

A TALE OF THREE CITIES

DULUX STUDY TOUR // POST TOUR REPORT // HANNAH SLATER



COPENHAGEN



LONDON



MADRID

The Dulux study tour has been an incredible opportunity. It has provided a unique platform for learning and broadening my architectural knowledge through travel. Beyond the amazing built work, the tour gave us the opportunity to step into a number of offices and provided great insight into the diverse ways different practices function. Through targeting young and emerging architects the tour provides the opportunity to share the experience with other like minded and passionate professionals. Most importantly, it has made me ever aware of the opportunity we have in Australia and the incredibly rich and diverse context that we work within and respond to.

Experiencing so much in such a short amount of time was somewhat overwhelming. I have tried to recount most of what was seen and experienced through this report which summarises the meanderings and learnings that were personally accrued over the course of the tour and aims consolidate these in two key ways; firstly through an urban reflection that considers and describes the urban realm and framework of each of the cities. This is important in understanding the broader condition each practice and work was responding to, and secondly through an architectural lens by trying to identify particular themes that emerged over the course of the visit.

I would like to extend a huge thanks to Dulux for sponsoring the study tour which truly exceeded my expectations. Particularly Phil White and Mat Henderson for the opportunity and organisation. Additionally, Daniela Crawley from the Australian Institute of Architects and Kaitlin Butler from Architecture Media for prompting and encouraging such diverse conversation and reflection over the course of the trip. Finally, to the four other Dulux recipients for being wonderful travel companions, their ongoing advice and for continually challenging my perceptions and opinions; Qianyi, Katy, Matthew and Chris.



STOP 01 // COPENHAGEN

THE CITY

The first stop was Copenhagen which has undoubtedly become the benchmark for exemplary urban planning and design over the last 70 years. Historically, the city adopts a 'finger plan', implemented to assist in controlling suburbanisation around infrastructure corridors that connect back the centre of Copenhagen through rail transport. One of the most significant moves in recent years has been the cities incremental removal of cars from the centre and reinstatement of people and cycle infrastructure. Much of this recent urban change and the ultimate success of Copenhagen can be attributed to the work of Jahn Gehl.

“What does it take to be a good architect? If you want to be a good architect you must love people... it is about constructing a framework for life”

Jan Gehl, Principal, Jan Gehl Architects

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ARCHITECT?

For the last 2 years my experience has been in the realm of masterplanning and urban design. For this reason, in each city I became very interested not only in the projects and practice visits but the city, public spaces and urban form. Perhaps the architect that spoke most candidly about this was Jan Gehl. Visiting his office was a great privilege and allowed the opportunity to engage in a direct dialogue regarding his ongoing involvement in the city. The most significant personal learning from my time in Copenhagen was best summarised through a question Gehl asked of us; 'What does it take to be a good architect? If you want to be a good architect you must love people. Architecture is not about physical things, it is about constructing a framework for life...' Indeed, this sentiment was evident through the work of a number of practices and projects visited and inevitably challenged by others.

During the practice visit to Gehl Architects the conversation became focussed around the role of the architect in city making. He identified that architecture does not have to be expensive, in fact it is better if it is inexpensive. He supports the notion of building very simply through 'glueing' the architecture on the outside of the building. He discussed the opportunity for stairs, balconies and trellis' as elements that serve to enliven buildings and encourage activation. Gehl further identified the two most important elements in making a neighborhood and fostering community as being; the street - which accommodates movement, and the square - which establishes spaces that the eye can oversee. Together these elements are seen to enliven the urban realm.

THE URBAN DILEMMA

More recently, there has been extensive master planning for a new city region, Orestad. The planning of this component is a clear departure from the original finger plan, fragmented from the city and divided by vast amounts of agriculture and greenfield sites. Walking through Orestad was a strange opposition to Copenhagen's lively and dynamic centre, and was eerily vacant and lifeless. There are significant issues with the residences which are currently disconnected to any civil, social and public domain. The stark disconnect



5. Jan Utzon; Bagsvaard Church
6. BIG; 8 Housing
7. BIG; 8 Housing
8. Lundgaard and Tranberg; Danish Playhouse



1. Lundgaard and Tranberg; Teitgen Housing
2. Terroir; Malmö Maritime University
3. Henning Larsen; Practice Visit
4. Jan Utzon; Bagsvaard Church



between the teachings of Gehl and the lack of good urban and public amenity experienced through the visit in turn coloured a number of discussions with practices to follow. A number of residential buildings by BIG dominate the development in Ørestad. The 8 house and VM housing project undoubtedly have very strong conceptual underpinnings and architectural diagrams, however their built success is questionable with little life and sparseness on the ground plane and between buildings. It is difficult to judge whether this is a result of the urban planning or architectural response, or a combination of both.

THE HUMAN SCALE

Copenhagen delivered in providing a diverse spectrum of project work, from the urban to the very intimate as experienced through the work of practices including Utzon and Lundgaard and Tranberg. One of the highlights in Copenhagen was visiting Utzon's Bagsvaard Church which we hastily sped to from the airport the afternoon we arrived. The exterior of the building reads as a white box, composed of matt and glazed ceramic tiles whose patternation subtly reveals a story of the building structure behind. The mono material and purity of the exterior is successful in concealing the internal drama. Sweeping concrete forms create spatially complex ceilings which cast diffused, soft light across the pews and altar. The volume and handling of light creates an appropriate calmness and quietness. Jan Utzon shared stories of working on the church as a young architecture student. He revealed the project was originally priced 10% over budget with the remedy being an exercise in reducing the documentation and shrinking the building to 90% of its original scale.

Lundgaard and Tranberg were another personal highlight. Lene welcomed us into the office encouraging us to gather around the meeting table offering tea and biscuits and prompting a conversation with us rather than about the work of the practice. This was a welcome shift from the structure of other visits and provided the opportunity to critically reflect on our time in the city. Three projects by the practice were visited, all equally carefully resolved and beautifully detailed and each underpinned by strong design drivers. The Teitgen student housing project is innovative in its circular donut plan locating common public spaces around a central courtyard and private living spaces facing outwards to the view. The second project, The Royal Danish Play house, sits at the harbour and is comprised of three distinct forms; the auditorium, the stage tower, and the service area. Each specific program is articulated and expressed differently making the logic of the building easily read and understood. In turn, the internal workings and logic become transparent and the building easily navigable. The third project, located directly beside the playhouse, is a series of stepping golden pavilions which occupy the harbour promenade edge and command attention along the waterfront. Each made of Tecu the boxes reveal their construction chronology, displaying a slightly different golden patina. The work of Lundgaard and Tranberg displayed careful consideration to place and were each in their own right generous in their contribution beyond architecture to the urban realm.



STOP 02 // LONDON

THE CITY

In order to understand the architecture of London it is important to appreciate the urban form, its history and morphology. Greater London covers 600 square miles and the city has an interesting tapestry. Unlike other cities it is a patchwork of areas from different periods with historic structures scattered across the sprawling, contemporary city. A number of significant events have contributed to the fabric. Most notably, the great fire of 1666 destroyed 4/5 of the city, as a result only a small portion of pre-1700 London buildings and structures remain today. Additionally, the city experienced significant devastation during the second world war where much of London was bombed and has since been rebuilt. Despite this, the 20th century saw the largest urban expansion in its history with much of the urban fabric reflecting this era.

PLANNING REGULATIONS

As a result, much of the built form of London is determined by significant view lines which favour conservation areas and historically significant architecture, including; St Pauls Cathedral, the Tower of London and the Monument. Regulations which come in the form of the London view management framework safeguard long distance views and culminate around St Pauls. The tour visited the recently completed Rogers Stirk Harbor and Partners, Leadenhall building, which is the epitome of this condition. Its form is a direct outcome of the view lines which carve up and determine the urban mass of the city centre. A number of discussions regarding the drivers of the architectural form were prompted and divided the group. Some argued and speculated upon whether the regulations were pre-emptively placing less significance on future built work and thereby compromising future architectural outcomes. Others passionately argued favouring the role of the regulations in the preservation of cultural heritage for the public. In any case the framework has produced a number of formally interesting buildings which adopt 'token' namesakes including Norman fosters 'Gherkin', Rogers, 'Cheese grater', Grimshaw's 'Walkie Talkie' and KPF's 'Scalpel' which is currently under construction. The view corridors determine the emergence of this cluster of icons in the city of London, their location and proximity to one another creates an interesting formal 'standoff' of sorts. Our first day in London took us past and into many of these sites, guided by the speedy Ken Wilkison with whom many of us struggled to keep pace with.

THE EXPENSE OF LIVING

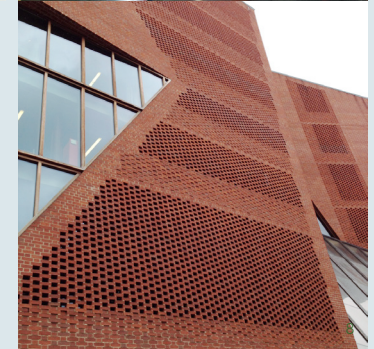
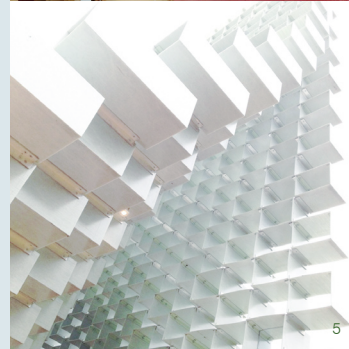
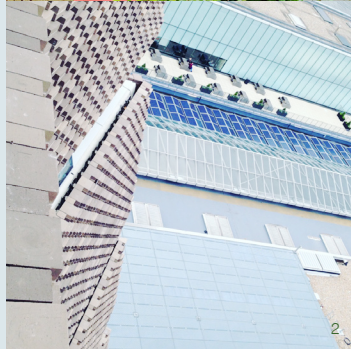
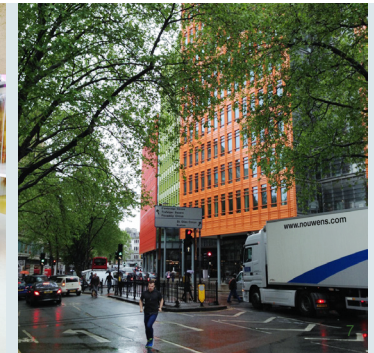
Much of the architectural work seen during the London leg of the tour was dominated by residential work. The ever increasing London housing prices along with the demand to accommodate for the population is an ongoing and significant challenge for the city. One area of gentrification and urban uplift is Elephant and Castle, a historically 'dodgy' and unsafe region north of London city. dRMM is working within this area and during the tour we were taken to Trafalgar Place which is significant in its contribution to a larger city rejuvenation strategy for the Elephant and Castle region. The project integrates 25% social housing in the scheme, which has become legislated in new residential developments with a view to encourage a more diverse socio economic mix. The prevalence of residential work permeated through a number of other practices including Piercy

***“Like the view lines
in the city, the long
history of London is
perhaps conciously and
subconciously influencing
architects contributions to
the urban fabric”***

Architect, Practice name



1. dRMM; Trafalgar Square
2. Herzog and De Meuron; Tate Modern
3. Selgas Cano; Office Fitout
4. Assemble; Studio space



5. BIG; Serpentine Pavilion
6. Selgas Cano; Office Fitout
7. Renzo Piano; Central St Giles
8. O'Donnell Tuomey; School of Economics

and Co, Studio Octopi, Alfred Hall Monaghan and Morris, Wilkinson Eyre and David Chipperfield architects. However, it appears that the absolute urgency of the issue along with planning controls is stifling architectural outcomes with the tour members agreeing a need to drive more diverse and innovative solutions for this complex problem.

SCALE AND DIVERSITY

One of the most significant 'take-aways' was the diversity of London's practices. This became most obvious on the second day of the London where we visited practices at opposite ends of the spectrum. We began the day at Assemble, a collective formed by a group of peers on their year out of university. The group occupies an old industrial site in Stratford, on the outer periphery of the city of London. A key component on the site is a brightly pastel coloured concrete tiled structure which houses a number of leasable spaces for young emerging professionals. This strategic business model allows the group to acquire rent from the space which acts as an additional source of income, easing financial pressure for the young practice.

On the opposite end of the spectrum sits Foster and Partners who we visited later in the afternoon. Occupying a significant portion of inner city riverfront land the practice functions as a campus, housing over 1400 staff in London and 1500 globally. The tour took the group through an incredibly diverse series of spaces, including animation, sound recording and composing rooms, materials libraries and model making laboratories. Our tour concluded in the 'ideas room' which was a hive of activity housing a cafe, library and lounges. A truly global practice Foster and Partners has projects all over the world and functions 24 hours a day. The scale and variety of project work undoubtedly reflects the number and diversity of staff with projects ranging from furniture, architecture and the master planning of mega cities to the design of the new NASA headquarters on Mars.

Zaha Hadid's practice sits somewhere in the middle in terms of scale with 350 staff and is located in a converted school building in central London. The earlier school occupation makes for a maze like and slightly disorienting experience, comprised of a series of small vestibules connected through a number of staircases and corridors. With the recent passing of Hadid there appeared to be no shortage of work with the office having an intense energy and buzz. Tour participants were commonly interested in the multiple projects proposed for construction in Australia. Specifically, the multi residential tower in Toowong, Brisbane and commercial and mixed use tower in Collins Street, Melbourne led much of the conversation. Both projects adopt a similar façade treatment whereby the structure is integrated in a decorative woven skin. Characteristic of Hadid's process, the projects pushed formal and surface boundaries, where the outcomes are very much driven by advancements in parametric modelling software. Rhino and grasshopper are used in the office and become the tools that support this endeavour. Many models feature throughout the office proving the extensive model making and fabrication tools are well used, encouraging the iterative physical testing of the complex forms.



STOP 03 // MADRID

THE CITY

The study tour concluded in Madrid, with a bicycle tour around the city, led by Werner. As we cycled the intrinsic value of public space in Spain became obvious, with much of the life of the city happening on the street. Werner identified the city as historically being constructed out of a series of facades. Oftentimes, the facades would be erected with the absence of any built form beyond, a mechanism of 'smoke and mirrors' which allowed the public stage set to be adapted and accommodate for a variety of events to happen on the streets. This was a provocative thought and contrary to the previous two cities.

“Often people talk about Madrid as a monumental city, but its actually about the ornament, the facades”

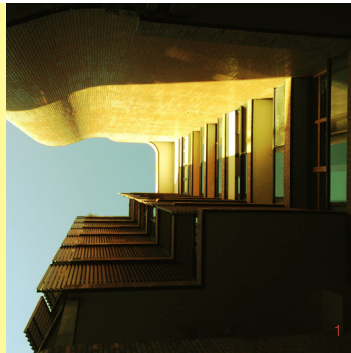
Werner Durrer, Tour Guide

In recent years Burgos & Garrido Arquitectos Asociados has played a key role in constructing a transformative piece of urban infrastructure that taps into the existing city, the Rio Madrid project. This project looked at the 8 year staged conversion of a significant parcel of land, over 6km long, which was key in liberating a much broader, 60km long green corridor. This recently completed project was significant in offering the Manzanares River, a significant water corridor, back to the public.

ECONOMIC STRUGGLES

The Madrid practice visits revealed an interesting condition that has emerged as a result of the 2008 economic downturn which dried up much of the architectural work in Spain. Three key strategies appeared consistent to compensate for the unfortunate economic condition. Firstly, competitions dominate and account for the majority of work with many practices relying on winning for ongoing job security. Secondly, many of the practices are situated in Madrid but complete almost entirely all of their work externally, much throughout Europe. This was particularly evident with AGI Architecture who complete 90% of their work in Kuwait which they attribute to their ability to remain afloat during the crisis. The third identified strategy was the tendency to have significant teaching commitments and relationships with universities. Despite the poor economic state many architects remain optimistic and reflect upon the downturn as being a key catalyst for more intense and radical architectural outcomes.

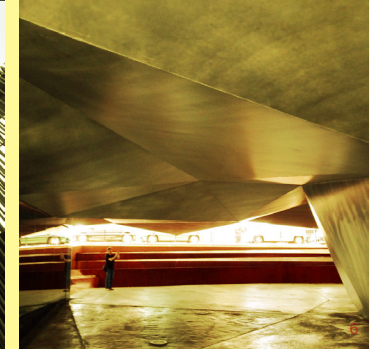
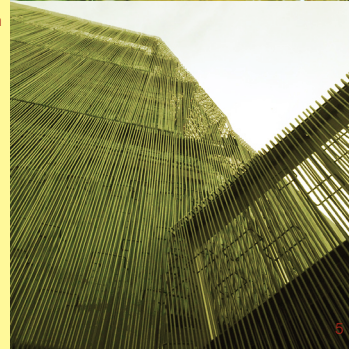
This optimism was particularly evident in the work of Estudio Entresitio which was a personal highlight in Madrid. Upon arrival to the office we were greeted by Maria who spoke animatedly and passionately about the work of the office, explaining schemes through versions of carefully handcrafted models, disassembling and reassembling them to convey the internal workings. The office had a strong and rigorous design process, underpinned by a meticulous desire to deliver incredibly well resolved and considered work. A project of particular



5. Amid/Cero9; Giner de los Rios Foundation
6. Herzog and de Meuron; Caixa Forum
7. Jean Nouvel; Reina Sofia Museum
8. Amid/Cero9; Giner de los Rios Foundation



1. Apartamentos Girasol; Jose Antonio Coderch
2. Estudio Entresitio; Museum of Memory
3. Selgas Cano; Office
4. Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners; Madrid Airport



interest was the museum of memories, a series of gallery pavilions with large light scoops and traversable tiled roof terraces. Much of the delight in their work can be attributed to a preoccupation with the human scale with many of the models experimenting with surface and materiality.

THE FOSTER LEGACY

The profile of Norman Foster became further apparent in Madrid when we were given the rare opportunity to visit the foundation which will showcase his lifework. We were led through a series of carefully curated rooms which exhibit the architects work tracing back to early sketches and college applications. I was amazed and overwhelmed meeting the 5 full time curators who revealed vast compactus containing over 1100 sketchbooks documenting the thoughts and notes of the architect from as early as primary school with their white cotton gloves. I couldn't help considering how far in advance Foster had pre-empted his professional success the rare position of being able to curate his own legacy within his lifetime.

WORKING FROM HOME

The Dulux study tour ended in the same way it began, with a wonderfully intimate and humbling project, Selgas Canos own house and practice. For the last time we piled into two cabs to make the hour trip out of the city to a wooded, leafy neighborhood in the north eastern suburbs of Madrid. Upon arrival to the site the office is approached through strolling through the garden and descending a flight of stairs to the sunken workspace. Curved acrylic walls form roofs and allow the sunken office to truly become part of the forest floor. Fallen leaves form a secondary canopy and cast random dappled light inside the office. The house and studio are two separate buildings, however they speak the same language and fold into one another and into their surrounding context. The envelope of the house is similarly composed of opaque and transparent panels which strategically moderate between the private and more public spaces of the house. Primary colours become an important organising factor with red defining the private realm, blue the public and yellow the office. Cano invited us to explore the house and we each peeled off traversing the stepping timber deck and roofscape peering down skylights into spaces below. It was a wonderful privilege to visit the Silicon House and office which is a celebration of both the natural environment as well as the social approach taken by the practice.