Dulux Study Tour Report

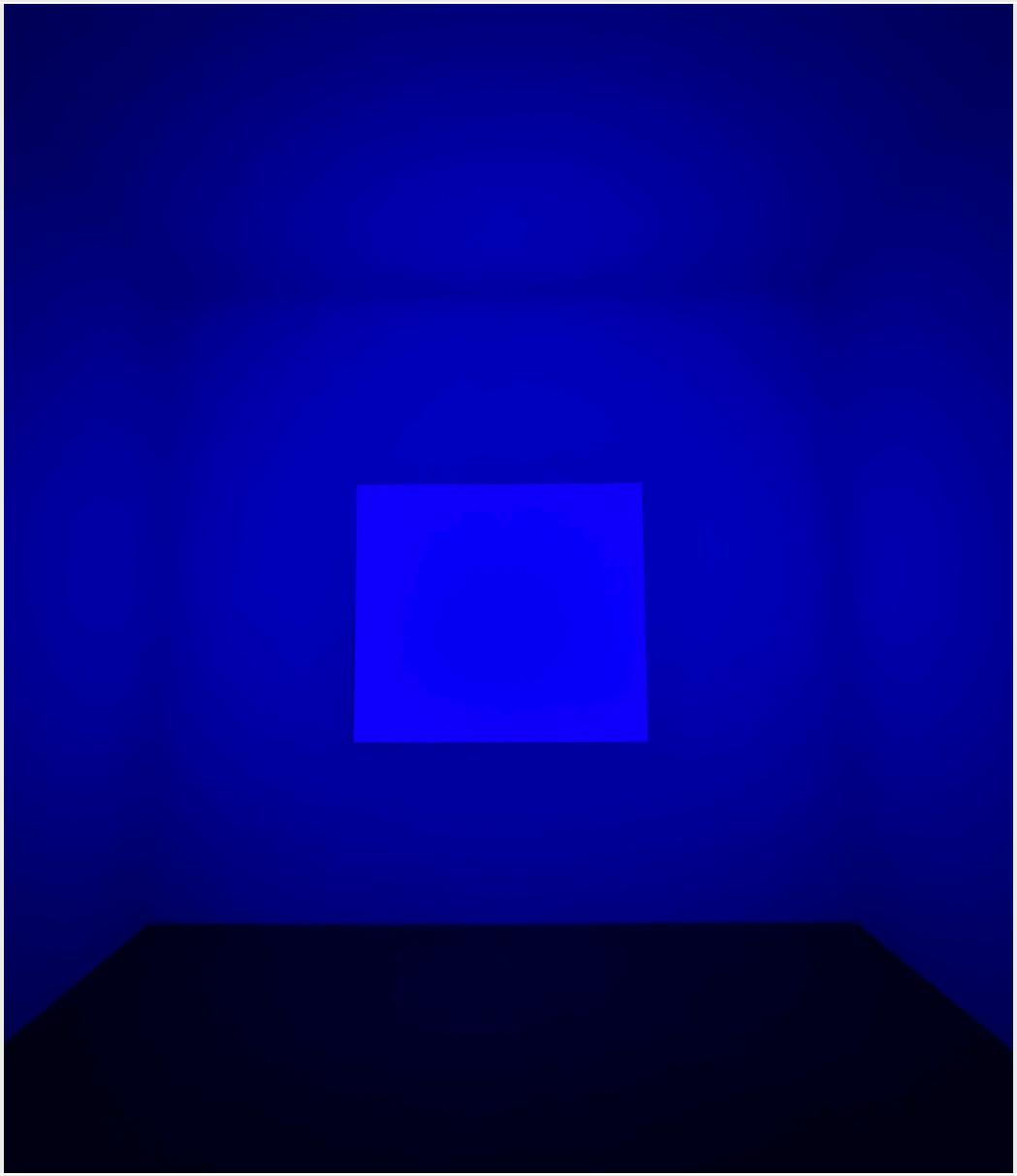
Jack Gillmer-Lilley



(Image: Lucia Amies, Paris, pre-cycle tour)

Recipients:
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Pre-Study Tour Reflection



(Image: Jack Gillmer, Paris, James Turrell at Fondation Cartier)

Before departing on the Dulux Study Tour, I found myself reflecting on the past decade of practice. It had been a period defined by extraordinary opportunities, generous mentors and experiences that I could never have anticipated. My work had taken me from conversations across Australia to lectures at institutions including the Architectural Association in London, ETH Zürich and the Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism in Ottawa. I had the privilege of contributing as co-creative director of the Australian Pavilion at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, participating in the steering committee for the 2026 Australian Architecture Conference, serving on the NSW State Design Review Panel for the Government Architect NSW, alongside several other projects that continue to unfold.

Yet beneath these milestones, I found myself questioning my own direction. I had begun to wonder whether architecture was still the right vehicle for the work I felt compelled to pursue, and what the next decade of practice might look like. My energy increasingly gravitated towards broader questions of Country, culture and community, and I wasn't certain whether architecture could continue to hold those ambitions.

Receiving the 2026 Dulux Study Tour award arrived at exactly the right moment. Rather than seeing it simply as an opportunity to observe exemplary projects and practices, I approached the tour as a chance to reconnect with the discipline itself—to rediscover what first drew me to architecture, to challenge my assumptions, and to better understand the role I wanted architecture to play in the next chapter of my practice.

What next? Where will I be in 10 years?

Singapore

Singapore announces itself the moment you step from the airport. The humidity is immediate—a dense tropical warmth that stands in stark contrast to the cool edge of winter we had left behind in Sydney. Climate is not simply a backdrop here; it is a fundamental driver of the city's architectural language. It shapes how buildings breathe, how landscapes perform and how public life unfolds. The lush, biophilic character synonymous with Singapore is not an aesthetic gesture, but a response to place.

Our guide described Singapore's evolution as moving "from a garden in a city, to a city in a garden, to a city in nature." It is a simple phrase that captures an ambitious national vision. Across the city, this aspiration is realised through policy as much as design. Housing, transport, landscape and environmental performance are considered as interconnected systems rather than isolated disciplines.

Singapore's planning framework demonstrates what can be achieved when long-term policy and design ambition are aligned. New developments are expected to replace, and often exceed, the landscape they occupy through generous green infrastructure integrated throughout buildings. The Singapore Green Plan 2030 continues this trajectory, positioning nature as essential civic infrastructure rather than an amenity. Future investment in more than 1,500 kilometres of cycling infrastructure reinforces this commitment, embedding active transport within everyday life while strengthening connections between people, landscape and neighbourhood.

"..from a garden in a city, to a city in a garden, to a city in nature.."



(Image: Jack Gillmer, Singapore, The Jewel by Safdie Architects)

Singapore

This integrated approach extends beyond environmental policy into housing and social infrastructure. Through the Central Provident Fund, housing is understood as a long-term social investment, while the Housing and Development Board has delivered high-quality, high-density neighbourhoods that are both accessible and desirable. Around 80 percent of Singapore's residents live within these communities, challenging many of the assumptions often associated with public housing.

Projects such as Kampung Admiralty, designed by WOHA, demonstrate how architecture can support community across generations. More than a housing development, it brings together homes, healthcare, retail, public space and landscape within a single vertical neighbourhood. Families can live, learn, work, gather and age in place, fostering everyday encounters that strengthen social connection. It is an architecture shaped as much by public policy as by design excellence.

Walking through Singapore, it became clear that its greatest achievement is not simply its remarkable buildings or abundant greenery, but the collective vision that underpins them. Design is empowered by governance, and policy is used as a tool to cultivate healthier communities, regenerate nature and improve everyday life. It prompted reflection on the Australian context and the opportunities we have to think more ambitiously about how architecture, planning and policy might work together to deliver places that are equitable, resilient and deeply connected to community.



(Bonus Image: Jack Gillmer, Snake Snaking)



(Bonus Image: Jack Gillmer, Turtle Turtling)



(Image: Jack Gillmer, Singapore, Punggol Digital District by WOHA Architects)

Paris



(Image: Jack Gillmer, Paris, Olga de Amaral at Fondation Cartier)

It's been two years to the day since I arrived in Paris for a three-month residency through the Galang Residency, a program brought to fruition through a collaboration between the Powerhouse Museum and Cité Internationale des Arts.

During that time, I engaged with archaeology and anthropology museums, examining the rematriation, (re)conciliation and exhibition of First Nations cultural materials through a cultural and architectural lens. The work sought to challenge and reframe museological practice, and in doing so, partly informed the proposal for Home, a temporary archive of place, personal stories, and social cohesion presented in the Australia Pavilion at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Returning to Paris now, alongside new friends and immersed in architectural discourse, visits and conversations with inspiring architects and their work, I find myself reflecting on how my practice continues to evolve, and I recognise synergies between the ideas explored in Home and the discoveries, encounters and questions that Paris continues to offer.

Touching down on the Paris tarmac, we were a world away from Country. In the days before our arrival, Paris had been gripped by an intense heatwave – a dense urban landscape bearing the full force of the urban heat island effect. Young Parisians sought relief by jumping into the Seine, despite restrictions that led to arrests. Yet, swimming in the river was once an ordinary part of Parisian life, a tradition long interrupted by pollution and regulation. Fortunately, the extensive infrastructure and water-quality improvements undertaken ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games have helped make a return to the Seine possible, transforming an act of rebellion into a safer reconnection with the city's historic waterways.

'..transforming an act of rebellion into a safer connection with the city's historic waterways..'

Paris



(Image: Bella Walker, Paris, Lina Ghotmeh Architecture Office Visit)

Paris is an archive. Structures centuries-old line its cobblestone streets, each bearing traces of the social, political, economic and technological forces that have shaped the city over time. As one navigates both horizontally and vertically through its layers of history, these narratives gradually reveal themselves. Paris is a place where adaptation is not concealed but embedded within the urban fabric; where the evolution of society is inscribed into every building, street and public space.

Tadao Ando's intervention within the Bourse de Commerce exemplifies this dialogue between past and present. His insertion introduces contemporary architectural language into a historic structure with remarkable restraint, balancing heritage with new cultural ambitions. Neither exists independently of the other, each enriching and informing the other. The result is not simply a contrast of old and new, but a continuation of the building's ongoing story – a reminder that architecture is always both inheritance and transformation.

During our time in Paris, we met with Rohan Golestani, an aspiring architect from Perth working at Lina Ghotmeh Architecture. He reinforced the firm's manifesto as being about the creation of "archaeology of the future" – reviving architecture as a medium for storytelling, memory, and traces from the past. The approach is deeply rooted in curiosity, with the firm undertaking archaeological-type research and engaging in community discourse to produce architecture that reveals layers of history and culture while meeting contemporary practices.

I find reassurance in my approach to architecture: working with Country, community and culture to strengthen the identity of community and place, and empowering voices of the people.



(Bonus Image: Jack Gillmer, Trying to be Cool Kid)



(Bonus Image: Rachel Litch, Judgy Faces Villa Savoye)

Vienna

Vienna - the final stop before we part ways. The only thing that popped in my head when thinking of Vienna was the rhythm and lyrics of *Vienna* by Billy Joel, perhaps suitable in relation to my 'pre-study tour reflection', non-the-less I remain ambitious with my passion and pride.

In truth, I knew little of Vienna's architectural identity. Unlike other cities on our itinerary, it is not defined by a catalogue of globally recognised contemporary icons or the work of celebrated architects. My expectations were modest. Yet it was Vienna that proved to be the most surprising, offering some of the tour's most compelling lessons.

Arriving in Vienna we were excited by the vibrant river life - Sand imported beaches to bask in the summer sun with a few beers to cool down, floating restaurants and clubs that fuel the nightlife, walking and picnics like we were still at the Siene in Paris enjoying the last of the light.

Much of Vienna's urban character is inseparable from its history. Following the devastation of war, the city embraced housing as a public responsibility, establishing one of the world's most enduring models of municipal housing. Today, Vienna owns and manages approximately 220,000 dwellings, while many more are delivered by limited-profit housing associations supported through public investment. Rather than treating housing as a commodity alone, the city has consistently recognised it as essential social infrastructure.

A remarkable aspect of Vienna's housing model is the absence of stigma. Developments such as Wohnpark Alterlaa remain highly sought after decades after their completion, with waiting lists extending for years. Affordability has not come at the expense of quality. Shared gardens, generous courtyards, swimming pools, childcare, community facilities and mixed-use programs are embedded within these neighbourhoods, creating places where people not only live, but belong.

Like Singapore, Vienna demonstrates that when housing is supported by long-term public investment, thoughtful planning and shared amenities, higher-density living becomes both desirable and equitable. The city challenged many of the assumptions we continue to hold in Australia, prompting reflection on how policy, architecture and civic leadership might work together to deliver housing that prioritises community, dignity and long-term public value.

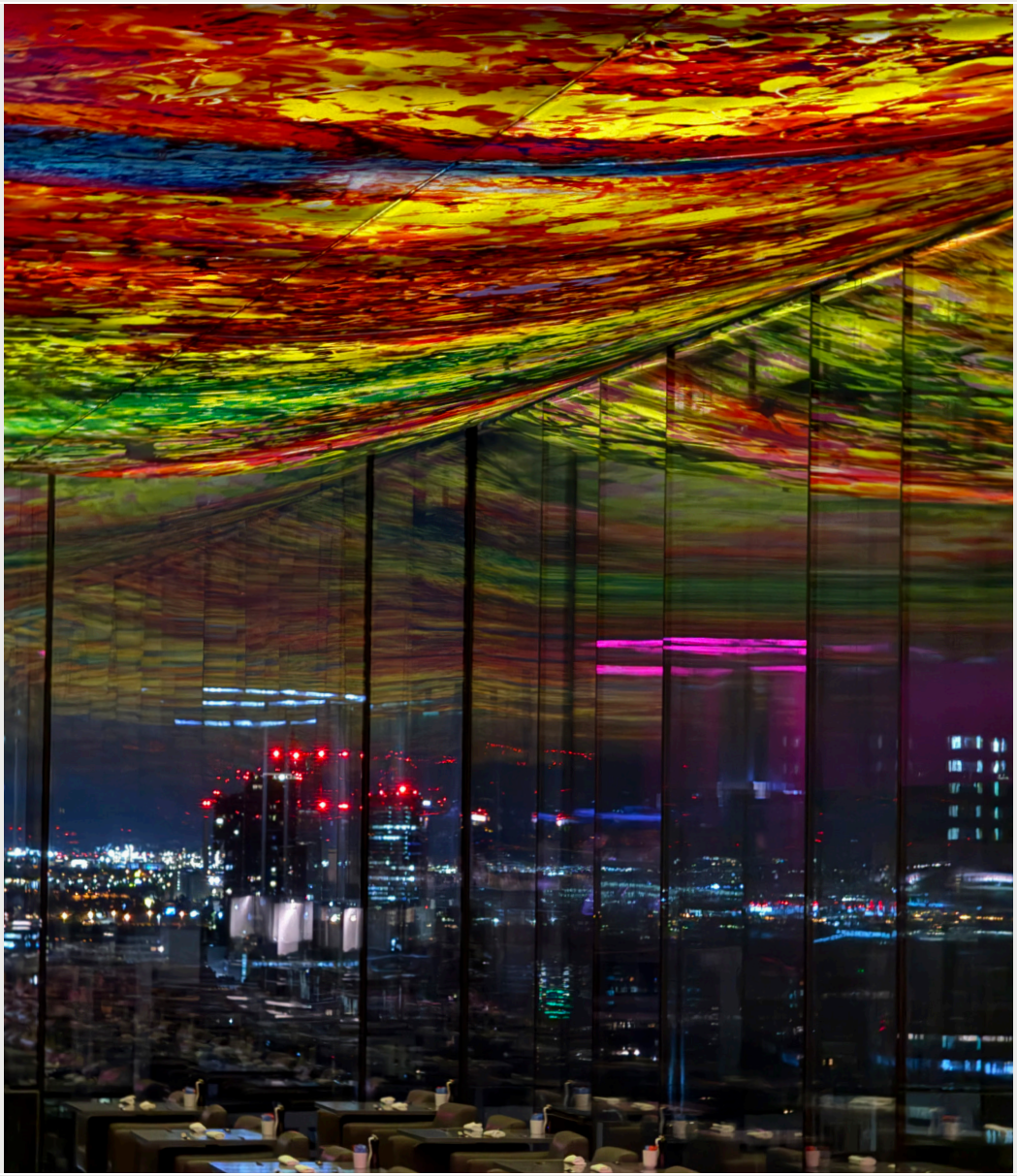
"..You've got your passion, you've got your pride
But don't you know that only fools are satisfied?
Dream on, but don't imagine they'll all come true, ooh
When will you realize Vienna waits for you?.."

Billy Joel - Vienna



(Image: Jack Gillmer, Vienna, Wohnpark Alterlaa, Harry Gluck)

Post-Tour Reflection



(Image: Jack Gillmer, Vienna, SO/ Vienna, Jean Nouvel)

One of the most valuable aspects of the study tour was experiencing such a breadth of architectural practice. While each studio had developed its own methodology, philosophy and measure of success, the contrast between them was striking. More importantly, it challenged me to reflect on the kind of practitioner I aspire to become.

The practices that resonated most deeply shared a common thread. They demonstrated a generosity of spirit, recognising that architecture is not an individual pursuit but a collective endeavour. Their work was grounded in place, informed by local cultures and enriched through genuine collaboration with communities. Rather than positioning themselves as the authors of change, they understood their role as facilitators—creating the conditions for knowledge to be shared and for more meaningful outcomes to emerge. There was a humility in their approach that acknowledged architecture is always stronger when it listens before it speaks.

Not every practice embodied these values. In some instances, architecture appeared disconnected from the people and places it sought to serve. Process gave way to personality, and authorship seemed to outweigh responsibility. We left some conversations unsettled, questioning whether the pursuit of recognition can, at times, overshadow the social and cultural obligations that architecture carries. It was a timely reminder that design excellence cannot be measured by form alone, but by the relationships it fosters and the legacy it leaves behind.

Experiencing these opposing approaches proved invaluable. At a moment when I was questioning the future direction of my own practice, the study tour brought clarity. It reaffirmed that the work I want to pursue is founded on listening, collaboration and cultural respect—an approach that sees architecture not as an expression of individual authorship, but as a shared responsibility to care for people, place and the future.