I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.
TANDEM
DESIGN OF A PRACTICE

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements
for the masters degree in
architecture by practice

RMIT
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE +
DESIGN

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03 2011
When I began this masters 3 years ago with my business partner Tim Hill I was unsure of how we would find a way to describe the way we worked. The principal reason for this was a sense that our approaches, techniques and operations were innate, it felt a little like self-diagnosis.

In a sense the tandem conversation began in 2003 when Tim Hill, Dominque Ng and myself with a group of 3 other designers began imagining a collective formed from our shared desire to design a workplace. The foundations were to be connected to what we saw as the strengths of the Lab experiment* and affiliations of like minded people from disparate design disciplines as described by Tomato**.

It was from the failure of this first attempted collective and a deeper understanding of the realities of our initial influences that we regrouped in 2005. Perhaps as a reaction to what we saw in the yawning gap between discussion about design ambitions and the actual outcomes our practice moved the focus to the particulars of day to day design problems.

The forum for discussion became the enacting of built works. Understanding of our interests, intentions and desires revealed itself as work was generated; a general distrust of manifestos did not mean there was no underlying consistencies more a preference for allowing them to emerge organically.

What we came to understand through the conversations initiated by this programme was that as much as any building project we had designed our practice; bringing our personal and shared experiences from other practices to form the idea of an entity we called tandem.

Our attempts to unravel and re describe what we had created began at GRC 1 with a taxonomic presentation of what we saw as our most important works; in fact our selection was driven primarily by a desire to explain the diversity of briefs encountered by the office. In this sense we revealed something about the types of work we engaged in but very little about what drove the design approach or the histories that had led to these approaches.

GRC 2 examined a selection of our built and hypothetical works through the lens we termed streams. These streams defined techniques, thematics and interests that recurred to varying degrees in the work. The revelation was as much the streams as the way these streams morphed and redefined as we designed them to suit the particularities of each project. We began to refine this understanding by cataloging the relationship clouds that occurred on each of the projects.

In a somewhat backward manoeuvre we endeavoured at GRC 3 to present what we learned as our key driving approaches independently from their outcomes. Without the work to illustrate the subties and gaps between the way we described our work and its architectural resolution our descriptions moved toward the generic.

This document captures what we believe to be an accurate representation of where the tandem projects sits today. We have not drawn conclusions but define moments, recall fables, recognise individual influence within the collective and seek to make links from outside tandem to within and back again.

Ultimately our design practice evolves or withers on the strength of communal understanding; without the ability to be self reflexive the narrative that drives our approach remains singular and stagnates; The Masters by practice has set in train a process of recording and self renewal.

In the document that follows, the work on the left hand side of the document is held in common. My major contribution is the image pages on the left of spreads and touchstones, running down the right hand side of the document.

* We were all working at the architecture practice Lab architecture studio at the time

** Tomato is a design collective that includes graphic designers, musicians an others. Perhaps their greatest work was the creation of their own myth.

Compromise is a word bandied about at every self help management seminar and the problem
**DOING**

The problem with practice is that you ‘do, do, do’.

Doing leads to income.

But the quality of what you’re doing, or how you’re doing it, becomes lost in the sprint to complete everything and anything.

We initiated this process of reflection on our practice to understand ourselves better.

Our extended history at LAB, with its connections to the AA, Lebiskind’s office and Guiseppe Terragni was the backbone of our experience before we began TANDEM.

This legacy left us with questions:

To what extent can you claim ownership of work produced while working for other offices?

To what extent would you continue the work of another office, because you were so much part of its invention?

And, to what extent would you - or should you - choose to be different just because you wanted to be different from your past?

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**NARRATIVE**

Talk was cheap at LAB; what mattered was what you did with your hands and whether it was selected for further development.

LAB was 2 things to us –

An illustration of the potential inherent in teams, how they are guided, how to elicit innovation, and how to encourage participation

An illustration of the worst kind of monotheism, an exhausted design elite, driven to repetition by the pressure of the office environment

The organizational patterns developed by LAB functioned as abstract organizational matrices – simultaneously guided by a single hand and encouraging particular interpretation by other individuals in response to particular conditions.

In this way, LAB was able to orchestrate a coherent, over riding response while encouraging it’s many studio voices to autonomously deal with the array of local conditions that naturally emerge during the course of a project.

TANDEM was formed from these experiences.

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**TOUCHSTONES**

Federation Square Stage 1 model 1997

“Everything here is visual, the conversations we have are hung on the walls and in the pictures we make..”

Attilio Terragni, while working at LAB on the Federation Square Project, 1997

Federation Square Stage 2 model 1997

“The time of the genius is over because projects are now too complex - this is the time of the team.”

Attilio Terragni, while working at LAB on the Federation Square Project, 1997

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**(n) monotheism**

belief in a single God
AN EXHAUSTED ELITE
Rob had been unable to produce anything usable since yesterday morning. It was now 4am the following morning, and I had to step in.

The rendering package was notoriously fickle, one slight adjustment and an image could go from almost perfect to completely useless. It was not something to be working on with a monster(director) raging at your back and sleep deprivation.

As usual, everybody had been awake for upwards of 36 hours straight.

“Get off the computer, Rob”

The print run was at 8am - at the current rate the presentation would be without key images.

Through my own miasma, I was made vaguely aware of his pleading.

He wanted - no, needed - to try one more thing. He’d trotted out the same line for hours.

I decided.

“Get off Rob. Alex, take over.”

Although Alex was incapable of coherent speech, somehow the part of his brain controlling the mouse was still working.

Architecture had become some kind of macho survival test. Like an ageing athlete I knew it wasn’t sustainable and that any buzz from pulling something out of nowhere at the last minute was long gone, it just felt like a continuous hangover.

(n) tandem
1 an arrangement where a team of machines, animals or people are lined up one behind the other
2 the connections of networks or circuits in a series; that is, the connection of the output of one circuit to the input of another

PRACTISE
The point about practise is that it isn’t separate. Practise begins as what you do and becomes what you are.

This transformation is, in some ways, the thing you wanted to become. In other ways it arises from providence. We arrive at the point between our and circumstance and therein lies practise.

TANDEM encourages collaboration within and beyond our workplace.

TANDEM looks to the outside and brings these experiences in.

A sole practitioner’s existence is singular. Our experiences leading cross disciplinary teams at LAB had been rewarding and stimulating and we sought to do the same at TANDEM.

Engaging multiple viewpoints; creating a forum for discussion that allows individuals to express their ideas; and providing a supportive environment in which individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their roles within the team; produces richer, more complex outcomes - with sometime unexpected twists - than an individual’s singular response to design briefs.

Our objective in establishing TANDEM was to provide a critical though supportive environment, where we sought to encourage dissonant voices and engage all team members on our projects.
Kensington Lighthouse - view from carport with master bedroom above, courtyard and main house beyond
Collaboration does not naturally arise; it must be encouraged, nurtured and directed.

During our reflection on our practice, we came to understand the design processes we naturally gravitated towards were themselves deliberately designed: to encourage engagement, participation and collaboration.

THE IMAGE

Images are a way of beginning a conversation.

The images we choose to articulate the conceptual underpinning of a project while at the same time countenancing a catalogue of possibilities. Meaning is slippery rather than inherent and interpretations are encouraged.

Our interest in the image is 3 fold –

- Their capacity to bridge over and rise above architectural jargon and create dialogue between ourselves and our clients
- The difference in the way that different members of the studio translate images to architectural concepts
- Their capacity to act as touchstones throughout a project’s evolution, guiding development and allowing flexibility to deal with emergent conditions

The images we source reflect our interest in discovering new material outside the studio and incorporating them into our practice. This prompts re-invention and innovation.

ANECDOTES

The masters was/is the chance to engage with practise from the outside.

What is it, we do?
Why do we do it?
What does this tell us about ourselves?
And then -
Should we keep doing things this way?

IMAGE/PATTERN/ORDER

We tend to be drawn to patterns that also allow for open interpretation, at a simple level it might be an asymmetric grid that provides multiple geometric readings as opposed to an orthogonal grid.

To a degree, this interest was spawned at LAB.

The entire ordering geometry for Federation Square came from initial geometric generators based on distortions of tartan grids.

Our educations primed us for this interest. RMIT and Melbourne University at our times of graduation were actively experimenting with irregular ordering systems and geometries. Tutors such as Peter Raisbeck and Peter Brew at RMIT and Kathi Holt Damant at University of Melbourne pushed students to research, speculate, experiment - avoiding over arching presumptions or geometries - rather letting architecture evolve out of a series of self styled tests. The ability to dissect and describe design choices given close to the same weighting as the end result.

NARRATIVE

sometimes it's not important how you start, the most important thing is that you actually start - then you can work it out as you go...

TOUCHSTONES

like LAB, we assembled the biggest library we could afford.
RISING ABOVE JARGON

The act of interpreting, describing and discussing an image cuts jargon from conversation between us and our clients. The discussion about what an image might become when translated to architecture creates an immediate investment by the client in a project, liberates us from the recurrent theme of ‘architectural expression for its own sake’ and allows us to quickly hone in on a client’s particular interests and concerns. Deploying an image creates a bridge to our client’s usually different professional backgrounds; allowing them to drop their inhibitions and talk more openly about concepts important to them.

Inside the studio, images create opportunities for individual contribution while maintaining an overarching framework that holds a project together. The difference between interpretations leads to richer design outcomes, encouraging designers to express and pursue their particular interests on a project.

Images emerge at different stages of a project. They are as likely to be chosen at the start, as at the middle or towards the end of a design process. Projects typically acquire a number of images, which then disperse into conversations about different parts of the design, find their ways into sketches, drawings and models spurring further development as the images are translated into architecture.

The image also provides a mechanism for resolving conflict. In this case, the spaces between interpretations allows for negotiation between team members.
NGVI shop - merchandise display extending into foyer to create sublimating edge.

NGVI shop - merchandise display, runway beyond, modular shelving and built in seat, jellyfish light overhead.
members without resorting to open argument. The resolution of conflicting impulses, negotiated through an image, produces new layers in design solutions, while maintaining overarching response, marshaled by the image.

While some images come and go at TANDEM and have a life dedicated to a particular job, others recur. These recurrent images sometimes have consistent, proven interpretations and are therefore static, while others have the flexibility to evolve from project to project and have acquired a repertoire of architectural expressions.

ONE MEDIUM TO ANOTHER

Translation emerges as a natural consequence of encouraging multiple interpretations, which in turn leads to the question of design process. As an idea is transposed from image, to sketch, to physical model, to computer model, to documentation and then finally construction; it adapts, each time, to the peculiar constraints of its medium.

A further question lurks deeper – are the images themselves metaphors for something else?

It’s hard to know. We haven’t examined the process by which we make our selections. We both felt it wasn’t so much the subject of our translations that interested us, but instead the process.

Process, for us, wasn’t about generating information, or adopting a director’s position to edit work.
NGVI shop - central reading room enclosed by field of modular shelving, runway for fast turn over of merchandise beyond.
– but related to demonstration and discussion.

In our post mortems on projects we found projects suffered when allowed to incubate alone. When they were discussed, new leaps were made and the outcomes improved. We designed our process reflect our need for demonstration and discussion. Although all projects are different we deliberately expose them scrutiny at critical points –

The image - a guiding metaphor associated with the project.

**Sketching - iterative exploration of possible outcomes; often a sort of frantic overproduction where constraints are tested, opportunities explored and architectural sensibility established.**

**Physical models; building models in house prompts new inquiry.**

**Computer models; the effort of building detailed computer models in virtual space requires collaboration from all members of the studio.**

**Images are researched by the studio but we - meaning James and Tim - make the selection. The image immediately slips into the nomenclature of a project, becomes embedded in the group, and takes on a life of its own.**

Because we begin with an image, it’s translation into architectural space is both more immediate and less defined.

**The images generally infer qualities of space, light, texture – sometimes even**
NGVI shop - computer generated image for modular shelving as it approaches the foyer
organization. Their translation into sketch, and then into either 3d model or computer model – forms the basis of our response to the questions posed by the site, the client and our ambitions for the project.

But everybody translates concepts from one medium to another in their particular way. The difference between hands produces alternatives. These alternatives allow individual expression and investment in a project, while at the same time creating a coherent, coordinated response to a brief.

We are more interested in encouraging different responses, rather than driving towards a pre-conceived outcome. Our solutions percolate upward through the work completed by the studio, rather than being pushed from the top down; although by picking the initiating images, we provide the arena in which this takes place.

And because they emerge from the bottom up, the studio’s translations become polluted by successive mediums. Information is added; on the one hand transforming the idea in its new medium to something different; while on the other hand serving to reduce the original image to its essence.

Of course, there is no cliff in the house in Kensington, just as there are no jellyfish floating in the blackness above the NGVI shop, a shop we perceived as slowly transforming from solid to gas.

Something of the qualities represented in the images survives the transformation. These qualities are the subject of our architectural effort.
It is something to inhabit the different levels of the Kensington Lighthouse, sometimes you sense vertigo, and sometimes you’re in contact with the ground, or you peep over the cliff or take shelter behind it.

Just as the lamps clump together in strange formations, creating pools of light – like the way jellyfish seemingly at random swim through the ocean - this contrasting geometry finally breaks from the orthogonal lines of the NGVI.

And the qualities are not always experiential. There are no taboos.

At the NGVI shop, the sublimating edge is a spatial quality that allows the shop to colonize the foyer, creating a new kind of shop front display somewhere between museum display cases and window dressing. In this instance, qualities of the image were selected because of the client brief and shop program - these re-emerged in the plan and informed the joinery design.

The particular nuances of someone’s translation of an image, it’s relationship to the source material and it’s realization in the design – are therefore key points in our effort to discover the best way of capturing our intentions for a project. From this emerges the question of how we make decisions given our preoccupation with generating possibilities through studio interactions.
We make decisions through repeated processes of demonstration and discussion. Although we become familiar with our responses; the key leaps are usually made in the moments when we are all able to contribute.

Exposing the design to scrutiny (by insisting that it become a physical model, or that it be accessible in virtual space) forces the studio to tackle head on the relationship between a concept’s translated medium and its essential qualities head on.

When a design becomes available for everybody to see, everybody can critique it. And when a design becomes visible, it has, by its nature – been translated.

Translation, though, is itself a thing in tension. It is the difference between the aspirations hinted at in the image, and the constraints fed into the outcome by it’s many constraints.

How good was your sketch?

How good was your model?

How realistically could you anticipate the skills or your carpenter, brickie or plasterer?

Responsibility and honest interrogation are essential to this conversation.

The question is always -

Where are we now? and;

Where do we want to move to? ;and later still -

How do we get there?
Talk is cheap. Doing is what matters – and then discussing what was learnt by doing something.

The repetition of

‘Do, do, do’

becomes an iterative progression, where designers try, assess and learn – slowly working their way towards solutions that simultaneously satisfy brief requirements, the imperative of a concept and the particular nuances of a medium.

FRAMING WORKS FOR DIFFERENCE

The mechanisms developed at LAB foreshadow the manner in which TANDEM elicits investment from its team members and provides a mechanism for our many voices to be heard.

Multiple interpretations of a given image, is one example - the process of direction is another.

Direction is a balance between providing an answer and eliciting a response. Too much direction and you get a simple echo. Too little direction and you get something irrelevant or inappropriate. Efficient direction lies between these poles.

Directors establish frameworks for designers to work to. The tension between director and designer is a relationship. In the best relationships, designers are able to creatively satisfy the many emerging issues of a project within a framework. The success of the response therefore depends on the flexibility of the framework and the creativity of the designer.
Creeds Farm LLC - plan from construction documentation

Creeds Farm LLC - section from construction documentation showing skillion section
By its nature, the process of designing interrogates the framework. The best designers know when to break the rules and challenge orthodoxy; in this way both framework and detail progress together as design solutions emerge.

At TANDEM, although James and Tim are the directors, we are also designers. Often one will fulfill the role of creating the framework, while the other works as the designer.

Critical discussions reflect our roles in the project and what we have learnt in the process of setting frameworks or designing. As the practice has grown we’ve added employees, who all work in design roles.

The Lake Taihu project reflects this preoccupation with frameworks and takes it to an extreme. This project was for an island site in Lake Taihu, west of Shanghai, for a system of prefabricated accommodation modules of 1200m2 each. The buildings were to be placed on the island in locations not known at the time of designing the system – and to be placed by designers we didn’t know at some point in the future.

The system also had to accommodate a rapid roll out and be adaptable to future needs, as yet unknown.

We invented a framework that took account of the major island influences of topography, orientation, prevailing winds, aspect and amenity – and populated it with prefabricated modules that could be arranged in a variety of configurations and densities. Modules could be added or
reconditioned at any time. In this system no site was pre-
determined. Every site remained open to interpretation, but was guided
by the framework. Each designer had the framework to work within, but the flexibility to respond to the local conditions presented by each particular site on the island.

In this system, every building could be different, and yet come from a system of prefabrication that engaged repetitive industrial processes. In one sense, every building was the same – and yet – every building would actually be different.

We remain profoundly interested in construction. In a sense, it’s the thing that matters most. Engaging with construction is a key part of our interest in frameworks because they allow us to find particular expressions within a generalized system.

The entire logic of the Kensington Lighthouse was set up on a corrugated iron sheet width, and so is the Creeds Farm Living and Learning Centre.

Within this organizational module, the window widths were set, the decorative possibilities of the sunshells understood and the setout for the portal frames. The slipping panels of the corrugated iron sheets allowed the windows to skip up and down, following the gradient of the stair and responding to particular lighting requirements inside.

Creatively interpreting a framework allows a designer to respond to a project’s particular needs – while the framework creates repetition, which we understand as a crucial element to

GODZILLA PART 1
Peter had peculiar, square shaped hands. A friend told me that’s what architects had. All those other hands, long and slender - they weren’t architect’s hands. They were pianists, playwrights, magicians and so on.

Peter was trying to knot his square hands together.

“See? It has to be like this.”

I nodded, not understanding at all. Why couldn’t he draw the bloody thing? I get to sit here, mouse in hand, computer screen flickering - and interpret his bizarre interlaced hands into some kind of planning arrangement.

As usual, it was night - early morning, actually - the day before it was due. I was totally exhausted - like everybody else - and I hated it.

I watched his hands and was reminded of

Catherine Wheel
Author Unknown
C-House 2004
C-House - plan from construction documentation

C-House - sections from construction documentation showing variation in the roof enclosure
controlling cost. While our buildings appear as though they don’t repeat – we try and make them as repetitive as possible.

Our experience at Federation Square was a crucial component in this thinking. The Atrium building and the opaque facades engage industrial processes in two different ways.

Both systems begin with a pinwheel tiling system that governs the underlying set out.

The facade encloses the buildings in a skin decorated with a triangular tile arranged into a pinwheel grid. The repetition is in the triangular tile – and, although the tile is always the same – every façade is different because the tile can be arranged in an infinite variety of configurations. The repetition, and it’s capacity to engage with the production line, comes from the repetitive, triangular base unit.

The Atrium, on the other hand, engages with production in a completely different way. It also takes the pinwheel grid as a starting point, but develops from this starting point into a 3 dimensional, self supporting spatial network of interconnected welded elements joined together in complex, irregular nodes. Every node is different, but - because the process of assembling every node repeats – industrial processes can be engaged - making the building possible.

The Federation Square project demonstrated the potential of teams to us. The establishment of this competitive, creative office - in the image of a classic atelier rather
Lake Taihu - diagram showing relationships between typologies and program

Lake Taihu - typological clock diagram demonstrating the influence of orientation and outlook on a single type

Lake Taihu - diagram showing relationship between structure and topography

Lake Taihu - diagram exploring relationship between structure and form
than a traditional, pragmatic office - is the cornerstone of what we term frameworks for difference.

We don’t really know if it was an accident, or it was designed to operate this way - but LAB’s preoccupation with pattern as an organizational tool created the freedom for it’s many authors to find their own voices on the project.

By degrees, savagely critical or unrelentingly busy, or inspirational and uplifting, the studio was, for a while, a unique platform teams to come together in a highly energized, creative environment where virtually every conceivable outcome was contemplated within an abstract, overarching framework of graphic, twisting filaments. The patterns hinted at relationships without prescribing them or whispered about spatial potentials while postponing decision making until every element was in play.

Often, this tendency created a kind of decision paralysis where so many possibilities were in suspension it was impossible to pick a linear path through it. Sometimes, though, their patterns co-ordinated teams of designers, consultants and patrons, to willingly give extraordinary, cooperative efforts and rapidly produce rich, intelligent and original solutions to design briefs. The tension between designers and consultants, the gaps between prescription and implication and the latent potential in the abstract organizations that were chosen, or that emerged, during the design process were critical to the quality of the outcome.
ground water run off collected and filtered for waffle pod tanks
all formed concrete from e-crete
double hung window openings for cross ventilation
double glazed windows
adjustable external sunshades function as sun awnings when raised
adjustable louvres for cross ventilation
trafficable roof deck
roof water harvested and stored in polly waffle tanks
concrete thermal mass with hydronic heating and cooling
sub floor insulation
sub floor plumbing
insulated timber panel
insulated roof panel - timber panel
glu bam laminated portal
concrete thermal mass with hydronic heating and cooling

Lake Taihu - plan showing demonstration cluster of 4 villas, single typology only deployed

Lake Taihu - schematic section showing construction techniques
Sometimes these processes, which were closer in some ways to experiments, were quarantined under competition conditions that ran parallel to the project office. Sometimes they found their way into the project itself. Because of the process, outcomes were rarely visible until the last moment and so the environment leading up to resolution was often highly stressful and exhausting.

At TANDEM, we’ve taken our cues from this process, cherry picking the parts we want, rejecting those we don’t. The image - with it’s capacity to bridge artwork, or images we discover in science, nature or our experiences, or even images we manufacture during the course of our work in the studio - is our version of artworks that were often presented as a point of departure at LAB.

But unlike LAB, where we were subjected to the logical extension of an unmanaged, idealistic design process where order was considered emergent - we remain actively involved in creative production. Rather than stand aside from the process, we are enmeshed in the process.

In part, this is a consequence of our limited resources at TANDEM - but it also reflects our belief that over-production doesn’t create better results.

Our design processes are more actively controlled; and therefore managed. Because we want to share it, discuss it and take critical decisions together - actively demonstrating, evaluating and
enacting - has required us to adopt a more structured approach.

The question of the image, with its immediate and obvious meaning on one hand and inherent ambiguity on the other - and the process of translation from medium to medium - is the basis of this design process.

We take a journey with our images. They’re a bit like postcards. In fact, the starting point for David Walsh’s Museum for Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart were holiday snaps from a trip through antiquity in Europe. Somehow the images of Alcatraz in Nafplio mixed with the tombs of Mycenae and the monasteries of Kalabaka.

They found a connection in David’s interest in antiquity, the subterranean qualities he sought in the museum and our sensibility.

The connections made with these images transcended so many other conversations we attempted with David – through more conventional means like diagrams, text and speech – and led us to identify critical qualities in the project.

In this experience, we discovered the gap between interpretations to be the really important thing.

What I see, is not what you see – but there are qualities inherent in the image that somehow bridge differences between professional backgrounds, cultural differences and expectations.
Albert Park Sports Pavilion - documentation showing pre-cast concrete supports and roof structure. This project was a joint venture with H20 architects where TANDEM was responsible entirely for the design and documentation of the grandstand.

Albert Park Sports Pavilion - construction drawing showing pre-cast concrete V-support columns.
The images have a ‘lead in’ quality, encouraging both parties to participate in a conversation about what they see; and the images lead the parties into an interpretation aligned with the original as they see form emerging. The group then re-engages in the discussion, embellishing the response – and on the iteration goes.

So; in some ways these images represent moments in time. They are markers, pointing to particular interests and to particular resolutions.

This is important.

Architecture has a language all its own - a lexicon of floors, frames, roofs, walls, membranes and windows, with its own logic, conventions and history. Different offices put their own spin on the language and create stylistic nuances that, with success, graduate to brands - but also to formulaic designs.

A SOAPBOX IN TASMANIA

David walked in wearing snakeskin pants and stained T-shirt with “viagara is for pussies” in red. He avoided shaking hands and made intermittent eye contact.

To begin with he sat down in our overheated studio. As the meeting wore on he got up, moved away from the table, and by degrees jammed himself into the furthest corner possible from us.

In some ways he was always seemed uncomfortable. In others, he was engaging, articulate, unexpectedly funny and fiercely intelligent, especially when it came to numbers - fiercely manipulative - apparently - when it came to sex.

“Sex and Death - that’s it.”

“What?”

“All of human existence - we’re obsessed by death - or sex - it’s in our genome.”

Your genome.

“I’m gonna divide the collection, the whole thing, into sex and death.

“I want two doors, one red, the other black. I want to count which door people choose - I’ll count them without them knowing.

“I bet they all choose sex!”

“Unnnn.”

He made a noise between humming and moaning when he was uncertain. “I think the doors should be the same. I just want the doors to be labelled - SEX and DEATH.”

He waived his skinny arms around for emphasis.

David flew us to Hobart to see the collection. Actually collections. I didn’t expect him to come to life quite like this.

He knew every single piece intimately. He knew their histories, the price he paid, who’d tried to outbid him and where the piece had been before he got it.

He wrote the text that accompanied all his museum displays. His texts were both prosaic and incredibly informative; quite unlike the materials that usually populates museums.

“Here!”

David threw me a scarab. He didn’t throw it far and I caught it. His idea of a joke. His curator, gloves on, swore as the object

Tholos, Mycenae
by Dominique Ng 2004

Tholos interior, Mycenae
by Dominique Ng 2004
Pollywoodside Museum - view showing foyer

Pollywoodside Museum - exhibition

Pollywoodside Museum - exhibition
We graduated from LAB saturated in this tradition. Every line we drew was an acute angle. We recognized agglomerations, fractures, thin rock sections, Jasper Johns like arrangements – in our own work and sought actively to escape the graphic preoccupation that came from a highly refined aesthetic sensibility; perfected in the extreme climate of competition architecture.

We wanted the best parts of LAB without the pressure, tantrums and late nights.

We wanted success without the formula - and wondered whether we could we achieve this.

We were tired of drawing, drawing, drawing - we wanted to build.

Our clients changed too. Now, instead of appealing to the highly refined aesthetic sensibilities of gallery curators and government architects – we met chefs, gamblers, doctors, bio-mechanical engineers or restaurateurs. In reaching these new clients, we needed new ways to communicate.

We also needed new material to work with. We both felt outright urgency when it came to what we naturally drew. It couldn’t be the same – it had to be different - but at the same time it seemed the years we’d invested in helping to refine our own aesthetic tendencies seemed a waste to throw away.
MONA - concept model - the concept design for this project was undertaken with Nonda Katsilidis from FK Architects

MONA - concept study models showing building development

MONA - view of building from the Derwent River, Tasmania
The images we uncovered and presented to ourselves and our clients became a bridge. First, between our backgrounds and those of our clients’, but also importantly between our past and our future.

The images are themselves metaphors that appeal to our common experiences. That they unite disparate backgrounds in conversation indicates this.

What is it like to live on a cliff?

What is it like to hover amongst the jellyfish?

What is it to understand the building practices of the ancients and illuminate our legacy?

These qualities drag us from our daily pre-occupations, forcing us to re-consider our practice from new perspectives. It keeps us fresh; gets us out of bed in the mornings.

Critically, our tools – the aesthetic sensibility generated at LAB – have been transcended – finally becoming a language to express our interests, rather than an end in itself.

In this way, we feel we’ve graduated from ourselves and escaped our past – while at the same time bringing it with us.

We’re using the highly refined aesthetic sensibilities and the vast

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**EXPERIMENTATION**
Dom was interested in dance. Her thesis researched Merce Cunningham (choreographer) and John Cage (composer); where she came across Chance Operations.

John Cage and I became interested in the use of chance in the 50’s. I think one of the very primary things that happened then was the publication of the “I Ching,” the Chinese book of changes, from which you can cast your fortune: the hexagrams.

Cage took it to work in his way of making compositions then; and he used the idea of 64—the number of the hexagrams—to say that you had 64, for example, sounds; then you could cast, by chance, to find which sound first appeared, cast again, to say which sound came second, cast again, so that it’s done by, in that sense, chance operations. Instead of finding out what you think should follow—say a particular sound—what did the I Ching suggest? Well, I took this also for dance.

I was working on a title called, “Untitled Solo,” and I had made—using the chance operations—a series of movements written on scraps of paper for the legs and the arms, the head, all different. And it was done not to the music but with the music of Christian Wolff. — Merce Cunningham, Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime of Dance, 2000

Although the use of chance operations was considered an abrogation of artistic responsibility,[citation needed] Cunningham was thrilled by a process that arrives at works that could never have been created through traditional collaboration. This does not mean, however, that Cunningham holds every piece created in this fashion is a masterpiece. Those dances that do not “work” are quickly dropped from repertory, while those that do are celebrated as serendipitous discoveries.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merce_Cunningham
Competition entry for the re-development of Minshen Wharf, Shanghai from shipyard to leisure and culture precinct. This project was undertaken with ANS Architects in Shanghai and place 6th in a field of 12 entries.

Competition entry for the re-development of Xingang Shipyards, Tianjin from shipyard to 189 Ha leisure, culture and entertainment precinct incorporating 2M square meters of additional residential, commercial, cultural and entertainment buildings. This project was undertaken with ANS Architects from Shanghai, Oculus from Melbourne and has been declared the winning entry.
experience we accrued in our previous professional lives to express the new values we bring to our practice everyday.

We actively wander outside the studio, and like bower birds bring our experiences back inside the bubble. Our experiences outside the studio have become essential to developments within it.

The new material prompts experimentation and stretches what we’re familiar with. This constant coursing to and fro, testing the limits of our architectural expressionism – and how it helps us to reconnect with our shared human experiences – is the thing at TANDEM.

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