





Photo from Djernes & Bell Studio space

Architecture doesn't happen in isolation. It is shaped, challenged, and inspired by the conditions around it - social, political, environmental, and cultural. The Dulux Study Tour offers more than a chance to see buildings; it offers the rare opportunity to see differently. To step outside familiar frameworks, to question inherited assumptions, and to learn from contexts where the discipline is practised with different constraints, values, and aspirations.

This report is a reflection, not a catalogue. It documents not just what was seen, but what was felt, questioned, and learned across Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Barcelona. It is an attempt to make sense of recurring patterns, provocations, and tensions that emerged, particularly through the lenses of governance, materiality, and aesthetics.

At a time when architectural practice is increasingly shaped by global challenges, it feels more important than ever to carve space for critical observation. This is not a definitive account, but a personal one. An invitation to think harder, listen closer, and stay engaged with the complex, evolving project of architecture.

Copenhagen

Practices:

- MAST Architecture
- Over Byen Arkitekter
- Terroir
- Lundgaard & Tranberg
- Johansen Skovsted
- Office Kim Lenschow
- Djernes & Bell
- Bjarke Ingels Group

Projects:

- Kalvebod Wave - JDS
- Danish Radio Broadcasting Complex - Jean Nouvel, Vilhelm Lauritzen et al
- Tietgen Student Dorm - Lundgaard & Tranberg
- Karen Blixen Square - COBE
- Kvarterhuset Library - Dorte Mandrup
- Prismen Sports Hall - Dorte Mandrup
- Copenhill - BIG
- The Opera - Henning Larsen
- Børnebyen - COBE
- Krøyers Plads - COBE
- Israel's Square - COBE
- Mærsk Tower - C. F Møller
- Diabetes Centre - Dorte Mandrup
- Thoravej 29 - Pihlmann Architects
- Bagsværd Church - Jørn Utzon

Amsterdam

Practices:

- Next Architects
- Studio Ninedots
- West 8

Projects:

- Hotel Jakarta - SeARCH
- Tolhuistuin
- Eye Filmmuseum
- Shell Lab
- Apartment Building, Overhoeks
- Buiksloterham & CO
- Schoonschip
- Republica & Rooftop
- NDSM Werf
- Het Schip
- Sparrndammerhart Social Housing - Marcel Lok_Architect + Korth Tielens Architects
- De Jakoba Social Housing - Studio Ninedots
- Borneo Sporenburg - West 8

Rotterdam

Practices:

- MVRDV
- Monadnock

Projects:

- Fenix Gallery
- Het Depot van Museum Boijmans
- Markthal Rotterdam

Barcelona

Practices:

- Peris + Toral
- Mateo Arquitectura
- Lacol Cooperative
- Office of Architecture in Barcelona (OAB)
- Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura
- MAIO

Projects:

- Mercat de Santa Caterina | Market hall. EMBT Enric Miralles + Benedetta Tagliabue
- Plaça de les Glòries - Canòpia Urbana
- Nou Mercat dels Encants
- Torre Glòries | . Jean Nouvel. 2005 |
- Media-TIC | . Cloud 9 Enric Ruiz Geli
- Sala Beckett | Flores & Prats. 2016 |
- Diposit de les Aigues
- Mies Van de Rohe Pavilion

Governance

Systems that Enable, Not Inhibit

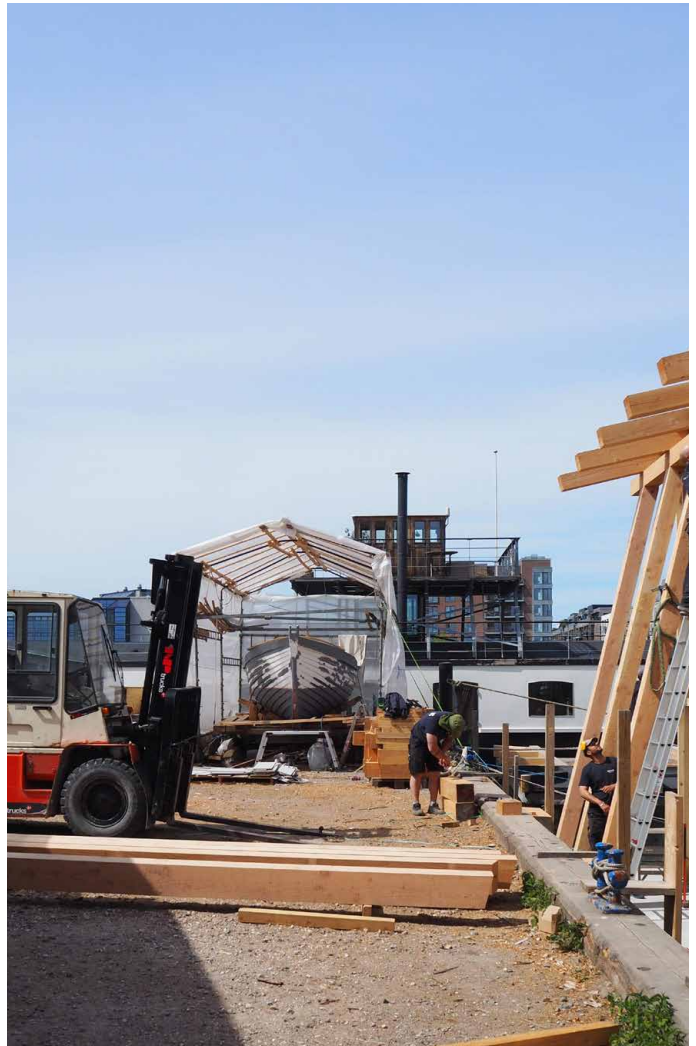
One of the clearest distinctions between the cities we visited and the Australian context lies in the governance frameworks that shape design outcomes. Copenhagen and Amsterdam, in particular, revealed how thoughtful governance can act as an enabler of quality design rather than a hurdle. Long-term political commitment to housing, sustainability, and civic value, paired with a mature culture of public trust, provided a scaffold for architectural innovation.

What stood out was not the absence of regulation, but the presence of intelligent, transparent frameworks that prioritised public good. Dutch spatial planning, for example, operates through robust design review processes and layered stakeholder engagement, offering a model where design excellence is systemically encouraged, not stifled.

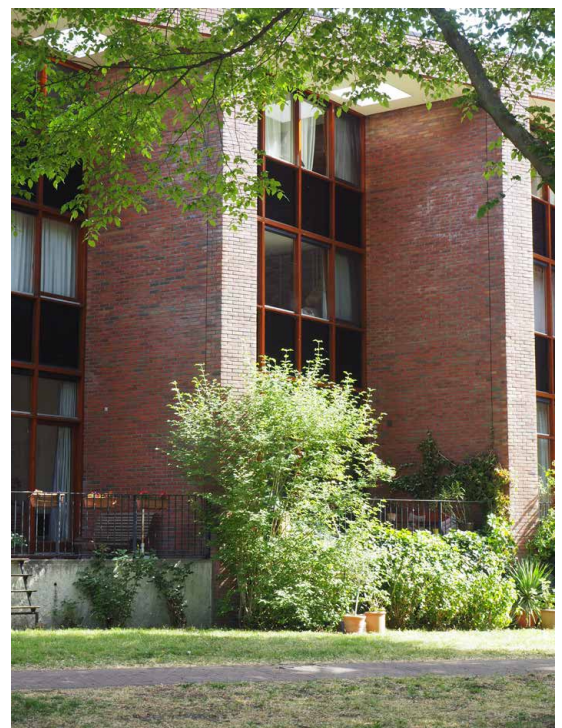
Notably, the Netherlands maintains a Board of Government Advisors (College van Rijksadviseurs), which includes a Chief Government Architect (Rijksbouwmeester), tasked with providing strategic design advice on planning, sustainability, and spatial quality.¹ This model, where architects hold influence within public governance, draws a productive parallel with the Office of the Victorian Government Architect. Yet, in Australia, such institutions are often sidelined from meaningful involvement in shaping planning policy. The tour highlighted how embedding design leadership into policymaking can elevate the architectural culture of an entire nation.

Equally important is the role of the government as a client. Across the tour, we witnessed how well-informed, design-literate government bodies can champion projects with clarity and courage. Rather than burying innovation under compliance, the public sector can lead by example and supporting a human-centric, design-led logic that prioritises quality of life over procedural rigidity.

Governance, then, is not simply policy; it's a cultural position on what we value in the public realm. As we confront intersecting crises in climate, housing, inequality, such governance is not idealistic, but necessary.



Workshop yard at Mast Architecture



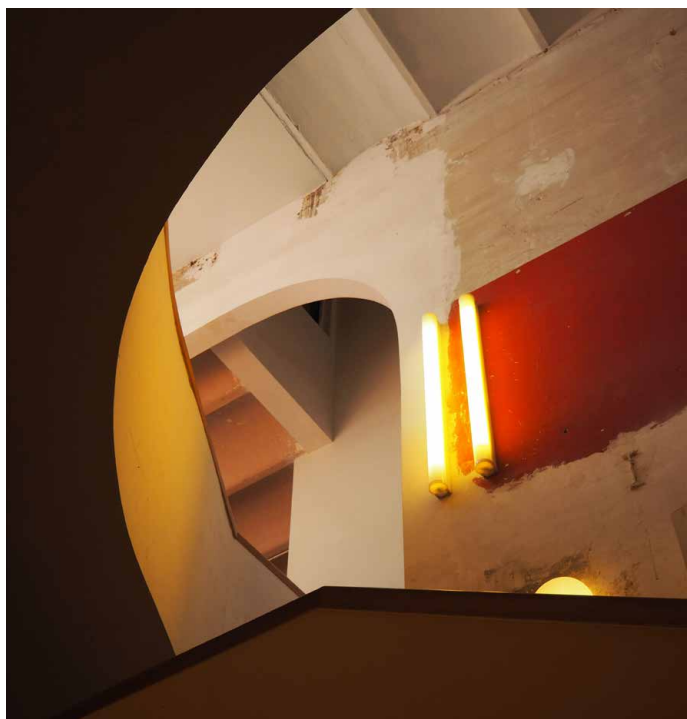
Borneo Sporenburg

¹ Beroep Kunstenaar, "Architectural Policy," accessed 28 June 2025.

<https://www.beroepkunstenaar.nl/en/disciplines/architecture-in-the-netherlands/architectural-policy/>.



Thoravej 29 by Pihlmann



Sala Beckett by Flores y Prats

Materiality

Care, Context and Clarity

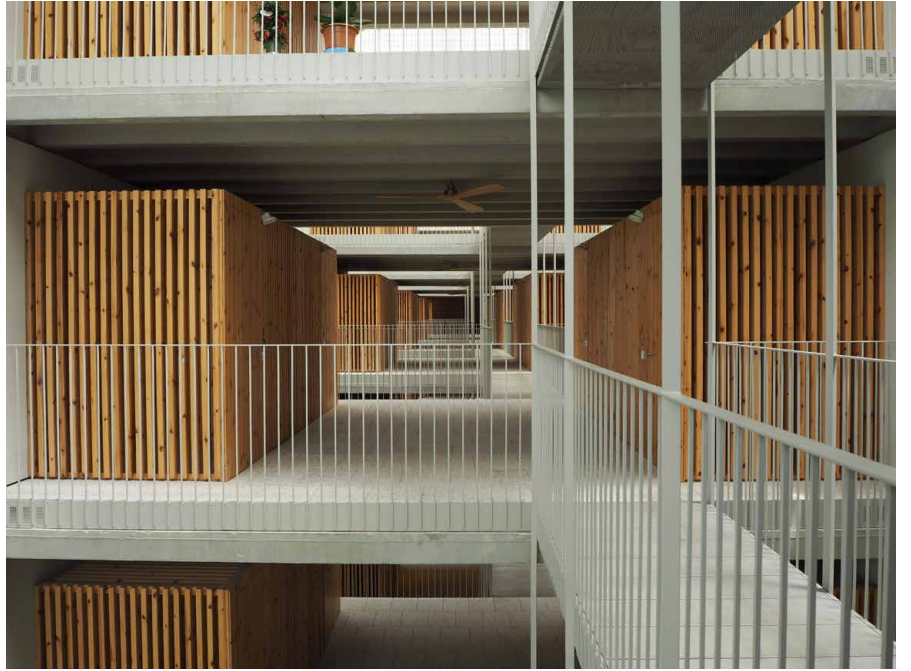
Material presence was a quiet but persistent theme throughout the tour. In Copenhagen, the architectural expression often relied on an economy of means, where materials were deployed sparingly but deliberately. At Thoravej 29 by Pihlmann, circularity was not a future ambition. It was already embedded in the present. The reuse of existing structures and materials, paired with minimal yet precise interventions, framed sustainability as a spatial, not just technical, ambition. The project reflects a wider ethos captured in Pihlmann's recent publication *Making Matter What Too Often Does Not Matter*, which challenges architects to see and work with the overlooked - materials, stories, and systems often deemed secondary.

This ethos of working with what exists was visible throughout the tour. Practices like Pihlmann demonstrated how every material had to earn its place, not through extravagance, but through presence and performance.

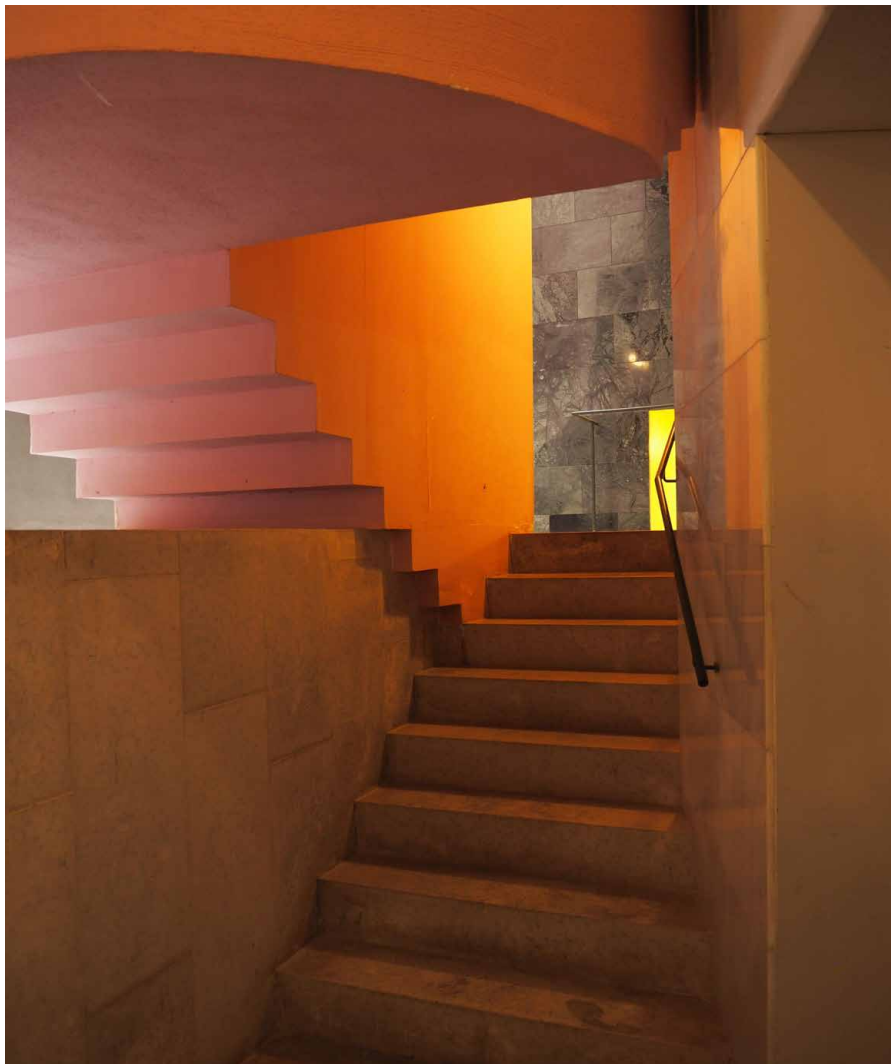
The Sala Beckett by Flores & Prats in Barcelona offered another lens through which to view materiality as a living archive of the building's past lives. By retaining layers of decay and imperfection, and carefully inserting new elements within the old, the project revealed a sensibility that was as poetic as it was practical. It's a powerful demonstration of architecture as a palimpsest—where memory, material, and imagination coexist.

In Amsterdam and Barcelona, this care took on different registers: layering, reuse, adaptation. Materiality was not always polished or pristine, but embedded with story, conflict, and resolution. It taught us that architecture doesn't need to shout. It needs to speak clearly. And that clarity often comes from thoughtful calibration of material choices in response to site, climate, and cultural memory.

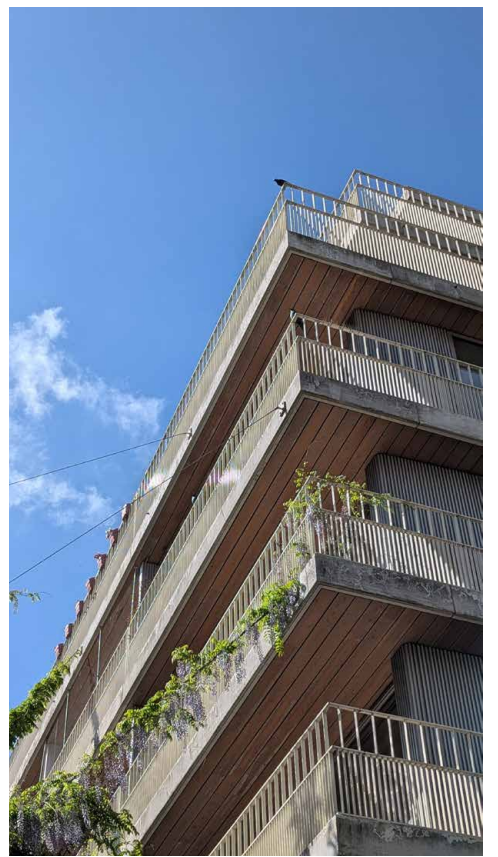
This sensitivity is increasingly urgent. As architects, we are being asked to work within tighter ecological margins. Observing how these cities embrace reuse, minimal intervention, and long-view thinking offered a timely recalibration of what it means to build responsibly.



GREENH@USE by Peris + Toral Arquitectes



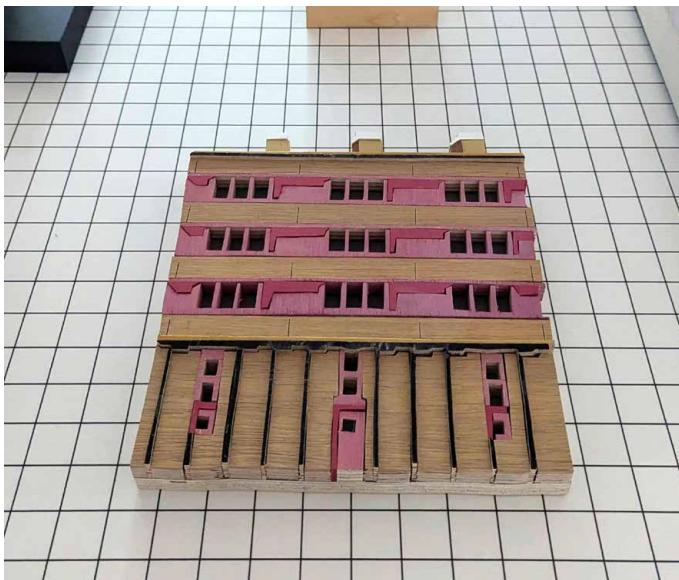
Collective Housing 110 Rooms by MAIO



Overhoeks B1 & B2 by NL Architects



Spaarndammerhart Social Housing by Marcel Lok_Architect + Korth Tielens Architects



Elevation model at v

² Beroep Kunstenaar, "Architectural Policy," accessed 28 June 2025, <https://www.beroepkunstenaar.nl/en/disciplines/architecture-in-the-netherlands/architectural-policy/>.

³ Meer aandacht ruimtelijke kwaliteit, "De wereld van de architect" accessed 28 June 2025, <https://www.architectuur.nl/nieuws/meer-aandacht-ruimtelijke-kwaliteit/>

Aesthetics

Beyond Surface

If materiality is about the bones, aesthetics is about how the skin reads. On this tour, it became clear that aesthetics is not merely a question of style or decoration; it is an ongoing dialogue between architecture and society. A larger pursuit that shapes how people experience and belong to their environments.

Aesthetic resolution is deeply tied to civic presence and collective identity. It is an attitude, a way of caring for the public realm and telling stories through built form. The best architecture we encountered, whether in the precise structural rigour or the expressive ornamentation, was always rooted in context, culture, and human scale. It invited us to linger, to engage, and to feel a sense of place.

Rotterdam's boldness demonstrated that aesthetics can also be a form of political expression. A refusal to be paralysed by tradition or fear of failure. The city's willingness to experiment and welcome the unexpected spoke to a restless creativity that keeps the conversation alive and evolving.

Too often, discussions about aesthetics fall into the traps of taste or fleeting trends. Yet this tour reminded us that aesthetics is fundamentally a shared cultural language. It is about empathy as much as elegance, participation as much as presentation.

Aesthetics, in this broader sense, is a civic gesture. It's an invitation to belong, to debate, and to observe collectively. In the Netherlands, this ethos is institutionalised through mechanisms like the *welstandscommissie* (Spatial Quality Committee), which assesses buildings not only for their technical competence but for how they contribute to the local fabric—considering materiality, proportions, facade rhythms, and relationships to surroundings.² These processes underscore that aesthetic quality is a communal value, embedded in governance and everyday life.

Ultimately, aesthetics invites us to consider what kind of world we want to live in and what architecture can do to help us get there. It is not an afterthought but an essential part of the design journey, deeply intertwined with context.

The 2025 Dulux Study Tour has been an invaluable journey. I am deeply grateful to the Australian Institute of Architects, Dulux, and all those who made this experience possible. The opportunity to engage with visionary peers, thoughtful practitioners, and inspiring cities has broadened my perspective in ways that will resonate throughout my career.

This trip was not simply about observing architecture; it was about embracing new ways of thinking, questioning, and collaborating. I am excited to translate these learnings into my practice, championing governance that enables, materiality that respects, and aesthetics that connect. Beyond that, I look forward to sharing these insights with the broader architectural community.

Thank you to the entire Dulux Study Tour team, my fellow participants, and the practices who generously shared their knowledge. This journey has only just begun!

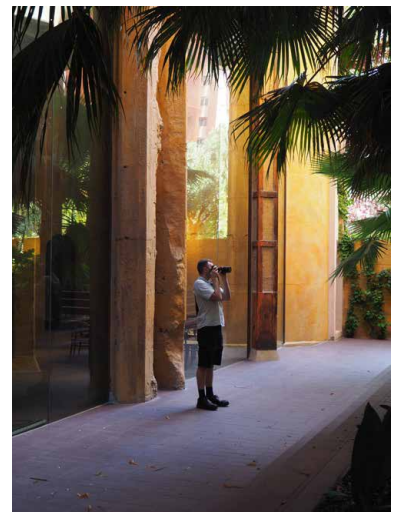


2025 Dulux Study Tour Prize recipients

Jimmy Carter
Kate Shepherd
Marni Reti
Nicholas Souksamrane
Gumji Kang

Industry Representatives

Abbey Czudek Australian Institute of Architects
James Kennedy Australian Institute of Architects
Maridza Riccioni Dulux
Pete Wood Dulux
Adair Winder Architecture Media



Gumji Kang

gumji@snohetta.com
Snøhetta