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introduction

I have recently returned from the inaugural RAIA Dulux London Study Tour, as 1 of 5 emerging architects to tour contemporary buildings and architects studios around London. It was a fantastic and irreplaceable gift to experience Herzog & De Mueron's Laban Dance Centre and Tate Modern; Norman Foster's Swiss Re tower and Council House; and David Adjaye's IDEA Store and Rivington Place to name but a few.

A good university imbues the theory of great space, and the making of great space comes slowly over time in practice, but architecture is a visceral art at its most transcendental. Therefore experience beyond the image to the actual site of such architecture is fundamental to the development of any aspiring architect.

The added and unexpected highlight to the tour was the eye-opening experience of visiting diverse studios of London's world famous architects. The scared creatures working in Zaha Hadid's paperless, model-less elementary school sweatshop and Norman Foster's plan for World-Fosterisation with his 100 0 or so minions contrasted vividly with the exquisite creativity of David Chipperfield's model based studio, the sublime output of ideas by small office youngsters Carmody Groarke, and the palpable philanthropy of Richard Rogers and his extended architectural family.

This report traces a detailed account of my experience, outlining specific benefits I received from this fantastic opportunity. This knowledge covered architectural design, urban strategy, client relations, material potentials, social conscience, practice management, and the allusive magic of great architecture.



figure 01: London's progressive attitude to street art: a new Banksy in Angel is immediately preserved by local council as valuable art

grandad's joint

ARCHITECTURAL TOUR OF RIBA

If the RIAA is like a father figure of sorts to our emerging generation of Australian architects, then RIBA in London is surely the elder grandfather. Housed in a slightly grander building than Tusculum, RIBA headquarters is an austere building, even if non-learned activities such as weddings now have to be housed within her halls to keep the space viable.

Richard Hastilow and David Gloster seem vexed by a similar problem we have back here, that of raising membership amongst the emerging architects between graduation and registration. Those of us who are completely in love with architecture, attend the conference yearly and frequent talks are not the problem, it is the many other recent graduates that have to be convinced that such a significant fee is worthwhile.

I found it intriguing that RIBA strives to set up chapters worldwide corresponding to where ex-UK architects actually live and practice, and amazing that RIBA Pics online visual library has 4 million images already.

Much as a real visit to granddad's house, it felt more like an obligation on the surface, but as soon as I stepped through the doors and noted one of the first engraved names I knew I was in worthwhile company. RIBAs Co-founder, president from 1863 to 1864, royal gold medallist in 1851, first professor of Architecture at the University of London College from 1841 to 1865, and pioneer of the academic study of architecture, was a Thomas L Donaldson.

How could an institution co-founded by someone with 2 of my 3 names not be learned?

chalk & layers

LONDON WALKING TOUR PART 1

The walking tour of London led by Ken Allison was an early highlight of the trip. It was a perfect historical introduction and urban critique of the city, marked diagrammatically in chalk on the very ground we trod, fantastic!

London's slow development patterns reminded me of those of Sydney with water as its lifeblood. The ancient Roman settlement on the water continues to be the financial centre today, albeit a different kind of market, and separate from the Monarchy. The edgy current East End was initially poor and disease ridden due to prevailing winds blowing industrial pollution its way. With the decline of heavy industry on the water in many cities globally, it is ripe for incremental transformation. Even in the most built up metropolis, the earth and her behaviours below silently guide its formation.

We toured through the Medieval, Art-Deco, Modern, Post-Modern and Hi-Tech of London, always with buildings explained through chalk diagrams on their forecourt. It was a successful and inventive way to critique and explain the mechanics and lineage of many works by Grimshaw, Rogers and Foster in our current climate of security, where public access to the Lloyds of London or Swiss Re is not possible.



figure 02: RIBA reception; My learned namesake; Ken Mapping London; Roger's Lloyds and Foster's Swiss Re banks jostling for attention

field technology

WILKINSON EYRE AT KEW GARDENS

Kew Gardens is simply enormous, and Wilkinson Eyre have a few idiosyncratic machines that dwell in the landscape there. We are shown thoroughly through their elliptical hothouse complete with retractable canvass wings, though a winking eyelid might be a more appropriate description.

It is a much smaller building than what I had perceived from Chris Wilkinson's presentation at the RAIA CV08 conference. In his own words, they strive for something new with each commission, and that an understanding of site is what gives us the art. My instincts were contrary to this statement: this alien craft had an ulterior motive.

Whilst the elliptical concrete eyelid is beautiful in plan and section, there is so much reinforcement in the stressed points that it is essentially a steel base. A beautiful solution to an unforeseen problem came one day on site as the mechanical canvass eyelids came to close, they collapsed inward, and an elegant curved plywood guide had to be added to keep the canvass in line upon closing.

These anecdotal snippets of reality and wisdom can only be relayed by the project architect themselves at the building site. It showed Wilkinson Eyre in a humble light, and my personal understanding of that particular project became that much deeper.

doctor evil

PRACTICE VISIT: FOSTER & PARTNERS

The series of office visits were without a doubt the highlight of the entire study tour. Whilst building tours with a group tend to make me a little claustrophobic, as I love to sketch and soak up the atmosphere in solitude, turning up as a solo traveller to the offices we visited would have been nowhere near as fruitful or enlightening as the prepared group tours turned out to be.

Foster & Partners riverside offices are huge, as one is to discover only after passing the first reception desk on route to reception proper. From here we can take in the office bar, rack upon rack of models past, including my favourite, and maybe the most emblematic of the offices true mission: a timber context model of greater London, with all Foster buildings localised in glowing Perspex literally as a wartime territorial domination strategy. This was confirmed by our walking tours: he is as recognisable on the city skyline as St Paul's Cathedral.

We arrive in the studio space 60M long and 6.5M high, a space on the Thames large enough for full scale façade mock-ups to be positioned by the windows to monitor transparency from a distance as they did with the Swiss Re façade. Egalitarian to a degree, the space did allow the special modelling group, physical modelling group, architects and Norman himself to exist in the one open plan. However, if the space accommodates 300 employees, and 1000 out of the 1300 worldwide are in this complex somewhere, where was the 700-person strong engine room hiding? Not within our tour trajectory.



figure 03: Wilkinson Eyre hothouse; Foster's front door; Author's sketch of office layout inside the depths

Such a large practice turning over such a significant amount of money does allow quite specialised working environments. The Special Modelling Team simply invents concepts in BIM environments to rapid prototype iterations in an ideas bank of sorts, so that when a competition comes around, they have the equivalent of heres-one-I-prepared-earlier to choose from. There are 6 directors essentially running 6 large practices of 150-200 people each, and each team reports to the 6-director design board headed up by the man himself. They have access to a materials research library with physical samples of almost everything

It is a beautiful space buzzing 24/7 all year round, and although I never intend on employing 100 people there are still lessons to be alert to in the existence of such a place. Handsomely rewarding employees for their contribution to your fortune is a good start, but it is the creative talents of key players that really need egalitarian treatment, or you will find yourself as Foster has with a difficult succession plan on his hands through refusing named partnerships and project credits to key recent directors. Even in the smallest local practice, retaining talented staff is a fundamental future proofing strategy.

terror & sport

LONDON OLYMPIC SITE VISIT

At present Stratford is one gigantic dirt patch. East of East London, the Olympic suburb is a place where life expectancy is 10 years less than 2 tube stops closer to the city, and SOCOG are hoping that £6.5B will alleviate this situation somewhat.

Unfortunately for the connoisseur, visual splendour will not be the medium by which this will be achieved. Unlike Beijing where challenging contemporary architecture seems to have been embraced, Foreign Office Architects have had their poetic stadium scrapped, and Zaha Hadid's aquatic centre is shaping up as one of her least dynamic.

On the scale of the master plan one thing stood out to me more than anything else from our vantage point upon a classic London 1960's estate tower: the amount of red on the drawing. It contained the usual grand concourse flanked by rolling green and sparkling blue, with large white public buildings organised around its spine, though beyond the pinkish back of house designated area of each building where great dollops of red. I had to read the legend, and as a sign of our times, red was anti-terrorist top-security areas, equivalent to having international border security around all the buildings and entry points, equating to roughly 35% of the architecture.

Our security global security state is literally changing the way in which architecture is designed and realised, and one wonders if the authorities trusted the people a little more they would have been able to afford the Foreign Office Stadium?



figure 04: Terror planning at the Olympic site; FOA's thwarted vision; the safe reality beyond

noble plastic

LABAN DANCE CENTRE: HERZOG & DEMUERON

Outside the practice visits, visiting the Laban Dance Centre came an equal first place on our trip. In my opinion it is not only London's finest contemporary building, but also a pivotal piece of architecture for one of the finest architectural practices of our times, Herzog & De Mueron.

It is a comfortably sited, slightly inflected box in response to the turf amphitheatre in front, turning its back on the quite frankly disgusting Deptford creek. Minimal by nature, the prism displays a good dose of humour and fun at all scales throughout, evidence that the practice had moved from a concern with the origin of form and material to something wittier and more relaxed.

The once bright pink, green and blue polycarbonate twin wall has all but faded into the ether, but it remains a jewel like object. A sheer surface that shifts from transparent to opaque and mirrored coloured to white and clear, cube to inflexion to freeform. The centroidal planning gives all dance studios beautiful coloured light by day, and in turn their movements are projected back through the colours to the skin for the public by night.

As with many buildings one discovers abroad, it is worth approaching from the wrong direction. Something doesn't look quite right, and it is the steep pitched roof towards that accommodates the fly tower for the central theatre. I had assumed from the journals that it was a Meisian box slightly inflected in plan, but there is no flat roof here!

As if recognising an old friend, a hydrant pump and its enclosure, obviously shaded from the day it was built, is like neon in its original blue, green and pink polycarbonate cladding. The Laban must have truly shone in its first days, but in the pursuit of a new architecture, I found it reassuring that a recent plastic cladding system, detailed creatively still managed to weather beautifully over time.

the orphanage

PRACTICE VISIT: ZAHA HADID

Although exciting from the outside, once we entered the airless rabbit warren ex-schoolhouse I wondered what these people were doing here, and how this ship stayed afloat. The staff are organised into groups by what language they can speak, and came complete with caught-in the headlight stares at the site of visitors.

We are told that of the 280 staff that only 30% are long-term employees. That seems usual enough, until it is defined that long-term means that they have been there for a year. Or, in other words, 200 of the 280 foreign youngsters will only stay for 6 months, working on whichever blob-producing software they happen to bring with them.

Of the 80 Employees that have been there longer than 12 months, there is a small handful that runs all projects under her. Beneath that are 25 project architects, with teams of between 5-25 under them.



figure 05: Herzog & DeMueron's gracefully ageing Laban Dance Centre; The disguised pitched roof; Entering the labyrinth at Studio Zaha Hadid

As it seems to be in many 'star' practices, there is never the singular: it is always a core team that are either nurtured together, or leave in a fit.

Zaha's is a story of rapid rise, in 1982 when she won The Peak competition in Hong Kong with her beautiful exploded axonometric paintings; she had a shadow staff of 20. This was an experimental first wave Zaha, predominantly painting, not building much, and exploring dynamism through drawing.

Second wave Zaha came in the 1990's with the completion of in my mind, her most accomplished building to date, the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Museum, and many other competitions in which curves are always in 1 direction, in plan or in section. This is also a time in which physical models played an inseparable role in design development. After her Pritzker win in 2004, her office exploded to its current ever-expanding size.

They produce architecture, fashion, exhibitions and furniture. Such a wild leap in scales coalesces when it is divulged that she tests any building at the scale of furniture, a manageably scaled form that then waits for a willing site. This is not to different to Foster and his R&D team of special modellers, and I would think this kind of design methodology would be very damaging to the fleets of young students in their underpaid quests for architectural direction.

To their credit, our spokesmen stated bluntly that they are a formal office, there is no greater social overlay, we do form. It was like Burger King countering McDonalds' 'healthy' burger range by ramping up the fat content: they do fat.

There is never a structural logic; it will always conform to the shape. Apparently any commission will be taken on if there is some scope to go wild. To my dismay, these days there are no models, paintings, or drawings to be seen outside of Zaha's grand personal office. It is all either Rhino, 3D Studio Max, or Maya.

It also seems to be run in a very top-down manner, Zaha sketches a concept, then that is immediately turned into hundreds of 3D model iterations, then printed directly from the computer via stereo lithography for Zaha to work on the form at a small scale, no matter what the project. This process is then repeated over and over.

This was to me almost anti-architecture, though I was still fascinated by the strategy, and their commitment to it.

Their Sci-Fi furniture's journey from screen to reality is a very labour intensive and wistful process in reality: I shudder to think about the production of larger constructs. For a blob-like sofa, an inorganic steel skeleton is put together, covered in C&C milled high density foam to create the illusion of free form, then cover in glossy car enamel to complete the illusion. It couldn't be very comfortable.

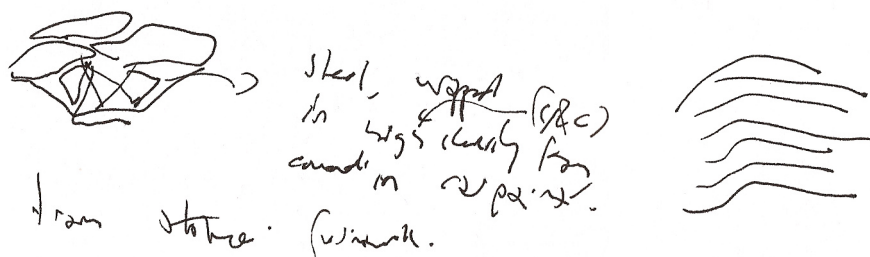


figure 06: Author's sketches of wanton furniture and formwork construction practice, We exit via the 'Girls Entrance' of the ex-schoolhouse

In a 3-way curving concrete example of Third Wave Zaha, an illusion of horizontal shuttering was pursued; where in reality 1-off leaf shaped shuttering boards were painstakingly fixed together before the pour.

The white glass 3 way curves of the Innsbruck station each needed a customised steel triangulated stand to approximate a curve at each node, then a sheet of glass is gently heated to melt into the form. However, as there were too many imperfections, this first sheet ended up being used as formwork for the second final sheet before being thrown away. This happens for every sheet. Amazingly, the client is given a DVD of thier building, so if any glass is smashed, they can print the form out to replace it.

Our guide leaves us with this thought: yes they are a formal company, but through thier pushing of limits they have made the technology available to others, and through competition of more than one factory now able to pull off wild propositions, the services are both competitively priced and viable.

This was all true, but then I remembered this senior project architect had only been here for 1 year, and gave us all the practice and project history from what he read in her El Croquis! Form and hype have truly transcended substance in this studio.

models & guitars

PRACTICE VISIT: CARMODY GROARKE

What a breath of fresh air these ex-Chipperfield youngsters were after Studio Zaha Hadid. A small office of 8, Kevin Carmody and Andrew Groarke started a partnership after winning an ideas competition in Chicago. There office is in Denmark Street in Soho, and very loud guitars below often interrupt conversation, fantastic!

I found this office and the people who run it the most instantly transferable to how I intend to eventually run my own office: small enough so that one can have a hand in every design decision of every project and thus ensure there is never a compromise or lazy moment. Zaha is clearly in another stratosphere, and has to remedy this by reducing projects to furniture.

Their process, undoubtable influenced by the Chipperfield training, is driven by models at every stage of design. The first concept is always a model, and then in order to prove its worth, again it is tested through a physical model. The next stage is the 1:50 interior model, and if for a competition entry, the models themselves are photographed and photoshopped, not a computer rendering. With full-scale component mock-ups at 1:1 it is difficult to say where modelling stops and architecture begins, probably because there is no such delineation.

Light is scaleless, and a 1:50 interior has the atmospheric quality of the final building, and even more importantly, clients love them. They have an extremely wealthy client who allows such testing to take place, and Kevin offers advice when I query him on how to meet such a person. Essentially, he advises that I be nice to everyone I ever meet, as you meet these fantastic people in the strangest places.

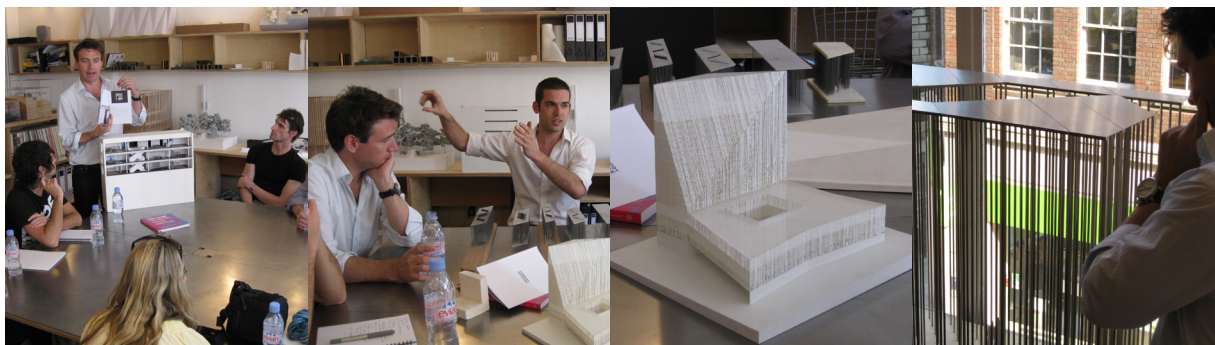


figure 07: Models as interior; iterations; concept; and de-authorised architectural design and presentation tool

They show us some beautiful projects, with a preoccupation for the pavilion. From an installation with one simple steel junction to testing acid patinas on poured iron, there is a sensitive and measured critique of every architectural component. Pushing a simple idea to unimaginable limits is my kind of architecture.

Their decisions on which model to make conform to the following, 1:500 or 1:100 for anything formal, and 1:50 for anything spatial. If a sketch is an idea, and a montage creates a narrative, models are the form and the space.

After quite a few bottles of white wine, I press with the question of how a small practice can actually structure in the huge cost of constant model making external to client architect agreements, and it is divulged that it is put in as a separate cost to the standard percentage fee arrangement. The trick is to convince clients that model making is essential to the way in which we work i.e.: you have to pay for them!

There is a difference between the handmade study models and jewel like professional ones, the clients often love the professional ones and cant wait to keep them anyway. Models are physical, they draw a client into the process, they de-authorise work in the studio, they deal realistically with light, and are intensely spatial.

riot by the canals

MANCHESTER WALKING TOUR

Phil Griffin spent an entire day leading us around Manchester. A city ringed by dark red brick warehouses and a network of canals, it once produced 80% of the world's cotton products. This has had such an influence to this day that department stores still call their bedding and linen the Manchester department. Phil claims the city was the first fashion component of globalisation, exporting patterns to the world, over the French generational hand me downs. Dilemmas of social housing seem to translate across continents, the occupants all want low-density housing, but that model is unsustainable for both population and amenity.

Although I don't recall any outstanding examples, there was a potent caution made on the issue of altering any building, that once you regenerate a building it would never be the same again. Too often we consider merely existing and new in the quest for architecture.

There was a very modest Calatrava bridge to be seen as we skirted the CBD, but the highlight was without a doubt DCM's Law Courts. A thinly stacked assemblage of boxes, with DCM trademark overshooting planes, graphic design and colours transferred well to this example of courthouse typology. Such a building has the added social weight of becoming an emblem for justice, and a comforting place for people going through possibly the most anxious moments of their lives: a difficult task. Visit the building soon, as its most dynamic elevation is about to be built out. The quintessential Manchester experience came as we fled the courts through the 100,000 strong Glasgow football fans going wild on the streets, and thankfully we slipped onto the train back to London before the rioters turned on the Police.

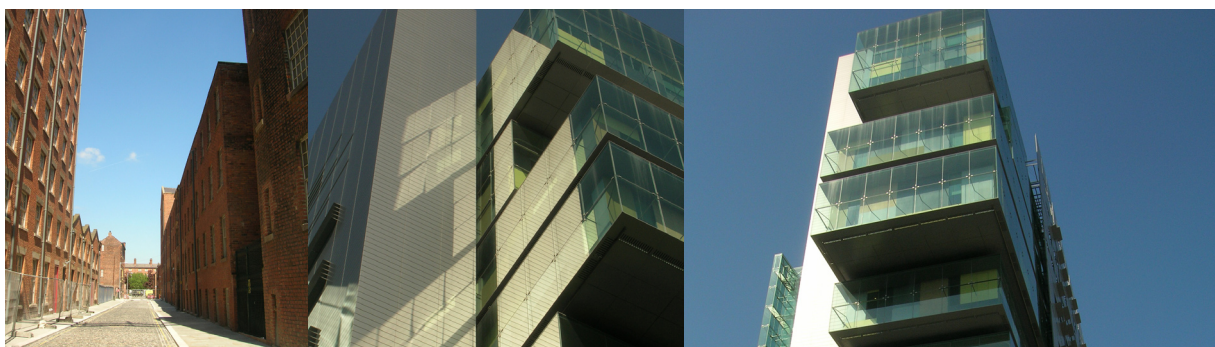


figure 08: Yesterday's Manchester brick warehouses; Today's law courts by DCM

chalk & layers continued

LONDON WALKING TOUR PART 2

The second half of our London walking tour picked up where we left off, though unfortunately for us it was raining so the chalk had to stay in the pocket. We were treated to more anecdotes surrounding Ken Shuttleworth and Norman Foster's credit disputes before the former left the latter as we ventured through Council House on the southern bank of the Thames.

We continue through more Richard Rogers with his recognisable yellow structure, blue air supply and red air exhaust machines, some Alsop, and of course the magnificent TATE Modern.

Talking all things Herzog & De Mueron, Ken agrees with me that the Laban is probably London's best contemporary building. Inside the turbine hall, I was amazed to see for myself that Shibboleth, the Doris Salcedo crack in the floor was truly a cavern, and has now been filled in, scarring like an old wound.

competition machines

PRACTICE VISIT: DAVID CHIPPERFIELD

David Chipperfield's office was amazing, if I had a predilection towards working in a large practice, this would be it. With 175 employees worldwide, there were 75 in the London office. As with Zaha, and in stark contrast to Foster and Rogers, Chipperfield has built little on his home turf. They have 75 in Berlin, 15 in Milan and 10 in Beijing.

The building is a Chipperfield, and the office layout is as ordered as any of his designs: this was a well-oiled machine. There are some beautiful models positioned up on entry, and immediately to our left is administration including 6 full time PR employees. This is similar to Zaha's Press machine.

The architecture studio is on the left, with models, drawings and materials everywhere. Small teams work vitally around a fantastic mix of large projects. Upstairs above this room is the 8-person full time competition team, constantly winning projects around the world to bring in to the office.

The work is very expensive, there is a \$280M Manhattan apartment project, where they are expecting a \$4M sale for each apartment, totalling \$352M. This beautiful work costs a lot, but seems to earn a lot.

David still sketches all the initial ideas, and meets with the teams once fortnightly. A few exciting projects were being developed, including the Turner Contemporary Art Gallery. The foundations of Carmody Groarke's methodology were evident, with working models split into categories of working and presentation. If the client wants the beautiful model, which they often do, then they pay big for it. Otherwise, Chipperfield is wise enough to know that they make fantastic PR material, so it really is a win-win situation.



figure 09: Inside Foster's Council House; Herzog & Demueron's Tate Modern post-'Shibboleth'; Authors sketch of a Chipperfield competition winning study model

Study models are rapidly produced for design, and are produced from an early stage for every project. There are lots of iterations of material samples, again seen in Carmody Groarke's method, and they will research each sample meticulously for aggregate mixes, patina, and endless variety. For Chipperfield, architecture is matter.

The upstairs competition team churns out the entries, and I note that their presentation panels do not change too much from win to win, they seem to have a formula down for how best to market the architecture to the judges, and I do my best to soak it in.

Their latest win was 6 panels, model and image, diagram and montage, diagrams, site plan, plan and section, and plan and section. Their models for competitions are a deft mix of rapid prototype exterior with detailed card inserts, quick to make, and they photograph beautifully.

In a manner similar to Foster & Rogers, Chipperfield's stunning models are on show immediately on entry, along with any publications and press clippings in simple plywood joinery. If ever a client was kept waiting here wondering whether to continue with their architectural services or not, it would always turn out positive!

Upon leaving, we were informed that in their eyes, a lot of other UK architects seem to have too much going on at once, and that at Chipperfield's they are about material, elevation, section, plan. They are disciplined and gimmickless, with a rigorous process that teases out any gimmicks over and over until anything not essential is removed.

It was a very enlightening experience, and refreshing to see such disciplined commitment in a large office.

inspirational compromise

DIRTY HOUSE, RIVINGTON PLACE & IDEA STORE: DAVID ADJAYE

The seemingly theory-less base for David Adjaye's practical and diagrammatically beautiful houses and public buildings created an air of expectation around visiting such buildings in the flesh. As we know, publication is seductive, and a good diagram does not necessarily a good building make.

Rivington Place in Shoreditch is a low budget gallery, library and photographic exhibition space that took a stretched weave fabric pattern as a conceptual departure point for its scalar distortion, granting the modest 3 story building the impression of being much bigger.

The ground floor gallery addresses the street openly, and the library joinery beautifully compliments the pre-cast elements that brace and support the building, along with lending it its stretched appearance. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, the skylights were omitted from the saw tooth roof form, and the precast weave reaches only 2 of its 4 facades, lessening the impact of the total system.

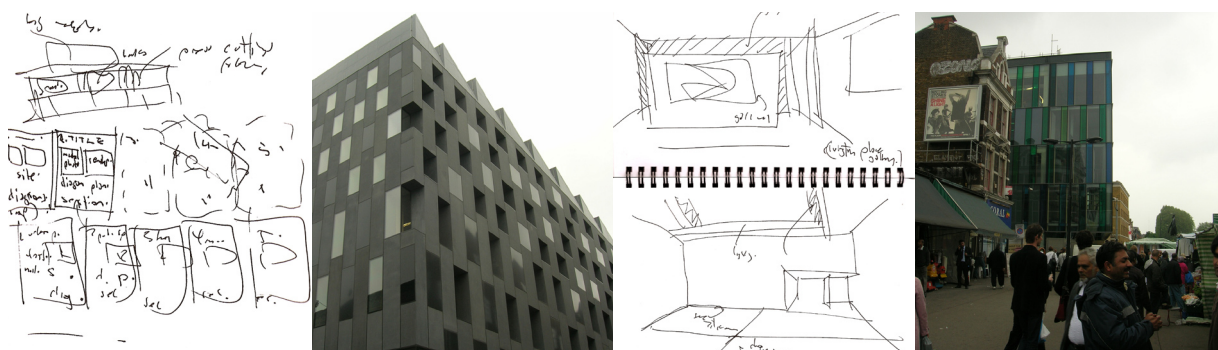


figure 10: Chipperfield's never-fail panel layouts; Adjaye's Rivington Place exterior; Authors sketch of Rivington Place interior gallery; Adjaye's successful IDEA Store

An equally impressive public building was his IDEA store in Whitechapel, with its coloured glass façade reminiscent of the Bangladeshi market stalls down on the street it addresses. The façade treatment wears Adjaye’s Chipperfield training on its sleeve. The locals have really embraced the library and community centre as their own, a true sign of a community buildings success.

Unfortunately, due once more to budget cuts; the duelling large escalators meant to draw people literally off the street to a place of education were cut. There is one small escalator, now boarded up, and entrance is gained by ducking around the side through a small door.

Although we only saw it from the outside, Dirty House is very famous Adjaye residence in the East End, and has a very foreboding street presence. A simple, rough anti-graffiti paint is applied to all existing brickwork, with flush mirrored windows covering the openings, with a sleek minimal roof terrace on top. As a successful diagram, it was set to resurface in his later work such as the Denver Contemporary Art Gallery.

Adjaye creates truly successful public buildings; whether for ethnic minorities or creative networks, each strives to be truly, democratically public, literally embracing street life even in spite of glaring compromises that could have crippled either. These buildings were another definite tour highlight.

suck em’ in, suck em’round

WESTFIELD SITE VISIT: BUCHAN GROUP

I still have the bitter taste in my mouth after visiting Buchan Groups super-sized Westfield project. Entering the 400m by 400m building site felt like stepping into the Dark Ages, there is no doubt in my mind that buildings with objectives like this one are killing our earth a little too quickly.

It has 2 tube stations and a bus interchange within its ground upon completion, and 2 concrete plants on site currently. Buchan call themselves Executive Architects, where Westfield give them a concept and they turn it into a building. They pay a fortune, and in return you are expected to give 24-hour service. At present, it has already cost £1.6B.

Interesting in its very vulgarity, we were privy to the divulgence of the black art of retail, which boils down to securing a few big department stores and distance them all from each other with a maze of smaller shops. The primary store is there to “Suck you in”, and then the others are there to “suck you around” once inside. The planning literally bloats in the areas where the stakeholder stores grow overnight. We are told that Buchan Group don’t know why everyone shops, but they know that they do.

When queried for guilt over the myriad of social ills such a project inflicts on a community, they replied that they have updated 20 kilometres of traffic lights around the sight. This is likely only to make it easier for cars to pull up to the mall.



figure 11: Adjaye’s famous Dirty House, the terribly detailed Lost-House; An early Adjaye-Russel interior-The Social; Author’s sketch of Westfields ‘suck-em-in’ retail model 13

rich kids

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION SCHOOL VISIT

The AA is a fantastic institution in the centre of London that completely lived up to its hype. Amazingly, it is a registered charity with no government funding whatsoever, so essentially they can do what they want. Unfortunately this also means that it is prohibitively expensive, and rife with spoiled rich kids in the undergraduate degree. There are roughly 400 undergraduates and 100 postgraduates at the moment.

They have an equity policy that ensures 95% of students are from outside the UK, and perhaps the most egalitarian policy is that in which anybody can just walk in off the street and listen to a lecture or observe a crit, and even have input if they want.

Amazingly, almost every presentation has been recorded in their DVD library, so an unsure young Zaha Hadid student presentation is only a click away. There are Laser cutters, rapid prototyping machines, stereo lithography, C&C milling, an amazing bookshop and library, and clusters of students making weird and wonderful objects all over the myriad of interconnected terrace houses. It is a vital and exciting place, where every student seems passionate, involved and immersed in architecture's potential.

everybody loves richard

PRACTICE VISIT: ROGERS STIRK HARBOUR & PARTNERS

Richard Rogers and Norman Foster split from Team 4 in the 1960's, and ever since then the 2 high-tech heavyweights have turned out an amazing catalogue of buildings. Before this trip, I classed the two and their architectural output interchangeable, but in light of meeting the staff of both and their views, the 2 Men could not be more different.

Every Monday morning there is a design review involving all the partners. For a new project, one or two of the directors will come up with the first idea, and then it is straight to the model shop to flesh out the concept as a physical artefact. The model shop is a separate building to the architectural office, and apparently, for tax purposes, also a separate entity. They produce the Perspex masterpieces that adorn reception and the foyer. Rogers, Stirk, Harbour & Partners are 180 strong worldwide, with 100 in London and the rest throughout Barcelona, Madrid and Japan.

Compared with Norman Foster, with his private jet and reluctance to name partners, Rogers recognises his entire team. He took the entire office to Paris for a Christmas party, has a chef prepare lunch every day, and supports cycling to work via the urban taskforce.

Amazingly, there is only enough working profit to keep the company going on a day-to-day basis, with all profit going directly into a charity fund. Once a staff member has worked there for a period of time, they choose a charity and have to manage how the company's profit goes towards working for that charity. A truly astounding man, all his staff seem to love working for him and show a real dedication to a talented architect willing to give the world back to them.



figure 12: Fruits of the Architectural Association's student labour; Richard Rogers front entrance; Author's sketch of Richard Rogers meeting room layout

outcomes

EMERGING WORLD CLASS PRACTICE CHECKLIST

1. REALITY CHECK

The sheer volume of talented young architects and start-up practices in London was for me a catalytic reality check. There is no time for resting on laurels of accolades past, right now is the time to start competing with the worlds best: and the competition is stiff.

2. TAKE THE TOUGH ROAD

London holds unbelievable opportunity for emerging Australian architects, a vital and pulsating architectural climate, countless talented young firms, established superstars, fantastic buildings, and proximity to Europe. Despite all this, I am determined to take on the much more difficult and disciplined task to use my energy and knowledge gathered to making fantastic, challenging architecture within Australia rather than relocating to the nerve centre.

3. MIND THE GAP

A major benefit of pushing beyond the publications and experiencing your idols buildings and studios in reality, is that the perceived chasm between oneself and the big names is not unachievable at all if you are determined enough to fight for it.

4. CHOOSE YOUR MENTOR CAREFULLY

I would suggest really soul-searching for why you want to work for a particular architect and what you want to get out of the experience. I simply do not know what 6 months at Zaha Hadid's studio would achieve beyond a line on your CV.

5. ELUSIVE MIRACLE CLIENTS

Continue to be friendly to everyone you ever meet and stay alert; the next patron of contemporary architecture could be anywhere.

6. MODEL DESIGN REGISTRY

I am not talking about Rapid Prototyping here. For scale, use, and potential to make fantastic architecture:

Concept Model	Scaleless	Study or Presentation	I Pay
Test Model	1:500	Study or Presentation	I Pay
Form Model	1:100	Study or Presentation	Client Pays
Interior/Spatial Model	1:50	Study or Presentation	Client Pays
Component Iterations	1:1	Sample Only	I/ Client Pays

7. COMPETITION PRESENTATION

Simple coherent panels, with photographs of real models instead of computer renderings, and plenty of diagrams has been a winning combination for David Chipperfield, David Adjaye and Carmody Groarke.

8. OFFICE LAYOUT

Simple: all your beautiful models at the front desk, staff, clients, everyone will be impressed. They are never a waste, always an asset. Chipperfield, Carmody Groarke, Foster & Rogers all employed this technique. Zaha should thank about it.

9. STAFF ASSETS

Realise that your staff are everything. If you let enormous ego get in the way like David Adjaye of Norman Foster, you risk losing your amazing team.

Retain the talent by ensuring credit is given when it is due such as Richard Rogers, keep your inner circle close like Zaha Hadid, give a clear overarching direction like David Chipperfield, or keep your team small, vital and happy like Carmody Groarke.

conclusion

I have lived and breathed architecture for 9 years now. Smitten with my profession and its potentials, I will continue to be a strong, dedicated advocate for architecture for the rest of my life.

I would absolutely recommend entering the Dulux London Study Tour to any young aspiring architect; you would be simply crazy not too. Although you may be able to source out buildings on your own, the practice visits are invaluable tools for all the outcomes I have discussed, and you will meet other amazing like-minded people from areas of Australia that you may not frequent.

The vastly differing working practices of London's big-name architects was to both contradict and transcend what is published, and my insiders view from the study tour has intensely focused my own design methodology and that of running a future practice.

With a number of my projects beginning to take form in our constructed landscape at the end of this year, I plan to register as an architect in early 2009. The RAIA Dulux London Study Tour 2008 was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and as an emerging architect, now was the perfect time for such a critical and inspiring tour, not to mention the introduction to an amazing group of Australia's future architects.

Thanks RAIA, Dulux and Virgin,

Yours Gratefully,



Andrew Donaldson

31.7.8



figure 13: Extra curricular London: Caruso St Johns sublime Gagosian Gallery for contemporary art exterior and interior; night life on Brick Lane in Londons East End