

# THIS REPORT CAPTURES ...



PHYSICAL: Graft Lab model making room - Berlin

personal reflections, professional lessons and highlights of the 2012 Dulux Study Tour.

Preparing this report has been a fantastic opportunity to reflect upon what was deliberately an incredibly varied journey through the design and creation of built environments in the United Arab Emirates, Berlin and London.

These reflections are personal and subjective. They are influenced by my own philosophy of architectural creation, my aesthetic predilections, my feminist preoccupations. They are equally influenced by the “weather patterns” of an intensive study tour: the sequence in which we saw buildings, met people and walked cities; the diurnal cycles of coffee and wine consumption and the growing intimacy of our group.

Taken together, the reports by each of the five winners (Emily, James, Shaun, Wei-An and myself) should give some sense of our group dynamic: of the professional experiences (heavily skewed towards small, boutique practices and largely residential work), architectural obsessions geography and personality. Added to the mix were the wonderful organisers from the Institute of

Architects and Dulux. The unique weather pattern of 11 days on the road with this group has left its traces all over how I think about the architecture and architects that we encountered.

**The Dulux Study Tour** is a national prize awarded annually by the Australian Institute of Architects.

The award was created to give young designers an accelerated awareness and engagement in the global conversation about the built environment. The 5 winners gain unique insights into leading design practices and have access to works under construction.

In addition to the study tour, winners become a member of the DST alumni, who meet annually to share their experiences and network.

There is a two-stage submission process for the award, which includes written responses to questions about what architecture means, a portfolio of work, a CV, references and professional qualifications.

**My submissions** to the Jury demonstrated my conviction that architecture should make a difference: it should enrich,

delight, nurture and provoke.

In addition to describing my philosophical position, my submissions described the ways in which I work, which includes writing about architecture and the practice of architecture, teaching, conducting design research and leading collaborative multidisciplinary teams.

My folio submitted to the jury included work across a number of scales (urban > architecture) and phases, such as pre-architectural work including strategic masterplanning projects.

This report is a book-end for my earlier submissions, it is demonstrative of my interest in the practice of architecture and also tracks new perspectives as a result of this incredible journey.



COLLABORATIVE: realities:united business card mark up - Berlin



Australian Institute of Architects

Davis Langdon  
An AECOM Company

**Dulux**  
Worth doing, worth Dulux.

Dulux Study Tour 2012 | Report  
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The 11-day tour included visiting:

> architectural practices to gain insights into their studio culture, methodology and projects;

> buildings under construction to experience first-hand the manifestation of the designer's concepts (and where the concepts are being underdone or compromised);

> significant pieces of architecture (both historical and contemporary)

I gained insights into the practice of architecture: the philosophies and manifestos that drive designers and that inform how they organise themselves and work with others.

I explored the process of making architecture: the generative and representational tools that designers use to interact with unbuilt space.

I experienced the built product: the spatial, social and visual artefacts that we create.

Each of these ways of engaging with architecture in its varying states provoked different reactions in me. Each raised different questions around a number of themes.

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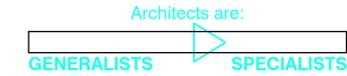
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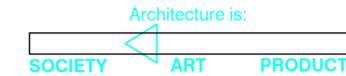
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FRAGILE: Dubai Mall - Dubai



Where architects sit along this spectrum speaks to the depth and boundaries of their practice's enquiry. Discussions on this theme sometimes revealed opportunities for learning about architecture by moving around it. More often they illustrated the architects ego and an ignorance or undervaluing of other trades or skills.

"We like to do everything ourselves, we'd build it all ourselves if we could." Carmody Groarke



For me, this theme is the most significant as it situates the architect and their work as belonging primarily to society, art or the market (product).

It drives how they interact with others, what they will compromise and informs how to judge the work as a success.

"We do the Omani look, traditional Arabic, contemporary Arabic...whatever they want." Woods Bagot



Architecture draws together multiple disciplines, skills and trades. It negotiates, coordinates and hybridises to produce a single outcome.

How architects think about this porosity of architecture and how they chose to organise themselves in relation to other contributors is philosophical and methodological. It is also legible in our environments.

"He just creates these amazing things that we never would have thought of...and then we respond to them and something new happens." FAT

# THEMES



The practices that we visited utilised both physical and digital modelling techniques, however each practice seemed to focus their energies on either physical or digital models during early design phases.

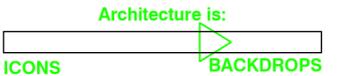
"We firmly believe that there are qualities that you can explore and communicate in a large scale physical model that you just can't capture in a render." David Chipperfield



Architects draw, model and document for varying reasons and audiences during the different phases of a project.

During the initial design phases, why architects draw or make models is symptomatic of where their ideas come from and how they develop them.

"We like to muck around with cool 3d forms, that's how we design." Juergen H Mayer



We visited buildings that were sculptural objects in space, that lacked connections, had nothing in common with their surrounds, were bossy about how you should move and what you should see.

We also experienced architecture that was quiet, framed views, set the scene for life to unfold.

"I drew a sketch of what it would like from above, with each of these arms and it ended up looking just like that." Benoy Architects



This is perhaps the most esoteric theme and also the most subjective. I am talking here about resilience programmatically, materially, conceptually and professionally.

Will this piece of architecture withstand a change of owner, a change of use, a change of taste of fashion?

"The programme changed several times during the design and will again in the future." Deadline Architects



ICON: Burj Kalifa - Dubai

I represented these themes as a spectrum between two extreme positions and mapped the attitudes and methodologies of the architects and environments that we visited.

This is a flawed and simple tool but has been useful for me to record and reflect. The locations along the spectrum on this page indicate my position.

On the following pages it maps my understanding of the Architects we met.

This report reflects on four practices to further explore these themes.



# realities : united

"To the extent that we work as architects we tend to work in collaboration with others...typically we come on board as artists and we work to strengthen the architects' concept - to somehow help it become more powerful"

Jan Edler, realities:united

realities:united collaborate. They assemble teams of specialists who then abandon their training and oscillate between disciplines, pursuing the idea, the technology, the strategy that will best serve the project - the concept.

They borrow from the performing arts to describe their methodology - notably recording musicians with the notion of 'featuring' - where a particular voice or aesthetic is leant to a project.

realities:united are committed to the creation of architectural experiences - to the sensations of shelter, protection, connection, stimulus. They employ whatever materials and technology are available to them - these are infrequently static building materials; more frequently light, pattern, picture.

The processes of uncovering and refining design in the realities:united studio appeared

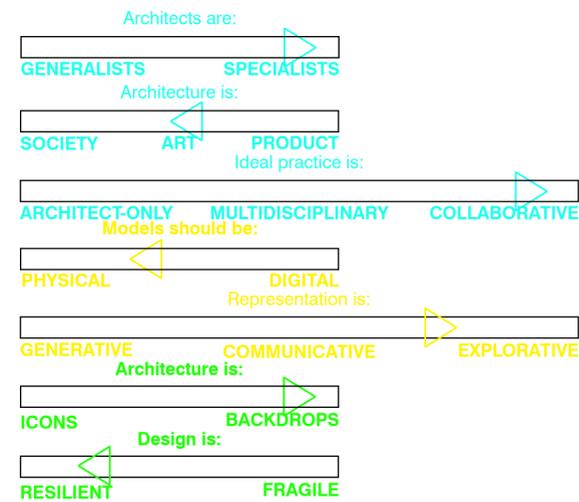
to be particularly skewed towards representation as a method of exploring and communicating - not as a generative tool.

To the extent that architects can explore and refine at 1:1 (rather than treating each project as a prototype and slowly eliminating mistakes over one's career and many buildings) realities:united seem to seek out opportunities to tighten the feedback loop between design, testing, refinement and 'execution'. They design installations, mount exhibitions, build prototypes, collaborate with product designers and, critically for me - they reflect, talk, teach, write and publish.

Perhaps most indicative of realities:united's success and the philosophy that imbues their work is that they are most commonly known for a building that they did not design, but that would not be the same building without the pixel skin that they conceived for it. Their proposed collaboration with BIG will see them choreograph the plume of an incinerator - the performative, weather pattern metaphor that will no doubt be the building's icon but which was not a part of the design until the brothers

were brought in to collaborate. realities:united's architecture is performative, mobile, peripheral - it is 'backdrop' to BIG's icon.

The firm's work is robust in a manner that 'real' architecture perhaps can not be - it is not made of materials that patina, that crack and age - it is assembled of components, infinitely replaceable and the images themselves infinitely programmable - the image can always be new, always moving, flickering and dancing.



Most of the practices that we visited are engaged in the reflective processes of collating, discussing and publishing their work. The format and content of these publications talk to several themes.

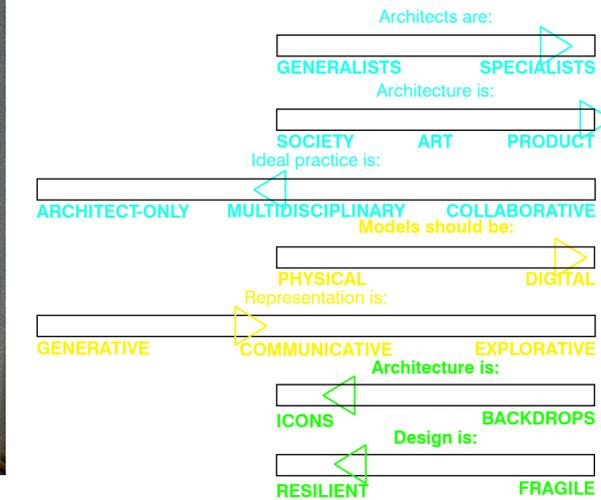
Publications include: 1) Atkins Design Catalogue; 2) Foster + Partners Catalogue; 3) FAT in MARK magazine; 4) AECOM Climate Design; 5) ARUP Associates in MARK magazine; 6) realities:united Featuring.

# ATKINS DESIGN

Atkins Design is sub brand / group of Atkins, a global multidisciplinary company that delivers architectural projects in addition to engineering, infrastructure and consulting services.

Like many multidisciplinary firms, Atkins Design propose that the co-location and integration of architects and engineers leads to built environment outcomes that better exploit opportunities for integration and synergy.

Other than a commitment to a particular mix of professionals (rather like the ingredients in a soup), I did not get a sense of any



other guiding philosophies.

This is, I think, a common issue for large, commercial practices that need to appeal to such a broad range of clients, projects, building typologies. There is no clear manifesto, no philosophy, no design language or aesthetic - rather the individual has a greater impact on the design outcomes on a project by project basis.

Process received even less consideration at the larger corporate firms than practice - there was no discussion about how ideas are generated, tested or refined. The narrative tends to be more product oriented, 'we can do a traditional one, a cosmopolitan one, a curvy one, a rectilinear one' as if clients are walking down the supermarket aisle.

The artefacts of the creative process seemed to be highly pragmatic, there was little play obvious in these offices - the processes of drawing and modelling were used judiciously, scribbled thoughts on butter paper straight into working BIM models - we saw little evidence of an iterative, explorative process (outside of course of the absolutely necessary

development of a project as real program, planning and budget constraints take affect).

Shaun and I talked a lot about branding during the tour - about the idea of emotional connections between a consumer and their product / brand of choice.

For me, large corporate firms like Atkins Design offer a degree of consistency, scale, risk mitigation that appeals to particular clients but they lack any personality.

The architectural products that emerge from such large, multidisciplinary firms are, I think, particularly robust - they have been safety-in-designed, risk-workshopped, value-engineered and subjected to countless 'design' workshops that ensure that all components have a place to be.

It is precisely because all of these competing needs are simply overlaid with each other, however, that the end product is entirely competent and robust but rarely interesting.

The buildings tend towards iconism but without any iconic thinking.

# FAT (FASHION ARCHITECTURE TASTE)

FAT's first project was a self-generated commission to create art for / as bus shelters. They conceived, convinced, curated and executed an exhibition across the City of London that brought the public into direct communication with and occupation of artists and designers work.

The practice's first significant architectural project was a commission for one of the directors' own residence, Blue House. This work remains significant within their oeuvre as one of the first articulations of their interests in the interstitial and in the manipulation of symbols.

Each of the directors is engaged in education and there is clearly an ongoing, self-reflexive conversation within their studio. This conversation facilitates a deep understanding, or at least the development of a language to name and contemplate, what kind of architecture they are engaged in creating and why.

FAT sits within the canon of contemporary architecture and the studio is self consciously aware of (and has even tried to kill off) their engagement with the language of modernism, in

particular, planning principles. But one of the things that I adore most about their design process is that it is both inward and outward looking: there is one eye on Mies and the other on the vernacular, the kitsch, the quotidian. The parts of me that love Pop art adore FAT's work, there is a kind of absence of artifice - an whole-hearted and sincere engagement in helping people live their lives in a way that is more beautiful, more fun and more richly textured.

At the same time I feel as though there is something intrinsically British about their aesthetic and the coming together of elements in their composition. There is a restraint - and delicate balance of whimsy and austerity.

The methodologies that FAT employ, namely collage and physical model making support and influence the aesthetic they pursue and the philosophies they work under.

There is a sense of absurdity that is life affirming in their work - and that is instantly recognisable.

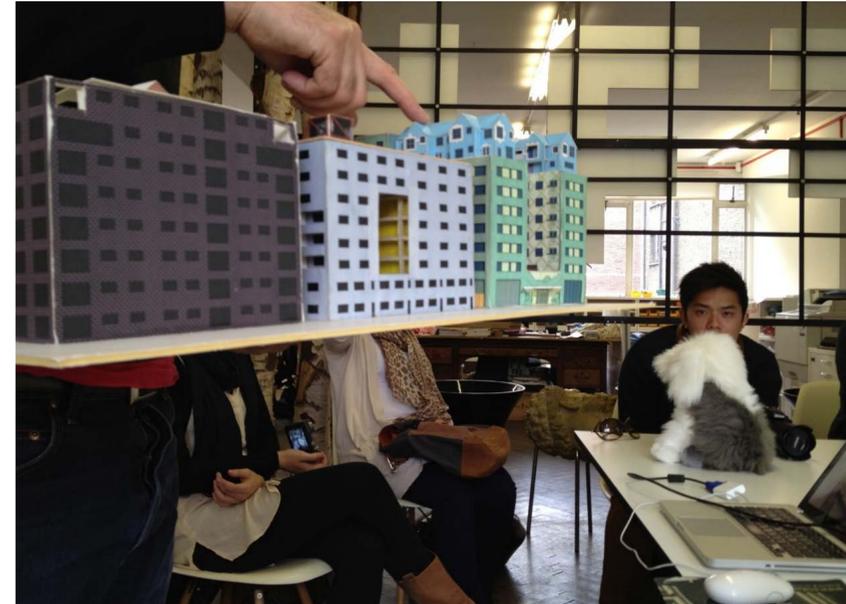
FAT's built work operates between multiple scales in reality and compositionally, that is they design urban projects and they

treat interiors like landscapes - a composition of discrete elements. Their architectural language is identifiable but their work foregrounds the people living out their lives in these spaces: these homes, community centres, advertising offices.

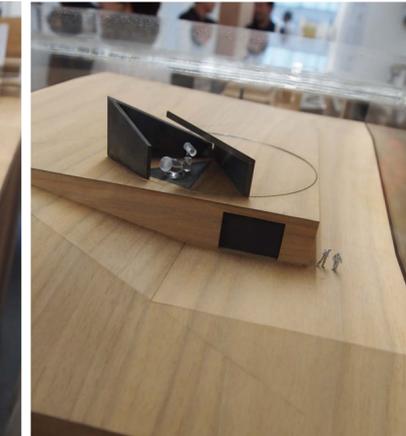
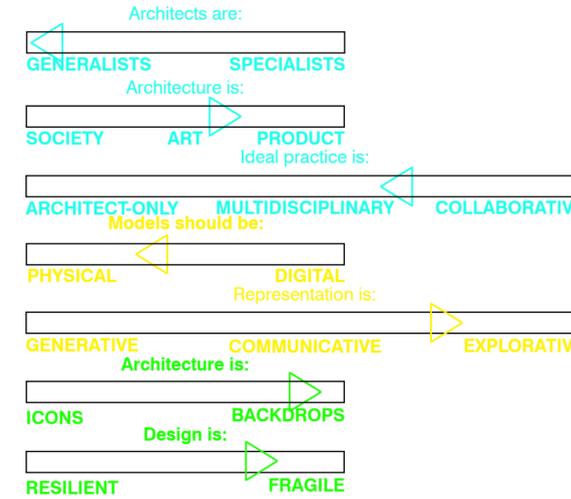
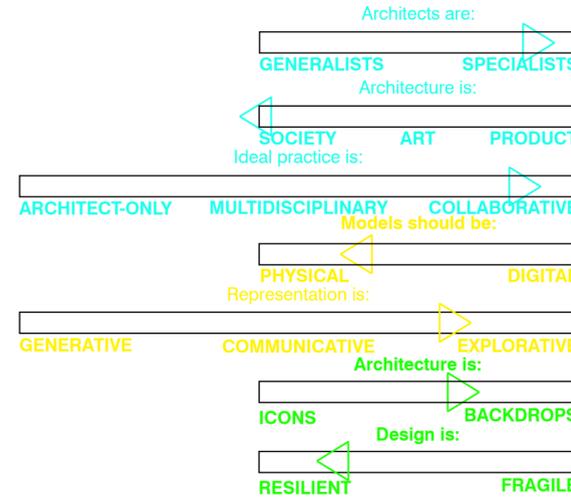
The extent to which they design around and for human habitation, behaviour and symbols makes their work, for me, a joyous backdrop.



COLLABORATIVE: Ceramic tile prototype by artist in collaboration with FAT - London



SOCIETY: Community In A Cube (CIAC) design models - London



EXPLORATIVE: Conceptual models - London

# CARMODY GROARKE

I am a big fan of Carmody Groarke's architecture. Their pop up restaurant at Westfield Stratford City is a favourite and I was incredibly excited to catch a glimpse of their studio and an insight into their design process.

I expected that they may talk about the influence of Japanese architecture on their work: as simple formal gestures; emphasis on light and shadow; and the

exploitation of translucency seem to be key components of their design language. Groarke was largely silent on their inspiration, however and did not seem to readily acknowledge influences, peers, mentors etc.

Having recently visited David Chipperfield's practice in Berlin we could identify practices and processes fundamental to Carmody Groarke's work that seem to have been borne or borrowed from that early apprenticeship. But this was not acknowledged or discussed.

Rather, in talking about their work, Andrew Groarke emphasised their philosophy that architecture is a setting, a backdrop: a carefully constructed series of spaces and frames that further focus inhabitants' senses on the site, the program and each other. Although compositionally and aesthetically resolved in very different manners, this philosophy underpins both FAT and Carmody Groarke's work - an interest in generating architecture from the performative aspects of inhabitation and use.

A key difference for me between the authenticity of this claim by FAT and Carmody Groarke is that the latter's product is always

immaculate, minimal, serene and highly stylistically refined. The 7 July Memorial, although beautiful, seems brutal in its deliberate erasure and negation of the individual families' desires for some acknowledgment of their loss: somewhere to put their son's football scarf. I can't help but think that FAT would have embraced these understandable emotions and created a memorial that was more embracing and therefore meaningful, if less architecturally exquisite.

Similarly, both firms collaborate closely with artists and operate at the fringes of 'traditional' architecture: designing pop-ups, installations, exhibitions etc in addition to their built work.

I get the sense, however, that the motivations for collaboration differ between the two practices: FAT seem to relish bringing specialists together to share knowledge and spark new thinking whereas Carmody Groarke seem confident that as Architects they are generalists capable of anything. Collaboration seems to be a pragmatic strategy for diversifying client bases and project types. It will be interesting to see if it is a practice that they remain committed to.



ART: 7 July Memorial, Hyde Park - London



# THE END



The 11-day DST was many of the things that I expected it to be: incredibly exciting, humbling, exhausting, huge fun and insanely stimulating. What has followed has been nearly 2 months of reflection, ongoing conversation and research. The ripples are starting.

Dulux's vision, an exceptional example of corporate leadership has changed the course of my career. Not wildly and not instantly (my mentor wisely advised, "No change! Don't do anything drastic for at least 6 months!") but deeply.

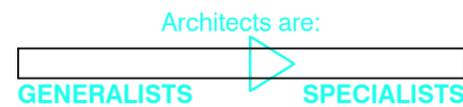
I am setting in train changes to my practice, my process (and therefore product) that I hope will realise and deliver upon the investment made in me by Dulux, the Institute of Architects and Davis Langdon.

What do I know now that I didn't know before? My predilections and values are unchanged: the kind of design philosophy that I respond to; the formal, spatial and textural compositions that I most like. But what has come into particularly sharp focus for me is the connections between the themes I have identified.

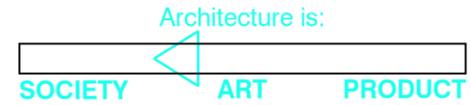
How you think about what you are doing and why you are doing it informs how you go about it and that inevitably impacts the outcome.

You can't be inconsistent across these themes and expect it to not have an impact. You can't skip particular processes due to program or financial constraints and hope to still achieve an exceptional outcome.

I have articulated some goals around each of the themes and will share some of them here:



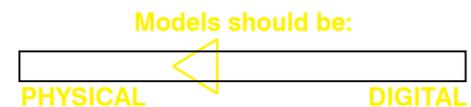
Find some more specialists! I'm lucky enough to work with some gurus but I am going to deliberately hunt down and seek opportunities to collaborate with some more specialists who work in the areas that I am currently engaged and interested in.



Prioritise understanding behaviour! It's too easy to skip over thorough study of how people inhabit space and focus on form, fashion and wilful architectural concepts. I am going to find ways to describe the value of this to clients and engage them in the process of making sure that my architecture belongs to its users.



Collaborate! This is perhaps one of the most significant areas of enquiry to emerge for me. I feel as though I may need to draft an allegiance document, "I pledge my allegiance to this project and the ideas that it explores, not to personalities involved, not to my discipline, its cannon and current best practice."



Physical EVERYTHING! This tour was a fantastic reminder for me that human experiences can not be completely simulated. The best architects in the world make models: lots of them. At all scales. All the way through the design process. That is enough endorsement.

Draw to think! To see! I diagram, doodle endlessly through out all of my life, when working, making shopping lists, communicating with my teams.

The danger for me in practice and in charge of teams is the quickening - the shorthand that develops - the entirely pragmatic, quick exploration and resolution then transformed into communication and handed on.

I love the languages that we speak as architects, our technical language, poetic one, persuasive one. I love that we drill down, specify, label and describe things that others must use a string of words to describe.

But in the process of professional practice, drawing as a way of seeing gets marginalised. We draw for clients, for builders, for ourselves when teasing out an idea but less to understand.

I am preparing my own curriculum - my own activities to reconnect me to things that get squeezed out over time, and this is one.

For all those extra drawings and all of the things that I have seen and will uncover - thankyou DST.

SPECIALIST: Neues Museum by David Chipperfield Architects in association with Julian Harram



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