Constructed Isolation

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

Adrian Iredale, B.Appsc, B.Arch,
School of Architecture & Design
RMIT University
September 2008
Master of Architecture by Project Adrian Iredale
School of Architecture & Design
RMIT University
September 2008
Content

01. Constructed Isolation
02. Context: Separated by desert, connected by water
03. Key Moments in the Development of West Australian Architecture
04. The Perth Modern Movement
05. Current Housing
06. Perth Opportunities
07. Personal Path of Interest
08. Design Methodology
09. Sketching Technique
10. Diagramming
11. Constructing Families
12. An Introduction to the Work
13. Early Work
14. Context, Time and the Emergence of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
15. Operations and Devices: Exploring and unpacking the collection of devices to unpack the work
   Geometry
   Place
   Time
   Craft
16. Responding to a Young Tradition
17. Constructed Isolation: Inventing new relationships
18. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Simultaneous Opposites and Paradoxical Pleasures
19. Familiar made Unfamiliar: Transforming the ordinary
20. The Backyard Renos and their Relevancy
21. Specific Application of Devices: Backyard renovations
   Place
   Constructed Isolation
   Borrowed Landscape
   Geometry
   Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
   Stretched Space
   Time
   Craft
22. Reflection on Other Renovations
23. Swan Street- The End and the beginning
   Constructed Isolation?
   Time
   Craft
   Summary
24. Reflection: New Houses and the Renovations
   Place
   Geometry
   Time
   Craft
26. Wilner and Dawesville: Opposing discourses or performative architecture?
27. Wilner and Wilner- The Shift to performance fulfilment
28. Current Houses: Testing the renovation devices
29. The Reflective Process Effecting Change in the Nature of the Work
30. Future
01. Constructed Isolation
Architecture begins gradually to lose its traditional definition: there is clearly a growing interest in incorporating a certain naturalist condition through geometry, components and construction, and seeking an environmental sensibility and formal complexity which respond with precision to the new values of our society. The project is valid in so far as it achieves a complete re-description of place, above all proposing the invention of a topography.\(^1\)

This Masters investigates the development of a collection of architectural devices and operations that respond to and have evolved from the specific nature of residential suburban Perth, Western Australia.

‘Constructing Families’\(^2\) collates a collection of projects and explores the devices under the thematic concerns of geometry, place, time and craft.

These devices explore the potential for ambiguity to create space that transforms the occupant from being a passive observer into a dynamic participant.

It explores the potential for Perth’s geographic isolation to manifest as a positive construct, developing a unique architecture that opportunistically reinterprets past traditions to create individual environments.

‘Constructed Isolation’ is an ambitious idea where identity may begin with the individual dwelling and collectively evolve to create a constellation of considerable influence.

It demonstrates how these devices may result in new propositions for suburbia, how big ideas with small-scale projects and a little irrational joyousness may contribute to or at least aspire to create change.

These small projects will be viewed as a continuation of Perth’s ‘Heroic Period of Modernism’, the fertile and ambitious but incomplete project from the 1950s and ‘60s.

This will also focus on the development and change that occurred as a result of the reflective practice process, while identifying potential opportunities for the future.

02. Context: Separated by desert, connected by water
Perth is a 100km linear city stretching north and south, bound to the west by the Indian Ocean and to the east by the Darling Escarpment. Settled in 1829, it now appears as a long, linear, flat space,

…not a profile against the sky, but a horizontal constellation on a block stretched ground without firmness and figure, where the human frame is carried into compressed time frames and stretched linear space. The city has an immanent density, like looking into the night sky it all seems far apart, ninety percent unseeable dark matter.\(^3\)

This area is referred to as the Swan Coastal Plain – two large, parallel belts of coastal limestone, one formed by the wind action and one by water movement. Homogeneous in its geology, soils, climate and vegetation but unfertile and lacking in water, the city

---

\(^2\) Refer to page 8 for an explanation of the Constructing Families map.
\(^3\) M Markham, *Howlett Architectural Projects*, School of Architecture, UWA, 1992, p. 5.
of Perth has been described by George Seddon as being a ‘kept woman’, relying on the immense virgin land east of the Darling Escarpment (wheat belt, wool and minerals) and dependent upon an external water supply for more than six months of the year.

The beach environment and the bush environment to the west and east provide recreational delights, influencing the direction of development, resulting in an approach to dwelling where ‘the average single family house has tended to become a self contained recreational facility with a consequent lack of urban life being characteristic of the city centres’. The projects of Iredale Pedersen Hook (IPH) transgress the entire Perth coastal plain, situated in environments ranging from exposed coastal locations with primary views over the ocean, to Darling Escarpment bush settings, inner-city suburbs developed around 1900, suburbs of the 1960s, and suburbs with distant views over the estuary. Each site contains unique qualities that are distinctly different and micro-climates that influence a specific response.

03. Key Moments in the Development of West Australian Architecture

In one of the few historical studies of local architecture, Ian Molyneux described Perth architecture as ‘that of a European society grafted to a strange land. It is not indigenous architecture which has evolved from primitivism but rather an adaptation of developed, introduced forms to local conditions, in order to accommodate established living patterns’. The ongoing architectural influence from settlement primarily came from delayed but direct contact with England, and not with the east coast of Australia. The extent of influence was subject to the volume of immigration and this, in turn, was subject to the local economic condition.

It was not until the 1890s when gold discoveries were made, that east coast architects shifted to Western Australia. This resulted in an almost rebuild of the capital, replacing the ‘architecture of improvisation and pattern books with the eclecticism and invention of professionals’. The foundations of Perth architecture were formed in this period; many architects established practices that were inherited by sons and grandsons, and the tailings of these practices are still having some impact today.

As a result of the Gold Rush, Perth received many immigrants and became an architectural melting pot of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain and new ideas developed by the eastern state architects.

There are a few notable architects of this period. George Temple Poole became the superintendent of public works, gaining the title of ‘Colonial Architect’; he obtained the prestigious public commissions and was responsible for most of the highly competent public buildings that remain today. More important for this discussion is the work of William Williams and Eustace Gresley Cohen. Williams and Cohen were thoroughly versed in the Arts and Crafts vernacular and understood the appropriateness of this theory to Australian Vernacular forms, exploring its application in a Mediterranean climate for a predominately British society. They continued this exploration in residential work for most of their careers.

6 Ibid, p. XVI.
7 Ibid, p. XVII.
04. The Perth Modern Movement

'It was the European revolution happening all over again, a generation later. What sensations. What excitement. What inexperience.' This was the 1960s and the emergence of the modern movement in Perth, our ‘Heroic Period’ of modern architecture or ‘A Quiet Revolution’. Perth hosted the Empire Games and an experimental building boom resulted. Once more, the influence was not from the east coast but from the travel and work experiences of Perth architects returning from England and Europe. However, as noted by Geoffrey London, ‘unlike British modernism, Perth developed beyond the stylistic tendencies of English Modernism… the modern housing became technically inventive, responsive to climate and the site, economy-based, and construction orientated’. The specific housing quality was further defined in another article by Geoffrey London and Simon Anderson:

[Western Australian] buildings have a sense of austerity about them, of a minimal frugality, allowing architectural modernism to be easily assimilated as an almost natural extension of a utilitarian tradition. Much of this austerity can be traced back to the impoverished conditions of the colony in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century as the sustaining myth of the pioneer. Without any commitment to a modernist orthodoxy, and with the freedom associated with the geographic isolation, the early Perth modern architects showed a great willingness to innovate, to invent from first principles.

05. Current Housing

This was the last major influential period of housing exploration in Perth; residential architecture evolved into the project home market that we encounter today, with no regard for any of the attributes noted above.

As it is in most of Australia, Perth’s current housing focuses on electronic lifestyle additions, importing international styles to create identity, and super-sizing the house while reducing block sizes to supposedly satisfy recent desires to increase density. This design culture encourages young talent to look to other states and countries, returning to Perth via the lure of ‘lifestyle’ when they are past their influential years or ready for retirement.

06. Perth Opportunities

Economically, Perth occupies a central position within Asia. This is evidenced by the economic boom. Culturally, though, we continue to look to other parts of the world. The result is a wealthy society with little understanding of how to spend money, suffering from an identity crisis and a lack of confidence to embrace the very qualities that make the city so enjoyable. Perhaps now is the time to write the Perth equivalent of Rayner Banham’s Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies – a book in praise of Perth that considers the potential of the mining industry. The new study by Professor Richard Weller and Professor David Hedgcock, Boomtown 2050, may provide part of the answer.

---


Ibid.
It is within this field that iph discovers opportunities. Like the ‘50s and ‘60s architects, we look beyond Perth for ideas; however, like the Hills Designers, we are also prepared to learn from the immediate situation. We value the physical separation of Perth, treating this as a positive construct in the knowledge that current technology renders isolation discussions irrelevant. Embracing the naivety of youth and the opportunities afforded a young culture seeking answers, we have the capacity to penetrate the disorganised architectural mafia and adopt a leading role.

From this scenario emerges an interest in ‘Constructed Isolation’, an idea that encourages re-connection to the place we inhabit, introspection rather than continual extroversion, and the capacity to define direction beginning with small-scale projects.

07. Personal Path of Interest
Duncan Richards, friend, thesis supervisor and former Senior Lecturer at Curtin University, introduced me to the work of Hans Scharoun during first year Architectural History. An investigation of the experimental schools helped identify the links between spatial organisation and social and learning consequences. This was followed by a study of houses designed under the extreme conditions of National Socialism, where the role of the house as a retreat from politics and social destruction shaped ideas about ‘specific interiority’, with the exterior being a consequence of this investigation. In first year architecture and at a point where one’s architectural direction is gathered primarily from previous experience rather than from inside the profession, the methodology of designing as a process of discovery was a natural and intuitive path for me to follow. This led to numerous years of research and three years of visiting projects in Germany and Europe.

Peter Blundell Jones is the major source of English writing on Scharoun and identified the importance of Hugo Häring, German architect and theorist. Häring provided the theory ‘Organisches Bauen’ and Scharoun became the practitioner and executor of this theory. In an attempt to place the work in the canons of modernism and dismiss the inappropriate ‘expressionism’ label applied by earlier historians, Peter Blundell Jones termed this approach ‘Organic Functionalism’.

Scharoun’s investigation of the use and inter-relationship of activity and function was more open ended and less referential than Alvar Aalto’s. I have learned from Aalto’s relationship to the Finnish landscape and culture – his sensitivity of material selection and detailing that considers the ongoing weathering and transformation of a building in time.

In searching for contemporary architects who follow this understanding of architecture, I researched and visited the work of Enric Miralles, and this was followed by an invitation to study with him (and Peter Cook) at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. Conversations with Enric Miralles centered around the works of Hans Scharoun and other lesser-known German architects who continued the Häring/Scharoun approach in small-scale residential works. Miralles absorbed and re-interpreted both architectural and literary influences, producing a specific personalisation, wherein influences are difficult to trace. It is this same approach to understanding the culture and history of a place that results in architecture that is simultaneously sensitive

12 Refer to Martyn Hook PhD.
14 Sergius Rugenberg, Heinz Schudnagies, Fehling und Gogel.
and reactionary – the desire to create space where the occupant is an active participant. ‘Miralles and Pinos’ work suggests that, in a time of reduced direct contact with our buildings, even as other sensorial and communicative systems have radically expanded, more emphatic and intimate strategies of engagement are needed.15 And a process of collating projects as ongoing, unfinished stories correlates to this collection of renovations and new houses.

Recently my research has focused on Sigurd Lewerentz, in particular his use of brick – the plurality of material use embedded in a quiet inventiveness where depth and weight of space is achieved through minimal material (and maximum effort). This ‘profound’ quality is being explored in a number of current iPh projects through the use of brick.

While the ’50s and ’60s architects may satisfy the link to economy-based and site/social/climate-responsive architecture, it is the work of a small group of under-valued architects from the 1960s and ’70s that provides a local link to the organic-based tradition. American critic Reyner Banham once remarked upon this unexplored ‘organic tradition of Perth’; 35 years later this is still a valid remark. This small group of architects16 remained primarily in the eastern hills known as the Darling Escarpment with no desire to travel for inspiration. Their desire was to learn from each other and the situation, to understand the local constraints and potentialities and to try to work within these. There was a desire not to damage the site but to return the site to its natural condition, thereby enriching the lives of the dwellers and resulting in unique, individual, complex solutions that celebrated the particular. Solutions included ‘unfolding interiors (that) created an exciting sense of the possibilities of personal exploration’.17 This work also possessed a sense of incompleteness and, as one critic noted, was characterised by ‘the use of the broken line and the fuzzy edge’.18

This lineage is completed by the introduction of Iwan Iwanoff, the Bulgarian architect who emigrated to Perth in 1950 after training at Munich University. His work retains an almost mythical quality – derived from an understanding of local conditions and the ability to find innovative and inventive solutions in that context, excelling where others felt constrained. Iwanoff demonstrated the ‘extraordinary capacity to…reconcile divergent and apparently contradictory design issues’19 and this resulted at times in dualities – solutions both radical and conservative, modern and classical, international and local in their concerns. The immigrant eyes and expertise of Iwanoff remain important influences in this work.

I have discussed the evolution and relevance of Perth architecture primarily in the context of an imported knowledge that is adapted to local conditions. This is also of personal relevance; my own learning exists within this field.20 While the Hills Designers preferred to learn from within, my own experience has not been

16 Including Wallace Greenham, Gene Mapp, Ken Waldron, John White, Bill Kierath, Ray Lefroy and others.
18 Ibid.
20 Refer to Martyn Hook PhD.
limited to this. It has involved numerous study tours of the Perth back garden, national garden and international garden. Each study tour has been carefully pre-determined and at times obsessive. An example of this is the research on Hans Scharoun, conducted over two years and including a visit to almost every built work. This exhaustive approach mirrors a broader, reflective process inherent in this Masters – that of discovering unknown qualities by revisiting past works, or, in the case of other architects’ work, researching minor and relatively unknown works and doing so within my own evolving frame of references.

08. Design Methodology
Projects begin in the sketchbook, removed from scale and the office, and motivated by a certain desire to become lost in an imaginary world. They reveal a design process that has evolved over the past ten years. Increasingly the sketchbooks have become diaries that collect more than architectural life and precedent, they contain traces of movement, travels, past events, performances visited, observations of people interacting. They have become an extension of my life experiences, and these experiences ultimately influence the nature of the architectural world that they extend beyond. It is from these experiences, and not theoretical readings, that the work emerges.

The sketchbooks are rarely completed; end pages remain empty, almost waiting for a revisit, anticipating that at some point in the future additional information will be added out of chronological sequence with the sketchbook collection, and perhaps in a form that is foreign to that particular diary. I now view these empty pages as an opportunity to revisit and reflect at a different time, perhaps an opportunity to rediscover past thoughts with new eyes and the benefit of new experiences.

The diaries began as an avenue for personal moments, an opportunity for isolation perhaps similar to a child entering a fairytale. Later they became travel companions, being eagerly opened at every opportunity, removing the sense of loneliness that can accompany travel. Recently there has almost been a sense of desperation, with the sketchbooks representing privileged times away from the demanding office environment. They are at times revealing – long gaps between diary entries being indicative of stressful times at work, too much administration, or rare, under-inspired moments resulting from the state of mind noted above.

Early sketches are a process of cleansing, attempts to remove preconceptions through the act of repetitive drawing. Each new sketch shifts further from the past and closer to the future. Past ideas are identified; personal parodies revealed and then challenged to offer new directions. Self-criticisms become evident, manifesting in written form adjacent to the drawings as personal words of encouragement, challenging me to look for new solutions.

09. Sketching Techniques
The sketchbooks are filled with different sketching techniques that have a direct relationship to the project qualities. Early works were explored through slightly adjusted ink sketches rotating around the design, combined with watercolour sketches exploring colour and material. Each sketch includes only essential information to avoid distraction or the masking of key ideas.

A critical moment during the Masters research occurred over the Christmas 2005/2006 holiday. It began with revisiting books on Hans Scharoun and, in a peaceful moment of reflection and contemplation, memories of my Berlin research on the German
‘Organic Functionalists’ emerged. This resulted in a shift in my sketching technique and medium. Soft pencil sketches were introduced, along with a technique of layering combined with watercolours to explore light and shadow; the layering continued until the precise moment of certainty seemed to remain. Alberto Giacometti mastered this technique of extreme re-working, indulging to the point of exhaustion and personal satisfaction.

10. Diagramming

The ‘Constructing Families’ chart explored the possibility of collating ideas from the private world of the sketchbook and placing projects in a context that would invite external review and comment. Like the unfinished end pages of the sketchbook, they encourage re-visiting at later moments, revealing previously undiscovered connections between past projects, and identifying the positioning of current projects. This retrospection is a form of liberation that allows an understanding of the work as one evolving project while revealing new types and possibilities.

This also allows others to enter the overwhelming iph body of works with a certain sense of personal position and interpretation. Constructing Families was a successful medium for reflecting on the large body of work and extracting families of concerns. These families were then explored in subsequent Masters presentations and local lectures.

The role of the diagrams eventually manifested, through specific past project investigations, as attempts to re-discover and reveal qualities that were resting hidden in the project. The outcome of these investigations will be discussed in later pages.

Refer to pp. 8–9. The Constructing Families chart was presented during the May 2005 Graduate Research Conference, RMIT Melbourne.

Swan Street Alterations and Additions, 02.01.06.

Alberto Giacometti

Sketchbook diagramming 29.05.05. Return flight post GRC May 2005.
Since 2006, diagramming has become a key method in the investigation of current projects, to the extent that it may now be considered an immediate form of reflection, intertwined with the design process. Initially this evolved from the personal desire to achieve clarity about the parts that constituted the design and to express this to collaborators and clients; more recently, project architects have been encouraged to introduce this technique as a form of self-critique to help develop the design. This is a conscious introduction that acknowledges the spreading of our time over numerous practice duties and the desire to maintain an intimacy with the development of projects.

In summary, the process of investigation has progressed from an intimate and perhaps introverted activity to one that encourages the inclusion and interpretation of other collaborators. While this may seem a necessity for a growing practice, it is primarily driven by the distinct desire to allow others to contribute. More importantly this provides a more immediate means to reflection; a self-curatorial medium in a collaborative curatorial existence.

11. Constructing Families

Constructing Families is a chronological chart collecting the various techniques, themes and ideas of our past ten years of practice. It explores the inter-relationships between projects through concerns of geometry, place, time and craft while identifying the architectural act as one continuous and reflective process. It reveals the development of individual projects as part of a constellation of other projects, identifying the importance of the iph precedent while allowing the absorption, introduction and identification of new ideas.

Constructing Families is primarily a means of generating reflection and allowing this to evolve as the projects and ideas...
evolve. It was never intended to remain a static device but to evolve as the work and practice evolves, taking new form. This has emerged in the form of a laser-cut, kit-of-parts model that is transformed to suit the space it occupies. The parts are two-dimensional manifestations of the Constructing Families project stamps, and are given spatial quality through the interconnecting compositions. This new form of Constructing Families is an active form of reflection that unexpectedly becomes an exhibitor of local culture. This has become evident through responses from the different cultures it has visited. In Greece, user participation resulted in surprising manipulation; in Tokyo the model was constructed by a group of polite students who only required a briefing and encouragement by iph; in Melbourne it was rapidly assembled without the need for consultation with the original authors; in Perth the iph collaborators willingly negotiated and re-negotiated their way into a composition while documenting this in the form of a time lapse.

12. An Introduction to the Work
This Masters will focus on a collection of predominately small-scale residential projects ranging from back garden additions to recent new residences. The renovations, while small in scale, are ambitious attempts to extract architecture within the constraints of modest budgets, conservative authorities and clients who are interested in achieving something appropriate for their lifestyle and middle-class income, interested in something ‘special but not too challenging’.

13. Early Work
The early projects involved renovations to Perth modernist houses and apartment buildings coinciding with the design of a new residence.

These projects provided the opportunity to research the adaptation of European modernism to the Perth climate and context. The single residence in Melville and the ten-storey apartment building on Mount Street Perth were designed by post-WWII immigrants from Germany and Austria.

Our exploration on Mount Street continued for seven years, beginning with a foyer and perimeter security renovation seeking homage to the existing building, and finishing with a proposed ten-storey addition that challenges the modernist silence and anonymity of the original building. The desire to create a challenge eventuated from the small-scale renovation investigations of place and time.

In contrast, Kilburn continued the adapted modernist language aesthetically unrelated to place, this was a conscious effort to deny the existence of a context that seeks identity in obese buildings with borrowed overseas ‘styles’. The notion of ‘a-contextual’ began, and ironically it was the very notion of an imported-style context that created this response. Recent projects have continued to investigate the possibilities of the ‘a-contextual’.

14. Context, Time and the Emergence of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
Two early projects – ‘News’ and the 2G Mies van der Rohe archive – interpret local, unvisited contexts using historical studies and maps to form specific and universal contextual relationships. Investigations of ‘time’ and the emergence of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (simultaneous opposites) attempt to ‘slow time’ and create contemplative public space.
15. Operations and Devices: Exploring and unpacking the collection of devices to unpack the work

As previously noted, Constructing Families evolved out of the desire to understand thematic concerns and devices to then explore and further develop the work with a continuousness of intent and meaning. Interpreted as a whole, these families collectively describe the work as one ongoing and interrelated body where ideas and thematic concerns may shift between projects. The Masters process then resulted in a reflection upon the reflection; i.e., the initial reflection of the work followed by a reflection of the meaning of the families.

Geometry

Geometry predominately relates to the ongoing interest in the polar opposites of Sharoun/Härting and Mies van der Rohe. This interest evolved from research I conducted while living in Berlin, where both legacies are highly evident and still relevant to ways of exploring contemporary living possibilities. Peter Blundell Jones and Colin St John Wilson have written about the opposing approaches, however their discussion attempts to define one as being better than the other. My interest lies not in making a fatalistic determination of superiority, but in exploring the potential of each approach, and discovering what is the most appropriate for a given project. In determining ‘appropriateness’ it is possible to create hybrids that exploit positive qualities of both approaches. Ultimately these investigations attempt to create solutions that are simultaneously specific and general; i.e., a position that offers a particular way of using the space while allowing occupants the flexibility to partially redefine this at times. Through research of the Scharoun houses of the 1930s (houses completed during the Nazi regime), it became evident they are primarily intended to be occupied in one manner. For instance, built-in sofas that focus the best view out while advocating a way of socialising with others; circular dining spaces requiring circular tables and, once more, a way of relating to others where there is no ‘head’ of the table. There is another level of use, which creates a unique flexibility, and it can be found in the in-between spaces. Generous spaces that relate to circulation, but are sized and shaped to permit furniture or other items of personalisation.

In contrast, the houses by Mies – with their specific grid ordering devices – advocate a notion of ‘use universalisation’. Yet, paradoxically, the furniture tends to be placed so carefully in relation to the grid that it is inconceivable that it be placed in any other configuration. This could be perceived as a sublime form of architectural dictatorship.

Place

Our architectural interventions are considered as a moment in time that will continue to evolve beyond the physical existence of a project. They are positioned to understand events, moments, stories and qualities that are unique to the context. Whether the site is in the city, suburbs, fringe or desert, each project is ‘grounded’ and enriched through the creation of both physical and subliminal connections. This is described by Steven Holl in his book *Black Swan Theory*:

> Building transcends physical and functional requirements by fusing with a place, by gathering the meaning of a situation. Architecture does not so much intrude on a landscape as it serves to explain it... when a work of architecture successfully fuses a building and situation, a third condition emerges. In this third entity denotation and connotation merge; expression is linked to idea, which is joined to site.
The suggestive and implicit are manifold aspects of an intention.\textsuperscript{22}

Time
We are conscious of the role of architecture for documenting, storing and exhibiting ‘time’. For us this is a privileged position of responsibility that requires each project to understand its place in a local, national and, at times, international history, and to be mindful of these connections and the ongoing impact of such interventions.

These projects also understand the preciousness of time and the increasing importance of ‘slowing time’ in a booming local economy and an emerged international digital existence. ‘Slowing time’, ‘stretching time’ and ‘capturing time’ are techniques concerned with creating both a consciousness and subconsciousness of places we inhabit, bringing awareness to everyday events.

Architects and artists create in an attempt to make people perceive, to make something visible. As an instrument of the experience of time, light, and place, the house has the potential for poetic language and relative autonomy.\textsuperscript{23}

At times these projects are concerned with the preservation of built form, streetscape and past approaches to living. At other times they are concerned with the way light may enter a room, from both an environmental and a poetic interpretation. We are also interested in the maturing of the building: designing for the future to allow the building to change with time, in a specific manner.

Craft
‘Art is the demonstration that the ordinary is extraordinary.’\textsuperscript{24}
We believe in a craft embodied in place, a low-tech inventive approach that explores the ordinary in unfamiliar ways and achieves complexity within a modesty of means.

Ideas of restraint, robustness, economy and delight are explored based on the field of concerns of place and time. Craft may at times defy the specific notion of place – it may be simultaneously local and international – but is ultimately grounded by place and time.

We are also concerned with the capacity of craft to create a sense of local tradition,

Traditions in any field are not discovered, or even revealed, they are made. They are cultural and intellectual constructs that require continued commitment and constant redefinition in order to sustain them.\textsuperscript{25}

16. Responding to a Young Tradition
‘In the new climate…a house which expresses the life and the land may grow more profusely and the scattered seeds spread by creative architects may take abundant root.’\textsuperscript{26}

The devices noted above create a framework to explore individual projects with a consistency that collectively creates a

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{24} A Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art.
\textsuperscript{25} D Richards, ‘Lost’, The Architect Magazine 87-4, WA Chapter RAIA, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{26} R Boyd, Australia’s Home, Melbourne University Press, 1952, p. 278.
constellation of site-specific yet theoretically connected works. The devices are concerned with the identification and re-establishment of local value, selectively reconnecting to aspects of the past that are re-identified, preserved and reinterpreted through the alterations and additions. These works are selectively referential but often abstracted or exaggerated, connecting to the context of the specific house, the suburb and the evolution of housing in Western Australia.

They desire to create value in a young tradition of living in the suburbs of WA, while questioning and opportunistically offering new ways of relating to ‘this place’:

If the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us…… ‘tradition’ should be positively discouraged…. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it with great labour. It involves in the first place, the historical sense… This historical sense which is a sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and the timeless and the temporal together is what makes a writer traditional and is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity…. No poet, no artist of any kind has his complete meaning alone.27

17. Constructed Isolation: Inventing new relationships
These projects accept the existing suburban condition to the street and then challenge this condition to the rear. They explore the idea of a removal from place, a constructed isolation derived from the very existence of the place and situation, a way of placing one in a world quite removed from the street presence, perhaps in an illusory world that allows one to reflect and ‘slow down time’. Numerous devices have been incorporated to achieve this quality: borrowed landscape, extroverted distance, constructed landscape, framing, bunkering, anchoring, screening, form, density (inhabitable wall)…

18. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: ‘Simultaneous Opposites’ and ‘Paradoxical Pleasures’
This is the acceptance of and interest in a world that is not necessarily black or white—enjoying and exploiting the possibilities of an in-between position. Old and new, introvert and extrovert, hovering and embedded, slick and hairy… these are just some of the qualities that are enjoyed. ‘Paradoxical Pleasures’ is the desire to generate awareness of the place we inhabit, the desire to avoid experiential apathy. As noted by Jessica Multari,

Ultimately, the juxtaposition of dichotomous themes is merely a means to achieving an end; a method of manipulating the relationship between built form and location, occupant and space, in ways previously unexplored and uncaptured… By utilising rather than oppressing the potential for dualism, iph has created unity out of conflict.28

19. Familiar made Unfamiliar: Transforming the ordinary
We delight in the everyday acts of living but believe this may be enriched by transforming the ordinary into the unexpected.

Besides being a site for resistance, the everyday and the ordinary offer an alternative approach: ‘First by providing a space in to which one can retreat, a refugium, a place for calmness and reflection, a breathing space. Secondly, by providing the opportunity to once again reconsider

The relations between media, consumer society and inhabitation. Empathetically, the everyday never provides an idyllic spot nor regains us our lost innocence. On the contrary, it constitutes a battleground, a site of contestation of values, where new relations between realism and idealism may be established. 29

“In the Western world, most people now live a life of unprecedented plenty... where the virtual and the real are blurred almost beyond recognition” 30 One may argue that to delight in the ordinary is no longer possible without a process of making the ordinary extraordinary. Our work desires to create a consciousness of the familiar through the act of making it unfamiliar.

20. The Backyard Renos and their Relevancy
Architectural practice in Australia typically begins with renovations for family, friends or colleagues. Most practices view such projects as a means to an end, stepping-stones to larger, more lucrative projects requiring less time and delivering more income. Iph has continued to explore renovations for almost ten years as entities in their own right, and as testing platforms informing other projects of varying scale and use.

The field of concerns that intrigues iph has developed through the design and realisation of renovations. These were never considered ‘means to an end’ projects. Each renovation has been given a level of commitment far beyond that necessitated by scale and budget. The ambition applied to projects always transcends budget and project constraints; each challenges, questions and manipulates authority regulations.

A technique evolved that included working quickly and at times ferociously; the sketchbook and sketch model became primary places of development. Plans, sections and elevations would come after these investigations. When these arrived, they were not fine-line computer drawings, but watercolour and hand-drawn (to scale) diagrams, loaded with emotion and the information necessary to describe particular conditions.

Preciseness of drawing evolves in conjunction with the development of the design and its detailed components. Each stage is carefully measured to produce exactly the amount of information needed to achieve what is absolutely necessary.

This working method continues with the majority of larger projects but, as the office grows and team sizes grow, and the partners’ time is stretched over numerous demanding projects, this is increasingly under threat.

What has developed over a period of time is a consistent methodology, a consistent attitude to creating an individual solution out of a limited palette of materials and elements. Each project finds its own uniqueness while maintaining a place in the development of all the renovations. Maximum effort is applied to discovering the uniqueness of each project; this is only achieved with time.

Each project finds and documents special moments in the host house, placing the occupant in a new form of living – immersed in the exaggerated exploitation of the old and new possibilities of living with the exterior.

30 Ibid.
They begin with a cleansing process, where the house is returned to its origins and approximately 80 years of random additions are removed. This coincides with a desire to remove preconceived ideas from the architectural thinking – repetitive sketching as a form of architectural exorcism.

In summary, the renovations are quick, compact, cost effective, loaded with aspiration and ambition, but never easy.

The small-scale project, while time consuming in terms of the labour required, is completed in a time frame that permits rapid reflection and integration into subsequent projects. Coinciding with these projects is a collection of exhibitions that operate on an even shorter time frame. Each exhibition captures a moment in time and tests the practice concerns that are operating in the renovation projects in the public realm.

21. Specific Application of Devices: Backyard renovations

Place

Constructed Isolation

Reynolds began with the denial of the site boundaries, removing the constraints normally associated with suburban subdivisions and attempting to create an autonomy physically connected and anchored to the existing house, and spatially connected to the garden. This autonomy was reinforced by the introduction of a dense native garden concealing the perimeter fences. The peaceful and tranquil setting that existed in the 1880s is referenced and reintroduced through a ‘fabricated landscape’ of native species that once occupied this place.

Borrowed Landscape

The notion of constructed isolation is reinforced, as one moves through the house, by carefully placed openings that focus and borrow from the surrounding landscape. This landscape exists outside of the site perimeter, and is both privately and publicly owned.

At Dunedin Street there is no sense of the former native bushland or of trees even one hundred years old. The smaller blocks result in the residences disappearing into a forest of metal and tiled roofs; large, space-hungry trees are avoided in preference to introduced, manicured boutique species.

Unlike Reynolds and Dunedin, at Gooseberry Hill the landscape naturally exists. No fabrication of the landscape is necessary, however a cultivated focusing is required. The design evolved from the desire to bring meaning to the landscape, from the desire to maintain this quality of inclined topography, and to explore the house as a ‘walk in the bushland setting’, capturing experiences of varying intensity and proximity.

It continues the exploration into dualities, or the Jekyll and Hyde possibilities of architecture in relationship to place. One side is embedded in the carved hill, while the other side is suspended above the landscape. This dualism is reflected in the selection of materials (timber boarding contrasted with green plastic; the organic and the synthetic!) and the detailing of the concrete wall – one side is smooth, off-form concrete and the other is poured against a bed of industrial bubble wrap (the slick and the hairy!).

Geometry

Due to the size constraints of the site, the Dunedin Street...
Typical turn of the century bull-nose verandah.

Reynolds Residence South Perth: stretched and exaggerated bull-nose and ‘lean-to’.

Dunedin Street: a spatial exaggeration of existing events.

Reynolds Residence: stretched skin and elastic skin.

Reynolds Residence: stretched and elastic space.

project is found not in the plan (as in South Perth) but in the sectional manipulations. The geometry evolved from studying the existing house interior. The ceiling of each room was decorated to varying degrees, creating a hierarchy reinforcing its relative importance. The new space continues this elaboration of the ceiling but transforms this into a spatial event (rather than a primarily decorative event), literally unfolding to allow north sun into the living space and then continuing this unfolding poetically into the garden.

It exploits the entire site using subtle axial distortions to deflect view corridors and avoid strict axial focusing. This axis is intersected, folded and punctured strategically, revealing fragments of other spaces and creating a sense of spatial generosity out of a collection of small spaces.

This allusion to more space is reinforced by the intersection of the old and new parts. A ‘sleeving process’ results, where the original roof form remains but is transformed into an internal spatial experience. Tiles replacing the plasterboard create an endless depth of sectional space. This connection concept is explored in a later project (Swan Street) and transformed from a visual spatial event into a functional and visual event.

Reynolds explores traditional West Australian domestic forms of the lean-to and the bull nose verandah and exaggerates these while considering them as functional devices. As Duncan Richards noted,

Paradoxical wit in architectural design is as potentially contentious as humour in criticism, but equally it can be enlightening and enjoyable. There are many examples in this small project. I especially like the morphing of the roof form into a wall and then into furniture, a shelf internally and a seat externally. You will find others if you look carefully. Possibly the most enjoyable is the architect’s assertion that the project is a reinterpretation of the lean-to tradition in local housing. In this case the lean-to has become extremely assertive, even aggressive, and the result is rather like the caravan towing the family car.\[31\]

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Reynolds is created around the adoption of dualities that permeate the design at multiple scales. It begins with the spatial contrast of the ‘somewhat pessimistic, protective and battened-down, hobbit-like retreat from the vast alien landscape, and an open-air, horizon-embracing manifold that shields you from the extremes of the climate but does not remove you from its immensity’.\[32\] The dualities continue between the sympathetic street appearance and exaggerated, rear garden appearance, the dense, elastic rear wall (that admits cooling winds and provides thermal mass) and the taught, stretched garden-facing façade constructed from glass and clad with recycled floor joists.

Stretched Space

The transition from one quality to the other is exaggerated by a spatial compression and then release, an attempt to create a spatial explosion. The space is then stretched and further bent and twisted (elastic space) before being cupped in the hands of the lean-to roof, hovering slightly above the floor to reveal the garden below.

At Gooseberry Hill a central, under-developed spine existed in

31 D Richards, Architectural Review Australia, Residential 03, Niche Media Victoria, p. 76.
Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.

Gooseberry Hill: spatial form and strategic placement of openings capture the bush walk experience.

Dunedin Street: familiar made unfamiliar.

Hugo Häring Cow Shed, Gut Garkau 1922-1926. (Blundell Jones)

Reynolds Residence: recycled floor joists showing the marks of a past life.
rendered unfamiliar by the passages of time and weathering. Gooseberry Hill finds its craft by turning its back on the city, looking towards the farmland and adopting this ‘agricultural’ language of craft. It explores the sophisticated possibility of this language creating economical-yet-challenging solutions. At the same time it continues the investigation of poetic sustainability (re-use of old decking for expressive sunshades) and achieving the extra-ordinary out of the ordinary.

At times it explores a craft that embraces the loss of control by the architect. This is seen in the concrete retaining wall poured against industrial bubble wrap – the final outcome was at the time unknown.

There are other moments in this project where the craft of the synthetic is placed against the natural. Green polycarbonate walls abstract the ‘actual landscape’, creating tension and once more intensifying the experience of the ‘real’, raising awareness and encouraging questions. ‘This shift alone says much about an anthropological shift from a Hobbit-like survival aesthetic to a more expansively optimistic grasping of the future – at least by upwardly mobile professionals who can afford these radical makeovers.’

22. Reflection on Other Renovations
As Duncan Richards noted in Architectural Review Australia (AR),

The Reynolds house is a small project, essentially an addition and alteration, the sort of project that nurtures the small firm, even if rarely financially rewarding, so should it be expected to carry the burden of an elaborate analysis? Unquestionably the answer is yes! The Reynolds house synthesizes past influences and previous architectural projects so effectively that it is likely to serve as a model for future directions, particularly for domestic projects.

The projects discussed in detail above are highlighted here because they have been critical, defining moments in the establishment of a framework for subsequent investigations. As anticipated by Duncan Richards, the principles embodied in the Reynolds House became the model for renovations and new works, culminating in the most recent project, Swan Street.

Reynolds began in a moment full of immense ambition and naivety. At the time, everything seemed possible, there was a distinct quality that is best described by Richards as ‘Irrational Joyousness’:

One quality of this project is mentioned with a feeling of slight embarrassment, but it cannot be ignored. It seems to promote a feeling of irrational joyousness rarely found when exploring buildings. In my own case the euphoria suggested it would be enjoyable to put Creedence Clearwater Revival’s, ‘Looking Out My Back Door’ on the sound system, turn up the volume, sit on the deck and drift off into a reverie of what South Perth might be like if this type of project was more generally accepted.

Dunedin Street began in a moment of emotional pain, sitting in a specialist dental surgery waiting for two hours to have my pre wisdom teeth extraction inspection. The search for a solution

34 L van Schaik, Architectural Review Australia, Residential 07, Niche Media, Victoria, p. 73.
35 D Richards, Architectural Review Australia, Residential 03, Niche Media, Victoria, p. 76.
36 D Richards, Architectural Review Australia, Residential 03, Niche Media, Victoria, p. 76.
was not easy, unlike the thinking for Reynolds, which began in a relaxed holiday state as I travelled through Finland. Finding the solution for Dunedin involved hours of sketching, modelling, 3-d modelling and the challenge of a restricted budget. At the time, for Martyn, this project was ‘trying too hard’ and needed to ‘calm down’. These words were enough to encourage me to continue to fight for the solution. Eventually this project broke ground in the investigation of an illusory unfolding spatial experience exploiting the formal qualities of the existing residence through the reinterpretation of traditional pitched roof forms.

Gooseberry Hill introduced the potential to explore the ‘actual’ landscape through folding space, compression and frayed edges while introducing fabricated synthetic materials that created the opportunity to question this very landscape. This was enacted through the role of duality. It is at times visually eclectic but this was deemed acceptable in the context of the bush setting.

There are numerous backyard renovations that have complemented the renovations noted above. Each has a specific position and explores a particular quality.

Egina Street was a built exploration of the oblique, hinged and elastic space on the unbuilt Wilner Residence, and introduced the notion of an interior constructed landscape topography.

Matlock 128 literally flips the existing roof form, transforming the formal qualities of the typical suburban roof into spatial qualities.

Steedman developed the technique of referencing the existing host house in material, texture, form and light – with sensitivity not apparent in the previous projects. A collection of clip-ons engage with the existing mature tree, intertwining the house with the garden.

Podias introduces a folding plan and section that explores the merits of the Mies/Häring debate – outstretched planar arms are influenced by Mies van der Rohe’s courtyard houses, and a stepping section references the work of Aalto. The walls collect fragments of green space that reference those in the surrounding garden suburb of Coolbinia or focus on existing trees. It is the first project to work with the most standard of Perth construction materials – face brick and tile – and it manipulates these by referencing past decorative techniques.

Tate Street represents a climax in our work with found and recycled materials while sensitively introducing light. In a rather Dadaist manner, 80-year-old doors rescued from a salvage yard are used as cladding, retaining the leadlight glass, paint and marks of their past lives. This interest connects to work by one of the Hills Designers, Gene Mapps, whose innovative use of doors for wall and ceiling lining in 1960 was delight in the economy and not delight in ‘time’. A recycled, pressed-metal ceiling is maintained and introduced as an intense moment of surprise. The entire site is bound by a recycled brick matt, which collects and supports all the activities of the house.

23. Swan Street: The End and the beginning
Swan Street is the latest completed project and carefully considers the personal precedent. It is also an appropriate moment to reflect. It began shortly after the commencement of the Masters program, and construction was completed last month. It has not only followed the progress of the Masters (and been reflected upon throughout), but has also come to
represent the culmination of the backyard renovations. It seems an appropriate time to reflect upon this, to demonstrate the development in thinking that has resulted both from the Masters and from the evolution of the backyard renovations.

**Constructed Isolation?**
Swan Street is anchored to the immediate context but simultaneously alludes to a world quite removed from the surrounding environment. It adopts the green polycarbonate material used in Gooseberry Hill but transforms this from an abstraction of actual nature to the illusion of a missing or past nature. The green light emitted strategically permeates the house, creating ‘green’ space while re-emitting this to the street at night, producing an effect reminiscent of the coloured glass over the entrance doors of neighbouring Federation homes. It embraces the folding sectional space of Dunedin while introducing this language in plan. The result creates a sense of surprise and delight; it is a form of resistance to maintain elements of surprise when everybody wants certainty.

The folding plan creates an aperspective quality; traditional reference points are reduced to create an unfolding and refolding space engaging with the interior and exterior; dissolving barriers via formal qualities instead of by simply using glass. This, combined with the green light, alludes to living in an atypical suburban space, perhaps closer to a forest, passages of filtered green light, fractured views through the woodland…

The folding plan was a late introduction to the design. This was a breakthrough moment that I had been wanting for some time and I was encouraged by the reflective practice pursuit. So much was embodied in this small moment – it had taken more than six months to achieve. What may seem from the outside to have been a simple, small act was in fact a personal renewal of faith and understanding of past research, of relevance beyond the scope of the project at hand.

**Time**
Swan Street considers multiple moments of time – immediate time, daily time, seasonal time and a long-term time – that will be defined by aspects of the project.

This is partly achieved by a materiality that actively encourages the visibility of time. The recycled jarrah battens that lap the vertical plywood joints will weather naturally based on their exposure to the elements, creating an evolving and inconsistent contrast with the dark, painted plywood panels. Slow time will emerge as the copper fence capping oxidises and stains the (manipulated) traditional, white, painted picket fence. This is complemented with a mass of green-leaved Anigozanthos (Kangaroo Paw) planted at the base of the fence, flowering each spring against the ‘evolving’ qualities of the picket fence.

There are other, more immediate moments – the expression of the water flowing from the roof, the shifting sun patterns on the folding ceiling of the main bedroom, the deciduous trees placed on the axis of Olivia’s room, the fractured prism of light that slowly moves up the wall, and the diffuse and direct green light. Collectively they create a composition of ‘time’ demanding attention.

**Craft**
Swan Street reinterprets the craft of a past time and the original Peppermint Grove and Mosman Park houses by Sir Talbot Hobbs and William Williams, while indirectly referencing Australian...
Swan Street: plywood panel set-out construction drawing.

Swan Street is both a summary of the past and a beginning point for the future. In the investigation of 'Constructing Families' and their deliberate application, in the reaffirmation of many years of research and the defining of new drawing techniques; 'for the moment I want only to point out a paradox: architecture as we know it can only escape the flatness imposed by drawing through drawing'.

24. Reflection: New Houses and the Renovations
A body of new houses now dominates the practice with renovations declining. This is partly due to the growth of the practice and the time commitment required to fulfill the desired outcomes. Ideas that evolve from the necessary intimacy when working specifically with an existing fabric are difficult to pass on to other team members. The new houses allow a more open dialogue between partners and team members, a more inclusive approach that allows others a sense of ownership.

New houses offer a new form of freedom, but, perhaps paradoxically, this freedom can be considered a loss. The renovations considered the context of a suburb but, more specifically, the context of an existing residence. The building became a host – with and against which new works were able to react. In the absence of a specific host, how do the new houses evolve? Do the field of concerns remain the same? Do the techniques remain the same?

Reynolds alterations and additions were underway as Dawesville was being designed. This allows a direct comparison to be made between the ideas explored in an alteration and addition and the ideas explored in a new house.

Place
As noted above Reynolds explores the context of the existing house, it also elaborates on a broader context – one that relates to many inner-city suburbs of the same era: formal devices including the bull nose veranda and the lean-to, and the role of the verandah as a mediator between interior and exterior. Dawesville also references the surrounding suburbs and looks for guidance in the rapidly disappearing 1950s weekender homes – homes that represent a past way of living and a respect for the land. Dawesville also reinterprets traditional devices such as the 'sleep-out' for climatic and pragmatic purposes.

Both projects create autonomy in their immediate relationships to place. Reynolds constructs isolation via a fabricated native garden and carefully placed openings, borrowing neighbouring landscape; Dawesville constructs isolation through distance (from the street and above the ground) and by regenerating the native garden under the house.

Both projects reinterpret built tradition, but the traditions are 30 years apart and they both construct an isolation to create autonomy and encourage contemplation.

Reynolds and Dawesville exploit duality as a device for sensory

vernacular interpretations of the English Arts and Crafts houses by Williams and Cohen.
stimulation. Dawesville compresses at the rear and expands to the view, with passive spaces predominately at the rear and living spaces at the front; Reynolds achieves this between the old and new parts. They both expand to the point where they engage with the exterior.

The paradox of this ‘learning’ from past traditions lies in the public perception declaring the projects as undesired foreigners. This is evident in the public’s naming of Dawesville as the ‘shearing shed on legs’, or ‘the grandstand’, and Reynolds as ‘the caravan’ or ‘the Boeing 747’. This is symptomatic of a failure to understand, or a choice to ignore local tradition; of a society that prefers to import international traditions.

Geometry
While the geometry of Dawesville is predominately passive in comparison to that of Reynolds, this is quickly supplemented by its exposure to the immense view, the horizon and dynamic external conditions. Reynolds relies on geometries to position the occupant in an equally dynamic experience. While one relies on geometry to create a dynamic relationship to place, the other relies on existing nature to create this relationship. One encourages a sense of ‘joyous irrationalism’, the other creates a desire for contemplation.

Time
Reynolds engages with weathering (future time) and past time, while Dawesville attempts to resist weathering; durability and the reduction of long-term maintenance demands are necessary pre-requisites for houses of retirement that are also located four metres above the ground. Instead Dawesville captures present time (shadow) and transforms a flat surface into a dynamic, optically manipulated surface in the context of the immense view. For retirees, animation of present time is given preference over considerations of past and future time.

Craft
Both exploit the craft of their chosen materials, the plasticity of a rendered brick wall or the economy, restraint and robustness of an exterior, metal-clad, framed wall. Material and construction preference is based on a project-by-project assessment and not on preconceived architectural impositions.

26. Wilner and Dawesville: Opposing discourses or performative architecture?
Previously I discussed Reynolds and Dawesville in terms of relationship to place and inheritance of past traditions. A comparison can also be made between Dawesville (1999–2002) and Wilner (1999–2001), two new houses being designed at the same time. Wilner is located in South Perth on a corner subdivided site among 90-year-old houses interspersed with modern-day heritage replicas.

These two projects are examples of the seemingly opposing architectural discourses of Mies and Häring. While Dawesville adopts a strict orthogonal language of post and beam, Wilner explores the potential of oblique planning with an elastic and hinged perimeter skin. The reference for this geometry is not found in the adjacent properties but in the ideas of Häring and Scharoun. This project subconsciously references Hans Scharoun’s ‘Haus Schminke’ – a defining project in the Scharoun oeuvre and a stepping-stone to architecture free of geometric associations.

Both projects are referenced to demonstrate a flexible
methodology where the design ‘seeks to adopt its ideal form through a process termed “Leistungserfüllung” or “Performance-Fulfillment”’.38 (Not only must architecture contain performance, it must itself be performative.) Dawesville suppresses performative expression to allow the discipline of restraint and economy to prevail.

27. Wilner and Wilner: The shift to performance fulfilment
Wilner began as a new residence and then changed to an alteration and addition of the existing residence. This provides the opportunity to study the shift between alterations and additions and new houses in a reverse scenario. After working on the new house for one year, the shift to a renovation was initially difficult to comprehend. Eventually, in a breakthrough moment, a solution was discovered where the design for the new house (‘the ideal house’) was laid over the existing house (‘the un-ideal house’). This created a hybrid type that contained fragments of the oblique and elastic crossed with fragments of the inherited.

Unfortunately, no project was built. However this was a process that enabled, almost by default, the same transition that occurred in the work of Hans Scharoun. After Haus Schminke, the work of Scharoun relied less on geometric ordering systems with the form being determined by investigations of use and movement. This approach has been termed ‘Performance Fulfilment’39. These qualities may not have emerged in my work for some time if it were not for the required shift in the project from a new house to a renovation.

28. Current Houses: Testing the renovation devices
Each renovation attempts to discover an individual solution relative to the host house. Each new house discovers its uniqueness through the field of concerns explored in the renovations applied to sites with individual characteristics and loaded with individual memories. As a result of this approach, each house discovers a unique solution. This may, as in the earlier Kilburn residence, be a reactionary reference to the context of the suburb, or a reference to a rapidly disappearing form of living and construction. The new houses may explore the silence of tactility, or they may attempt restraint where others practice indulgence.

Coleman explores the illusion of the home as a holiday retreat, exploiting the tapering boundaries with a vanishing point that meets in the neighbouring property. All walls align with this point, creating a ‘constructed’, one-point perspective; the vanishing point is denied visibility by a wall at the end of the property that serves to exaggerate the illusion.

Analogous to a wedge of Camembert cheese, the tactile and delicious materials are reserved for the interior spaces and courtyards. The large, anonymous, external white walls resonate as powerful barriers, carefully concealing the internal richness of the private world.

Colvin finds its influence in the local diminishing craft, the rigour and economical use of material minimising waste. It also finds inspiration in international ideas, imagined by Jorn Utzon, of public congregations on the beach, and it legitimises these for a residential situation. The subtle roof forms of Baegvard

38 H Häring, Approaches to Form, 1925.
Church that resulted from Utzon’s imaginings are translated as a sequence of folding pitched roofs aligning with the plan to create an extruded space focusing on the ocean views. It combines the strictness of the Dawesville Plan with the delight of the Dunedin Street and Swan Street ceilings.

Gidgegannup began as a line in the landscape occupying the space between the earth and sky, cranked in plan to embrace and be embraced by the surrounding landscape. Like Gooseberry Hill it adopts a sophisticated agricultural aesthetic while introducing a new sensory exploration of temperature. It forms part of the Dawesville lineage but enjoys the inherent freedom of no site boundaries.

Caves exploits a cranked or folded spine to collect the view of a tree in the foreground and deflect focus to the distant ocean. The folded plan transfers into the section with only a loose correlation. Dr Jeykll and Mr Hyde are explored one over the top of the other.

Meares adopts the Walmajarri desert techniques of platforms, pods and parasols – and a material and formal quality that disassociates this from the old houses on the street – accompanied by an abstracted garden attempting a form of wilderness. In spirit, is this project perhaps closer to Walmajarri than it is to the suburb of Dalkeith?

Cattell unfolds along a cranked axis and ceiling, but with a new interest in the tactile, with the familiar made unfamiliar. Bricks are turned inside out, brass door handles are left untreated to show the marks of time, copper trims will quickly oxidise and stain the white painted panels. This learns from the time sensibility of Aalto and the material refinement of Lewerentz. We hope for a refined subtlety that will help to guide future work.

Coleman Eagle Bay completes the collection of landscape observers with heroism unachievable in the others. It abstracts the native landscape and cultivates the landscape; lessons learned at Gooseberry Hill are employed with new scale, clarity and refinement. The platforms of Gooseberry Hill now step to follow the site and create subtle programmatic boundaries.

Childs explores fluid space for a fluid site with a fluid view (the ocean), and formal qualities evolved from this exploration. This is part of the cranked and folded lineage of Caves-Cattell-Childs and then Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club.

McCowan, the latest and largest, explores dualities of subtlety to the street and directness to the river view, material constraint contrasted with square-metre and lifestyle indulgence.

29. The Reflective Process Effecting Change in the Nature of the Work
The reflective process has enabled conscious understandings of what and how we design, interact, and define ourselves individually and as a practice within our local, national and international communities. This has coincided with local, national and international events that have complemented the reflective process. Each event, in its moment, became an opportunity to further the reflective Masters process; some related to very specific aspects of investigation (CCAA Lecture) others to the dynamic of iph’s field of concerns and our typologies of operation (New Trends of Architecture).

The past three years of investigation have spanned from birth
Preparation for the ‘Cement Concrete and Aggregates Australia’ lecture 13.07.06.

Swan and Hillside Gardens: wonder and the rainbow.

Gidgegannup and Swan: multiple sensory experiments.

Origins (immigrant aspiration) and partner relationships to the interrogation of completed projects by diagramming. This has coalesced to a point where new projects are designed using diagramming as an active form of investigation (rather than as a retrospective activity).

The diagram technique attempts initially to achieve clarity of the parts, and subsequently to maintain clarity for the duration of a project. It allows all team members to enter a project through a collection of drawn theamatics and allows clients (and authorities) to understand the background of a project. The development of this technique coincided with the preparation of concept design booklets that further collate the background experiences, sketches and ideas of a project, relegating the actual plan from the beginning (where it formerly drew focus) to the end of the discussion.

This shift, over the course of the Masters, also coincided with a tripling in size of the iph practice. With this has come a demand for more and larger projects and less partner time allocated to each. The project concept booklets are a technique for protecting the project while creating space for others to contribute in an informed manner.

More important is the question of how the work has changed as a result of this reflective process. The process of reflection creates a consciousness of what was previously considered ‘operating on intuition’. But does a potential paradox emerge here, where the gaining of this knowledge risks inhibiting the capacity for intuition to remain a significant creative factor? This has been discussed by Philip Fischer:

The Aesthetic Paradox – that wonder depends on first sight and first experience and yet by the time that we are old enough to have the experience of wonder we may have already used up and dulled by repetition all of the most significant potential experiences of the truly wonderful... are we left, once we are ready for wonder, with only the poor cousin of just those experiences that happened to us long before the structure of ‘having an experience’ existed at all?41

It is also possible to view this ‘creation of consciousness’ as a way of finding new wonder in past experiences; this is the approach we have taken with the investigation and comparison of old and new projects. Armed with a consciously understood collection of devices and thematic concerns, the new projects continue the exploration of ambiguity but explore a new tactility and sensory delight. They have a greater understanding of the Perth light, and now shift to ways of poetically manipulating this instead of applying a purely pragmatic approach related to heating and cooling.

This has also coincided with a shift from dealing with colour and light as an applied skin to exploring a resonating, deep-coloured, natural light, as in Swan Street.

The current explorations examine the possibilities for multiple sensory experience. Gidgegannup commenced this experiment with the use of temperature to articulate program and manipulate connections to the exterior. Future experiments will explore sound, touch, smell and, potentially, taste.

40 Refer to Martyn Hook PhD.
There has also been a transfer of knowledge gained from working in remote areas. Devices explored in the desert have now transferred to the suburbs of Perth. Meares is an example of this with its transfer of ‘pods, platforms and parasols’ into an affluent, conservative suburb, as is Swan Street in its testing of the parasol wall. This investigation will continue, but informed by the additional desire to explore the contrasting relationships to landscape expressed in the suburban and the remote works. In an interview with Margaret Throsby I was asked to comment on the difference between remote Aboriginal dwelling and white suburban dwelling and noted (apart from the obvious impact of distance on construction technique and cost) the relationship of both to the landscape. The remote works consider the edge of the building as an extension of the natural landscape (and the interior can almost be considered a separate building), while the suburban works consider the edge of the building as an extrusion of the interior. The evolution of a ‘hobbit-like’ survival existence into an embrace of the landscape remains a challenge for us to explore further. The extra-sensory investigation will possibly form part of a solution to this challenge.

After almost ten years of iPh, the origins of the recent houses are complex and difficult to fully identify. Perhaps they are beyond the scope of this discussion, however it is fair to state that certain projects could not exist if it were not for the reflection that this Masters has generated.

Coleman Eagle Bay may have its initial origins in Dawesville but the sophistication of observation and abstraction was developed in the Gooseberry Hill project. This remains to be tested and assessed after construction. Meares’ origin may be found in the early Reynolds alteration and addition but it is also directly linked to the Walmajarri community centre and the unbuilt Broome Bird Observatory that preceded this. Swan Street is easily linked to Dunedin Street, Caves (unbuilt) and Gooseberry Hill.

This reflection process validated the importance of the early projects as part of a definite journey towards richer understanding. The diagramming of lineages continues with each new project and the project-specific diagramming tests, in the realm of personal precedent, the validity of new ideas.

30. Future

‘Australian suburbs are not primarily concerned with natural ecology but with human ecology. The suburbs are a complex socio-spatial system, a readable guide book on territorial limits, patterns and standards of acceptable community behaviour.’

While the renovations and new houses are ‘one-off’ responses for single families, the intent is for them to contribute to a broader discussion about Perth housing stock and social behaviour. They do not necessarily attempt to solve the dilemma of low density but they do demonstrate intelligent architecture that makes thoughtful and, at times, innovative use of the space available. Dawesville was the first demonstration of densification through the purchase of an ‘unwanted’ back-garden – unwanted because it was deemed impossible (or expensive) to build on. Not only did this project create an economical example but it also demonstrated an intelligent solution where the introduction of the building created more useable space for the site. This project won an environmental award and has become popular mainly with city residents desiring a low-impact, low-cost weekend retreat. Dunedin Street demonstrates the capacity of

---

small, inner-city suburban sites to accommodate growing family requirements including maximising useable exterior living and play space.

The reflective process has enabled a calculated and informed shift to larger projects. The larger projects search for identity by reacting to place or inventing identity in anticipation of some future change. Importantly, each project attempts to maintain a level of specific intensity equivalent to that found in the renovations and small houses, and to empower the individual with choice and diversity while exploring new possibilities for social discourse. The success of this shift in scale will take some time to manifest in a form that permits reflection.

Our proposal for the Think Brick 07 competition seriously examined the possibility for a new form of suburban housing. We explored the possibilities for average families to individually embrace issues of affordability, increased density, improved use of available sites, appropriate selection of materials, and low-tech sustainability, as well as the potential for new forms of family relationships and an improved, social model for interaction with the street. Most importantly this solution would not require legislative change or the support of the project home developers. This also forms part of the future assessment.

It is no small task to achieve significant change at any level – the personal, the household, the small community or the nation. Most of the time, most people are reasonably content with the way things are and reluctant to embrace change, especially at a fundamental level. I believe there are four steps to major change: discontent, a new vision, viable pathways and commitment.

During the RMIT GRC in October 2007, Leon van Schaik commented that the suburbs will need to ‘work harder’ in an environmental context. As noted by Ian Lowe, this will not be easy, but the actions of the individual will play an important role and the manner in which these manifest will be equally as important. This Masters has explored the shifting scale from alterations and additions to new residences to multiple residences and to propositions for a new suburbia. It demonstrates how big ideas in small projects can, and hopefully will, manifest into large-scale constructed works. It demonstrates the role that the architecture of each scale may play in the evolution of a society that places pride in the particularities of its own place and heritage while protecting and improving the physical and environmental possibilities.

This is a vision of a future Perth that empowers the individual to accept responsibility and help guide growth. If we accept Ian Lowe’s four steps to major change, we must acknowledge that we are currently in a state of increasing discontent. Faced with the challenges of fewer viable pathways and shifting commitments, perhaps the best role of the architect with some vision is to seize on the discontent, to educate by example, to demonstrate how to negotiate the pathways and to do this with an infectious commitment and a little ‘irrational joyousness’.  

---


Faber, T. *Jörn Utzon Houses in Fredensborg*, Ernst + Sohn, Germany, 1992.


van Schaik, L (ed.). *Interstitial Modernism*, RMIT University Press.


---

**Selected Bibliography**

Constructed Diagrams: recent research investigating spatial and shadow qualities of past and present projects.
Acknowledgements

Professor Leon van Schaik for his guidance and support
Professor Sand Helsel for continued informed comment
Zelinda Bafie for her patience and ongoing words of encouragement
My parents David and Ena Iredale who have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams
Finn and Martyn who have shared this experience and given support when it is most needed
Glenn Russell who has shared many of the overseas study tours
Stephen Neille for the numerous conversations in and out of the water
Penny Anderson, Isabel Legge and all the iph collaborators who have given extra time to help create this body of work and support this research.
Penelope Modra for the weekend reviews of this document

Credits

Photographs:
Fred Albronda- pages 25, 30
Peter Bennett- pages 15, 16,
Patrick Bingham-Hall- pages 24, 30
Robert Frith- page 26
Shannon MacGrath- pages 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 30
Shirley Melville- page 14