

ARCHITECTURE BULLETIN

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DIVERSITY – WHO WE ARE



Diversity

ARCHITECTURE BULLETIN

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Thank you to Ashley Dunn for his significant
contribution to *Architecture Bulletin* over the last
two years; he has stepped down from the
Editorial Committee. We welcome the new
committee members – Jason Dibbs, Elise
Honeyman and David Welsh – as well as
members of the newly formed editorial working
group and associate contributors.



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MESSAGES TO THE BULLETIN

24 MAY 2019

Congratulations to all the members who contributed to the *Architecture Bulletin* Procurement issue (Vol 75 No 4, March 2019). It was broad reaching, informative and generally very interesting.

Further to Andrew Nimmo's president's message referring to the NSW Procurement Taskforce, I'd also like to mention a recent and growing trend of local councils in procuring architectural services on a stage-by-stage basis and requesting competitive fee bids for each stage, as opposed to engaging services for the entirety of a project.

I have discussed this with a number of council procurement departments who genuinely believe this method provides better financial 'value' for council. My counter argument is that this process dissipates the design intent and interrupts the flow of project knowledge, which leads to poor outcomes that fall short of community expectations. Further, the disjointed sequence of consultancy inevitably leads to costly construction variations and complicates the question of liability. My argument continues to fall on deaf ears.

As a considerable portion of our profession is engaged by local council, I believe these misguided procurement policies should be countered by the Institute.

Tim Greer

is a director of Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects.

27 MAY 2019

I agree that staging commissions is becoming more common – I think it is for two reasons. Firstly, I think that briefs are so poorly developed that they are not in a position to gets fees for the full engagement. Secondly, that some councils and government departments think that different architects specialise in design and documentation, therefore once you have the design you want a low cost provider of glorified drafting services and that is sufficient (which of course is wrong).

Personally we refuse to tender for documentation services on someone else's design – even if it is shortlisted – and try to explain why to the client. I agree that this is something that the Procurement Taskforce could look at as it is a trend which further diminishes the role of the architect.

Andrew Nimmo

is the immediate past NSW Chapter president of the Australian Institute of Architects.

WRITE TO US

Send your feedback to bulletin@architecture.com.au. We also invite members to contribute articles and reviews to our Chapter section. We reserve the right to edit responses and contributions.

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Diversity

Architecture Bulletin Vol 76 No 2 Sept 2019

FRONT COVER

Waterloo has the highest concentration of public housing in the inner city of Sydney and is an area slated for large-scale urban renewal. As high-density private dwellings are planned to dominate the neighbourhood, *#WeLiveHere2017* made a visible protest against the redevelopment by the residents of the two largest towers on the estate. For a month in September 2017, over 300 residents illuminated the inside of one of their windows with coloured lights as a sign of resistance. The project also celebrated the diverse community of Waterloo before the area is reimagined.

The *#WeLiveHere2017* art project was created by the residents of Waterloo, as part of the City of Sydney's Art & About program. The story of the project is documented in *There Goes Our Neighbourhood*, a film directed by Clare Lewis and produced by Carolina Sorensen. Photo: Carol Tang

More info on this project: welivehere2017.com.au

CHAPTER

Understanding and respecting differences	Kathlyn Loseby	36
Advocating for solutions to a crisis of construction quality and consumer confidence	Kate Concannon	37
Regional news		38
Patrons' news		39
Patron's case study: Diversity by design	Mirvac Design	40
Reconciliation Conversations: grounding architecture in truth	Michael Mossman	42
Life Fellows and Fellows in NSW: how can it be more equitable?	Tessa Goodman and Kate Concannon	43
The Bauhaus in its centenary year	Ed Lippmann	45
Book reviews	Andrew Daly and Kerwin Datu	47
Provoke: A return to rooms	Jennifer McMaster	48

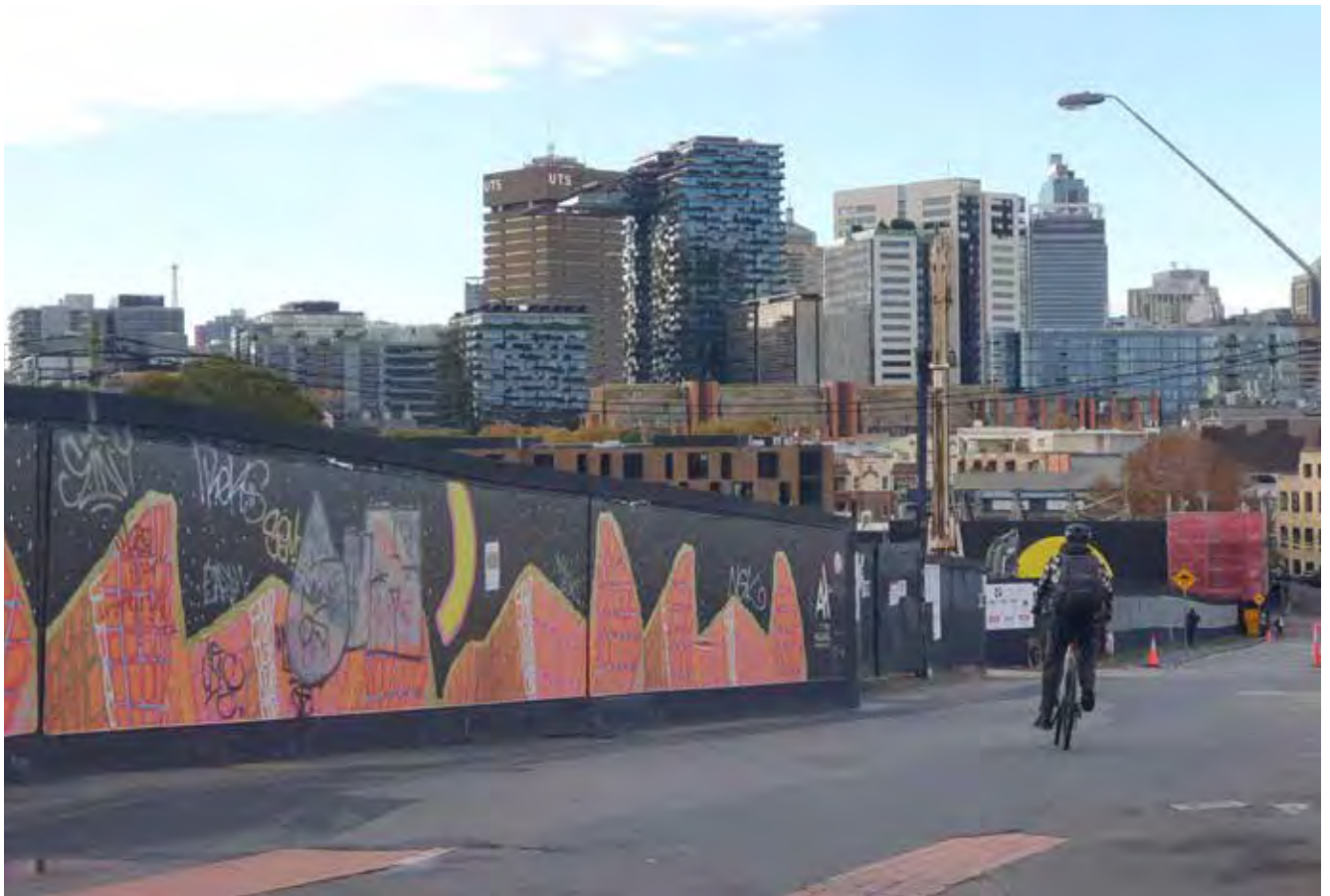
Diversity is a reality for architects and architecture, and increasingly a desire. But while we all readily agree on the value of it, coming to terms with the reality of diversity is still hard. It is uncomfortable; we do not yet know where it will take us. For this issue, we encouraged contributors to think of just how far the imperative to embrace diversity can push our expectations until they break, and what kind of profession and practice we will find on the other side.

Echoes of Redfern	Marni Reti	2
Learning from the Redfern and Waterloo communities	Shuang West	6
Mind the gap	Ben Coulston, Brooke Jackson and Gerard Reinmuth	8
Harnessing cultural diversity to elevate architecture	David Kaunitz	10
Balarinji – embedding Aboriginal design in major projects	Ros Moriarty	12
Building the Maronite faith in Sydney	George El Khouri	13
Cultural intelligence: de-layering diversity	Satvir Singh Mand	14
Bangladeshi architects in Australia	Iftekhar Abdullah	16
Harmonising diversity	Adauto Melo de Carvalho	17
AACA study on architectural education	Alex Maroya, Gill Matthewson and Louise Wallis	18
Forms of hope and dignity	Salma Eddie and Hermez Ichaya	19
Design ethic as the first step in an architect's activism	Sahibajot Kaur	20
Punchbowl Mosque	Jason Dibbs	22
Architecture, drawing and the body	Rena Czaplinska-Archer	24
What does gender-sensitive placemaking look like?	Nicole Kalms	26
Diverse terrain	Oi Choong	28
Building the unfinished: Victorian Pride Centre	Steve Whitford	30
Making a new norm at work	Neph Wake	31
Severe mental illness in the workplace	Kerwin Datu	32
Smashing the architect archetype	David Tickle	34

The Block

The Block today [May 2019], on the east side running parallel to the trainline where Murawina once stood. Murawina was a preschool run for and by Aboriginal people, a school that put culture at the centre of early childhood development and community. Today, it's desolate – awaiting developments. Developments that were widely opposed by the majority of the community of The Block: a mere five years ago the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy occupied the land, fighting against it. The development is going ahead and already we feel a great loss.

Redfern has been the heart of Indigenous self-determination for as long as I've been alive, a beacon for Indigenous people across the country to establish themselves. A place where, even away from our respective Countries, we could reclaim space and community alongside the Gadigal people. It's no longer the place I remember: the schools I attended aren't the same – if they're still there at all; the programs that supported me through to adulthood aren't present; and the community that I knew feels dissipated. In the place of all of that ineffable spirit there are empty streets, construction partitions and scaffolding hiding the destruction of one of the culturally richest and most evolved areas of Sydney city. I'm not under any delusion that Redfern was a perfect suburb – it has a sordid history and reputation – but I'm a proud Palawa and Ngatiwai woman, born and raised on Gadigal land. I spent my formative years learning, developing and growing into the woman I would become in Sydney's inner city. It's where I founded my Indigenous identity and is ground zero for ongoing Aboriginal resistance. There's a history here from the not so distant past that feels like it's disappearing for developments and high rises.



Echoes of Redfern

Marni Reti

Darlo

Darlington Public School, it was my next step in education – we were a school that took immense pride in the Aboriginal heritage of our location and the majority of the school’s population. Our sports houses were named Pemulwuy, Yagan and Truganini. We were taught introductory Wiradjuri, Aboriginal dances and the long history of Aboriginal resistance from young ages. I was shocked to learn in my later years that not all schools were like this.



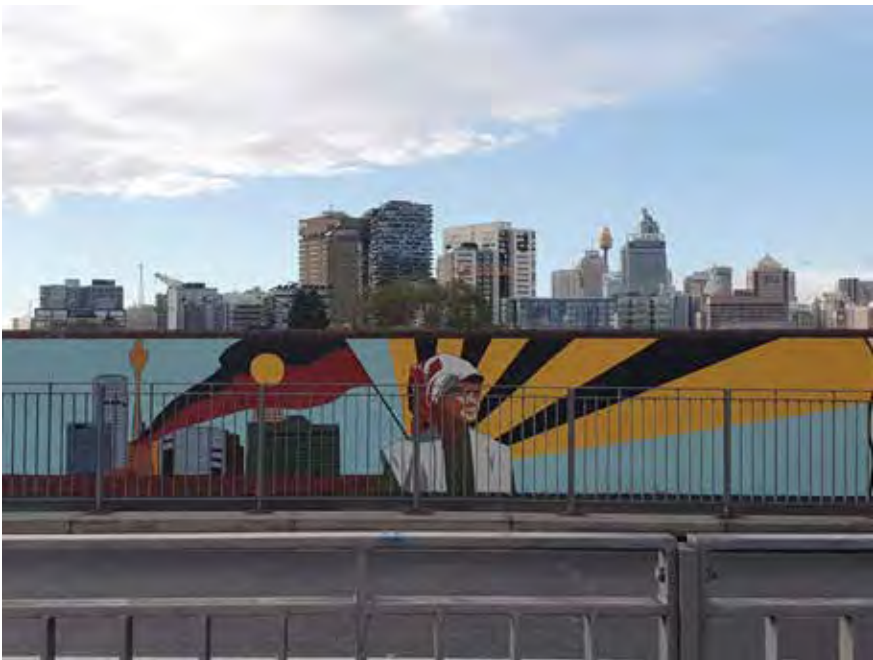
Lawson St Bridge right

Lawson St Bridge has been lined with murals since I can remember – murals that tell stories of a long history before Redfern would become the iconic suburb we know it as now. There is pride being taken in our history here, on this bridge, on these walls. It is this kind of pride and public support we need in all facets of development and future planning for Redfern, not just in art but in buildings and design.



Lawson St Bridge skyline

Redfern for me has always been a reflection of the city’s CBD but it’s not just the proximity but the fact that it’s an integral part of the urban fabric of the city that makes it so popular. I understand why Redfern has become such a popular suburb with its location, community, culture, history. What I can’t grasp is why, in the process of its growing popularity, we have to lose the foundation of what makes it a great place to live and thrive.





Lawson St Bridge left

The street art that guides you down Lawson St has always felt like a reflection of the contemporary urban Indigenous community that has thrived here. Now it feels like an echo of it. It is one of the few aspects that have been not only kept but maintained. It is a small piece of the Redfern I used to know.



Abercrombie & Lawson

The walk between Darlo and Murawina is littered with new developments as well as echoes of old Redfern. There are histories here that I don't know of that are just as important and relevant; we're at risk of losing it all and that's my greatest concern. Each building is a representation, and many of the new developments represent a Redfern devoid of culture and history. Not everyone wants to be an architect or a designer. What everyone does want is for the people who make decisions pertaining to them to listen. Consultation is key. How do we as an industry give back to communities? We listen. If there's anything we can learn from Redfern's history, it's the power of self-determination.





Little Eveleigh

I've walked each street in Redfern more times than I can count. Little Eveleigh feels like the road most taken and one of the streets that has endured. Maybe because it's privately owned or maybe there just isn't enough land available on it to make enough money to make it worth developing. For whatever reason, it's one of my favourite streets to wander down because it feels so familiar.



Redfern House

With everything changing in Redfern it's been getting harder and harder for me to recall the way it used to be. There are moments, however, walking along Regent Street when you look up and there are pockets of our history peeking out. It's refreshing to see amongst the swell of unfamiliar shopfronts. I don't want to imply that these new businesses are bad for Redfern. On the contrary, the opportunity for growth within our community is a major benefit of the peaking interest in Redfern. I just believe it's important for us as designers to look at the existing infrastructure and culture to drive our work, to develop contextually appropriate spaces and facades for these infamous streets.



Redfern Park

The core of what made Redfern a vital aspect of my life and an icon in Sydney has always been its communities and its commitment to the people that call it home. There have been a lot of changes to the suburb in the last decade or so – with some positive and some negative outcomes. In the midst of the mass developments happening – The Block, the Redfern/Waterloo Housing – we risk the continued displacement and loss of what makes Redfern great and what has kept Redfern at the heart of this city: its people. The designs and developments that are inevitably coming for Redfern should do what Redfern does best: represent its people, their histories and facilitate their ongoing communities.

Marni Reti is a Master's student at UTS and works at Kaunitz Yeung. This year she was awarded one of three inaugural Droga Indigenous Architecture Scholarships.



Future Method



#WeLiveHere2017

Photo: Nic Walker

Learning from the Redfern and Waterloo communities

Shuang West

As the NSW government ramps up growth and development in Sydney, those of us in the architecture and planning industry have become enablers of processes that impact vulnerable communities around us. Our social responsibilities are challenged as we navigate between serving the economy of the state and the diverse local communities that we are ultimately a part of. Are we enabling privatisation over community? Economy over diversity?

At the heart of these questions is the redevelopment of the Waterloo Housing Estate, home to a strong Aboriginal community as well as 4,000 public housing tenants from varying cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. For the past three years, the Waterloo housing community has been undergoing the prescribed masterplanning process of the NSW government, which plans to drastically increase the density of the area in the next 20 years. The existing 2,006 public housing units will be replaced with more than 6,800 new units, over 70% of which will become private housing with no extra provision of social housing.* The tallest of the development will reach 40 storeys.

What has been fascinating to observe is that the state's top-down masterplanning process and outcomes has since triggered multiple *counter-masterplan* initiatives from the current housing tenants. The space in which the housing tenants and their local architecture allies have gathered is the Future Planning Centre (FPC), established by the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group (WPHAG). WPHAG is the *only* non-governmental group who is able to submit an *alternative* masterplan to be negotiated and integrated into the final preferred masterplan.

Through the FPC, alternative methodologies of inclusive community consultation have been prototyped and demonstrated. These initiatives have attracted support from local architecture practitioners and students alike who have seen value in aligning their skills and knowledge with the values of the housing community. The following are three local organisations and their key approach to working with the Waterloo community.

*For more information and facts on the status of the Waterloo redevelopment, please visit: communitiesplus.com.au/news/waterloos-preferred-masterplan

FUTURE METHOD

Local architecture and spatial practitioners Joel Sherwood-Spring* and Genevieve Murray (aka Future Method), facilitated the original design of the layout and interior of the FPC. As you enter the space, the message is clear: ‘Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.’ They have approached their involvement with the alternative masterplanning process as prioritising the voice of the Aboriginal community – a voice drowned out by the ongoing processes of colonisation and dispossession, an issue which for the majority continues to be too confronting to deal with.

Future Method have shown in Waterloo that as uncomfortable and confronting as it may be, it is possible to create a generative space that allows the respectful dialogue and understanding between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community. Teaching us that the voice of the Aboriginal community should not be an afterthought but rather the place where inclusive planning begins.

* Joel Sherwood-Spring is another winner of an inaugural Droga Indigenous Architecture Scholarship.

VIGILANTI

Vigilanti, a spatial design practice co-founded by Eddie Ma and Linseen Lee, was the final external consultant to deliver the alternative masterplan on behalf of the housing tenants. Along with a team of architecture students from the University of Technology Sydney, they sought to empower the tenants by helping them understand the often misleading planning information and industry jargon issued through the state’s consultants. For them, it was as simple and important as breaking down the word *masterplan* in many languages.

The skill set provided by the Vigilanti team was not atypical to our industry. Masterplanning research, case studies, 3D models, rendered visualisations were all familiar tools they used to communicate information back to the tenants. Unlike the state’s planning process, Vigilanti treated each individual tenant they came across as a client, listening to them through countless visioning and informative sessions.

The WPHAG *Waterloo Estate Re-development Options Report* (December 2018), facilitated by Vigilanti, can be read here: <https://bit.ly/33GWdhd>

#WELIVEHERE2017

While tasks of delivering the alternative masterplan carried on, something exciting was happening on another scale in the housing community. Initiated by creative producer Clare Lewis, *#WeLiveHere2017* was an architectural art installation involving the aging tenants from two public housing towers Turanga and Matavai.

Starting as a crowdfunded campaign, the *#WeLiveHere2017* volunteer team, consisting of locals and tenants, doorknocked to install vibrant LED strips around the large windows of each living room in the towers. The effect was the dramatic illumination of two 30-storey housing towers seen from most parts of Inner Sydney. As they installed the lights in the living rooms of the participating tenants, the team documented collective stories and memories while transforming the built environment of the Waterloo neighbourhood.

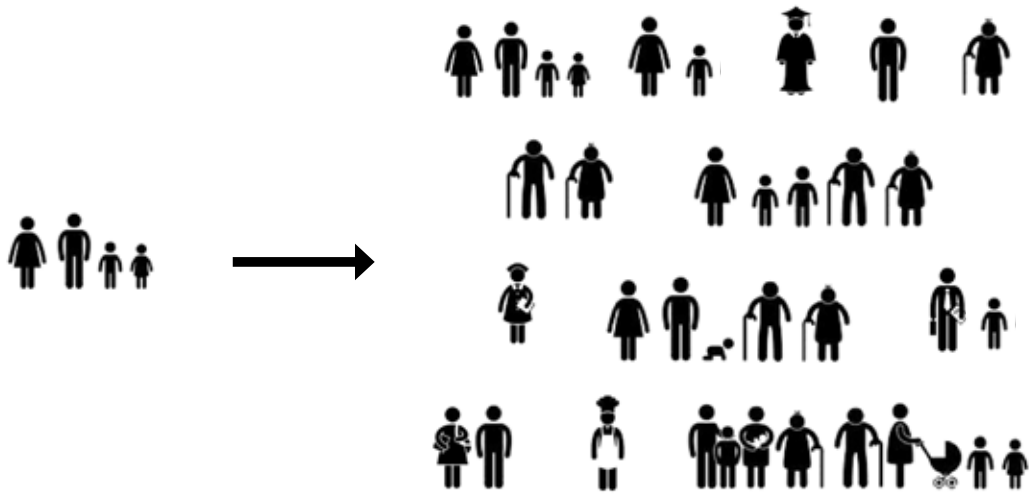
There Goes Our Neighbourhood is a documentary film co-produced by People Productions and Wildbear Entertainment. It screened on ABC on November 2018 and is available to be viewed online. Please visit: <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/there-goes-our-neighbourhood>



Vigilanti

Learning from these alternative methods of community engagement in Waterloo, it is clear that being inclusive and working with diversity is not a straightforward process. It is the dedicated, ongoing social engagement with a community who are capable of having the knowledge and skills to lead an inclusive future that represents *everyone*. While there will inevitably be decision makers beyond our control, we can continue to enrich our own practices by finding new frameworks of working with, and learning from, the diversity around us.

Shuang West, director of Studio Shu, is forming a practice around social impact within our built environment. She thanks Future Method, Vigilanti and *#WeLiveHere2017* for contributing to this article.



Diverse family types – moving beyond the nuclear family Image courtesy the authors

Mind the gap

Ben Coulston, Brooke Jackson and Gerard Reinmuth

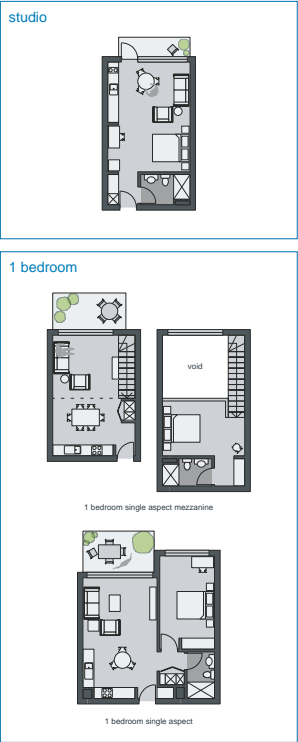


Figure 4D.4 Diagrams showing indicative layouts for small apartments
Note: these do not represent the only solutions

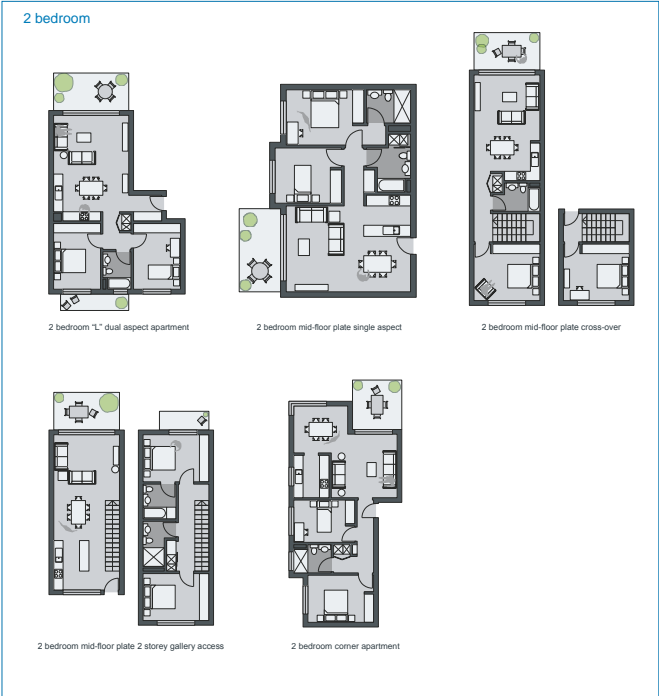


Figure 4D.5 Diagrams showing indicative layouts for 2 bedroom apartments
Note: these do not represent the only solutions

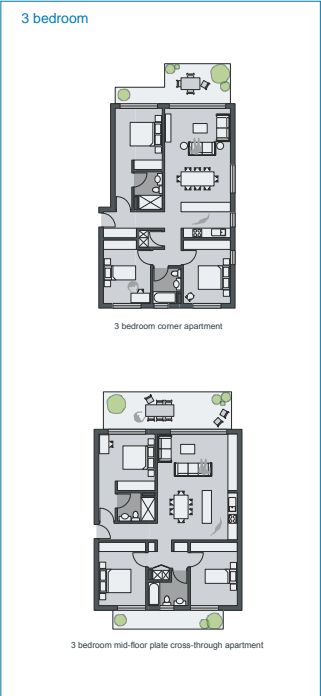


Figure 4D.6 Diagrams showing indicative layouts for 3 bedroom apartments
Note: these do not represent the only solutions

Extract from Part 4 of the *Apartment Design Guide*, 2015 (NSW Department of Planning and Environment)

‘Secure and diverse forms of tenure would ensure the ambitions of the model are met. Looking internationally there is no shortage of examples to show how this might be achieved: resale restricted leases, cooperative lease/purchase, community land trusts, shared equity and deliberative development to name a few.’

The housing crisis in Australia is well documented. Both Sydney and Melbourne continually feature near the top of global unaffordable housing market lists for both purchase and rental affordability. While this fact is the dominant headline, there is a related crisis in housing diversity that is only now being given appropriate attention. A ‘diversity gap’ classifies the growing divide between the forms of housing people actually need when measured against the housing stock that is being provided and can be afforded.*

While there are quantifiable measures that assist with the definition of affordability, measuring the specifics of housing type supply against the needs of individual households is less understood. Housing diversity, as a defined term, is a more complex label as it affords the synthesis of housing stock with household ‘family types’, geo-specific supply and demand, and in turn also calls for diverse measures of tenure for financial accessibility.

So why is housing diversity more relevant than ever? The supply of housing globally is increasingly being left to the private market to deliver. We claim that we are witnessing a seismic market failure whereby risk-return logics combined with increased financing costs and limited regulatory and tenure frameworks has produced a housing market with very limited options.*

We are now seeing how the current limitations on what is being delivered in Sydney’s apartment market is having catastrophic impacts on the city. With the entire apartment production consisting of a mono-product (differentiated only into studio, one, two and three bedroom apartments) the market is unable to accommodate diverse ‘family types’, including multi-generational and blended families – not to mention ill-addressing the rise in solo households – and the ever-present issue of aging in place. Adding to this the singular development model has caused a stalemate for financial access to market, attributing to issues of affordability.

As design professionals we assume that our skill in spatial innovation places us in an ideal position to solve the crisis. Yet we don’t ask, is this solely a design problem?

In the first instance, we can say ‘yes’: provision of diverse spatial models is a key element to the solution (see GANSW’s *Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code and Design Guide*). Yet, it should also be recognised how housing design sits as but one contributor in an ecology of factors impacting on the current housing market and where the blockages are preventing the production of diverse housing models. While we can reference many international precedents that provide housing diversity as exemplars – including Berlin’s

Baugruppen and Zurich’s Hunziker Areal – they are illegal in NSW and much of the Australian context (in regulatory terms), unfinanceable (by the banking sector) and unaffordable (given our limited engagement with alternate forms of tenure).

This is not to say that planning controls within NSW, specifically SEPP 65 and the complementary *Apartment Design Guide* (originally the Residential Flat Building Design Code), have not done a great deal to improve the base quality of housing amenity. Yet, there are two key problems. Firstly, the ADG was designed in the context of a limited market with its simple one-, two- and three-bedroom differentiation; different housing types were not imagined in the guide. Secondly, the ADG is not used on a discretionary basis as allowed by the legislation but as a mandatory requirement. The ADG provides market stability but curtails innovation around new types.

A financial industry that understands and accommodates new lending processes could also ease some issues surrounding access to market. We have seen internationally (and even now more locally) how CHP, cooperative, private and public funding has diversified the assessment of development on default risk and broadened to allow partnership and alternative methods of securing finance.

Secure and diverse forms of tenure would then ensure the ambitions of the model are met. These would need to be selected and indexed based on demographic requirement and likely demonstrated to allow a cultural shift. Looking internationally there is no shortage of examples to show how this might be achieved: resale restricted leases, cooperative lease/purchase, community land trusts, shared equity and deliberative development to name a few.

New spatial reasoning can then finally be deployed, not in a naïve attempt to ‘solve the housing crisis’ on its own, but to provide speculative models that are tested against current regulatory, financial and tenure practices. By pinpointing the correlative aspects of these practices that constrain housing diversity at present, we may be able to make an incisive cut through the housing problem, highlighting barriers that then only government has the authority to dismantle. Until they do, the housing affordability and diversity crisis will continue, regardless of the efforts of designers.

This article forms the basis of wider body of research – *Creating the City We Want: Tackling the Barriers to Housing Diversity in NSW* – currently being delivered by Landcom in conjunction with the University of Technology Sydney (lead institution), Western Sydney University, the University of New South Wales and Terroir.

* N Perry, A Nguyen and T Ho, *Creating the City We Want – Building the Housing Project DATA Index* (School of Business, Western Sydney University, 2018)

Harnessing cultural diversity to elevate architecture

David Kaunitz

The team at Kaunitz Yeung Architecture and I have the amazing privilege to work with some of the most culturally rich and diverse clients and communities in the world. People often think this is a strange context for an inner Sydney firm. How can we have the right understanding and perspective to overcome the differences and challenges? The answer is simple. Through our experience we have developed an approach which harnesses the challenges of working in very different cultural worlds. This process turns what may appear to be insurmountable challenges into advantages which lift the architecture beyond what normally could be achieved.

The challenges appear to be infinite. How do you communicate? How can you be sure you are understood? How do you understand the culture? How do you do this in a short project time frame? How do you avoid making a cultural mistake so significant the building is not used? Uncertainty compounds these challenges. What can we possibly have to offer from the outside? Would it be better for a more culturally aligned architect to lead this project?

These challenges and doubts could be harnessed by gaining a level of proficiency of the particular culture and language. In my case I speak fluent pidgin and a now very rusty Indigenous language – one of sixty – in the Solomon Islands. But even there where I spent years living in remote communities as the only outsider, I would need to live a lifetime to have a true understanding. Nor could I possibly learn each of the 60 languages. The truth is that you can never become the ‘other’ and nor should you. So the only approach if you are to work across cultures is to have the right process.

The foundation of working with diverse groups is mutual respect. You must acknowledge what you do not know and open yourself up to two-way learning. In central Australia this is called the *Mulparara Way*. In Vanuatu this is the *Penama System*, which in Ambae Province is the *Hango-Hango*: the respectful two-way learning in equal partnership. This requires humility and can be confronting for architects as it means relinquishing control. The design process must be opened to the clients and users. In this way, the clients and end users bring their knowledge of their cultural world to the design process. They bring what you lack. This complements what you bring to the project: your experience, best practice

and expertise. The best of both worlds can be brought together to turn the challenges to your advantage.

We use local governance structures to facilitate consultation and interaction with clients and users through the whole project. All cultural settings have often complex and not necessarily apparent structures. If you ignore these, you risk causing offence. Or worse you could cause complete disengagement. For example, if you do not follow the right cultural protocols you may put people in the position of only being able to engage if they offend their family, elders or leaders. We almost always use a cultural intermediary to overcome this.

How might this work in practice? A starting point is to identify an individual or group that can act as an intermediary. This may be a person that has the respect of the clients and users; they also will have some cultural understanding of your world. This person (or people) will serve as a bridge and may be a community leader or future leader. It could also be a board in an instance where the board is a true representative of the culture and diversity.

This person or group then becomes your sounding board and navigator. An effective approach we use is to jointly present or run consultation workshops with the cultural intermediary. We may spend the morning presenting to them and engaging with them. This allows for two-way learning to enrich the presentation. The result is a joint presentation to a broader group in the afternoon in a culturally appropriate way – perhaps in language – by the intermediary. Our role is to dovetail our input to ensure the detail is not lost and guide discussion towards meaningful outcomes.

It is also important that engagement is as diverse as the group you are dealing with. Women, men, school children, youth and older people should all be engaged. Here we are creative (eg it may include school workshops or community BBQs). We also allow time and opportunity for the incidental: a chat at the shops or a yarn under a tree. The more voices you hear the greater understanding of the challenges you will have. This will maximise the opportunities for the project.

What are these opportunities? The primary opportunity is the ability to make a building that is highly relevant to its users and loved by your clients. You can think of these as



The Punmu Aboriginal Health Clinic in the Western Australian desert aimed to reinforce the organisational approach of respect of people, land and culture to create a facility with community ownership
 Photo: Brett Boardman

customisations that enrich the building. Many of these will be small and not obvious in the finished product. They also may be things that were not done to avoid cultural irrelevance. They enable cultural compliance just as conventional regulations are required for compliance.

The real opportunities are in those elements which raise the architecture to another level. Particularly in our Pacific and south-east Asian work this has taken the form of fusing with local vernacular into the architecture using local building practices and materials. Through the involvement of local artisans and trades we allow for local expression and architectural quirks. This combines with your expertise, best practice and broader architectural approach to create a cohesive architectural outcome.

In other instances, particularly in the Australian context, there may be an absence of clear local vernacular or local artisans. In these cases, we use art as the opportunity to create a cultural connection and involve community members. In Australia we are privileged to be able to work with some of the most amazing artists who are sold in Sotheby's and collected by galleries. Their art reflects the oldest living culture in the world. The integration of culturally appropriate art in a meaningful way into the building is an opportunity. An opportunity which creates cultural relevance and elevates the architecture.

We have used this approach in our latest remote Aboriginal health clinics in the communities of Parnngurr and Punmu in Matu Country in the Western Australian Desert. There, in parallel, we have delivered two of the remotest pieces of architecture in the country. At the end of the project there were the usual teething problems and defects. When the CEO of the health service sat with the elders to discuss these, they told him not to worry – they were very happy with the building. The CEO said, 'That's good – it was

'All cultural settings have often complex and not necessarily apparent local governance structures. If you ignore these, you risk causing offence. Or worse you could cause complete disengagement.'

designed by the white guy, the architect'. The elders replied by saying: 'That guy was very respectful and we like him, but he did not design the building – we told him what to draw. So any issues are our issues'. Of course, we did more than draw what we were told. The projects were a complex synthesis of culture, place, program and the tectonic. However, this sense of ownership is the most important outcome and is a level of ownership and responsibility not usually experienced from clients.

Working in a different cultural world is the opportunity to elevate the architecture beyond what would normally be possible; to create buildings that are loved and used. Buildings that are owned by the clients, users and communities, and reinforce their aspirations for a brighter future. Without the challenges this would not be possible.

We are by no means the only practice who work in this way. We are thankful for those who helped forged this path, such as Paul Pholeros and Dr David Week among others. We also respect the work of practices such as MASS Design Group, Elemental and Kéré Architecture who show how working in culturally diverse settings in a collaborative way can lead to elevated architectural outcomes. But through our experiences, particularly in the remote places of Melanesia and Aboriginal Australia, we have forged a unique approach specific to the context. In an increasingly homogenised architectural world, it is important that there are still unique approaches contextualised in place. Harnessing cultural diversity in this way elevates architecture.

David Kaunitz is a director and co-founder of Kaunitz Yeung Architecture. He has more than a decade of architecture, community development and post-disaster experience in Australia, Asia and the Pacific and the Pacific: working for clients such as UNICEF, UNHCR, World Vision and the governments of Australia, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Fiji and the Philippines; this includes work in more than 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



Art screens designed by local artists create a sense of pride in the community. Pictured is artist Jakayu Biljab with her screen at Punmu Clinic
 Photo: Brett Boardman

Balarinji – embedding Aboriginal design in major projects

Ros Moriarty



Balarinji sculpture for the Roads & Maritime Services' Nambucca Heads Service Centre on the state's north coast. Photo: Kylie Cork

There was no meaningful design engagement with Aboriginal Australia when Yanyuwa man John Moriarty and I established Aboriginal design agency Balarinji in 1983. The initial drive to establish the agency was for us to ensure that our eldest son Tim and our younger two children would understand more about their Yanyuwa culture. It soon became apparent that our family's exploration of identity resonated more widely for questions about the identity of the nation as a whole.

Over 36 years since, Balarinji has endeavoured to foster a deep understanding and awareness of Aboriginal culture through design excellence, embedded storytelling and authentic collaboration for major Australian public spaces. It has increasingly been embraced by clients and the design community, but it wasn't always this way.

We've seen a fundamental shift. Our clients are understanding the importance of engaging Balarinji and the local Aboriginal community at the start of a project in order to embed an Indigenous sense of place into planning, rather than attempting to retrofit to a completed site.

The NSW government, and in particular Transport for NSW, has taken a lead in commissioning public art strategies and installations for major infrastructure sites. These projects have focused on activating storytellers and artists from local Aboriginal communities who speak for a particular site. An example is a Roads and Maritime Services' granite and steel sculpture at the Nambucca Heads Service Centre. It was produced by a group of Gumbaynggirr artists, whom Balarinji appointed, to educate travellers and locals alike on their Dreaming story and the importance of the area's ecology.

Similarly, Balarinji worked recently with four local artists on public art for the Redfern Station improvement works.

Comprising Dolly Brown, James Simon, Suzy Evans and lead artist and curator Adam Hill, Balarinji appointed and guided the artist group to develop integrated art for bollards, glazing, a sculptural tree guard and heritage wall application.

While we've made significant headway in meaningful design engagement with Aboriginal Australia for major projects, there is still a way to go to ensure Indigenous knowledge and culture become more visible. The Aboriginal narrative is largely invisible in Australian public places. Australia has much to gain if Indigenous design integration becomes the norm in all major infrastructure projects throughout the country, not least a unique identity, grounded in place, that integrates 60,000 years of traditional knowledge and sustainable land management.

As well as embedding Aboriginal design thinking within masterplanning, we need to set real targets for tangible community outcomes. We need a percentage of construction budgets across Australia dedicated to Indigenous public art, alongside public art and interpretation in general. We need to recognise Aboriginal communities' rights to control their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, much of which is communally owned intellectual property (IP). We also need to ensure Aboriginal knowledge holders and artists profit from the use of this IP when it is integrated into built outcomes. We will then have the potential to develop an Australian aesthetic that incorporates and celebrates Indigenous knowledge and culture. It will speak powerfully to our shared Australian identity.

Ros Moriarty is managing director and co-founder of Balarinji, a leading Australian strategy and design practice she established with Yanyuwa man John Moriarty in 1983. The business celebrates the nation's Aboriginal cultural heritage through contemporary design in the resource, infrastructure, tourism, media and sport sectors.

The Maronites have influenced the culture, food and to a large degree the construction industry in Sydney. The support from their churches maintains the heritage roots of character and perception of the Lebanese diaspora. Most Lebanese migrants that came to Australia in the second half of the 1900s were from mountain farming villages – a lifestyle unchanged for centuries – looking for a better life for themselves and their children. On arrival they came with the spirit to succeed and to maintain their identity and culture; the church helped maintain their ambition. My parents arrived here in the 1950s and my father became a builder. I joined the family business as an architect and for over 35 years I have donated my time and architectural services to give back to the community.

There are 200 000 Maronite Catholics in Australia. In Sydney there are nine churches, with the first opening in 1897 at St Maroun's in Redfern. Most are in areas of the main concentration of parishioners: Our Lady of Lebanon at Harris Park and St Charbel's at Punchbowl. The latter is the largest church worldwide in the Maronite faith with over 26 000 parishioners attending weekly for Church and school related activities.

As through history, establishing a Maronite community focuses on the church and its rituals, which form an important part of bringing together people with a common cultural and religious background. The power of architecture and what it can achieve encourages me: a simple architectural sketch or concept has led to government funding or inspiration for clergy or community members to start a project which was only a dream.

Past pro bono architectural work includes designing a 30-bed hostel for Bezzina House (the St George Hospital Cancer Care Lodge), and a primary school and multipurpose hall for the Malek Fahd Islamic School in Greenacre. In Lebanon, following the end of the civil war, I funded and developed a website about my parent's village of Niha. This gave me an insight of the history of the Maronite way of life

through the centuries. I also funded street tree planting and undertook restoration work for the village square and church.

Currently most churches are experiencing declining numbers of parishioners but the Maronite Church in Sydney is expanding. It has learnt from other Lebanese diasporas around the world that the church-only tradition will not encourage the new generation to stay connected. One of the ideas to engage the community is to improve the existing structural activities and to build other facilities managed by the church. Currently I am helping clergy with architectural advice and concepts for churches, aged care facilities, function centres, schools, childcare facilities, carparks and welfare centres.

The wonderful thing about architecture is that it influences the crowd over time. Buildings give a sense of pride, identity, achievement and belonging to a community. Working with the Maronite community over the years has given me a lot of pleasure – to design and then attend church services and buildings knowing that you have helped the community and future generations through architectural planning.

George El Khouri studied architecture at UNSW and has practised as a registered architect since 1984.

Note
Of a population of about 4 000 000 in Lebanon, roughly one third are of Christian faith with the majority being Maronite, and two thirds are Muslim. The president of Lebanon is Maronite and is the only non-Muslim head of government in the Middle East outside of Israel.

'I am part of the first generation of Arabs born here ... One of my successes is down to the fact that we work together as a family. My father was a builder and he worked very hard. We worked well because we followed his advice and would always give him the final say. That is a very Middle Eastern trait.'

George El Khouri in the 'Sydney Diaspora' issue of *Brownbook* (Jan-Feb 2012)

Building the Maronite faith in Sydney

George El Khouri



St Charbel's Church in Punchbowl, Sydney

Cultural intelligence: de-layering diversity

Satvir Singh Mand

Diversity has in the main focused on gender equality and LGBTQ inclusion, with little visible debate on indigenous, ethnic and cultural inclusion, though common factors resonate across all. Prejudice permeates all spheres of the societal, cultural and political agenda, fuelled by insecurity, bigotry and superiority over the 'other'. It is essential to consider the experience of members of the profession who may feel marginalised and be aware of the limitations ingrained within the imperative to embrace diversity. Does the profession recognise this as an issue or is an attitude of ambivalence acceptable?

This contribution is informed by my shared observations and personal experience and sensitivities while aiming to offer balanced, objective insights on diversity. These are offered based on living and working in Kenya, the UK and Australia for over 15 years each, several years in Japan and Malaysia and a year in India, with access to both the practice and schools of architecture in Australia. Though it may not be valid to compare previous experiences to the current Australian debate, attitudes still prevail at a different scale – perhaps more as subtle undercurrents.

Some of the experience in the UK has been of offensive comments from 'you are not like the others' in not aligning with stereotypes, to 'if we don't talk to him maybe he will just leave' said of a potential intern from an African country, to 'fuck off you black bastard' on a leaving card.

These can stab through aspirations, scar trust and morph into the cultural etiquette of quiet acceptance and lowered career aspirations.

Racism in the guise of entitled arrogance sometimes rears its head when the privileged status of the alpha is challenged. Though this is difficult to prove and easily deniable, the prejudiced logic and lack of sensitivity towards potential and aspirations offers little other explanation. Despite the genuine tension inherent in personal interactions between professionals of diverse backgrounds, the undercurrent of prejudice taints the perception of equality.



Pete Majendie's *185 Empty Chairs* and Shigeru Ban's Transitional 'Cardboard' Cathedral, Christchurch 2016

Photo: Satvir Singh Mand

'Layers of difference may lead some to ignore or fail to acknowledge the potential for complex cultural richness. Instead, they are converted into a paranoia of exclusion and marginalisation, while the new migrant tries to adapt to and adopt the norms of the new dimension.'

THE COVER OF MERIT

A key principle of professional recognition is merit. Yet, this can also be a convenient tool in filtering perception and concluding 'is not good enough'. Prejudice can be conscious, subconscious, overt, subtle or subliminal. It manifests at various stages of the architect's career: as a student, at job interviews, career development opportunities and external engagement with clients, consultants and contractors. Is it a level playing field? Does everyone get a 'fair go'?

The assessment of merit is based on norms inherent in the superior/supervisor/employer's framework and is subject to interpretation and biased application. The international student, interviewee or staff member's understanding of the new, alien environment is complicated by a layering of communication skills and cultural expectations deriving from multiple language, social etiquette and belief systems. Architectural and industry reference points may not align and there is limited social or professional network support for new arrivals. These layers of difference may lead some to ignore or fail to acknowledge the potential for complex cultural richness. Instead, they are converted into a paranoia of exclusion and marginalisation, while the new migrant tries to adapt to and adopt the norms of the new dimension. It's a non-stop game of catch-up with little reciprocal engagement from the host professional culture.

THE CAREER TRAJECTORY

University engagement observations suggest most international students struggle with English as a second or even third language. The level of qualification and curriculum offered in the home country, as well as the level of language-based skills required, condition their comprehension of the brief, interpretation of tutorial guidance and expectations of the process, outputs and quality of submissions. Do academic staff have the skills, resources and most importantly the inclination to provide nuanced support to encourage their potential? The other critical issue is the lack of social engagement between local and international students. There is an expectation of assimilation, rather than multiculturalism, placed on the new arrival. The profession needs to encourage inclusiveness within the university system.

The employment process is also open to a level of bias, starting with the interview, where confidence opens doors while prejudice can stifle careers. The candidate may accept a position or salary lower than what his or her experience might merit. Knowing that one may be marginalised, there is a conscious belief that despite significant contribution this effort may not be fully acknowledged, while more 'appropriate' co-workers will achieve greater recognition with less effort. The reality of this perception, compounded over a

career, alongside the effects of the education process results in impaired and delayed promotion to senior levels – excused as 'should have happened years ago, it's just bad luck', or maligned as 'there is no future for the white male'.

For the aspiring new Australian, through compromise of one's ambition and cultural systems, passive respectful acceptance sets in, resulting in talent abdicating the profession, unrealised potential, loss of skilled workforce, demotivation and frustration, and wellbeing issues. For a few with a combative approach – combined with resilience, patience, significant recognisable contribution and, most importantly, through mentoring – there is opportunity to succeed and break barriers.

VEHICLES FOR CHANGE

In Australia, as in every host country, every generation of migration has had to deal with varying levels of discrimination in all spheres. In the architectural profession, does quantifiable data exist? Is its magnitude discernible and are individual experiences documented? Perhaps the number of architects migrating is not significant or they have not sought or secured a position in the profession. The challenges faced by the second generation are less acute, now having local reference points and education foundations as is seen in the diversity of graduates transitioning into the profession. Also, for others the awareness of new imperatives and of outreach initiatives aim to correct past inequalities.

Careertrackers and Careerseekers – through internship placement programs across various industries – provide the essential imperative to support indigenous and refugee communities respectively for those who may not have found a path in a career in architecture. The challenges faced by both programs are more complex, given the social, cultural and political references. Male Champions of Change has been a vehicle for gender equality; similarly, recognition should be afforded to ensure equality for ethnic and cultural diversity.

Initiatives of proactive engagement provide the foundations of recognising, understanding, accepting and adapting to cultural differences and developing cultural intelligence. A high level of cultural intelligence enables a suspension of judgment – an understanding that the personal characteristics from another culture are different, yet at the same time similar – and begins to de-layer stereotyping. A dynamic and diverse creative culture benefits the profession.

Satvir Singh Mand is a director at COX Architecture.

Bangladeshi architects in Australia

Iftekhar Abdullah



A recent BaA get together in NSW Photo: Kazi Hossain

Like many others in Australia, I am an immigrant and have found this to be an amazing country. As an architect from Bangladesh, I have found both much joy as well as sadness through my experiences of finding my place here.

Soon after completing my Master in Urban Design in 1993 at the University of Sydney, I set off looking for a job, full of hopes and dreams. However, by my thirtieth rejection letter, I found that without local experience I couldn't get much closer to my dream job. Trying to find local experience without knowing anyone as well as being an immigrant meant it was almost impossible, leaving me greatly frustrated with my circumstances. I tried many different ways, until I eventually managed to get the opportunity to create an office layout for what was previously known as the Social Security Office, granting me a recommendation letter and reference. My teachers at the University of Sydney tried to help me by providing recommendations since I had done quite well in my studies. However, finding limited opportunities I relocated to Malaysia to pursue a job offer from HKAS Architects in 1994.

When I returned to Australia in 2000, I had the experience from my role as team leader in various projects in Malaysia like Putrajaya, but found myself once again desperately searching for a job – this time with the added pressure of supporting a wife and baby. I eventually landed a job at Woodhead Architects and this gave me the opportunity to meet many architects working in Sydney.

I am now the owner of my own company, ideas – iftekhar + design associates. I try to involve diverse voices wherever possible, whether through my hiring habits or by providing support to those I can who are immigrating to Australia. In my experience, whenever talent from diverse backgrounds has a place in design, there's a higher chance of creating an innovative end product. I aim to help more people gain the opportunity to share their talents in architecture and encourage more businesses to employ people from other countries as well.

I am also one of the founders of Bangladeshi Architects in Australia (BaA), which was formed from a backyard BBQ dream in 2004. The dream was to reinforce our ongoing

relationships with the Australian Institute of Architects and the Institute of Architects Bangladesh as a group of professionals to share knowledge, experiences or just to have good times together. Another part of the dream was to create an environment of ongoing support for the younger architects coming from Bangladesh to settle here in Australia with skills recognition and registration. BaA has currently around 65 members in five cities.

BaA members spread knowledge through exhibitions and events. Paul Pholeros had been a great contributor in some wonderful projects in Bangladesh, as well as in many other countries. We are very grateful to him for all the wonderful work he has done. To show our appreciation, we are planning an event next year with the NSW Chapter to celebrate Paul's achievements.

Bangladeshi Architects in Australia acknowledges the tremendous support from the Australian Institute of Architects, Institute of Architects Bangladesh, ARCASIA (Architects Regional Council for ASIA), CAA (Commonwealth Association of Architects) and major universities in Australia.

Reflecting on my journey I am reminded of the those whose support has been foundational to my successes in Australia. I must acknowledge: Prof. Peter Webber, Prof. Peter Armstrong and Dr Simon Combe of The University of Sydney; Alec Tzannes, former national president of the Australian Institute of Architects; and David Holm, former director at Woodhead Architects.

Iftekhar Abdullah is the principal architect / director of ideas – iftekhar + design associates and a founding member of Bangladeshi Architects in Australia.

'In my experience, whenever talent from diverse backgrounds has a place in design, there's a higher chance of creating an innovative end product. I aim to help more people gain the opportunity to share their talents in architecture and encourage more businesses to employ people from other countries as well.'

The saying *o que não te mata, te fortalece* (what does not kill you, makes you stronger) has never been so real to me. Arquiteto Imigrante (Immigrant Architect) is an organisation that unites Brazilian architects, interior designers and engineers living in Australia through social media, networking events and training. It's an initiative to help other architects facing a similar journey to me: starting a career in Australia. As architects we are lucky to have a globalised and adaptable profession; from the moment we have our training, it is just a matter of exploring the opportunities for developing our careers anywhere around the world.

Despite it being possible to practice the profession overseas, it isn't always easy to obtain knowledge of local laws, titles and drawings standards, as well as an understanding how the market behaves. For example, you can't call yourself an 'architect' in Australia before completing registration. The faster you grasp the dynamic of the market, the smoother your pathway will be to professional success.

From afar, particularly from a developing country like Brazil, it's simple to create an idealised image of a perfect place. This comes with a high dose of innocence and the immigration market takes advantage of this. When making plans to live here, it is easy not to take into account the huge challenge it is to be in an enchanting place, especially with your hands tied for not having the requirements to enter the market.

But this is a myth! The growing number of Latin American architects are bringing high-quality work to add to the rich Australian construction scene. We are known to be emotive people. Each time we hold meetings of Latin American architects and engineers, it is beautiful to see how a

simple word of encouragement or sharing successful experiences can make all the difference to those who have not yet conquered their place in the market.

The *Brazilian Architects Tribute* exhibition organised by Arquiteto Imigrante last year at Tusculum gave an overview of what Brazilian architecture has to offer. Through images it was possible to show four different aspects of our architecture: the history, awarded architects (including Lina Bo Bardi, Oscar Niemeyer and Paulo Mendes da Rocha), current production in Brazil and what Brazilian architects are doing in Australia. Later this year, the exhibition will tour to Brisbane, Melbourne and Canberra, so that our professionals may also benefit from seeing the show.

One of the biggest struggles of the community is not being able to provide local experience for our peers. To address this issue, a Sydney exhibition (December 2019) will include a design contest for Brazilians seeking local experience. The competition will have two different themes and each of them will have a winner. The prize will be a professional experience in one of the most prestigious offices in the country – what an opportunity for integrating into the Australian market.

Since the creation of Arquiteto Imigrante I have seen a stronger, more united and confident community, which is our organisation's main objective. The number of new opportunities and approvals for immigration skills assessments for Latin American architects reflect this. I always say that life is an eternal 'recalculating route' but it's so much easier to recalculate it when you're surrounded by a supportive community.

Adauto Melo de Carvalho is the founder of Arquiteto Imigrante and has lived in Sydney since 2016.

Harmonising diversity

Adauto Melo de Carvalho



An informal meeting of Brazilian architects and engineers at the Royal Botanic Garden in Sydney

The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, with support from a range of architectural stakeholder organisations, has been undertaking a large-scale study of architectural education since July 2018. It aims to help understand and identify ways to improve the experience of architecture students, graduates and academics, and to support greater connections between schools of architecture and the architectural profession.

The study has gathered data from all Australian architecture schools as well as surveying 508 architecture academics and 2773 architecture practitioners, conducting 11 student/academic/practitioner focus groups and interviewing around 30 academic and practice managers.

Since the last major study of Australian architectural education in 2008, the number of universities offering Master of Architecture qualifications has increased to 21 (three of which have not yet sought accreditation for their programs). Data provided by the architecture schools shows the number of professional graduates of Australian schools has grown from 872 in 2007 to 1234 in 2017. The proportion of female graduates has increased slightly from 45% to 46% over that time.

Overall, in 2017 there were 6236 bachelors and 2929 masters full-time equivalent students studying architecture. The proportion of international students has risen from about 20% to 35% in the decade to 2017. China is the largest source country with over 1000 architecture students in Australia, but there are also significant cohorts from Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and India.

Unfortunately there are still few Indigenous students, students from low socioeconomic groups and students from regional areas studying architecture. Several schools are offering or intending to offer scholarships to increase the participation of underrepresented groups, while some are considering other measures (eg school roadshows to areas unrepresented in architecture study).

Many participants in the study felt that architecture still has an image of an ‘elite’ profession that is not closely related to most people’s everyday lives. They also thought that more should be done to promote the breadth of career opportunities within architecture and the built environment sector.

Participants believed that Australian architecture graduates typically develop strong conceptual design skills and a passion for the design process. At the same time, many were critical of what they saw as a lack of practical building knowledge and business skills among graduates.

Participants sometimes felt that architectural education was taught from an overly European perspective, and this in part reflected the small number of faculty members from outside the European architectural tradition. In particular, Australia’s Indigenous traditions of design and architecture, and the influences of our Asian neighbours, were said to be largely absent from most architecture programs.

Architecture schools have told us they would like to do more to promote diversity, but they have themselves been under challenge from falling Commonwealth per-student funding, pressure from university administrations on studio and support staff resources, and a heavy reliance on a casualised teaching workforce. With the built environment sector evolving rapidly, they must also manage a crowded curriculum including technological and regulatory changes, and the need for students to develop effective soft skills in communication, problem solving and teamwork.

It is hoped that our report will provide some fresh ideas to support a contemporary, diverse and industry-engaged architectural education in Australia which can lead students into a range of great careers here and abroad.

Dr Alex Maroya is research director at the AACA, the national standard setting body for architectural education and registration. Dr Gill Matthewson is a lecturer and researcher at Monash University. Dr Louise Wallis is a senior lecturer at the University of Tasmania. Together that are the authors of the *Architecture Education and the Profession Study*, which will be available on the AACA website (aaca.org.au) in September for free download.

AACA study on architectural education

Alex Maroya, Gill Matthewson and Louise Wallis



University of Newcastle students with Derrick Chu's *Architecture* model
Photo: Jed Cranfield. Courtesy UON School of Architecture and Built Environment

Forms of hope and dignity

Salma Eddie and Hermez Ichaya

Hermez and I are first year architecture students from Western Sydney University. We met each other at the beginning of the autumn semester in 2019 and are originally from two different cities in Syria. Our choice to study architecture stems from our background of a recently devastated Syrian society. Worldwide, wars have shown that architecture plays a significant role in creating conflicts or exacerbating them with main cities becoming targets of destruction.

The first signs of what is being planned in Syria are alarming. The new law introduced by the government, the so-called Law 10 (and since amended by Law 42), allows the government to confiscate unclaimed areas and rebuild them as mega-investment projects of tower blocks and corporate buildings. In Syria, many of those involved in the reconstruction have little knowledge about the country, the way of life and its social and cultural landscapes. But this should not be the case because architecture can contribute to our sense of belonging and to the community's attachment to its city and people. The people need encouragement to help rebuild and bring the community back together, in a place once known as the cradle of civilisation.

On another note, there is an overwhelming underrepresentation of diversity, especially in the upper levels of the industry. We want to take part in creating this diversity whether it is about our gender, ethnicity or cultural background. Different forms of creativity and work ethics are needed to push the innovation within the profession to the next level. One should develop a sense of responsibility towards building for the people rather than for the money, the capital or the investment. Certain architecture can bring a sense of social justice and cohesion to all members of the community when it contributes to creating spaces and places for everyone. Professor Nick Bullock (University of Cambridge) explains in his book *Building the Post-War World* how after World War II rebuilding created an opportunity for the spirit of innovation and experimentation, which was linked to the hopes of a new and better world and architecture.

Today we find a dialectical approach to the term multiculturalism, where we see it poised between being a supporter and an opponent. Some communities are afraid to lose their identity and cultural character, and do not accept or regulate multiculturalism; while other societies see the possibility and motivation for community cultural interaction. The latter is seen in Angelo Candalepas' new 99-domed mosque in Punchbowl, Sydney. His bold and brutalist design aims to improve the interaction between different faiths and



Aleppo (2017) by Salma Eddie

religions in the surrounding community. Candalepas did not want to build a traditional mosque to prevent the stigma associated with them – especially the case in this multi-religious community.

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, one of the world's largest mosques, also captures unique interactions between Islam and world cultures through their open-door policy. Tourists and celebrants from all around the world can witness its spectacular onion-top domes, reflective pools that fill the courtyard, the iconic prayer hall and the world's largest indoor carpet and chandelier.

The exchange of accumulated experience is what drives our society forward to provide a unique type of urbanism. Architecture might not be a complete solution but it can be a significant part of one. The architect may design buildings of hope that reconcile the irreconcilable, that press the advantages of peace and amity. Although Syria is already severely damaged, our aim for the long term is to invest in the dignity of the community that we want to serve and contribute to the larger society to heal the national psyche.

Salma Eddie and Hermez Ichaya thank Professor Chris Knapp for his assistance in preparing this article.

I was first introduced to the concept of ‘diversity in architecture’ when Philip Thalís addressed my cohort at university, with a lecture on *Public Sydney* (the magnificent illustrated compendium on the buildings of our city) and Hill Thalís’ winning (and later disregarded) proposal for Barangaroo. Never have the principles of any masterplan stayed with me so clearly. ‘Each building is to be designed by a different architect’, Thalís said, referring to the series of slim, sensitively-scaled forms behind the baths and green spaces along the foreshore. He concluded the sentence with, ‘to allow for diversity’.

As an architecture student only just learning how to design what always seemed like a single building on a specific site, this struck me as an apt approach to designing multiple buildings so that they might be in conversation with one another and their context, allowing for the varied voices of the community to speak through them. This notion subconsciously stayed with me throughout my education. The technique of approaching large built-form as a composition of fine-grain elements grew into an essential design tool for me. It placed itself comfortably into my design thinking – my personal architectural ‘style’ – something most students of architecture find themselves in pursuit of.

It took me over four years of architecture school to realise why I always found it hard to answer the question, ‘What style of architecture are you into?’ The answer lay in the fact that I was never inclined toward the visible signature form, but rather, toward the underlying approach of giving space to local people and place to speak *through* form.

To me, it was, and still is, clear that there can be no greater ethic in architecture than to design that which gives life to community, over that which silences its eccentricities.

As architects – at least in the traditional sense of the word – our agency is naturally limited to that which we are commissioned to design, unless we involve ourselves in policy and development (which we should). Until then, in a climate that is pushing profit and tight timelines as the driving forces of the built environment, our design ethic is imperative as a form of activism.

In a call for regional identity, which seems to be slipping away under the shadow of universalisation and an ‘international’ style of building, Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper, in their essay ‘Designing with intent’, ask: ‘in order to get onto the road towards modernization, is it necessary to jettison the old cultural past?’ We see this question underlying debates occupying our own public dialogue at the moment – debates such as the need for Sirius to remain public and the gentrification of long-standing communities.

I would like to extend the question to include the avoidance of participatory design processes (whereby an architect becomes facilitator rather than director) in addition to the abandonment of the cultural past, because it is people that create culture. To compete in the race of accelerating development with diminishing budgets, is it necessary to forego considered design and community involvement? Perhaps tradition is too much of a task to keep, and community input is too cumbersome to manage. We admit that diversity is uncomfortable; yet, we still strive for it.

Diversity and the ethic of culturally-responsive design go hand-in-hand, and in an innately diverse country like Australia – a melting-pot of cultures and traditions supported by an egalitarian value system – neither of the two should be unachievable (theoretically). But the reality is, that even though we do not characterise ourselves as a class-based

Design ethic as the first step in an architect’s activism

Sahibajot Kaur

society – unlike that of a country like India, which is still influenced by remnants of the caste system – our built environment does not inspire diversity.

From my experience growing up in the peripheral suburbs of Sydney, this can be attributed to something as simple but as critical as affordability (and density – a topic for another day). Largely, we see migrant communities inhabiting the outer suburbs, and more recently, young people and other minorities struggling to inhabit the city independently at all.

Perhaps it is not the diversity itself we find uncomfortable, but the means that will allow for it – affordable housing in otherwise affluent areas, policy in favour of renters and homebuyers rather than investors and housing designed with the user (rather than yield) in mind.

Returning to the example of India, the resistance I received in proposing mixed-income housing in the centre of Chandigarh (a homogenous collection of buildings with clear socioeconomic stratification), showed me that diversity is not valued everywhere, but also reminded me that this resistance wasn't an unfamiliar feeling. My proposed design was my way of making a statement against this thinking – my activism – but in reality, it wasn't enough. *As architects, our design ethic may be the form of activism easily within our reach, but it shouldn't be where our activism stops.* True agency lies in policy and development, and our involvement on these fronts starts with conversation (which, in my example, was kicked off by a presentation of my proposal last December to the public and architects of the city).

The ethic of people and place is summarised beautifully through the concept of the 'topos' – defined by Beck and Cooper as 'the local determinants associated with place,

climate and topography'. Kenneth Frampton, in *Studies in Tectonic Culture*, talks of the three components that create the built environment:

'the topos, the typos, and the tectonic. And while the tectonic does not necessarily favour any particular style, it does, in conjunction with site and type, serve to counter the present tendency for architecture to derive its legitimacy from some other discourses.'

Beck and Cooper aptly comment on this as being 'in favour of architecture as autonomous and self-referential' – in my view, the best 'style'.

If, as a profession, we made the conscious decision to honour topos, recognise the difference between typos and stylistic typology, and claim our agency through activism beyond design, I think we'd be on our way to showing wider society how architecture can do its bit in the human pursuit of an ethical world.

Sahibajot Kaur won the Architectural Communication Award (2019 NSW Student Architecture Awards) after completing her Master of Architecture at the University of Newcastle last year. She now works at fjmt studio.



Sahibajot Kaur's UoN Master of Architecture thesis project *Type 15: Work-Live in Chandigarh* strives to reduce inequality in her home city through diverse, mixed-use environments

'To me, it was, and still is, clear that there can be no greater ethic in architecture than to design that which gives life to community, over that which silences its eccentricities.'

Punchbowl Mosque

Jason Dibbs



View of the concrete muqarnas domes with calligraphy depicting the 99 names of Allah and the timber-lined central dome with oculus at Punchbowl Mosque by Candalepas Associates Photo: Brett Boardman

Candalepas Associates' Punchbowl Mosque is a new religious and community centre woven into the urban fabric of one of southwest Sydney's most culturally diverse localities. A landmark contribution to Australia's Islamic community, as well as the local architectural landscape, it negotiates with the conventions of the traditional mosque typology through the geometric interplay of hard and soft edges and a raw and austere sense of materiality. Poetically, Punchbowl Mosque searches for what is essential in sacred architecture and, in the process, redefines our understanding of the Australian mosque.

Punchbowl is a densely populated suburb in Sydney's southwest, quaintly named after a nearby circular valley, referred to by 19th-century settlers as 'the punch bowl'. Today, the area is known locally for its cultural diversity, with migrant communities from countries including Lebanon, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan and China now calling Punchbowl home. In the midst of bustling multiculturalism, the Punchbowl Mosque provides a new hub for the area's Muslim community, and further, offers a new vision for Islam as part of the broader Australian community in the 21st century.

In an interview discussing early ambitions for the Punchbowl Mosque, Dr Zachariah Matthews of the Australian Islamic Mission stated that the congregation wanted 'to have a mosque that had the traditional elements ... but that the finish itself and the design of it needed to be contemporary, new and different'. While Candalepas Associates' Punchbowl Mosque does in many ways depart from the conventional mosque typology, it still carefully retains those characteristics essential to cultivating an atmosphere of reflection and awe. Students of sacred architecture and followers of Islam will note the conspicuous absence of any minaret from the Punchbowl Mosque (at the heart of this omission lies exploration into the essence of mosque architecture). As Angelo Candalepas has explained, it is not the structure of the minaret itself that is significant, but rather, the tradition and sound of the human voice projected from it announcing prayer times.

Commentators have likened the Punchbowl Mosque to Brutalism, characteristic of public architecture from the 1950s to the 1970s. However, the only real connection between Candalepas Associates' mosque and the Brutalist School seems to be the preference for concrete, poured and cast in situ. In fact, Candalepas has been quick to point out that his project was never intended as a reference to Brutalism, nor was it ever intended to be 'retrogressive' in its outlook. Indeed, more fruitful comparisons may be drawn between the Punchbowl Mosque and the exquisite concrete detailing found throughout the work of Pritzker Prize recipient Tadao Ando. Similarly, the use of concrete in Candalepas Associates' mosque is incredibly refined; the juxtaposition of soft curvilinear forms and hard, crisp edges in concrete is both elegant and striking.

Tensions between an intimate human scale and the scale of the sublime are evoked by visual datums created by the ascending vertical hierarchy of materials in the prayer hall, and the rhythm and repetition of the 102 muqarnas domes, seemingly 'carved' into the ceiling. The muqarnas domes each

contain a 20 mm diameter oculus, introducing a play of light and shadow. The effect of myriad tiny 'pin-points' of light in the cavernous, honeycombed interior kindles associations with constellations and planets, and the historic Islamic astronomers of the Middle Ages.

Aligned with the manifestly innovative character of the Punchbowl Mosque, Candalepas Associates' have reconsidered the various programmatic components essential to worship in Islam. Ablutions are performed against a backdrop of timber accents and concrete, with light filtering from above, behind a sloped ceiling light-shelf, reminiscent of Jørn Utzon's superb Bagsværd Church. The women's gallery is elevated over the main prayer hall in a mezzanine, veiled by elegant vertical timber battens. The main dome directly above is stepped in concrete and timber, pierced at its centre by a large oculus. The overall effect is powerful; in an interview with SBS, a member of Punchbowl's Islamic community said of the Punchbowl Mosque that 'having this kind of extraordinary design ... will uplift not only our beliefs but also what other people think about Islam'.

Candalepas Associates have received a number of accolades and awards for the Punchbowl Mosque, including the Australian Institute of Architects 2018 Sulman Medal for Public Architecture – the second time the practice has been awarded this prestigious prize (the first was for All Saints Primary School in 2008). Reflecting on the achievements of the Punchbowl Mosque, Candalepas has stated that 'architecture should import, as does poetry, a sense of observation of the world'. And certainly, the Punchbowl Mosque is imbued with a sense of the choreography of worship and the needs of its congregation, but in the poetic exploration for that which is essential, it has also uncovered latent potential to transform communities and architectural traditions.

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Architecture, drawing and the body

Rena Czaplinska-Archer

'True journey of discovery lies not in seeking new horizons but in opening the eyes' – Marcel Proust

Years ago when starting my own architecture practice in Sydney, I wrote a mission statement:

Metaphorically speaking, houses and cities are like vessels or stage sets. Their usefulness lies in the quality of space that fills them: its atmosphere. On their own, buildings are like empty shells, a stage for life – while life needs space. Each needs the other but they speak different languages. Rational, functional, economic considerations are only one side of the story. But how to describe space and its atmosphere? It may be better suited to use dance, music or poetry.

I saw the creation of living, vibrant or tranquil space as my ultimate goal. I saw it as a key to creating spaces which are healing and set out searching for answers on how to find it. Ecological architecture attracted me. I identified the need to create spaces which are healing as a universal need – not just a function of hospitals and healing centres, but a need common to all people living with the stresses of everyday life. The fundamental role of every family's home is to nurture life and to provide a pool of tranquillity. In some way I have been on this path ever since.

I come from an academic family with Armenian ancestors. It is a genealogy marked by generations of exiles, migrations and war traumas. I studied architecture and art in Wrocław, Poland and at the AA in London. In 1972, I led a group of students to the Varna UIA architecture congress where Georges Candilis shared his experiences, including working with Le Corbusier on *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseilles. I remember him saying: 'You are all very young and keen to show what you can do but remember architecture is an old man's profession.' He did not say women's, but I assumed he meant it too. 'Your best years will be when most other professions retire in your 50s and 60s. It takes a long time to learn to be good architect. And you get there when you have

lived enough of your life ... if you don't quit on the way.' Well, here I am in Sydney in my 60s, having spent over 30 years practicing and teaching architecture, and I'm busier designing and building than I have been for years.

Resettling in Australia in 1981 was strange. My life before coming here did not count. Later, while reading stories of other Europeans who had studied at the Bauhaus before coming here, I discovered that we shared a similar path, having to prove ourselves from the beginning.

But I was lucky too. Eve Laron approached me in the mid '80s and invited me to join Constructive Women: a support circle of women architects, mostly young mothers working from home, who were exploring questions around running our small practices. We shared our hopes, visions and our growing disappointment with our profession. We saw it as being preoccupied with technical questions, ignoring deeper ecological, environmental and social questions, and what hurt most – ignoring our bodies. We organised exhibitions of our work and published the newsletter *Constructive Times*. Eve Laron launched the slogan 'Consult a woman architect and see the difference', implying that we were different, more intuitive. Yet I did not feel it. I felt left-brain heavy, overthinking and overrationalising the design and construction details. I shared these feelings with the group and we organised a dance workshop based on the work of Anna Halprin.

'Our bodies are our instruments – they need tuning'
– Anna Halprin

Anna Halprin's exercises showed us that there was a direct connection between awakening the body and awakening creative intuition. Awakening the body through sensory awareness became my mantra. When my children were school age, I offered a series of experiential architecture courses in their school. I witnessed the amazing creativity and spatial intelligence kids showed, which, in my experience, many adults have difficulty accessing. Through sensory awareness and play, children became participants in a collaborative design process.



‘Our responsibility as architects is to come back to our senses and to tune our bodies.’ Rena’s drawing class at the University of Sydney in 2012; this active exercise (from Feldenkrais) allows students to become aware of gravity, weight and the sense of touch – touching the earth and being touched by the earth

These experiences made me more confident and playful in my own work. An Aboriginal elder Ann Thomas invited me to her Dreaming camps and I spent many years camping on women’s sacred sites, learning to love the stories of this land and its ancient culture while growing my roots here. Through my postgraduate studies in social ecology, I dug deeper into my questioning of how to practice as a woman architect in a male-dominated industry. This led me on a journey of discovery in search for the feminine and to the development of a process-oriented and collaborative design model, which I used for a community project in Jindabyne and later integrated into my teaching and design work. Its key ingredients were based on Lawrence and Anna Halprin’s RSVP cycles, an ecological model that gives equal value to intellectual/rational planning work, sensory awareness and collective creativity. I presented this work at the UIA congress in Denmark but this kind of work was not valued in Sydney at the time. So I returned to building houses and started teaching design and drawing.

With my architecture students at the University of Sydney in the 1990s, I started from the assumption that we are all creative. That is, initially we can all draw, see and feel, but with socialisation and education our natural abilities become blocked. Using Halprin’s approach, the drawing program addressed the unblocking of the senses while simultaneously releasing drawing skills. Through tuning the body and training the hand, the course was really about learning to see, feel and listen.

This idea of teaching drawing as a way of releasing and tuning the senses took a life of its own and grew into the Time for Drawing workshops, which I have been running for over 15 years in Australia and overseas while balancing my time between architectural projects. I visited New York’s Cooper Union, which runs a similar hand drawing program focusing on the body (initiated by John Hejduk in 1970s); was invited to the Embodiment Symposium in Sweden; and was a keynote speaker at Healthy Houses in Bratislava. In 2013, I presented a workshop at a drawing conference at the Porto University; the campus was designed by Álvaro Siza, who always encouraged

his students to draw. I love teaching and I am grateful to all my students for sharing this journey of discovery with me.

‘Buildings and cities are experienced through our bodies, through multi-sensory channels’ – Juhani Pallasmaa

About 15 years ago I met Juhani Pallasmaa and we discovered a common ground: phenomenology. Having worked in architecture all his life, he concluded that to mature as architects we need to develop a sense of self which includes a respect for the intelligence of the body; rational and functional considerations are not enough. Maybe this is what Candilis was talking about when he said that it takes a lifetime to become an architect, balancing reason – scientific and technical knowledge – with experience: sensory perception and feeling.

Rena Czaplinska-Archer is an ecological architect, artist, teacher and writer. She is passionate about ecological design and collaborating with other artists in developing multidisciplinary programs to inspire creativity and new ways thinking.



Rena Czaplinska-Archer with Juhani Pallasmaa in 2016

‘Using Halprin’s approach, the drawing program addressed unblocking the senses while simultaneously releasing drawing skills. Through tuning the body and training the hand, the course was really about learning to see, feel and listen.’

What does gender-sensitive placemaking look like?

Nicole Kalms



Ideas from the 'Free to Be Design Thinking' workshop (Melbourne, 2017) which welcomed more than 80 participants from all sectors of the community. All were different: with different jobs, ages, experiences, and most importantly, with diverse (and possibly conflicting) perceptions of the same city

When areas of the city and suburbs feel unsafe the usual response is brighter lighting, more CCTV cameras and more authority figures. But what are the other ways that we can design safer cities for women? This is the central question asked by the Monash University YXX Lab – a team of researchers dedicated to identifying and illuminating why women and young girls continue to feel unsafe in Australian urban spaces.

‘Yelled at by man (from his car) when jogging.
Made me feel unsafe. I only go in the daytime now.’
(woman age 27, afternoon)

In 2019, *The Australia We Want* report noted that at least half of Australian women do not feel safe walking alone at night. Similarly, the 2018 *Unsafe in the City* report that when young women have an unsafe experience in Sydney, 12% will never return to that place again.

‘Horrible bus stop for late nights, will now only catch buses to Manly if coming home from the city. Have been groped here and stalked home.’
(woman age 27, Roger Street, Brookvale, late night)

These substantive reports remind us that we need to understand the patterns which exclude women from areas of cities. This requires embracing the multifarious factors that can shape women’s access to urban life including, socio-economic status, gender, age, ethnicity and mobility. Importantly, designers must accept that cities are gendered and that research over the past twenty years has shown that women suffer a distinct disadvantage navigating the built environment. *Unsafe in the City* captures young women’s stories and reveals a complex internalised geography – one where she must be hypervigilant when in the city.

‘I always check behind my back and scan the trees and bushes and walk fast to the main road where light is.’
(woman age 25, Bryant Street, Rockdale, late night)

‘One of the most dangerous train stations in NSW. I have been approached here by many desperate-looking men and they do not react well at being turned down. I’m only 18 – I should not have to put up with it.’
(woman age 18, Lindfield Station, North Shore, anytime)

At the YXX Lab we are committed to understanding how women’s access to city life is curtailed by their fear of victimisation and perpetrated violence in cities. Our collaboration with Plan International and CrowdSpot on the *Free to Be* map-based social survey tool (2016–19) has provided deep insight into young women’s experiences in Melbourne, Sydney and in cities as diverse as Delhi, Lima, Kampala and Madrid. The findings overwhelmingly reveal how women’s experiences of urban life are dominated by managing the sexual harassment perpetrated by men.

Free to Be allows young women to identify areas of the city where they feel safe and unsafe. In Sydney, the survey was open over a six-week period during April and May in 2018. Of the 3500 young women who engaged with *Free to Be*, well over a third were resigned to the fact that sexual harassment is a normal part of city life and that the repetitive nature of the harassment meant that they didn’t report it.

‘Didn’t believe I could report it due to lack of evidence and was afraid I would be told that he is just being friendly or some other BS excuse.’
(woman age 17, Devonshire Street pedestrian tunnel, evening)

The data produced by *Free to Be* offers clues to designers about what makes a public place feel safe for young women. After the presence of other people and a community ‘vibe’, women noted that the lighting levels and the quality of public infrastructure contributed to their perceptions of safety and to the enjoyability of a place. Poor lighting was often an indicator of a place being ‘unkept’ and lacked an engaged and caring community. Such areas also seem to encourage inhabitation by groups of unpredictable people with young women making a connection between the physical environment and a susceptibility to antisocial and unpredictable behaviour.

‘Never felt safe walking in this area, even if I am not alone. The lighting is terrible and the design of the walkways leaves a lot of spots hidden from view.’
(woman age 19, Central Station, anytime)

**GENDER SENSITIVE DESIGN
WITH WOMEN AND GIRLS**

The YXX Lab’s approach to understanding and proposing solutions to the gendered experiences of women in cities is through participatory co-design. By inviting young women into the various stages of the design process as active ‘experts’, empathy is built with the traditional design team and the various stakeholders. The co-design activities include grappling with the data and findings, conducting interviews and empathy exercises, workshops to develop design strategies and policy recommendations, and social media outreach. All aim to accelerate urban intervention that can address the needs of women and girls in cities.

‘I pass through here twice a day to get to work and am routinely verbally abused by men. I feel unsafe and would never go through here at night. I wish the police or government would listen to women’s stories and do

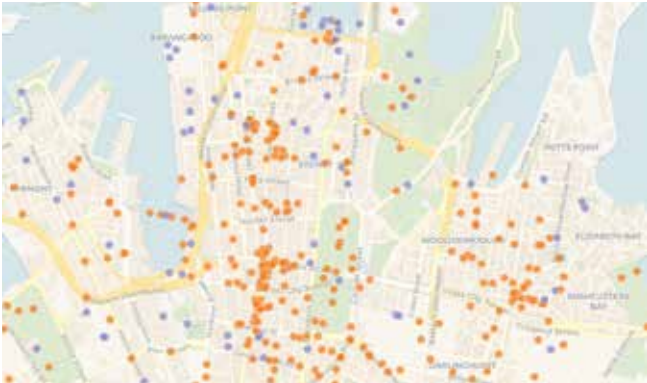
something about this place.’
(woman age 25, Belmore Park, anytime)

Co-design activities between young women and the YXX Lab – in partnership with the Committee for Sydney and Plan International – have led to a range of outcomes including: the audit of lighting and other design features across local NSW government areas and around public transport nodes; giving priority to the ‘hotspots’ identified by young women; addressing the impact of construction work on the public realm and assessing the impact of hoardings and street closures on women’s safety; and investing in design features that increase lighting and/or sightlines.

For the Monash University YXX Lab, co-design is used as an equalising force to create inclusion and address power dynamics inherent in the conventional expert led process. It is a way to disrupt and challenge traditional hierarchical power structures between clients, stakeholders and designers. Rather than women’s input remaining a reactive afterthought, the YXX Lab provides a future-focused emphasis on preventative safety for women and girls. Building on the foundational awareness of women’s stories this issue becomes the responsibility for both communities *and* designers to tackle via gender-sensitive approaches to placemaking.

Dr Nicole Kalms is an associate professor at Monash Art Design & Architecture and founding director of the YXX Lab which leads national research in space, gender and communication. Kalms is author of *Hypersexual City: The Provocation of Soft-Core Urbanism* (Routledge 2017) examining sexualised representation and precincts in neoliberal cities.

References:
The Australia We Want, Community Council for Australia, 2019
Unsafe in the City, Plan International and Monash University YXX Lab, 2018



Detail of the *Free to Be* map for Sydney showing bad (orange) and good (purple) spots

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNING PLACES
FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS**

- 1. Listen to women’s voices** Design professionals must work to strengthen women’s agency over decisions that affect them and their ability to fully take part in public life.
- 2. Apply a gendered lens** The city is not gender neutral. Apply a gender lens to all considerations of changes to the city – developing policy in consultation with young women and experts in gender-based safety/city-planning.
- 3. Mandate gender-sensitive training for designing public urban places**
- 4. Gather data and analysis on gender for public projects**

Diverse terrain

Oi Choong

Oi Choong, winner of the 2018 Marion Mahony Griffin Prize for a distinctive body of work by a female architect, reflects on her career and influences, as well as the changes and diversity within the profession of landscape architecture. Interview by Kate Concannon

What led you to landscapes from architecture?

Landscape architecture has always interested me, even though architecture was my first love. At the University of Sydney, I had a wealth of tutors including Richard Leplastrier, Glenn Murcutt and Lindsay Robertson who inspired us to design with the intrinsic qualities of the Australian landscape.

When I started work at the Government Architect's Office upon graduation, it had a fledgling landscape group. I decided to explore this further and enrolled in a postgraduate course in landscape design then environmental studies. The course involved transects across NSW in the footsteps of explorer and Surveyor General Sir Thomas Mitchell. Sketching my way across the Western Plains, alpine regions and coastal belts of the state opened my eyes and heart, and established my complete connection with the Australian landscape.

I enjoyed the opportunity to combine both professions; each informed and enriched the other. The landscape group rapidly grew into a vibrant section in its own right, working on the siting and landscape settings for public and cultural buildings, national parks and heritage landscapes as diverse as Centennial Park and Rookwood Cemetery. From there I naturally segued into landscape architecture.

How do you describe your cultural background as it has shaped your approach to your work, and your experience as a design professional?

I grew up in postcolonial, multicultural Malaya where we learnt to value others' cultural traditions. It encouraged me to look for the common ground rather than differences in cultures.

When I started working internationally my background experiences allowed me to relate more empathetically to different cultures. I quickly realised that no matter where you are working, people's aspirations, their need to belong, to be physically and emotionally connected and their desire for a better urban reality are universal. Only their governments are different.

Being Chinese, we were drilled from childhood to uphold the virtues of a strong work ethic, moderation, public duty and the notion of quiet achievement. Like many females from another culture, I often felt that I had to be twice as good and work twice as hard as anyone else to make an

impact. I think it helped a lot that I was passionate about my work.

When starting work as a landscape architect, the profession in this country was still relatively new. We very much felt that we were pioneers, pushing for legitimacy and acceptance in the planning and development industry. This pioneering role and experience was much more powerful for me than dealing with cultural stereotyping.

Who have been your most formative role models?

Leaving home to study overseas, I looked to as many role models as I could for inspiration, women as well as men. They were my teachers, other architects, writers, scientists, artists, philosophers – people who were pioneers and intellectual engines in their field.

Both my parents also influenced me greatly. My father believed in equality and gave my siblings and me the best opportunities to educate ourselves and encouraged us to excel. My mother has had a very strong lifelong influence. She used to sit us five children around the dining table for 'Sundays with Mother', where she extolled the teachings of Confucius. I was only about eight, but still remember one of her quotes: 'By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.'

What are the most salient changes you have observed in the industry since you began your career?

There have certainly been some radical changes over the last 30 years of practice. We have seen the maturing of the landscape profession and its influence in primary decision-making.

The development process has become more complex and specialised. Armed with government regulations, planning studies, specialist reports and consultation feedback, we are often much more informed when we start projects, but it hasn't always resulted in better outcomes.

In the 1980s, the state government took a greater interest in conserving our public buildings and enhancing the public realm, and was much more committed to leadership in design quality. I am pleased the GANSW is again taking the leadership role and carrying the mantle for design excellence following its radical makeover.

There is much greater awareness today about the environment and the need to manage our impacts. Access to nature is driving the agenda for recalibrating the physical form of our cities and buildings and we are witnessing a welcome emphasis on green infrastructure and biophilic design.

Likewise there is growing appreciation for the integration of landscape architecture and urban design, and for our Indigenous, precolonial landscapes.

Some of the greatest changes, of course, have emerged with rapid advances in technology and its impact on all facets of the design and construction process and the culture of workplaces. While I can see the enormous benefits, I fervently hope we will continue to draw and never stop using our capacity for hand/eye/mind coordination in the creative process, which has been honed through millennia of human evolution.

There is no question that there are a lot more women in the design professions and that is a good thing. Many offices now have strategies in place to increase the number of women in practice and provide a better career path. But it is still an uphill battle. Many women still never make it to associate level or above, and the issues of bias around gender still apply twice as much for those with an ethnic background. Promoting cultural diversity is a no brainer; we are a global profession and part of the global economy. Fostering inclusiveness and diversity and creating an open-minded global culture simply makes good business sense.

You have worked across Asia and the Middle East to deliver projects for clients and end-users from very different cultures. In what ways have you been most challenged and delighted in these transcultural partnerships?

Apart from the opportunity to work with other cultures, it was the scale of the projects that I was drawn to: kilometre-long waterfronts, town centres, major parklands, residential developments, masterplans for new cities, etc.

The greatest challenges have been learning how the construction industry operates in those countries, being at the mercy of locals when dealing with the different approvals processes and getting paid on time (if at all).

With landscape projects, procuring mature plants and materials for a project is always a serendipitous challenge. I have trawled through nurseries across southern Malaysia looking for plants for a project in Singapore, trampled through the Sarawak jungle looking for particular rocks for a project in Kuching and scoured vast markets in Shanghai trying to find pavers for a residential project.

Working overseas is a privilege and a great opportunity to showcase Australian talent. When I first started doing it in 1990, many Eastern countries wanted to emulate the West and were keen to learn and absorb everything new. Since then, countries such as Singapore and China have experienced meteoric transformations, becoming much more advanced and sophisticated in their responses to local architectural, landscape and environmental challenges. The reverse is now apparent – we have much to learn from them and the dialogue has become a lot more interesting.



Oi Choong

Photo: Artur Ferrão. Courtesy Street Furniture Australia – streetfurniture.com

Do you think Sydney's built environment adequately provides for our diverse communities?

Sydney's natural setting – the harbour, the rivers, the bush-land parks – provides an enormously rich and inspiring landscape tableau for the enjoyment of our diverse, multicultural communities. The harbour parklands, redolent with layers from our Indigenous and colonial past are the city's playground and public arena, providing endless inspiration for our creative spirit.

The rest of the built environment is more patchy. There are wonderful bits, especially around the harbour and rivers, but everywhere else is less successful with suburban sprawl, inequitable distribution of social/cultural facilities and public transport, and urban heat island effect in outer suburbs. The Cumberland Plain has fared badly and we have virtually lost our green belt to development in the middle ring suburbs.

We should all expect more of our city. We need big ideas and vision rather than piecemeal developments and expediency, and we should not forget how to do things well, especially in our infrastructure projects which have the capacity to divide rather than unite communities.

The Sydney Green Grid strategy is a great initiative by GANSW and I hope that our new minister for planning and public spaces will actively support it as a matter of priority. We have to be smarter about how we protect our depleting resources, protect our fertile soils for food production and have greater respect for our shared heritage and Indigenous landscapes.

Paul Morris, former CEO of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, said, 'Sydney has a rich Aboriginal presence and heritage but these aspects of Sydney's character have until recently been largely invisible to non-Aboriginal people'. Aboriginal heritage and connection to nature are inseparable from one another and need to be managed in an integrated manner across the landscape. With appropriate planning, the sites and stories that are so much a part of the heritage of Sydney's sandstone and shale landscapes could be made more accessible, with opportunities for all communities to reconnect with and explore Sydney's Aboriginal cultural heritage, past and present.

Oi Choong was head of the NSW Public Works landscape and environmental design section before establishing Context Landscape Design in Sydney. She has been a role model and mentor for many women in the architecture and landscape professions.

Building the unfinished: Victorian Pride Centre

Steve Whitford



Victorian Pride Centre by BAU (Brearley Architects and Urbanists) and GAA (Grant Amon Architects)

The Victorian Pride Centre (VPC) in St Kilda will be the new home of Victoria's LGBTQI communities. In 2016 the state government committed \$15m to the concept. The following year St Kilda was selected as the location and The City of Port Phillip donated a site in Fitzroy Street's commercial strip, famous for its history of alternative popular culture.

In January 2018, BAU (Brearley Architects and Urbanists) and GAA (Grant Amon Architects) were selected winners of a two-stage open design competition. To be eligible the architects must have previously delivered a \$10m+ project, and won two awards, one of which had to be from the Australian Institute of Architects. From an initial field of 18 entrants, then down to a field of four, BAU/GAA's design for a conceptually clear and strong iconographic architectural proposition was selected.

The centre will be home for many resident organisations, while dozens of other groups will frequent the building for meetings, events and projects. The building provides a public working hub, café, theatre/multi-function space, library/archive, health centre, rooftop garden and lettable space for related tenants.

BAU/GAA believe in being well informed, be it a well prepared brief, understanding the site, knowing the client, or the introduction of other physical or intellectual frameworks. Our client represents a community working towards a more fair, tolerant and supportive society, and they became our expert consultant on LGBTQI community issues. Members of the design team had lived in St Kilda for over 25 years. We also sought extensive input from the local Indigenous community. Finally, we brought to this project contemporary concepts of becoming, of dynamic systems and the sublime.

CLIENT

Each LGBTQI person has a personal challenge in moving from culturally imposed shame to a sense of pride. The fight for equality, mutual support and community is an essential social project.

PLACE

Indigenous content will include small-scale details cast in concrete (acts of naming) and the ground surface taking on the significance of Country – all exploring themes common to local Indigenous and LGBTQI values.

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN METHODS

A series of conceptual tubes emerged as an abstract robust armature that integrates the maximum urban envelope, architectural expression, structure, services and flexible interior design. These conceptual tubes are then acted upon by the extraction of urban issues and the extraction or addition of the specifics of the VPC brief. These issues generate change, encourage difference, diversity and inclusion, resulting in surprising outcomes.

CATALYST

This project is a positive intervention in Fitzroy Street, not another anonymous commercial building. It engages with, understands and then abstracts the spirit of the place that is St Kilda. The result is a landmark building that people will use as a navigation point and a meeting place. Welcome to the VPC.

An architect and urban designer with over 40 years' experience, Steve Whitford is a partner at BAU and teaches at both RMIT and the University of Melbourne. He has been involved in a series of urban design and architectural competition-winning projects, as well as being an Australian representative at the 12th Venice Architecture Biennale.

Making a new norm at work

Neph Wake

In architecture, the gender wage gap starts shortly after graduation and becomes greater over time. The gap is typically reported as women 'earning less', rather than men being excessively paid compared to their female counterparts. For instance, if a woman earns 75 cents to a male dollar, this is usually reported as women being underpaid by 25%, but the *same* raw data is rarely reported as men enjoying an unearned gender bonus of 33%. This approach embeds full-time (typically white) male income levels as the 'norm' and can also lead to an underappreciation of the significance of the discrepancies (and ignores the challenges of the gender non-conforming altogether). Further, by continuing to use full-time male income levels as the base for income, departures from this are easier to frame as a consequence of personal choice rather than the result of cultural expectation. Think of individuals of both genders as moving in and out of phases where earning is prioritised (such as early adulthood) against other periods where it is balanced against other aspects of life (such as study, travel, birth and parenting responsibilities, health treatment, elder care, cultural responsibilities and obligations).

Because of the length of architectural training and registration, the move into higher income brackets typically coincides with the family formation years for women. The penalties that potential and actual motherhood inflict are multi-edged: job mobility is reduced in the lead up as women avoid moving employers to stay eligible for maternity leave, indirectly reducing opportunities to negotiate wage increases; employers may (illegally) avoid hiring potential mothers; time out of the workforce is required for childbearing; the return to work is often on a part-time basis. Many working norms in architecture were established in a time where professionals could expect the full-time support of another adult taking care of domestic and caring responsibilities – namely, a wife. Contemporary economics means that a single income is no longer viable for many families in most Australian cities, so it's clear that something has to give.

There are many fantastic resources on how wage gaps can be closed by implementing gender blind hiring, having clear and transparent payment practices, undertaking pay audits and regular pay reviews, and implementing return to work schemes. Initiatives like these increase women's participation and attachment to the workforce, as well as the financial benefits to businesses of doing so. But to truly make

progress, we need to do much more on the *other* side of the equation: we need an equitable approach to responsibilities outside the workplace, especially in the caring sphere.

So let's unpick the brief, break the rules and remake the industry into something that works for everyone. Let's make it the norm for taking six months off work in the first year of a new child for both parents and let's pay it so it's not a penalty for employing women. Let's normalise daily handovers to colleagues so that the expectations around staff availability and project understanding modernise. Let's treat workers with full-time availability as a pleasant bonus rather than the default setting. Let's assume the average adult will spend over a decade moving in and out of part-time work to balance caring responsibilities and teaching and school holidays and celebrate the richness such experience brings. Let's advocate for free childcare so that families can choose the solutions that work best for them, rather than making choices on a purely financial basis.

Let's get rid of the Christmas shutdown so that staff can choose to take culturally relevant holidays such as Ramadan or Lunar New Year off instead. Let's work split days that include mornings onsite and long luxurious lunches and being home at the end of the school day, with evenings Skyping an international client. Let's transition into retirement with days that end at 3pm, or just because the surf's pumping. Let's collaborate with colleagues in different time zones to progress work faster.

Let's design offices with quiet rooms for neurodiverse people to take a break from the sensory assault of open plan spaces. Let's include preferred gender pronouns in email signatures. Let's take time off to pick seasonal mushrooms and coach soccer teams and party until 10am at Mardi Gras. Let's work a four-day week over five days. Let's work a five-day week over four days. Let's prioritise making time for 'sorry business'. Let's shift to a culture of outcome-based work, rather than presenteeism. Let's work a nine day fortnight or only do overtime on the 11th of the month. Let's finish at 5pm sharp or start and finish on Jakarta time. Let's live our values and commitment to work-life balance and mental health.

Let's make our work practices and workplaces as messy and complicated and diverse as humanity. Architecture which is produced and informed by only one way of working, one way of living and one set of values is likely to produce spaces that reinforce and replicate those values. When we truly embrace the full spectrum of work, both the industry and our built environment will be richer and better than ever.

Neph Wake is the business development manager at CplusC Architectural Workshop.

'Let's make it the norm for taking six months off work in the first year of a new child for both parents and let's pay it so it's not a penalty for employing women. Let's work a five-day week over four days. Let's take time off to pick seasonal mushrooms.'

Many initiatives for mental health in the workplace seem to me almost exclusively focused on work-related stress and how to relieve it, as if to hope that our duty of care on mental illness might be discharged by the right tweaks to corporate cultures and HR policies. The industry seems largely unaware of the distinction between milder mental illnesses that can benefit from such initiatives and more severe illnesses that are much more complex for workplaces to adapt to.

The *Literature Review: Architects and Mental Health* by ConNetica for the NSW ARB in 2016 cited the *Report of the National Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services* produced by the National Mental Health Commission in 2014 identifying three tiers of mental illness. Loosely, these are mild-moderate conditions (eg anxiety, depression) affecting three million Australians per year, severe conditions (eg schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating disorders) affecting 625,000 per year, and conditions likely to entail a psychosocial disability, affecting 65,000 per year.

People in the third category are rare in full-time employment. It's those in the second category that employers are likely to encounter but without the tools to accommodate. Architects are by and large willing to do what's right by these employees, but few may be ready for the reality of a severe mental illness in the workplace or the nature of adaptations required. Severe conditions can be bewildering to the observer, often to the sufferer as well. The symptoms found among severe conditions – psychosis, hallucinations, mania, compulsions, purging, self-harm, suicidal ideation – can be

traumatising to witness, leaving employers and colleagues feeling helpless and responsible, with risk to their own mental health.

An employer's usual methodology in other forms of severe illness or injury would be to ask the employee's medical specialist to provide a return-to-work plan. That request is usually in vain for severe mental illness, largely because of their dynamic nature, with symptoms and needs changing from month to month or week to week, making a mockery of any kind of plan. It is also alien to how many psychiatrists see their own role, which is not to prescribe treatments that can be set down in black and white but to engage with a patient in an intimate process of interrogation, observation and redirection over several years. The adaptations that may be needed may not be obvious until months after the workplace finds itself crying out for them.

The only way out of this impasse is for employers, employees and colleagues to be able to embark upon a similar long-term process of trust-building and communication. Five years ago I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder (type 1, the more manic variety), a product of a period of profound social isolation conducting fieldwork in West Africa. My original instinct was to conceal my diagnosis from my employers. Time and again I found that struggling in secrecy caused my symptoms to get much worse than they ever needed to be, turning mildly stressful circumstances into everything from manic overwork to self-harm, catatonia and suicidal episodes.

Severe mental illness in the workplace

Kerwin Datu



Buffering

Each occasion forced me to reveal my diagnosis, and each revelation allowed me to learn that overwhelmingly my employers and colleagues in the architecture industry can be trusted with such knowledge. They can be counted on to offer their full support, even if neither of us know what forms that should take.

Their understanding has given me the courage to change my approach, and embark upon this process of trust-building and communication with my employers and colleagues, so that the right adaptations will reveal themselves through dialogue. It is easier now to explain that commuting to work fills me with dread every morning, and that sometimes that anxiety will be overwhelming. But when I do make it to my desk, the routine of sitting down quietly, opening my laptop and checking my emails stabilises me. That I'm better on large, long projects than short, sharp deadlines. That I don't cope well in too-many-cooks situations. That it's better that I can plan my time months in advance rather than try to do anything at the last minute. That I integrate poorly with others' attempts to do anything at the last minute. That I may overreact emotionally to trivial things, but that it's nobody's fault when I do.

I used to think that telling people I had bipolar disorder would be a career-limiting move. I am glad that I have been forced by circumstances to learn that this is not really true, at least not in the architecture industry.

I wrote this article for two reasons. First, to lead by example and indicate to other architects with severe mental

illnesses that it is possible to be open and honest about your condition and not be misjudged for it; in fact, that your condition may be easier to manage as a result of it. And second, to show to employers and colleagues that this second category of mental illness exists in your workplaces, and that the usual methods of dealing with severe illnesses may need to be set aside in favour of a method focused on building trust and communication over the long term. And to both employers and sufferers I say: there are more of us than you may realise.

Kerwin Datu is a practising architect as well as a qualified urban and economic geographer. He is also chair of the NSW Chapter's editorial committee.

If you are troubled by anything in this article and are not sure who to turn to, please consider reaching out to one of the following as I have in the past:

- Lifeline: lifeline.org.au, 13 11 14
- MensLine: mensline.org.au, 1300 78 99 78
- Suicide Call Back Service: suicidecallbackservice.org.au, 1300 659 467

Please also enquire whether your company engages the services of an employee assistance program such as the following: Assure Programs / Access EAP / EAP Assist.

'Time and again I found that struggling in secrecy caused my symptoms to get much worse than they ever needed to be, turning mildly stressful circumstances into everything from manic overwork to self-harm, catatonia and suicidal episodes.'



Crossing the street: a routinely paralysing experience for the author

Smashing the architect archetype

David Tickle



Rebel Wilson plays an Australian architect in New York in the film *Isn't It Romantic*

'You know I always wanted to pretend that I was an architect'
– George Costanza

In the recent satirical rom-com *Isn't It Romantic*, Rebel Wilson plays Natalie, an Australian architect working in New York – the latest in a long line of architects to be portrayed on the large (and small) screen.

Within the limited time of a film or a television episode, familiar character types are used to quickly establish backstories, settings and motivations ... and unless there is a purposeful deconstruction of the stereotype, we are happy to accept it. So we are used to viewing ruthless lawyers, kindly teachers and firefighters who are both sexy and selfless. But these portrayals also provide a lens through which we understand how others perceive and categorise our work – and the uncomfortable, inaccurate and irritating misconceptions of what being an architect means.

As practitioners of the aesthetic, architects are the perfect vehicle for a great wardrobe and stunning set pieces, from art galleries and skyscrapers to opulent domestic interiors. Architects are people of passion and commitment: the creative act is one that excites characters as well as audiences. They are complex beings; a marriage of artist and engineer, both a dreamer and pragmatist. The male architect (representing a vast majority, as in real life) is the ideal character – described by AV Club simply as 'sensitive but not girly', with multi-sector audience appeal.

One enduring foundation of the architect character is *The Fountainhead's* Howard Roark, played by Gary Cooper in 1949 film based on Ayn Rand's novel. Roark is an individualist, pursuing Modernist ideals in a world of conformity and blandness. His uncompromising position forces him out of the industry; he returns to become ghost-designer on a housing development with another architect, then dynamites the project when his design ideas are dumbed down (spoiler: he escapes conviction, only to be awarded the biggest architectural commission in New York). Roark is a kind of *architectural hero*: his professional passion sets his moral compass but when soured becomes individualistic, dangerous and, ultimately, psychopathic.

A more recent rendering of this type is Jeremy Irons' Anthony Royal from the dystopian *High-Rise* (again, leaping from page to screen, and losing some nuance along the way). Royal is the creator and penthouse resident of the titular *High-Rise*, a socialist Utopia of stacked communities and shared facilities where life is easy and everything is in order ... until it isn't anymore. Shocked by the failure of his architectural vision, Royal spends most of the film locked in a state of denial and disgust as his life work literally crumbles beneath him.

But as we have one type, we have an opposite: the *creative problem solver*. Where the architectural hero seems expert in making crises, the creative problem solver is employed to deal with such crises. The former is intent on designing other people's lives. The latter's enduring role is to 'design their own life', finding resolution in a world of complexity and confusion beyond their control.

An early exemplar is Mike Brady from TV's *Brady Bunch* (played by Robert Reed), the head of newly-formed household of nine and work-from-home practitioner. Mike is constantly called upon to solve both personal and professional issues. He is both tender and tough, a listener and an authoritarian, a designer of solutions for both clients and family members.

Elyse Keaton (Meredith Baxter Burney) of *Family Ties* appears as the next-gen equivalent, saddled with four kids and a seemingly useless husband, as well as her own independent business (although her professional life focuses around a drawing board located in the family kitchen alongside the cooker and dining table). The architect character again is shorthand for passion (in this case, in the service of others), balance and the convenience of being able to work from the family home.

Yet in the compressed timeframe of a typical film, the creative problem solver is directed towards a singular, albeit overwhelmingly perplexing, life challenge. So, in films such as *Intersection*, *The Lake House* and *Indecent Proposal*, we respectively find Richard Gere choosing between his wife and mistress, Keanu Reeves learning how to undo his imminent death, and Woody Harrelson deciding it may be OK to pimp out his wife to a billionaire so they can finally finish that beach house. These characters are relatable in their haplessness but are ultimately inspiring, because we know they are able to work their way to a solution. And they (and their homes) look good while doing it.

Rebel Wilson's Natalie would appear to fall simply into the creative problem solver typology. Early in *Isn't It Romantic*, she wakes from a concussion to find her life is now a romantic-comedy and she must navigate her way back to some kind of personal fulfilment and normalcy.

But is it romantic? Far from it. It is one of the most functional, least inspiring portrayals of an architect in film. Natalie is way down the foodchain in a mid-range commercial practice; her project is a hotel carpark. And despite working through the night on a design concept (piles of paper on a drawing board, natch!), Natalie can only muster mild interest from her client.

Her journey is wholly personal; she learns to love herself, without needing to develop a raging ego. Her creative problem solving is by optimistic intuition and accidental

fortune, not self-torture and self-loathing. And while she is a team player, she is not at the service of others ... she demands design ownership within the context of a larger project.

She is an architect but this doesn't define her – her gender, her nationality, her personality, her unconventional desirability (by film standards) are all more important. It's like being an architect is the least interesting thing about her. It may not be romantic, but in broadening what it means to be an on-screen architect, it may be progress.

David Tickle is a principal and head of urban design at Hassell, Sydney.

'Her journey is wholly personal; she learns to love herself, without needing to develop a raging ego. Her creative problem solving is by optimistic intuition and accidental fortune, not self-torture and self-loathing. She is an architect but this doesn't define her.'

CHAPTER



The *Reconciliation Conversations* event at Tusculum began with a smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country by Brendan Kerin from the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Council – see page 42 Photo: Brett Boardman

Understanding and respecting differences



Diversity is consciously understanding and respecting differences in our humanity, whether it be recognition of religion, identity, culture, environment or other. We still have a long way to go to be a truly accepting culture. But as a profession, the architectural community has typically been more aware

because our training makes us open our eyes look and listen, trying to understand how our clients will use the built environment. How else can we design and deliver the most appropriate outcome for them and the community? The sadness of intolerance of diversity is devastating when taken to extremes such as atrocities like the Christchurch mosque shootings in March. When the sanctity of peaceful prayer is abused we all lose our innocence.

Our profession can help heal by educating with our best tools: the built environment. Punchbowl Mosque by Candalepas Associates and the Australian Islamic Centre Newport by Glenn Murcutt and Elevli Plus are beautiful examples of buildings that bring delight and appreciation for a faith that is less understood by most Australians. The images and openness of these buildings allow an appreciation of the diversity of our humanity for everyone to see.

After the tragic Christchurch shootings I reached out to the people of Christchurch and the Islamic Community to offer our condolences and support. Bashar AlJamal, the client for the Punchbowl Mosque, replied: ‘During these turbulent times we will stand together in support, peace and harmony to ensure that

as fellow Australians, our wider community will push through and prevail as a multicultural nation. These notions are further embodied in our houses of worship and they will remain open and inviting for all to see, a few of which were proudly designed by [member] architects of the Institute.’

The NSW Chapter hosted the inaugural *Reconciliation Conversations* event on 28 May. This was a sell-out event and an important moment for the architectural profession to really make a difference. Conversations about Reconciliation are gaining traction, but we all need to understand how we can participate to truly make a difference. It is an ongoing journey for all to embrace.

Gender diversity in the profession still needs to improve. The Institute has reformed the NSW Gender Equity Taskforce and the NSW Architects Champions of Change have gone from strength to strength, now expanding and creating a national second group. We look forward to improvements. I close with a statement from the Institute’s Code of Conduct: ‘members are dedicated to ... raising the quality of the environment and consequently the quality of life. In this it seeks to improve the standards of health and safety for the protection and welfare of all members of the community.’ We should interpret ‘all members of the community’ as inclusion for diversity.

Kathlyn Loseby
is president of the NSW Chapter.

Advocating for solutions to a crisis of construction quality and consumer confidence

Better procurement practices, registration across the built environment, independent inspection and certification, holistic assessment of proposed variations and substitution – these are all reforms the Institute has been campaigning in favour of for some time. (Indeed, poor procurement practices were a driving force for the establishment of the Institute 85 years ago.) The underlying problems prompting these solutions we’ve championed have all come to a terrible head in the current circumstances that have seen multi-residential construction failures continue to make news headlines as they undermine public safety, personal finances and consumer confidence.

While the circumstances that have piqued government and media interest in the building quality issues that we have been flagging are unfortunate, the Institute welcomes consideration and action to address the failures plaguing the construction industry – overdue as this may be. Accordingly, at both Chapter and national levels the Institute has been working intensively to leverage most effectively the present appetite for positive reform. Led by NSW Chapter president Kathlyn Loseby, we have consulted widely across industry to prepare deeply informed and coordinated responses to the NSW Government’s *Building Stronger Foundations* paper and the NSW parliamentary inquiry into the regulation of building standards, building quality and building disputes.

The *Building Stronger Foundations* paper, released in June, makes four key proposals:

1. Requiring all building designers to formally declare plans, specifications and building solutions are BCA compliant and all builders to declare buildings are constructed according to declared plans
2. Introducing a registration scheme for all ‘building designers’ (ie architects, building designers, engineers)
3. Ensuring an industry-wide duty of care is owed to subsequent homeowners
4. Establishing a building commissioner to act as the consolidated building regulator for NSW.



Kathlyn Loseby has brought together key industry stakeholders to lead collaborative action on building quality. From left: Brian Seidler (Master Builders Association), Kathlyn Loseby, Linda Gaunt (Consult Australia), Jonathan Russell (Engineers Australia), Steve Watson (Association Accredited Certifiers), Craig Donovan (MBA), Banjo Stanton (Owners Corporation Network), Agi Sterling (Association Consulting Architects) and Stephen Goddard (Owners Corporation Network)

While the Institute’s submission on this paper supports all these proposals as important steps forward, we argue that government needs to go further to ensure safety and quality and to restore consumer confidence.

Similarly our submission to the NSW Legislative Council Public Accountability Committee calls for reforms to address critical issues impacting consumer protection, documentation and compliance, independent inspection, and registration and licensing.

The response our advocacy effort has received from within government and the media has been very encouraging and we are continuing to advance the Institute’s position through further consultation. There is much to be achieved but the time is now for much needed reform.

Full submissions are available on the Institute’s NSW Chapter website.

PROCUREMENT

There is growing recognition that the approach to design and construct contracts that has dominated market practice in recent years has been deleterious for building quality and design integrity. We are beginning to see a welcome shift in some of these core practices and are working to positively influence industry, guided by the NSW Chapter and National procurement taskforces.

The Government Architect NSW (GANSW) is also maintaining its efforts to

make government a smarter client. With the significant spend allocated to new building projects in this year’s budget, the profession stands to benefit not only from these work opportunities but from the conditions and possibilities for great built outcomes that flow from engagement with better clients.

In August we were pleased to host a talk by GANSW presenting the pipeline of government work as well as an update of the GANSW prequalification scheme. The scheme is always open and we strongly recommend members in practices of all sizes apply for prequalification to gain access to the extensive range of projects coming online. We especially encourage regional members to apply – with big investment slated for regional areas, there is strong opportunity for local practices to win work and obtain valuable project experience.

Kate Concannon
is the NSW state manager.



Country Division chair Cameron Anderson



Newcastle Division chair Jason Elsley



Multi-award winning Maitland Riverlink by Chrofi with McGregor Coxall

NSW Country Division

It is a great honour to take over the position of chair of the NSW Country Division Committee, a committee that has a long and important history within the greater NSW Chapter. Tricia Helyar must be commended for her tireless work and commitment over the last two years as chair in what has been a challenging yet rewarding period.

I look forward to working closely with the committee, Chapter Council and state manager Kate Concannon over the coming months as we refocus our attention to the following areas:

- Local government procurement and strengthening the role and value of regional architects
- Strengthening and improving regional corporate partnerships
- Building our strong regional event program
- Building our Country Division Awards program
- Reviewing regional member services in terms of value and member equality.

A highlight of the Country Division calendar is the annual conference held every October. Sarah Aldridge and Shaun Carter are putting together an exciting program that will be held in Byron Bay (8–10 October). Details at architecture.com.au/nsw.

As a committee we value member feedback so I encourage any member who has an issue, suggestion or comment to please reach out and get in touch.

Cameron Anderson
is the chair of the Country Division.

Newcastle Division

The Newcastle Division Committee would like to sincerely thank Peter Kemp for his years of dedicated service to the Institute including the many hours spent mentoring future architects via the Newcastle PALS Course. We also thank Joel Chamberlain, Matt Sainsbury, Caine King, Ramsey Awad and past EmAGN Newcastle members Gabriel McLean, Marley Swanson Wood and Nick Flatman for their service to the committee.

The Newcastle Division welcomes new chair Jason Elsley (Derive Architecture) and five new committee members: Rebecca McLaughlan (University of Newcastle), Stuart Campbell (CKDS), Phoebe Glanville (Alleanza), Prue Bowe (Prudence Bowe) and Justin Hamilton (SHAC). The division is also joined by new EmAGN co-chairs Jasmine Richardson and Kalyna Sparks who will join us at our monthly meetings.

Events during the year include the Newcastle Division’s ArchiMeet CPD seminars, UoN SABE Practice Matters lecture series and the EmAGN talk series.

The 2019 Newcastle Division Awards were held on 21 March with 14 awards and commendations over 11 categories. The quality of entries continues to be very high and they represent a diverse range of established and emerging practices. We wish to thank the jury of Georgina Wilson (chair), Louisa Gee and Warren Haasnoot for their efforts in assessing the entries.

Newcastle Division Committee



The design for a secondary school in Malawi by NBRS received an honorable mention in an international competition

AJ+C shortlisted five times and gained one commendation in the NSW Architecture Awards

AJ+C was recognised by the Australian Institute of Architects with three projects shortlisted in this year’s NSW Architecture Awards. The Burcham was also awarded a commendation for Heritage – Creative Adaptation. AJ+C is proud of our team and congratulates everyone involved in these projects. Shortlisted projects included: The Burcham, Rosebery (for multi- residential, heritage and sustainable categories); Maybanke, Balmain (for residential alteration and additions); and Polaris, North Sydney (for multi-residential).

BJA’s diverse projects statewide

In contrast to previous years ago when 65% of our projects were apartments in Sydney, BKA is now designing exciting, diverse, mid-sized education, community and commercial projects across all studios in Sydney, Newcastle and Byron Bay. We are keen to talk with architects with experience in construction documents in ArchiCAD. Contact us at bka@bka.com.au.

CM+ lights up Vivid
CM+ is thrilled to have three light installations in Vivid earlier this year: *Let it Snow*, *Harmony* and *Nostalgia Above*. Following an internal design competition, three concepts were developed, each led by our young creative professionals and to our delight all three were selected.

Crone’s DJ renovations
Stepped into David Jones lately? Renovations continue at David Jones’ flagship Elizabeth Street store in Sydney, with initial stage one complete and trading. Highlights include the new ‘magical children’s world’ on level nine and the luxurious shoe emporium on level seven. To learn more, visit crone.com.au.

Mirvac community named nation’s best medium density development
Mirvac’s Brighton Lakes masterplanned community at Moorebank, Sydney, incorporating 306 Mirvac-designed and built homes in a golf course setting, has won UDIA’s National Award for Excellence in medium density residential development, adding to its growing collection of industry accolades.



Homebush West Public School by TKD Architects, complete with rooftop play spaces



Harmony, one of three light installations by CM+ at Vivid

African school project by NBRS
NBRS has designed a new secondary school in Malawi. 500 entries from 71 countries were submitted to an international design competition to expand an existing complex. Reaching the final 50, NBRS then ranked within the top 15 receiving an honorable mention. The design draws from the woven textures and patterns found in the Malawi culture. The idea evokes a weave of faith, education, socialisation and habitation.

Public education by TKD Architects
TKD Architects is currently working with School Infrastructure NSW on the design and delivery of 14 innovative Public Education projects. Eight schools are now complete and six are in various stages of development.

Diversity by design



Directors from Mirvac Design (from left): David Hirst, Michael Wiener, Andrew La, Jill Skelton, Vong Sinbandhit, Anita Verma, Nicolas Thioulouse, Diana Sarcasmo and Brett Crellin

Just as every living thing is the sum total of its genetic history, so too are buildings embedded with the DNA of the architects and designers who bring them to life.

Mirvac's Encore in the heart of Sydney's King Cross would have existed in a vastly different form had it not borne the imprint of its New York born and raised architect Michael Wiener, a design director at Mirvac Design. Entwined in its Manhattanesque form you can also trace the seeds of a new wave of sustainable architecture, a consequence of Wiener taking on Encore immediately after completing the Newington Apartments, where he was part of the Mirvac team that created Australia's first solar-powered suburb. Encore got a green roof long before green roofs were a thing.

This cross-pollination of different cultures and experiences – diversity in modern parlance – to create something uniquely Australian is an essential component of Mirvac Design. Diversity in design must surely begin with diversity in designer.

You can see it in Andrew La's mastery of spatial design at Harold Park. His adherence to the view that every millimetre must count is a natural expression of having lived in the high-density environs of Hong Kong. Yet it is tempered by his many years working on urban renewal projects in the UK, where he developed a reverence and love for the old and the granular.

There's an echo of the primacy of family and community in the masterplans of Vong Sinbandhit, who left his own family in war-ravaged Laos in the '60s to attend Cranbrook, later gaining his architectural credentials at UNSW and Master of Town and Country Planning at the University of Sydney. He joined Mirvac Design (then Henry Pollack and Associates) in 1984, and counts the masterplanning of Newington and Raleigh Park, the first community title development in NSW, among his early achievements.

Study and work have taken Nicolas Thioulouse from Paris to Nebraska, London and Amsterdam, ultimately arriving on Australian shores in 2006, working with Woods Bagot before joining Mirvac Design last year. He views the diversity of Mirvac Design and the Australian population itself as a gift that opens the door to greater creativity.

'You can see things from a different point of view because you don't have that cognitive bias of what architecture should be and what placemaking should be', says Thioulouse. 'You have this good creative community because of the diversity and backgrounds of people. The British are very British in their approach, Parisians very Parisian. It is quite conservative in a way, whereas in Sydney there is the best of both worlds.'

Speaking as flames turned Notre Dame's centuries of history and culture to ash, Thioulouse acknowledges that respect for culture is embedded into the French from an early age. 'Because you are surrounded by this rich heritage people respect it more naturally and they will tend to go back to their roots in search of the authentic. In Australia it is more difficult to describe what is authentic. Heritage is one thing but craft and authenticity is expressed at a different level.'

Anita Verma was born in India and studied architecture there before coming to Australia 26 years ago, joining Mirvac four years later. Her initial challenge was to gain acceptance on work sites as a woman architect, something she had not encountered in India where the architect holds revered status, regardless of gender. Australia has of course moved with the times and the collegiate atmosphere that prevails within Mirvac Design extends to its work sites.

Diversity is a non-specific word that can say a lot or very little. Diversity among the Mirvac Design directors is reflected not only in their cultural background and a fifty-fifty gender split but also life experience.

Commercial manager Jill Skelton succumbed to the charms of Sydney over Glasgow 18 years ago, her travelling holiday turning into a permanent relocation.

Brett Crellin's journey to become a design director began with a trade background, running a successful plumbing business. His interest shifted to hydraulic design which manifested itself in his current role focused on building services coordination. Brett's world of design is about making sure the inner organs of the building function, allowing the vision of the architect to be fully realised.

For Brett, who grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney, Mirvac Design's diversity of culture, race, age and gender is a fair reflection of Australia today and is what makes the design process creative and dynamic.

It's not culture, country of origin or gender that has influenced the design thinking of David Hirst but a man called Seidler. Mirvac's new business design director grew up immersed in the lore of Harry Seidler, where his architect father worked for 50 years and he also worked for six years.

'Harry Seidler shaped my thinking around architecture', says Hirst. 'Everything that I thought about architecture from a very young age was through the lens of my father which was the lens of Harry Seidler. I've always admired the brutal honesty, conviction and rationality in his work and the principles he stood by.'

Mirvac's general manager of design Diana Sarcasmo didn't set out to create a mini United Nations among the architects and designers at Mirvac's 200 George Street head office. Yet diversity seems an inevitable consequence of her preference for the attraction of opposites.

'It's about having the right people in the right job and not having any bias', says Sarcasmo, whose grandmother came to Australia from Italy on a one-way ticket, newly widowed with five children in tow. It's a familiar migrant story from which the seeds of meritocracy were planted.

'Architecture is such an international business and to get the best results you need a team with a diverse skill set and diverse backgrounds bringing a range of different perspectives. Everyone comes at it from a different angle. We collectively make all decisions. And even though we disagree on almost everything, everybody has a say from a design, documentation and management perspective.

'Our director group in many ways mirrors the composition of Australia and that is a healthy thing. For me, the most important thing is to employ people with opposite or different skill sets. Some people prefer to have a team where they feel a connection; they went to the same school or they think exactly the same way.

'But there's no creative energy in sameness – no spark. It's the questioning, the disagreement, the diversity that is the essence of design.'

Mirvac Design

Reconciliation Conversations: grounding architecture in truth

Held on the 28 May 2019 at Tusculum, *Reconciliation Conversations* was a much anticipated event for the NSW Reconciliation Working Group (including co-chairs Michael Mossman and Callantha Brigham, together with Dillon Kombumerri, Elizabeth Carpenter, Tricia Helyar and Samantha Rich). From the group's establishment, a key action was to create a forum to engage with Institute members each year during Reconciliation Week. Commencing in late May, Reconciliation Week is an initiative designed to raise awareness of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It represents opportunities for communities to celebrate and commiserate *truths* of our collective past and to join together in strategising new futures.

The 2019 Reconciliation Week theme was 'Grounded in truth: walking together with courage', a fitting title for the NSW Chapter's inaugural discussion. *Reconciliation Conversations* provided a forum for story-sharing dialogue, information exchange, and personal and professional learning. The aim of the day was to speak truths – good, bad or indifferent. Experiences were to be placed on the table to activate thought processes seldom heard in formal architectural settings. Reconciliation Australia reminds us all that 'reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

The day began with a smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country by Brendan Kerin from the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Council. With the backdrop of less welcome events imposed upon the lands of the Gadigal people, it was humbling to observe Brendan's sharing of protocols on Country. These are the truths of this land, and it was generous for Brendan to cleanse our spirits through ceremony and good humour.

Dillon Kombumerri (Yugembir) – principal architect at Government Architect NSW – opened proceedings with his keynote: addressing historical mistruths, a discourse on designing with Country, consideration of Indigenous rights and the imminent *Ochre Grid* project. Lisa Pulver Jackson (Wiradjuri) – deputy vice chancellor of Indigenous strategies and services at the University of Sydney) then followed, offering dialogue on the significance of working together to inform policies and strategies, changing institutions from within through collaborative engagement.

The event then provided a platform to share experiences of policies that have enhanced the visibility of Indigenous issues in the profession. Speakers Juliette Churchill, Olivia Hyde, Russell Kennedy and Ellie Chatfield (Gamilaroi), Mal Ridges and Sue Barnsley covered a range of topics from the University of Sydney's implementation of the Wingara Mura principles to the Australian Indigenous Design Charter, changes to the EP&A act, Aboriginal heritage reforms and AILA's journey to prepare a Reconciliation Action Plan. Each raised the importance of creating a space to challenge existing systems, listen to the aspirations of communities and activate change within government and institutional systems. It was clear that to see change while working with and within existing structures requires leadership, patience and determination from all parties.

The conversation then turned to projects. Rachel Neeson, David Kaunitz, Peter Lonergan, Genevieve Murray and Joel Sherwood (Wiradjuri) each spoke about the criticality of process to achieving sustainable outcomes on projects. Interestingly, the forum provided agency and conversation around not just reconciliation but the issue of treaty. Perhaps this is the line of inquiry that challenges us to understand the baseline issue at hand – sovereignty of Country.

The closing part of the day, titled 'Where to from here?', was facilitated by

Meld Studio. This session turned the conversation to audience participants to hear their thoughts on where the Reconciliation Working Group should focus their energies next and to offer their own personal commitment. Ideas – such as building a Reconciliation Action Plan for the Institute, preparing a cultural protocols document to support practice, undertaking a high school outreach project to interest Indigenous students in architecture, and creating a partnership model to support practice activities – were all discussed and built on by workshop participants. Feedback sheets were taken from the audience and will provide an excellent platform to build on for future strategies.

Reconciliation Conversations has provided the necessary starting point for the Institute and its members to begin an important dialogue and foster future conversations and activities within the profession. From a Reconciliation Working Group perspective, our spirits were lifted by the number of people who attended the event, the generous sponsorship we received, the volunteers who assisted and the thoughts and contributions shared with us on the day. Our aim is to synthesise findings from the event and communicate outcomes back to the profession. While there are practitioners out there engaging in this space, the opportunity now exists for others to proactively engage. We look forward to working with the profession on reconciliation objectives over the coming year and inviting members back for further conversations next year.

Michael Mossman (Kuku Yalanji)

is a lecturer at the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning.

Life Fellows and Fellows in NSW: how can it be more equitable?

The Art Gallery of NSW recently presented a selection of works from the extraordinary modern art collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The gallery described this *Masters of modern art from the Hermitage* exhibition as capturing ‘the ebullience, idealism and confidence of artists as they freed themselves from tradition’. All exhibited artists were male.

Why have so few female artists managed to achieve master status? Is it a lack of talent? Or of dedication? The story of 16th-century painter Artemisia Gentileschi, who managed to attain recognition as master, suggests neither inadequacy. Rather, her story provides a poetically concise example of the exception that too often has proved the rule. For a lack of access to networks and resources combined with an audience limited by a hegemonic male-centric perspective trumps even remarkable talent and dedication almost every time.

As assistant to her painter father Orazio Gentileschi, the young Gentileschi enjoyed the profoundly rare privilege of access to her father’s workshop and entourage. But even then the support she received from him for her own artistic aspirations was hard won: several times Orazio attempted to send her to a nunnery before recognising her extraordinary talent. On numerous further occasions too throughout her life Gentileschi found herself fighting to free herself from the shackles of men. Artistic output aside, her extraordinary ebullience, idealism and determination to free herself from tradition was amply demonstrated when she not only brought a rape trial against her teacher but managed to secure his conviction. A master of art *and* a determined master of her own destiny and personal sovereignty then.

Gentileschi’s place in the canon however has been tenuous. A 2017 *Sydney Morning Herald* article questioned whether an ‘odd classical painting’ found falling out of its frame and ‘leaning against a back wall’ in a Crows Nest art gallery in 1976 was by her hand. Gentileschi’s subjects were not the idealised version of women seen through a man’s eye; they were disturbing and reflected her passion and anger. When its new owner brought it home, his wife banished it to a spare bedroom, deeming it ‘too gruesome’ for the lounge room. And so the work remained out of sight and unrecognised for years.

The moral of Gentileschi’s story requires no further explication. But the lesson needs heeding.

The NSW Chapter counts a total of 3766 members out of which 350 are Fellows and 59 are Life Fellows. Respectively, women account for 33 and 11 of these. The Institute and the profession – collectively and individually – need to take action to prevent further failures of recognition of outstanding female architects and actively contribute to the number and prominence of these role models to which girls and women may aspire. This means committing to critical reflection on how the way we do and think currently may result in negative bias – conscious and otherwise. Redressing the Fellow imbalance does not require that women in architecture demonstrate more talent nor greater dedication. (As the Gentileschi story reminds us, the deficiency lies not there.) It means interrogating our assumptions, procedures, structures and eligibility criteria and asking: are they equitable?

For the Institute this reflection is a timely and ongoing project. At our 2018 end-of-year celebration, we were delighted to announce one new Life Fellow and 19 new Fellows. Even more pleasing was that 11 of the latter are women. We have a long way to go, but the good news is we’re facing in the right direction and momentum is building.

Tessa Goodman and Kate Concannon
is the NSW awards coordinator and NSW state manager (respectively).



Self Portrait as a Martyr
by Artemisia Gentileschi, c. 1615

BECOMING A FELLOW OR LIFE FELLOW

Achieving the status of Fellow displays to the profession, clients and others the high standing a member has attained within the profession as well as their advanced skill level and contribution. It is also the first step toward Life Fellowship. Members may be nominated or self-nominated for Fellowship.

To successfully obtain recognition as a Fellow, a member must satisfy the following requirements:

- 1. TIME: have a minimum of 12 years’ membership as a Corporate Member (exceptions may apply)
- 2. CONTRIBUTION: have made a significant contribution to the profession
- 3. ENDORSEMENT: attained recommendation by two Corporate Members as well as the recommendation of Chapter Council

Life Fellowship is an honour bestowed on members who are confidentially nominated by the Honours Committee. It is the highest class of RAI A membership. The nomination must include a citation and supporting documentation. These applications receive endorsement from Chapter Council before progressing to National Council for assessment and, if successful, approval.

Nominations are open throughout the year. For more information, email tessa.goodman@architecture.com.au.

2018/19	2018/19 Fellows
Life Fellows	Hector Abrahams
Tony Kemeny	Sarah Aldridge
	Melonie Bayl-Smith
	Camilla Block
	Elizabeth Carpenter
	Shaun Carter
	Gareth Cole
	Neil Durbach
	Abbie Galvin
	Justin Hamilton
	Tricia Helyar
	Tim Horton
	David Jaggars
	Chris Jenkins
	Virginia Kerridge
	Alexander Kibble
	Annabel Lahz
	Peter Lonergan
	Kathlyn Loseby
	Donald Mason
	Debra McKendry-Hunt
	Rachel Neeson
	Andrew Nimmo
	Eva-Marie Prineas
	Gerard Reinmuth
	David Rose
	Agi Sterling
	Philip Thalys
	David Wilson
	Virginia Wong See

2019 fellowships will be formally awarded at our end-of-year prize night, to be held Friday 22 November at Peter Stutchbury Architecture’s NSW medallion winning Joynton Avenue Creative Centre.

This list is current at the time of printing.

The Bauhaus in its centenary year



An entrance to the Bauhaus Building (1925–26) by Walter Gropius in Dessau, Germany in 2011
Photo: Marczoutendijk / Creative Commons

As for most students, I learned about the Bauhaus in history of architecture classes in my undergraduate course (in my case at the University of New South Wales). But when I started work in Marcel Breuer's Madison Avenue office in 1979, there was a real sense that my serious architectural training was about to start. This was a time when modernism was under attack in the press and postmodernism was reaching its zenith. Historicism and eclecticism were getting a lot of oxygen from a new generation of architects led by Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, Charles Jencks and Robert Stern. It was ironic that my personal discovery of Breuer and the Bauhaus in the late '70s and early '80s came at a time when they were not in fashion and had become, for many, irrelevant (just read *From Bauhaus to Our House* by Tom Wolfe).

Despite that milieu, it was a unique privilege and opportunity to spend a year in Marcel Breuer's New York headquarters. I worked on a large industrial plant in North Carolina. Herb Beckhard, Breuer's long time collaborator, was the partner in charge and Breuer showed up intermittently for design reviews. I was invited to spend a weekend at Beckhard's wonderful family home at Glen Cove which epitomised Breuer's portfolio of residential masterpieces and later featured in the book *Architecture Without Rules*. Hazram Zainoeddin, another gifted and long standing design collaborator of Breuer's, became my tennis partner and, just to keep me in my place, dealt me a regular thrashing. Nevertheless, I carried out my office tasks with determination and diligence, and delighted in searching through the office plan chests to find original transparencies for working drawings of great buildings like the Whitney Museum, now known as the Met Breuer. I immersed myself in an environment and an approach to architecture that sent me on a long future trajectory. This was especially poignant because Breuer was one of the last remaining and practicing Bauhaus 'masters' still alive, passing away in 1981, shortly after my departure.

On return visits to the United States, Gropius' family home in Lincoln, Massachusetts – not far from the Harvard campus – was top of my agenda. It was a treasure trove of architecture, industrial design, interior design, fabrics and furnishings – the embodiment of the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art. Several years later and just prior to the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989, I was invited by the then East German government to visit the Bauhaus in Dessau. I was taken through the studios, workshops, offices and theatres of an impeccably restored building. It was functioning, once again, as an architectural school behind operable steel-framed glass curtain walls with fully repaired slab blocks; all the interiors were good as new. It was a pleasure to accept an invitation to spend a few nights in the student dormitory – small but efficient sleeping quarters with ribbon windows offering panoramic views of the exterior landscape.

The principles espoused by the Bauhaus – functionalism, industrialisation, the synthesis of art and technology – were still alive and relevant at the end of the 20th century as they were groundbreaking at its start. Of course, times have changed – politically, socially, technologically and environmentally – as they continue to change, but the principles which underpin good architecture had not. Commenting on postmodernism at the end of his life, Breuer's observation was the curt German phrase *nur abwarten* (just wait). True to Breuer's prediction, postmodernism was dead by the end of the century and in its place came a resurgent regional modernism based on the expression of program, technology, structure and materiality. As the Bauhaus celebrates its centenary this year, a new generation of architects would do well to revisit it as a critical link between the revivalism of the 19th century and the modern world of the future we inhabit. This is a

world which includes high performance, lightweight architecture, virtual technology and, the critical issue in the 21st century, environmental sustainability.

The principles of Gropius' Bauhaus came from a conviction that architecture and design should embrace contemporary technology, utilise the potential of new materials and address social inequity to create a better world for global citizenry. From a historical perspective, there is nothing new about this. Unshackled from the orthodoxy of 19th-century revivalism and steered by a visionary as Gropius was, these principles manifested a revolution in early 20th-century Germany. It's not surprising that right-wing suprematism – Nazism – sought to keep closing down the Bauhaus until it eventually resurfaced on the east coast of the United States.

Since the end of World War II, there has been massive construction of residential and commercial tower blocks around the world as populations grow and become more urbanised. This has relied on the technical capabilities of a modern building industry. In the hands of less capable design professionals and civic authorities, many of these developments have proven as socially and environmentally disastrous as they were a bad and inaccurate reflection of the ideals of the Bauhaus and modern architecture generally. While prefabrication – a central tenet of the Bauhaus – was a historic inevitability, there's no doubt that poor quality architecture is the result of technical skill, on its own and without the corresponding creative sensibility. The Bauhaus centenary is a poignant reminder of the critical importance of art, technology, materiality and social conscience – essential ingredients for enduring architecture of its time and place.

Ed Lippmann

is founder and principal of Lippmann Partnership.

Capital Designs

Capital Designs: Australia House and visions of an imperial London
by Eileen Chanin (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018)

As an antipodean living in London, you're constantly confronted with a strange sense of the familiar. It's hard not to feel the weight of generations of Australians gone before you – many Londoners purport to either know an Australian, have a tie here or profess to loving our country (the beaches at least). It's unavoidable to find yourself brushing up against a legacy of Australians making their way to the Big Smoke. Our reputation for working and playing hard precedes our arrival yet we are still greeted with a sense of curiosity about what Australia is like or what's going on down this way, as if somehow our identity on the world stage and distinction from our colonial *alma mater* is not yet entirely clear. London still exhibits a pull on our young adults (this one included – or a younger version) to pay our dues in a perhaps outdated sense of London as the centre of our colonial identity. Most of us come back home, some don't.

Capital Designs: Australian House and visions of an imperial London by Eileen Chanin traces out the origins of the first consolidated example of a unified dominion and diplomatic building typology, being Australia House. In remarkable detail, Chanin recounts the difficult birth of an extraordinary building that remains a bold statement sitting possibly vaingloriously at the intersection of the Strand and Aldwych deep in the heart of London. The book is also a fascinating account of a fractious time in London's history, caught between city-beautification programs, new concepts of London's identity and the impacts of WWI.

Perhaps better known to many for its moment of fame as Gringott's Bank in the *Harry Potter* films, Australia House was a newly federated colony's return to its parents on its own terms. Beyond symbolism, the building brought together the organs of Australia's early prosperity under one roof and set the direction for future dominion buildings. Combining financial, banking and immigration services, Australia House was a functioning apparatus of government – a space to conduct business, sway potential migrants to make the journey south and the consol-



Australia House (1913–18) – at the junction of Strand and Aldwych in London – by Alexander Marshall Mackenzie
Photo: National Library of Australia, nla.obj147613114

idation of an optimistic Australian ambition for itself that rose above the competition between the states. Perhaps most significantly, the presence of an Australian 'seat of power' on one of the most prominent sites in London's then redeveloping Strand was a statement: we had arrived and we were there to stay.

Today, Australia House continues to be used generally along similar lines to those for which it was established with only minor modifications to the Grade II listed building including the no doubt required contemporary technology upgrades. The building hosts citizenship ceremonies and art exhibitions, and is Australia's largest overseas polling station – purportedly even going so far as to hold a sausage sizzle for key events. It also continues to act as a base for the continued application of diplomatic or 'soft' power in the interests of furthering Australia's relationships with the UK and regional partners.

Chanin's book is an impressive and well-researched record that describes not only London's changing place in the world but also reminds us of Australia's aspirational spirit in the early days of federation. It's an aspirational spirit that led to distinct innovation in design and construction – Australia House as a typology and a piece of design is a critical record of that inven-

tiveness when today Australia seems more regressive and reactionary in comparison. *Capital Designs* is a timely reminder of a significant relationship in our nation's history and, for this reviewer, a resolute prompt to rediscover that innovative spirit as we move forward into an uncertain future of shifting empires.

Andrew Daly
is the director of Supercontext Studio.

Designing the Global City

Designing the Global City: design excellence, competitions and the remaking of central Sydney by Robert Freestone, Gethin Davison and Richard Hu (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Designing the Global City is an invaluable history and analysis of the City of Sydney's Competitive Design Policy (CDP) as applied within the central business district (CBD) between 2001 and 2017. A full one-third of the book is given to placing the policy in a broad series of contexts: design excellence as the driver, design governance as the conceptual framework, Sydney's evolution into a global city, its governments, its planning system and the precursors to the CDP that emerged throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

These include *Quay Visions*, the Institute's 1983 effort to provoke serious debate on the design of the harbour city, the East Circular Quay competition of 1993, and the architectural successes of the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

Going into a satisfying level of detail, the book steps through the assembly of the policy from beginnings such as these, highlighting the seminal role of key figures such as Frank Sartor and Graham Jahn, and the ongoing stewardship of the program under a much wider cohort including the likes of Peter Mould, Bob Nation, Peter John Cantrill and Olivia Hyde. The book traces the shift in the policy's focus from a traditional planner's concerns for issues such as massing and overshadowing to a larger remit encompassing sustainability, placemaking, engagement with research and innovation, and integration with transport and mobility. It identifies the success of the program hinging greatly on the 10% floor space uplift offered to developers to participate fully in the competitive process.

The research underpinning this book relies on two main methods: an eclectic study of the 46 competitions completed during the study period including the use of an appraisal tool to assess as objectively as possible the available completed buildings from an urban design perspective, and a series of in-depth interviews with 60 leading figures including architects, planners, developers, elected politicians and government officials. With such a cross section, the study was able to capture many of the gripes architects have with the CDP, including the cost of participation, the lack of sufficiently deep engagement with the client and its requirements, the possibility for lack of transparency and theft of intellectual property. But the study was also able to weigh these against the apparent benefits of the policy: in overall increase in design quality, in awareness about design, and in the value of architects and their services.

The study also rated the CDP a success against the objectives of its original creator, Frank Sartor as lord mayor in 2001: 'One, to allow variation to controls – a proper process that allowed you to say, yes, there is a better solution to this than the planning control, or DCP control. Secondly, to break the cartel of the three or four architecture firms doing all the CBD building design, boring mirror-glass rubbish. Thirdly, probably most importantly, was to make the property industry realise that design paid a dividend, that design was important' (Sartor 2015, quoted on p. 129).

CAUSE AND EFFECT

One must ask whether these objectives were achieved as a result of the CDP, or if the CDP was simply another conduit for industry

trends that were already heading that way. Sidestepping planning controls rather than fixing them has become so much a part of doing business in NSW that successive state governments have legislated a growing number of pathways for doing so. In this sense the spot-planning components of the CDP seems more like a symptom of the same disease than a solution for a problem specific to the CBD.

Likewise, the value of architecture and design has been increasing globally throughout the years that the CDP has been in place. Arguably the CDP was created at a time when there was already broad appreciation of the need for instruments that could mandate improved architectural outcomes, and has succeeded for so long because wider faith in its objectives has not waned since.

By relying so much on a methodology based on industry insiders, some of the book's ability to tease apart causation versus correlation for issues such as these has been lost. Which makes Sartor's second objective so interesting: 'to break the cartel of the three or four [...] firms'. This is perhaps the most specifically Sydney of the three objectives. Why was Sydney's CBD designed by such an oligopoly? I surmise that it was because Sydney of the 1980s and 1990s was a small, isolated market for architectural design, especially in contrast to similar cities in North America and Europe where there were greater capacity and tradition of hiring architects from other cities. The book argues that the perception that the CDP has opened the door to international architects is unfair since only 21% of winning firms have been international. Arguably that is a comfortable ratio for a balance between importing new ideas and employing a greater diversity of local architects.

DESIGN REVIEW PANELS

The book points out that much of the success of the CDP has been the fact that the City of Sydney has been led by various independents throughout its history, and is vulnerable to a major shift in power. What then will prevent architects from falling back in line with the development industry at the expense of the public interest if that happens? The book notes that the main mechanism in the current form of the CDP is architects' ability to refer back to council when the developer attempts to jettison any element the architect believes to be in the public interest.

These design integrity provisions allow council to reconvene the jury or establish an independent panel to weigh the impacts of design amendments and make recommendations. Such panels are examples of a Design Review Panel (DRP), a policy tool also having its genesis in precursors such as the Sydney 2000 Olympics and growing in favour with initiatives such as the Government Architect NSW State Design Review Panel pilot program. It is easy enough to say, as the Government Architect does, that different policy tools are relevant at different stages of a project. But it is the task of architectural scholarship to determine to what extent that has been true in practice.

Designing the Global City is an excellent and thorough example of scholarly investigation applied to a major policy paradigm, coming to a very fair-minded judgement about the net-positive benefits of the Competitive Design Policy for the governance and quality of architectural design in Sydney. The questions it does not answer, however, point very clearly in the direction of a follow-up study on the comparative merits of other policies in the government's toolbox, in particular the current generation of Design Review Panel initiatives.

Kerwin Datu

is a practising architect as well as a qualified urban and economic geographer.

A return to rooms

I've been thinking about rooms by letting this term circle in my mind. I've recalled Mary Duggan's eloquent label 'broken-plan homes' and noted a cultural shift towards enclosure and retreat. I've considered Anna Puigjaner's research on kitchenless cities, wondering if Australians will ever reject the ubiquitous island bench. I've pondered Stephen Bates' declaration: 'It seems that not many people have been interested in rooms of late because the modern movement exploded the plan outward and territory became blurred.' And I've been retracing a trip I took last November to Mexico. I'd just wrapped up my twenties and after a decade spent studying, graduating and promptly starting a practice, I saw Mexico as a place to see architecture – and escape it, momentarily.

But architecture, of course, follows you everywhere, so in Mexico City I learnt a lot about rooms. There were lessons in the broad public square, the Zócalo, where people gather to protest and perform. There was Kahlo's Casa Azul, where she painted until she died in spaces laced with memory. Coming home, I watched *Roma* and saw rooms that spoke of class and gender, the



A corner of the living room at Casa Barragan, Mexico City
Photo: Jonathon Donnelly

very hierarchies we're untangling to this day. Finally, there was the work of Luis Barragan and the rooms he crafted throughout his career.

We began at Casa Gilardi, on a tour led by the owner's son. He spoke of a childhood chasing friends through yellow-tinted corridors, amidst bright pinks and blues. A few days later, we were ushered through Barragan's Chapel of the Capuchinas by a small, rotund nun. She wordlessly pivoted each door open, revealing rooms that glowed like sunsets. Later, we visited Barragan's house and studio. We wove through a fragmented plan, emerging in courtyards that dripped with green. On our last day, we visited Casa Pedregal. The rooms felt generous and unencumbered, with space for life to unfold.

From afar, I'd never made sense of Barragan's work. I'd viewed his homes like postcards: as perfect compositions of neatly coloured planes. His plans – with their endless succession of rooms and shifting levels – had always confused me. Reared on a diet of Miesian modernists, I'd always thought: Why weave through rooms when you can travel directly? Why wall spaces in when you can open out?

Nothing prepared me for the profound beauty of Barragan's architecture. His buildings meander up and down, revealing light and shadow in slow, thoughtful concert. The simplest devices – walls and proportion – hum in harmony. Put simply, his spaces feel right. His rooms offer time and pause, privacy and possibility.

Leaving Mexico, I felt I'd rediscovered rooms and, along the way, had found space. It made me think of these two terms as intertwined which, in fact, they are: *room* derives from the Old English *rūm*, which references space. This space is both physical – defined by walls and floors and roofs – and metaphysical. Think of time: how it can expand and give room for our thoughts; or space, which can be infinite or finite. All this, and much more, is held within rooms. I think Barragan intrinsically knew this: as he accepted his 1980 Pritzker Prize, he described an architecture of silence, solitude and serenity – all of which are held in his rooms.

We make rooms to make room. We need spaces where we can stop, feel welcomed and close the door to the world beyond. We need to craft these spaces for our clients and we need to carve them out for ourselves.

As I work, there are days where I get overwhelmed with clients and competitions, emails and calls. If I'm not careful, architecture is the thing I rarely make time for. Yet, stepping away and finding space, I've resurrected my fascination with this most basic spatial type. Ultimately, this is what Barragan's work offered me: an appreciation of the simple, unequivocal beauty of spaces made great – and a pledge to return to rooms.

Jennifer McMaster

is the founder and principal of Trias.

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