

JOHN ELLWAY

dulux study tour
report 2015

Hello!

The next few pages will take you though a few of my highlights and thoughts after visiting projects and practices in Tokyo, London & Paris in May & June 2015.

How do I summarise this amazing adventure? That's a hard task, but lets run with a set of words: eye opening; outlook changing; unforgettable memories; exhaustingly quick; lasting new friends; an escape from real life; and most importantly, learning though experience, food and drink.

A sincere thank you to Phil & Sarah from Dulux as well as Daniella & Bernadette from the AIA for all your efforts organising the tour this year. Another big thank you to my partners in crime Nic, Bonnie, Monique, Casey & Katelin for your company, conversation and triangles.

My advice to anyone who hasn't applied or has previously, make sure you keep applying! And, if you get the amazing phone call that you are in (and have to keep it a secret for 4 months), three important pieces of advice... pace yourself, drink lots of coffee, get enough sleep!

Thank you again!



TOKYO

the circle

I've spent quite a bit of time in Tokyo travelling on previous trips, but never had access to many of the projects we visited, let alone the practices.

In addition to visiting the Nakagin Capsule Tower (yes anyone can via Airbnb), the highlight of the first day tour around the city and outer regions by public transport was a visit to the Fuji Kindergarten by Tezuka Architects. If you haven't seen the TedX talk, it's a must see: [<https://goo.gl/ymAaCJ>] Such an interesting project in terms of exploring boundaries and layers of use through a circular plan. Teachers never have to worry about losing a child if they step out of their classroom. They will just keep walking (or more likely running) around the circular courtyard until they get back to their start point.

Our practice back in Brisbane is super rigid and grid based; the interesting take away for me here (and later in Paris) was that a circular plan can have a place and can be just as rigid, structured, functional and beautiful. An interesting thing to explore.

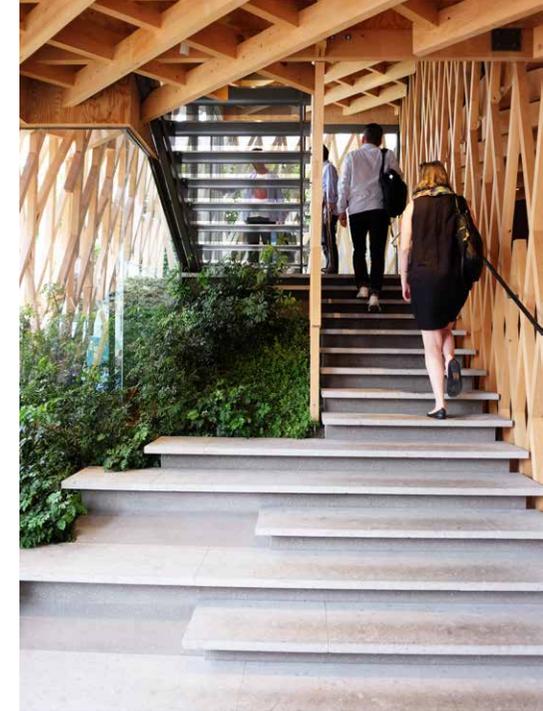
the interns

The practice visit day in Tokyo was the one I was looking most forward to (and most fearful of, as I was the public transport navigator). I think the first visit to Sou Fujimoto's practice was the most eye opening for all of us. Rarely in Australia do we have unpaid interns.

After visiting Fujimoto's studio we all became acutely aware of the scale of intern use in Japan (and many other countries) often being the norm. The studio was set up as a series of concentric circles of desks with a couple of paid project architects in the outer circle, all the way down to intern and student staff (of increasing number) towards the centre of the 'ring'.

I'd always thought at some stage in my career I might spend a year overseas, perhaps working in Japan. My unpaid fears were realised. While the intern policies of the other practices we visited didn't seem to be quite as bad, it did seem to still be a general approach to staffing.

It's an interesting thing to think about in our Australian context. We do actually achieve a lot in terms of the volume of work we do while still paying all our staff (yes some practices do go down the route of overtime exploitation, but there is still payment for normal work hours).



TOKYO

the rules

The visit to Daikanyama T-Site by Klien Dytham was my final highlight of the Tokyo leg of the tour. I didn't know a lot about their work previous to the trip, but did know of them via the PechaKucha event they established.

Coming from a signage & wayfinding graphic design background before studying architecture, I can really relate to the key aspect of the T-Site brief of integrating a company's brand into a building. It's one of those things that never seemed to be considered by the architect of any building I worked on. The reality is that unless you make space or have an integration strategy, the retailer is going to plaster a clunky lightbox on the side of your beautifully detailed building. Not in the case of T-Site.

From the start, the strategy was to make the building the brand and make it recognisably connected to that identity. The pictures above speak better about this than what I can write. It's subtle, but recognisable and repeatable on other sites. The splitting of the project into three forms (Each a T in elevation) is brilliant and completely rational. It's fascinating due to the breakup of the parcels of land and the local planning regulations that dictated this breakup. The bridges that link each building on the upper level aren't in fact connected. They are seen as deep 'verandahs' under the local planning code because they don't touch.

We like to experiment and play with 'rules' in our practice. It was lovely to see this in a retail context and in such a dense city like Tokyo.



LONDON

the size



London was always going to be a really interesting experience for me. I lived there in the early 2000's before all the renewal prior to the Olympics, congestion charging, before The Shard, before the Walkie Talkie and before the Tate Modern 2 had grown out of the ground. I wanted to see how it had changed and see it through an architectural lens that I didn't have previously.

When I lived there Foster & Partners Gherkin was halfway under construction. It's one of those buildings that has been on my bucket list to experience (especially the bar on the top level) for many years after watching a doco on its construction in 1st year uni. Spending the day with Ken on his walking tour and ending up in the bar on the top floor was just fantastic. Although I am disappointed we didn't break the bar tab record of previous years...

The other big thing for me in London was observing the size of the practices and the commercial level they work at. Especially given I come from a 2-3 person practice. It's not just the scale of projects or the numbers of staff, but interesting thing like the marketing / sales / developer-esque language they use to describe projects. I'm sure there are still many smaller practices, but it's the sort of city that facilitates the 1,100+ people offices like Fosters. I found thinking about and discussing these scale issues with the other guys really fascinating.

the changes

A bit like the redevelopment around King Cross we saw on the first day, the way that East London has changed so rapidly in 10-15 years really struck me as well. In the early 2000s it was on the cusp of being a place that wasn't industrial anymore. We'd go to pop-up design shows and food markets in vacated factories. Now these same spaces are filled with Aesop shops, private members clubs and high end clothing shops, all in a sort of similar gritty visual context ...well, maybe a bit more polished.

The visit to the TEA building was an-eye opener; to think about how you could convince a developer to take a 10-20 year approach to improving an existing building slowly. Attracting tenants in a raw shell while its cheap and using their presence and business type as a catalyst to bring in more tenants, therefore income and therefore the funds to improve the building and slowly increase rent in conjunction with those improvements and maturity of those businesses. Fascinating stuff.

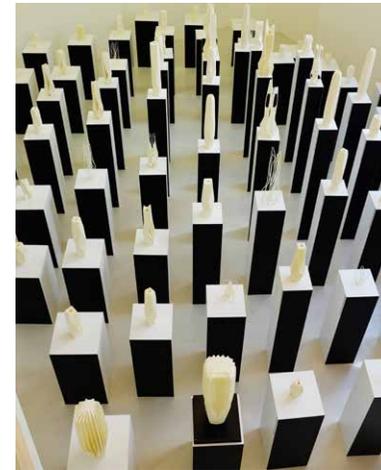
What are the places in our own cities in Australia in which this could and should happen?



LONDON

the monk

One last note. David Chipperfield. I'd never experienced such a controlled monk-like studio place. Every staff member spoke calmly, controlled and articulately. All the models were made from the same palette of materials as per the 'style guide' and everyone shopped at the same pastel sweater shop. OK maybe I'm exaggerating with sweater shop, but there was this really controlled sense on continuity I actually quite liked! Maybe I am a control freak?



PARIS

the dog

I really didn't have an agenda or expectation of Paris. After day one though that did change to a degree and involved making sure I didn't have a bag stolen after the Dulux Dog was nabbed (and saved) after arriving on the Eurostar train.

By the time we got to Paris, I think we were all reaching peak exhaustion from the pace of the trip and the writing we were doing for the DST blog & AAU. Luckily the number of project and practice visits dropped proportionally with the increase in bars and restaurants we visited in the city :)

Highlights for me were visiting the "Le Corbusier: The Measures of Man" Exhibition at the Centre Pompidou and then the next day visiting my first Corb building, Maison La Roche, in the flesh. It's a project you study so heavily in school and essentially build virtually in your head, but when you go there realise how completely different it is to how you imagined. Maybe something to be conscious of for all projects?



PARIS

the blob

The absolute highlight of Paris, and I think I could say the whole trip, was visiting Pathé Foundation by Renzo Piano Building Workshop. It was the last visit, on the last day, I was exhausted, and literally had no idea what we were going to see next. How good is going to a building you know nothing about, by a practice you've never really studied, with no expectations ...and on first glance you think it's a silly blob. It wasn't until we got inside and heard about the rational reasoning behind its shape from the project architect that I understood all the decisions completely. What did I learn from this? Pretty simple. Don't judge an architectural book by its cover. Find out about it before making judgement. My article for ArchitectureAU explains my experience:

THE RATIONAL BLOB – PATHÉ FOUNDATION BY RENZO PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP

<http://architectureau.com/articles/2015-dulux-study-tour-the-rational-blob-pathé-foundation-by-renzo-piano-building-workshop/>

The final site visit of the tour in Paris was to the Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé by Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW). Unexpectedly (after being unimpressed by other contemporary Parisian architecture), this building was a complete delight to experience – one of the most beautiful buildings I have ever visited. On first impressions, it appears as a giant Ghost Busters goo blob. But, it's definitely not just about form. It's a rational blob that knows its place perfectly.

Our tour guide for the visit was Thorsten Sahlmann, an associate at RPBW. Thorsten has been working with Renzo for the past 14 years. This building was his baby – a project that started in 2006 and took only one year to design in a very close dialogue with the client, but another seven years to be completed. The Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé is an organisation setup to preserve the history of cinema and house an archive for the Pathé company. Founded and originally run by the Pathé Brothers in 1896, it later became the world's largest film equipment and production company. The new headquarters sits among typical Parisian apartment blocks in the thirteenth arrondissement, on the site of a mid-19th century theatre that was turned into a movie theatre in the mid-1960s and later fell into disrepair.

The facade to the street has been lovingly kept, with a covered outdoor transitional space between it and the new structure. This space is used as a meeting point for visitors and for ticket sales for the silent movie theatre in the basement, accessible by the public. Thorsten also explained how its rectangular shape (the only orthogonal part of the scheme) has ingeniously been used to house external fire stairs. Almost unnoticeable, covered by a theatre-like lighting rig, the stairs connect to each floor of the main structure via delicate steel gangways – a little bit like somewhere you would launch a spaceship.



PARIS

the blob

The ground floor of the blob... I mean, main building... is the publicly accessible exhibition space. Glazing on three sides creates a strong visual connection from the entrance to a courtyard at the rear of the building. The blob above doesn't feel like an ominous foreign object filling the voids between 19th-century buildings. You don't even notice it's there, with natural light beaming down to the small and large courtyard spaces that surround it.

Thorsten explained that the design never began life in its curved form. Key to the project was opening up the amount of natural light for the neighbours, who for so long had windows overlooking six storey party walls of the former structure. Initial schemes focused on more regular shapes with wedges removed to increase the light and ventilation for neighbours. After a couple of site visits they soon realized this wasn't going to work. Through a series of studies connecting the small areas of party wall that had to remain, with a series of vertical and horizontal curves to open spaces for light, courtyards, and the program vertically, the bulbous shape of the building began to emerge as the rational solution.

The new issue of overlooking from neighbours, as well as the shape of the building, was dealt with using a perforated aluminum screen that covers the whole of the building. It hides the transition from the building's upper glazed levels to mid, solid concrete levels that house three floors of archives. The transparency of the screen changes depending on orientation (30% transparency to south and 50% to north). Thorsten described the fine balance of light penetration between summer and winter months, while also maintaining privacy for neighbours.

The most beautiful space of the building is reserved primarily for the staff of the Foundation: researchers. Arching over the top of the two uppermost floors are curved timber ribs spanning from floor-to-floor, like the upturned belly of an old timber boat. On top of the ribs sits a fine steel structure that supports the edges of glazing (as well as the aluminum screen) that also spans the entire space. It conjures the feeling of climbing a mountain and being able to see for 360 degrees. On this occasion, the view is of the rooftops of the surrounding Parisian apartments.

Thorsten explained that the client requested the transparent office space as the heart of the Foundation from the beginning. They had seen and fallen in love with RPBW's Italian office and understood a space like this would have to be managed manually during the peaks and troughs of climatic extremes during the year.

Manually adjustable openings in the top of the skylight can be opened in the height of summer. A plenum collects cool air that settles in the depth of the courtyard, which is pumped through the building. This limits airconditioning to

only the peaks of winter or summer. And, like our own clients at James Russell Architect, the client was happy to wear a coat, put on sunglasses or move the angle of their computer screen during the odd hour of the day during the height of winter or summer where the perforated screen couldn't quite cope.

We also visited one of Renzo Piano's first projects, The Pompidou Centre that he designed with Richard Rogers. You can clearly see how this influenced later projects. He saw the value in creating buildings that let you see and appreciate how they were constructed. Like our own work at James Russell Architect, structure is on show and isn't hidden. The building is broken down into identifiable and relatable segments. Thorsten mentioned that in France, the architect typically just does concept drawings and hands it over to the engineer to work out the hard stuff. On this build they had to convince the contractors they knew what they were doing and through the back and forth, simplified the structure and screen detail to make it affordable.

It's not until you look through the drawings that you realize how big this building is. Perhaps it is a combination of the public ground floor, the openness of the top two glazed levels, and the curves of the blob that hides its scale and thus makes a building that is truly comfortable in its space and with its neighbours.

The tour concluded by one of the Dulux Study Tour members asking Thorsten "does the building have a nickname yet"? He replied by saying that he hadn't heard of one yet.

