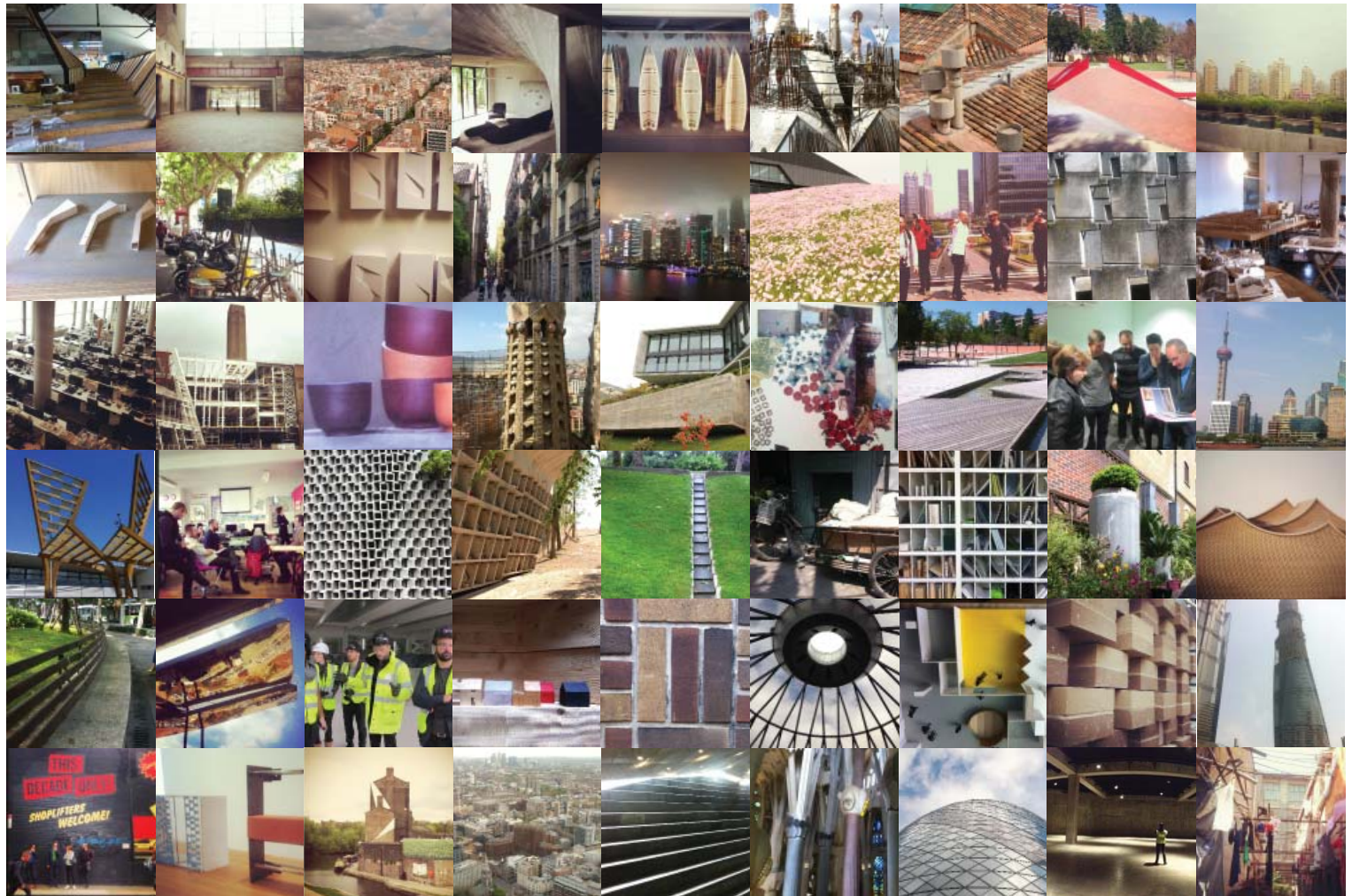


## 2013 DULUX STUDY TOUR REPORT - MEL BRIGHT



### SUMMARY / INTRO

The Dulux Study tour represented a rare opportunity to be totally immersed in an appreciation of the many facets of world architecture. Taking the time out of life to stop and visit great cities and experience great buildings has been hugely inspirational. The Dulux Study tour accelerated my growing sense of the possibilities for future directions in architecture and I'm sure this will resonate with me for many years. 'Behind the scenes' site visits gave us insightful access to wonderful buildings in their embryonic state. The city tours were inspiring and the practice visits gave us an invaluable window into the many different ways one can pursue the business and art of architecture. Conversations and debates within the group were a real highlight and I have come away with a sense of communal connection with some brilliant colleagues from across Australia.

The key thing the Dulux Study Tour has given me is the opportunity to gain a new perspective on my own practice of architecture and where it sits within the global context. The means by which practices great and small go about their processes seem to be of limitless variety, but dedication and enthusiasm are commonalities in the path to success in Architecture regardless of how one chooses to define it. I also found it great to meet some of the women who are juggling motherhood and practice. It seems that the family / work balance is a challenge everywhere and at all levels.





# SHANGHAI



## CITY

### A CITY OF EXTREMES

Shanghai..... a city of extremes. From the fine grain of the small shops and lanes to the super-skyscrapers of Pudong, we were given a fantastic walking tour of the city by the lovely, and enthusiastic Ansgar. It was 'study tour boot camp' with non-stop walking and no breaks but the group held up well and the delicious lunch at 3pm was well worth the wait.

As an architect there is a sense that one should be impressed by all of the progress. There has been a huge amount of development in such a short time and the scale and size of the city and its buildings certainly are impressive. However, what stands out for me are the small moments of occupation and engagement with the city: the washing hanging out over the street, the men carrying the waste for recycling on their bikes and the shared kitchen facilities in a small villa in which each tenant had their own light and tap.

With a visit to the Urban Planning exhibition centre there was much discussion on the planning of the city. In the city fabric, it is possible to clearly see the points where the planning has shifted away from being pedestrian and bike focused and onto the car. In the older areas the buildings are bursting at their seams and the streets are filled with activity spilling out onto the street. The mix of program at a fine grain gives the areas texture and life. In the new areas the large and impressive skyscrapers dominate the skyline, the scale shift is huge and the space between the buildings is vast. Life in these areas is more about moving quickly in your car to the next destination and it is not the place for the pedestrian or a game of cards on the street.



## PRACTICE: NERI & HU

Diverse range of locally specific projects.

There seems to be a strong desire in China to produce 'global' buildings but these buildings often do not feel very attached to their context. Arguably this is because the existing texture and grain of the local context is ignored for the next new shiny building. For this reason it was such a pleasure to visit Neri and Hu, a local Shanghai practice engaging with local vernacular and typology in a very beautiful, restrained way. Neri and Hu are also expanding the boundaries of architectural practice by making ceramics, lights and furniture. This was impressive to see and was a real inspiration to where I would like to see my practice in the future.



## SHANGHAI



### PROJECT: ARCHI UNION - SILK WALL

I was really looking forward to seeing this building because of its use of locally sourced inexpensive materials to produce a very elegant patterned 'silk wall.' The wall is constructed from concrete blocks that shift slightly in angle across the facade of the building to create a fabric-like screen. The concrete blocks are a readily available in China and Archi Union play to the strengths of this situation through their use of low tech construction systems. They are also in a position to use the country's large numbers of unskilled and affordable labour to their advantage. While this facade was beautiful I was disappointed that the 'silk wall' is rarely experienced from the interior of the building.

### PROJECT: TOBACCO TYCOON VILLA

One of the Shanghai building highlights hidden away in the back laneways of Bubbling Well Lane was the tobacco tycoon's villa, beautiful brick detailing with custom corner bricks made for each corner.



### CITY

The visit to the Morphosis project meant that we needed to drive for kilometres through the reality of China. Repeated apartment blocks seem to march endlessly out on the horizon and we were all hit with the reality of the problems associated with housing the ever expanding population. The drive also gave us an appreciation for the true scale of the city.



### PRACTICE: ARCHI UNION

This visit was a great combination of seeing beautiful buildings and prototypes as well as seeing the inside of the practice. Archi Union are combining high-tech modelling with low tech construction methodologies. There was much talk of the screens adapting to the environment, however I would have liked to see a much more responsive designs that could control sun shading and privacy. We also saw the beautiful models of the Lanxi Curtilage project. There is an obvious connection with the local context and typologies in this project - a real delight to see.

### CITY: ELEVATED PLANTERS

The street highlight was the elevated planters that maintained space for bike parking underneath. These inventive ways to squeeze in green space in small dense streets were fantastic to see. There was a concerted effort across the entire city to squeeze greenery in and planters were often hung off the side of the freeway overpasses or located in the centre of small roads.



### PROJECT: MORPHOSIS

The green roof on this project was really beautiful and we were lucky enough to see the field of pink flowers in bloom. The premise of the dragon shaped building seemed appropriate to the program of video gamers but it really felt like a building that had landed on a site with very little relationship to the local context. Once inside the heavily guarded grounds it felt as though you could have been anywhere in the world – the obsession with global architecture in China over local contextual buildings is disappointing.



LONDON



CITY

We packed in a huge range of studio and project visits in London. From the small emerging office of Studio Octopi to the huge Foster machine. The absolutely stunning Herzog and DeMeuron Tate Modern gallery extension touched our souls, while the opulence and excess of the Chipperfield project brought into question issues of sustainability. The scale and size of the Foster office practice means that they can afford a considerable amount of resources. The dedicated ‘materials research’ team has a highly organised material library and the enviable ability to prepare comparison data on the embodied energy of any material. All practices visited placed a huge emphasis on physical models and it was great to see the rigorous testing process of all the projects.



PRACTICE / PROJECT: ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

The Architecture Foundation is a really interesting not-for-profit group that are doing some really engaging work. The projects that they are getting off the ground are focused on trying to improve the quality of the built environment. Often these projects are quite small but they deal with larger issues in an innovative way. The Foundation puts considerable effort into getting small, emerging practices involved. We visited the Gibbons Rent project by Australian architect Andrew Burns that was achieved through this Foundation. The project converts a network of laneways in central London into an urban park.

PRACTICE:  
Zaha Hadid

The lovely Effie gave us some brilliant insights into the reality of working at Zaha’s mega practice- definitely not for me but interesting to see.



PROJECT: FOSTER’S  
GHERKIN

A surprise delight of the tour was the visit to the members’ bar at the top of the Foster ‘Gherkin’ building. It was particularly good to visit this after visiting the underwhelming Shard viewing platform. The domed fully glazed ceiling and circular plan configuration of the Gherkin created a wonderful space that really gave the feeling of being up in the clouds.





LONDON



**PRACTICE: STUDIO OCTOPI**

This studio visit was really engaging as the young practice seemed genuinely enthusiastic to meet us. Studio Octopi are doing brilliant work and the very accommodating directors Chris and James talked us through their elegant and highly considered work. The Stratford kiosk project was a favourite and I am sure that soon we will be seeing their work everywhere. Visiting an emerging practice like this was really beneficial for those of us trying to get our own practices going, Chris and James are at that next step and it was great to discuss their journey with them. I am really pleased to have spent some time with them and to have made the connection.



**PROJECT: CENTRAL ST MARTINS + GRANARY SQ**

This was a very quick visit to Stanton Williams' Central St Martins project. It was brilliant to see the installation, 'Across the Buildings' by the Swiss artist Felice Varini at Granary Square out the front. The refined and controlled work of Stanton Williams in this adaptive re-use project was great to see. Visible scars of the building's past have been retained and the new elements have been carefully inserted.

**PRACTICE: CARMODY GROARKE**

Carmody Groarke showed us an impressive range of projects. Many of the projects show a strong engagement with production processes that allow them to find efficiencies and to produce inventive outcomes. Their temporary scaffold project on top of a Westfield shopping centre was a favourite and it was interesting to hear that they consider these temporary projects as products not buildings.

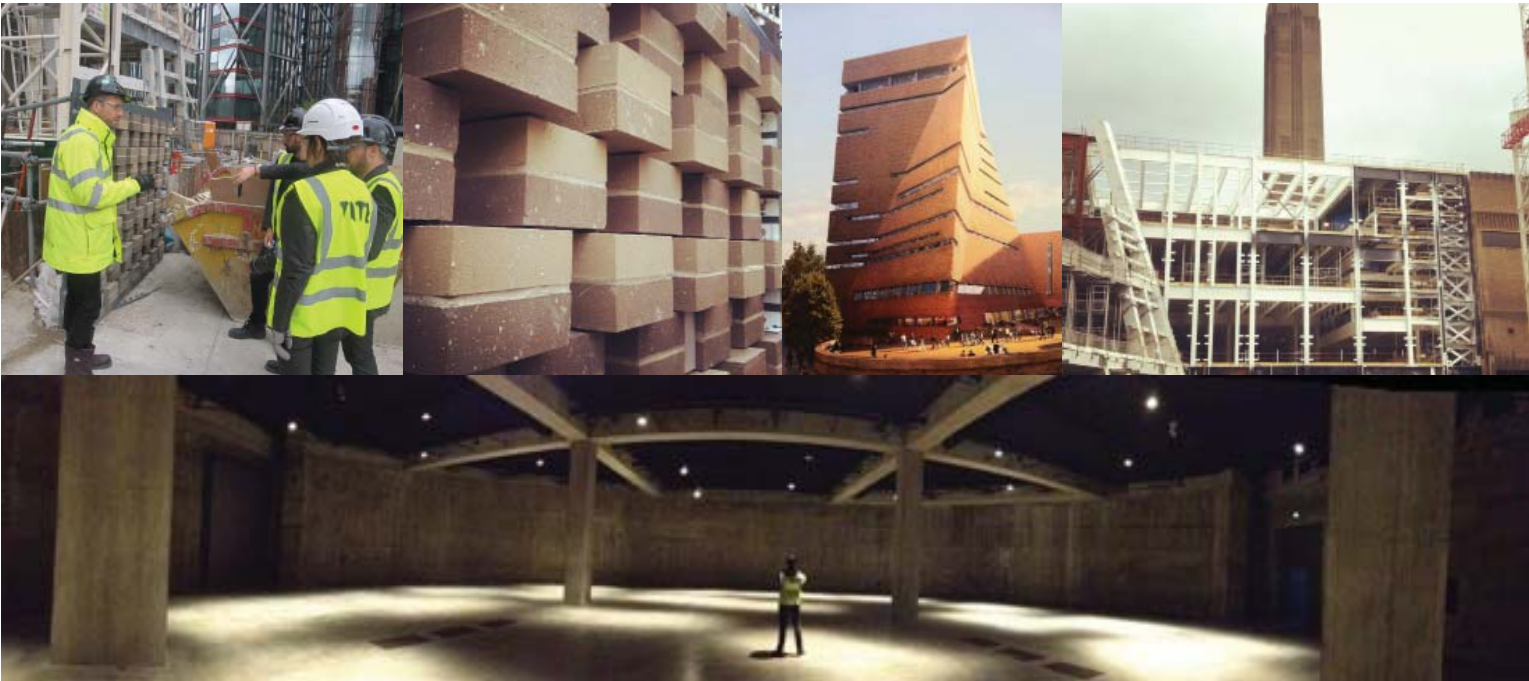


**PRACTICE: dRmM**

The director Alex of dRmM generously showed us some of their social housing work and the much published 'Sliding House' was interesting to see.

**PROJECT: TATE 02 - HERZOG + DeMEURON**

The visit to the new Tate Modern extension and the tour of the construction site lead by John O'Mara from Herzog and DeMeuron was a highlight of the trip. The lower level spaces are almost complete and we were able to stand in the oil tanks that have been converted to gallery spaces. The opportunity to experience the beauty of these raw spaces was a brilliant. Externally we were able to see the beautifully detailed concrete structure and we had some insightful discussions about the brick detailing. The brick screen prototype was great to see and we were all inspired by the use of new techniques and custom square bricks.





# BARCELONA



## CITY

Barcelona is such an impressive city, it is a joy to get lost in its lanes and meander through the pedestrian and bike friendly streets. The little piazzas where tapas and cava are available late into the night make the experience of the city pure pleasure. The pace of the tour slowed down a bit here, which meant that we had some time to soak up the city. It is truly a great city that manages its density well – the Barcelona blocks with their chamfered corners make civic spaces out of each intersection. Each block has an internal shared courtyard for central patios and gardens provides light and ventilation. The model provides many ways of how to manage density.

The inner city areas with their compressed lanes give clear preference to pedestrians. Bikes slow down to give way to people on foot and cars are often excluded as they cannot fit in the small lanes. There is also a sense in the city that design doesn't stop at the edge of the building, instead it goes out onto the streets into the public spaces and is considered down to the small detail of the drains. There are many lessons here that could be considered in Australia.



## PROJECT: MERCAT DELS ENCANTS - b720

We walked past this beautiful market canopy underconstruction. The highly reflective and angled, underside projects the activity below out onto the city. The city would also be reflected back into the market when inside.

## PROJECT / PRACTICE: X-HOUSE CADVAL + SOLA-MORALES

It was interesting to visit the small practice Cadval and Sola-Morales and hear about how they manage a practice and family in 2 different cities (Barcelona and Mexico City). We were lucky to be given a personal tour of the X house by Eduardo. The X disappears inside the house – it was not a formalistic exercise - rather the design came from a desire to take advantage of the different views on the site.



## PROJECT: PARC NOU BARRIS - ARRIOLE AND FIOLE

The left over space between existing buildings in outer Barcelona has been transformed from a 'terrain vague' landscape into a vibrant urban park. The carefully folded landscape that negotiates all of the different levels was simply a joy to walk through. The design is a topographical architecture that makes connections between the existing streets and levels of the site, and creates a plaza. The sun shade elements connect the park together at a larger scale and provided much needed shade while the newly planted trees grow.





## BARCELONA



### PRACTICE: EMBT

I enjoyed visiting the thriving office of EMBT, with their huge numbers of interns working away in the model workshop and their exhibition space and model storage rooms. The boxes and boxes of packaged up models were interesting to see as were the larger scale collages throughout the office. The power of using unpaid interns to test multiple design options and produce large amounts of work at little expense to a company was evident here. I am concerned about the devaluing effect that this has on the architectural profession and would like to see more of the larger design offices making better efforts to create a more sustainable working environment.



### PROJECT: IGUALADA CEMETARY: MIRALLES & PINOS

I have wanted to visit this project for many years and it was definitely a highlight of this trip. The chance to sit quietly on the train and watch the Spanish landscape roll by and then walk around the beautiful and calming landscape was a much needed break from the frenetic pace of the tour. The cemetery is nestled into the landscape and the elements unfold as you walk down through the spaces. The traditional notion of a cemetery has been challenged so that it becomes not just about the dead but also a place for the living to come and enjoy the solitude. Graves and seats are integrated together and are similar in appearance meaning it is difficult to differentiate between the two. Such a delight and well worth the trip.

### PROJECT: SAGRADA FAMILIA

I have visited Sagrada Familia before and I so didn't expect much from this visit. How wrong I was! The interiors have changed dramatically since I was last there and they are now really quite amazing. The 'behind the scenes' tour of the worksite that is located up in the high towers was a truly unique experience. Watching as the wheel barrows of concrete were craned up to this site provided us with an insight into how complex the building process must be. However, watching this process take place also demonstrated that no matter how much digital modelling takes place, the building is still constructed by people using their hands.

