

# 2019 Dulux Study Tour Report

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# Copenhagen

Day 1 kicked off with a bicycle tour. We spent a long day weaving around the city, spotting architecture and sampling Copenhagen's neighbourhoods. It was an energising way to start our Grand Tour.

The next day, we commenced our practice visits, starting at Lundgaard and Tranberg's studio. Their space possessed the kind of beautiful mess you dream of as an architect: productive and yet slightly chaotic, much like a living, working archive. I've long admired the work of Lundgaard and Tranberg, so it was a privilege to visit this studio, and to see how – and where – such high-quality work is being produced. It gave our small practice back in Sydney so much to aspire to.

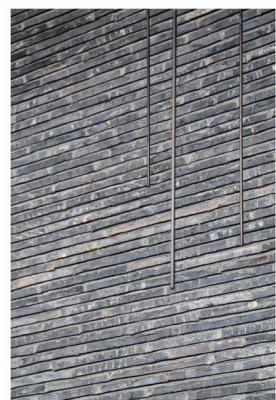
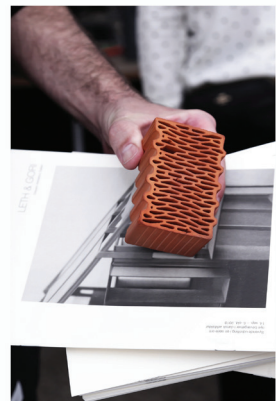
After a quick round of coffees and pastries, our next stop was Jan Gehl's studio. The Gehl studio was remarkably welcoming, which befits a practice whose mission is to create cities for people. Their studio space reflected this vision at every turn. The walls were covered with stencilled measurements, and reminders to 'check your human scale.'

A few streets away, we found Leth and Gori's shop front. Passers by can peer inside the studio, witnessing architecture at work. Leth and Gori is a small studio of seven that produce work that is quiet, and yet ambitious. Their studio is arranged across two rooms, with the front room acting as an exhibition space. The mere fact that Leth and Gori devote so much of their studio space to exhibiting architecture exemplifies their generosity, curiosity and goodwill.

Our day finished over at COBE's HQ in Copenhagen's new Nordhavn district. Our kind guide – and my good friend, Caroline Richardt Beck – showed us through several of COBE's projects, before we embarked upon a neighbourhood walking tour. We finished at the top of Jaja's Lüders Parking House, where we jumped around on what has to be the world's funnest rooftop playground. A dinner feast at Høst – where we were treated to new Nordic delights – capped off a delightful day.

Day 3 saw us head to Jørn Utzon's stunning Bagsværd Church. Here, we were given a moving tour of the church by Jørn's son, Jan, who explained the beauty and design logic that underpins this building. As a long time admirer of Utzon's work, I was quietly awed by the calm confidence of this church.

Our final stop was to Studio David Thulstrup, over in Amager. This small practice welcomed us with incredible generosity, with David's kind smile and honest recounts touching each of us. David, alongside fellow Australian Georgie, radiated warmth and humility, speaking with great passion about the work their studio does across the residential, commercial and hospitality sectors, as well as furniture design. And then it was hej hej til København, and we were off to London.



# A City for People

Copenhagen is - as Jan Gehl would say – a city for people. There is life within - and between - the city's buildings, which come in all shapes and sizes. Some buildings are big and brash, with experimental materials and obvious forms. Others are polite and quiet, and slot within the city, virtually unnoticed. Across Copenhagen, there is bold colour and beautiful craft in equal measure - and this variety makes the place welcoming, and forgiving, and endlessly interesting.

Yet people, and the human experience, sit at the heart of contemporary Danish design. What ties Copenhagen's architecture together is not a single style, nor approach. Instead, there is a shared commitment to people. Architects collaborate regularly with city planners and clients, looking for opportunities to give more than what is asked. This sentiment ties in to a unique Danish idealism that no doubt comes from the welfare state, and its founding tenets which suggest a society that is equitable and generous.

Every single studio that we visited spoke about 'giving back.' Architects worked – and often fought - to craft public space and protect collective interests. Leth and Gori spoke of working for the vulnerable members of society, while Lundgaard and Tranberg's described their efforts to carve out a public courtyard within the most commercial of buildings: a bank. The result is a city – and architecture – that places the collective before the individual. We saw this same pattern on our bicycle tour when, roaming around the city, we encountered places and public buildings for a full cross-section of society.

There was a similar commitment to craft and quality. All of the studios we visited were littered with samples and models, demonstrating a curiosity around the act of making architecture. These concerns tied in with broader dialogues relating to the city, its history and the value of design within society. Even within Studio David Thulstrup, which mostly focuses on interiors work, there was a sentiment of "creating a rhythm of time with objects."

Good cities are not inevitable. As Copenhagen reminds us, they need to be planned and cultivated, slowly and with care. They require effort. They require intentional investment. And they require architects, urban planners and designers, who work from – and for – the greater good.

Our time in Copenhagen was inspiring and energising. It reminded me of the important work that we do, as architects, when we make single pieces of the city. It reinforced the importance of advocating for our profession, and showed the value that comes from taking on larger commissions with public significance. It taught me to stick to my convictions, to think strategically at all scales, and to build with longevity and quality in mind.



# London

Our first day in London signalled a full day of practice visits. The pace had immediately picked up, and we found ourselves clambering in and out of taxis, watching London whiz by.

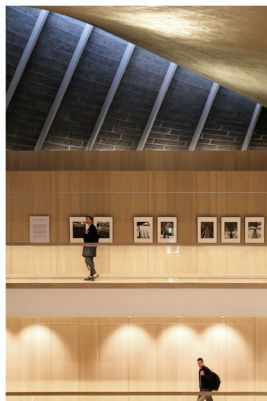
We started the day at Peter Barber Architects' studio in Kings Cross. This small shop front studio - which hosts a practice of eight - was crammed with models, showcasing a thoughtful array of housing projects. Our visit here revealed a practice that is passionate about their city and its housing. The studio's associate, Alice Brownfield, explained how they work closely with local borough councils to refine low-rise, medium density housing types. Their designs speak to London's smaller, more idiosyncratic features: railway arches, ad-hoc brick buildings and charming mews. It was clearly a studio driven by good intentions, a desire for agency and a whole lot of heart.

Next up was 6a Architects, whose studio sits at the top of an unassuming staircase in London's Holborn. Their stairwell is crammed with working models, which tumble over one another in precarious stacks. Outside their working space, a verdant balcony garden, planted by Dan Pearson, occasionally hosts a visiting sparrow. During our presentation, we were shown several of the studio's projects, which revealed a fastidious, almost obsessive attention to detail and a process driven by research. "There isn't a day that doesn't begin with a dive into the archives," said Karolina and Alex, our generous guides. This tendency was echoed within the finished buildings, which were both earnest and whimsical, playful and polished.

We then headed to Kensington, for a quick tour of London's Design Museum. We met briefly with the museum's director, Alice Black, whose love of design was infectious. We all wandered a while, before regrouping and heading to our final stop for the day: Rogers, Stirk, Harbor + Partners. Up a dramatic escalator, and an even more dramatic lift, we encountered a hard-working practice whose influence extends all around the world.

After a well earned rest, we commenced Day 5 with a visit to Foster + Partners' studio in Battersea. We were awed by the scale of the studio's campus, as well as its super-organised materials library and model making areas. From here, we raced over to AL\_A, where we learnt about projects like the V+A Entry and MAAT in Lisbon. The afternoon was spent touring AHMM's White Collar Factory and the London outpost of Australian-based studio, HASSELL.

Our last day in London was wrapped up with an all-day walking tour. Here, we sampled London's incredible history, which catalogues a multitude of architectural styles and social movements. As we walked, we debated the importance of heritage with our guide, David Garrard, before indulging in one last dinner and a celebration-filled night out.



# A Tale of Two Cities

Above all else, London thrives on ambition. Pace, pulse and energy define this city, which is being constantly carved at, on the ground and in the air. Commerce and capital are ever-present, and are cleverly employed to produce buildings of great beauty and iconic significance. Medieval meets modern, with glass and sharp lines and steel sitting right alongside ancient alleyways.

The studios that we encountered in London were distinctive in their styles and architectural outputs. Some designed local housing, or galleries, while others worked elsewhere, building towers abroad. Yet, each and every studio exhibited common threads: intellectual curiosity, technical prowess and an incredible depth of knowledge.

This same pattern could be seen in firms both large and small. It could be seen in the well-organised drawers of Foster + Partners materials library, and the obsessive research of 6a. It was also evident in the dialogues of our tour guide, David, who spoke with great rigour about the history of his home city.

Yet the comparisons we found ourselves making between our two cities were interesting, too. London's architectural culture - much like Australia's - is under strain. Leaving the city, I recalled a recent article by The Guardian's architecture critic, Oliver Wainwright, who wrote that: "In 1979, 49% of qualified architects in the UK worked in the public sector, designing schools, hospitals, parks and council housing....Following decades of cuts and outsourcing, that figure is now just 0.7%. Walk around any British town and the effects are all too visible in the kind of thoughtless developments that are happily waved through the system."

This conversation dovetailed into several of our own discussions: debates about the election and social policy, stories about Siruis - the public housing project that Ben has been defending in Sydney - and reflections on how history changes, as we all learn to appreciate movements like Brutalism for the offerings they made.

So, in London, we also learnt that architecture - as a profession, and a public craft - is severely under threat. We see this, too, in Australia, where good design is often seen as a luxury, and not a necessity. Yet, architecture defines our cities and skylines like nothing else: from the curves of the Gherkin to the dome of St Paul's. It also defines our daily experience, and the places where we live, work, meet and play.

I hope London's architects continue working with rigour and ambition, to build better cities, for us all.



# Lisbon

After flying in that morning, our first stop in Lisbon was the glistening Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology by Amanda Levete Architects. This formed a formidable introduction to this city by the sea.

Our next day, Day 8, involved a full day walking - and bussing - tour. Our guide, Rodrigo Lima, led us through an jam-packed day, where we encountered some remarkable buildings, including Lisbon's Thalia Theatre, by Gonçalo Byrne Architects & Barbas Lopes Architects, and archaeological works at the Castle of São Jorge, by João Luís Carrilho da Graça.

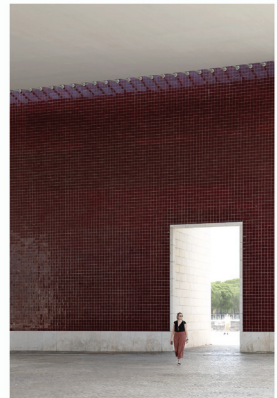
We also enjoyed a visit to the Expo '98 site, where works by leading Portuguese architects left us awestruck. Throughout the day, we saw attention to context and structural prowess in equal measure, reflecting a city with a confident architectural legacy. We also began to understand Lisbon's history and neighbourhoods, which had been razed and defined by earthquakes and cultural change.

Our final, full-touring day was defined by practice visits. After a brief tour of Selgas Cano's vine-entangled Second Home, we located the office of Embaixada. This ambitious and yet approachable studio showcased their impressive work, which includes meticulously bound bodies of research on their home city. To extend their hospitality, one of the studio's directors - Cristina de Mendonça - accompanied us for the rest of the day.

Next up, we stopped by Bak Gordon, a small practice led by the studio's founder, Ricardo Bak Gordon. After a studio tour, which revealed models and working drawings on almost every surface, Ricardo showed us several of the studio's projects. They were poetic and intensely sensitive, responding to complex briefs with thought and care.

After lunch, we circled back to the studio of ARX. Here, director Jose Mateus kindly sat down with us and shared the wisdom he's accumulated over decades of practice. He spoke of highs and lows, victories and failures, as well as his growing interest in the city's politics, and the public role of architecture. His passion seeped through every sentence, and we all left energised by his optimistic fervour. It was a final reminder of the value of conversation, and shared wisdom - a key lesson of this tour.

After a visit to an ARX site up the road - an impressive apartment project - we all gathered for one final dinner in a local restaurant. Amidst drinks, we shared jokes and stories one last time. Then, all too soon, we left this sparkling city, heading our separate ways.



# Layers, of Topography and Time

Lisbon is composed of layers, of topography and time. The centre of the city - defined by its Pombaline plan - is a product of the 1755 earthquake, which razed Lisbon to the ground. What was built, in its place, is often cited as the first prefabricated city: a place made of replicable parts. This makes Lisbon - with its standardised buildings, clothed in ornate tiles - both pretty and surprisingly precise.

In Lisbon, the architects we met were humble and sincere. They saw their task as adding one more layer to the strata of their city, making incisions and, often, repairs. There were no references to trend, only time. Their egos receded to the background in favour of greater conversations that felt local to this place.

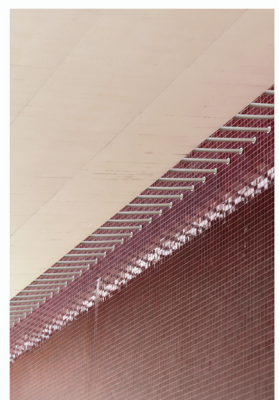
Out on the streets, these attitudes played out in interesting ways. In many cases, the interventions the architects made were quiet, and almost invisible: they were white, concise and clean. Occasionally, the buildings sparkled or shimmered, continuing the colourful traditions that demarcate this city. But, more often than not, they receded into the background, quietly complimenting this already charming cityscape.

Even when the architecture embraced drama, it was always respectful: of place, and people, and purpose. The buildings worked with the simplest things: scale and proportion, detail and abstraction, absence and presence. It felt like the fulfilment of all the things we learn in architecture school, which I'm still trying to perfect, and will no doubt pursue for a lifetime.

Lisbon was also upbeat and progressive. In the practices we visited, we heard developers described as investors, and international influences - from the presence of MAAT to the desks of Second Home - welcomed. In every corner of this city, architects were busy at work: performing research, mapping neighbourhoods, and planning their Biennale. This is a place that continues its patterns of change.

We were also surprised by how global this small city was. We met practices who worked all across Europe, Asia, the world. This, too, revealed a bigger mentality: maturity, and a quiet confidence, prevailed.

It was here that we finished our tour, rejoicing in Lisbon's sharp, crisp light. We all relaxed into the pace of a slower city, letting the lessons sink in as we enjoyed these final days. It marked the end of a remarkable experience, for which I'll always be grateful.



# Thanks

I couldn't be more grateful for this experience:

To Alix, Ben, Carly and Phillip. I couldn't have wished for better touring companions. Thanks to each and every one of you for the hugs and chats, dancing and debates, tarts and tears.

To Anurita and Carrie, from Dulux, for making us all laugh at every turn. Your endless support and encouragement was amazing, and the tour was infinitely better due to your presence.

To Linda, for your blogging prowess, and for forcing us into awkward group photos. Your commitment to sharing our story was second to none.

And, finally, to Mai, for being so caring, and for making it all so seamless and smooth. Without your amazing organisation, we would never have seen and learnt so much.

Thank you all!

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