were working at a 24-hour news channel – it seemed to us that there were some serious issues around the world such as natural disasters, urban poverty and conflict – and that architecture has a role to play there.

Nonetheless, we quickly became uncomfortable with the many international, humanitarian projects that tend to be very top-down, with little meaningful engagement with the people whose lives they are affecting.

As we kept digging, we realised that – although often overlooked – there were in fact architects out there, working in their own communities, who were using their professional skills in very practical, tangible and effective ways.

So it is not a coincidence that all of the 'rebel' architects are working in their own communities, regions, or contexts.

EW *What were some of the challenges involved in producing the series?*

AN Many of the environments we looked at are difficult to film in, for different reasons. The Israeli occupation of Palestine (*The Architecture of Violence*) posed numerous logistical difficulties for a film that actually proposes to navigate the territory; Nigeria (*Working on Water*) is notoriously problematic and expensive for film crews; and the area of Baluchistan (*A Traditional Future*) is unstable and can be extremely dangerous. Fortunately, we were working with imaginative, resourceful filmmakers and crews who knew their regions pretty well – they found a way to make it work.

EW *You've taken an observational approach to filmmaking, choosing to focus more on the personal stories of each architect rather than present a more 'objective' discussion of all the issues involved in each situation. Why this approach?*

AN For us, the observational approach was the key to understanding the challenges and realities of the particular environments in which our 'rebel' architects are practicing. When you allow your subject to be your guide, you are going to see things you'd never see otherwise.

Stylistically, it is also because the *Rebel Architecture* series came from the Witness team at Al Jazeera English – an observational documentary strand committed to providing a platform for stories that don't normally get told elsewhere in the media. Over time, Witness has developed certain stylistic features, with films often being made by filmmakers about their own region or context rather than by foreign crews and presenters; and the phasing out of 'voice-of-god' VO narration, in favour of allowing subjects to use their own words to tell their stories. All of this fed into the style of *Rebel Architecture*. We never even discussed following a presenter-led format, I don't think it could ever have worked for us. We were trying to do something different; not to replicate old-fashioned models of representation.

EW *The series features the work of personalities, some of whom have trained in architecture, and some who have had no official training, such as Brazilian builder, Ricardo de Oliveira. In many countries (including Australia), the use of the term 'architect' is highly regulated – to what extent is the series a critique of this practice?*

AN Under the banner of *Rebel Architecture*, it made perfect sense.

Because we are not architects, we approached the whole subject from the outside – as storytellers and filmmakers. We were not steeped in the debates raging within the profession, nor did we feel bound by its codes and hierarchies.

We explicitly decided early on that we wanted to feature a 'slum architect' like de Oliveira.

Close to a billion people now live in informal housing, built this way – not designed by professional architects.

EW *Five out of the six architects in the series are male, with the exception of Pakistani architect, Yasmeen Lari. Was it your impression, when researching work for the series, that female architects are underrepresented? Are female architects even less likely to be involved in these kinds of alternative practices? Why might this be?*

AN We were really keen to have a balance of men and women on the series and it is much to our regret we did not manage to do that. But at the end of the day, architecture is a *very* male-dominated profession and there is no point in pretending that it isn't. But, four out of six of the films were made by women filmmakers, which I think is important. I don't think female architects are less involved in alternative practices, however – from our research, they are very active, perhaps because alternative practices are not necessarily governed by the same, ingrained hierarchies as mainstream architecture. Certainly this occurred to me whilst filming collective architecture groups in Spain.

EW *Both Eyal Weizman (*The Architecture of Violence*) and Santiago Cirugeda (*Guerilla Architect*) work in the overlap between architecture and law – Cireguda manipulates legal structures to enable occupation of urban space, while Weizman analyses ruins as evidence for the commission of crimes. What is your interest in the relationship between law and architecture?*

AN The 'rebel' in *Rebel Architecture* was always intended to be more than just a token title. In my previous films, I've looked at different forms of activism and protest, and these have almost always involved groups or individuals bending a law or two; rules have to be broken in order for there to be change. But in particular, I'm fascinated by the creative ways in which activists confront power.

Through the work of Weizman and Cirugeda, I began to see how this particular set of professional tools could be used in a completely different way to how they were intended.

Weizman and Cirugeda are rebelling twice over: they are rebelling against the State, using their architectural knowledge; and they are rebelling against the established architectural profession by being a radically different kind of architect.

Previous page: nighttime at Vo Trong Nghia's House for Trees in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photograph by Hiroyuki Oki.
Top: 'slum architect' Ricardo de Oliveira looks out over Rio's Rocinha favela. Photograph courtesy Ricardo de Oliveira.
Bottom: Yasmeen Lari, Pakistan's first female architect, outside a flood-resistant women's centre she designed in Arawan. Photograph courtesy Yasmeen Lari.

Previous page: Vo Trong Nghia's House for Trees brings greenery into the Ho Chi Minh City skyline. Photograph by Hiroyuki Oki. Top: architect Kunle Adeyemi's striking floating building, a potential solution for residents of the Makoko slum in Lagos. Photograph courtesy Kunle Adeyemi. Bottom: subversive Spanish architect Santiago Cirugeda's La Carpa, Seville's first self-built arts space. Photography courtesy Santiago Cirugeda.

EW *Weizman raises the potential for architecture and the built environment to enact a form of 'slow violence' on its surrounds; to be used as a weapon or spatial ammunition in warfare. What do you perceive to be the role – and ethical responsibilities – of the architect in this kind of situation?*

AN Perhaps since having made the film with Weizman, it seems obvious to me that architecture is very much about controlling people by controlling movement. Mostly this is manifested in fairly banal forms; housing estates with regulated walkways and play areas, for example, or shopping centre corridors designed to lead us from shop to shop without noticing. Increasingly, it is also to do with surveillance, policing and the quest for 'security'. Architects play a fundamental role in determining how we live, by designing the public and private spaces that we use every day; so of course they bear some responsibility, for better or worse, for those spaces and structures.

However, in recent years there has been an interesting debate in the USA that has centred on the ethical responsibilities of an architect regarding the intended use of a building. The case in point is prison architecture, and a number of professionals have been openly calling for the American Institute of Architects to prohibit, in its ethical code, the design of execution chambers and spaces for solitary confinement. The AIA has rejected the call and also refused to condemn architects who design buildings that involve human rights violations, such as torture facilities. In response, Raphael Sperry, the founder of the organization Architects, Designers, Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) wrote that: "When architects design prisons, we take responsibility not only for the conditions of prisoners and guards on the inside, but for the status of freedom of everyone on the outside as well."

Despite the decision from the AIA, I think the ongoing debate in the US is an important and interesting one that poses many questions not just for architects, but also for the rest of us. Most of all, I think it's the sort of discussion that must take place not only within elite architectural institutions and industry press, but in public, and among communities.

EW *Largely, these 'rebel' projects take place in the developing world, from the slums of Nigeria to post-earthquake Pakistan. What can architects in the developed world learn from the spirit of these projects?*

AN Al Jazeera English is an international channel which broadcasts all over the world, so we were looking for stories that were spread throughout the globe (from Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Middle East) and that dealt with some of the most urgent contemporary issues on the planet (slum dwelling, poverty, pollution, natural disaster, etc.). We did not consider them as 'developing' in contrast to 'developed' at all; we were thinking about where our audience is, and what they expected of us. I feel that these kinds of binary terms often reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate the sort of victim-saviour dynamic that has been so unhelpful in humanitarian architecture and engineering to date. It's significant that the architects in the series are working in their own regions or communities; as Yasmeen Lari says in the episode about post-disaster housing in Pakistan, "The foreign aid has dried up, and it is a very good thing. It's time we started doing things ourselves."

However, there is definitely a suggestion in the series that "necessity has become the architect", by which it is meant that urgent situations – poverty, disaster, conflict – can provide fertile ground for radical solutions.

I think it's fair to say that risks need to be taken for new solutions to be found; and perhaps in urgent situations, people are more prepared to take risks.

Maybe I'm hesitating here, but it's because we were always aware that there is a thin line between celebrating innovation in the face of adversity, and glamourising poverty.

Overall, I think the spirit of the whole series is that all of these architects have refused to accept limitations on what they can and can't do. They have broken with convention (and sometimes broken the law!) and they have proved the skeptics wrong; that's what makes them rebels.

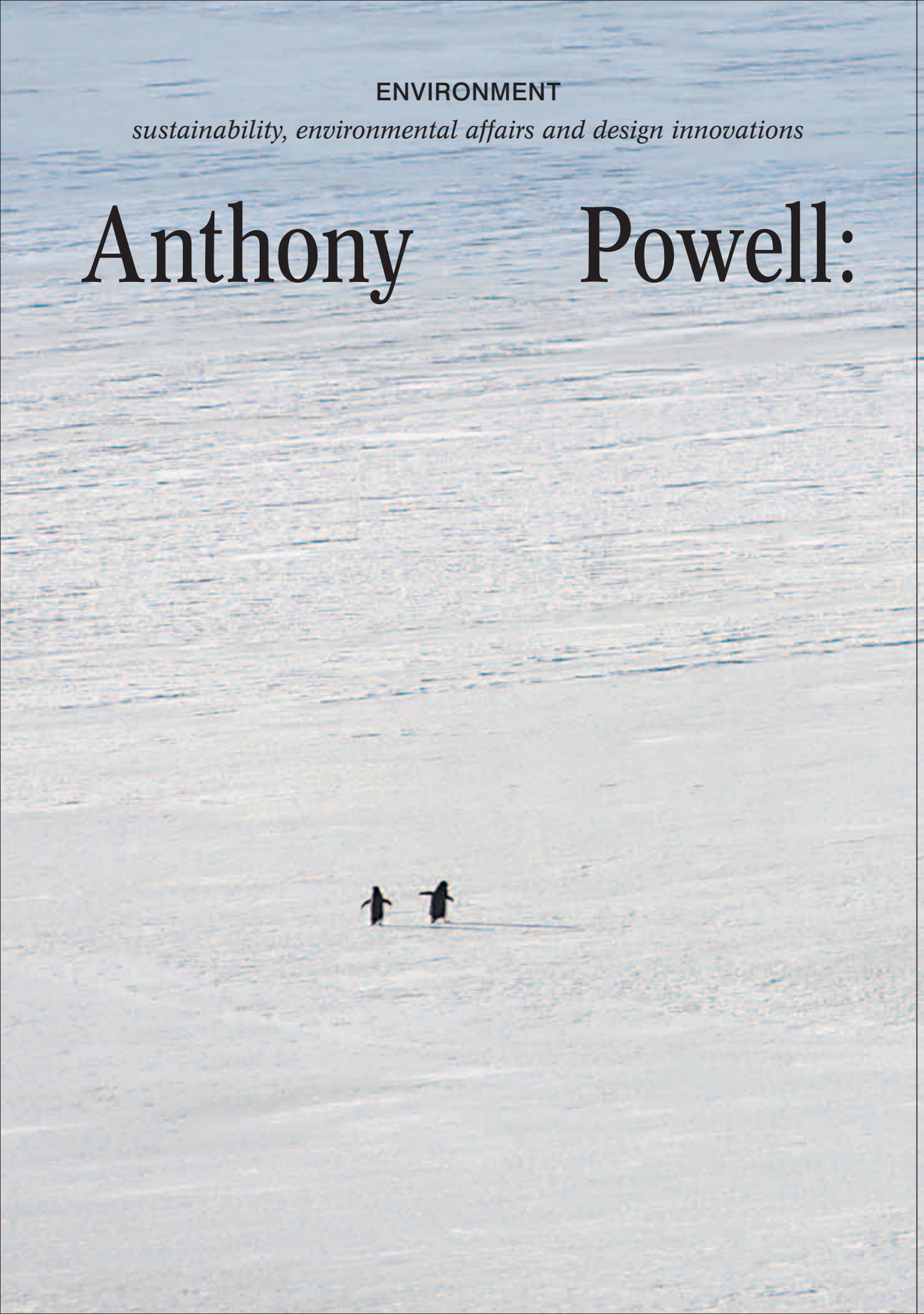
EW *What other projects are you working on now?*

AN At the moment, I'm developing a few film projects, some of which still involve architecture – I'd never studied architecture or been involved in it before this series, but it's grabbed me and doesn't seem to be letting go. One of my projects is with an architect whom I met while in Melbourne, which will look at the negotiations and changing relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in architecture and urban planning in Australia, which I think is fascinating.●

ENVIRONMENT

sustainability, environmental affairs and design innovations

Anthony Powell: Walking on Thin Ice



EMILY WONG IN CONVERSATION WITH ANTHONY POWELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY POWELL

A sense of adventure and a year-long contract as a communications technician first brought Anthony Powell to Antarctica in the summer of '98. Initially daunted by the prospect of weathering a full twelve months in one of the world's most remote regions, Anthony soon fell for the spectacular yet inhospitable qualities of his new surrounds. In the fifteen years since he first set foot on the stark, white shores of Scott Base (New Zealand's polar research outpost), he has spent more than one hundred months living, working – and increasingly in his spare time – filming Antarctica. 'Antarctica: a Year on Ice' is his labour of love, a compilation of more than a decade in the life of the Kiwi-born engineer turned filmmaker, a meditation on the strange, hypnotic magnetism of this highly fragile yet tempestuous stretch of wilderness. Here, Emily Wong speaks to Anthony about the personal and political importance of Antarctica: its life-changing influence on his career and stance on climate change; and the significance of the Poles in our shared global, environmental future.

EMILY WONG

Your film explores Antarctica from a number of perspectives: your personal point of view and the experiences of other human and animal residents in the landscape. What was your main agenda in making the film?

ANTHONY POWELL

I guess the main thing was just to tell it from an everyday point of view – pretty much everything else you see about Antarctica is about scientists studying something. Most people don't realise that the majority of people there are just everyday workers who keep the base running so that the scientific research can happen. The everyday point of view – that's never really been told before. Winter in Antarctica had never been shown on the movie screen either. Pretty much every other film you see, the film crews are only there for a few weeks in the middle of summer and then they fly out. There's never been that real insider's point of view.

EW *Do you think there's a particular kind of person willing to live in Antarctica, one perhaps more environmentally oriented than the average person?*

AP Possibly. I found that for most people that go down there the first time, myself included, it's more for the idea of having a bit of an adventure; something new that few people have seen before. But once you spend time there, you really can't help but fall in love with the place; everyone I know who has spent time there tends to become much more environmentally aware and quite protective of the place.

There's just something that feels very right when you see a place that is untouched. Even when you go to national parks around the world, they've all been manicured in some way for visitors. When you go somewhere and there's no human involvement at all, it's really quite remarkable.

EW *To what extent is Antarctica actually pristine?*

AP It's pretty much the last untouched place left in the world. When they first set up a lot of the bases in the '50s and '60s, they'd dump trash in the sea in front of the base, and raw sewerage would flow straight out onto the ice. But they've really tidied things up a lot in the last twenty years or so, and now absolutely nothing is left behind – the environmental impact is almost nothing. There's always going to be a little bit, just by the fact of us [humans] being there. But the situation has dramatically improved, even in the time since I've been going. When I first went down they would still get rid of old newspaper by burning it in an old incinerator building. They don't do that now because they don't want particulate matter ending up on the ice.

EW *What other kind of changes have you witnessed taking place there in terms of climate or environmental change?*

AP In the area that we're in, because we're far enough south, we don't see any very obvious signs of climate change on the surface, although I've definitely noticed that the surface melt near Black Island and Scott Base and McMurdo Stations has been getting progressively worse. There are also massive changes, for example in the West Antarctic ice sheet where there's a lot more snowfall because of increased humidity.

Climate change is definitely a very real thing. There are odd things that people like to fixate on, like 'how come there's more sea ice?'… Well, that's because salt water freezes at -1.8 degrees, while fresh water freezes at zero.

So we're getting more snow fall, we're getting more freshwater run-off from the glaciers, and we're actually seeing sea ice and changes in the wind which is blowing the ice further north and letting more freeze in the south. There are penguin species that have traditionally only lived way up north on the peninsula that are now moving further and further south.

You might look at any one thing and wonder a bit, but when you get a lot of things adding up, one after the other… I admit I was a bit skeptical five or ten years ago about this whole idea of climate change, but you talk to more and more people who are doing research and… it's serious stuff now.

EW *How do you feel your experiences in Antarctica have changed you and the people you've met there?*

AP Spending a winter down there is in many ways like having a reset button pressed on your life – you go down there with just a couple of suitcases and that's it, there's nothing to spend money on. You're cut off from being bombarded by the everyday, so you just have to bat for more of the simple pleasures in life, like playing a game of cards with someone – more basic kinds of social interaction. There's something very rewarding about that.

I think you definitely tend to form a lot of friendships because it's a very like-minded group of people. There are a lot of different backgrounds, but there tends to be that commonality of that slightly adventurous spirit and wanting to get out and see the world.

I also wouldn't have ever considered myself an environmentalist in the past, but when you see things – how solar energy is at the point where it's cheaper than coal energy – you've got to wonder why you would even consider burning coal. I've definitely become a lot more environmentally aware.

EW *What are your experiences of returning to civilisation?*

AP The first time, after I came back after spending a year down there, it was really quite a shock to the system – the sensory overload is fairly extreme. When you're on the plane, still an hour away from landing, you start to smell the chlorophyll in the air. That's a really powerful smell when you step off the plane – just the smell of green things growing. It's interesting – the things you tend to miss are just the simple things – the really simple foods, and seeing family and friends again. You don't really crave a lot of the more high-end products that are always being pushed onto you here. You have a lot more appreciation for the simple things.

EW *Was it ever your intent to question, through your film, whether we as humans, should be setting foot on Antarctica at all?*

AP In terms of whether we should be there – without doing the research there, there'd be so many things we just wouldn't know about. [Science on] ozone destruction, most of the climate change data we're getting is coming from Antarctica: high-end as well as basic science. By studying the Antarctic systems, we can really get a good indication of what's changing in the rest of the world.

A lot of the scientists there like to compare Antarctica to the canary in the coal mine – a little change elsewhere in the world shows up as a big change there first.

It's hard to think of any other scientific programme that's getting as good value for money, in terms of hard science being returned, as Antarctica.

EW *In addition to beauty, do we also need to be confronted with hard truths to motivate us to action?*

AP For me, it wasn't so much about showing the hard truths, more the experience of being there. I did intentionally touch on climate change towards the end of the film, but as a way of starting a conversation. I didn't want to beat people over their heads, but rather get them thinking and maybe do some research for themselves. There's more evidence for man-made climate change now than there is for smoking-related lung cancer, but most people don't see it that clearly. The vast scientific consensus is that it's a really bad thing. So my aim was just to start some conversations, to get people talking about it.

EW *What do you hope audiences will take away from watching your film?*

AP I guess just an appreciation for Antarctica itself. I do believe it's a place that needs looking after and protecting. It's never been exploited for minerals and I think it has far more value, down the line, as wilderness than it does in terms of mineral use and resources. But the oceans around Antarctica are not currently protected by the Antarctic treaty – that's something that needs to be looked into. [The ocean] is basically where the whole ecology of Antarctica is based; a very significant part that isn't being protected.

EW *Why is Antarctica so important in the current environmental debate?*

AP In terms of biodiversity, there's still a lot of really basic information we don't know, like how long Adelie penguins live naturally. It's probably about twenty years, but we haven't been studying them long enough to know for sure.

Antarctica is basically untouched. Scientists can drill ice core samples from some two hundred to three hundred thousand years ago and get bubbles from the atmosphere at that time. It's a huge record that goes back so far. As a resource for studies of what's been going on in the planet's history, it's unequalled.●

EYES

interesting views as snapped by guest artists from Australia and abroad

Ngurra, Wanga

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM HILLIER

For the past three years, I have been working with Indigenous Hip Hop Projects (IHHP) in remote communities of Australia, participating and documenting youth workshops in music, dance and culture, promoting health, wellbeing and self-determination. Despite what the mainstream media might portray of these communities, the reality is far richer and multi-faceted. If you ask the young people we work with, they would not have it any other way.

Ngurra *and* Wanga – *both terms mean 'land' or 'country', in the areas where these photos were taken. I would like to acknowledge traditional owners past and present of the lands where these photos were taken. Thank you for your beautiful countries.*

Small Children Looma

This sign is near the communities of Looma and Camballin, in Western Kimberley. Looma is the land of the Lungurra Lizard, and the languages of Walmajarri, Nyikina and Mangala. The word Looma is Walmajarri for 'blue tongue lizard', while Lungurra is Nyikina for the same. Near Looma is the town of Camballin, which was built to house the workers of a now defunct rice farm. The residents of Camballin, now mostly work in the schools in Looma and Jarlmadangah. In leaked documents about the closure of WA communities, Looma and Jarlmadangah were listed, but not Camballin. For some reason, Aboriginal communities are 'not sustainable', yet the white settlement (with less people than Looma) *is*. Gina Rinehart has recently bought the cattle stations close to these communities, signaling more developments in the 'mining to dining boom'.

New Looma Hills

These are some of the community members of Looma. With backgrounds from three different language mobs, they all join together to educate students in modern and cultural ways. The hills that surround Looma have a well-known dreaming story about the blue tongue lizard and her children. The Nyikina and Mangala communities have lived peacefully near each other for thousands of years – and, after forced removal from their communities in the 1950s onto mission camps – are trying to reclaim their lands and cultures. During those years, some mission camps would be full of up to fifty-two different language groups. After many years of decimation from trying to live the European way, some tribes went back to their homelands, and set up new communities. Looma was one of the first in the Kimberley, and the three different groups (Nyikina, Mangala and Walmajarri) worked together to build a future together.

Halls Creek Swimming Hole

These two boys are looking at the swimming hole known as Caroline Pool. Caroline is known as Wimirri in Jaru Language. Halls Creek is considered the middle of the Kimberley and it is one of the largest towns along the Great Northern Highway. The languages here are Jaru and Kija. Even at the end of the winter/dry season there is water in the Caroline Pool and Palm Springs (15km further down the Duncan highway). Swimming in the Kimberley is one of the most enjoyed activities.

Ngaanyatjarraku Grand Final

This photo was taken in the community of Warburton, the largest community in the Ngaanyatjarra Shire. The grand final consisted of a ‘round robin’ of all the teams in the shire: Wingellina, Blackstone, Jameson, Tjukurla, Warnarn, Warburton and Warakurna. Two or three games are played at night, because it is too hot to play during the day. The 2014 grand final was played over five days, with Jameson the victors. After winning, they drove through town parading their trophy (for all of Warburton to sneer at). The whole shire gets together for the finals, and Warburton is abuzz with activity for the preceding week and after the games. Off field, women play softball, kids have dance battles, there’s a ‘cutest baby’ competition and a raffle for a car. The love of football encompasses the entire community.

Wangkatjungka Football Training

The Wangkatjungka football team is the Crows. They play in the Central Kimberley Football League. Their opponents are the Bayulu Bulldogs, Yiyili Tigers, Yakanarra Dockers, Fitzroy Hawks and the Noonkanbah Blues. All the games are played in Fitzroy Crossing, which is only about an hour-and-a-half drive for the Crows. They train with or without boots on this ground that is pure red dust, which does not seem to affect them at all. While the men play, all the kids play their own match, or play basketball. In the community, football is serious, and basketball is for fun. The drive to watch the matches is not a hindrance – driving anywhere up to 600km for a game is normal in WA.

A friend who plays for the Wyndham Crocs has been scouted by several AFL teams. Yet, he has refused to move, because it would mean he would not be able to go fishing with his Grandma everyday. To him, family and community mean more than money and fame.

Yolngu Power

Yolngu is the most spoken of the languages in Arnhem Land. This wall is in the community of Yirrkala, 18km away from the mining town of Nhulunbuy. Yirrkala is where the bark petitions came from back in 1963. The bark petitions were documents written in Yolngu and sent to parliament house to protest the construction of a mine on traditional lands. These are considered to be the first formal claims for native title. While the mine was eventually built, this has not stopped the Yolngu, who have become a leading voice for the rights of all traditional owners. Yolngu Power.

To learn more about Tim's work and his collaborative projects, visit: indigenoushiphop.com

ASSEMBLAGE

the cultural fabric of cities across art, architecture, design and cross-pollinated creativity

Clare Cousins: Buildings To Breathe In

WORDS BY NADIA SACCARDO

Clare Cousins remembers The Barbican. She was eight years old and living in London. Her father, a specialist surgeon, had brought the family to the city via Berlin, and young Clare had her eyes open. She couldn't articulate it at the time, but the Barbican's imposing structure and raw textural qualities made an impression. "It was a like a little city within a city," she says. "The geometric forms and 'tough' materials, the bush-hammered concrete, softened by the lush planting and a confident use of colour internally." The family soon returned to their hometown of Melbourne, but the influence held strong.

Previous page: Clare Cousins in the meeting room at the Blackwood Street Bunker. Photograph by Daniel Aulsebrook.
Above: raw beauty of The Blackwood Street Bunker. Photograph by Lisbeth Grosmann.
Opposite: breeze blocks and framed views in ‘the Bunker’. Photograph by Lisbeth Grosmann.

Clare Cousins Architects is a diverse studio. Based in a North Melbourne workspace dubbed ‘The Blackwood Street Bunker’, a semi-brutalist space that adjoins her husband Ben’s building practice, the design pits open-plan desks against glazed office spaces. Raw concrete flooring connects with warm plywood walls; floor-to-ceiling windows reveal a generous deck. What was once a cramped, low-ceiling ’70s office block is still a low-ceiling ’70s office block, now softened with curved walls, subtle planting and airy communal spaces.

Clare’s 10-strong team has around 25 active projects. Their folio spans commercial spaces, cultural installations and retail, but it’s houses they love.

The practice thrives on dwellings with distinct personalities and renovations that cleverly navigate original buildings: a Victorian façade mixed with copper concertina, structural steel against a Californian bungalow, a family home blending inner-living zones into outdoor decking. Consistent to all is a fluidity of space. Windows stretch wide and deep. Sidewalls open to connect rooms. These are buildings you can breathe in; that help enable life, not control it.

Building houses is about building relationships, and Clare’s team takes time to understand those who dwell within.

“For us, it’s really about trying to understand how people live and what they’re attracted to,” she explains. “We ask about daily habits. How they sleep, where they sleep, who gets up early… You find there are a lot of chuckles.”

This conversational tactic spans the entire design process. “It’s not about saying: ‘Here is the perfect house. This is it. We’ve worked it out. This is what it should be,’” Clare says. “We take a collaborative, small-steps approach.”

Unlike many in her field, Clare cut her teeth on construction. While chipping away at her architecture degree at RMIT, she landed a job at the construction arm of the Van Haandel Group. Her task? To work on the Aurora Spa Retreat on the roof of St Kilda’s iconic deco Prince of Wales Hotel. “We were working with architects Wood Marsh and Paul Hecker,” Clare remembers. “It gave me a lot of

understanding of the mechanics and process of construction: the importance of something being functional and buildable; working with trades rather than thinking you know the best way." She was thrown right in: ordering materials and making mistakes, but buoyed by the energy and support of her colleagues. After over two years on the job, Clare petitioned Wood Marsh to give her a six-month role and ended up staying for three years.

The approach of Clare Cousins Architects is often referred to as "holistic", a much-bandied around term, but here it makes sense. From early site meetings through to design, construction and interiors, the practice is hands on; construction excites as much as design. Aesthetically, Clare strives for a balance of raw and refined. Her houses interplay pared-back, natural materials and subtle (sometimes punchy) colour. "I've always been interested in limited material pallet, using materials to their advantage," she says. "Whether it be brickwork or timber, there's enough beauty that it doesn't have to be ornate to have a sense of interest." Affordability and maximising livable space are front-of-mind, too.

"Volume builders are always telling people: 'you can get a house this big and it's this amount of money'," Clare says. "For us it's the complete opposite. It's about how big and how little you have to spend on it."

So rather than build walls for a small-budget family apartment in a heritage-listed Melbourne building, Clare and her team used plywood joinery to define spaces, devised a mezzanine loft to maximise storage and snuck in a neat workstation below.

Outside of her practice, Clare openly champions Melbourne's culture of collaboration and its "collegial" architectural spirit. The practice recently invested in The Nightingale, a five-storey apartment block spearheaded by Jeremy McLeod of Breathe Architecture. Rather than go to large developers for

Above (L-R): light and curved vistas in the Brick House, an addition and renovation to a single fronted Edwardian house in Prahran. Photographs by Shannon McGrath.

A former black box is transformed into 'the Channel', an immersive space for learning and collaboration in sound, music and technology. Photograph by Shannon McGrath.

capital, The Nightingale asked likeminded architects to invest in the model. Twenty-seven shares were issued and Clare Cousins Architects bought one, along with other firms such as Six Degrees, Wolveridge and Andrew Maynard Architects. The idea? By knocking off superfluous items, such as car parks, agent fees and display suites, time and money are allocated to conscious and long-lasting design. The Commons – a much awarded pilot building using a similar model – is already up and running, but The Nightingale takes things further with an eight-star energy rating. "The idea is that this model can be replicated over numerous sites; each designed completely differently," Clare explains. "Six Degrees are already working on the next one, Andrew Maynard is looking to do one and so are we… Working together only strengthens it. The point is to create great spaces. Not just to hit a bottom line. That's the spirit we want to foster."

On top of her day-to-day – which includes anything from site meetings and furniture appraisal to design work and drawing – Clare sits on The Chapter Council of The Australian Institute of Architects and leads public talks, which is important to her as both an architect and woman in her field. "I hate public speaking, but I believe young women need older women to be seen," she says. "Gender equity is a big issue. It still amazes me when you hear the statistics about the pay gap; that's obviously across all industries." Despite the relatively equal numbers of men and women entering architecture, there is a striking lack of women in senior leadership or management roles. "I don't feel like I personally have felt it so much, but I know it's prevalent and a problem," she says. "This is what's going on. This is the reality. We have to address it." As the mother of two young daughters, and with ten years leading her practice, Clare is a walking example of what's possible.

"There's still such a perception that architecture is elitist or unaffordable," she says. "We need people not to be afraid of architecture."●

BLUEPRINT CITY

practical and lateral food for thought on urban design

City Limits

MAITIÚ WARD IN CONVERSATION WITH PAUL DONEGAN
ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE OEHR

Cities amplify opportunity. In comparison to, say, life in a village, they offer greater opportunities for employment, for social connection and for exchanges of culture and experience. The physicist Geoffrey West has demonstrated that whenever a city doubles in size, it produces 15% more services per capita; which is to say, every person in that city is responsible for 15% more economic activity and likewise enjoys 15% more access to opportunity.

We don't need physicists to tell us this, though – we instinctively understand the pull of cities and vote with our feet accordingly.

Most of the world's people now live in cities. This is especially true of Australia, where they are home to more than three quarters of the population and generate 77% of the national income.

According to a new book by Paul Donegan and Jane-Frances Kelly of the Grattan Institute – if cities are at their best when they improve access to opportunity for their inhabitants, Australia's cities are becoming deeply dysfunctional.

I met with Donegan at the Grattan Institute's headquarters in Melbourne's Parkville, in a room decorated with framed front-pages of newspapers from around the country – each one boasting a lead story in response to the Institute's research. The Grattan Institute is an independent public policy think tank that provides governments and others with advice and ideas about pressing issues facing Australia – health, education, productivity, energy, or, finally, cities. Of course, governments aren't always inclined to listen to policy wonks, so the Grattan Institute also has an interest in shaping debate and raising public awareness around its research – which explains the proudly displayed newsprint and why, through Melbourne University Press, it has also just published Donegan and Kelly's book, *City Limits*.

Dressed in a sensible charcoal suit and red tie, Donegan speaks with the cadence and clarity of a man accustomed to explaining complex ideas to distracted, time-poor people. He chooses his words carefully, with every response weighed and measured to fit the facts as he understands them. This is not a man accustomed to hyperbole, which gives added weight to the central assertion of *City Limits* – that, to quote from its subtitle, "Australia's cities are broken".

"The reason we chose that description was that from the perspective of people living in them, two of the things you need from a city are a home and a job," says Donegan. "What we're seeing as a result of the way the housing market works, and the way the economy is changing, is that there's a big and growing divide between where people live and where people work. That has some pretty dramatic consequences for people's access to opportunity, for social connection and family life."

As Donegan and Kelly explain in *City Limits*, for much of the 20th century, Australia experienced urban population growth. This accompanied the rapid development of manufacturing, which brought with it employment opportunities in what were then the outer suburbs of the capital cities. In turn, a sharp rise in car ownership gave people choice as to where they could live – they were no longer tied to train and tram lines, or to industrial areas in the inner city. Australia saw rising incomes, rapidly increasing home ownership, high employment and rising living standards, and people were able to get around more easily. Australia's cities grew outwards to envelop their suburbs.

Today, the geographic footprints of our cities continue to expand in line with these trends, with new homes being built further and further out. Meanwhile, the economy has changed dramatically, to become more knowledge intensive; instead of factory jobs in the fringes, opportunities are now concentrated where knowledge-driven businesses tend to operate – in offices in the central business district and inner suburbs, typically within 10 kilometres of the city centre. Combined with our fixation on rubber and roads, this has created some serious problems for the way our cities function.

"We've got this car dependant approach to getting around, which doesn't work so well when you're trying to concentrate lots of people in a small area,"

says Donegan. “Cars are great when you’re travelling to places where there aren’t that many other people; when you’re travelling to where there are lots of other people it’s just gridlock. With our cities’ populations growing outwards but opportunity concentrating inwards, as the manufacturing sector stagnates, what that means is division and inequity.”

If the subtitle of *City Limits* implies a mechanistic understanding of cities, that they should be operating like well-oiled engines and with a few new bolts in the right places they’ll be humming along in no time, the book itself sees them as the product of many forces, not all of which can be readily “fixed”. Likewise, Donegan is loathe to pin the blame for their dysfunction on any one actor or organisation. While there is no quick fix for Australia’s urban woes, he does believe there is one ingredient that will be crucial to any solution: housing.

“What we contend, is the most important thing governments can do, is make it much easier to build new homes in the inner and middle established suburbs, where there is good access to employment and there is good access to transport,” he says.

Australian governments will face stiff headwinds in tackling this challenge, not the least of which, stems from the enduring legacy of the Australian Dream, which sees the ownership of a house on the proverbial quarter-acre block as practically a right of citizenship.

As the research within City Limits *reveals, however, Australia’s supposed fixation on the single residential dwelling in the depths of suburbia is at least as much myth as it is dream.*

“We did some survey research where we asked people to, within their own budgets, trade off a range of choices around the kind of home they’d like to live in, against location,” says Donegan. “What we found is that while nearly all new homes being built in Melbourne, for example, are detached houses on the fringe or highrise apartments in and around the CBD, many people identified that they’d prefer to trade-off the location of their home against its size in different ways.”

The survey found that fewer than half of its respondents from Melbourne said they would prefer to live in a detached house. About a quarter of people surveyed said they would choose semi-detached housing such as townhouses, units or terraces, and another quarter would choose a flat or apartment, if they could live in the kind of neighbourhood they wanted. In Sydney, the preference for detached houses in a real-world scenario was even less. About 40% preferred it. A quarter preferred semi-detached townhouses, units or terraces, and about a third preferred apartments or flats. Clearly, Australia isn’t building the kind of housing that it wants or needs.

The biggest challenge in addressing this discrepancy, though, won’t be the myth-busting, but tackling the regulation and resistance to development that is endemic to our cities’ more established suburbs, which benefit from the relatively central locations and high level of amenity most Australians want.

“The regulatory constraints on building a detached house on the fringe are very minimal – often you don’t need to get planning approval at all, or it’s through a fast track process, the potential for objections from neighbours are very limited, given the neighbour is agricultural land,” says Donegan. “Contrast that to the considerable number of hoops that need to be jumped through to build homes in established areas, particularly homes other than detached houses. Fewer of them are getting built because there’s a pretty clear set of disincentives that have nothing to do with the demand from people looking for housing.”

On the morning I met with Donegan, an announcement by Victoria’s Minister for Planning had thrown the enormity of this challenge into sharp relief: in response to pressure from the City of Boroondara, a local council for some of Melbourne’s wealthiest neighbourhoods, the government had passed legislation that prevented the construction of any buildings over three storeys within its boundaries. Some 60 square kilometres of inner suburban Melbourne had been locked away from development. When I put this to Donegan, who just weeks before, had enjoyed extensive coverage in *The Age* and other mainstream press on *City Limits*, he gave a characteristically measured expression of disappointment. I had to ask, though – what drew him to work in urban policy, a field where the chances of effecting real change are subject not just to the outrageous swinging fortunes of politics, but so many more forces beyond the control of any one person or organisation?

“The kind of satisfaction we have in our life is shaped in no small part by our job, the kind of shelter we have, how we’re able to connect with people and get around. There’s an opportunity to make things work a lot better than they are, and you can make a big difference to a lot of people by doing that. These are some of the most important things we can deal with in our lives”.●

LESS IS MORE

standout architecture and design for compact living and small spaces

Backyard Bungalows

MURRAY BARKER

18m²

ALICE AND OTIS

40m²

ALEX KENNEDY

35m²

MURRAY BARKER

IN CONVERSATION WITH SARAH BOOTH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN CLEMENT

Murray Barker's garage conversion is a compact 18m² space. Emphasising his tiny home's interface with the great outdoors, Murray's ad hoc design encourages interplay with the laneway and the life upon it – while still providing natural light and privacy when required. Referencing Donovan Hill's D House, Murray's ingenious additions could be applied to almost any garage space as a living or workspace – in this case, Murray envisions both. Here, he shares his story:

"Out of necessity two years ago, I found myself moving into the shed of a typical Federation-era terrace house in Melbourne's inner-north. I'd arrived home from five years living abroad, and it was the only free room in the house. It was also the cheap option, out the back, right on the rear lane. The bathroom, kitchen and living areas are located in the main house, but the old garage was the perfect size for a bedroom.

I still remember the pool of sweat the first morning I woke up there – it was a hot summer and probably fifty degrees inside. I could hear animals on the roof, feasting on the nectarines that dropped from the tree next door. After years of apartment living in Europe I was excited by the sensory experience of the place – in the backyard, under the bottle brush. I was in the city but it felt a bit like being in the Australian bush, with bright light shining in through holes in the old iron sheet walls.

Once I decided this 18sqm was going to become my permanent home (and with winter on its way), it was time for some proper work to be done. Previously, people who had lived in the shed were sleeping in beanies and gloves by July, and I wasn't keen on that. I had the time to fix it up but hardly any money. I decided to start doing things slowly, bit by bit. I'm an architect, so I understand structure and how things go together, but I didn't really know how to actually build anything. Since nothing I had planned was structural I thought it was worth a shot.

It wasn't so much designed in advance as made up as I went along, using found materials and seconds. The main mission was to insulate and seal the place, which has made a huge difference. I built new timber framed walls in front of the original corrugated iron walls, with a third wall built behind the garage door. The timber framing was all seconds, which I instantly regretted. Building stud walls with slightly warped timber is a nightmare, don't do it! I in-filled these new walls with insulation and lined the framework internally with ply. I found the plywood online for a steal. It used to line Mitsubishi caravans – it has a beautiful grain, quite different to the typical stuff. I then set about insulating the ceiling. I had help from tall friends for this, the only part of the build I really needed more than two hands for. Four hands, plus a pair to hold the drill.

Very few cars still use the laneway for access, so it's really quiet, and the northern light from that side was something I wanted access to – it's a perfect place to sit in the afternoon. I'd seen amazing row houses in Vietnam and Japan, right on the road, and interconnected courtyards in European towns. I'm really interested in the way this screening and shuttering can filter the level of engagement between public and private. There's a great example of this, the D-House built by Donovan Hill in Brisbane, where a berm, an entry path, and a screen separate the internal living spaces from the footpath – just metres away.

A few neighbours sticky beak or drop by to chat from time to time, but most don't even know I'm there. There's an old European neighbour who has built his own sitting place to the side of the lane, in the sun, surrounded by his potted plants.

I really love this little wooden cabin, squeezed in between the laneway, the garden and courtyard. Maybe it has something to do with my growing up in Queensland, where timber and tin houses creak and crack with each change in the weather and you can hear the rain. It can be tough, in mid-winter, running to the shower through the rain, but that five-metre dash over paving is mostly a good thing. The need to pass through the outdoors wakes me up, and often forces me to pause and notice the sky and the weather.

It's a room for now, but it could work as a studio one day soon, a retreat, or even a shed once again. I know a lot of people who have done simple renovation jobs like this, but I can see so much potential for people wanting to do something like this properly. As densities increase and demographics fluctuate in the city and the suburbs, small footprint living – with programmatic flexibility at street level – will become more crucial. The way a small house can maintain private space but still connect to the outdoors and the street is really worth exploring.●

ALICE AND OTIS

IN CONVERSATION WITH SARAH BOOTH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN CLEMENT

Tucked away behind her auntie's house in Clifton Hill is the ramshackle abode of Schoolhouse Studios' Alice Glenn and her pint-sized sidekick Otis. The building itself has existed for several decades, but has been coaxed into its current, very comfortable iteration thanks to a couple of renovations over the years. Alice gives us a window into her leafy little home.

"I live in a self-contained bungalow out the back of my auntie's house in Clifton Hill, although it feels more like a cabin in the woods. I have a window on every side of the house with an aspect onto something green and leafy and a view up into the trees from my bed. I live here with my four 'and-a-half' year-old son Otis. He has the one bedroom and my bed is in the living room.

I've been visiting my cousins in this house for almost 30 years and the cabin has always been there. It was always a mysterious place where someone unknown was living and it wasn't until about 10 years ago that I actually went inside.

The shell of the cabin was already on the property when my Aunt bought it in 1988. They did the first renovation on it in 1989 and put in a bathroom and kitchen, but the bedroom was an addition for the arrival of my cousin Gracey's daughter Beth, 10 years ago.

My aunt Fleur and my cousin Martha (aka Banoffee) live in the front house, but there are always weary travellers dropping in for a nourishing vegetarian meal and a rom-com in front of the fire. Apart from sharing a wine in the garden and tea and scones on a Sunday morning, I do my clothes washing in the main house and borrow cake tins when the occasion arises.

This house is the perfect size for Otis and I, just enough room to spread out and make a mess – but small enough that the housework doesn't take over my life (it takes me 10 minutes to clean up)!

I love having the security of someone else living on the block and company is there if I get lonely. There are so many aspects of this house that I love, but the sunlight, the big trees and the company are amongst the top five. Also the high ceiling and windows on every side!

I've realised that I don't want a lot of space and I think I could even go a bit smaller! Although, I'm not sure how Otis will feel about that in 10 years as he hits his teens. More space equals more time on housework and more space for stuff that I don't need.●

ALEX KENNEDY

IN CONVERSATION WITH SARAH BOOTH & EMILY WONG

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM ROSS

Alex Kennedy's 35m² space was once a car garage amidst the lush garden behind her mum's house, until Alex (and friends) took to it one summer with a hammer and plastering board, while designer Sarah Trotter of Hearth Studio helped translate Alex's ideas around recycled materials and Japanese minimalism into built form. Alex takes us on a tiny tour.

"Previously the space was a very dilapidated garage at the back of my mother's property. The idea to renovate it started through conversations with my family, particularly with my uncle who built a sauna and a spa when I was a kid. He's always been interested in handmade building and doing interesting things with small spaces.

I had spent some time in a commune in New Zealand, which inspired me to use mainly recycled products and to do some of the labour for the reno myself. Recycled timber and fittings are so much nicer; they have a story and a personality. I also travelled to Japan before the project started. I had always been interested in Japanese design and architecture, but living with friends there gave me a whole new understanding of space.

The space is roughly 35m² and is set on a laneway back from the main street. Lanes have a whole other life! There is almost a whole new community I would never have known on the street. The only down side is not having an exact address when ordering takeaway.

The size is great and functions well – I can have dinner parties and do all the things I like to do. It does mean I can't hoard though, so I am always getting rid of excess stuff, which I actually really enjoy. It feels like a cleansing ritual. Oh, and you have to be OK to get nude, with a bathroom that's open to the rest of the space! Ideally, at some stage, I'd like to build a bedroom on top. With two people it can be a bit hard if one person wants to sleep and the other needs to get up and do things.

My mother still lives in the front house. There is a large, lush garden that separates the two dwellings, so it feels very private. I usually see her about once a week, unless I feel like stealing a snack. It's good because I can help out with the garden and other chores she needs help with now and then.

Sarah Trotter – what a dreamboat! She was the designer, and most of all she's my friend. I took some basic designs to her and she worked them up. Sarah had some fantastic thoughts on light, space and storage (thank you Sarah for the storage!); she also helped me source most of the hardware, making sure it was true to my aesthetic. Her ability to understand what I wanted to achieve and her attention to detail were so important to the way the renovation has turned out.

In planning the space, the most important design consideration for me was that the house took in the full aspect of the garden and that it felt open, yet private. The garden gets really beautiful light for most of the day – I can spend hours just looking at it and how the light moves through the trees.

My friends and I did all of the demolition, I helped lay the hardwood floor and wall, and ceiling, and did all of the tiling and most of the finishing work, including sanding, staining, painting, paving and adding handles to cupboards. Oh, and grinding down the plumber's bad concrete work (haha) and other stuff too boring to mention.

Moving in has definitely changed the way I think about space. It's crazy how much space and stuff people think they need, and how little of it they actually use. It is really important to connect small spaces with a feeling of openness and the outdoors, which is something many new apartment

developments fail to do. I think it's because Australians are obsessed with privacy and are actually quite conservative. European apartments are much better at considering shared external spaces.

The overhaul cost a bit over $50,000 all up. I've never done the exact calculations (and don't want to!) but that doesn't include the cost of my labour – two weeks of demolition and every Friday, Saturday and Sunday throughout the build, which took about four months. I also managed the project and would get up before work and meet my builder to talk things through and then come back after work most days and check in when there were issues. I'm very lucky to have mates who totally undercharged me because they wanted to work on an interesting project.

I feel pretty lucky having a home so close to the city – something that's becoming less and less of a possibility for my generation, without the support of their parents. My advice if you ever want to do something like this is to work with people you like. I was lucky enough to have an incredible group of people that worked so hard and made it all enjoyable. Oh, and expect to add at least $10K to your original budget."●

BACK TO THE FUTURE

we celebrate the establishments that have stood the test of time

Casa Iberica on Johnston Street

AS TOLD TO ASSEMBLE PAPERS BY PAULO DA SILVA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL BARBERA

Casa Iberica has single-handedly been providing Melbourne with hard-to-find Spanish and Portuguese smallgoods and culinary essentials since Jose and Alice de Sousa opened its doors in 1973, and it continues to flourish under the shrewd management of current owner, Jose and Alice's godson, Paulo. We caught up with Paulo over one of Casa Iberica's legendary sandwiches.

“Casa Iberica was started by my godfather back in 1973, and it’s been in the family ever since. We took over about six years ago – that’s when we wanted to emigrate to Australia and he wanted to sell it, but only to a member of the family. So we took advantage of that and we’ve grown it even more.

Casa Iberica has always been on Johnston Street, but now we’ve opened a second one in Alphington. That’s where we do all the production, so we do all the smallgoods there, and my wife’s opened up a shop in front to the public.

It’s me, Salma, and another guy Javier – we run the shop here – and my son every now and then. He’s out there now, that’s what he does on school holidays. Casa Iberica is a family-run business. We sell all the stuff we produce – chorizos, salamis, cacciatores, fresh chorizo, sweet peppers, marinated eggplant – and all the deli products that we import as well, such as cheeses. Our own produce is made from recipes learnt through family members, and we’ve added some new ones of our own, based on the way we’ve felt. It’s working out well and we’re happy.

All types of people come through. A lot of South Americans. I’d say probably half our customers are Australian, because they want to know about other cultures, and then the other half from around the world. People come to us because it’s a very unique shop, also because we produce our own products and I suppose it’s stuff that you won’t get anywhere else except Casa Iberica. There used to be a very big Spanish community around here. Now there’s very little, if any. You get one or two Spaniards, but those are people who have been here from those times anyway – they’ve bought their houses and they’ve stayed on.

My favourite part of working here is mingling with the customers, talking to them and all of that – it’s nice, especially the old ladies. We have a lot of regulars who we get to know by name.

The hours are long. We start off very early in the morning because of all our deliveries, then we open to the public at 7.30am. We close at 6pm, but by the time we’ve cleaned up and everything it’s close to 8pm, so you’ve worked a good 15 or 16-hour day. But it all comes with the fun of it.”●


Spain
Mexico
Casa
IBERICA

HOME MADE

recipes and insights for homegrown ingenuity

French Onion Soup with Gruyère Toasts

WORDS AND RECIPE BY
JULIA BUSUTTIL NISHIMURA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BEN CLEMENT

I have fond memories of eating this soup as a child. The smell of onions cooking often wafted through the house, well before I was even out of bed most Sunday mornings. This heady aroma meant we would be hosting guests later in the day for a long lunch. The soup would be followed by roast pork with pommes Lyonnaise and end with a boozy chocolate mousse – retro done right! My mum worked for QANTAS in the '70s and during her travels, she procured and refined a handful of dishes. Her food was always accompanied with tales of late nights spent in Parisian bistros after long-haul flights and quick trips to Morocco to buy exotic spices.

Every meal was a history lesson, or at the very least, a lesson in how to tell a great story.

French Onion Soup is truly classic fare made from the most simple of ingredients – the brown onion! I remember the first time I made this soup without my Mum – I rushed the onions and all I was left with was a pale, insipid boiled onion mess!

It's all about taking your time and letting the onion's natural sugars slowly caramelise. In fact, you'll have to season the soup carefully to balance out the natural sweetness.

I can't remember my Mum ever putting the soup in the oven, as I do, but I like how with this method, your soup comes to the table bubbling and cheesy. Either way, this old school soup is full of flavour and so satisfying on a winter's night!

French Onion Soup with Gruyère Toasts recipe

Ingredients (serves 6)

100g butter
2kg brown onions, thinly sliced
1/4 cup brandy
1tbsp plain flour
1L beef stock
3 sprigs of thyme
1 fresh bay leaf

Gruyère toasts
8 slices of baguette, cut on the diagonal
250g Gruyère, coarsely grated

Method

1 Melt butter in a large saucepan over a high heat. When the butter begins to foam, add the onions and stir to coat. Cook on a medium-high heat for 30-40 minutes, stirring occasionally to ensure the onions don't burn. The onions should have a nice golden colour and be caramelised (this step is really important to draw out the subtle sweetness of the onions).

2 Add the brandy to the onions and cook for a few minutes until the liquid has evaporated a little.

3 Mix the flour and a little of the stock in a small bowl to get rid of any lumps. Add to the onions and cook for a minute or two, stirring constantly. Add the remaining beef stock, thyme and bay leaf and simmer for a further 20 minutes until the soup is rich in colour. Season with some cracked black pepper and salt, if needed.

4 Ladle soup into individual, oven-proof bowls and transfer to a tray. Scatter soups with half the cheese.

5 Top the baguette slices with the remaining cheese and transfer to a separate tray. Place soup and bread under a grill and cook for approximately 5 minutes until cheese is bubbly and melted. Serve soup immediately with the cheesy bread pressed gently into the soup. Bon appétit!●

HOME MADE

recipes and insights for homegrown ingenuity

Edible Only: The Community Garden

AS TOLD TO EUGENIA LIM
BY KATE RHODES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM ROSS

It's a crisp but sunny autumn morning as we meet seven-months pregnant Kate Rhodes and her two-year-old son Rem at the front gate of the North Fitzroy Community Gardens Group Rushall Garden. Dressed in cosy knits and boots, the pair pull up in a four-wheel Christiania bike, ready to harvest tonight's dinner while giving us a tour. For most of the week, Kate is co-curator at RMIT Design Hub, a purpose-built space dedicated to design thinking across research, archiving, exhibition, conversation and critique. When not gracefully striding the halls of the glacial Sean Godsell and Peddle Thorp building, Kate observes a life cycle of a very different nature: the seasonal changes of her 8m^2 kitchen garden plot. After waiting three-and-a-half years for an in-demand patch, Kate and her husband Daniel Palmer (an academic and art historian at Monash University) have been keen members of the garden community since Rem was six months old. Prior to moving to a small terrace in North Fitzroy (members of the garden must live locally in the City of Yarra), the couple lived in a war-time, government-issue house in Williamstown, close to the bay and with a generous garden in which they grew almost all their weekly veggie intake. "We ate everything from our garden. But after a while, too many canceled and delayed trains became tiresome, and we moved closer in. Which meant no garden, so we put our name down here. Everything seems to grow here."

The community garden sits on reclaimed land within the Thomas Kidney reserve – much work was done to remediate the soil, which is now nutrient rich and highly conducive to Kate's thriving kale, parsley, basil, peas, rhubarb, chard, spring onions, brussel sprouts, chives and broccoli rapini. There are 50-odd plots and all members must commit to a set number of hours on collective maintenance: regular working bees, an annual Open Day ("Dan was the official photographer this year!"), and meetings to decide on any necessary repairs and renovations. All plots use companion planting, "distraction and attraction", as Kate says, following organic principles. "We use things like wormwood, chilli, eggshells, coffee grounds... and hygenic practices: getting rid of old, spent leaves. There's a shared philosophy. Agreements. And no one ever sneaks a bit of 'Round Up' on their garden!"

Kate's community garden tips

Hi-vis kids: "It's a good thing to dress your kids in red because then you can see them!"

Net your fruit trees to protect from birds: "the apple trees were really great this year. And it was very satisfying because Dan and I were part of the group that netted them. So it's nice that our work paid off."

Strawberries... "like to have a mound around them – that's how they get their name of course, from the straw that protects the fruit."

Espalier architecture: "I like seeing the structures that people grow too, for their beans... and see Paul's pumpkins? Keeping his prize pumpkins off the ground. I also get to live out my dream of being an architect with these structures!"

Fry together: "During our get-togethers and working bees, people generally pick stuff from the garden and fry it up. So we'll have a sausage sizzle with fried eggplant and zucchini from the garden."

Don't rush the compost: "This is the shared compost, being very careful of your fingers ['chop, chop, chop'] with the axe. This batch is covered with black plastic to help it break down. Keep it in there as long as possible... months".

Planting politics: "I would never put my tomatoes on this side because I'd block the sun on [neighbouring] George's plot."

Edible only (with exceptions): "You're not allowed to grow plants, everything has to be productive (unless its companion planting, such as wormwood and flowers for bees)".

Re-live 'The Good Life': "I've always been a keen gardener. I grew up on a hobby farm in Mildura. We had a veggie garden. My parents were probably a bit 'Tom and Barbara' from *The Good Life*' [a 70s BBC sitcom about a couple who quit the rat race in favour of a self-sufficient life]. We had horses, chickens and peacocks walking around. I collected horse manure for pocket money."

Holidays: "If you're away, put up a sign: 'I'm away, please water and harvest whatever you like.'"

Pay attention to the seasons: "I work to two seasons here, Mildura timing, which seems to work. Tomatoes in Sept (around Grand Final time!) and then all the winter crop in by Feb. Parsley was planted in Nov, Basil in Sept. I try and keep a physical and mental note of where everything is, and its cycle."

Partake in garden gossip: "There is a sense of social cohesion – you find out little things about everyone through the garden. It's miraculously harmonious."●

Many local councils throughout Australia have community gardens. To find out more about how to join or start one, contact the Australian Community Gardens Network, an informal, community-based organisation linking community gardeners nationally: communitygarden.org.au

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Booth
Sarah is one of those people who'll never be able to explain to her family what she does. At present she works as a writer and editor, has a bake sale called Flour Market and has various other coals in the fire.

Tristan Main
Tristan has been exciting Assemble Papers print issue readers' eyeballs for three issues now. A Melbourne-based graphic designer, he is interested in publishing and the printed page and enjoys working on magazines and publications most.

Alice Oehr
Alice is a graphic designer and illustrator whose work spans pixels, print, paper and textiles. Alice works as an assistant to Beci Orpin, as well as juggling teaching, exhibiting, freelancing and her own range of prints and homewares.

Genevieve Murray
Genevieve works across architecture and urbanism, with a focus on collaborative and socially engaged projects through her Sydney design practice, Future Method. Gen has projects on the go in India, Alice Springs, Redfern and Newcastle and has collaborated on projects for Sydney Architecture Festival and the Venice Architecture Biennale.

Tim Hillier
A Melbourne photographer, filmmaker and skateboarder, Tim captures the life around him with documentary and vernacular flair. He has exhibited in New York, Vancouver and Australia and contributed to magazines worldwide. He is currently traveling and collaborating with remote indigenous communities through his work with Indigenous Hip Hop Projects.

Nadia Saccardo
An editor who bounces between Melbourne and Sydney, Nadia co-founded and edited Smith Journal, published The Thousands City Guides, and has contributed to frankie, Four & Sons, Head Full of Snakes, Dumbo Feather and Monster Children. Currently, she's starting two new mags that riff off sport and beer.

Paul Barbera
A roving eye with a global reputation as an interiors and lifestyle photographer, Paul works with the likes of Vogue Living, Elle Decor, Frame, View on Color, Bloom, Grazia, Black Book & AD China. Based in NYC, Paul also publishes the blogs Where They Create and Love Lost.

Daniel Aulsebrook
Daniel is a Melbourne-based photographer who specialises in architectural and documentary photography. A former student of both photography and classical music, Dan enjoys the finer things in life, including beer and bread goods. When not taking photos, Dan's probably out walking his dogs, Herb and Neato.

Maitiú Ward
A publisher, editor, journalist and occasional broadcaster with a special interest in architecture and design, Maitiú is the former Editor-in-Chief of Architectural Review Asia Pacific and (Inside) Interior Design Review. Maitiú is the co-founder of specialist publisher Uro Media.

Ben Clement
Ben is a New Zealand-born, Melbourne-based photographer who has been forging his style as a practicing artist from London to Tokyo, the US and beyond. Ben is Head Content Producer for Hard Workers Club and Coordinator of the Independent Photography Festival.

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

Tom Ross
Tom grew up on Victoria's surf coast, always carrying a camera but never considering it a career. He started out studying marine biology before a road trip around Australia caused him to reconsider his path. Tom is now a full-time photographer, specialising in architecture and editorial work.

Julia Busuttil Nishimura
Julia is an Italian teacher and the creator of OSTRO – an online collection of recipes combining her love of story-telling with cooking, eating and sharing food. Julia also curates MINAMI, an online store with her husband Nori, selling thoughtfully crafted Japanese wares for the kitchen and home.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Eugenia Lim – Editor-in-Chief
An artist, editor and *Wayne's World* fan, Eugenia co-founded Channels: the Australian Video Art Festival and is a Next Wave board member. Eugenia loves croissants, Copenhagen and collaboration. She lives in Melbourne with her husband Quino, their young daughter, and Chips the greyhound.

Giuseppe (Pino) Demaio – Creative Director / Assemble Director
While known for the creativity he offers high-profile clients through his agency Local Peoples and as a founder of NCDFREE, Pino is also famous for his beard – one of the most coveted face-warmers in Melbourne.

Rachel Elliot-Jones – Creative Producer / Assemble Community Engagement
Rachel is the co-founder of MANY MANY and the occasional publication HOUSE WEAR, which explores nomadic culture across art, design, architecture and writing. REJ loves Japan, bread products, and dancing.

Emily Wong – Editorial Assistant
A Masters of Landscape Architecture graduate, Emily writes, designs and tutors at Melbourne University. Emily loves sci-fi, Japanese food, and speculative spatial fiction. A former lawyer, she is currently working on ways to combine law and architecture.

Gabriela Holland – Proofreader
Gabriela's serious case of itchy feet has seen her dabble in everything from film to travel writing. Now based in Melbourne, Gabriela runs Pop Plant and freelances as an editor and proofreader.

Joachim (Quino) Holland – Assemble Director
An architect, Quino also co-directs Fieldwork, Assemble's sister architecture practice. A keen gardener, cyclist and cook, Quino's enduring hero is famed maker of bridges, Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

Ben Keck – Assemble Director
The only clean-shaven director of Assemble and a co-director of Fieldwork, Ben's background is in finance, property and law. A one-year exchange in Berlin sparked his interest in small footprint living, a movement he hopes to advance in Melbourne, where he lives with his partner Chelsea and son Reuben.

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Get in touch.
We are always on the look out for like-minded contributors. If you are a writer, photographer, illustrator, interested in an internship or just want to say hello, drop us a line at hello@assemblepapers.com.au

EXPLORING SMALL FOOTPRINT LIVING ACROSS ART, DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM, THE ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCE.

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