

An Itinerant Architect

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

An itinerant architect—one who learns, teaches, and practices architecture on the road—has the ability to improve spaces that would otherwise never reach their fullest potential. The profession of architecture as it stands is insufficient and does not properly address what people need. As a means for educating and improving space, an itinerant architect involves those unfamiliar with their own design abilities and needs throughout the design process, encouraging the appropriate customisation of their environments.

This thesis follows an itinerant architect in three stages. In the first he navigates the metropolis of Lima, where a series of interventions is completed as a means to understanding the capital city. He then returns to Canada and in the second chapter revisits familiar territories where he gains different perspectives through several additional projects. The third and final chapter follows his travels throughout Southeast Asia as he experiences what it means to practice architecture as a true itinerant.

The itinerant architect self-educates: he learns by doing. In stripping the profession down to its first principles, he improves space at a fundamental level. Lessons are learned as he abandons the comforts of the familiar to pursue the challenge of creating in a foreign place. It is in these unfamiliar situations that an itinerant architect thrives; challenges are welcomed, the vernacular is embraced, and experiences are gained.

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INTRODUCTION

For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling - to build is in itself already to dwell.¹

1 Martin Heidegger,
Poetry, Language, Thought
(New York: Harper & Row,
1971), 145.

Behind us lay the whole of America and everything Dean and I had previously known about life, and life on the road. We had finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic.²

² Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1957), Part 4, Ch. 5.

The pursuit of what lies at the end of the road has been the focus of my efforts for the past several years, and I used architecture as a means for realising it. I have traveled, I have built, and I have learned. This thesis encapsulates a self-education beyond the classroom, and in seeking the vocation of an itinerant architect, I have documented, sketched, and designed my way through a number of foreign places. Using a series of domestic interventions as a catalyst, I experienced what it means to be an architect who builds for people. In my pursuit to realise suitable architecture, I entered into personal relationships with not only my clients, but also the sites and projects as I believe that appropriate design needs to engage the architect completely on an almost spiritual level.

I took the role of the architect and stripped it down to the naked essentials. Gone are the contracts, the materials, and the builders; I reduced it to solving a set of problems that address how people live. The only tools on hand were those I had within.

*Is 'home' where we are most ourselves or is home the very thing that exiles us from ourselves?*³

*How can this be turned into a field of research? How can I draw a thesis from these past experiences? I would say that the sense of place and belonging is a constant theme throughout, as is the therapeutic nature of my constant transition.*⁴

*Our understanding of the city is heavily influenced by how we choose to reside, and through an understanding of this place of habitation, one begins to form an image of what the city actually is and how we simultaneously affect and are affected by it.*⁵

3 Greg Madison, "Existential Migration", *Existential Migration*, <http://www.gregmadison.net/existence.htm> (accessed 12 April, 2012).

4 Early thesis musings: February & March 2012.

5 Ibid.

IT BEGAN IN ROME...

Lost, searching for answers among the winding neighbourhoods of the Eternal City, I gradually worked my way through to the question at the heart of it all.

Only to discover that there was no question.

Does there need to be a question? Can there be answers if there is no question? I'm not even sure I have answers now.

It began with an address: *Via Cosmo Egiziano 11*, where I found myself thinking through the act of doing. I sketched, I observed, I questioned, and I worked.

And then, two days later, I moved on.

I would like to know which is worse: being raped a hundred times by negro pirates, having a buttock chopped off, running the gauntlet of the Bulgars, being flogged and handed in an auto-da-fé, being dissected, rowing in a galley, in short, suffering all the misfortunes we've all suffered, or simply being stuck here doing nothing?" "That is a good question," said Candide.⁶

6 Voltaire, *Candide and Zadig* (Clinton: Colonial Press Inc, 1966), 91.

I was determined to understand Rome from a range of differing perspectives. Through analysing previous travels of mine, I had identified the *home* to play an integral part in shaping my memory of place, and so it was my intention to obtain a unique portrait of Rome from several different locations. I was lucky enough to find three homeowners willing to host me for several nights each,⁷ and the results narrowed my scope considerably.

But why not *build* as a means for understanding place?

I have since compiled a sequential documentation of my activity across Europe, Canada, Latin America, and Southeast Asia as I have approximated an itinerant lifestyle, using my architectural abilities to experience a variety of homes and develop my research. My work consists of a series of analyses and corresponding built projects that together construct a narrative to address some fundamental architectural questions.

A typical project involves a two to three week residence in a local home as I study the neighbourhood, the dwelling, and the individual. I then design and build an architectural intervention that responds to my analyses while contributing to the evolving narrative.

Initiated in Rome in March 2012, the narrative has followed my itinerant lifestyle in three different stages:

PART I: UNDERSTANDING A METROPOLIS

MAR - JULY 2012

The first significant foray into my thesis research began with no clear agenda and the purchase of a one-way ticket to the desert capital of Lima. I chose Peru as I had successfully backpacked through Central America several years prior and sought to experience more of Latin American culture. Several Peruvian attractions, from the world-class gastronomy to the stunning Inca architecture, convinced me to make this the point of departure for my exploration of the continent.

Fortunate circumstances found me in Lima, and I decided to call it my home for the next three months. As I made the decision to conduct my research entirely within the city limits, I received a very thorough impression of Lima through a series of explorations and projects scattered across the metropolis. I ventured outside Lima only twice; once, to surf in the coastal town of Trujillo, and the second time to marvel at the ruins of Machu Picchu.

PART II: REDISCOVERING FAMILIARITY

AUGUST 2012 - APRIL 2013

The second phase of my thesis occurred by means of a series of sporadic satellite trips based out of Cambridge, Ontario, where I was a student. Whereas in Lima I lived in the homes in which the interventions took place, I adopted a different methodology of working in Canada. As I was largely limited by courses at the school of architecture, I could only afford to venture out occasionally. This meant that the projects were far more drawn out, and my chosen homeowners had to be accommodating. With this in mind I chose three friends to collaborate with on an assortment of projects over several months.

PART III: AN ITINERANT ARCHITECT

APRIL - JULY 2013

I finally realised a true itinerant lifestyle during these fourteen weeks as I traveled across the mountains and jungles of Thailand, Lao, Cambodia, and Vietnam, leaving a trail of interventions in my wake. It is no surprise that my most memorable experiences as an itinerant architect arose during this time, and I am fortunate to have had this opportunity. I chose this part of the world as accessibility throughout the countries is excellent, the food is renown, and I had never experienced Asia before.

I completed five projects in total, and made an effort to work with homeowners who lacked the means to adapt their homes to their current situations. My work culminated in a three week residence in the mountains of Vietnam where I collaborated with a disadvantaged family on improving their home.

ITINERANT METHODOLOGIES

Each intervention required an extended stay as a guest as this close interaction with the client and their living space enabled me to develop highly comprehensive site analyses. In living with the homeowner, a biased, incomplete, and yet entirely appropriate account of the context in which they lived was revealed. This was further supplemented by my own observations of the neighbourhood, its history, and architectural styles. This information, combined with the occupant's needs – apparent or unrealised – inspired an intervention that served as a catalyst for the homeowner to begin to interrogate their environment. Involving the homeowner in the design and construction of these interventions was a crucial step in ensuring that the modification of their environment continued after the completion of the project. Since each intervention lacked external funding or equipment, the size of the interventions remained relatively small. When conducted within a site as intimate as the home however, these projects were able to have a significant impact on both the environment and the mindset of the inhabitant.

Excerpt from a paper written for a conference (October 2013):

Highly customised and responsive living elements are an established typology with a rich architectural history. In 1923, German artist Kurt Schwitters took it upon himself to create a highly personalized sculptural intervention in his family home in Hanover – the first and most famous of his Merzbau projects. Designed around an assortment of relics and artefacts that fit within its geometries, he constructed an incredible project over the next fourteen years of his life, altering his home at the same rate as his growth as an individual.⁸ Unfortunately destroyed during an Allied bombing raid in 1943, the Merzbau stood as a dynamic reminder that although abstracted in form, personal experiences can affect architecture as much as architecture can impact the way we live. Schwitters seized control of his environment. His experiments and ideas share many similarities with those of philosopher Giorgio Agamben who said in 2009, “The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness.”⁹ While this ability to reflect upon one’s environment and step outside the confines of social cognizance may be ambitious, it is a skill everyone can begin to grasp given apposite encouragement. Thinking critically about one’s environment is one of the most vital skills inherent to a good design education; however, teaching this concept can pose a significant challenge. The act of making via collaboration is one way in which critical thinking can be taught as it involves the application of these concepts towards practical ends.

8 Roger Cardinal, “Collecting and Collage-Making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters” in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 75-88.

9 Giorgio Agamben, “What is the Contemporary”, in *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 39-54.

INSPIRATION: JACK KEROUAC

Ever the great tale of wandering across America, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* captures perfectly a restless search for meaning and place. There is no clear order to the story; events happen, places change, and the characters develop. It is almost certain that anyone with the will to pursue personal growth by means of traveling will find it, just as Neil Cassidy and Kerouac did during the events of this tale. This book harbours no false romanticisms of the road; it accurately portrays what it is to wander. Difficult at times, exhilarating at others, one of the consistent themes throughout the novel is that of development.

My own approach to traveling is one of minimal planning. If one plans too much, one will almost certainly miss the important things. I never planned to stay in Lima for three months, but when I got there, I found myself in a situation that smiled favourably upon extending my stay well past the date on my visa - who was I to say no? When I found myself in Asia, many of my travel plans were shaped by visa restrictions and bits of information I had garnered from other travelers. At one point I took a significant detour to Cambodia where although no interventions occurred, I gained some valuable insights that were crucial to the conclusion of my thesis.

I consider myself a very fluid traveler, adapting and altering 'plans' as necessary. I have learned that a place is often only as good as the people you meet, and much like Kerouac who lingered in several locations when he happened upon interesting people, I will often adopt a flexible working schedule in favour of good company. This happened continuously throughout my thesis, and while it may have ultimately extended the length of my graduate studies, I cannot possibly harbour any regrets.

The quintessential itinerant, Neil Cassidy (aka Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*) has boundless energy and an incredible zest for life. Kerouac cannot understand why he is so drawn to Dean, and follows him without hesitation on many the adventure. When he's with Dean, he feels alive; when he travels, he feels alive. It's a book about finding meaning and place, and so there is a strong connection between it and the work I've been doing. While I don't see myself as Cassidian in nature, I do sympathise with his quest for meaning.

Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again; we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life.¹⁰

(excerpt continued)

In much of the architecture produced today the ego of the architect often trumps the personalization of architecture, and the resultant buildings are more likely to reflect the tired architectural styles of the latest magazines rather than the identity or needs of the client. This is why design must not be solely reliant upon the architect, but must be understood and shared with the client. While the architect can never be replaced, they have a responsibility to encourage appropriate design through leading by example, and in some cases, working on site to educate through making.

The vitality of space is dependent upon the suitability of the design with consideration for our necessities as social beings. In the early eighties, the Memphis Group addressed this as they created a series of unusual objects as a critique of the way people designed and lived. A founding member of the collective, Andrea Branzi, said this of the relationship between contemporary society and architecture: "Today's men and women suffer from a continual . . . violation of their sense of identity . . . This problem cannot be solved with traditional architectural composition, by construction architecture as mega-objects containing generic functions". Instead he called for "A complex, literary, emotional, and symbolic relationship between man and his system of objects and structures".¹¹ The work of the Memphis Group featured highly creative furniture that seemed to exclaim to the public with saturated colours and asymmetrical shapes that there were alternatives to the standardized templates society had become complacent with. An excessive, inefficient bookshelf and an unusual armchair were designed as a critique of our role relative to it.¹² Their ambitions were to question the relationship between man and his possessions, while developing the sense of identity and purpose through customized space. They adopted the position that design is like a spiritual journey, and to truly create something relevant, one must first engage the subject completely. However, the great irony of their work is that they opted not to develop designs attainable by the masses, and while their pieces were highly engaging, the cost of their work was such that only museums and the upper classes were able to purchase it. The underlying ambition was present, but the Memphis Group lacked the ability (or desire) to reach into the homes of those who stood to benefit most from their work.

11 Andrea Branzi, *Learning From Milan: Design and the Second Modernity*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), 27-8.

12 Richard Horn, *Memphis: Objects, Furniture, and Patterns*, (New York: Quarto Marketing Ltd, 1985), 24.

INSPIRATION: THE MEMPHIS GROUP

Creators of bizarre furniture, the Memphis Group is important as their approach to design was almost spiritual in nature. This holds a particular resonance within me as my working methodology involves a deep connection with the design subject, something I feel is lacking in much of today's designs. Andrea Branzi, a leading member of the Memphis Group, wrote in 1988 that architects are largely ignorant towards the increasing influence of simple objects in our lives, choosing instead to design generic domestic spaces.¹³ 'Designers' (by which he means anyone designing that isn't an architect) on the other hand, have adapted to our changing needs:

*"The designer, unlike the university-trained architect, is inclined to see the work of architecture as the end result of a process of accumulation of elements that collect around a new hierarchy of functions until a whole is created. This whole is the outcome of different schemes of logic, of different plans and materials, held together by a powerful domestic tension."*¹⁴

He felt that architects have been left behind.

I charged myself with the task of reintroducing the architect's skilled hand in domestic design as this is a crucial aspect to the profession that is currently undervalued.

The Memphis Group understood the importance of the domestic object, and turned their attention towards bridging the gap between object and home. Identifying the *object* as a new generator of architecture, they analysed and reinterpreted its function. They challenged our comfortable lifestyles – i.e., a bookshelf with unusable shelves as a critique of our need for possessions – and brought back the importance of intelligent design. In redefining familiar objects from our childhood such as lamps, desks, and chairs, the Memphis Group attempted to remove our ability to turn to such artefacts for comfort when confronted by harsh reality. They encouraged us to live in environments where the architecture of space, rather than of the object, is the source of genuine comfort. This is also something I've attempted to instil upon the spaces that I've worked in. I'm not creating new projects or even furniture; rather, I seek to improve the comfort and appropriateness of existing spaces through the implementation of my interventions.

*This problem cannot be solved with traditional architectural composition, by constructing architecture as mega-objects containing generic functions... This result is obtained by turning the traditional process of composition on its head, arriving at the architecture by starting out from the infinitely small, from the air conditioning, or from the surface of materials.*¹⁵

13 Branzi, *Learning From Milan: Design and the Second Modernity*, 27-8.

14 Ibid, 30

15 Ibid, 27-8

(excerpt continued)

As the global housing crisis reaches unprecedented levels, the international community is tasked not only with providing adequate shelters, but also with developing them in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. Organisations such as Architecture for Humanity have experimented with the Open Source Architecture (OSArc) approach, and the results have been encouraging. Opening up the availability of design to anyone across the world, free from copyright laws via Creative Commons Licensing, will undeniably lead to more solutions for those in need of basic shelters. The use of parametric software further increases the potential for personalization as these template structures can begin to adapt to specific environments and requirements. One of the more admirable features of the OSArc initiative lies in its goal of encouraging design participation of the general public. In many cases however this can be an overwhelming request, as presenting a homeowner with a highly customizable digital blueprint is often not enough to inspire action. A skilled designer is required to assist them in the recognition of their needs and aspirations as well as encouraging appropriate design strategies so that the fullest potential of these customisable templates can be realised. Without the inclusion of design knowledge, OSArc is at risk of perpetuating an industry already ripe with standardised and ill-fitting designs.

Projects such as the Merzbau were significant architectural milestones that inspired people to reflect on the possibilities of completely customized personal space. The idea that our lifestyles and identities could so thoroughly influence the architecture around us was a revelation that inspired many to reflect critically upon their environments in the mindset of 'contemporaries', as Agamben wrote. As true contemporaries, designers such as the Memphis Group believed the International Style to be far too impersonal. They challenged the stagnant relationship between society and design with a series of unique living elements that proposed a highly connected relationship between people and their environment. The innovative architectural process proposed by OSArc is beginning to incorporate the need for personalization via open source blueprints with integrated dynamic options. But without the promotion of design principles and understanding, the industry is in danger of simply perpetuating standardized and unsuitable architecture. This paper addresses these topics through the analysis of three case studies in which collaboration and education have been utilised to create a highly personalized and dynamic domestic architecture.

INSPIRATION: ITALO CALVINO

Calvino's Marco Polo is the quintessential traveler in *Invisible Cities*. As he speaks to Kahn about the cities he's seen, he imparts upon the reader a fantastical version of what these places mean to him. Similarly, I initially departed to understand cities and cultures not through conventional means, but by my constructions. My ambitions evolved as I traveled, and I gained a completely unique idea of each place in which I worked. While I haven't woven together a fantasy like Calvino, I did succeed in assembling a narrative that includes unique perspectives of many cities.

When I reflect and write about these places I've been, I access my memories through the lenses of my interventions. Even the interstitial cities - those in which no project was ever completed - are recalled as a period of relaxation (or unsuccessful project-hunting) between intervention X and Y. These memories are of course incomplete and completely biased towards achieving content for my thesis, and it is likely that my perspective is missing some very important information. As Calvino writes,

*"Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that cities may exist."*¹⁶

The missing information only makes my perspective more interesting which results in a better story. Many of my 'facts' come from primary sources, and while these may be incorrect I still embrace them. These cities exist for me only as memories now.

One of the benefits in establishing a linear working methodology is that initial experiences begin to inform subsequent projects and decisions. None of my thirteen interventions can stand entirely on their own, and many of the corresponding written passages can apply to several projects. The best way to read my thesis is to start at the beginning and work through it in a linear fashion, much like *Invisible Cities*. However, I also think (again, like *Invisible Cities*), that it can be enjoyed with segmental readings chosen at random. While there is an overarching narrative, the writings contained within were written piecemeal, and are strong enough to be read in this manner.

*...the more one was lost in unfamiliar quarters of distant cities, the more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there...*¹⁷

¹⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (Italy: Italo Calvino, 1974), 19.

¹⁷ Ibid, 28

PRELUDE: ROME

March & April 2012

Thinking is too easy. The mind in its flight rarely meets with resistance. Hence the vital importance for the intellectual of touching concrete objects and of learning discipline in his intercourse with them. Bodies are the mentors of the spirit, as Chiron, the centaur, was the mentor of Greek heroes.¹

¹ Alvaro Malo, "The Hand: Organ of Knowledge," *On Making: Pratt Journal of Architecture* 3 (1992), 47.





M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT

The Eternal City is a fascinating place and makes for an excellent case study. Through experiencing Rome through a number of different dwellings, a unique, more informed notion of the city begins to unfold. What is it about a Roman home that is unique? Is it the objects therein or perhaps the individual who is a product of the city? In addition to learning a great deal about the city, the stories of the individuals with whom I stay add a fascinating layer of data that works with their urban settings to form some highly customised spaces. This personalisation of the dwelling space speaks a great deal about the relationship between an individual and their city. A primary focus of mine is to analyse how Rome is evident in the home, and how these spaces begin to tell the story of the Eternal City itself.

For the site of my Rome case study, I selected three different homes situated in areas that I had yet to explore. A series of studies were conducted, and although I attempted to find a consistency in the types of recorded data, the mapping exercises that emerged were unique to their locations and residents. In my attempt for this consistency in data, I separated my efforts into three areas of research: a) the dweller, b) the home, and c) the neighbourhood. Across these three scales I examined how Rome influenced and was evident within each.

SITE I:
PIGNETO, ROME, ITALY

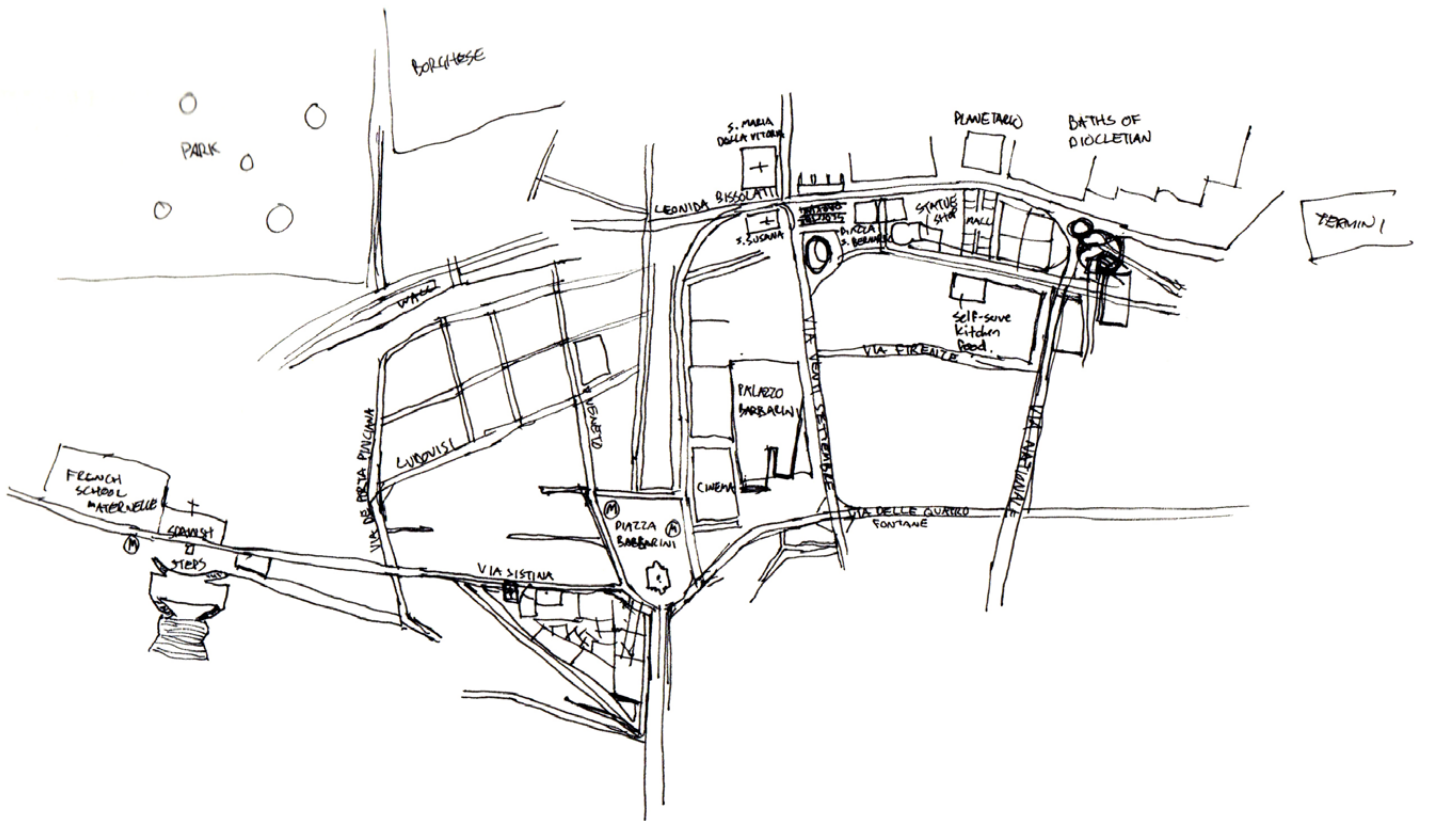
My initial foray into living-with-strangers-in-Rome began in the district of Pigneto with Giancarlo, a middle-aged man whom I met through CouchSurfing. In the past few years Pigneto had become gentrified with the recent arrival of many young families and professionals. Giancarlo's home had recently undergone a significant renovation whereby several walls had been removed and a number of rooms amalgamated. The house, like many of the *villeni of Pigneto* (cottages of Pigneto), had originally been built to house rail yard employees new to Rome, and featured a small backyard that had originally been used as a garden by the workers, many of whom had previously been farmers. During the allied bombing raids of WWII, many of the homes were destroyed, and mid-sized apartments erected in their stead. Giancarlo's immediate neighbourhood was relatively apartment-free, and had existed for several decades as a gated community run by the conglomeration of homeowners. It was a very healthy, successful neighbourhood.



the outdoor dining space of
Giancarlo's home

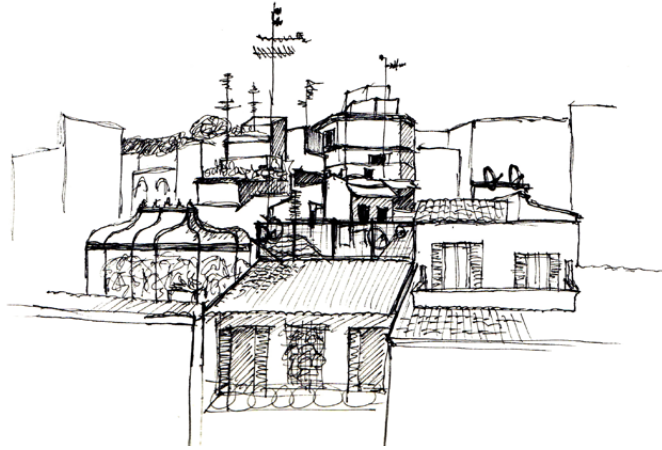
COUCHSURFING

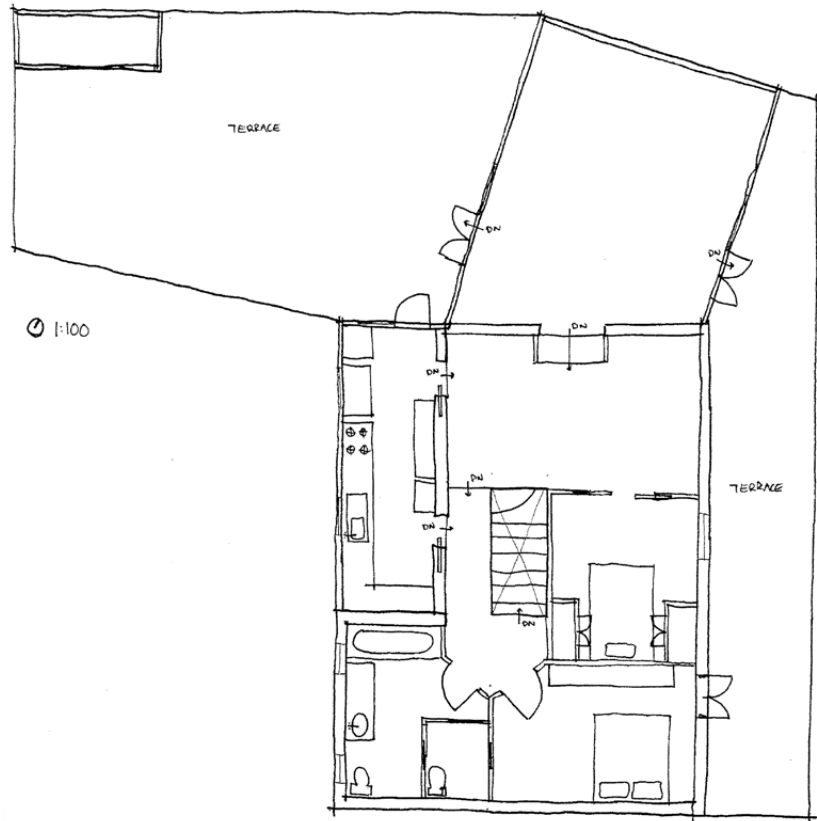
I use CouchSurfing when I have no connections in a city and am in need of a place to start. Often I will reach out to potential clients/collaborators through this medium which has proven to be a valuable resource and has resulted in six completed projects. I've stayed with a number of other CouchSurfing hosts during my thesis wanderings, and have found that opportunities often arise through the people with whom I stay. As CouchSurfing is largely an online tool, I can send very specific emails to people whom I believe would be open to a collaboration—I'd say that I have a five to ten percent success rate. When selling a potential collaboration, I have to tread carefully, tailoring my proposals to the personality of the intended recipients. I'll usually request to stay at their place for a short time to study their environment and discuss the potential for a collaborative project structured towards their strengths, whether it be photography, design, or fashion. At any point they're welcome to reject the initiative, as it is their living space I'm working with. I often look for other architects, but it's worth mentioning that I haven't actually found any willing to work with me.

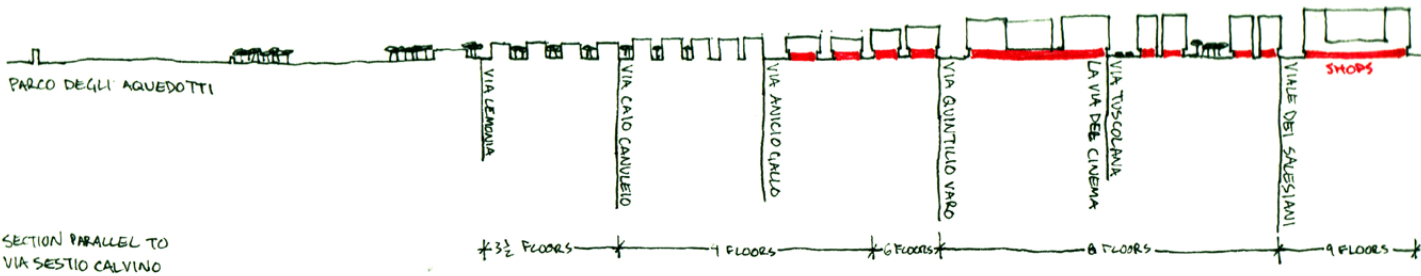
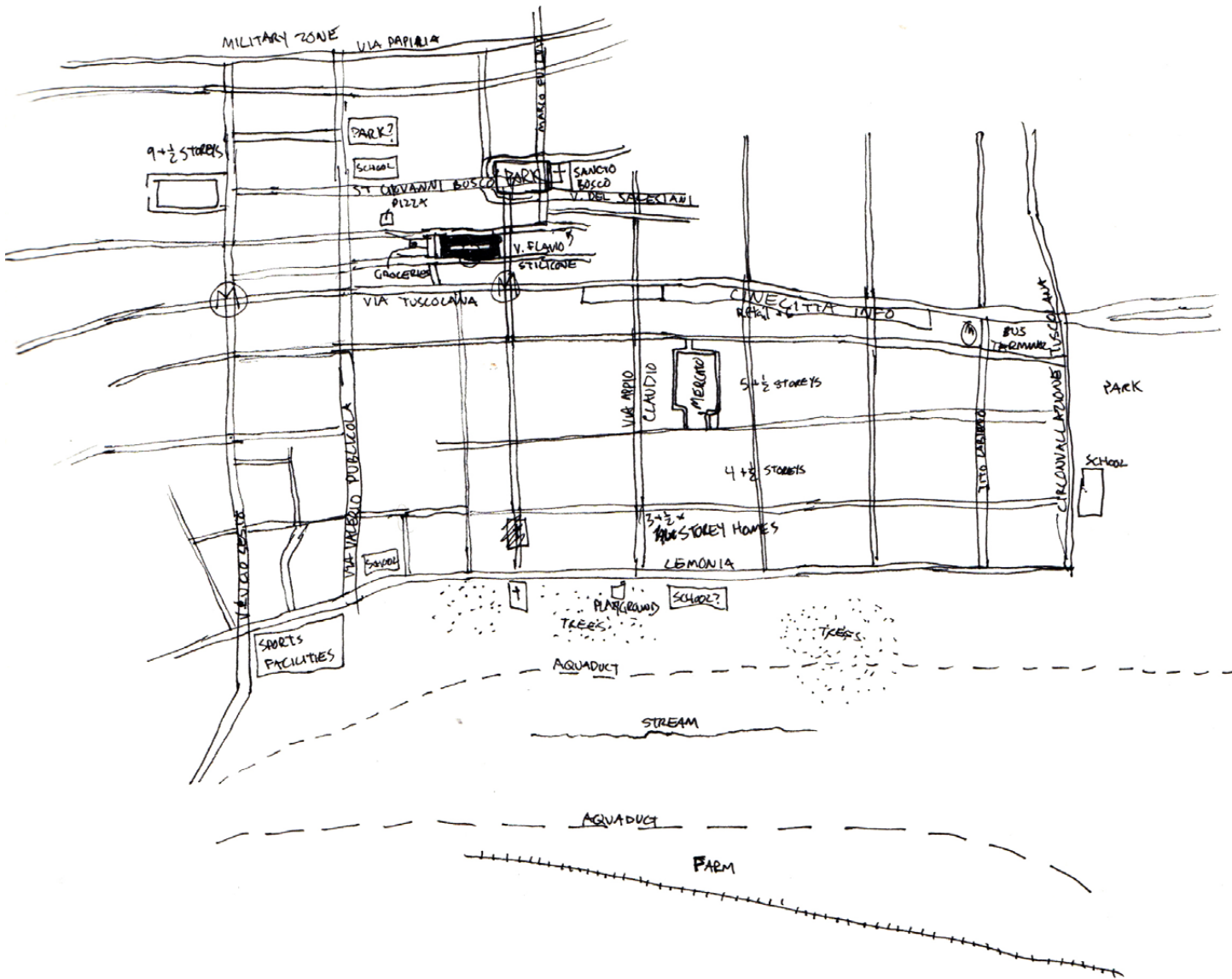


SITE II:
FONTANA DI TREVI, ROME, ITALY

After my very brief stay in Pigneto, I turned my attention towards the Fontana di Trevi neighbourhood where I stayed with Anna in her penthouse apartment for one night. The apartment was located on the sixth floor of a building that sat atop the Quirinal Hill, with excellent views across the city. The area was subject to hordes of tourists, and noise from the streets below was an issue for Anna. Her apartment was strange: originally a much smaller unit, a hasty renovation had resulted in the appropriation of a large portion of the terrace into two smaller rooms, neither of which had been given much thought during the design phase. The apartment had a very strange aesthetic as it had been renovated into a holiday rental. There were artificial columns and pediments, gaudy wallpaper, and awkward corners that arose as a result a hasty renovation. What remained of the original terrace was still relatively large, but more importantly, it was detached from the clamour of the street below by the recently constructed living room. I took particular interest in the dichotomy between the interior and exterior conditions of the dense apartment block. The exterior (as experienced from the narrow balcony) overlooked the street below, whereas the interior (best enjoyed from the terrace), looked upon a far different condition in which a series of unfinished facades, windows, and balconies created a more genuine portrayal of what the buildings actually were. As the majority were holiday rentals, they were largely superficial, and the interior condition of the block reflected this.







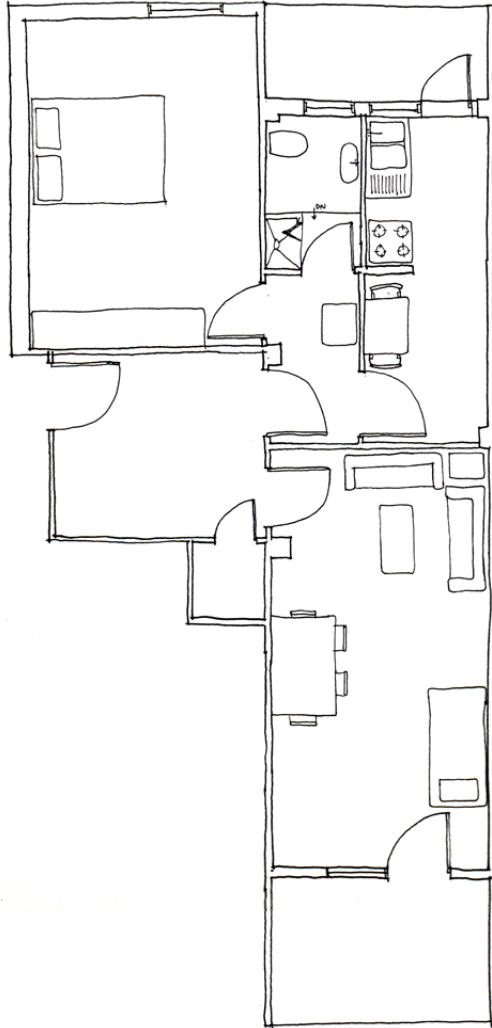
SECTION PARALLEL TO
VIA SESTIO CALVINO
1:5000

SITE III:
CINECITTA, ROME, ITALY

The Cinecitta neighbourhood of Rome is the proud home of the once-famous Cinecitta film studio that blossomed during the fifties and sixties. Turned into a dense residential neighbourhood during the sixties, the area is situated just north of the beautiful Parco degli Acquadotti at the end of the metro. A section of the area running north-south reveals that the units closer to the park are far less dense and owned by a wealthier clientele. Because of its density, the neighbourhood has a great deal of street life as the ground floor of many apartments are filled in with shops.

*MARCH 9-10 &
APRIL 2-5, 2012*

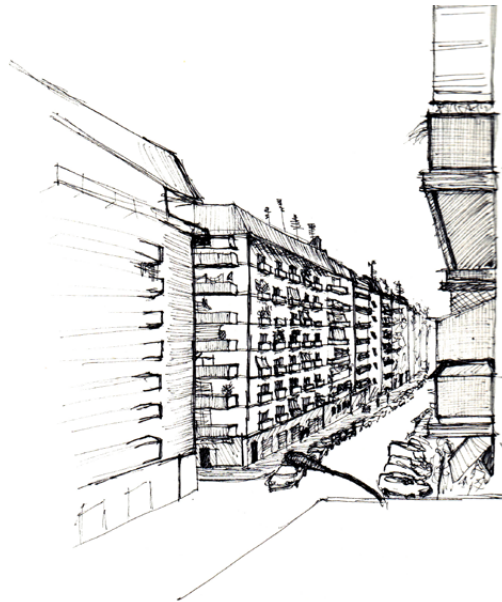




Niente è più definitivo del provvisorio

*“Nulla è più definitivo del provvisorio”
(Nothing is more permanent than the temporary)*

*an Italian expression that
Arcangelo abides by*

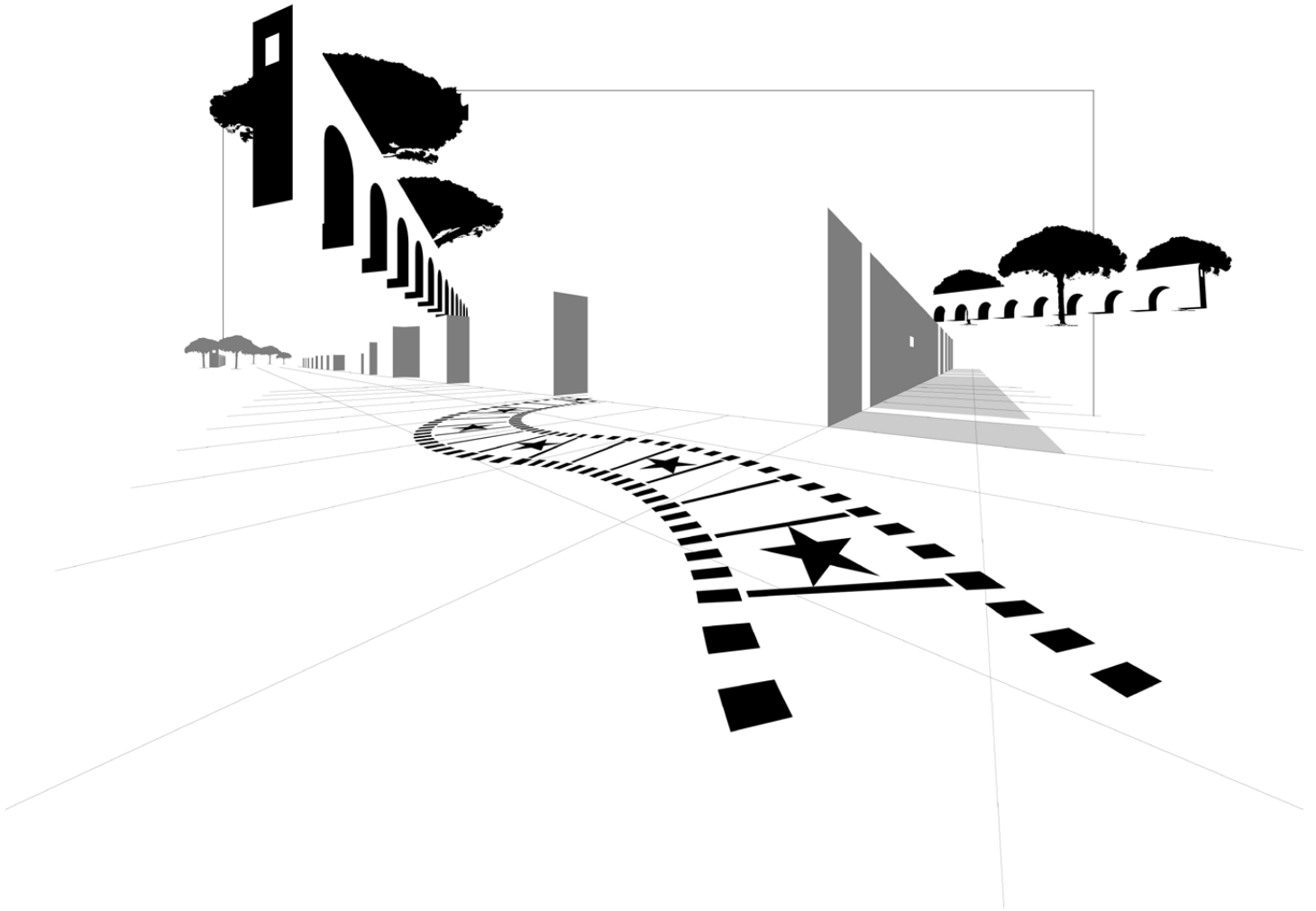


The layout of the apartment is simple yet confounding. An awkward circulation interrupts any flow to the space. An efficient and economical method of construction has not left much in terms of quality design. The rooms are too large and too few; the kitchen is isolated, and the entryway wasteful.

Arcangelo, although very much a homeowner, believes that his home is just a temporary stay, and has existed as such for the past eight years. In denying himself the comforts of an apartment full of personal artifacts, he has convinced himself that possessions result in permanence. An avid traveller, he would rather put his energies towards social and transitory ends than material possessions.

His furniture is scarce; leftovers from relatives and friends, there is very little investment in material items. A massive dresser is the largest piece of furniture in the apartment, but it is undesired. He has tried to get rid of it even though he knows it won't be replaced and its contents will become neatly piled on the floor. He has devised several schemes to remove it but has yet to put any into action.

the "view" from the apartment is unspectacular: it speaks to the efficiency of a dense residential neighbourhood



The mural emerges from a study of Arcangelo. The apartment is very minimal, so the mural seeks to activate the main living room by becoming the feature wall. Arcangelo mentioned that he desired to do something with this large blank space, but wasn't sure what. When asked about painting the apartment walls something other than the current off-white, he indicated that he couldn't be bothered but that he would welcome any efforts by me to do so.

A collaboration with Arcangelo yielded this mural; his assistance was greatly appreciated, and his patience and faith in my abilities even more.

The mural contains:

- the large residential block that gradually fades in scale and density as it approaches the Parco degli Acquedotti*
- an urban street grid that is a result of urban planning to contrast the historic streets of ancient Rome*
- the two aqueducts of the Parco degli Acquedotti*
- a reference to the Cinecitta film studio*

The mural activates the main living space and brings into the daily life of Arcangelo the history of his neighbourhood. The larger objective is to initiate an effort by Arcangelo to continue this customisation of a very bare apartment. Assuming that the paint was applied properly, the end result of this Intervention is unknown.



plate 0.1

The end result.

In hindsight, the location for my inaugural Intervention was actually somewhat challenging. The apartment was of a pretty standard (albeit inefficient) construction, and furnished very sparsely. There was very little fodder for inspiration, and the apartment itself was quite tame, especially when compared to some of the locations I've worked in since.

FIVE MONTHS LATER

The mural is still alive! No peeling or unexpected accidents have occurred, so I'm pleased. It is successful as a conversation piece, and Arcangelo has explained the meaning behind it to nearly everyone who sees it. He also said that it's working as a generator for spatial customisation—that is, he's thinking more and more about ways in which he can alter his living space. This is a big step for someone who is prepared to pack up and move overseas at any given moment.

PART I:
UNDERSTANDING A METROPOLIS

May - July 2012

The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored.¹

¹ Joseph Campbell,
Hero With a Thousand Faces
(New Jersey: Princeton
University Press, 1971), 78.

INTERLUDE: COLOMBIA

May 15-29, August 10-13, 2012



what does an itinerant architect need in his bag?

JOURNEY THE FIRST: PACKING

What to take? Always a good question, but I've done it enough times that it's no longer a big deal. In this instance I packed five or six hours before I was to leave for the airport. I have checklists that differ for each of my destinations and climate, and it usually only takes a couple hours to do a good job. I think if pressed for time I could do it in fifteen or twenty minutes, but fortunately I've never had to do that.

What does a travelling architect require? I have a sketchbook, a couple of pocket-sized notebooks, a compact camera and tripod, a flash drive, too many pens and pencils, a small ruler, a tape measure, and my compact laptop. Because of what transpired in Rome, I've also packed a paintbrush. What I am missing is a good multi-tool, so I'll keep my eye out for one as I travel.

Back to the question though: what does a travelling architect require? I'll argue that one begins with nothing and picks up items along the way as the kit of parts is in a constant state of evolution. I do have a few items, but they are more devices for recording than anything else. It will be interesting to see what sort of tools I acquire by the end of my thesis, and what I consider to be essential, if anything. Of course, a broad skill set is essential, as is a creative mind. Working with the tools on hand will probably be how I approach each of the projects, and it would be great to find some collaborators.



Bogotá: Colombia's capital has a sprawl of nearly nine million inhabitants²

² The Central Intelligence Agency, "Geography: Colombia," *The Central Intelligence Agency Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html> (accessed 20 Nov. 2013).

DAY 1: BOGOTÁ

“Today is a very bad day for Bogotá. There have been explosions.”

This is how I was greeted upon my arrival from Canada. A friend of a friend was there to meet me at the airport and after a few pleasantries this was what he had to say. Good to know. Apparently someone tried unsuccessfully to assassinate a former politician.

My Colombian friend has done a good amount of planning on my behalf which is a very good thing as I have no itinerary to speak of. At some point I'll get around to my thesis work, but I think for the next few days I'll just enjoy being a tourist.



BOGOTÁ'S TRANSMILENIO

I have a small love affair with the rapid transit system in Bogotá. I like to see it as an infrastructural snake of sorts, twisting its way around existing roads, bridges, and highways in a network of highly durable steel and connectors. I really wish I could've documented it properly, but maybe some Photoshop effects can make up for the sub-par photography. The one night I did get out, my friend Jorge instructed me to be subtle with my camera as the local law enforcement agencies could become suspicious if they spotted me snapping photos of bridges and transit terminals. No hablo español, and he didn't want to have to bail me out of a sticky situation.

The TransMilenio is wildly successful. Wildly. Modeled after the bus system of Curitiba, Brazil, it has reduced traffic congestion and air pollution in the city. It is basically a cheaper version of a subway, and is desperately needed in large cities that can't support a subway line. The buses have designated lanes that expedite movement throughout the city, and as of May 2012, there are some fourteen hundred buses operating eighty seven kilometres of road in Bogotá.³ They are safer than the independent buses that run amok in Bogotá's streets, and as far as I can tell, follow their routes and the assigned schedules, unlike those other buses. I'm a fan.

³ TransMilenio Online, "Historia: Transmilenio", <http://www.transmilenio.gov.co/es/articulos/historia> (accessed 17 May 2012).



*Lechona:
the "happy sleeping pig"
of Ibagué. A traditional
dish, the meat is carved
out, mixed with spices and
vegetables, and stuffed
back into the pig where
it is slow cooked in an
outdoor fireplace.*

IBAGUÉ, COLOMBIA

For the long weekend my friends made plans to go to Ibagué in the province of Tolima. Of course I was invited and of course I went. Although just a few hours away from Bogotá, the temperature was a good ten degrees warmer as it is at a much lower elevation. There was a football match of some significance, a concert, a waterpark, and several late nights. Good times and great food had by all.



the main plaza of Villa de Leyva

Casa Barro, a strange home outside town

VILLA DE LEYVA, COLOMBIA

Upon the recommendation of my friends, I set aside a couple of days to check out the small colonial town of Villa de Leyva in the Boyacá department of Colombia. It has some beautiful architecture dating back to 1572, and although they may or may not have been the source of some wicked back pain, the stone roads add a lot to the architecture. The food is good and there is plenty to do for a couple of days.

Casa Barro:

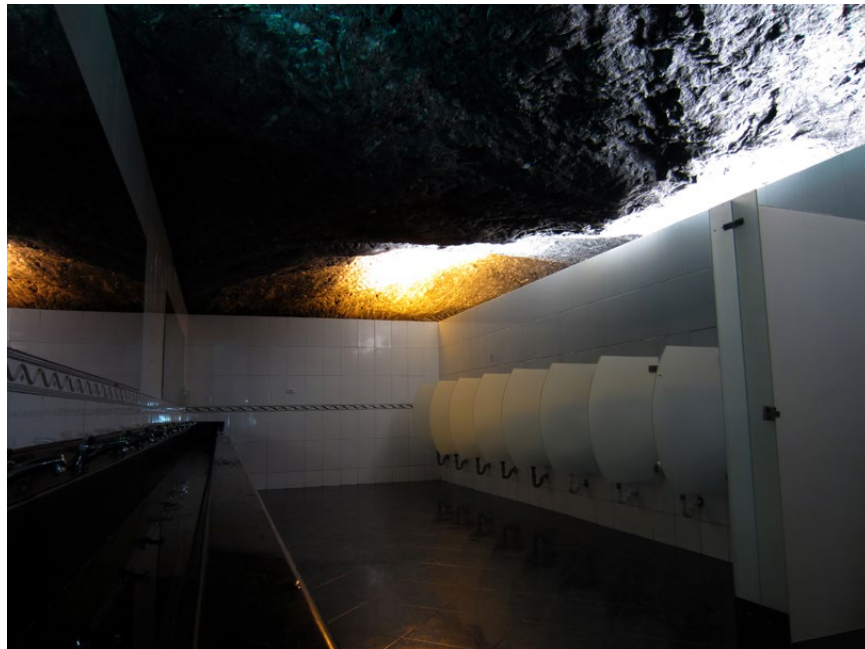
An odd-looking house clearly inspired by the Flintstones.

El Infiernito & its Neighbour:

This collection of ancient phallic stones was used as an astronomical observatory by the Muisca people. Religious ceremonies also took place here. From this remote site (six and a half kilometres from the town) one could hear obnoxious Christmas music played at a ridiculous volume from the only neighbour—an odd amusement park themed around early twentieth century cars. The cars were actually quite nice, but what on earth is the owner thinking? They obviously had put a lot of money into it, but had probably been on a lot of drugs whenever they made the decision to put such a thing here.

Museo Paleontologico de Villa de Leyva:

A really great, intimate museum located just on the outskirts of town, the Palaeontology Museum makes use of an old grain mill of some kind. The building was nicely renovated and appropriated, and the fossils were surprisingly good. We were able to wander through the back where some kid was cleaning off a kronosaurus—what a great summer job. I think they also had that kid do all the images and labels in the museum because they were hilarious and far from academic.

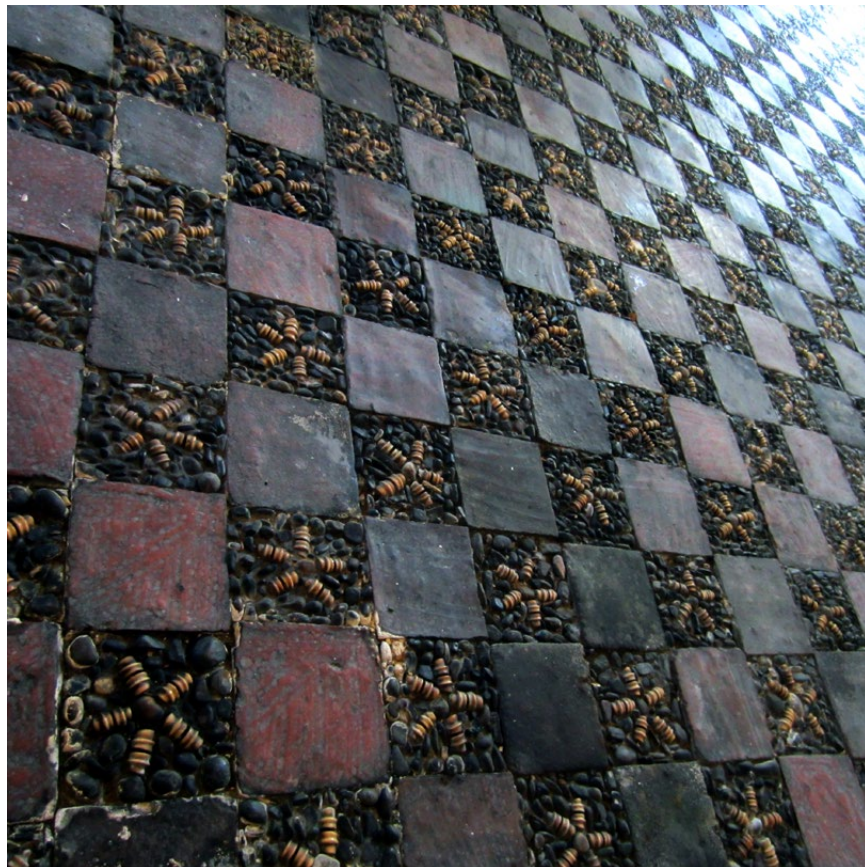


the primary nave of the cathedral

a delightful washroom

THE SALT CATHEDRAL OF ZIPAQUIRÁ

Wow, what an incredible sequence of spaces—I have never seen anything like it. Originally a salt mine, this network of subterranean passageways and rooms were transformed in 1995 into a Roman Catholic Church that is (understandably) hugely popular. This is the only example I can think of where the Stations of the Cross are depicted using architecture—too bad I have no photos as my camera battery died halfway through the trip. Much of the “furniture” and decor are actually just carved out of the walls, and even the washrooms are great spaces.



the main living space was originally a barn until a renovation in the 1950s

the floor of the chapel was patterned with pig vertebrae

TENJO, COLOMBIA

My friend Nicolo invited me to his family farm located a short drive out of Bogotá. As I thought it would be a great way to conclude my trip in Latin America, I decided to spend my final day enjoying the Colombian countryside. Nicolo promised a BBQ, hot springs, and some interesting architecture, and so I couldn't refuse. The farm didn't disappoint, and all the things Nicolo promised far exceeded my expectations.

The home is in fact a former farmhouse (built in the late nineteenth century) that had been renovated into a comfortable living space in the 1950s. It is in a constant state of renovation, and the homeowner gave me an extensive tour of several interesting spaces, some more finished than others. Among these was an interesting chapel on the property that is apparently still used for weddings and other assorted religious functions, although there is some talk of transforming it into a performance space in the not-too-distant future.

All in all, a terrific way to conclude my adventures in South America.

INTERVENTION #2

May 29 - June 8, 2012

MIRAFLORES, LIMA, PERU

Upon my arrival in Lima, Peru, I was fortunate enough to be offered a place to stay (via CouchSurfing) by Nicolo, Valeria, and Julie, who were living in the district of Miraflores. After meeting with them and discussing my thesis intentions they agreed to play host to another of my projects.

The district of Miraflores is popular amongst students and travellers who stay for a period in Peru's capital. Known for its nightlife and restaurants, this area has seen in recent years an increase in construction and apartment rental, particularly amongst the city's affluent youth. It was in one of these apartments, in which a recent renovation had awkwardly combined two smaller units, that a small Intervention occurred in June of 2012.

*BOG - LIM**

Now I'm in Lima, but just barely. I had a flight this morning with Avianca Airlines, and I thought that arriving at the airport three hours in advance would give me plenty of time to catch the plane. Good thing I did, and thanks to Jorge's parent's for adopting me that morning! I would've missed my plane for sure without them (Mr. Cardozo in particular was extremely patient and helpful).

When I showed up to check in, the check-in agent told me, in the nicest way possible, that I couldn't board the plane for Peru without a return ticket. Of course, I couldn't procure any such document, and she sent me to the ticket office. I certainly wasn't prepared to drop nine hundred dollars for a flight, especially since my itinerary hadn't yet been planned, and so I decided to buy the cheapest bus ticket to a neighbouring country. Easier said than done, and after nearly two hours of frantic searching online, I still didn't have a ticket. Websites in Spanish, unhelpful blogs, broken links, and stress all made for a very unhappy Gordon. In the final hour, after I had resigned to missing my flight, I somehow managed to find a website and make the purchase. Good thing the flight was late (I actually checked-in five minutes after the boarding call), and I just barely managed to catch it.

The flight was smooth and upon landing I bypassed the hordes of cab drivers to find the tourist police. As there was no tourist office, they became my source of information and escorted me out of the airport to a taxi stand where they even hailed a cab for me (it was half the price of an airport taxi). This only saved me six or seven dollars, but down here that can translate into two additional Pisco Sours.

So now I am in Lima, but have a ticket for Guayaquil, Ecuador, in six days. I will not be surprised should I happen to miss that bus.

EXPLORING LIMA

The architecture of downtown Lima features a mix of different styles, none of which I would describe as contemporary.

Nicolo and Valeria made sure to hit up the Hotel Maury, birthplace of the Pisco Sour, and were served by an ancient old man who I'm convinced knows how to make the best Pisco Sour in the world.

We also talked about theses—while mine is in the initial stages, Nicolo is wrapping his up, and Valeria hasn't quite started hers. Valeria noted that my thesis has so many parallels to the fundamental essence of CouchSurfing that it's really a thesis on CouchSurfing. Of course, my thesis isn't about CouchSurfing—that would really limit the breadth of my exploration, and there is far more to it than that—but there is a relationship present, and if I use this angle when courting potential hosts via CouchSurfing it could really further my research. CouchSurfing makes it easier to meet people and is an effective means for finding potential projects. My thesis certainly would be more difficult if CouchSurfing wasn't around.



THE CANTAGALLO COMMUNITY

Nicolo and I accompanied Valeria to the Cantagallo “village” near the Rimak river for a photographic study.

With the promise of more opportunity in the city, twelve years ago some two hundred Cantagallo families were swindled out of their jungle home to what the government claimed to be a beautiful riverside piece of land in Lima. It turned out to be a decommissioned landfill, and the community now finds itself living in poverty as it struggles to hold onto its spiritual identity in this urban environment. The younger generation lacks a connection to the forests of their elders and so a great many of them are choosing to find their way in the city instead of following the traditional spiritual path of their community. They are a people now lost as they struggle to make ends meet while maintaining their sense of identity.



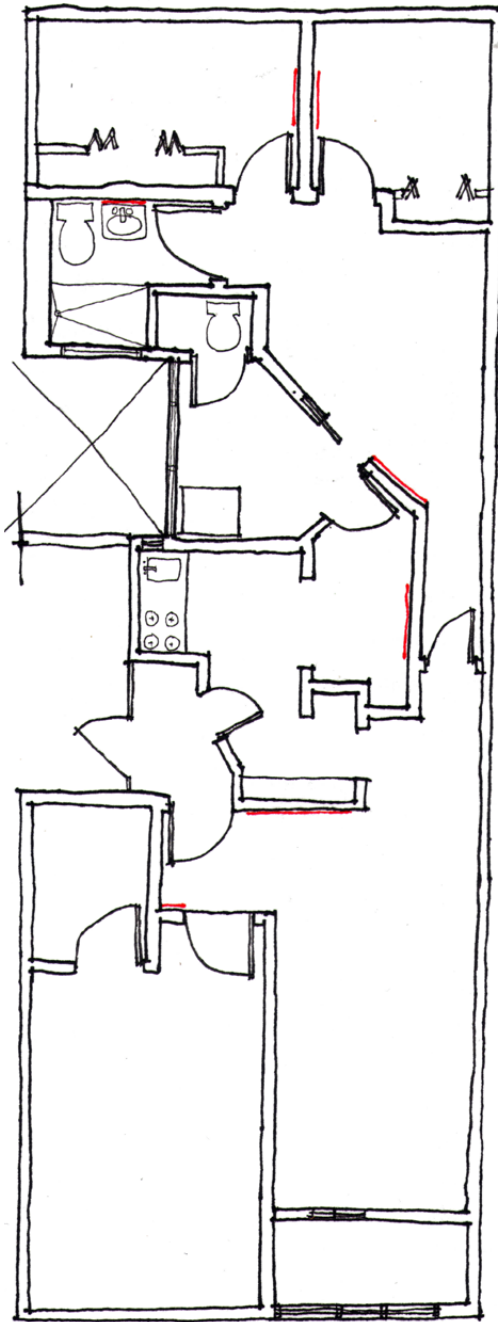




the apartment of Intervention #2: building vertically is a risky endeavor in an area with fault lines as active as the ones in Lima

LIMA: DAY 2

So I'm now two days familiar with Lima, and I like what I see. The weather, although grey, has been warm, slightly humid, and consistent. My new friends, Nicolo, Valeria, and Julie, have been great and have shown me around the city, taking me to several great restaurants and cafés. Nicolo and Valeria are from Colombia and Julie is from France, and the Colombians are photography students. Julie is a graphic designer, and with the introduction of my presence, we make for a pretty creative household, although this in no way relies upon my contributions. However I've been given the green light for an Intervention, so I hope to leave my mark very soon (hopefully it will be a good one). I have something in mind, but I won't act upon my initial reactions until I'm done my preliminary studies which begin tomorrow. They were supposed to start today, but following the incredible French food we had (at the only Michelin-ranked restaurant in the city), I just had to relax. That and my iPod badly needs some music as I recently formatted it. Procrastination. I guess I'm still in holiday-mode, but that will change tomorrow as I will attack my analyses with vigour.



CASA DE LOS ESPEJOS

① 1:100

Two of the three residents are currently writing their photography theses, and so they are now very selective of whom they accept into their home, opting for travellers with some amount of creative flair. Their apartment is full of artwork, photos, and artifacts from a number of guests with a range of skills and backgrounds, and the walls are adorned with the artwork to create a gallery of global creativity. They even have a Facebook page dedicated to this apartment gallery. This is a pretty interesting concept, and one not too far removed from what I've been investigating.

As a hybrid of two units, the apartment featured some strange spaces and geometries. Of particular note was the “guest bedroom,” which consisted of a pull-out couch situated in a triangular-shaped hallway leading to the main bedrooms. Too small to serve as a room and too large to be a hallway, the space lacked natural light, privacy, and identity. The apartment was rented, which provided a challenge for anyone wishing to claim the space as their own, because the lease stipulated that no alterations were to occur. While all three residents were creative in their own right, one of the characteristic features of the apartment was the collection of artwork, completed by guests and friends from all over the world who had come to stay with them. Oddly enough, there was a distinct lack of their own creative work on display, and so I decided to address this issue in the first of my Peruvian Interventions.



the site during and after construction

The triangular hallway definitely required the most attention. In our discussions it emerged that the three residents hoped to assemble their artwork into an informal mixed-media show at a local gallery at some point in the future. As the apartment was a rental, they had assembled simple artwork frames designed with impermanence and flexibility foremost in mind. And so I decided to work within the existing model of an informal gallery space, creating new, improved frames to hold entirely new content. The resulting Intervention redefined this guest bedroom, giving it new importance as a photo gallery space. New frames were built specifically for this project, which featured a collection of photography and artwork completed by the residents themselves.

This proposal is an extension of their existing gallery space, but one that analyses the relationship between artist/photographer and guest/host. As their current gallery is made up of creative works from other travellers and framed by structures made by Nicolo, Valeria, and Julie, I thought I would reverse the roles. I, a traveller, will make the framing devices for them to put on display some of their photography in the space where the traveller sleeps. This redefined "room" reverses the relationships between the host, the traveller, and the art.

The most dynamic aspect of the Intervention, aside from the didactic evolution of displayed photography, is the nylon wire upon which the photos are hung. My documentation can't do it justice, but the transparency and geometries of the nylon plays with light and shadow to an extent I hadn't anticipated. The shadows cast are faint, but reveal more of the pattern than the nylon itself, and the reflections of direct light create a shimmering effect. At first the nylon canopy goes unnoticed, but upon taking a closer look, a glimmer of the nylon spider-web begins to appear. The current lighting isn't the best to emphasize this, but hopefully a change is in the works.

Nicolo has already started using this space as a secondary study-area, using the photos as inspiration as he writes his thesis. This is an unexpected result as I never considered giving the house a quiet place in which to study—the space had always been an awkward room given to the CouchSurfers; I merely sought to give it some identity.

I consider it a success, as long as it doesn't fall apart.



ON THE TOOLS AT MY DISPOSAL

INTERVENTION #2

I don't have any tools, besides a tape measure and a small ruler. Nicolo lent me his a multi-tool, and as luck would have it, it's a Leatherman. Best multi-tool experience ever. Yes, the knife is sharp and of a good quality, but the saw blade has been my saving grace. You'd think that it'd be quite a challenge to build this photo gallery with just a knife, but the saw blade is sharp, and it's quite sufficient at just a couple inches in length. So clutch.

Nicolo was also able to borrow a power drill from "the guy downstairs," but it's probably a big hazard as it shoots sparks all over the place. It gets the holes drilled though—there's no way I would've been able to screw the pieces together with just a screwdriver. The drill is pretty weak though, so all the tightening has been done by hand which really adds to the construction time.

Picking up the materials on my own from the hardware store has been pretty interesting so far. I usually have to be well prepared with my Spanish sentences and key words written out and rehearsed before I leave the security of Google Translate. I also take my notepad so that I can draw pictures for the guy to understand—quite difficult if the item I need is glue. At one point all I wanted was some standard carpenters glue—apparently it doesn't exist in Miraflores, so I after a few hours of searching I had to settle with some nonsense white craft glue. It's not as good as Weldbond. Cheap though: twenty-five cents (CAD) or so for a two-hundred millilitre container.

I also really wanted some wire to cross-tension the wood frames, but after a half day of searching, the closest thing I could find was some thick string. Not exactly elegant, but it'll get the job done. I had originally hoped to conceal the string-wood detail behind the wood frame, but abandoned this due to the extreme difficulty of construction and a lack of patience. So I just wrapped it around the frame several times, giving it a more rustic look? Something like that. It doesn't look bad, and the performance of the string in tension is adequate.

And then there is the nightmare of the nylon fishing wire. I don't remember a time I swore so much, and I was actually exercising some restraint. It took something like eight hours to wrap the line around all the nails which grew exceedingly frustrating as the difficulty level increased exponentially with time. The problem with using an elastic material like nylon thread is that once taut, it relies upon tension to stay on the nail. Therefore, if one were to knock the thread off the nail, then all the work is undone as it initiates the most frustrating chain reaction known to man. This occurred repeatedly, especially late in the game when I had to use all my dexterity to reach through overlapping wires, around the wood frame, past layers upon layers of tensioned thread, etc. etc. But eventually it came together and it looks pretty good (similar to a spider's web), especially since the nylon thread is not immediately apparent and requires a closer inspection to understand.

JUNE 8, 2012



*cats lounging on a flood-
light*

PARQUE KENNEDY

Funny story: there are hundreds of cats that live in and around Parque Kennedy in Miraflores. The city feeds them and gives them free health-care. Tourists love them and they are an essential component to the success of the park from an urban design standpoint. I never really considered the potential of felines for good urban design, but now I'll use them in every single one of my design projects for the rest of my life.



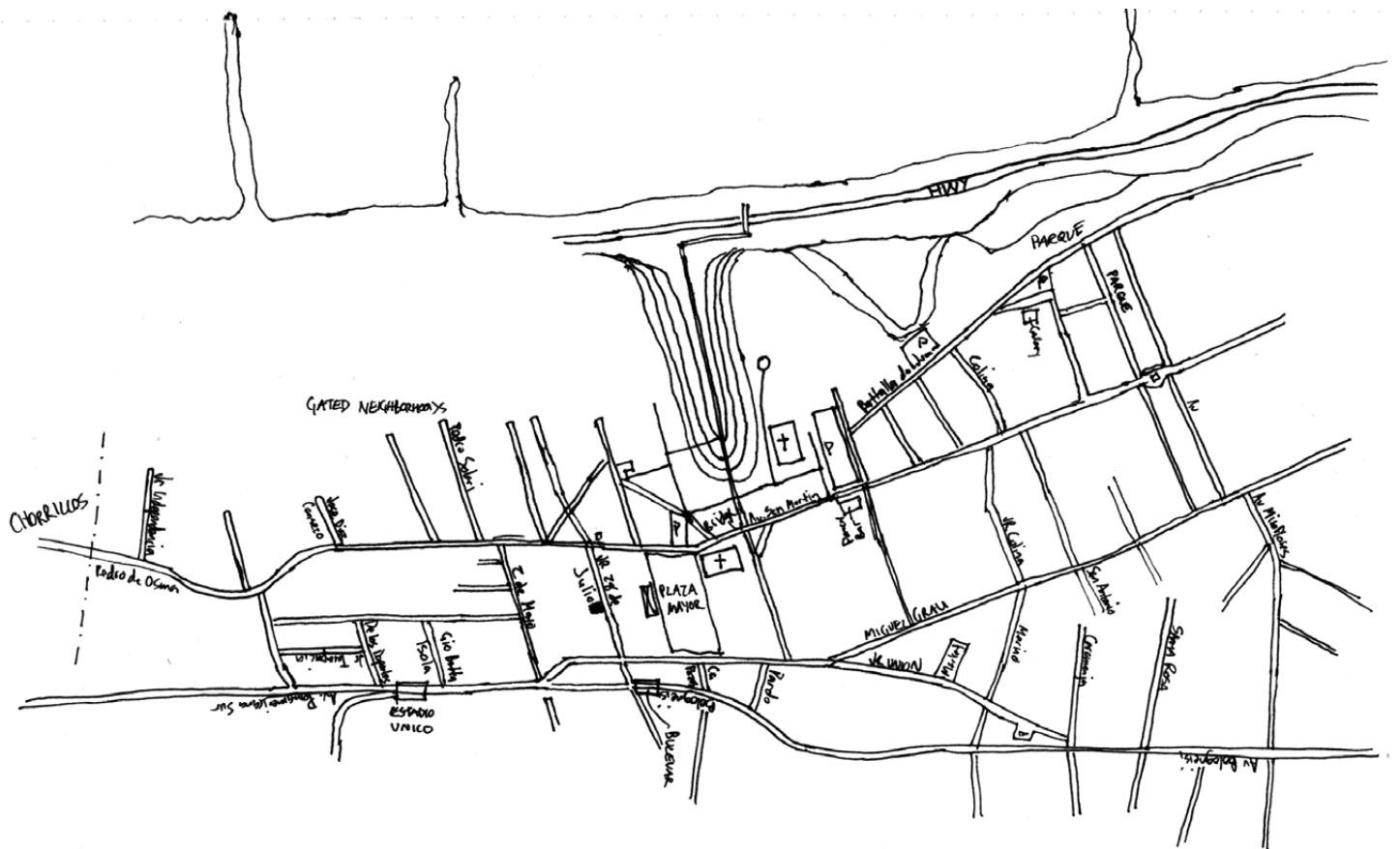
plate 1.11

THREE MONTHS LATER

I had left Nicolo, Julie, and Valeria with a framework to work with, and after several months the results were encouraging. The former guest bedroom, previously unused during long periods of vacancy, had been transformed into a second living room. Photos filled the walls, and a geometric ceiling, which had been created for the dual purpose of structural support and comfortable aesthetic, had resulted in a space now most frequently used as a small movie theatre.

INTERVENTION #3

June 13 - July 20, 2012



BARRANCO, LIMA, PERU

Intervention #3 took place in June and July in the neighbourhood of Barranco in Lima, Peru. My friend Nicolo introduced me to Jazmin Perea, who owned a fashion atelier in an old colonial home dating back to the nineteenth century. With her partner Gabriela Vaca, she had been working on a vintage fashion line and contacted me to do a project in her workspace to compliment the fashion.



THE VINTAGE CLUB SHOWROOM

Conceived of following a thorough analysis of both Barranco and Jazmin's atelier at Pedro de Osma 168, this showroom addresses the relationship between fashion and architecture. Considering the vintage fashion, the showroom adopts a similar theme, borrowing inspiration from the decrepit colonial homes of Barranco.

Whereas the fashion has been given new life by The Vintage Club, many of the former homes around Barranco will not benefit from a similar reuse. Already, many are being demolished to pave way for new development as the neighbourhood becomes gentrified. Which of these buildings will see another five years? Ten? Showroom pays homage to the temporary architecture that gives Barranco its charm, whilst highlighting a fashion that is anything but temporary.

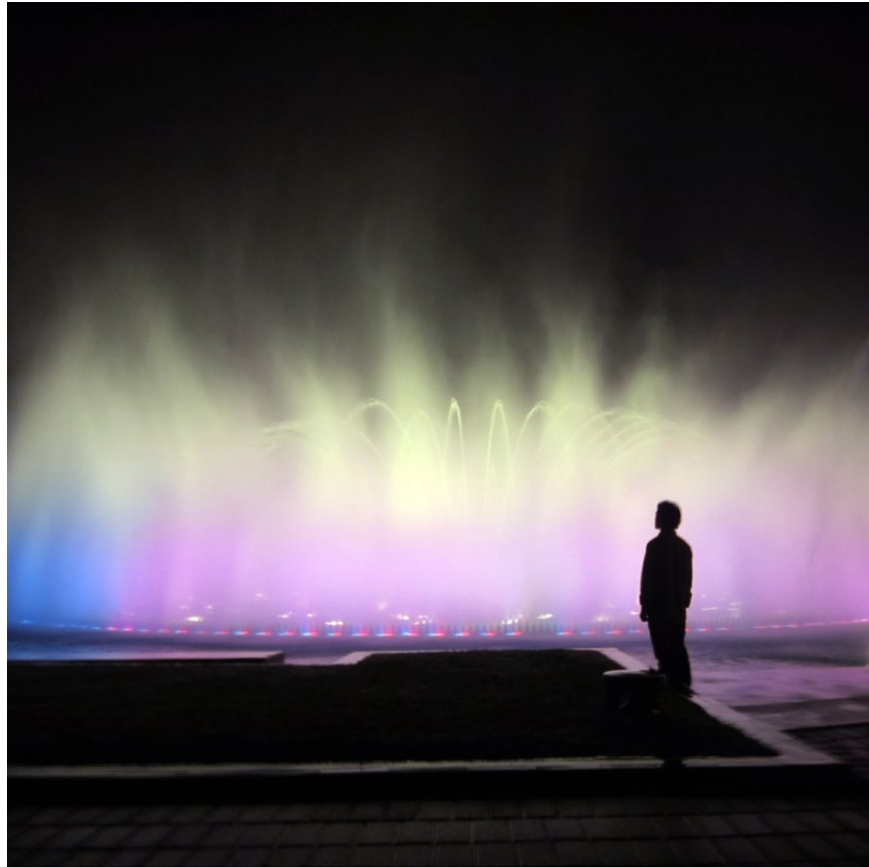


plate 1.12

PARQUE DE LA RESERVA

JUNE 13, 2012

Evy and I decided that a trip to the Parque de la Reserva was needed. The park is basically a series of fountains and light displays situated in Lima's downtown. It's an interesting park, and the lightshow (complete with lasers, no less) was pretty entertaining. Some of the imagery was of traditional Peruvian dancing, and since Evy was an expert in all things dancing, she explained a few things to me. What sticks out in my mind is the extent to which the Peruvian youth are taught traditional dance in school. Evy knew something like a dozen or so dances, and she kept asking me what a traditional Canadian dance is like. I told her it involves skates, a stick and a puck, and that it too is taken very seriously in school. But the park was way cool, and the interactive water jets completely tricked me despite my calm survey of all things tricky. Unpleasant as I had to go home afterwards to change out of my wet clothes—it was a chilly night, just like all the others in Lima during the winter—a steady 18 or so degrees.

FIRST PERUVIAN CEVICHE

I went with Evy for some more exploration of Barranco, and ended up in a cevicheria for dinner. It was quite delicious, but apparently that's just because I haven't developed a critical taste for raw fish. Ceviche is traditionally served for lunch just after it's hauled off the boat, and for those who don't know, it's raw fish cooked in lime juice, and in this case, some red onions. It can be mixed with a number of other items including salted corn kernels, garlic, and corn chips among other things. It's particularly delicious when chased with fresh chicha, one of the best things Peruvian. Purple drink from purple corn—so good.

JAVICHON AND THE TACU TACU ADVENTURE

JUNE 18, 2012

Javichon invited me out for lunch in a seedy part of town to try Peru's legendary Tacu Tacu. It's some combination of rice, beans, a stir-fry mix of meat and vegetables, and an egg. But the place we went to is famous for its super-secretive sauce which was nothing short of incredible. It was one of those gastronomic experiences that requires a frenzied eating pace even long after the belly runs out of space. So a few nights later Javichon and I cooked our own version, but it was just normal Tacu Tacu. It was still really good actually—Javichon is a great cook.



Interbank HQ by Hans Hollein

my Peruvian museli: 90% exotic fruit

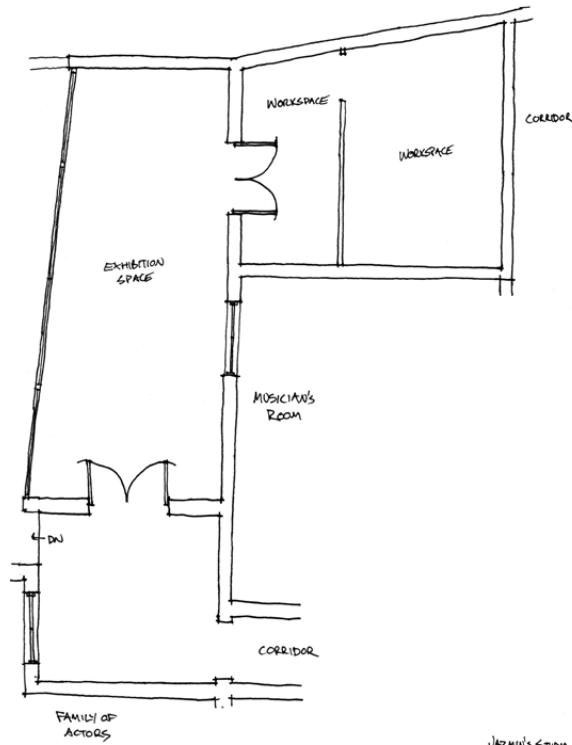
LIMA'S INTERBANK HQ

Neon lights cut across the facade in fancy patterns all night long. Architect Hans Hollein, you must be joking.

I challenge someone to find a building that is more offensive.

EPIC BREAKFASTS

When in Latin America, eat as much fruit as possible. I'm not a big fruit aficionado, but you wouldn't know that from my Peruvian diet. Breakfast involves three or four strange pieces of fruit mixed with some delicious guanabana (soursop) yogurt and some muesli-type stuff (basically just oats and granola). It's a pleasure to wake up to this.



JAZZMAN'S STUDIO
① 1:50
06/21/2012

INTERVENTION #3 UPDATE:

This project vastly eclipses the others in size and duration. I've been working for parts of the past four weeks on a fashion showroom with for a vintage clothing exhibition. I'm also doing the opening night launch (hopefully July 20th). More info and imagery to follow after opening night!

I just want to say that the house I'm working in is incredible.





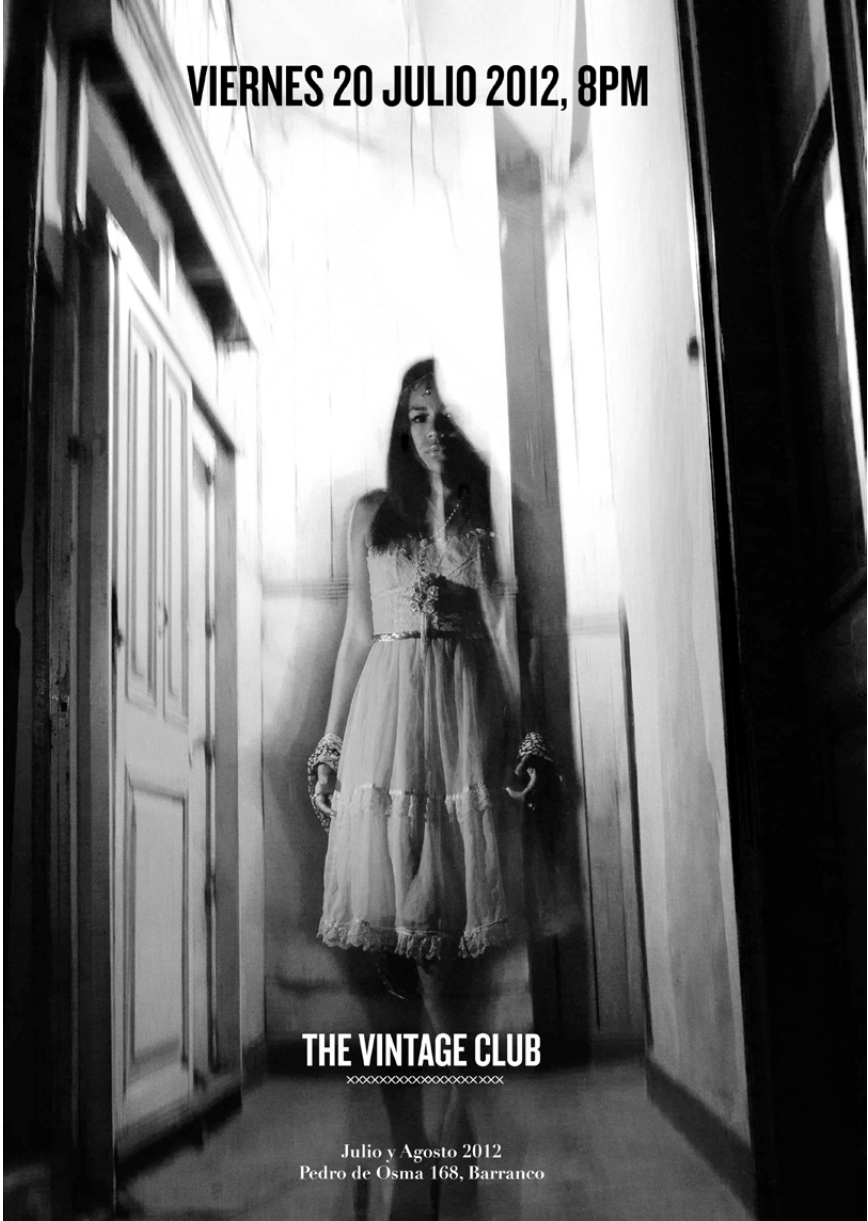




I took an old rooftop railing (that I would date back at least one hundred years) and after a lengthy cleaning & repair job, mounted ten of them onto the wall in a geometric pattern as a backdrop and display device for the clothes

I found a very old door that I mended and turned into an information board for the fashion exhibition. I used an old broom to support it, and nylon fishing line (not seen in photo) as the strands upon which the posters were mounted with clips. this gave the posters the appearance of floating.

I decided to pay homage to the decrepit architecture of Barranco, juxtaposing the renewed life given to the vintage line of fashion with the ruined buildings as they are forgotten. It was important to my project that any materials were to be found objects from the neighbourhood's abandoned buildings, as this not only addressed the temporal theme head-on, but also worked favourably within my budget (of approximately nothing). In the end, I collected an assortment of materials for reuse that complimented the vintage theme while reflecting the surrounding architecture.



VIERNES 20 JULIO 2012, 8PM

THE VINTAGE CLUB
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Julio y Agosto 2012
Pedro de Osma 168, Barranco

figure 1.1

THE VINTAGE CLUB SERIES

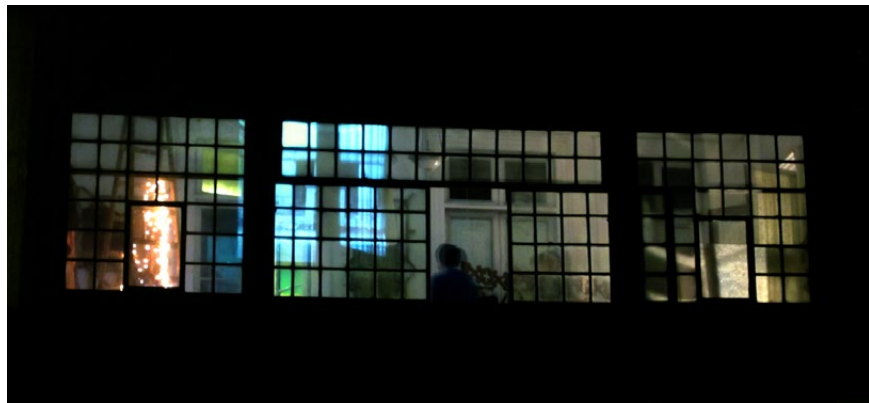
As part of *The Vintage Club & Showroom*, we decided to put together a catalogue highlighting the relationship between fashion and architecture. Using the photography of Nicolo Velez and graphic design skills of Julie Echivers, these are a few of the images featured in its pages.



plate 1.21



plate 1.22



THE VINTAGE CLUB EXHIBITION OPENING

A significant part of Intervention 3 was the exhibition opening on July 20th, 2012. Guests were invited to a show designed to highlight both the vintage fashion and the colonial architecture of the surrounding neighbourhood of Barranco. The exhibition showcased fashion items juxtaposed with architectural elements that had been introduced into the showroom. I created a space in which people could confront the reality of what was happening in their neighbourhood. I had a hand in much of the lighting and a slideshow featuring photography from several fashion shoots within some historic architecture of Barranco.

Styling : *Jazmin Perea, Gabriela Baca // thevintageclub.tumblr.com/*

Fotografo : *Nicolo Velez // zelev.500px.com/*

Diseño : *Julie Echivers*

Modelos : *Astrid Catellanos, Titiania Rannou-Carn, Julie Echivers*



salvaged materials

ON WORKING WITH NO BUDGET

Reuse Materials—I found one hundred percent of the materials on site, cleaned and repaired them, and appropriated them for my project. Sure, it took some time finding the appropriate pieces, but time was on my side.

Get Creative—I have the utmost respect for architects who are creative with materials. The sign I made is a good example of economical creativity—I used an old door and a broom to display signage. It also assembled quite quickly.

Work with Friends—Professional photographer Nicolo took nearly all of the photos, and his experience was invaluable, especially when it came to lighting techniques. Graphic designer Julie basically did the catalogue—I kept my requirements down to a minimum to give her as much flexibility as she wanted.

Pack a Lunch—Although this isn't exactly free, it does keep costs down.

In the end we decided to go with a really good printing company which charged more money than I wanted to spend. So we paid for this, but it was an acceptable expense as the catalogue looks really sharp.



plate 1.23

THREE MONTHS LATER

So the showroom is still in use, although it's the low season right now apparently. Jazmin is busy putting together a different fashion line for December, so the Vintage line has become a secondary priority. The good news is that the showroom that I contributed towards will be used for future fashion displays, so hopefully it will experience a long and lasting life. There was some effort a few weeks back to actually transport the display wood to another location for another fashion show, but in the end this pursuit failed due to some logistics involving a ladder. But the showroom is alive and well, and now exists not only as a key component to my thesis, but also as a functional showroom and workshop in which some pertinent issues of temporality in fashion and architecture are explored.

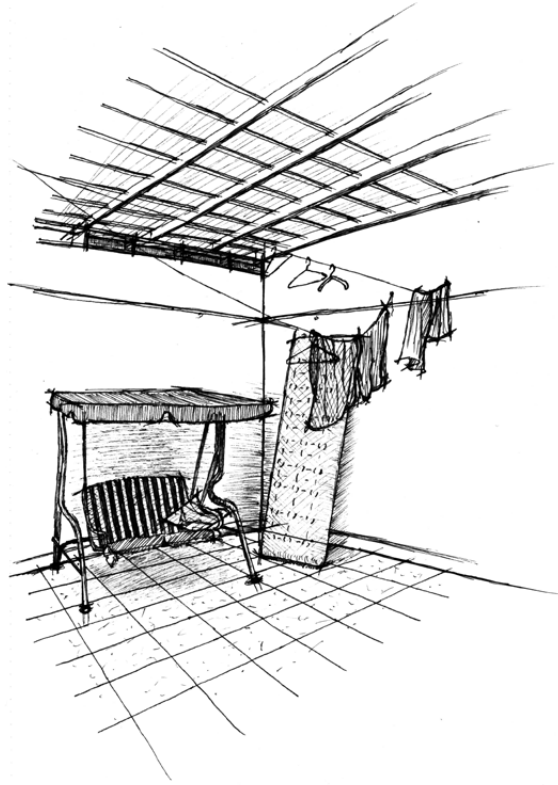
INTERVENTION #4

July 6-10, 24, 25, 31, 2012

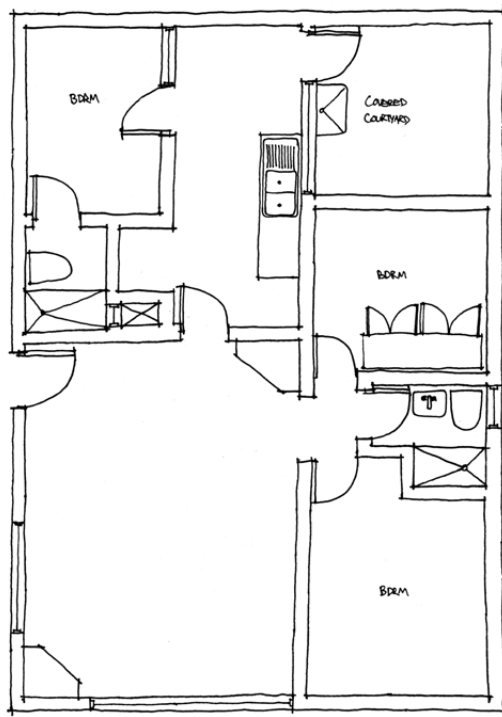
PUEBLO LIBRE, LIMA, PERU

Due to an excess of inspiration for the previous two Interventions, I hit a bit of a creative block for the third Peruvian Intervention. Working in the area of Pueblo Libre in Lima, Peru, I (eventually) designed an herbal garden for a friend who customised his rented living space very little.

Pueblo Libre is known for having more parks than any other district in Lima, a desert city second in size only to Cairo. The city tries very hard to maintain what little vegetation it has, and many of the poorer outlying districts are quite bare and dry. Pueblo Libre is very proud of its unnatural greenery, and I used this as an inspiration for the herbal garden Intervention. By building a garden that requires maintenance, I intend to initiate an effort by the homeowner to customise his living space, beginning with the upkeep of a modest garden.



07/04/12



① 1:50
CASA DE MARTIN + CARLOS - 07/04/12

The space I've chosen to work in was originally designed as a sheltered car port, but at some point was converted into an interior courtyard (with a translucent plastic roof). It is currently underused; only one of the two occupants uses it, and only then as a smoking area. I feel it is the most interesting space in the apartment, and there is a connection to the exterior world via the translucent roof and the sounds that penetrate through screened portions of the walls. The "courtyard" itself is separated from the main living space by a wall, seventy-five percent of which is glazing, and is accessed by a glass door. So in designing an attractive garden in this area, I hope to increase its importance to the occupants.



CEMENTERIO PRESBITERO MAESTRO

The first municipal cemetery in Latin America, the Presbitero Maestro Cemetery was constructed between 1805 and 1807 at the edge of Lima. Cities expand, and so it is now centrally located in a very rough neighbourhood. This posed a problem for us as we hadn't thought about paying the entrance fee, and showed up with no money. Finding an ATM was a bit tricky, but we managed not to get mugged and enjoyed a beautiful day in the cemetery. We considered signing up for the night tour, but I have an affinity for vast cemeteries and seeing row upon row of tombstones—something not possible at night. Unfortunately I hadn't done my research and was surprised to discover that the neoclassical complex consists primarily of above-ground mausoleums in a labyrinthian arrangement. Still a beautiful space, and although we were in a rush (Interventions needed my attention), we got to see most of it.



SEEMINGLY EASY TASK #1: OBTAINING SOME CONCRETE BLOCKS

In Canada concrete blocks are just about the most common everyday item I can think of. I'm pretty certain that I see four or five on a daily basis, and so it seemed perfectly reasonable for me to spec these items for Intervention #4. After a trip to the largest hardware store in the area—which was large as any in Canada—I realised that these blocks aren't actually commercially available, and that if I wanted some, I'd have to go to the manufacturer directly. So, after half a day of endless frustrations with the internet and calling local concrete fabricators, Martin and I managed to find a manufacturer who would sell us some blocks. So we hopped in a cab to get there quick before they closed—a futile venture as we were informed that only bank transfers were accepted as a means of payment (even though our order was a mere twenty dollars or so). And then of course we took the wrong bus home and ended up riding the buses for a few hours through some of the sketchiest neighbourhoods in Lima. Of course.

INTERVENTION #4

The next day we transferred the money and went looking for a cab that could handle our eight hundred kilogram order of concrete. We first went to the “truck cab” service, and Martin's best haggling couldn't get the price down below fifty dollars which we refused to pay—in Canada this would be considered a bargain. We then went looking for a regular cab with the intention of taking several trips. Again, the first few cabbies wouldn't accept anything much under fifty dollars and we were getting discouraged. Finally, a beat-up station wagon driver agreed to take our order for a mere five dollars. Sold.

When the cabbie saw our order he tried negotiating for a few more dollars, but we were steadfast and wouldn't budge. I was impressed with Miguel's stubbornness. I suspected though that we might have to give him more money as it would likely take more than a couple trips, and as the first few blocks went in, the car lowered enough to convince me that we'd be driving back and forth across Lima for the rest of the afternoon.

Twenty blocks in, and I was pleasantly surprised to see that the wheels hadn't blown out yet. I thought at this point that we should drive these blocks home as it was exactly half of the order and splitting the order up into two equal loads makes simple mathematical sense. The cabbie apparently thought otherwise and wanted to put another ten blocks in, which he did. And of course, once these ten were in, he decided to put them all in. I couldn't believe it, and the workers at the concrete plant were laughing at the absurdity of having eight hundred kilograms of concrete jammed in the back of a station wagon atop wheels experiencing significant duress. We decided that Martin would travel with the order in the cab, and that the two of us would take a bus back. Again, the cabbie insisted that we all climb into the cab, and so we merrily head out with a cargo in excess of one thousand kilograms.

The drive back was slow and we were careful not to hit any potholes or bumps. I suppose the cabbie wasn't all that careful though since at the end of trip he drove a wheel up onto the curb—the final test.

JULY 25, 2012







plate 1.3

SOME TIME LATER

Martin has found another apartment, so the fate of the Intervention is unknown. It is quite likely that the new owners have dismantled the garden, or what remained of it. I don't think Martin ever really took the upkeep of the small garden upon himself, so it's likely that it sat dormant, growing dirt. BUT! He did send me photo of a table that he built for himself from a piece of scrap wood. Apparently it was a result of the creative energies that were stirred during my stay; he saw how easy it was to build something modest, and so he picked up a scrap piece of wood from the hardware store we visited and made himself a chabudai (Japanese tea table). This is exciting news as one of the major themes of my thesis involves the customisation of space, and how I can imbue this upon my collaborators who are rarely trained designers. Martin is a graphic designer (and a very good one at that), so the transition to spatial design, while definitely lateral, was easier than it would be for most.

INTERVENTION #5

July 12 - 23, 2012

CHORRILLOS, LIMA, PERU

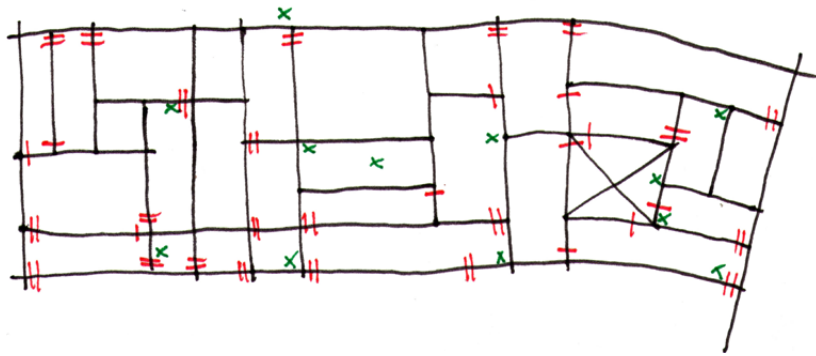
The fifth Intervention overlapped with the third and occurred simultaneously with the fourth. Needless to say, I spent far too much time struggling to get around Lima on the frustratingly-slow buses. Not the most efficient way to work, but the job did get done.

INTERVENTION #5

This Intervention took place in the home of my friend Miguel and his family in Chorrillos, a district in the south of Lima. This particular neighbourhood, while relatively safe, is surrounded by areas that are anything but. To ensure their safety, the neighbourhood has an excessive amount of security guards and gates that make driving anywhere very unpleasant. Many of the gates are unnecessary, with multiple nuisances occurring in rapid succession despite a lack of traffic.

This neighbourhood is relatively new, and was very much planned roughly forty years ago. It follows a strict lot and street grid, and the houses fill nearly the entire lot with no spaces between adjacent homes. I would say that approximately ninety percent of the lots have been occupied, which leaves interesting pockets of overgrown weeds and garbage in the vacant properties. The homes themselves are unexceptional, but I found the “confined masonry” building technique quite interesting as I had never encountered it before arriving in South America.

JULY 12-23, 2012



my mapping of the gates
in Miguel's neighbour-
hood:
red lines: single to indicate
a barrier to traffic, and
double for pedestrians/
traffic
green x: security guards

similarly to his neigh-
bours, Miguel's home is
represented on the street by
a formidable wall

THE "CITY OF GATES"

My time in Chorrillos was the first opportunity I had to experience the gated community of Lima. When I first tried to find Miguel's house, I entered into a neighbourhood made confusing by the sheer number of gates, many of which I wasn't able to pass through. If one had a map, one could easily determine which road to take to arrive at one's destination. However, odds are good that this road features several gates—the majority of which are completely unnecessary, and many of which are locked at all times. This is just plain silly, and I spent considerable time trying to find the proper route through the labyrinthian neighborhood.

As one can clearly see from the sketch, this is crazy town.

I can understand having gates surrounding the community, but to have this number within the neighbourhood itself makes no sense. The residents have an unnecessarily difficult time driving in and out of the neighbourhood, not to mention the safety issues regarding police and fire department access.

INTERVENTION #5

These gates are a solution that middle-class communities have adopted as a means of protection based on the example set by wealthier neighbourhoods in Lima, particularly La Molina. The residents pay for the additional security themselves, and there is evidence that they do feel much safer as a result.⁴

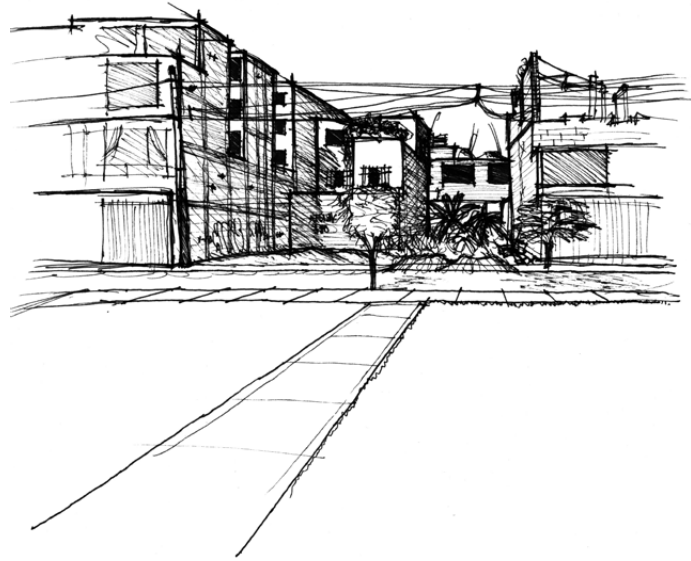
I certainly support some security measures, but these gates are overkill, especially when just about every home has a gate itself.

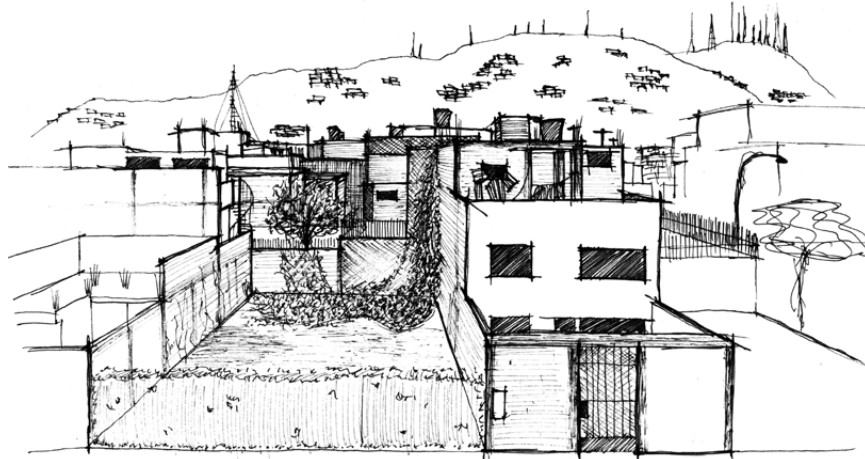
STREETSCAPE

Given the security measures of Miguel's neighbourhood, the resultant streetscape is bleak, devoid of any character from the homes that line them. Each home has a thick wall with the only penetrations being for a small door and a carport. On the other side of the wall is a small courtyard, often hardscape (tile is a favourite) with no vegetation. Miguel's home was interesting as the tile used for the courtyard was also used as the flooring inside the home, and with no grade changes, the definition of interior and exterior became unclear. Many of the spaces on the ground floor were without doors and windows, and the ground plane became a series of interconnected spaces that were both interior and exterior.

The street itself was a barren place. The residents chose to erect walls rather than gates to ensure privacy which prevented anything from within to influence the streetscape. Coils of barbed wire and broken bottles lined the top of the walls to complete the aesthetic. I don't recall seeing any children playing outside—the street and sidewalks were clearly a place for transportation only, and not for leisure. There were instead many parks (the large, square boxes in my sketch) that were completely vacant and far too numerous. A shame.

⁴ Carla Salazar, "Lima is Turning into the 'Caged Capital,'" *LA Times*, Dec 26, 2004, <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/dec/26/news/adfg-peru26> (accessed 15 July 2012).





INTERVENTION #5



rooftop of Miguel's home



LIMA, THE WORLD'S SECOND-LARGEST DESERT CITY (AFTER CAIRO)

This is the first time I've really witnessed the desert that lies beneath the city. Lima tries very hard to promote vegetation and there are far more parks than in Bogotá, a city roughly the same size as Lima but located in a far more fertile area of South America. However there is only so much the city of Lima can accomplish, and it's in the outlying, poorer neighbourhoods that the dirt and sand emerge. Miguel's house was in an interesting area (Chorrillos), that had a mix of poverty and wealth; Miguel was in a middle-class neighbourhood located somewhere in between the two. Of course I went wandering into some of the more interesting areas.

It's interesting to see the efforts the city makes to cultivate vegetation throughout the city. In Miraflores, where a large number of tourists stay, parks are successfully maintained. Pueblo Libre has a reputation for having more parks than any other district in the city, a claim it is very proud of.

And then there are the outlying districts.

In Chorrillos for example, there are some efforts to plant grass and keep it watered, but they just can't overcome the desert that refuses to leave. These areas are far more impoverished, and the streets are just a little less organised which causes problems for anyone wishing to grow anything. Dust, sand, and dirt fill the streets.





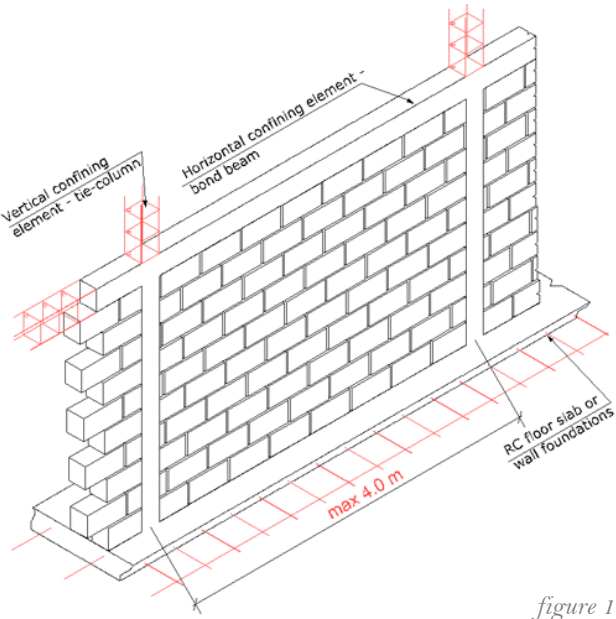


figure 1.2



ON CONFINED MASONRY

INTERVENTION #5

I've only seen this building technique used in Latin America, and it is very common in the architecture of Lima. It is an effective way to build in regions where there is seismic activity as it has proven to withstand earthquakes while remaining economical. I would say that there has been a fair amount of research invested into the proper methods of construction, but given the lack of training and comprehension, many of the buildings are constructed improperly. Shortcuts are made, people are lazy, guidelines aren't followed, and the efficiency of this technique is diminished significantly. And of course, none of this is realised until a quake hits, and by then it's too late.

This style of construction is used largely in countries that lie along fault lines. Reminiscent of the John Hejduk's Nine Square Grid exercise⁵, this method utilises a strict orthogonal grid of columns and beams that are then filled in with masonry (usually clay brick) for the walls and a concrete slab for the floors. These "columns" and "beams" aren't actually structural, but are in place to keep the structural masonry walls and concrete floors from collapsing in the case of an earthquake.⁶ The end result is often a rectangular home with a standard front facade, but with exposed walls on the other three sides (when there are no adjacent buildings). These walls are rarely given any finish, and so it gives the appearance of a cake slice—frosting on the top and front, but with the layers exposed on the sides.

5 Great Buildings Online, "John Hejduk," http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/John_Hejduk.html (accessed 17 July 2012).

6 Roberto Meli et al., *Seismic Design Guide for Low-Rise Confined Masonry Buildings*. (Oakland: Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, 2011), 6.



Miguel and his family were extremely generous and often welcomed many guests into their home through CouchSurfing, the means by which we were introduced. When I contacted Miguel to do a project, he mentioned that he had been thinking of renovating a rooftop space into a guest bedroom, and that a collaboration might be possible (Miguel was an established interior and furniture designer).

Inspired by the grid-like qualities of the neighbourhood and surrounding homes, I suggested building a modular furniture unit for the room, something Miguel met with enthusiasm. We brainstormed which pieces of furniture were necessary for the guest bedroom, keeping in mind the transient nature of the guest. As we were both well versed in these matters, we decided that a small table for laptop use was necessary and that several racks upon which to hang well-worn clothes would improve the comfort of a weary traveller. Six stools were constructed to encourage social events upon the roof, a space that Miguel had been seeking to activate for quite some time.

And so, one week later, the guest bedroom was equipped with a desk, shelving, six stools, and clothing racks.

Miguel's mother is an *incredible* cook, FYI.





ON INTEGRATION

It is no secret that a large component of my thesis relies on a 24/7 living in the homes of my Interventions. Not only do I obtain a clearer picture as to whom I'm designing for, but I also gain a terrific experience of another culture as I become part of the household for a brief period. This sets up an interesting dynamic between the "host" and myself: we become friends, colleagues, partners, client & architect, host & guest, employer & designer, and guide & tourist. It varies on a project-by-project basis as well as within the projects themselves as this relationship is in flux. Although my presence is relatively consistent in these homes, it is the "host" who has a regular routine and schedule that makes things interesting. On weekends we may be collaborators, but during week nights (after their daily grind) they take on more of an observer's role.

Sometimes I'll be working in a family home which makes the relationship far more complicated as there are now several hosts, with each of whom I'll have a different relationship. These are often hierarchical, beginning with my primary "friend" (the family member I was in correspondence with prior to my arrival), to the caretaker (the one concerned with cooking, if they indeed exist), and right down to the family pet who tends to gravitate towards my consistent presence in their search for company and affection. It can get awkward at times, especially when I don't speak the language. Although I am a bit of an introvert, there is simply no excuse for me to be so as I am ultimately a guest. They are offering up their homes with extreme hospitality, and since it is in my best interest to create a project they're happy with, I do my best to please. As far as I can tell, everyone thus far has been either very happy or very adept at lying.

Living and working with someone for a short period of time is a very strange thing, especially when we know almost nothing about each other prior to meeting. It's similar to having a new roommate, but one that you need to rely on, work with, and trust a great deal in a very short period of time. It can be awkward because I'm requesting permission to alter their home, but can't provide any details on how I may do this or what the end result will be. Asking them to have faith in a stranger is pretty much all I can offer, and so my sales pitch has developed quite nicely. The early stages of a project—those of drawing, recording, and researching—are fairly tame, and are very helpful for understanding my host(s). This breaks the ice as I am shown some things in the neighbourhood, share some food and drink, and learn about them. I always make it clear that the project is open to discussion, which rarely happens as they often place a lot of trust into my judgment and design (thankfully). So I work, frantically at times, and then I'm gone, off to the next place. We each have a new friend, a new project, and everyone is happy. And my thesis continues.

ON LANGUAGE BARRIERS

No, I don't speak Spanish. Or French, Italian, or Swedish (countries I've lived in). I have come to the conclusion that I am terrible at learning languages and it is a hidden shame of mine. However it doesn't stop me from trying to pick up a few phrases, and one of my goals while I was in Peru was to learn some basic Spanish. I don't think I accomplished much, but I did learn a few things. Communication however with more than a few people was extremely difficult, but I managed—usually with broken Spanglish, hand gestures, and my sketchbook. I suppose the times when Spanish would have been most useful was when I was a guest working on a project in someone's home, and only able to communicate with one member of the household. It was impossible not to feel like an intruder, even though I was there by invitation and I was working to improve their living space. I often found myself walking on eggshells, and although I knew perfectly well that this was unnecessary, I felt like an intruder and that I needed to be extremely courteous. The ability to communicate is vital to a sense of community and social welfare, and when you eliminate language, it becomes very challenging to fit in and feel welcome. I hadn't realised just how much I relied on subtle humour and the use of language to facilitate quick friendships until I no longer had these tools at my disposal. Smiling becomes important.

A couple of weeks after landing in Lima, I made an effort to learn some of the language during the periods of downtime when I wasn't working on projects. I enlisted the help of a couple of friends, and was sure that I'd be fully fluent in just a few weeks. As it turns out, Spanish doesn't teach itself, and it's quite a bit more difficult when one attacks it only during one's spare time. So it turns out that I didn't quite have as much spare time for learning Spanish as I'd hoped, and since most of my friends were eager to practice their English, minimal Spanish was learned. Next time, when I'm not so busy and can really apply myself, I'll make a far more concerted effort.

ON COMFORT ZONES

I tend to do my best work when I'm far removed from my comfort zone. One good thing about these Interventions is that since I live in the homes of the projects, I'm often uncomfortable. I'll sleep on an air mattress or couch, and be completely immersed in the project, even during any brief "downtime". So I work, and work fairly quickly to get the job done.

Miguel has been kind enough to offer me his bedroom for the time that I'm here. He sleeps on the floor of his brother's room.

This month of July has been anything but comfortable, and so I've been more productive than any other time in recent memory. It will be tight, but I think I will be able to complete all three Interventions before I go see Machu Picchu.

JULY 17, 2012



plate 1.41

OVER ONE YEAR LATER

The furniture is still standing, and while it would appear that some of the wood has snapped off, for the most part, everything seems to be in order. It would appear that a stool has found new use as a bedside table—I hadn't planned this, but of course it makes sense. The room itself sees frequent usage, and it is apparent that Miguel has determined that the furniture is enough for the room on its own—no additional constructs are required. I'm pleased with this; anything else might crowd the aesthetic of the room which is dominated by the furniture wall.

INTERVENTION #5

...and a Remarkably Similar Project in Japan:



plate 1.42

SEPT 21, 2013

INTERLUDE: PERU

July 26 - August 10, 2012

Heading into July I was disappointed by how much work I had accomplished. I had completed my second Intervention on June eighth, and much of June had been spent waiting and working around other people's busy schedules. Yes, my thesis is independent, but it is highly dependent upon green lights given to me by other people. I could've been promoting myself more aggressively throughout June, but I was enjoying life in Lima with my friends and the experience was really great. I was also settling into a very healthy routine with regular exercise and experimental cooking. I was constantly debating whether or not to stay in Lima, and I'm glad that I remained put.

Once July rolled around I decided to get going, and that I needed to aggressively pursue three new projects in Lima, one in Cusco, one in Trujillo, and finish up Intervention #3 with Washa, all before heading home on the tenth of August. So I had meetings with a number of potential clients, and decided to start my frenzied month of work in Pueblo Libre with Martin.

After a few days however I hit a creative block, and since time was incredibly short, I decided to move onto the next project and let Martin's Intervention simmer in the back of my mind. So onward I pushed to Miguel's family home in Chorrillos where I worked well past my deadline, but I didn't mind as I really enjoyed the project and felt that it was worth spending some extra days on. A big reason why things were taking so long is that I spent far too much time getting around the city: I was still working on Washa's fashion showroom at the time, and much of that work required bussing around the city. Public transit in Lima is agonisingly slow.

Needless to say, there was no room for a third Lima project in July, but the cancelling was done by the other party who decided to move apartments due to crazy neighbour. I also cancelled on the Trujillo project as the city had too many interesting things to see and I had my own private guide (Javichon). I did cut it a few days short however so that I could get back to complete Martin's project.

By the time of my Cusco trip, I decided that a project wasn't appropriate. I had a mere seven days there, and the city is beautiful—seven days was a perfect amount of time to enjoy the city and take a decent trip to Machu Picchu. Again, it was actually the other party that cancelled on the project as she took an unexpected trip to see some friends.

So yes, I was ambitious and unrealistic in hoping to finish six projects in six weeks, but I really feel that this ambition was needed for me to finish three. Considering all the running around I did in July, I consider myself fortunate for accomplishing just those. But in hindsight, I went to some really cool places and had a great time with my Peruvian/French/Colombian amigos, which is arguably more important than completing Interventions.



*Chan Chan (original)
Chan Chan (restored)
goin' surfing...*

TRUJILLO, PERU

My good friend Javichon invited Antoine and I to his family's home in the northern city of Trujillo, Peru, for a visit. I had some great food, saw some amazing pre-Colombian sights, and caught the first waves of my life. His family was ridiculously hospitable, and I was given the bedroom of the eldest son, who just happened to be Javichon.

CHAN CHAN

The largest city of the pre-Colombian period in South America, I was impressed with how vast everything was. We spent a good two to three hours walking around the restored areas, which was only half of the city. Although this gave us a great indication of what the city looked like hundreds of years ago (~850-1470 AD), I liked the sections that hadn't yet been restored. They looked like termite walls, and had been badly damaged by erosion over the years. There were also some areas with heavy bee infestations, which is as sure a sign as any that nature has taken over.

HUACA DEL LA LUNA

Part of the ancient Moche city of Cerro Blanco, the Huaca del la Luna is a massive temple dedicated to the moon. It has some really incredible murals that have survived through the centuries as they were buried under mounds of earth. I enjoyed this temple more than Chan Chan as it was an original construction, whereas the latter had undergone major reconstruction and repairs. I also found the protective structures that had recently been erected to be beautiful. There was a nice juxtaposition between the slender, almost cable-like qualities of the newer constructions and the heavy, adobe temple that rose out of the earth. I'm pretty sure nobody else appreciated this, so I felt it was my duty to document it.



*irrigation system looking
over the valley*

POROTO, PERU

As part of our visit to Javichon's hometown of Trujillo, we took a day trip to Poroto to see his grandfather's farm. The countryside was beautiful and we went for a hike through the fields and up the nearest hill. His grandfather gave us an informative tour through his typically Peruvian fruit orchard. The most predominant fruit in the hills was the pineapple, which is cultivated with the help of an interesting irrigation system that borrowed from nearby streams. However, Antoine and I took a particular affinity to the ice cream bean fruit that can be found in copious amounts growing on trees. The fruit tastes like vanilla ice cream.

The home itself hadn't been completed just yet, and the ground floor consisted of one large room that served as entrance, kitchen, and living room. The upper floor had a complete structure and walls, but the finishes and windows hadn't yet been completed. I've added this dwelling to the list of places in Peru that would make for an excellent Intervention.

The bus ride home was hilarious. We were lucky to catch the final bus back to Trujillo, and for the initial twenty minutes thought we had the fifteen-seat bus all to ourselves. However, we picked up a family on the side of the road (as the buses do in Latin America), complete with loads of furniture and possessions. They, along with the aforementioned possessions, filled the bus, but we were still comfortable. Roughly five minutes later we picked up a similar family, albeit with fewer possessions. As I had three months of bussing experience in South America, I wasn't surprised when this bus, already at full capacity, attempted to cram another eight or nine people on board. It was a tight fit to say the least. All the children were sitting on laps, sometimes two per adult, and other passengers were standing, hunched over (the "bus" was actually more of a van, and not equipped with enough space for people to stand). There was one gentleman who was obviously inebriated, and it sounded like he had an opinion on just about everything. I of course couldn't understand him, but both Javichon and Antoine were laughing enough to film his ramblings on my camera. The ramblings eventually persuaded our fellow passengers that \$2.25 was far too expensive for a ride this uncomfortable, and that a more reasonable fare in the neighbourhood of two dollars was in order. The van continued to pick up more and more passengers, which further infuriated the passengers who began to shout and argue with the driver and his assistant, both of whom couldn't have been older than sixteen. It got so bad that the van actually stopped next to a cop on the side of the road who had the honour of sorting the matter out. I can't remember what the solution was in the end, but we certainly enjoyed the hour-long ride. I think I have quite a bit of it recorded.



CUSCO, PERU

What a great town. Gateway to the legendary Machu Picchu, Cusco was once the heart of the Inca empire before being assimilated and destroyed by the conquistadors. Many of the older buildings (churches, museums, etc.) were built upon Inca ruins, and it would seem as if the quality of architecture begun by the Incas inspired the early settlers to do their best to maintain high building standards. I could definitely spend more than four days here, especially since there are so many ruins and great hikes to be done in the surrounding areas, some 3 400 metres above sea level.



MACHU PICCHU

I won't say too much about this incredible city since I clearly can't do it justice. I will say that an entire day (sunrise-sunset) is the minimum amount of time required to take it in.

We arrived just before sunrise with the hordes of other tourists and received a guided tour in our half-awakened state. When the majority of tourists departed halfway through the day, we found a secluded spot to enjoy a picnic. I would recommend this course of action to anyone visiting the ruins as the mountaintop scenery and air is spectacular enough on its own to warrant the trip. My only regret is that we departed a few minutes prior to sunset to enjoy the trek down from the hilltop in what little light remained. While our descent along the paved road was entirely forgettable and a waste of time, it was made worse by the knowledge that Machu Picchu was constructed along solar and astral patterns, and that we were missing the site as the sun set.







*chair carved from stone
joints so precise a thread
couldn't pass through*

ON THOSE INCAS AND THEIR MAD MASONRY SKILLS

Everybody talks about it, but until you see and feel the precision of Inca stonework, you cannot understand what an accomplishment it was.

There are several aspects to Inca masonry techniques that are quite advanced for the time and place. The most astonishing is the precision with which the stones were laid. One cannot pass even a piece of thread between the courses, they were laid with such accuracy. The durability of the Inca structures is commendable, and in a region as seismically active as Peru, this is not an easy feat. The Incas carved their blocks much in the same way as pieces of Lego; that is, cavities were carved into the underside that were large enough for protrusions upon the top face to fit inside and lock into.

Most of the structures were tapered towards the top, utilising the natural strength inherent to a pyramid with a low centre of gravity. The doorways and windows also featured a distinct taper which reduced the size and dependence upon the lintel above.

When the Spaniards conquered the Incas they decided that it would be far better to simply build atop the existing structures than to tear them down and build anew. This was as much a strategy employed for capitalising on existing foundations as it was about integrating and eliminating Inca culture. If Inca architecture—the most apparent symbol of their culture—were appropriated by the Spanish, it would deal a massive blow to Inca culture and memory. This has resulted in buildings that are a hybrid between both styles which I find particularly fascinating as I hold an affinity for the layering of different cultures and histories. This must be why I find Rome so beautiful.

*Inca stonework from the
Royal Temple of Machu
Picchu*





*on the way back from
Machu Picchu*



AUGUST 6, 2012

PART II:
REDISCOVERING FAMILIARITY

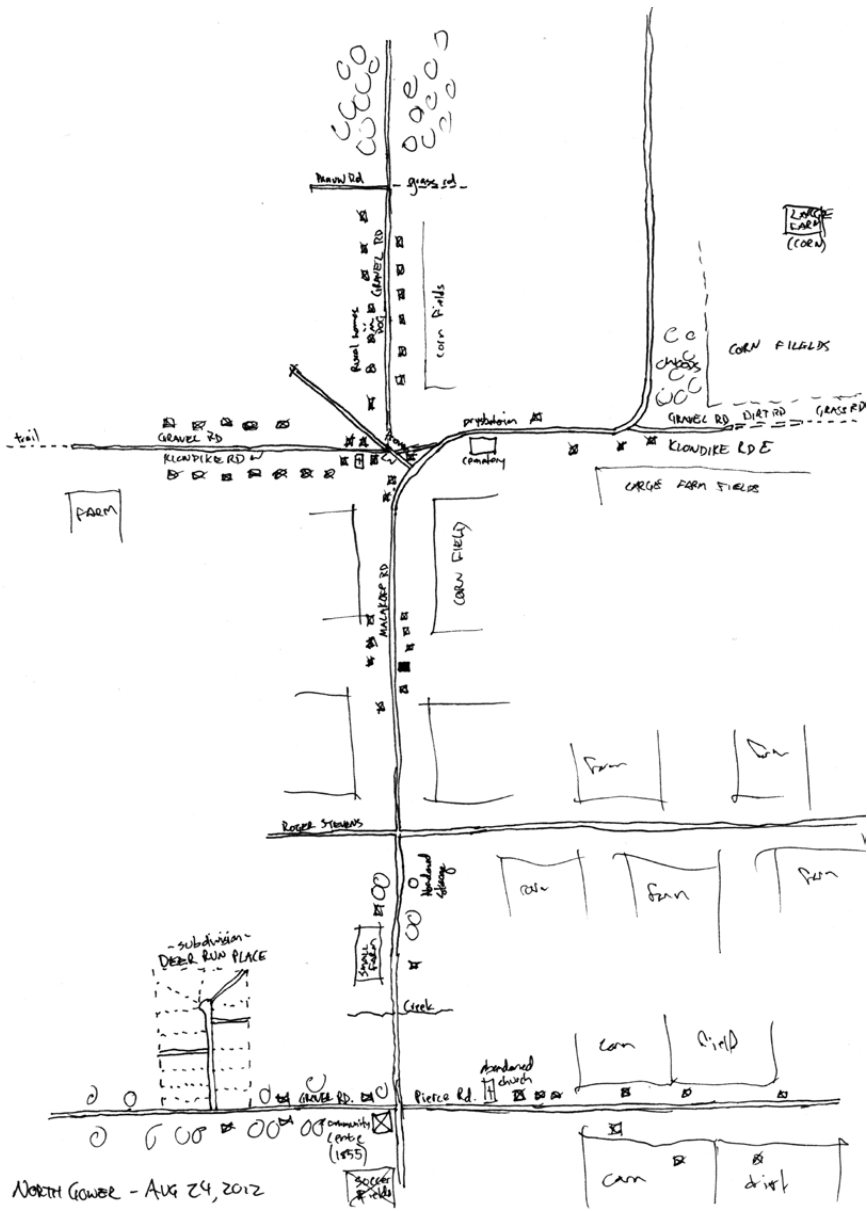
August 2012 - April 2013

When you are starting away, leaving your more familiar fields, for a little adventure like a walk, you look at every object with a traveller's, or at least with historical, eyes; you pause on the first bridge, where an ordinary walk hardly commences, and begin to observe and moralize like a traveller. It is worth the while to see your native village thus sometimes, as if you were a traveller passing through it, commenting on your neighbours as strangers.¹

¹ Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906), 452.

INTERVENTION #6

August 24 - September 1, 2012



NORTH GOWER, CANADA

This is the first of (hopefully) many Interventions in Canada. As I returned to Canada a couple weeks ahead of the new school term, I decided to do a project just south of Ottawa in the home of my good friend David. I sent him an email, and as an extremely proficient builder himself, he was more than game to play host to a collaboration of our skills.

INTERVENTION #6

Dave lives in the county of North Gower, located just outside of Ottawa, and recently purchased an old country home (roughly one hundred years old) with the intention of renovating it. He has done an incredible amount of work, and the end result, when complete, will be amazing. He's not the first to renovate this old home as it has undergone several transformations since its days as the general store. As a result, there is very little left today of its original construction, aside from a formidable foundation and some stubborn walls. The barn on the other hand, is another matter entirely.

AUG 24 - SEPT 1, 2012



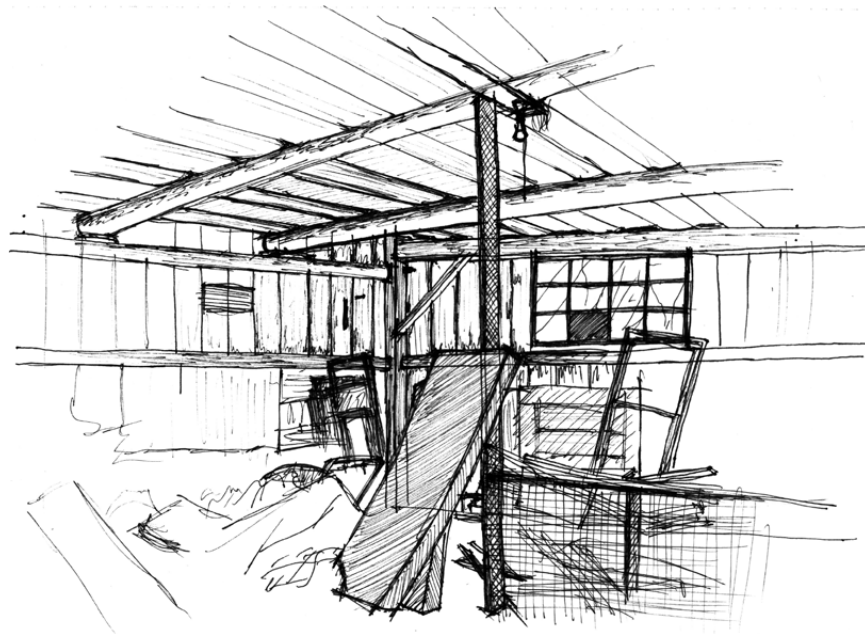
*St. John the Baptist
Anglican Church (1892).
decommissioned in 2008²*

² The Manotick
Directory, "Historical
Buildings in the Manotick
Area," *Buildings in Manotick*,
[http://www.manotick.net/
tourism.html](http://www.manotick.net/tourism.html) (accessed 25
Aug. 2012).



the barn

*original timbers, many of
which had been white-
washed*



INTERVENTION #6

THE BARN

The barn is original, and as sturdy as any I've ever seen. After doing my analyses, I convinced Dave that we could easily turn this semi-historic building (once the stable for the old post office) into a pretty amazing workshop. Dave had originally planned to tear it down to make way for his new workshop, but I convinced him that there were other ways to do it. Our proposal has two phases: the first would involve a transformation of the existing barn into a small workshop, while the second would see it become a "man-cave" of sorts following the completion of a far larger workshop in an entirely new structure elsewhere on his property. The only problem is that this is a large job, most of which will have to be done by Dave. I gave Dave six days of labour during which we were able to tear out the concrete and rock floor and rebuild one of three rotten sill beams. I was also able to draft up some designs for Dave, and we are currently developing a scheme.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2012



*before, after, and during
the job*

I was able to complete the least desirable work—ripping out the concrete floor—leaving Dave with the remainder of the renovation. This includes window placement (reusing old windows from the previous property owner), a new door and the boarding up of the old one, stairs up to the loft of the old barn, and the removal of the loft from the barn addition.

INTERVENTION #6

This is perhaps the one project in which the definition of the word “intervention” is most applicable: I literally intervened in Dave’s original plans to demolish the old barn, and convinced him—probably thanks to my week of labour—to turn it into his workshop. It has been great to collaborate with Dave, and this is the first project I’ve worked on in which the scale has been that of a building as I’ve always lacked the means for constructing anything larger than a piece of furniture. I look forward to following the development of this in the coming years.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2012



reinforcing & straightening the walls

the new workshop space

ONE YEAR LATER

After a hiatus of almost exactly one year, I returned to Dave's home in North Gower to see how the family was doing. Amazingly enough, they're nearly one year older, and have since welcomed the newest member, Declan, into their midst.

INTERVENTION #6

Dave has spent a good amount of time during the past year working on the barn workshop, and it is definitely beginning to take shape. He has been using it as a workspace for a multitude of side projects, primarily a tractor he is building from scratch. The floor that I spent a week tearing up has been replaced by one of OSB, and there is definitely more head clearance for working in. The three sill beams have been replaced, and the hay loft of the new section has been removed. A couple of the walls have also been replaced (just new studs), and a few windows have been inserted, but not quite finished. In true Dave fashion, the important parts are all here, but the finishing touches are absent—after all, it is a work in progress.

After Dave gave me a quick barn tour, I saw no need to push the project any further, especially since there are other, more exciting projects that await our combined energies.

SEPTEMBER 3, 2013

INTERLUDE: CAMBRIDGE AND AROUND

September 2012 - April 2013



Gas Station (1962); Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

MONTREAL

As part of my TA duties with the first year design studio, I was required to accompany the class to Montréal. I was pretty happy with this as the only other time I had been to the city was back in 2007 when I was able to spend only a couple of days sightseeing. This time however, we had four full days and so there was plenty of time to soak in the city and see what I wanted to. I was impressed with the city a bit more this time and I think it would be a great place to spend some time following graduation. Some highlights of note:

Benny Farm (masterplan by Claude Cormier)

Benny Farm is a low-income housing project undertaken with the intent of redesigning and densifying some aging post WWII housing. One could spend days here analysing and learning from architecture completed on a minimal budget. If there is one thing I respect and admire in the architectural world, it is when a great project is built for very little money. Nearly all of the projects featured in magazines are for wealthy clients who are paying top dollar for design with extravagant materials, and so of course they're going to look good. Real creativity, skill, and design prowess is evident when something great emerges with little cost and a tight schedule. I have the utmost respect for architects that can do this, especially if they have families. But I digress. Benny Farm was the greatest (pleasant) surprise for me during the field trip and it would've been great to have spent more time there. There were some incredibly subtle yet complex architectural moves throughout the project, both at the scale of the masterplan and of the units themselves.

Gas Station (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe)

Another favourite of mine during the trip, this former gas station (supposedly designed by the legend himself, although some would disagree) has recently been converted into a community centre. I suppose this is one of the first modern gas stations to be built, and you can tell how it's influenced gas station design ever since—they're all slightly Miesian. So it was great to photograph, just as all of his work is. It seemed quite dirty though which was compounded by all the black paint—dirt and cobwebs really stand out against black. I have some doubts about how well it works as a community centre since the furniture consisted of a projector, pool table, Foosball table, and about a dozen chairs. It seemed like the kids that were enjoying the space were on display as all the walls were glass and our group of eighty were waltzing all over the place snapping photos.

Habitat (Moshe Safdie)

This was my first time visiting Habitat, and I was amazed at just how large it was. If it hadn't been for the meddling security guard who chased us off the property, I would've enjoyed a solid afternoon of exploration. He was very diligent. The complex itself is completely cut off from the rest of the city and is situated on a peninsula with very little around it. I'm not sure why it was designed for this location, but I'm sure it made sense at the time.



*Montréal Biosphere
(1967); Buckminster
Fuller*

The Silos of Pointe-du-Moulin

These have quite the presence, and I wish I had been able to explore them more. As is the case with many design aficionados, I have a particular affinity for older industrial buildings, and the silos near Montréal's old port are as good as any I've ever seen. The more decrepit, the better, and someday I'll be able to properly explore one (they're always locked up as they're a safety hazard). One of my all-time favourite buildings is London's Battersea Power Station—I eagerly await the day when it is open to the public. I once spent half a day trying to get into it, but with all the construction crews (in Sept '09) on site, it was pretty much impossible.

Montréal Biosphere (Buckminster Fuller)

The American pavilion for Expo '67 still stands and is quite impressive. It's now an environmental museum of sorts which, while uninteresting, has value as it requires funding that supports maintenance for the biosphere. The pavilion is far more than just the geodesic dome as the buildings that housed the original exhibition within the sphere are well designed. It would've been great to experience during the Expo, especially given that the American theme focused on the space race and technological advancements of the time. An appropriate building that demonstrated to the world the might of America's technology and innovation. Apparently the Soviet pavilion was situated nearby, and was an impressive sight in its own right. Go Cold War.

Olympic Stadium (Roger Tallibert)

Originally expected to cost the city a mere 134 million dollars, the comedy of errors that is the Montréal Stadium was finally completed to the tune of 1.61 billion dollars, and depending on who you ask, is considered the second most expensive stadium in the world (after Wembley in London). Truly ambitious, a number of errors were committed during the design and construction phase that have all but eclipsed anything good that the stadium once stood for, and this is the legacy that it has been left with today. Some people believe that the most responsible thing to do with the stadium, which requires constant upkeep at the tax-payers' expense, is to fill it with dirt. No further maintenance required, and no threat of it collapsing and wounding anyone.

As a follow-up to the success of Expo '67, Montréal was awarded the 1976 summer Olympics and sought to put on a show for the world in much the same manner. The Olympic Park features a healthy amount of architecture in the "organic modernism" style, which essentially incorporates fluid, organic forms inspired by nature and organisms while adhering to the principles of modern design. The swooping forms and interior spaces can be somewhat arresting, and I might even say beautiful—but as a whole, the site seems to be a barren concrete mass that I have difficulty appreciating. But perhaps this is just because the weather was lousy and the park empty both days that I went.



FALLINGWATER

As I'm sure everyone who reads this are aware of Frank Lloyd Wright's legacy and Fallingwater, I won't go on about how great a project it is. I will however elaborate upon some simple observations and unexpected qualities regarding not only this design, but the landscape and the overall experience as well.

Fallingwater is every bit as good as they say. While I enjoyed making the trip down to Pennsylvania in early winter, it would've been far better in autumn as the surrounding woods must compliment and improve the interior spaces a great deal. In terms of all-time favourite buildings, it sits high on my list, but as I've never actually asked myself which are my favourite projects, I can't say off the top of my head which ones I enjoy more. While Mies' Barcelona Pavilion may have had a greater impression upon me, that's probably because I saw it several years ago when I was far more impressionable. Unlike the Barcelona Pavillion, I've read much about Fallingwater over the years and knew what to expect.

I was quite impressed with the detailing in Fallingwater. FLW was decades ahead of his time, and the house features an incredible amount of ingenuity and new technologies (such as radiant floor heating—the original copper pipes are still in use). Simple moments, such as swinging a corner window open to dissolve the corner mullion, make this project a true masterpiece. FLW's signature horizontal bands run rampant throughout the design and inform much of the furniture, millwork, mullions, etc., as he embraces the modernity of his masterpiece. Much of the furniture isn't actually Wright's design which is an indication that the conservation authority would rather preserve how the home was used by the Kaufmans rather than embracing FLW's holistic design vision. There were a number of instances in which the Kaufmans had some influence on the design, regardless of what Wright intended. This wasn't always the case, and as a master of his trade with over eleven hundred designs, Wright often ignored his client's requests. It was interesting to see how Wright accommodated his client's wishes and created solutions to compliment the design.

The extent to which he incorporated the surrounding nature into the home is truly incredible, right down to the fine details. The house is literally built on top of Bear Run's waterfall, and whenever any of the windows are opened, the sound of water fills the room. Each room is then designed to maximise views out into the forest, something achieved with more success than any other project I've seen.

Cantilevering, cantilevering, cantilevering. So much cantilevering. Given Wright's ego and the tight construction schedule, I'm not surprised that structural problems have arisen. I hadn't realised just how much of the building's structure is tied back to the large rock on which it rests; the same rock that penetrates through the walls into multiple rooms including the hearth that is carved into it. Clearly, this rock is critical.



plate 2.1

Fallingwater is built into and cantilevered off a large rock

this rendering from Patrick Schumacher Architects captures the rolling hills of Pennsylvania

My family and I opted for the extended tour, which I doubt contains more information than the basic tour. Occurring first thing in the morning, it lasts for two hours (as opposed to one), but I got the impression that the additional time is there simply for photos which are banned from the basic tour. Since my camera is a modest point-and-shoot, none of my interior photos are very good, and although I did appreciate the extra time allotted for enjoying the spaces, it wasn't enough to really understand the design (seven minutes here, four minutes there). The sales-pitch we were subject to at the end of the tour by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy was humorous as my family (four adults) had just paid them three hundred and twenty-five dollars for a tour which was by no means private, and in my mind, overpriced when one considers that my accompanying family members aren't architects and weren't taking any photos.

NOVEMBER 24, 2012
(CONT'D)

FALLINGWATER COTTAGES

DECEMBER 9, 2012

I'm not sure at which stage the design is currently, but Graham recently showed me Patkau Architects' proposal for a series of Fallingwater cottages. When I went a few weeks back to the region, I found the rolling hills of western Pennsylvania quite stirring, a landscape that the Patkaus have identified and appear to be working with. Patkau Architects rarely turn out anything short of inspiring, and I have every confidence that this will be another excellent project (if it is seen through to completion).



KENTUCK KNOB

I found my Frank Lloyd Wright day to be all the more successful because I was able to compare his masterpiece at Bear Run with this economical Usonian project seven miles down the road. It was interesting to see what a master architect could do first with a massive budget, and then an hour later, study what he was able to produce for a client who had just enough to afford his services.

One of the most remarkable things about the Kentucky Knob was how well Wright was able to design a functional (dare I say beautiful?) space based on the 60 and 120 degree angles of a hexagon. One would naturally assume that this would produce a series of awkward corners with unusable spaces, but he was able to minimise these (somehow) and pulled off a modest home with some great design features.

Like in Fallingwater, Wright customised this home to suit his clients exactly. As they were shorter, the countertops are slightly lower than usual and the corridors are slightly more narrow. The kitchen itself is a gorgeous space and is situated in the centre of the home as Wright commonly placed the most vital work room in a central location. It is bathed in natural light by means of a skylight cut into a ceiling that marks both the highest and most central points in the plan.

This house was sold in 1986 for around six hundred thousand dollars, making it the greatest bargain purchase mankind has ever known.

I'm not quite sure why, but the tour guide despised FLW and showered his contractor with love and praise. Sure, the construction was superb, but to thank the tool for the craftsmanship is a little strange to me. I think she just personally didn't care for Wright, who was a bit of a pompous besserwisser, and so was hesitant to give him credit.



*Pittsburgh's Union
Station (1903);
Daniel Burnham*

Pittsburgh

For American Thanksgiving I decided to accompany some members of my immediate family on an excursion down to the Pittsburgh area to visit my uncle and his family (and Fallingwater). My aunt is a terrific cook, and we were subject to a weekend of delicious food, minus the traditional bird—I actually didn't miss it at all.

Unfortunately I only made it into the city once during the short time I was there, but I was able to squeeze in Union Station, the only project I really wanted to see. It is now used as an office building and I want to work there.

I'll definitely have to return someday to check out some of the larger moves the city has made to revitalise it's downtown. Internationally lauded as a city that has turned itself around, there are some who say the attention is undeserved. I'll just have to go see for myself...



*The Guaranty Building
(1894); Louis Sullivan*

BUFFALO

On our way back from Pittsburgh we decided to stop off in Buffalo to check out a few sights and to sample the original buffalo chicken wing. Thankfully Buffalo is just over the border as I now have a taste of what the city has to offer a student of architecture, and I must return for a day of Wright buildings (Martin House, Graycliffe, Davidson House, Heath House, and a cemetery), more chicken wings, and a number of other noteworthy architectural projects.

As we had a late start to the day, we didn't arrive in Buffalo until well into the afternoon which left us with only a couple hours of daylight. We decided to visit Louis Sullivan's Guaranty building first, which impressed me a great deal even though we had no access to the interior. The facade consists of some of the most ornate terracotta tiles I've ever seen, rendered in the typical Sullivan fashion. Constructed in 1896, this building is one of the earliest skyscrapers and definitely worth a visit if one should find oneself in Buffalo.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Fontana Boathouse was one of his favourite projects that was never realised (until 2008). Again, access wasn't possible, but unlike the previous building, I'm not sure it's open for public viewing as it is currently used as a boathouse. I'm not sure how successful a strategy it is to construct a project many decades after its conception; the site has surely changed, and it's extremely unlikely that Wright would've designed the boathouse in this manner had the site existed as it does now. I'm sure his design is terrific, but how much of it's appropriateness has been lost over the years? But does this matter? This is a Frank Lloyd Wright building and that alone warrants a visit.

And the chicken wings. Against advice given to me by the strange lady, we opted not to go for the (supposedly) best wings at Duffs, but instead opted to give our business to Anchor Bar where it all began. The wings were the best I have ever had, and the ranch/blue cheese sauce was a great compliment. I always go for bbq and was pleased that this bbq didn't disappoint. I may return someday.



*Queens Square Public
Library (1968); Don
McIntyre*

ON AN UNDERRATED LIBRARY

One of our guest critics from last week was Don McIntyre, a former (legendary) professor of our school, who is also a founding partner of MMMC Architects, a firm based out of Brantford. This is interesting because they were the architects behind the Queens Square library here in Cambridge (across the plaza from the school of architecture), one of my favourite buildings in the area, and one that I feel is vastly underrated. I went in there one day on a self-guided tour, and was informed by the head librarian that the current building is actually the product of three different constructions, the first of which was completed in 1968.³ I was impressed with how seamlessly the two subsequent renovations matched and were integrated with the original building. The industrial aesthetic provided by the exposed steel, cables and interesting details was achieved quite successfully. I also find that from certain angles, the building has a certain monumentality to it, particularly when one approaches the western facade from the north (George st). I'm not too sure I support the purple brick, but that's a minor issue.

Cambridge is actually home to several libraries of note:

Preston—Teepie Architects did a renovation and addition in 2000. It won both the Ontario Library Association Award and City of Cambridge Urban Design Award, although I'm not sure how prominent these awards are.

Hespeler—Kongats Architects renovated and added to the original Carnegie library, enclosing it in a glass shell. I haven't seen this project but I've heard good things about it.

Since I'm on the subject of libraries, I'll add a segment about the Carnegie libraries of the Waterloo region. As everyone knows, Andrew Carnegie was a ridiculously wealthy philanthropist who was responsible for over 2500 libraries, 125 of which were built in Canada. Eight of these are still standing in the Waterloo area, some continuing to function as libraries, while others have been retrofitted for other uses (the one in Galt is now a beautiful office). Rarely was a town denied its request for a library by Carnegie, but it did happen. A little while ago my father, a history teacher, discovered that the town of Caledonia (a ten minute drive from my parents' place) was one of these rejected towns. He thought it was pretty funny, especially given the amount of time my family has spent in Caledonia (which is significant). He also told me that Carnegie basically invented his own language, and insisted that it was to be applied to all written correspondence with his person. I suppose when your (modern) net worth is three hundred billion dollars, you can do things like donate a couple thousand libraries or invent languages.

³ MMMC Architects, *Cambridge Library and Gallery*, <http://www.mmmc.on.ca/projects/cambridge-library-gallery/> (accessed 15 Dec 2012).

ON STUDIO CULTURE & REALITY

There is a stark contrast between the studio culture of an architecture student and the world in which real architecture happens. This became apparent to me when I was simultaneously juggling Interventions 3, 4, and 5, mental sanity, and a social life (that was actually necessary at the time—true story). One thing that the UWSA (University of Waterloo School of Architecture) provides for us is an uninterrupted environment in which to work religiously, and there are pros and cons to this approach.

If one can find a groove and become really efficient at producing, then an incredible amount of work can be accomplished in a very short time, especially when deadlines loom across several courses. It really is remarkable what some of the students have produced in such a short time when pushed to produce. I still look back at previous projects and am impressed with what I accomplished when under the gun. On the flip side though, if one struggles with creative block then there isn't much opportunity to go for that inspirational walk or needed night out. Rome was amazing when I needed to forget about the studio for a few hours as inspiration was always just outside my door.

Multitasking and the juggling of non-architectural endeavors while practicing professionally is something that I feel we don't receive enough experience with prior to graduation. If our campus were on main campus, we'd be part of a much larger network of interactions and distractions, making it more difficult to focus on our work and yet providing us with a much more realistic environment in which there is life beyond architecture.

I'm pretty thankful that my thesis has provided me with the opportunity to manage different approaches to architecture, just as it should with everyone writing a graduate thesis. It seems like everything I'm learning these days is of a different sort than when I was an undergraduate student, and in my case, this graduate degree compliments the preceding undergraduate degree extremely well. Undergrad was spent in a closed environment, working feverishly until we dropped, while the graduate program has enabled me to experience a freedom I'm unlikely to know again once I have real responsibilities and bills to pay. I'm quite fortunate for the opportunity to experience the two extremes while I decide how to incorporate them into my future path as an architect.

I can't understand why some people recommend against holding a TA position. It's been one of the highlights of my term, and I really enjoy working with the younger students. Of course, I can really only comment on being a TA for studio, but next term I'll have the opportunity to TA for the third year iconography class.

I enjoyed final reviews far more on this side of the judgment. The students were well-rested and in good spirits which made the day less stressful, although there were a couple moments when a student had a hard time keeping it together. The way Val structured the studio, while although far more relevant with real-world problems and solutions, yielded fewer projects that broke the rules. This is both good and bad for a variety of reasons, but more importantly, it made for a large number of similar projects—many of which were lacking in ambition. This in turn made for a lengthy day, and it was difficult to keep engaged at times, especially when I was expected to make intelligent comments. I'm quite thankful for the faculty's ability to keep to the schedule, something Val orchestrated by being very generous with the number of panels and the time allotted to each student. I think I saw only eight students each day—four in the morning and that number again in the afternoon.

In general, I'm quite impressed with how well Val and Tammy ran the studio. The quality of teaching was quite excellent, and all of the adjuncts were very good. The integration with Donald's courses in particular helped immensely as he structured his assignments to compliment the studio in many ways. I hope Val returns to do the Arch 192 again next year. It will be even better I'm sure.

ON HAMILTON, MY HOMETOWN

DECEMBER 12, 2012

For some strange reason, Hamilton has come up in architectural discussions this past week on several occasions. The final reviews for the first year studio was last week, and several of our guest critics were from Hamilton:

-Rebecca Beatty—partner at Rebecca Beatty Architect and former graduate of our school

-Ken Coit—an architect and former grad who now works for the city of Hamilton

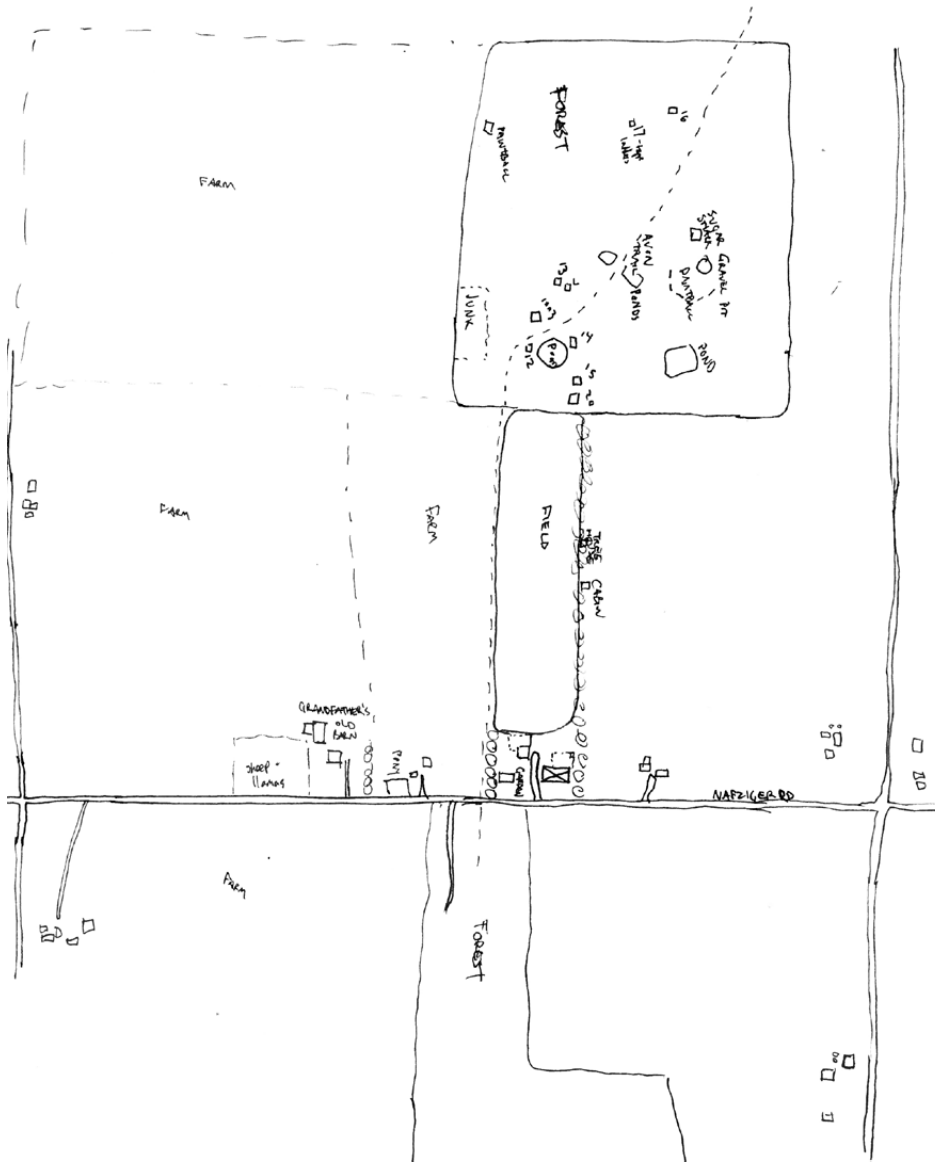
-Val—well he isn't currently practicing, but since he lives in Dundas I'll include him.

I had conversations with a couple other people on how Hamilton is becoming more of a destination for designers as it's viewed as an affordable alternative to Toronto. I can't really say that I'm knowledgeable of the current Hamilton scene, but I do know that Locke Street is becoming increasingly popular, and even my parents enjoy going down there when they go out for an evening. It seems like artists and designers are favouring this area to the high rental apartments of Toronto as they begin to realise just how overpriced it is there. Earlier today I had a discussion with a fellow student who is looking to move to Hamilton as it's just far more feasible for someone starting out as an architect. Go Hamilton.

INTERVENTION #7

November 3 - 5, 2012

August 17 - 19, 27 - 29, 2013



WELLESLEY, CANADA

Started work this weekend with Adam at his parents' property in Wellesley, Ontario. He's got a large amount of reclaimed wood from a barn that he tore down over the summer, so I'm pretty sure I'll be using that for something, but I'm not sure what. We have to get back to Cambridge tomorrow though, so it's unlikely that I'll start building anything this time out. Hopefully next weekend we'll return, finish his cabin (actually just seal it up for the winter), and perhaps start on something.

INTERVENTION #7

NOVEMBER 3-5, 2012



Adam & his bunkie
the remains of a fort from
Adam's youth



It was decided that Adam and I would work on a collaborative project at the home of his youth in Wellesley, Ontario (just outside of Waterloo). As per usual procedure, I had no idea what would be built, but we had some decent tools on hand and a large amount of timber Adam had reclaimed from a barn several months prior. Wellesley is an interesting part of Waterloo due to a large Mennonite population, and one will occasionally see a horse and buggy in action going down the road. Adam grew up on a hobby farm, and so there is a large corn field adjacent to his property that stretches back to a wooded area. His parents own several farm animals, including chickens, sheep, and sometimes goats, but they are not farmers. Sometimes it's just a great idea to have fresh eggs every day. During our tour of the surrounding area, I finally got to see Adam's bunkie for the first time. Still unfinished, he had been working on it for a number of months, and its completion was a potential project for us to work on over the weekend. As we continued to explore, we came upon no fewer than ten dwellings Adam had built over the years in the woods – a clear indication of his affinity for design and construction. They now exist in varying states of decay, a fading documentation of the development of his abilities as a young architect. Also of note in the woods was the small cabin that his father and grandfather had built some twenty years ago and the sugar shack that stood abandoned. The latter was full of old equipment and machinery that was slowly falling into disrepair.

INTERVENTION #7



*Adam messing around
a wall-mounted shelving
unit. built, but never
installed*

Upon seeing the pile of reclaimed wood, we became really excited and began messing around with the tools in his workshop (the garage). We made a few pieces of furniture without really planning anything ahead of time, and were generally pleased with what we produced. I didn't really build anything customised for this specific environment, and so I'm not sure whether or not this collaboration can be called an "Intervention" – certainly not in the sense of my other projects.

What was important however was the nature of our work: two aspiring architects playing around and brainstorming through creating with a large assortment of wood at their disposal.

INTERVENTION #7



tent assembled the morning of the wedding

the Boutaris & Schwartz-entrubers

Adam's bunkie was used for a photo shoot with the new couple

ADAM & STEPHANIE SCHWARTZENTRUBER

August 3, 2013



INTERVENTION #7 (AKA MESSING AROUND WITH BOKO) UPDATE:

I hesitate to call this an Intervention as it's primarily just Adam and I messing around with an assortment of projects in our (nonexistent) spare time. Last year we made some furniture from some of the barn board Adam had stockpiled, and this time it was much of the same. The important aspect to the small projects that we work on isn't the output; rather, it's the collaborative process and the boyish excitement that we derive from designing and building together. Admittedly, there is a good deal of time spent neither designing nor building, but it's time well spent as we're usually talking about mutual design or professional interests, which are plenty.

INTERVENTION #7

For this second trip to Adam's farm, again intended as a collaborative working session, we turned our attention towards the Bunkie cabin which sat in much the same state as it had been during my last outing. We completed the exterior cladding, and finished one of the interior walls with cheap recycled wood (which looks great) and a projecting shelf. We also began a mud feature wall. This wall was a vintage Adam move: last minute, almost on a whim, and for experimental purposes. We used the clay-rich soil of his farm, some straw, and a bit of water. Pretty simple really, and I'm quite curious to see how it will work. We only did the first of several layers, and Adam will let me know how it turns out.

AUGUST 17-19, 2013



bench + barn

*sanding the surface of the
barn timber bench*

This third collaboration was on a table Adam/Boko was commissioned to make for a client in Toronto. We gave ourselves plenty of time, but in the end it was still a painful ordeal. The massive timber we had to use (the only one that met the dimensional requirements) was twisted and we had to fight with it throughout the construction process, gluing and scaling it to suit our needs. But it was a bit of fun we had over a two day period, and it was great to spend some time in the Boko shop, working with my hands. Sometimes recycling can be very difficult – the project would've taken a small fraction of the time had we been able to work with new wood.

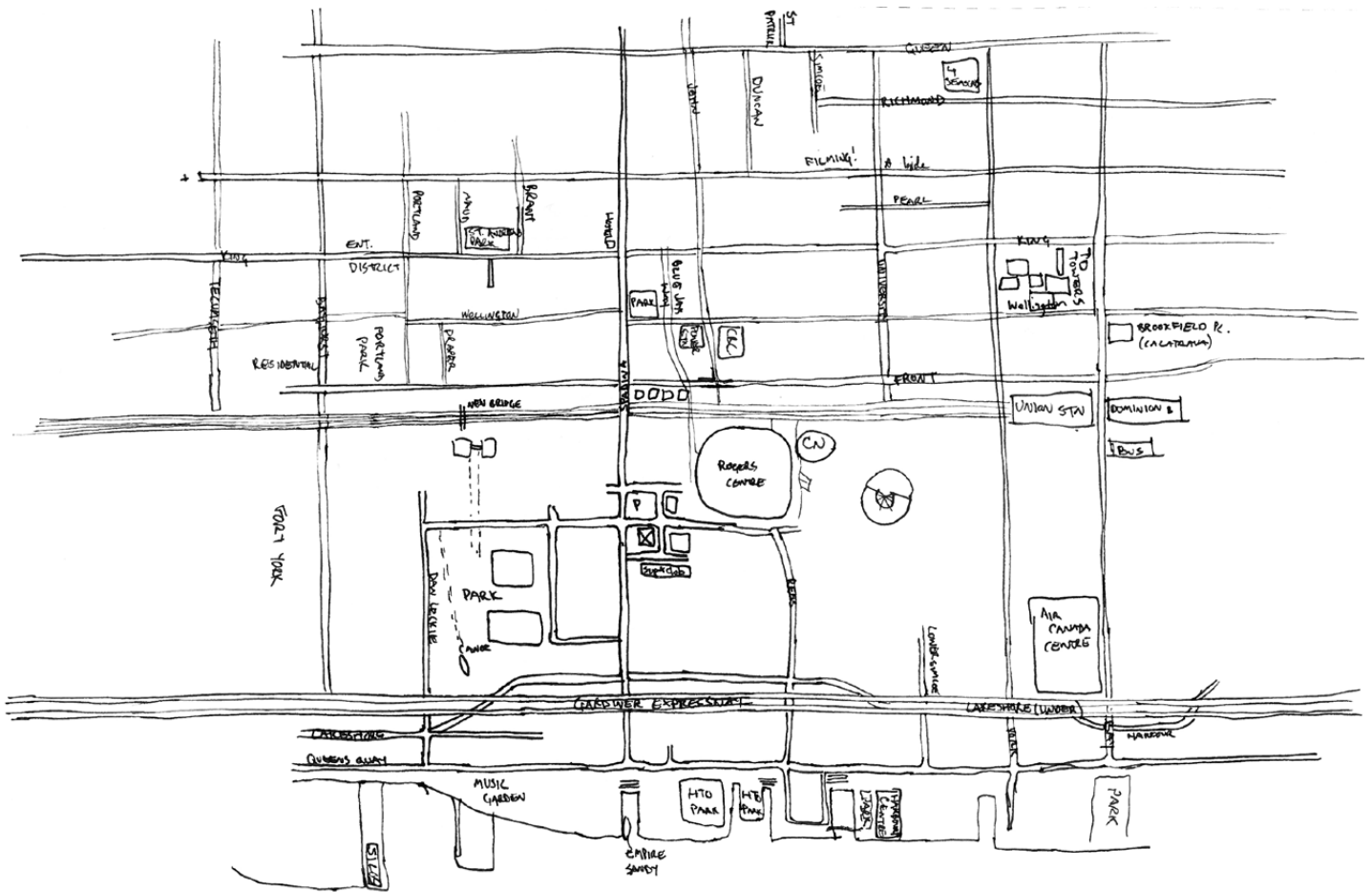
INTERVENTION #7

And Adam's farm is simply gorgeous. I could spend all day just sitting out on the patio, listening to and soaking in the country. If I owned a property like it, I would have no need to ever go to cottage country. It's all right there.

AUGUST 27-29, 2013

INTERVENTION #8

November 11, 2012 - April 7, 2013

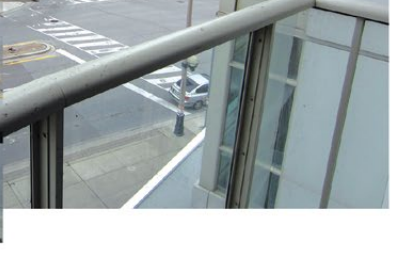


TORONTO, CANADA

I'm not sure why it took me so long to realise that I should be doing projects in Toronto as it's only an hour bus ride from Cambridge, but here I am, a few months later than I should be. Better late than never though. My first foray into understanding the city finds me on the waterfront, in the Concord Cityplace condo development adjacent to the Rogers Centre. Although it's raining right now, the weather has been mild, and I spent all day yesterday wandering around the area, investigating the waterfront.

INTERVENTION #8

NOVEMBER 12, 2012



view from Graham's apartment

Graham's apartment is pretty standard—a single bedroom unit in a complex dominated by young, trendy professionals (from what I can tell). Of course this is the target demographic of the Cityplace developers, and it seems to work relatively well for what it is. For the moment. There are a number of people however that believe this eight thousand apartment development will become a ghetto in a couple decades, something that I don't necessarily agree with. They do make some good points, but just so long as the buildings don't fall apart and Toronto maintains its population, I see the location alone as enough to keep the towers from becoming ghettos.

I can't see families inhabiting these condos—they're just not large enough, and they clearly aren't designed for such occupants. I read an article that claims that there are a mere 128 children in the entire development.⁴ Of course, I'm not saying that the condos are a good thing—certainly there is a severe lack of services, shops, and entertainment in the area, which becomes more of an issue when one considers that the condos are somewhat isolated from the downtown (by the tracks) to the north and the waterfront (by the Gardiner expressway) to the south. As it stands, the area will never have a vibrant street life, but I question whether or not this is really necessary as much of the action is just a five minute walk away. So on it's own, the condo development can't hope to sustain much activity, but for the moment it appears to successfully house people. This having been said, the activity amongst neighbours could be improved. There isn't much offered in terms of the social interactions and chance encounters that really make a community healthy, and it's places like this that lack character. The "superclub"—the resident-only social complex that includes a pool, gym, games room, etc.—provides for this, but it is far to planned and is no substitute for the social atmosphere of a cafe or restaurant. So to summarise, there are a great number of issues that simply aren't up to par, but to say that the development will become a ghetto is a bit of a stretch in my mind. As long as the downtown and waterfront are five minutes away and the buildings don't fall apart, I see the market for these condos remaining strong enough to sustain desirability. But I do think they're gross and would never choose to live in one.

4 Edward Keenan, "Is CityPlace Toronto's Next Ghetto?" *Life_real estate*. November 10, 2011. <http://www.thegridto.com/life/real-estate/is-cityplace-torontos-next-ghetto/> (accessed November 11, 2012).

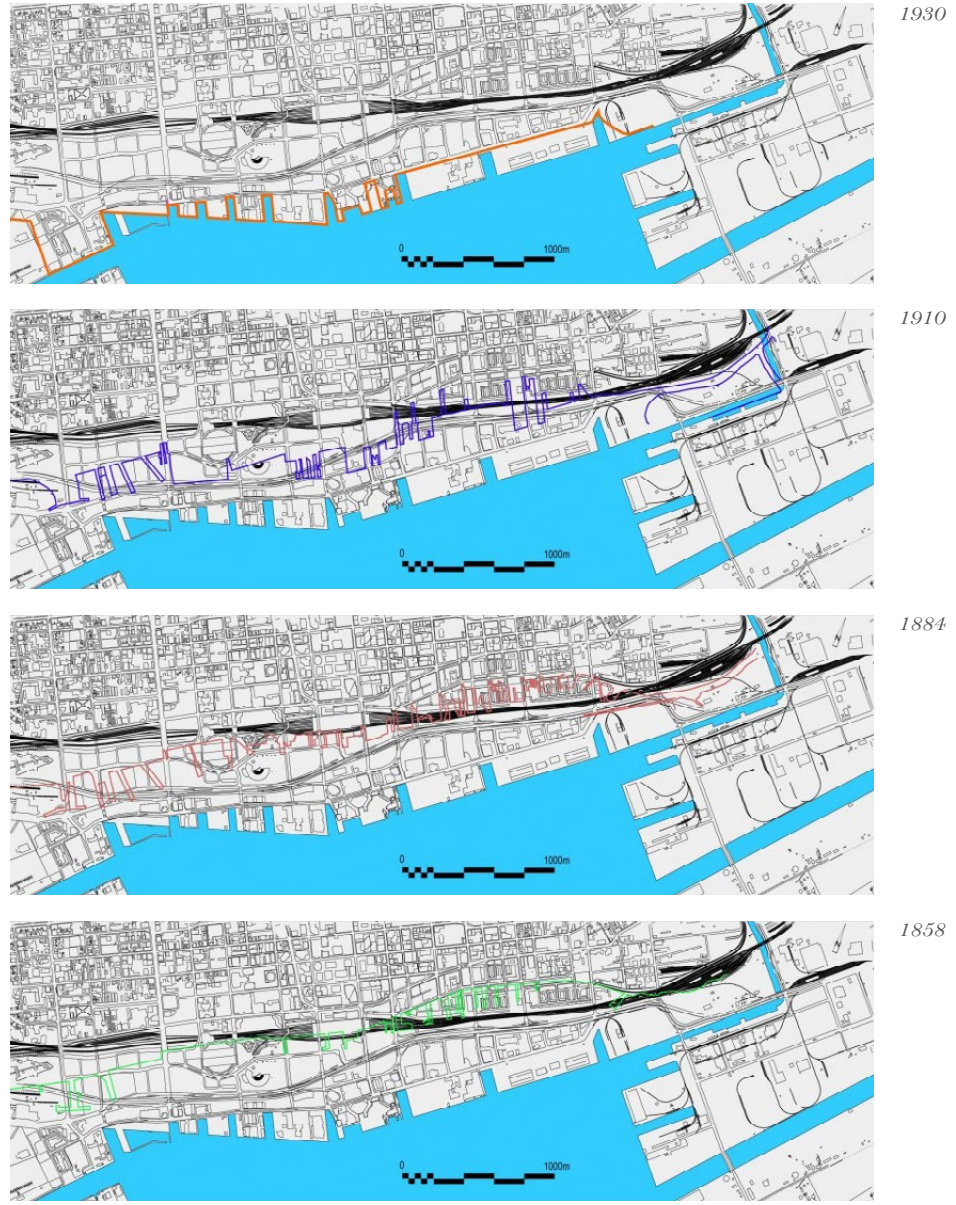


figure 2.1

*tracing the harbour front
over the years*

JUST SOME THOUGHTS ON THE WATERFRONT

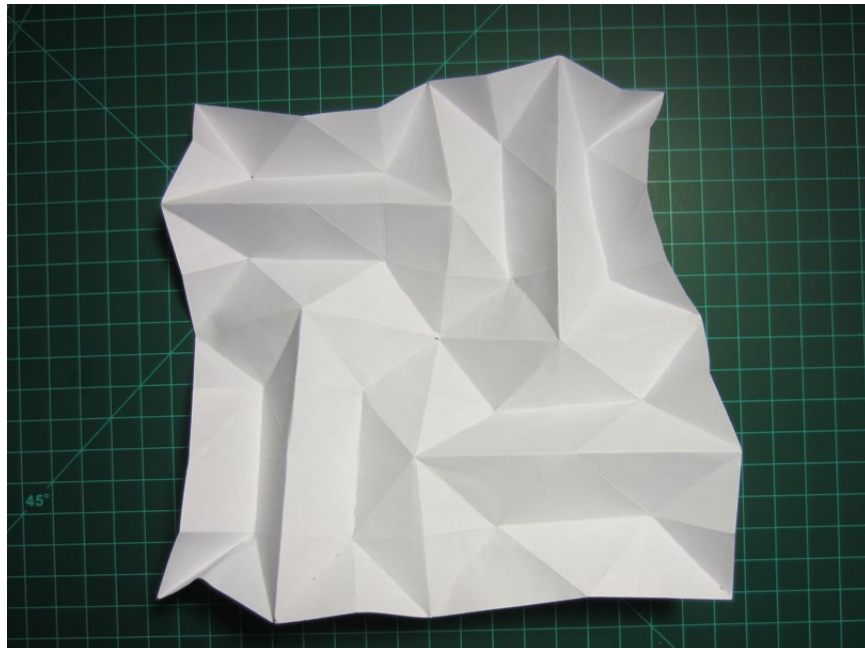
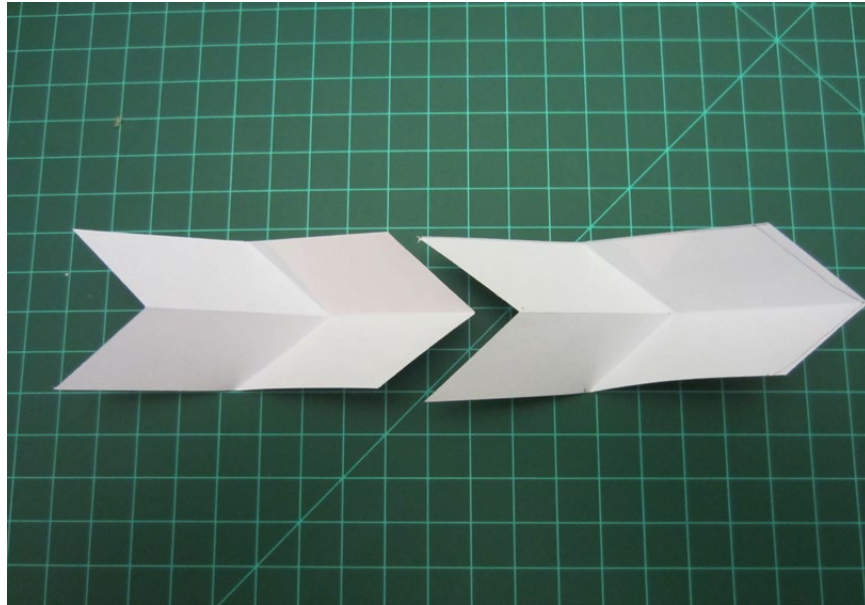
In doing some research on Toronto's harbour front, I came across a number of images that have me thinking about how this condo fad is affecting Toronto and other Canadian cities. Apparently one year ago Toronto had 132 high-rises under construction, tops in North America by a wide margin (Mexico City was second with eighty-eight).⁵

How long will this demand for condos continue? It's pretty crazy at the moment, and I have a particular distaste for the teal/green/blue pastel window colour garbage. Vancouver is particularly bad, especially north downtown. Spandrel panels, mullion patterning, and the pastel palette are among things I dislike thanks to this condo sensory overload.

Personal tastes aside, the condo boom could turn out disastrously, although one can say that about a great number of things. There seems to be a trend of people moving out to the suburbs for work, while living downtown—a reversal of the trend that has dominated the urban scene since suburbs first came into play. What is next? A series of smaller cities and CBDs that leave major downtowns largely empty? If an increasing number of professionals work from home thanks to advances in technology and communication, what will happen to "city life"? Too many questions!

Back to Toronto's waterfront. Looking at the series of diagrams in particular, one can see how the downtown is pulled back from the waterfront. It's interesting to note that it looks like Front street divided the industrial yards from the downtown, which makes sense as this was originally right along the water's edge back in 1858. The industrial lands are artificial, and now the city is trying to expand again over this area. The CN tower, Rogers Centre, some cultural program, and now a sea of condos have emerged in an interesting extension of the downtown that isn't really organic in growth. It hasn't developed naturally over the years, but has been planned meticulously by city officials and developers. So I think the problem is that while it may fall short of it's potential, when given the population of the city, it will work to some degree. And at least the city is trying to improve the waterfront, something long overdue.

⁵ Edward Keenan, "Is CityPlace Toronto's Next Ghetto?" *Life_real estate*. November 10, 2011. <http://www.thegridto.com/life/real-estate/is-cityplace-torontos-next-ghetto/> (accessed November 11, 2012).



iterations

*a piece by designer Elisa
Strozyk*

BLIND CONFIGURATIONS

NOVEMBER 15, 2012

So we've decided to create some kind of window shading system for the only window in Graham's apartment. The existing blinds are pretty bland, and there is a great deal of potential to be realised even if we make use of the current system. There are a number of problematic issues with it:

- looks terrible*
- rattling noise at night when the HVAC blows on it*
- insufficient privacy*

We spent some time over the weekend coming up with several schemes, but have yet to decide on the modular piece. We're hoping to come up with something simple that can be modified and replicated into a larger system that responds to the occupant's needs (views, sunlight, privacy, etc.). This weekend was a good start.

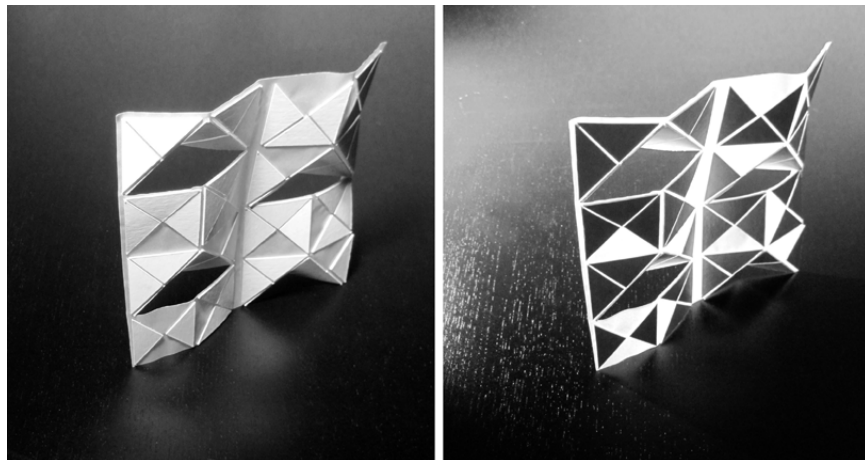
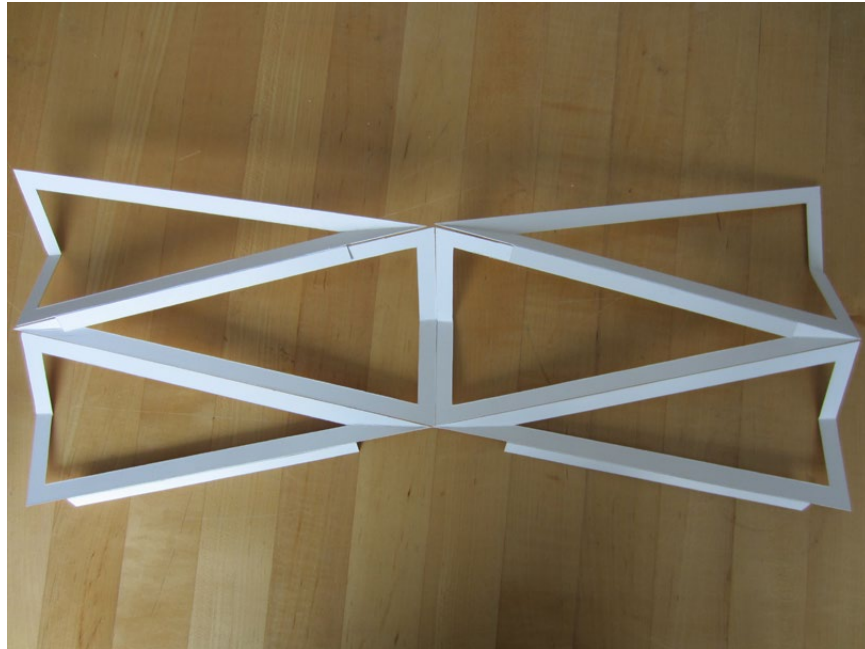
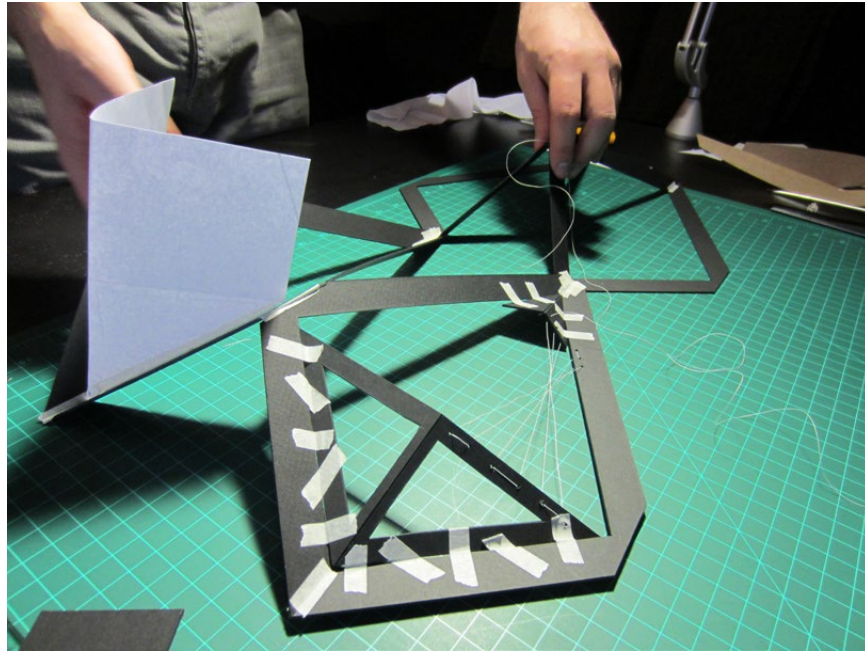
INTERVENTION #8—UPDATE

DECEMBER 10, 2012

A week late, but that's fine. Graham and I have taken our investigations in two separate directions. While Graham is working on a fabric-based system with elastic properties that twists open and shut, I've been analysing different faceted folding patterns. It's interesting to collaborate with Graham as we have two very different methods of working. Graham is more ambitious with his forms, choosing to work digitally, while I've been working primarily with study models made of paper, mylar, and museum board. My forms are more simple, which I believe to be because of the nature of my thesis. I see this project as a lengthy installation—one of many that make up my thesis—whereas Graham sees it as a stand-alone project that requires more time and effort. Of course I would like to see something terrific installed, but I have my eye on the calendar and feel that too much time has already been spent on the design.

INTERVENTION #8

In terms of direction, I envision the faceted plane to be something like this, a piece by German designer Elisa Strozyk. [see opposite page]. While it is a bit more intense than what I'm picturing, it's in the same neighbourhood. It will make for a far more interesting project if we manage to maintain the triangulated facets which will be enhanced by the natural light filtering in through the cracks (or omitted pieces).



*iterative study models:
January 6 - March 12,
2013*

INTERVENTION #8 CONTINUES...

Before we were distracted by food, we worked quite efficiently at building a full-scale model of the latest iteration. The spandex material that Graham found didn't behave quite as we were hoping, so we must brainstorm and scheme a bit more.

INTERVENTION #8

JANUARY 6, 2013

TORONTO DESIGN OFFSITE FESTIVAL

So we were in Toronto, looking for something to do on a Saturday night. Someone suggested going for a skate, but before that, we agreed to check out some opening exhibitions for the 2013 Toronto Offsite Design Festival. Two of the four we attended stood out:

Automatic/Revisited—This was a really well-presented thesis of a U of T architecture student from a few years back. He essentially derived function and inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright’s modular concrete unit that had been developed for the Usonian Automatic Houses. This was a 4”x12”x24” concrete block designed to be mortar-less and relatively painless to install, which it wasn’t. The artist in question had modified the building block idea to create a system of interlocking pieces of assorted geometries. From the short description of the project there wasn’t anything profound at work, but I’ll give him the benefit of doubt. I did note that the drawings and presentation (laser-etched ply) were very well done, and it made for a really attractive storefront.

Ash out of Quarantine—I liked this exhibition more, perhaps because they were doling out free (very good) beer and cheese (again, very good). This exhibition showcased the plight of the ash tree as its numbers are decimated by a foreign beetle. The artist, Brothers Dressler, took parts of the trees and had made some attractive furniture and art pieces from it, although it was difficult to examine up close as they were trying to conduct an interview while I was there. Just like the previous exhibition, the space was quite well designed. The larger shop (an art supplies store of sorts) was dimly lit, and made for a comfortable space for socialising and rubbing shoulders with Torontonians designers. The exhibition space was in the middle, and had some very bright lighting, which, given the pure white of the walls, made the dark brownish orange ash pieces stand out above all else. There was also a funky art piece in the front window display that I glanced at. I think it was also ash as apparently its appeared in much of the marketing for Toronto design week.

In the end we failed to go skating.

COME UP TO MY ROOM 2013

I took in the annual CUTMR at the Gladstone Hotel for the first time in its ten year existence and was pleased with what I saw. Sure, the hype was pretty great (a bit too much, I thought), but many artists had invested a great deal of time into the projects, some of which were quite impressive.

Of particular note was the installation by Fictional Territories (Virginia Fernandez, Shane Neill, and Mariela de Felix) entitled 15,000 Rosaries. It actually featured a mere 11 500 or so rosaries, so I had to voice my displeasure to Shane and Virginia, of course. But the act of hand-rolling nearly twelve thousand rose petals into beads before stringing them onto thread is pretty commendable. The concept behind their project was to raise a dialogue regarding the role of hand-crafted objects in today's consumer-first, production-heavy, society. They then ask the question: "can current design practices give over meaning to our material world?" A provoking question, and it comes at a time when it seems like current design processes in a globalised profession are becoming a major detriment to the industry itself. Free labour, an abundance of competitions, and outsourcing are some of the problems. But regardless, the final product looked terrific, and I think everyone I spoke to agreed that it was the highlight of the show. It had some great meaning, and aesthetically was delicate and reminded me of music. Shane is a professional cellist too, by the way.

Some other projects of note:

In All Falsehood (Gaston Soucy and Ruth A. Mora of the Sumo Project)—This was a pretty interesting sensory experience that featured vertical black lights, mirrors, and a box in a dark room. I'd say it was my second favourite because it altered my sense of scale. When I was in the mirrored box, the reflections twisted my perception, and the smaller space felt much larger. This effect is akin to the one I received when I ambled through the Prada store in Manhattan by OMA. The construction was also very well done.

Tapestry (Tara Keens-Douglas)—I'd really like to see just how she did this one. Apparently she built it flat on her floor and then just pushed it into its final position. Its basically a formal arrangement of coloured paper that was mounted to the wall in the common space. As she's a recent grad of UW, I might be able to find her email to ask her how she did it. Maybe this technique could be appropriated by Graham and I for Intervention #8...

IT'S BEEN PURCHASED!

THERE:

Departure: April 10, 2:10pm

Route: Toronto-Tokyo-Bangkok

Arrival: April 11, 11:55pm

Time of flight: twenty hours

RETURN:

Departure: July 26, 6:00am

Route: Bangkok-Tokyo-Toronto

Arrival: July 26, 3:15pm

Time of flight: twenty-two hours

PLANS

I really need to start thinking about where I'm travelling to this summer. I think my budget will be a huge limiting factor, but I really need to go somewhere dense enough to provide me with enough Intervention opportunities. I'd also like to go somewhere new, of course. Given these three requirements, half the planet is an option (hence my problem). A pretty enviable problem, mind you, and I'm going to enjoy researching possible destination(s). Some ideas:

Thailand (and/or any combination of the following: Vietnam, Laos, Singapore, and Malaysia)—my friend Graham spent a co-op term here and really enjoyed it. I have never spent any time in SE Asia, and I've been hesitant to go there in recent years as it has a reputation of being a party destination for backpackers. Of course since I'm heading there for different reasons entirely, I'll avoid much of this and instead engage in a far more cultural experience in larger urban centres. According to my sources, it's similar in difficulty to Peru for getting things done, but different. A few have said that they prefer the culture there, but I just might have to determine this myself. Flights are fairly expensive, but if I fly out of JFK then I can save roughly six hundred dollars. Bangkok seems like a good starting point, especially since I have some friends there.

Bolivia/Peru/Ecuador—This would build on my Latin American experience, and would give me a number of places that I've yet to experience. I've heard very good things about Bolivia and Ecuador, and am a bit regretful for missing out on them last summer. I'll add Peru to the mix as I have friends there that I would like to see again. And the food is worth the trek.

United States—If I somehow come across a big pile of money, I might go with this option as it would be the easiest way to get Interventions done quickly. However I'm not so keen on experiencing the culture down there, especially since it's nothing new to me. Road-tripping across the country would be fun though.

Cuba—I would love to spend some time here, and the way my thesis is structured, I would learn an incredible amount about a country I'm fascinated with. The soured relationship with other, more powerful nations of the world has effectively cut Cuban off from many of the "benefits" that come from living in a globalised age. This results in a nation that seems frozen in time in many regards (the cars and buses come to mind). A friend of mine spent some time there and highly recommends it.



MARCH 24, 2013

*full-scale mock-up in
preparation for the final
construction*

At a certain point we realised that we needed to push the completion of this project. I was becoming increasingly busy and Graham was planning on leasing out his apartment and wanted the new window shade up and running. And so, like every design project, we decided to freeze the experimental design phase and turn our full attention to materials and the installation process.

We decided to go with a derivation of the Miura fold that was relatively basic and uniform—given the difficulties we were having with consistent surface materials, this seemed to be the wisest choice. We mocked up a full-scale model for testing in Graham’s apartment with some pieces of 1/16” thick polycarbonate that I had laser cut during the week, some mylar, and a type of spandex fabric. The polycarbonate sheets were the most economical and easiest way in which we could provide a semi-rigid surface upon which to adhere the spandex. This spandex was the main ingredient in the sandwich-assembly as it achieved the semi-transparent surface better than any other material we tested. It was also very flexible, but failed to bond well with the polycarbonate—a problem solved with a negotiating layer of mylar in between.

The test was a huge success, and everything worked quite well, setting us up for optimism for the following weekend.

While Graham would take care of the spandex, my job was to come up with enough polycarbonate to cover the window entirely, and then to send it through the laser cutter at the school’s workshop. These tasks however were far easier said than done, and I almost failed to accomplish them.

I first hit an obstacle with the supply store who was unwilling to sell me fifty-six sheets of polycarbonate without several weeks notice. After a few days of emailing around in a panic, the supplier was able to come up with additional materials at the last minute. The second obstacle arose as a result of poor time management, deadlines, and lasers. It turned out to be a problem that money could solve, and so while I was able to achieve everything, it became quite expensive.



adhering the polycarbonate to the mylar at the school of architecture...

...and then to the spandex in my office

CONSTRUCTION

APRIL 6

Since the success of this device relied heavily upon extreme precision, we had to meticulously plan every step. We first lay down the mylar upon the floor of the school's atrium, taping and lining up where each piece would be placed. This was not a quick task. When we completed this, I operated the spray adhesive while Graham lay them into place. There were a few tense moments when we ran out of mylar, but fortunately I had some friends at the school who were able to help out in the twelfth hour. After everything dried, we moved the piece upstairs for the night.

APRIL 7

We optimistically slept in an hour, and finally got started around noon. Our only task this day was to adhere the spandex to the mylar side of the construction, and we were hoping to finish in a couple of hours. As we worked, it became clear that something was all wrong—the spandex simply wasn't adhering, and we weren't sure why. The study model had performed beautifully, so why wasn't this working?

The problem was simple, and irreconcilable. The spandex, while very elastic in nature, resisted the small amount of stretching that we required for it to cover the surface in its entirety. As a result, when the panels were folded, the spandex would bridge between the pieces, rendering the entire piece useless. The test models had failed to reveal this as they had been too small and the spandex was never stretched to this extent. While this was indeed troublesome, it wasn't the only problem we faced.

Even had the glue held, the folding process was nearly impossible—a Miura fold is difficult enough with paper that one can abuse and bend with fingers; here the plastic was rigid and unresponsive to our efforts. The success of a Miura fold relies on the malleability of the material—small pieces of paper are ideal. Even our thin polycarbonate was manageable in small amounts (such as a study model). However, take a plastic surface with an area in excess of six square metres, and you emerge with a nightmare folding scenario that even the most dexterous of hands would become sweaty looking at.

So we were left without anything to show for our efforts. Too much money had already been spent and with no time left before my departure for Bangkok, we had no choice but to pack it in and think about what we had done.

INTERVENTION #8



*the spandex wouldn't
adhere to the mylar; the
spandex was bridging the
folds*

All our test models failed us in the end, and now we have three months to lick our wounds and think about if we want to keep pushing forward or just count our losses. I'm on the fence, and I think just some time away from it will help recharge our batteries and give us perspective.

APRIL 7, 2013

At least our efforts were not all in vain; Graham has a renewed vigor towards design and will be taking some time off work to study for his GRE exams. We also explored new areas previously unfamiliar with either of us, and are better off for it.

SEVEN MONTHS LATER

NOVEMBER 7, 2013

The project sits in my office, tucked behind my desk. There will be no re-visitation.

INTERVENTION #8

*thanks to Graham Brindle
and Mariella Amodio for
all their help*

CONFERENCE REACTION...

I have spent a great deal of time in the seemingly endless pursuit of funding, conferences, and publications in the past two years with very little to show for it. I harbour no regrets; had I not gone ahead with applications and publications, I might have felt like I missed out on some potential opportunities. And I have experienced some measure of success: several award and conference applications have been received favourably.

The only conference I decided to attend occurred this past weekend. While my paper and corresponding presentation were very thorough and well received, I made some difficult sacrifices in my personal life in order to attend the conference. While the conference had potential, it fell far short in my opinion as interest and attendance was low, thereby enabling the presentation of several papers of questionable merit. The price tag for the conference was a steep six hundred dollars (I had a student rate that was far lower), which might cause one to question the intent of the organisers.

Several of the presentations that I attended lacked preparation—there were no supporting visuals and the presenter simply read their paper at the lectern. I find it difficult to believe that someone would pay that kind of money only to embarrass themselves in front of a room full of professionals. I suspected that many of the attendees had received funding and weren't concerned about whichever organisation had granted them support.

This is how my first and last conference transpired.

So to conclude: academia isn't for me.

I must do.

PART III:
AN ITINERANT ARCHITECT

April 10 - July 26 2013

...the more one was lost in unfamiliar quarters of distant cities, the more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there...¹

¹ Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 28.

INTERVENTION #9

April 16 - 27, 2013



CANAL HOUSE; DOST, BANGKOK

BANGKOK, THAILAND

It's hot. And humid. But first impressions have been good, and the food has been terrific.

The full, ceremonial name of Bangkok is:

Krungthepmahanakhon Amonrattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya
Mahadilokphop Noppharatchathaniburirom Udomratchaniwetma-
hasathan Amonphimanawatansathit Sakkathattiyawitsanukamprasit

or

City of angels, great city of immortals, magnificent city of the nine
gems, seat of the king, city of royal palaces, home of gods incarnate,
erected by Visvakarman at Indra's behest.

(I love the period at the end of the English translation—when was the
last time a city's name had a period at the end?)



ON A TWENTY-TWO HOUR JOURNEY BY AIR

Not my longest stretch of flying, but still a considerable amount of time to spend in transit. I checked with Google who said that Bangkok is roughly half way around the world—this was verified by the flights I found while shopping as some went east across Europe and the others west across the Pacific. I took the latter, stopping in Tokyo for a couple of hours.

I flew with Air Canada and United Airlines, and was impressed with both airlines by their movie selection and the food I was served. It seems to be getting better each year (at least the quantity of films does). I slept a bit, did some work, and watched some movies—typical flight activities.

There wasn't much to see out the window during the flight, but it was a little disorienting to follow the sun around as it traveled west—I think I experienced twenty-two hours of daylight from the moment I woke up on April 10th until the sun set when I was over Asia at some point on the 11th. But everything went smoothly and the flights were both long and short in different regards.

SUARNABHUMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Opened in 2006, this impressive structure was completed amongst considerable controversy. I won't get into the finer details here, but it was basically long delayed and subject to a lot of political corruption since the planning began in the sixties. Nevertheless, there are some grand spaces inside, and I hope to properly document them prior to my next twenty hour flight. I just didn't have the energy to do it upon arriving, especially since my arrival was after midnight and I really needed to find accommodation.



This is the largest mall I've ever been to outside of Edmonton. There were eight(!) floors of shopping madness, and the top floor featured an ice rink! I've never seen an ice rink so high up before—I hadn't realised that developers did that. Apparently it's Olympic-sized, although I'm not quite sure why. I did stay there for a half hour or so (waiting for a friend) and caught a bit of a Thailand versus United Arab Emirates hockey game on TV. Both countries are far from making an Olympic bid anytime in the future, let me just say that.

The culture here is a lot like that of South America in the sense that they both love large westernised shopping malls. Perhaps its the air conditioning, but for whatever reason there seems to be enough demand for one on every skytrain stop. And they are BIG. Like I said, eight floors, and sprawling out for blocks. Big money was spent, and many of the aesthetic forms are curvilinear—not a simple construction job when compared to the malls I'm used to seeing in North America (not many, actually—I tend to avoid them). I'm a little disappointed that I ended up in a mall on my first full day in the country when I'd like to avoid them entirely on this trip—I didn't come this far to visit a shopping centre, especially when it's one I can find anywhere back home.

SOME STRANGE FOOD INVOLVING CHICKENS

APRIL 13, 2013

This is an image of chicken fetuses. The yellow things appear to be eggs that may have been well on their way to being chicken. I don't know—I didn't ask, and even if I had, I wouldn't have understood what the vendor said. I did however eat some chicken rectums shortly after this (I was deceived). They were delicious but I don't think I'll do it again.

JUST SOME COSTS (IN CAD)

*a litre of water: \$0.03
 a phone call or text message: \$0.05
 a quick bus ride (under ten minutes): \$0.20
 typical street vendor meal: \$1.25
 a 660mL bottle of beer: \$1.25
 a ride across the city on the skytrain (thirty minutes): \$1.25
 a lengthy cab ride (twenty minutes): \$3.50*



The entire city of Bangkok (and Thailand, I assume) erupts into a gigantic three day water fight as they celebrate the new year. I even went out for some food when it was raining and some kid sprayed me with a water gun—it's relentless!

The tradition began with the idea of reform and cleansing with the changing of the calendar. Monks would give blessings, and people would catch the excess water in buckets which they would then pour over the shoulders of others as a sign of well-wishing. This inevitably evolved into the nation-wide water fight that Thailand enjoys, complete with chalk-mud being smeared onto the faces of anyone that comes within arms reach (also derived from chalk the monks would use). I've never had so many different hands touch my face in one day.

We went to a district famous for its Songkran celebrations and proceeded to walk down streets celebrating, which of course meant playing with water. We were all soaked within about three minutes, but it was so hot out that we didn't start to get cold until about six o'clock when the sun dipped below the buildings.

Some highlights:

- a Buddhist monk spraying water on me as a blessing*
- a really old woman in hipster glasses singing and dancing in the back of a pickup truck as it rolled down the street*
- a posse of lady-boys who were out in full-force*

But I had a great time. Everyone was in high spirits and the atmosphere was terrific. Apparently the party goes on long after the sun goes down, even with the ice-cold water (those who used this water were jerks). Everyone was a kid. At one point we hijacked a family's supply of water and helped their kids spray those who passed by their house. We finally called it a day around six o'clock, and I had my first good night of sleep in several weeks. On my towel, on the floor.

FINAL NIGHT OF THE SONGKRAN

APRIL 15, 2013

The final night of festivities were quite amazing—without a doubt, this is the greatest New Years celebration that I've been a part of. For this final night of celebrations I went to Khaosan Road—a major tourist district of Bangkok—where there was an incredible amount of people, water, and chalk/mud. Unfortunately the weather was getting a little too cold for all the ice water that was being tossed around and after we had dinner, where I enjoyed my first authentic Phat Thai, we tried to escape as dry as possible. I think the top of my head remained dry.

Of particular note was the manner in which the cops rolled in to put a halt to the festivities. About twenty cruisers appeared all at once, and slowly drove down the street, pushing the revelers away as they announced that the party was officially over. It's difficult to argue with that many police, especially if they are supported by the fire department and their hoses (which were used to clean the street).

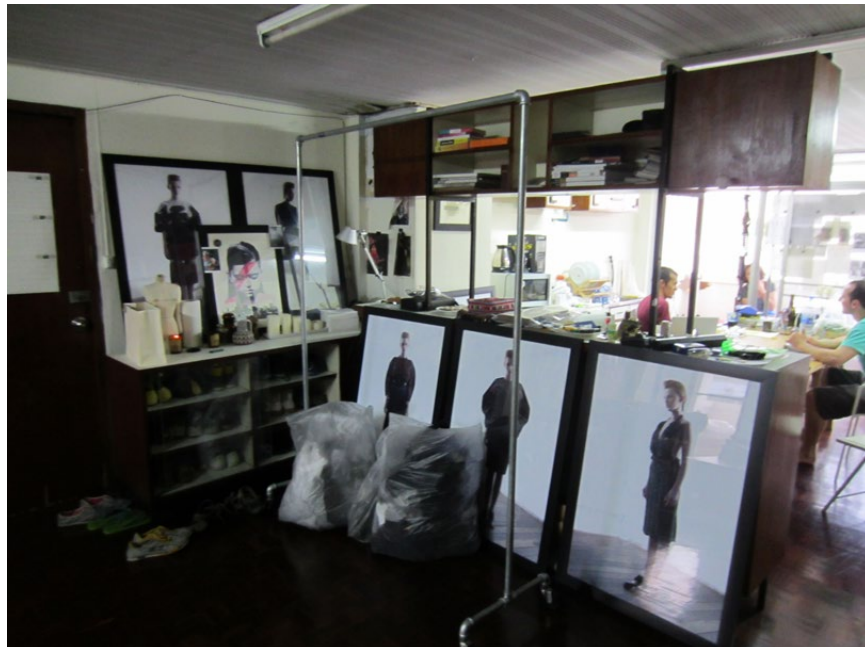
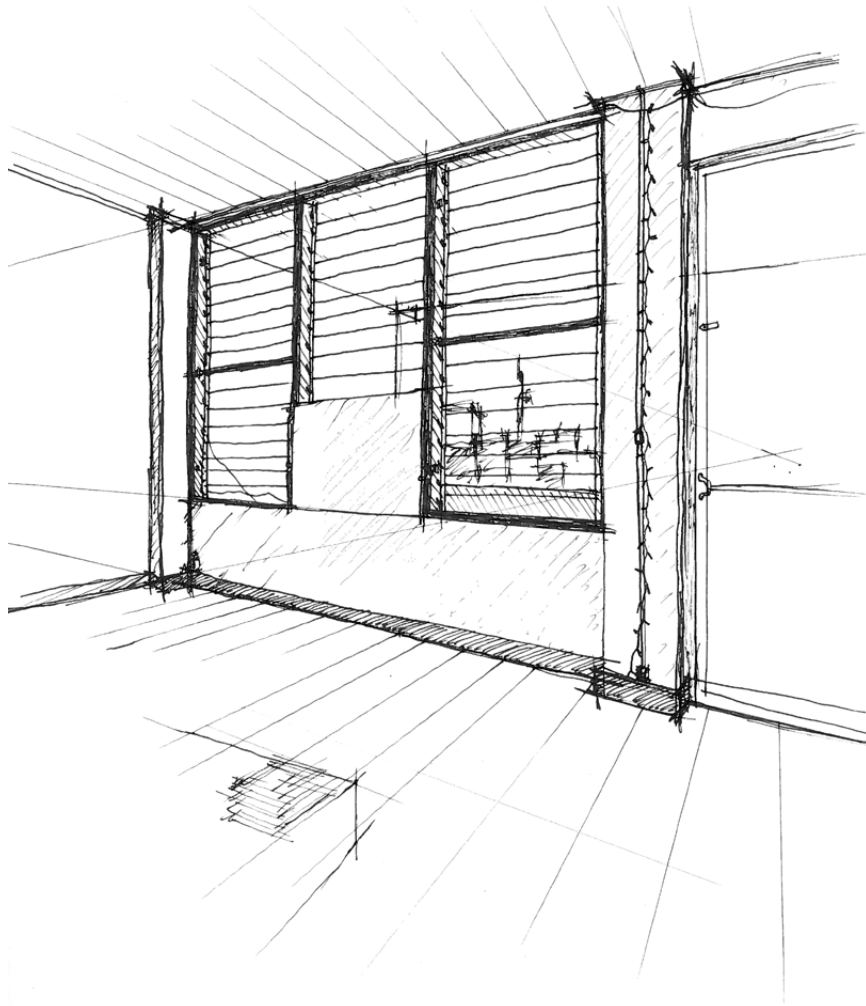
DUSIT, BANGKOK, THAILAND

Intervention #9 is officially underway. I spent the day walking around the neighbourhood of Dusit in Bangkok, mapping the urban fabric and snapping photos with reckless abandon. I also got lost a number of times which is always fun and never a surprise. I took particular interest in the canals/sewers that seem to spring up everywhere; at one point I followed one that wound in between buildings and under roads that was responsible for making me as lost as I've been since my arrival. Apparently Bangkok was founded atop a river delta, and so the canals, which at one time were far more numerous—now few and far between—are essential for the city's drainage. It appears however that they're used more for dumping garbage and are truly disgusting. Some have black water, some have white.

One of fifty districts of Bangkok, Dusit is home to some fairly noteworthy architecture including Vimanmek Palace, the king's Chitralada Palace, the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, and the Wat Benchamabophit temple. There are a number of canals that flow beneath the streets and in between buildings, the largest of which is the Khlong Sam Sen. Directly to the west is the Chao Phraya River which is horribly polluted, but not quite as polluted as the canals which are essentially open-air sewers. This would've been a beautiful city in the early years; it's really too bad that the fresh water sources have been abused so much. Wisharawish was telling me that at one point the citizens of Bangkok needed boats to get around, and that it wasn't really until King Rama V paved over many of the canals in favour of modern roads at the end of the nineteenth century that the waterways began to lose their presence.

INTERVENTION #9

APRIL 17, 2013



the south-facing wall

*samples of work adorned
the apartment*

INTERVENTION #9: BEGINNING

On the fifth day into my 106 day trip in SE Asia I've taken the first steps to completing what will be my ninth thesis Intervention. Today I was fortunate enough to have good weather as I explored the neighbourhood of Dusit (and parts of Thanon Nakhon Chai Si). I managed to get some sun on my eerily-white skin, draw the standard neighbourhood map, and get a quick sketch in before the sun set. I also managed to sample some delicious food (as always). The apartment itself is quite nice, and certainly not lacking in either inspiration or creativity. Operating as an atelier by an up-and-coming fashion designer, the apartment is full of clothing, sketches, and materials. It also has two balconies, which is critical in ensuring a healthy cross-breeze to cool the swelteringly hot nights (my bed/couch is adjacent to one of the balconies). The north-facing balcony is quite nice; it has a table & chairs, some plants, and is quite inviting. However the southern balcony is far too hot during the day and there are no plants as the source of water (a hose) belongs to the north balcony. Wish has mentioned that he doesn't know what to do with this unused balcony, so I might just have to have my way with it.

The apartment belonged to Wisharawish, one of Thailand's top designers, and winner of the illustrious Mango fashion award in 2012. His apartment was modest, and had been turned into an atelier with clothes racks, materials, and sketches strewn all over the place. One very nice quality about his fourth floor apartment was that it had a balcony on the north and south facades which enabled amazing ventilation that approached gale-force at times. These breezes limited the need for air conditioning while providing Wish with two exterior spaces in which to grow small plants, something the people of Bangkok do with admirable fervor. Although his north-facing balcony was filled with plants (and more importantly, water), the sunny southern balcony was essentially used for storage and cockroaches.

INTERVENTION #9

April 21, 2013



figure 3.1

ELEVATED TRANSIT

I'm a big fan of the epic modes of transit here in Bangkok, particularly the Skytrain and elevated toll expressways for their sheer size and ambition. I've never seen so much construction (and money) put into expressways or public transit. Compared with what Bogotá and Lima put together, Bangkok is miles ahead. I guess there is just a lot more money over here.

CHATUCHAK WEEKEND MARKET

Quite the place, and really hot. Twenty-three acres or so of crazy (but not too crazy) shopping for pretty much everything man has ever invented. I had to indulge, and I emerged with some shirts, one of which was a Thundercats t-shirt that I've never seen before. It will be a great place to do some souvenir shopping when the time comes late in July.

WISH'S FRANCE EXHIBITION

On Tuesday Wish will be heading to Hyères, France, with a posse of fashionistas for the annual International Festival of Fashion and Photography. Not only will he be presenting his own work (pictured), but he'll be on the jury to decide the recipient of a prestigious award from a shortlist of talented young Thai designers. It's been really interesting to see how he's been preparing—from designing new styles, to meeting with tailors, to running photo shoots—and I've been really impressed with how professionally everything has come together. Best of luck in France Wish!



INTERVENTION #9: MATERIAL SHOPPING

Today was a long and interesting—albeit unfruitful—day. I charged myself with the task of finding some reclaimed wood, which I figured shouldn't be difficult as I had seen it all over the city. It turned out to be far more difficult than I initially thought, and the best price I could find was eighty dollars for a single piece of timber. Needless to say, I won't be paying that. The bamboo also turned out to be more expensive than I had expected, and although I shopped around at a number of different places I couldn't find something I was happy enough with to give them my money. But I'll still go back tomorrow to pick something up as I do need it.

I did find a few really interesting places in and around the Chatuchak market. There was a community (where I tried to buy some wood) that had inhabited a number of old train cars. I wanted to take more photos, but I was already intruding enough by wandering through the homes—which had been raised up on segments of rail—as I searched for wood. Pretty much everyone I tried to turn into a seller today told me to move along. So I returned home discouraged, tired, sunburnt, and a little stressed—I've been here ten full days now and haven't even started constructing my first project. I'm definitely behind schedule now.

INTERVENTION #9

APRIL 22, 2013



*colours of the Grand
Palace*

Wat Arun

PLAYING TOURIST FOR A DAY

Grand Palace

I decided that my only day as a tourist in Bangkok would be spent at the Grand Palace, recommended to me by pretty much everyone as the primary tourist, cultural, and historic destination in the city. I had originally planned to spend several hours here, but given my late start (the first two docks I tried to catch the boat at were apparently not being used that day) and the sweltering heat in my jeans and shoes (respectful dress code in effect), I ended up only touring the complex for an hour or so.

Everything was quite opulent and extremely well-maintained. At night the building facades are flooded with light and seem to glow from across the city. Quite large at ~220 000 sq. m., the “palace” is actually a large complex made up of a number of buildings, temples, and lawns.²

The most popular destination is the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, where the Emerald Buddha is kept. This is the most holy of Thai sites, and controversial; neighbouring Laos claims that the statue actually belongs to them. It has an illustrious history in which it is continuously claimed by the dominant military power.

Wat Arun

(aka Wat Arun Ratchawararam Ratchawaramahawihan)

This temple is visible from quite a distance, and given the dark nature of the materials, it gives the (false) impression of being very old when it was actually completed in the mid nineteenth century. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it more than the Grand Palace as I don't enjoy the ornate architecture typical of most eastern temples and palaces.

ICAMA 2013

I just received word that my abstract has been accepted to the ICAMA 2013 (International Conference on Adaptation & Movement in Architecture) to be held at Ryerson University in October. This will be my first conference, just so long as I can get my paper submission done by July 1 (which shouldn't be difficult), and as long as Waterloo will help offset some of the hefty six hundred dollar entry fee. However they'll only help out with one conference per year, and as there are others that I'd like to attend, I may choose them over ICAMA. We'll see...

² Bureau of the Royal Household, The Grand Palace, <http://www.grandpalacethailand.com/> (accessed 23 April 2013).



MATERIAL COLLECTING

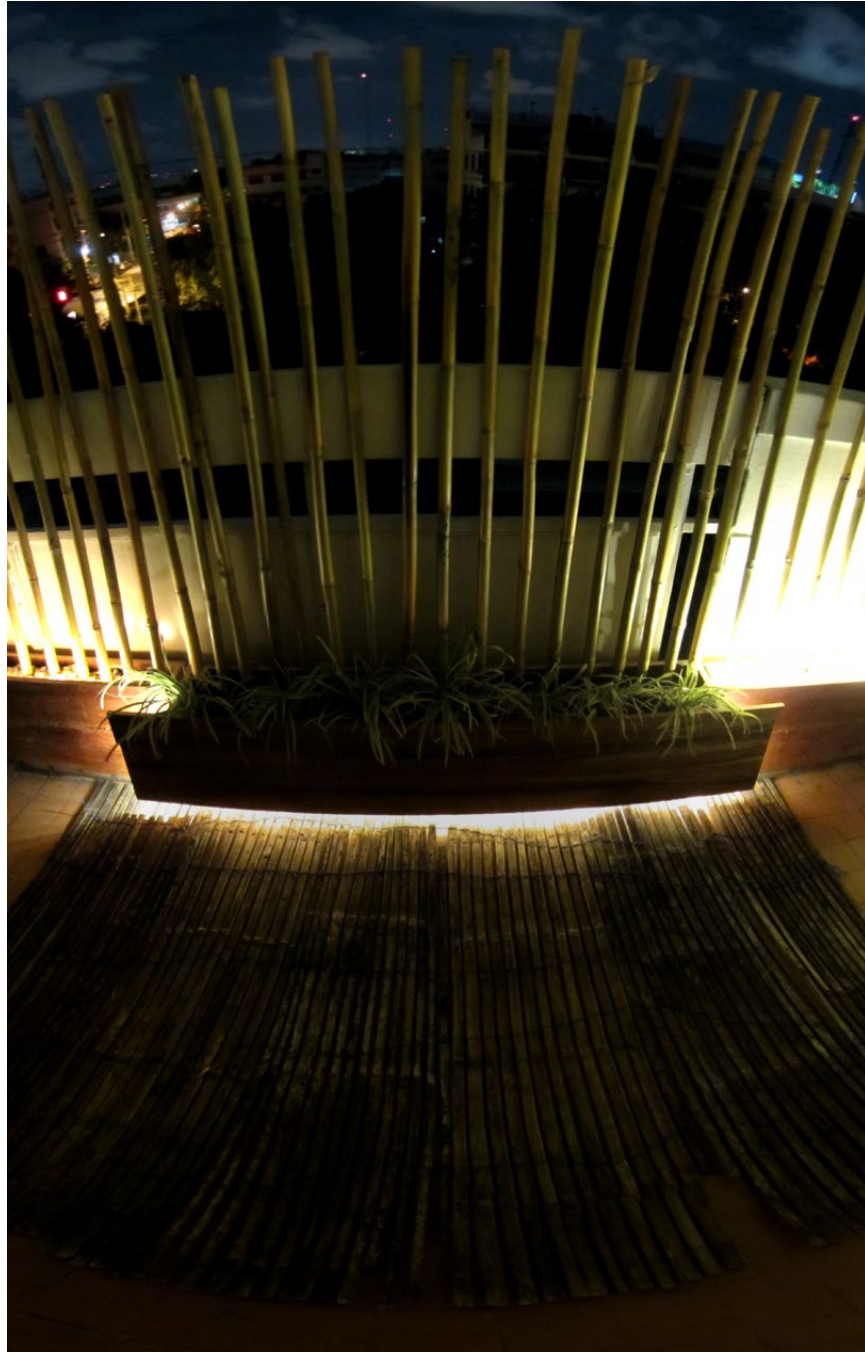
A long day collecting materials with the help of Oukkie, Wisharawish's assistant. I don't think any of the people we spoke to knew any English, so this day would've stretched out over several had she not come with me. I hadn't anticipated such difficulty in finding the proper materials, but apparently Thailand removed all their forests in favour of agriculture, and so wood is scarce (and expensive). Who knew. We went to a number of places, including:

- a wood shop for some 3/4" thick plywood*
- a wood shop for some 1/2" thick glulam board of some kind and the lacquer to coat it*
- some store for lights and metal (they also cut the metal for us)*
- a shop for nails*
- another shop for hooks*
- another shop for 2"x1" and 1"x1" wood members*
- a shop for bamboo rods*
- a shop for soil and plants*
- a shop for wood chips and stone*
- a shop for the wooden "mat"*
- a shop to get some holes drilled*
- back to the original wood shop to cut the wood down to size*

INTERVENTION #9

The stores were spread across two districts, and so it took the better part of two days to obtain everything I needed. It wasn't cheap. I had to scale back the design considerably and make some sacrifices in terms of quality of materials on the fly as I discovered just how far over budget the project was becoming.

APRIL 24-5, 2013



I decided to re-integrate the southern balcony into the rest of the apartment by creating a new use for it. As the other balcony had many plants, I decided to treat this one in the opposite manner, choosing materials that required far less maintenance and were durable (at least in terms of sun and rain). And so I turned the balcony into a meditative garden of sorts, seeking to create a more intimate space where one can enjoy being outdoors and yet still appreciate the Bangkok skyline without the clamor and bustle of the streets below.

As the sun is simply too hot to make this space comfortable during the day, I focused on how it might be used after the sun goes down. Lighting played an important role, and it was important for me that the light provided an ambiance that would invite Wish and his friends to spend some evening-time enjoying the space. For this purpose I also built a small table that can be compressed and stored in an unsightly hole in the window.

This Intervention turned out well, but I worry about it during the wet season when the wood will have to withstand copious amounts of water. I lacquered the 3/4" plywood quite extensively, but I still harbour some doubts. When I return to Bangkok at the end of July, I'll check on it's state and make any necessary repairs. Hopefully the plants are still alive and well.







*the bamboo bunched
together to resist wind*

vines were planted

ARTICLE PUBLISHED!

JUNE 2, 2013

My first article, "An Itinerant Architect in Bangkok" has been published by The Journal of Modern Craft.³ Sure, it may be a month after the fact, but at least it's up while I'm still abroad.

INTERVENTION #9: THREE MONTHS LATER

JULY 22, 2013

After my departure some three months ago, I occasionally worried that the boxes had fallen apart. However there had been no word from either Oukkie or Wish, and no news was good news. When I finally did return, I was pleased to find that not only were the boxes still intact, but that the plants were alive. So my project continued to intervene.

Wish had since planted some vines with the intention that they would grow up the bamboo stalks. This wasn't something we had discussed before, and it was good to see that the project continued to evolve. Several of the bamboo stalks had also been pushed together as the wind would occasionally catch the bamboo, spilling the entire garden forward into a big mess upon the balcony. The lights were rarely used as there were fears of a fire starting as the balcony was subject to rain-fall and water was used for the plants. I don't think the table had ever been used, and so I moved it from the window into its operable position.

INTERVENTION #9

So it is a success.

3 Gordon Hunt, "An Itinerant Architect in Bangkok," *Journal of Modern Craft*, 2 June, 2013, <http://journalofmoderncraft.com/responses/an-itinerant-architect-in-bangkok> (accessed 2 June, 2013).

RETURN TO BANGKOK

This city is far different from when I first experienced it some three months ago. It just doesn't seem like a part of Southeast Asia, at least not in the sense that the other places I experienced do. It is far, far different from the other cities and towns I went to, and this is for a number of reasons.

Bangkok is huge. With a population in excess of eight million, this simply isn't a city one can see on foot. Granted, neither is Hanoi, but at least I was able to stay within walking distance of pretty much everything I wanted to see, often within the historic downtown (which Bangkok lacks as it is a very young city). Every other city seemed to be accessible and friendly towards the pedestrian, but here if one doesn't have a set of wheels, one simply cannot get from A to B.

Bangkok has money. With money comes infrastructure and construction, both of which Bangkok has far more of than the other cities I saw. One can get downtown from the airport in thirty minutes using the skytrain. No other city even had a reliable bus service.

With money comes the ability to become more western. The shopping centres and food courts are among the largest I've ever seen, and as soon as I stepped into one, I was immediately transported to the ambiguity of the western shopping plaza, where store selection is consistently the same, regardless of global location.

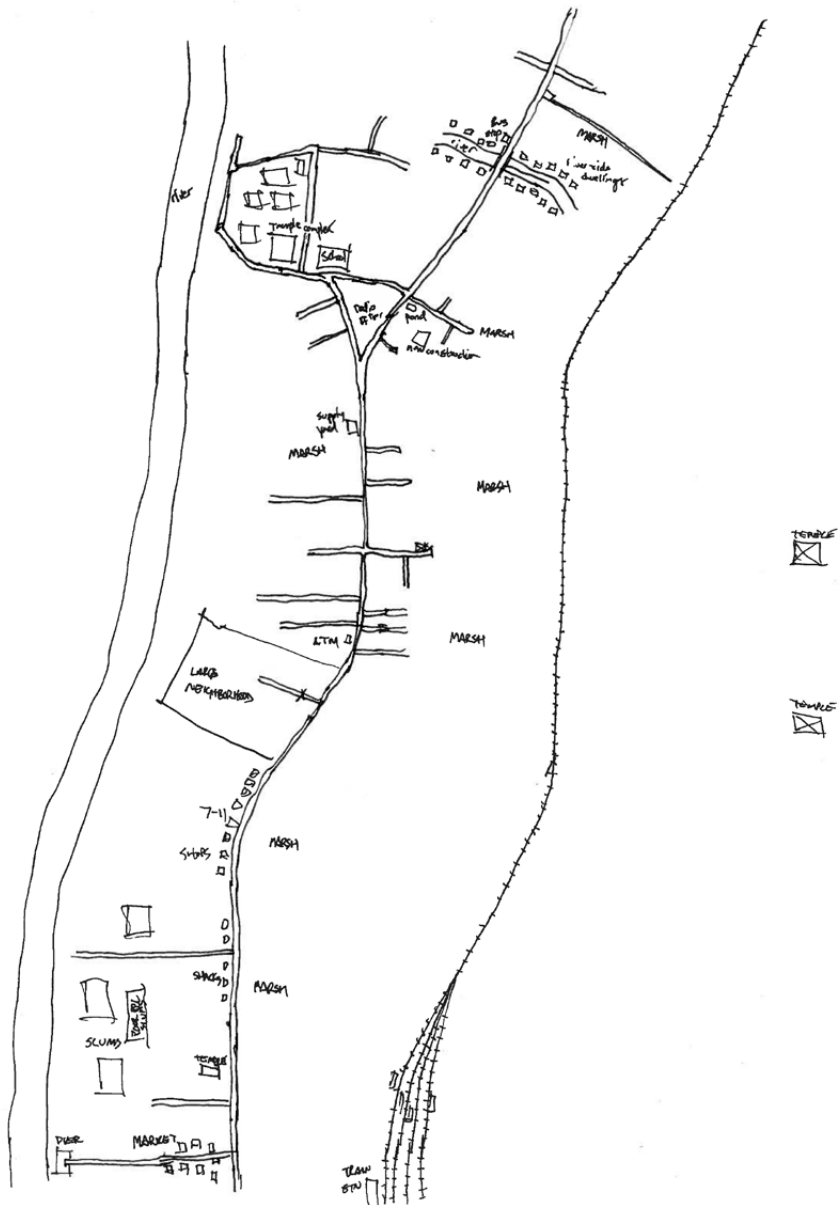
I'm comparing Bangkok to SE Asian cities right now, whereas before I compared it to Latin American, North American, and European cities. As I had no frame of reference for Asian cities, Bangkok was new to me, and while I knew it was larger and more developed than its contemporaries in this part of the world (that I planned to visit), I couldn't compare it properly. Now that I've traveled and lived for three months in other locations, I can develop a more informed opinion of this place.

My opinion is that Bangkok is a place to fly in and out of. Phnom Penh, where I spent far less time, was more deserving of my attention as its history and architecture are actually interesting. The short time I spent there was really intense. I don't think Bangkok is a very accurate representation of the surrounding cultures. It's a bit of an anomaly, and just too big without the corresponding character to justify my attention.

Sorry Bangkok; I'll give you a miss next time.

INTERVENTION #10

April 30 - May 9, 2013



AYUTTHAYA, THAILAND

I was lucky to find my next client in Ayutthaya, a fascinating UNESCO world heritage site located roughly seventy kilometres north of Bangkok.

From the UNESCO website:

These [historic] maps reveal an elaborate, but systematic pattern of streets and canals throughout the entire island and dividing the urban space into strictly controlled zones each with its own characteristic use and therefore architecture. The urban planning template of the entire island remains visible and intact, along with the ruins of all the major temples and monuments identified in the ancient maps.⁴

But what I found to be most interesting was this:

The [urban plan] took maximum advantage of the city's position in the midst of three rivers and had a hydraulic system for water management which was technologically extremely advanced and unique in the world.⁵

From the little information I could unearth online, it would appear that Ayutthaya's urban plan incorporated a strict grid of roads, districts, canals and moats. Water was critical to the economic prosperity of the city through trading and irrigation, and was used to improve the city's defences. Ayutthaya's planners diverted the three rivers upon which it rested with a series of canals that were designed to improve the city's defences and agriculture. It became an island, surrounded by a sequence of moats that were added to as necessary. When combined with a strong tidal bore along the rivers, this provided Ayutthaya with a natural defence from sea-based attacks while enabling its trade to flourish. As it had a key location halfway between India and China, diplomatic relations became strong, and ambassadors from many countries took up residence (while importing foreign art and architecture).⁶ The city eventually fell with the advent of gunpowder as the Burmese canons proved to be too much for the city's defences. The surviving Siamese packed up and relocated to what is now Bangkok, where the urban grid was implemented once again.

INTERVENTION #10

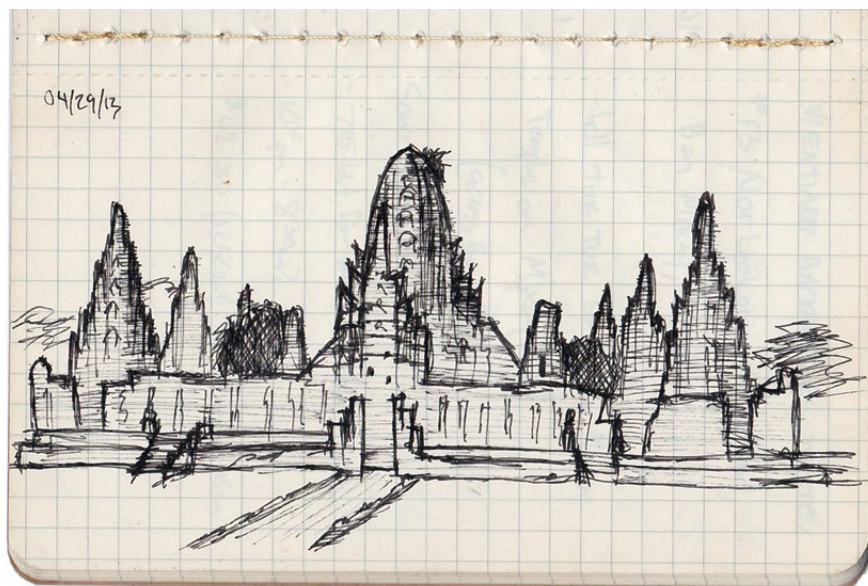
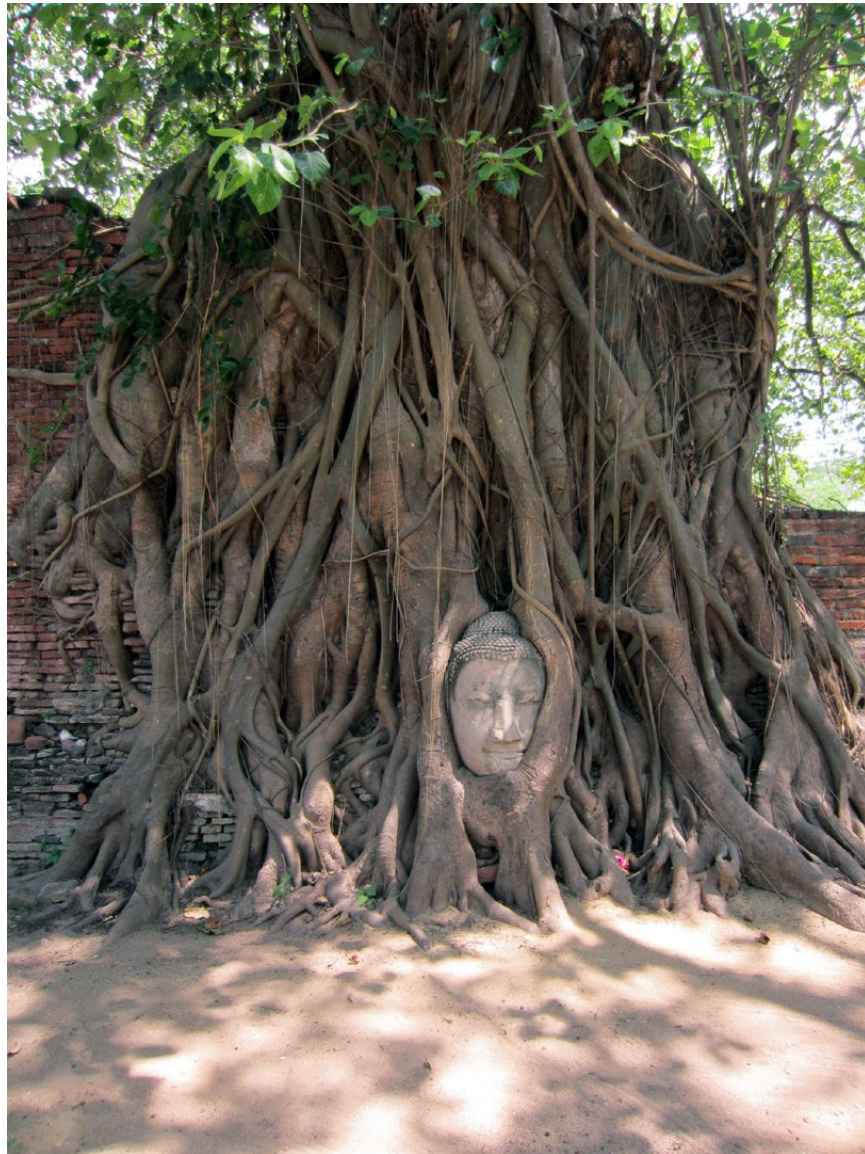
INTERVENTION #10: SITE

The next Intervention takes place in the old capital of the Siam empire, Ayutthaya. Situated just outside of Bangkok, it feels like another country entirely. My host/client, Note, was born and raised here, and his house is very inspirational, whether it be because of the history of the city, it's location (overlooking a wetland), or the building itself. He rents out a number of rooms to foreigners who have come to teach English in town, and so there is a really great multicultural vibe running through the place.

⁴ "Historic City of Ayutthaya," UNESCO (online; n.d.) in World Heritage List, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/576/> (accessed 20 Nov, 2013).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.



*Wat Maha That and its
Buddha tree*

Wat Chai Watthanaram

SOME WATS (TEMPLES) OF AYUTTHAYA

APRIL 29, 2013

WAT PHRA RAM

This monastery was constructed on the cremation site of King Ramathibodi I (r. 1351-1369), the first Ayutthayan king. I was quite impressed with it as it was my initial sight of the day, but it was definitely the least impressive ruin that I saw. Good thing I went here first.

WAT RAT PRADITTHAN

I like this wat because one can actually go inside the prang. But the fun doesn't stop here—down some stairs is a prison (or is it a burial chamber?) where there are some painted frescoes.

WAT MAHA THAT (PICTURED)

The highlight of this six hundred year old monastery is undeniably the Buddha head peering out from amongst the roots of a tree.

WAT PHRA SI SANPHET

This is the most important monastery in Ayutthaya and is located in the Royal Palace complex, much in the same way that the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is within the Royal Palace grounds in Bangkok (which was modeled after Wat Phra Si Sanphet). No monks ever lived here though.

WAT CHAI WATTHANARAM (SKETCH)

This is easily the most impressive temple in the city. Constructed in 1630 by king Prasat Thong, he built it to honour the birthplace of his dear mum. It's also much better preserved than the other temples I visited. I actually spent several hours here, observing how the sun interacted with the architecture as it moved across the sky. Unfortunately I wasn't allowed inside, but I didn't mind, just so long as they don't destroy the ruins with new bricks in a misguided restoration effort like they are doing at many of the other temples.

WAT PHU KHAO THONG

This monument was built by the Burmese near an old Siam wat commemorating their victory over Siam in the eighteenth century. The original temple was completely inaccessible by foot, and one needed a boat to get to it. It's amazing that the monument hasn't sunk yet, although parts of it have fallen over.

MAR 4, 2013



plate 3.11

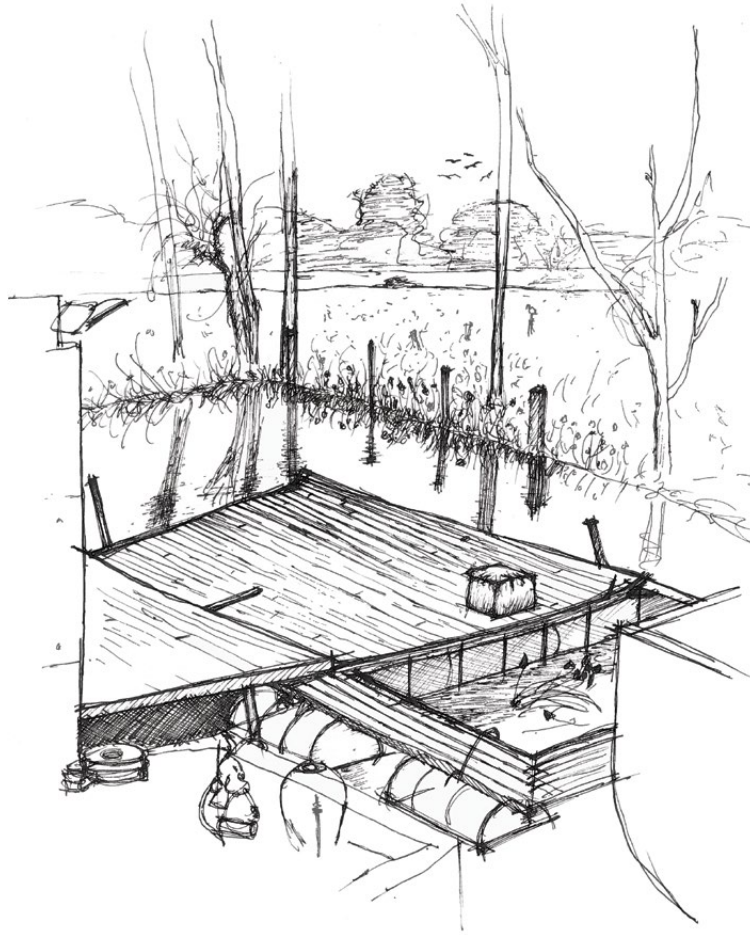
*Google Maps images
showing the state of
Ayutthaya during the
flood*

Note, Chris and I had several conversations about the flood that hit Ayutthaya several years ago. A major event, it initiated an intense period of wetland growth in behind Note's home. The surface of the marsh had always been clear of vegetation, but ever since the flood, lush greenery obscured the water from sight. There was also quite a bit of damage done to Note's home as the bottom floor had been completely flooded. Snakes (venomous vipers!) became a problem in the town as they searched for dry places to go.

One of the most significant problems of the flood was the damage it incurred upon the ruins of the historic centre. There was a great deal of damage done, but apparently not enough to initiate any significant disaster protocols for the future as another flood struck once again in October 2013. Once again, the temples suffered damage as the flooding went unchecked.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that when I arrived, the satellite image provided by Google Maps was taken in September 2011, when much of the city was submerged. Several months later I noticed that they had updated (half) the image—fortunately I had taken a screenshot of a flooded Ayutthaya while I could. It's quite interesting to look upon a flooded city from the air, especially one with such history.

I'm sure that the engineers of ancient Ayutthaya had managed to avoid such flooding. These floods really make apparent the presence and force of the water in the region—no wonder this site was chosen to be the centre of the Siam empire.



I stayed with Note, an extremely friendly and generous guy who was born and raised in the small city. His home was quite interesting, and since he had it built several years back, there were some unique characteristics that indicated it had been a custom job—although the skill of the designer left something to desire. The multi-tiered exterior spaces initially attracted my interest as they held a lot of potential, especially in section as I love mezzanines. My first studies were of the lowest level, the dock, and I spent some time sketching and trying to brainstorm how it could realise the fullest potential of its beautiful site. The property looked out across a large marsh that was home to hundreds of storks, and with the ruins of an old wat visible in the distance, it made for a serenely beautiful spot. Cool breezes replaced the heat at night and the sounds of nature, especially in the early morning, were calming. Needless to say, this site had resources that needed to be utilised.



INTERVENTION #10



*the back of Note's home
which looks out onto the
marsh*

*the curious structure built
at the back of Note's
family home*

Following some exploring and research into the history of Ayutthaya, I came to the conclusion that this small city has vast tourism potential. It is only an hour away from Bangkok, one of the largest and most international cities in this part of the world, it has some incredible history as the historic capital of the Siam empire, and it is built upon the same river delta as Bangkok. After a few discussions with Note, he revealed to me that his dream was to one day build a small hotel, to which I reacted with great enthusiasm. We eventually decided that this would be a terrific opportunity to draft up a proposal for a small lodging for temporary residents (English teachers), in much the same manner as the five existing apartments adjacent to Note's home. We would also use this opportunity to incorporate many of the ambitions (in terms of design, materials, and passive energy strategies) that he would employ in the construction of his hotel. Essentially a dry-run for this future hotel.

The site that inspired this idea is the adjacent property to Note's home where the majority of his family lives. Note owns it, and a curious structure sits behind the family home that will be appropriated into the our six-unit building. This existing structure was built as a parking garage of sorts, with space at grade for two vehicles and an open-air games room above. It was over-designed (structurally), and will be suitable as the structure for the simplest of residential units—we just need to fill in the walls, extend some of the columns, and replace the existing roof with one that is more than simple corrugated metal. Of course, what I've designed is far superior to this simple construction, although I must keep in mind the limitations and skills of the local work force.

In terms of design, there are a number of objectives that I have. First and foremost, the benefits of the site need to be realised. The units face northwest so that the views of the marsh and distant temple are maximised. Passive energy is also a top priority, and I've planned for solar hot water collectors, PV cells (budget permitting), reuse of greywater, passive ventilation (sliding & screen doors on opposite ends of the units), and a vast amount of insulation in the walls and roof. Note's limited budget is also a factor as he doesn't currently have enough to finance the project. Economical materials, unskilled (local) labour, and a simple design are all necessary for this project to move forward.

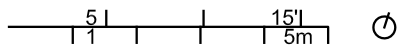
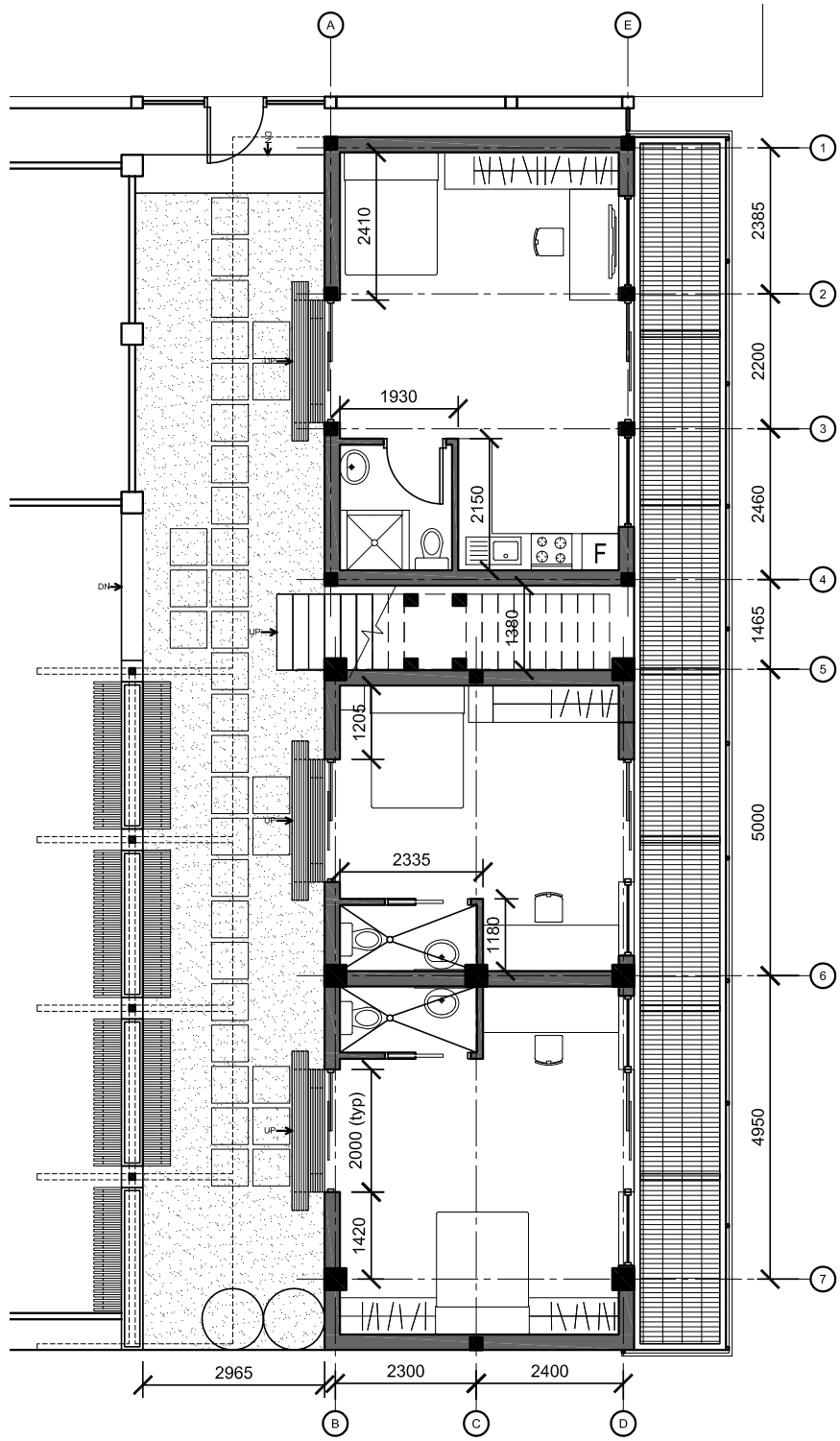


*view of the backyard of
the family home and the
apartment entrances*

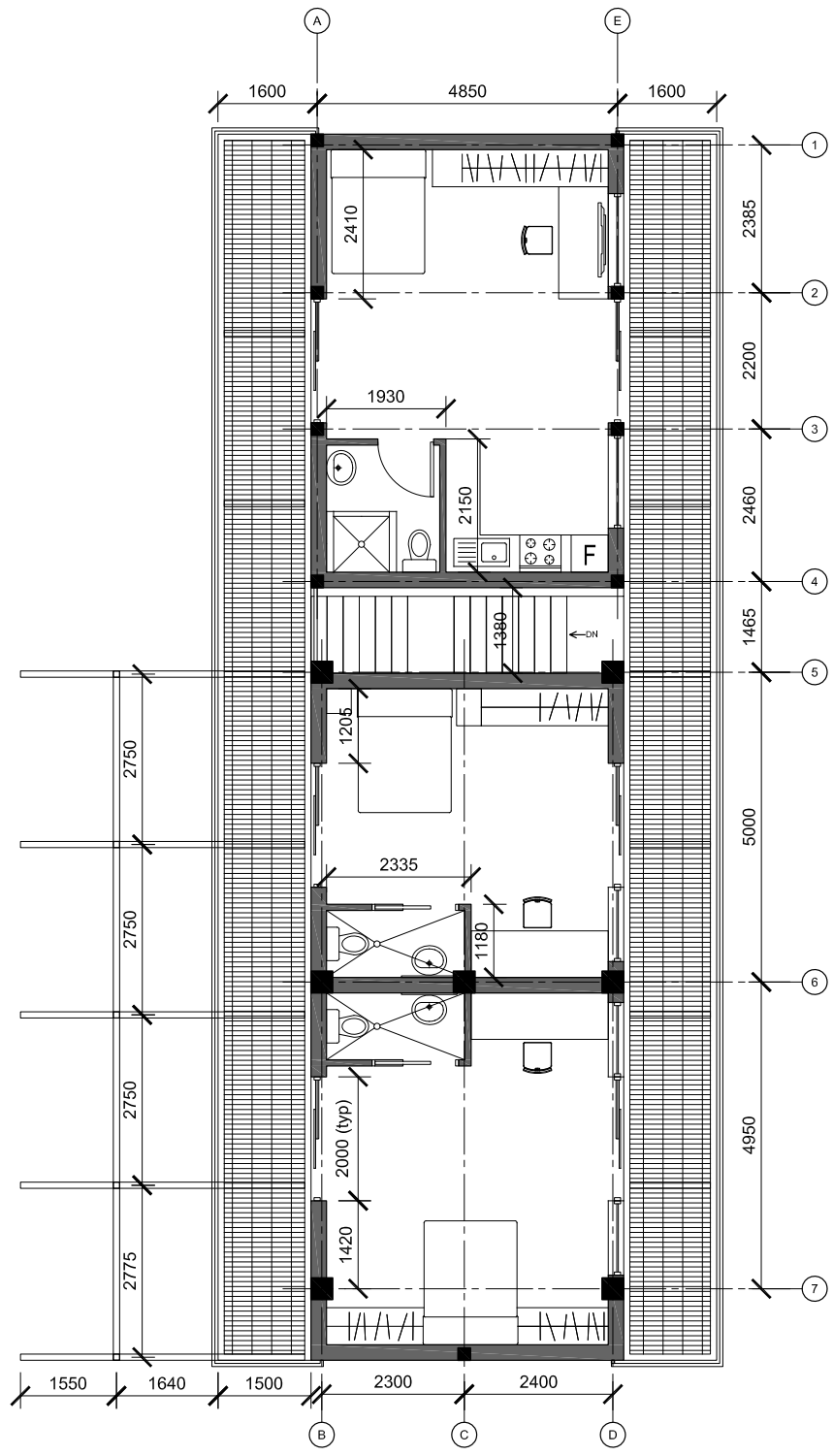
I spent some time during the schematic design phase investigating local building methods and materials. Domestic architecture in Southeast Asia is dominated by concrete-covered clay brick walls with a concrete structure and steel roof (with the exception of vernacular examples which use wood, a material no longer available in Thailand). I sketched some rough details in an effort to incorporate insulation, but the decision will ultimately be the contractor's—I'm not going to detail something they have no ability to build. Simple materials and techniques are the best way to move forward.

Another concern is the shared space of his family and future tenants. I'm not sure about building bylaws (if they even exist), but this structure will be erected and fill in a large portion of his family's lot—although it's currently underused as it's occupied by vehicles, an angry dog, and a pile of dirt. I've made an effort to establish clear thresholds between the family and tenant spaces, giving Note's family a smaller—but better—backyard, while providing the tenants with an entrance area that is clearly theirs. Contrasting materials, elevations, and small constructs (such as seating and hanging vegetation) will help enhance this separation of space. If the tenants would like a common space in which to socialise, they can go across the lane to Note's patio, where the five renters will often spend their time.

The units themselves are simple: small bathrooms, a large bed, a desk, and a wardrobe. I've included a kitchen in only the larger two units as there really isn't much cooking happening in Thailand—it's just far more economical to eat out when delicious meals can be had for a dollar and a half. I have yet to cook, and I've been travelling for a number of weeks. As mentioned previously, cross-ventilation is critical as the night breeze is cool and if designed properly, air conditioning is unnecessary. Given the amount of natural light (not direct—overhangs and shading devices will be built) that will enter the apartments, artificial lighting will be unnecessary during the day. Hot water will be provided by the solar water collectors, and the toilets will use rainwater for flushing. I think more complicated sustainable strategies may lie outside the project's budget and/or the skill of the builder. Simple is good.



Ground Floor Plan



INTERVENTION #10



ANOTHER CONFERENCE

APRIL 30, 2013

My abstract has been accepted to the "Eighth International Conference on Design Principles and Practices" to be held January 16-18 in Vancouver. I'd like to attend, but cost is once again an issue here, and I'm not sure if I'll be eligible for student funding this time. I have the option of submitting a paper for publication regardless of my attendance, and I don't even have to worry about submitting it until mid-October. This is a great deadline as I have too many other deadlines I'm trying to meet while abroad.

NIGHT TRAIN FROM AYUTTHAYA TO NONG KHAI

MAY 9-10, 2013

It took roughly twelve hours or so in total, but what a great way to travel. I slept well, made a couple friends, and saw some countryside. Much safer than a bus too, although bus safety is rarely an issue in Thailand.



plate 3.12

west-facing facade

*looking into one of the
lower units*

THREE MONTHS LATER

JULY 23, 2013

Note, ever the opportunist, has recently started preparing for the construction. He found a partner willing to split the costs, and has done some initial preparatory work on the road in between the two properties (as the parking garage will become an apartment and parking is needed). In true “Thai style” (his words), he paid a local crew to come over and pour concrete and paint the parking lines after work one day. They had actually been busy that day transforming a local waterway into a sewer by paving over the vegetation. Something about garbage becoming stuck, and so the vegetation clearly had to go.

We discussed some other ideas Note had concerning an even larger expansion—I advised him to stick with the six units, as anything else would be too large for the site and his family’s privacy would be jeopardised.

AND THEN...!

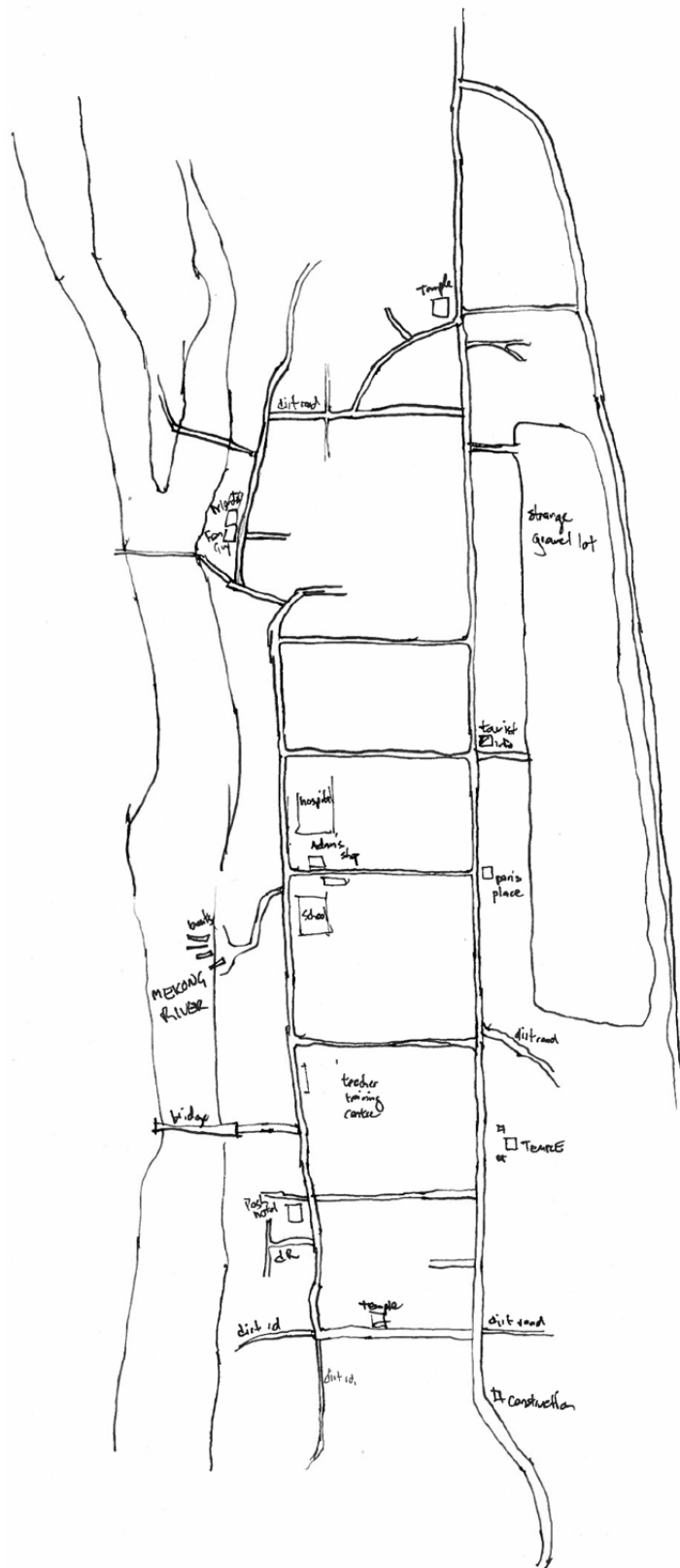
OCTOBER 14, 2013

I didn’t expect Note to begin construction so quickly, but he’s well on his way to filling in the parking structure with apartments. Good for him—I wish more people would just go ahead and do things. However I do think it’s premature as I really wanted to get some building details to him prior to construction. I really hope the builders use insulation.

But I suppose this is my first real building, so I’m just going to go right ahead and congratulate myself.

INTERVENTION #11

May 15 - 24, 2013



VANG VIENG, LAOS

The small town of Vang Vieng makes for a fascinating case study as it is currently undergoing an economic transition unique to its particular situation. Once a quiet town in the middle of Laos, over the past fifteen years it has experienced rapid expansion due a large influx of tourism. This tourism boom is now threatening to dry up, and the town is struggling to hang onto its reputation as an international destination.

In 1999, the leisurely activity of floating down the Nam Song river in an inflatable inner tube somehow became the thing to do amongst the backpacker crowd. Investors began to notice, and a series of informal bars and dangerous leisure activities along the river bank emerged as a plethora of new ways to generate revenue were imagined. A swift current and hidden rocks, combined with alcohol and drug abuse, led to a number of fatalities over the years, with twenty-two confirmed deaths in 2011 alone.⁷ The Laotian government eventually intervened and removed the illegal establishments along the river, and has since cracked down on the proliferation of drug usage. Now coping with a significant drop in tourism, Vang Vieng is once again forced to redefine itself.

Adventure tourism is now growing in popularity, and the number of kayaking, rock climbing, and mountain biking tour companies have increased dramatically. It was one of these rock climbing schools that became the object of my attention in Laos.

7 "Man Dies 'Tubing' in Laos River," *The Age: National*. 12 Jan. 2012, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/man-dies-tubing-in-laos-river-20120112-1pvtf.html> (accessed 20 May, 2013).



A HALF-COMPLETED HOTEL

One can read the recent history of Vang Vieng in what is left standing of this hotel. During the tourism boom several years ago, undisturbed land adjacent to the river was purchased, and the construction of cheap bungalows began. When the market crashed and the government shut down the drug-fueled tourism industry, this developer ran out of money and was forced to abandon a good portion of the bungalows. What remains today are a number of rapidly-decaying building shells that are under attack by the aggressive jungle. There are now other parties interested in the dilapidated shells—when I was there, a number of workers were trying to load what remained of the structures onto the back of a lorry.



VANG VIENG: DAY 2

It is pretty hot here—yesterday the forecast said thirty-nine degrees at seven o'clock with sixty percent humidity. So I'm pretty lethargic, but have managed to keep busy.

Vang Vieng has an interesting history as it used to be a beautiful small town halfway between Vientiane and Luang Prabang (important as a trading post and military station), but has since been descended upon by invading foreigners looking to make a quick buck. It started in 1999 when someone decided that floating down the Nam Song River in an inner tube would be a good way to pass the day. And it was. Before too long however a series of improvised bars and patios sprung up along the river, offering the hordes of descending backpackers a schmorgasboard of drugs and entertainment. Zip-lines, rope swings, and slides became commonplace, and I've heard reports that these, combined with low water levels and a plethora of drugs and alcohol (not to mention stupidity), were responsible for up to fifty tourist deaths a year. This seems a bit high, but apparently the real number is concealed. Big money is involved, but this is drying up as the government stepped in recently and shut down the bars along the river with only a couple of exceptions. So now it is a town geared for tourism, and the multitude of guest houses, hotels, bars, and shops are desperate to keep the tourists interested. There is now a great effort to promote adventure tourism, and places like Adam's Climbing school, amongst others, are trying to attract both backpackers and wealthy tourists.



plate 3.2

*'Lima Site 6': former
American military
landing strip, now just a
gravel lot*



5/16/2013

LIMA SITE 6

One of the most interesting spots in town was the expansive gravel lot located just east of the Nam Song river. Built by the Americans as an airfield (named “*Lima Site 6*”) during the Vietnam war, it was used by the American forces until the end of the war when it was abandoned. These are the same Americans who dropped an incredible amount of ordnance on Laos in their attempt to stymie the North Vietnamese army from transporting supplies through the Ho Chí Minh trail just west of the Vietnamese border.⁸ Laos may never recover from the American intervention as their people and economy still suffer.

The lot is now vacant, and always seems to have a strange number of scooters and vehicles driving around aimlessly.



street presence

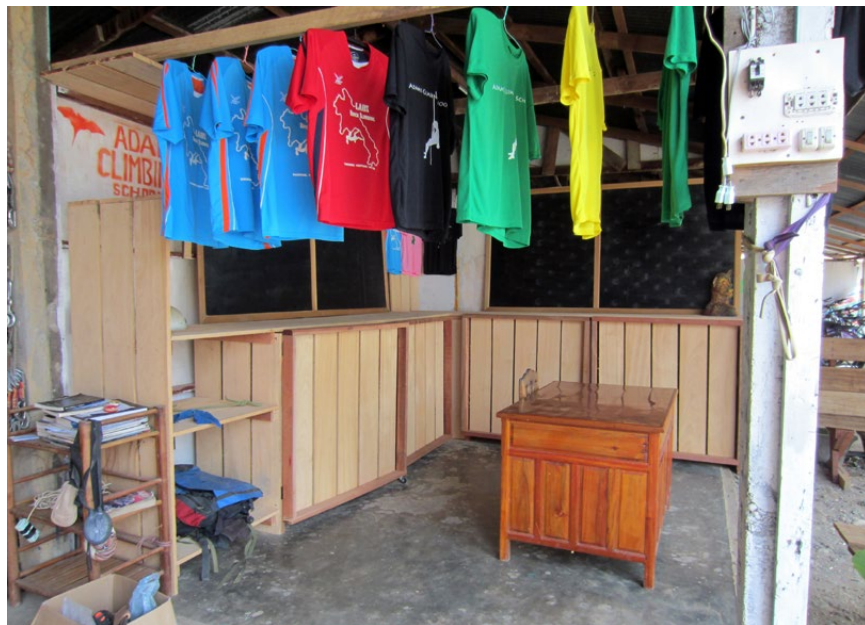
primary living space

Intervention #11 is one of my favourite and one of the more interesting projects to date. It's certainly one of the quickest, as the construction only took about four days.

My client for this Intervention was Adam, a rock-climbing instructor who claimed to be the first of his kind in the country. Laos boasts a wealth of scalable limestone cliffs, and climbing is just starting to become popular in a number of places. Competition among Vang Vieng's shop owners is fierce, and the branding of the town is moving away from "backpacker haven" in favour of "adventure tourism". Adam is now one of at least three who offer rock climbing classes and tours, and after meeting with him and discussing a potential project, we decided that the business end of his home/shop required a closer look.

Adam had an idea of how he wanted to improve his business, but his ideas needed a bit more clarity and an outsider's perspective. A former elementary school turned nightclub, his home/shop consisted of a corrugated metal roof atop a series of columns, bookended by two walls on either side. The front of the home was completely open, which meant security was a continuous concern, especially since his business depended upon the rock climbing gear casually hung by the front entrance. There was no hierarchy of space; the public area for his customers was the same as the living space where he ate dinner and socialised. He did not perceive this as a problem; however, from the perspective of a potential client, there was a significant amount of professionalism that he had failed to propagate. After highlighting this problem, we worked together to devise a solution that would benefit both his business and living spaces.

As is the case with many of the shop owners in Laos, Adam lived and worked in the same place. There was almost always someone home as the shop couldn't be left unattended in the event a potential customer should appear. After reading up on some of the current issues of the town and the new direction its tourism industry is headed, I decided that Adam's Climbing School needed an injection of energy to give it a leg up on the competition. And so after amending his website, designing some t-shirts, and creating a business card, I turned my attention to the more pressing task: creating a storefront for his climbing school.



Adam and I decided that the top priority was security: he had nowhere to store and lock his climbing equipment, and this was clearly a problem. Another pressing issue I felt was the matter of signage: his workspace had a number of obnoxious signs with colourful images, bold text, and a multitude of spelling errors that made the business seem less of a professional climbing school and more of an amateur tourist agency. We determined that a blackboard with neat handwriting was needed that could be updated regularly with the ebbs and flows of tourists during the year. A third issue was street presence, and this proved to be very difficult to address due to the large umbrellas and colourful scooters of the adjacent business. I did the best I could in extending the office portion of his property out to the street (moving some benches from his living space into a small waiting area), and re-arranged the lighting and flower pots—simple moves that ended up making a huge difference. In the end, the resultant space dedicated for clients was far nicer than I had anticipated. This space became an extension of the built storefront, and while the latter took several days to complete, it was the final thirty minutes of rearranging furniture, vegetation, and lighting that made the space so successful. Small moves can mean a lot, and this new space for clients is now my favourite space in his home/office.

INTERVENTION #11

Mar 16-23, 2013



The construction process for this Intervention was unique: I had a number of volunteers with varying levels of construction experience with whom to work, and so for much of it I was more a project manager than a builder. I built perhaps half of the entire structure, but was always present whenever anything was being constructed. I don't think there was any way I could've done it entirely on my own as some of the pieces were massive and needed to be coordinated with other pieces simultaneously. I knew that there would be help, and so I was able to design it in such a way that only a few people working together could assemble it—again, working with the tools on hand, a recurring theme of my thesis. It also meant however that the craft of the construction suffered slightly as I wasn't able to monitor everything; once something had been built slightly off I couldn't always tell my volunteers to take it apart and do it again. Actually I did on a couple of occasions, but only when it was critical.

I initially harboured some concerns about stability, but the wood turned out to be a lot heavier and stronger than I expected. Although the structure is anchored quite minimally to the adjacent walls, it's extremely sturdy. The wood was actually uncured, so once it dries out I'm sure the structure will undergo some cracking. I wanted to leave a good deal of breathing room for each of the boards, but there was no way it would stand without the amount of fasteners we pounded into it.

This was one of the more informative Interventions I've completed to date, and I found the town of Vang Vieng to be a fascinating subject to study.

INTERVENTION #11

Mar 16-23, 2013

INTERVENTION #12

May 24 - June 10, 2013

LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

The historic town of Luang Prabang has a charming atmosphere that enables the days to pass by quickly and easily. It is perhaps Laos' most popular tourist destination, and the historic centre has enough colonial architecture to have warranted a UNESCO designation. The restaurants are decent, the sights within the city are fine, and the history is interesting – but nothing stands out on its own as spectacular. However it is the city centre as a whole that is such a great place, and the architecture in particular plays an important role in the cultural identity of the city.

After Intervention #11 I decided to take some time off to enjoy the city, some of the surrounding sights, make a few friends, and relax before resuming work. It was during a social outing at a local cafe that I came across two posted ads looking for an architect. This was the first time I had ever seen an “*architect wanted*” sign (much less two), and I had no choice but to contact both parties. One of the signs yielded promising results, and a meeting was quickly arranged.



*the bells sound at sunrise
and the monks pass
through the streets collect-
ing alms*

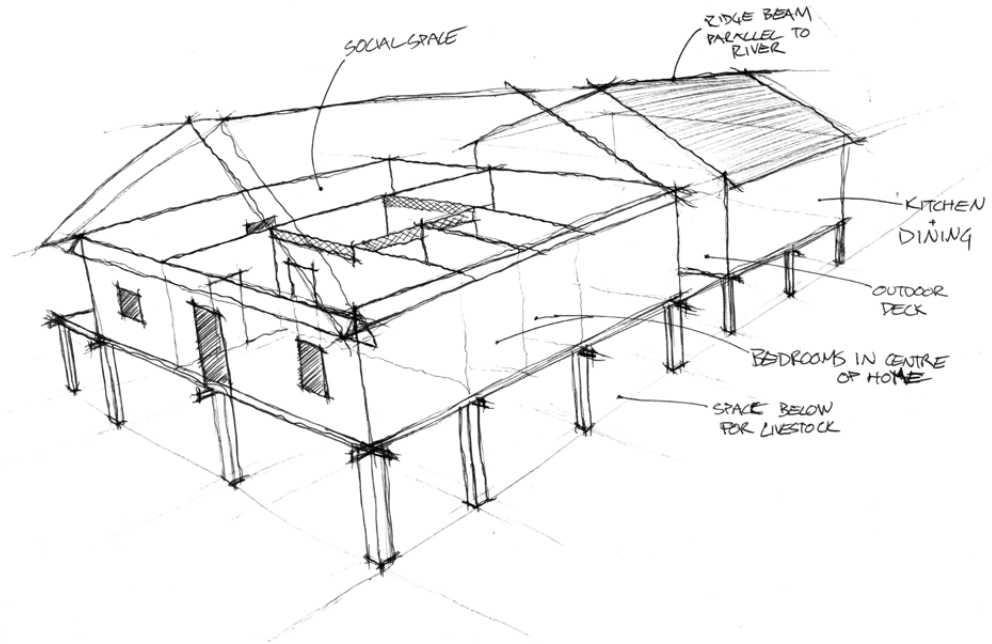
*the winding walkways of
a hotel district*

LUANG PRABANG: UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

I targeted Luang Prabang as one of my few stops in Laos not because of any particular sight, but rather because it is a UNESCO world heritage site. Since I had such a good experience working in Ayutthaya (another UNESCO city in Thailand), I decided to come here, especially since the reason it is protected is on account of the colonial architecture.

Upon arrival I immediately started exploring the city (after a relaxing day at a waterfall park and two nights of catching up on sleep), looking for the historic French colonial architecture. The French influence was unmistakably present, but I was surprised at how difficult I found it to identify the historic buildings, and the reasons why UNESCO felt this deserved protection over similar towns I had visited. I eventually found my way to the *UNESCO Heritage Home* (information centre), where the secrets of the town were revealed: it's not any specific building or buildings that earns the town such recognition, rather it is the *entire* historic city centre that is unique, from the people, to the buildings, to the urban plan, to the pavement. Everything here is a documentation of the transition from the vernacular Laotian design to a hybrid style developed by the French. The oldest buildings are unmistakably of Laotian design, which explains why I had such a difficult time finding any old French buildings (they don't really exist). As time progressed, one can see how the Laotian home was adopted and modified gradually by the French colonialists—a fascinating evolution to walk around and observe.

My problem with all of this however is that there has been an extensive amount of resources and effort poured into the restoration and preservation of historic buildings to such an extent that they're no longer "old". Many of the upscale guest houses and villas I came across are historically important—I can now identify several distinguishing characteristics of the historic buildings—but look as if they were only recently completed with fresh paint and new materials.



THE LAOTIAN VERNACULAR

My research into the homes of Luang Prabang led me to a very informative museum housed in the Villa Xieng Mouane, a historic Laotian mansion. As I was the only tourist at that time, I was given a private tour that revealed the extent to which the vernacular Laotian home was designed. The exhibition outlined many different vernacular housing typologies of the country, each of which responded to their specific landscapes. As Luang Prabang was founded at the confluence of the Nam Khan and Mekong rivers, this particular home was built atop a series of *pilotis*.

I found the spatial organisation of the home to be its most fascinating characteristic. The interior spaces were organised such that the most private rooms, the bedrooms, were in the very middle of the main home, far away from where the guests would be entertained. This guest room served as a programmatic threshold between the main entry and living spaces. The kitchen and dining areas were located in another building with its own roof, but were connected to the primary building by an outdoor deck. The kitchen/dining building also had an outdoor water source via a pump that was located adjacent to the stairwell. This was one of two stairwells: one was for the living, and one reserved for the dead. When someone passed away, they were carried down the appropriate stairwell and buried in a position parallel to the ridge beam below the home.

An interesting feature of the Laotian home is the spiritual nature of its spatial organisation. For example, the ridge beam of the roof is always parallel to the river. The beds are also positioned in a similar manner so that the resting body, and most importantly, the head and feet, are lined up with the flow of the river. Pointing feet at someone's head is avoided, and houses were even designed with the feet of one's neighbour in mind.⁹

There were a number of other features to the home that impressed me. Ventilation within the home was well planned, with large voids built just under the ceiling into the walls connecting the central bedroom to the rest of the home. The home was also raised up on columns not only to separate the realm of the living and the dead, but also man and animal (livestock were kept under the home). As the French modified the Laotian home in subsequent years, these areas below the homes were initially filled in with servants' quarters, and then with more affordable housing.

I found the traditional Laotian home to be a very cultural space and it's unfortunate that I wasn't able to complete any projects within one. I'll just have to return someday.

9 Northern Illinois University, "Laos," *Architectural Heritage*, www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/culture/luangprabang/Architectural_Heritage.htm (accessed 21 Dec, 2013).







LUANG PRABANG NIGHT MARKET

As night markets go, this has got to be the best one I've experienced. The main strip in the old quarter is cordoned off everyday around 6pm when the vendors begin to set up shop. What truly sets this market apart is the noise, or lack thereof—I can't recall the last time I went to a market and wasn't shouted at by some vendor who was selling tacky shirts or figurines made from recycled cans. In Luang Prabang the speed of life is slow, which is reflected by a gentle meandering through the night market. The vendors simply sit on the ground and ignore the shoppers unless they express interest in a particular item. Bartering still happens, but everything has a calm, peaceful demeanor about it. However, like any other market I've ever been to, I'm convinced that ninety percent of the goods were made in some sweatshop and that very little, if anything, was genuine – despite the reputation the market has of selling authentic crafts and goods.



SITE VISIT I

The site for my next Intervention is just outside Luang Prabang on the banks of the Mekong river. It is quite beautiful and I'll be working with Rob on a scheme to develop his property into something quite minimal that is harmonious with the surrounding jungle and nearby village.

INTERVENTION #12

Mar 31, 2013



finding work

the bar at Utopia

*bamboo lounge at Utopia
where I spent most of my
time*

UTOPIA

My client for this job (yes, in this case I had a client), was Rob, a Canadian expatriate originally from London, Ontario. Fortunately for me, he ran a very successful bar and restaurant, *Utopia*, where I spent most of my time once the project got underway.

Utopia, with the slogan “*Zen by day, groovy by night*” was the subject of Rob’s efforts over the past five years. He had taken an obscure bar and turned it into a cash machine, doing much of the design and marketing himself. As our project entailed building an affordable cooking school, *Utopia* became a helpful precedent that we were both familiar with.

Utopia’s bamboo structures had been assembled with a range of finesse which proved particularly helpful as we were able to study what worked and what proved problematic. The cooking school would feature a far simpler structure than *Utopia*’s, but many of the materials and construction techniques would be the same. For example, *Utopia*’s mortar-less bricks were particularly alluring as they had a beautiful texture that when weathered became a wonderful backdrop to the myriad of activity at the bar (beach volleyball, barbecues, yoga, and general relaxation by all).

The lack of bylaws and safety standards in Laos became apparent to me while I worked at *Utopia*. The bamboo lounge, for example, had unobstructed views across the river as Rob had decided not to install handrails. The yoga deck received similar treatment, and nobody had ever fallen the twenty feet to the ground below (yet). Even the flooring to the bamboo lounge was of a dubious quality: a thin bamboo mat had been placed over bamboo beams, and I always expected my foot to go through at any time. The two toilets and one urinal (the latter of which had been built onto the side of the bathroom shack), were clearly not sufficient for the occupancy load, but I don’t think that bothered anyone who didn’t have to stand in line when the bar was busy.

In general, this experience revealed to me just how easy it is to become an entrepreneur in a developing country. Rob had essentially built and run everything himself, and it had all worked out quite well as he had gone about it with some measure of intelligence. Often the largest obstacle for him lay within the hiring of an architect as good ones were very scarce in this part of the world. Not only is this something I’ll never have to worry about, but developing in this part of the world would afford me a flexibility in design that is simply not possible in Canada. As long as I’m confident that my design won’t wound scores of children, I can pretty much build whatever I want (and quickly). Something to think about.



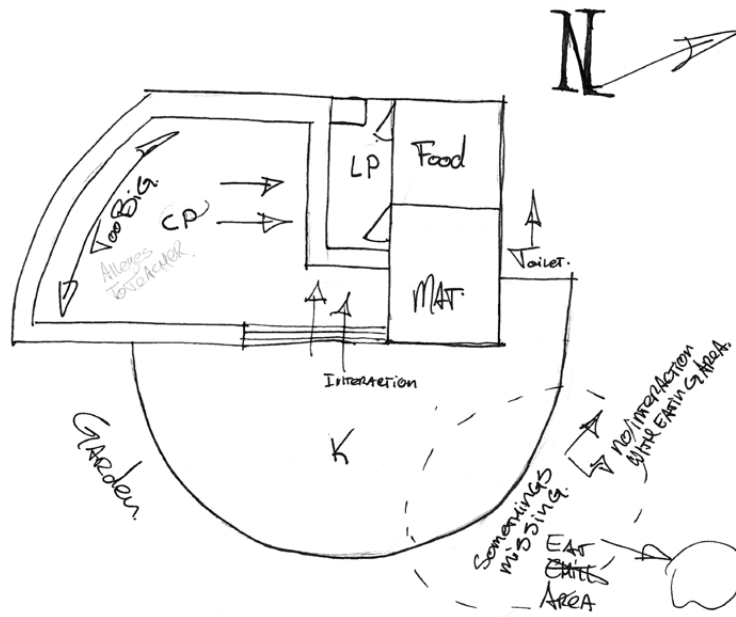
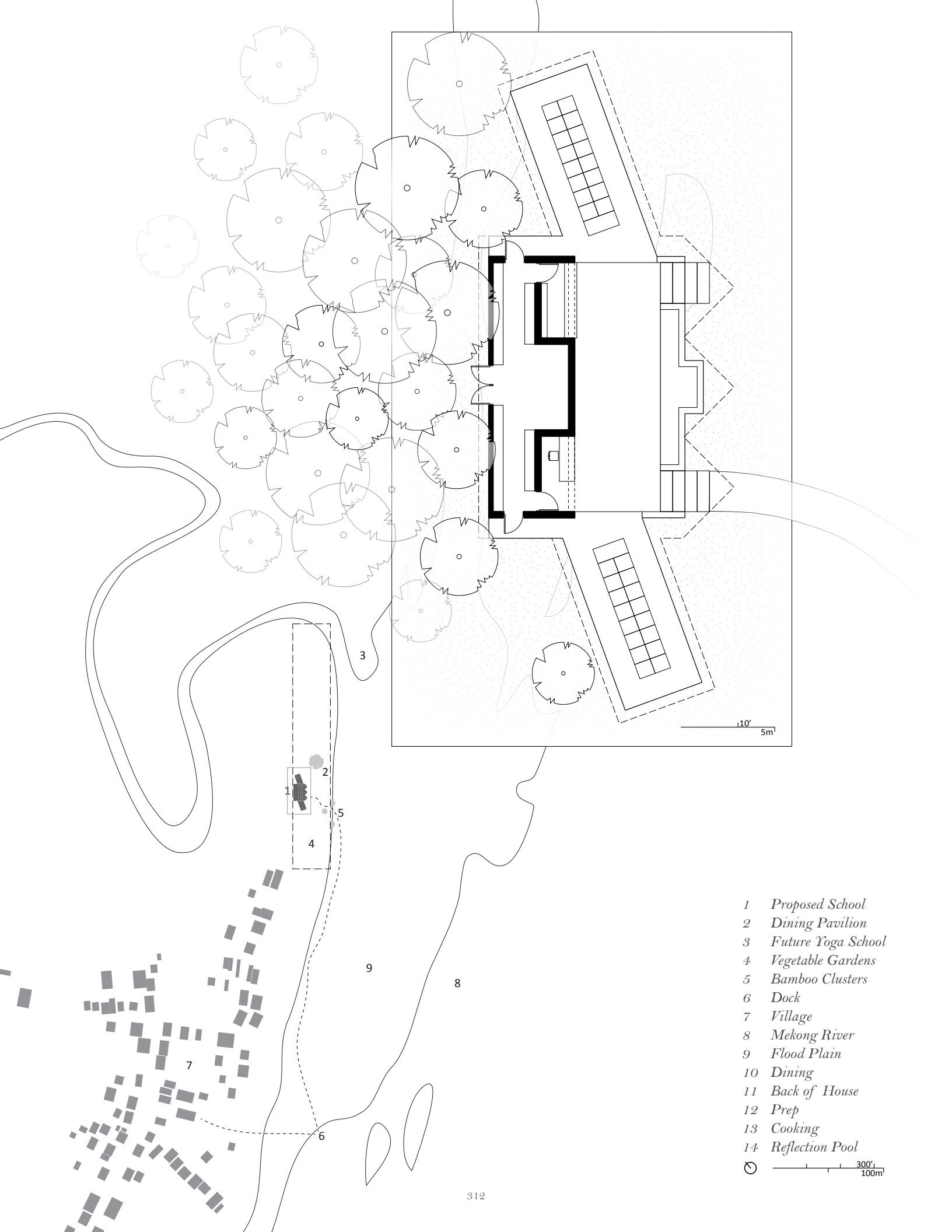



figure 3.21

The project in question wasn't an Intervention, and it wasn't in anyone's home. However, it presented an opportunity that I couldn't turn down.

My client Rob was looking to build a cooking school just outside Luang Prabang in the jungle along the banks of the Mekong River. While Rob had an eye for design and was quite capable himself, he knew that at this scale, his design abilities (he had received no formal design education as he was an engineer) had limits and so had sought out help. I wasn't the first designer to take on the project – there had been two previous architects who had been unsuccessful in their aspirations - it's interesting to see what passes as design in some places. Rob knew exactly what he wanted, but the scale and proportions were something that hadn't been solved, as were several of the program adjacencies and circulation issues. Through a large number of iterations, we reached a solution that we were both happy with. In addition to addressing the aforementioned issues, the design was simple enough for a largely unskilled team of local workers to build. This had been one of the most important design restrictions to arise in Intervention #10, but in this case, the workforce had even fewer skills and tools than its Thai counterpart.



- 1 *Proposed School*
- 2 *Dining Pavilion*
- 3 *Future Yoga School*
- 4 *Vegetable Gardens*
- 5 *Bamboo Clusters*
- 6 *Dock*
- 7 *Village*
- 8 *Mekong River*
- 9 *Flood Plain*
- 10 *Dining*
- 11 *Back of House*
- 12 *Prep*
- 13 *Cooking*
- 14 *Reflection Pool*



The structure would consist primarily of bamboo, concrete, and masonry, while the roof would be constructed out of bamboo and palm tree leaves (which make for a remarkably good roof). In terms of siting, the jungle with stunning views up the Mekong provided a location that I was thrilled to work with. In addition to views, the site featured a teak forest with a beautiful canopy, a massive mango tree, several huge bamboo clusters, and an assortment of fruit trees. However, given time restraints and the site accessibility, I decided to leave most of the landscape design to Rob, who was probably more capable than I as he had done all the landscaping at *Utopia*. I did consider several major site design moves however: I placed the entry approach through the bamboo clusters, situated an outdoor dining pergola far from the cooking area, and placed the main building as far back on the site as possible.

I hope this project will move forward, but Rob was waiting on a skilled Laotian cook with whom he could partner up with. Since they are incredibly difficult to find, he said the project would be put on hold until he could find one, and I had the impression that this wasn't going to happen anytime soon. So until further notice, it exists in my thesis only.



*marking the building
footprint*

SITE VISIT II: TESTING THE BUILDING FOOTPRINT

We returned to the jungle to rope out the footprint of our proposal and to obtain some more accurate measurements now that we had an initial design. This meant that we had to survey the land, and so we brought along some string, a compass, and a large measuring tape. Everything is approximate: Laos style.

The best part of the day was the topographical survey, which involved string, a tape measure, and an alarming amount of eyeballing. Again: Laos style.

But a great day, and critical to the design as we realised some very important site restrictions and features that had gone unnoticed until now.

INTERVENTION #12

JUNE 6, 2013



*bamboo joists, beams,
columns, and floor (at
Utopia)*

WORKING WITH BAMBOO

While I haven't worked with bamboo beyond anything ornamental, I did design the cooking school with bamboo in mind. Bamboo has a strange reputation which is appropriate since I'm undecided as to whether it is a magical material or a trap.

The Bali Green School is a beautiful example of how bamboo can be used, and it certainly has received its share of positive press. I recently heard however that the school was having major problems with bamboo decay: apparently insects were eating away at the wood and that they were falling apart faster than they could be repaired. I can't seem to confirm this with a second source, but I know that insects can pose a huge problem for bamboo. If bamboo is harvested at the wrong time of year, it will only last a short while before falling apart. It must be harvested just after the wet season when starch levels—the food for insects—are at their lowest as the new shoots have consumed the starch in order to grow. This was the reason that I wasn't able to build with bamboo in the highlands of Vietnam—all bamboo building projects in the villages are put on hold until after the wet season.

In general, I don't think bamboo is as hardy as most people think. I came across a great deal of rotten bamboo that would just flake apart in the places I visited. However, many underprivileged people who live in areas where bamboo does grow have the option of building with this cheap, rapidly grown product. Structures, roofs, floors, walls, and furniture are often made from bamboo, and there exist some very clever techniques for utilising a material that can be difficult to work with given some of its properties.

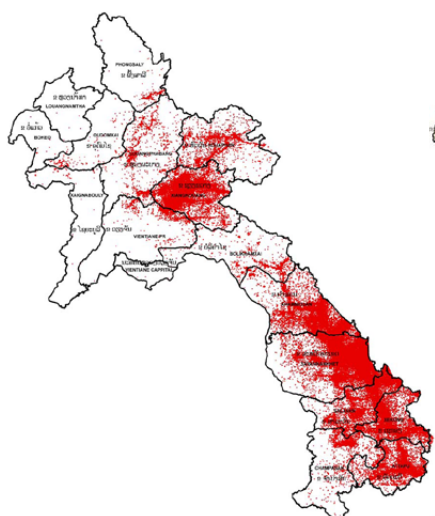


figure 3.22

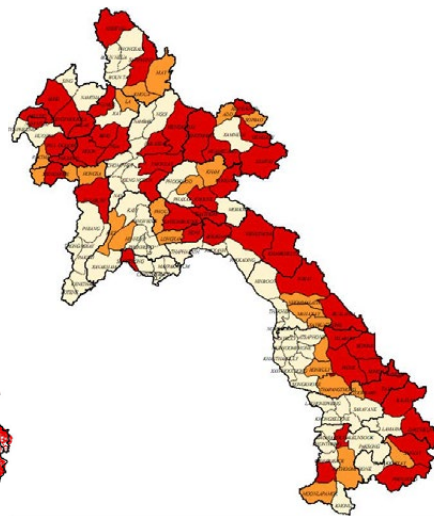


figure 3.23

once dropped from a plane, the shell would open up mid-air, releasing dozens of "bombies" into the air. they were too small to damage armoured vehicles and were designed to kill/ maim people

UXO impact map (left) and the areas of financial poverty (in red) in Laos PDR (right). coincidence?

The UXO (UneXploded Ordnance) museum and information centre, while not the most inspiring of places, is in my mind a must-see in Luang Prabang. The information it contains is something every traveller to the country should be aware of as it plays a critical role not only in the history of this small country, but also much of its current economic and social state.

Between the years of 1964 and 1973 the American government dropped some two million tons of bombs onto Laos with a detonation rate of roughly seventy percent. This means that after the end of the Vietnam War—during which the Laotian supply lines of the Viet Kong were mercilessly bombed, most notably along the Ho Chi Minh Trail—there remained approximately eighty million unexploded bombs in Laos. This figure is astronomical, and it is having a terrible ripple effect upon the Laotian economy which trails neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam by a significant margin. The Laotian government, with some international support (primarily Australia), has cleared half a million bombs since the UXO removal program was initiated in 1996, but at this rate, Laos will be free of bombs by the year 3356.¹⁰

The most significant problem with the UXOs isn't the deaths or dismemberment of the rural populations (roughly one person dies every day I've been told), but rather the psychological effects and fear associated with tilling land that may contain active bombs. There is a strong correlation between the impoverished areas of Laos and the areas that sustained the heaviest bombing—clearly these communities are still struggling to make ends meet forty years after the bombs fell.

CANADIAN FUNDING

OCTOBER 14, 2013

The Canadian government just announced that it will once again donate to the UXO remediation efforts in Laos. It will only donate one million CAD a year, but it's a large increase of the paltry two million donated between 1996 and 2011 when the program was quietly cancelled.¹¹ I suppose one million a year isn't bad—maybe Laos will be clear of the UXOs by the year 3300.

10 *UXO Laos Visitor Centre*. United Nations Development Programme. (visited June 10, 2013).

11 "Baird to Travel to Laos as Canada Restarts Funding to Deal With Cluster Bombs," *Guelph Mercury*, 14 Oct. 2013, <http://www.guelphmercury.com/news-story/4155630-baird-to-travel-to-laos-as-canada-restarts-funding-to-deal-with-cluster-bombs/> (accessed 14 Oct, 2013).

INTERLUDE: VIETNAM

June 11 - July 21, 2013



Huy Van lake

HANOI: CITY OF LAKES¹²

When I first arrived in Hanoi, my senses were immediately under siege by the scooter. Scooter on the sidewalk, scooter on the road, scooter honking in my ears; scooter in my head. Although a little overwhelming at first, the scooter culture is a great indicator that the city of Hanoi has been designed for the individual. The streets are far smaller and more manageable than other metropolises of its size, the amount of greenery and trees are truly commendable, and Hanoi in general just seems friendlier and more accessible. Perhaps the most redeeming of Hanoi's qualities and arguably the largest contributor to its success as a personable city is the network of lakes that permeate its urban form. Although certainly no Venice, the water systems of Hanoi (which translates as "in the bend of the river") are a critical part to the identity of not only the city, but its inhabitants as well.

When considering urban features that make for a successful city, one thinks of the Central Parks or extensive metro systems that improve the quality of life for city dwellers. If we take a look at Bangkok for example, we find a rapidly developing city with an efficient metro and some of the most colourful nightlife in this part of the world. However, green spaces are few and far between, and the sweltering summer heat can make for some unbearable situations. Completely absent are any water features similar to those of Hanoi, a fact particularly distressing given the fact that Bangkok was also founded on a river delta. The once majestic canal network in Bangkok has now become little more than an open sewer – a shocking reminder of what urbanisation can do to some of the region's most beautiful wetland, and a warning sign for cities such as Hanoi that also feature large expanses of water.

The benefits that the lakes give to Hanoi simply cannot be measured. Again as a means for comparison, Central Park was recently estimated to be worth over five-hundred billion American dollars, and that is for a plot of land of just over eight hundred and forty hectares. Hanoi's lakes occupy some 1165 hectares and as a value simply cannot be affixed to them, one can safely say that they are priceless. The environmental benefits of the lakes are vastly underrated, and they are a critical component to the storm water management system which prevents flooding in the streets of Hanoi. The lakes are essential for reducing heat-island effect within the city and regulating microclimate, a particularly important quality as many lakes are adjacent to bustling parks. Fish farming occurs within their shores, and the diversity of organic ecosystems within the city is heavily reliant upon the lakes. However with encroaching development and an increase of pollutants being dumped over the last few decades, the effectiveness—and beauty—of the lakes has decreased at an alarming rate. Over the past century, it has been estimated that over five hundred lakes and ponds have disappeared, leaving just over one hundred in existence today.

¹² Gordon Hunt, "Hanoi: City of Lake," *Vietnam Pathfinder*, Aug. 2013, 17-19.



HANOI: CITY OF LAKES (CONTINUED)¹³

Of all the lakes I visited, Huy Văn Lake perhaps best epitomises both the charm and the disappointment I experienced when navigating the lakes of Hanoi. Wandering aimlessly through the city, I stumbled upon Huy Văn unexpectedly. It was completely hidden within a neighbourhood west of the central train station, and was a welcome surprise as it provided me an oasis within the city where I could relax and enjoy a mid-afternoon coffee. However, it was at this point that the lake failed to realise its potential; a peripheral road completely blocked the most important spaces immediately adjacent to the lake, and there was no place in which one could enjoy a small coffee break. Had this been a park, however small, I might have lingered for some time. As it was, I moved on.

A far different set of lakes, Bảy Mẫu and Thiên Quang, had none of the secluded charm of Huy Văn, but featured the adjacent recreational space that should be a part of all Hanoian lakes. I preferred Thiên Quang as the park was far more intimate and had a much stronger connection to the lake itself. I was able to go for a relaxing stroll along the perimeter, something that the larger sport-oriented park Bảy Mẫu couldn't provide. However they worked extremely well in tandem: the smaller park was perfect for more passive activities, such as sitting or walking around the lake, while the larger one provided a sequence of spaces for one to exercise in.

The lakes play an important role in the identity of the people in and around Hanoi, a city located in the Red River delta. A substantial rice industry calls this region home, and since water is crucial to the cultivation of rice, it is one of the most important contributors to the culture of this region. Historically, the lakes of Hanoi (Hoàn Kiếm and the legend of the Golden Turtle come to mind) are the focus of cultural myths that the people have developed over time that speak to their importance as cultural artifacts. As the cultural and historic centre of Vietnam's capital, Hoàn Kiếm is the focal point of the city, and provides tourists and residents alike with a destination that is both relaxing and beautiful. It is but one of the many lakes that make Hanoi unique, and whether it is for cultural, social, or environmental reasons, these lakes are vitally important to the vitality of life in Vietnam's capital.

13 Hunt, "Hanoi: City of Lake," 17-19.

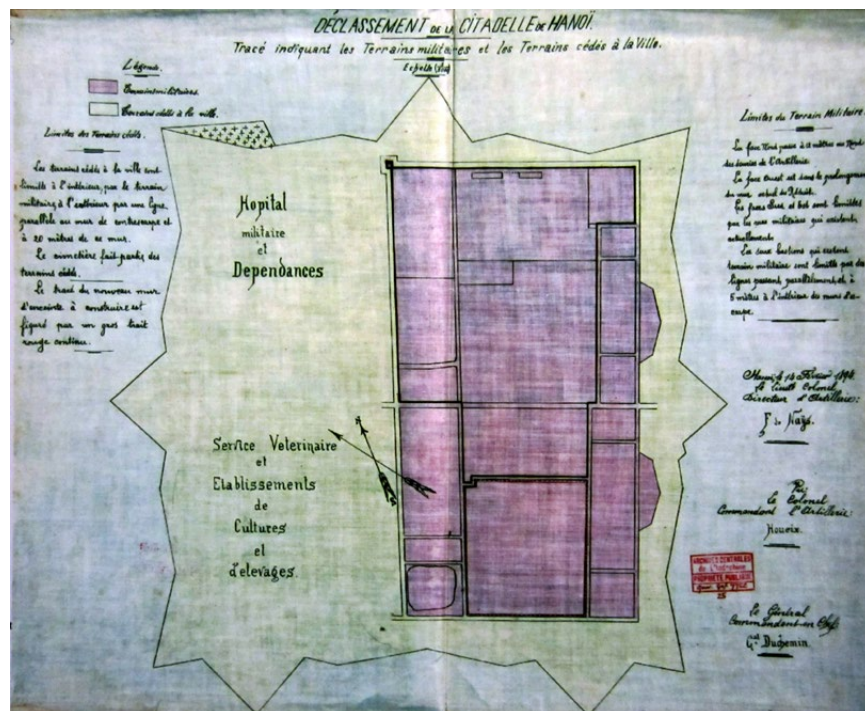


plate 3.31

French military buildings that replaced the sacred spaces

plan of the royal citadel's appropriation

THE TRAGEDY OF THE HANOI CITADEL (AND IMPERIALISM)

While I am generally in favour of mixing cultures and architectural styles as this can yield unexpected results and relationships, in this case it was done in such an offensive manner that it is an exception.

In 1883 the French, who had occupied Hanoi in an attempt to colonialize Vietnam, decided that the Citadel—for many centuries the centre of Vietnamese culture, politics, and religion—needed to be destroyed and replaced by French military barracks. Over the next several years the French deliberately targeted the most important buildings (Forbidden City, ceremonial gates, holy temple, etc.) for demolition in their attempt to subvert everything Vietnamese. The plan extended far beyond the walls of the Citadel as French planners sought to redesign much of the downtown, demolishing buildings and residences in favour of a typically French scheme, complete with boulevards, parks, and palaces for diplomats. The editorial writer of the Hanoi-based *“L’indépendance Tonkinoise”* published that:

“[...] We have thus long been in favour of demolishing this citadel that serves no purpose, from a military standpoint, and that is moreover a danger to public health: as early as 18 August 1891 in the 252nd edition of ‘L’Indépendance’, we requested ‘...that this great obstacle be demolished, these unhealthy moats be filled in and these vast tracts of uninhabited and uncultivated land be made over to the municipality.’[...]”¹²

The Vietnamese weren’t consulted at all during the entire process, but the appropriation of the citadel wasn’t without its share of critics. There were a number of articles published in French newspapers that condemned the process, highlighting corruption and racketeering as being the central agents in the project:

“[...] The Cemetery is among the pieces of land that have been handed over. Mr. de Lanessian has not even had the decency to have this clause removed, so that our cemetery in Hanoi, that little plot of land that should be sacred to each and every one of us, where we may lay to rest a friend, a relative, a fellow soldier, a loved one, a child perhaps, this land Mr. de Lanessian has just bartered away with the rest.[...]”¹³

It’s interesting to note that both quotations are from the same publication, and that the criticism only emerges once the French cemetery has been sold. It’s almost as if the Mr. de Lanessian in question sold everything without bias—he must’ve been just as greedy as he was ignorant.

14 Oliver Tesser with the Espace – French Cultural Centre in Hanoi and the Knowledge Publishing House. *Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long – Hanoi*. (visited June 12, 2013).

15 Ibid.

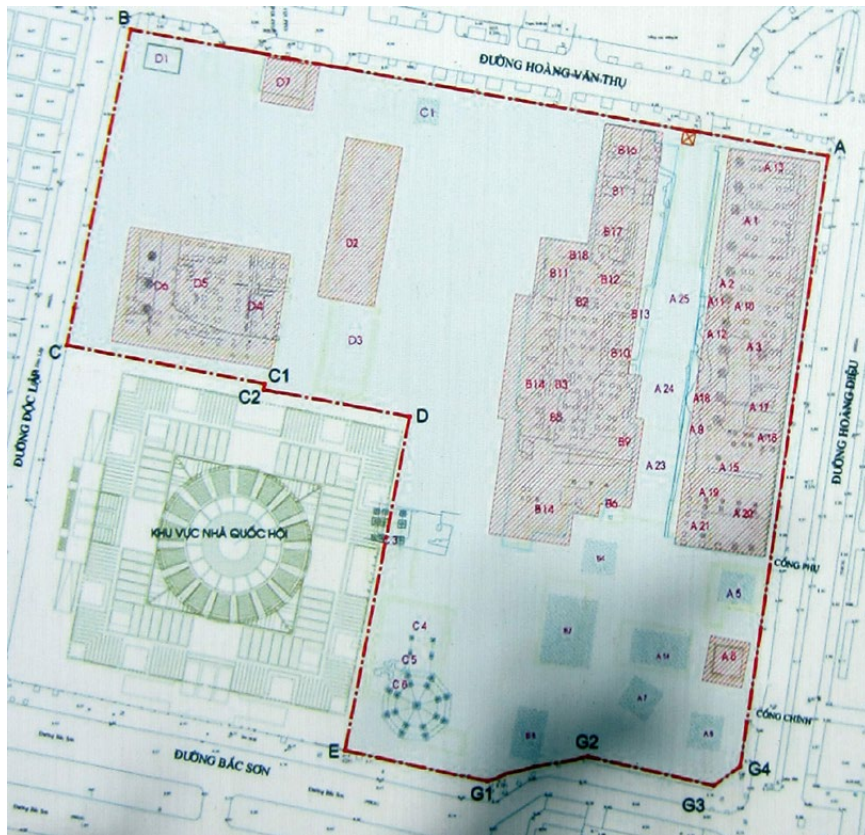


plate 3.32

18 HOANG DIEU STREET

“The construction of the new National Assembly adjacent to the archaeological site reinforces one of the key elements of the World Heritage site’s Outstanding Universal Value—the continuity of political power in this part of Hanoi.”¹⁴

Following my exploration of the former site of Hanoi’s imperial citadel, I wandered across traffic to the other side of the street where an archaeological dig was going on. The site was quite large, and its existence had only recently been unearthed following a discovery by construction crews building the new National Assembly. Over the past ten years they had uncovered enough material for the site to warrant a UNESCO designation which I had assumed would protect the ruins to some extent. I’ll again assume that radical design changes for the new National Assembly ensued, and I’ll assume once more that the building was moved from its originally planned location. As one can see from the plan and photos, the massive concrete and brick building was (probably) moved to a location that had never been built upon over the centuries, far away from any ruins, surely.

A large notch to the southwest of the dig site appears to be the new building location as logic tells us that the Vietnamese government couldn’t possibly build upon priceless ruins—how unusual that the preceding dynasties decided not to build in a logical manner, choosing instead an irregular geometric form. And it would appear that UNESCO (or whomever actually wrote that sign), believes that the new National Assembly is of historic value to the site, as it undeniably continues the site’s ancient tradition of being a hotspot for political power. Good stuff.

Speaking of which, the renderings of the planned park to sit atop the excavation seem quite good. It incorporates a system of terraces, glazed partitions of some kind (some of which glow at night), and ramps that weave the vegetation of the above park with the dusty excavation site below. This part isn’t sarcastic. That building is really big and monstrous though.

16 *Archaeological Site
at 18 Hoang Dieu Street.*
Thang Long-Hanoi Heritage
Conservation Centre. (visited
June 12, 2013).



ON DESIGN INITIATIVES

To conclude my first day in Vietnam I went to a small furniture exhibit at the Goethe Institut Hanoi that showcased some bamboo furniture by Future Living Studio. The design team consists of a number of international and local designers from a variety of backgrounds. Often designers will join the initiative for a short while, collaborating and producing a single piece of furniture before moving on.

The concept sounds quite promising, but I spoke to one of the designers who said that the process was extremely difficult; there was just too great a difference in approach between his German education and the local Vietnamese designers. Regardless, I'm sure it would be worth trying out for a short while; if one is living and working, this would make for a great side-project.

It would be extremely easy to do a wealth of design projects in Hanoi (or Vietnam, or SE Asia for that matter). Small installations, whether commissioned or not, would be very easy to do, and there are an incredible number of inspirational spaces throughout the city. I can see myself teaching English (teachers earn roughly forty dollars an hour) to pay the bills, but spending most of my time on independent design initiatives. I could rent out a workshop and just do any projects that interested me, something easily done, even in a communist country. Hop over the border to Cambodia, and the possibilities increase (Future Living Studio did just this).

I actually didn't care all that much for this exhibit, but the other two collections that Future Living Studio have done are quite good. I guess it all depends on which designers they have on board.

ALONG THE TRẦN NHẬT DUẬT

Trần Nhật Duật is one of the largest and busiest expressways in Hanoi, but it is unique in that it has a very pronounced and colourful edge condition made up of hundreds of tightly packed small buildings. This makes for a really interesting ride on the back of a scooter as I can just look up and experience a multitude of different architectural styles.



actual captions:

"picture drawn by the American pilots in the prison"

"American pilots receive souvenirs before their release. February 12th, 1973."

"American pilots Anderson, Ethimuller, Gurwen, and John A. Deering set right their clothes before leaving the Hoa Lo prison, Hanoi. February 12th, 1973."

plate 3.33

HOA LO PRISON (AKA HANOI HILTON)

This is worth seeing as it is propaganda at its finest. A large part of the museum exhibition (it ceased to be used as a prison in the 90's) was dedicated to demonstrating how well the American POWs were treated during the American/Vietnam war. The photos were amusing, the captions were incredible, and the artifacts, such as the Christmas scene, were remarkable.

The prison was renown for its deplorable conditions where torture was used upon the prisoners not as a means for obtaining information, but rather for breaking their spirits and encouraging anti-American confessions and statements. This treatment was par for the course, and I have no doubt that similar atrocities were committed by the South. The Americans of course were using chemical weapons (Agent Orange was the most common) in their attacks, which is still impacting some of the Vietnamese rural population. These chemicals are now considered Weapons of Mass Destruction.



*Ho Chi Minh mausoleum
communism
the old quarter of Hanoi*

SOVIET ARCHITECTURE IN HANOI

While not as evident or pervasive as the French colonial influences, the few examples of Soviet architecture are no less important.

The most famous of all Vietnamese monuments, the *Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum* (where he rests—preserved—against his wishes to be cremated), is clearly Soviet-inspired. It's actually modeled after Lenin's own mausoleum, but incorporates a traditional sloping Vietnamese roof.

The Cultural Friendship Palace is a large intimidating building used primarily for trade shows and other interesting events. I went inside but couldn't figure out where all the space had gone—I guess it's just designed to look bigger than it is. There is the standard monumental statue in the forecourt promoting unity across the country, etc.

And then there is the obligatory Lenin statue in which he is looking as distinguished as ever.

THE STREETS OF HANOI'S OLD QUARTER

JUNE 24, 2013

I have some mixed feelings about the old quarter in Hanoi, and as it's such a diverse environment attacking all my senses simultaneously, there is simply too much for me to be able to say I like it or hate it. Sometimes I enjoy walking around its streets, and other times the noise and grime are just too much for me.

I will say that there are far too many vehicles (i.e. scooters) in the Old Town, and that this district would benefit in terms of congestion, organisation, and tourism were it to reduce the number of roads by a huge margin. Simple road repair and the pedestrianization of streets would certainly make a huge difference, and it would make for a far nicer experience. This having been said, it takes away the interest of having a vital part of the city exist as a "natural" environment free from the meddling of city planners. Who could say what type of gentrification might happen without the bustle of a busy street, especially since a large number of people live in the apartments above seemingly every shop.

I'm quite comfortable with my air conditioner set at twenty-nine degrees. Is this strange? I think I've acclimatised.

JUNE 29, 2013



HA LONG BAY

I went to Ha Long Bay knowing full well just how many tourists would be there, but felt that it was a “must-see” in Vietnam. Since there would be so many tourists I didn’t have terrific expectations, and yet I was still disappointed. It’s difficult to explain, but there was a certain experiential element completely missing. At no point did I ever feel as if I was there—I lacked connection with the landscape. It felt as if I watched a documentary on the bay, and didn’t actually visit it in person. It just seemed like some sort of museum as opposed to one of the seven natural wonders of the world (which it claims). I wouldn’t even put it in the top fifty places I’ve been to. But beautiful nevertheless, and I don’t regret going.

FLOATING VILLAGES OF HA LONG BAY

It was somewhat sad to see the state that the fishing villages of Ha Long Bay are currently in. Due to a drastic increase in pollution and tourism in recent years (of course), the number of fish has dwindled. The fishermen now split their time fishing and selling drinks and snacks to the tourists from their boats in which they float around all night. Although convenient for the tourists who come to party, it sets the local villagers at odds with the employees of the tour companies, many of whom only receive payment through the selling of on-board refreshments. In order to increase revenue, the two cash-strapped groups propagate the party atmosphere that is unfortunately defining Ha Long Bay. Eventually someone will decide that the boat parties aren’t sustainable for the bay and things will change. But until then, the biodiversity of Ha Long Bay will continue to deteriorate.

The village that we visited was located next to the Sung Sot cave, and it is one of four such villages in Ha Long Bay that together house a total of 1600 people.¹⁵ This particular village seemed quite small – the others must be far larger. The homes were in poor shape and I kept thinking they would make for an interesting Intervention opportunity.

17 UNESCO, *Ha Long Bay*, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/672> (accessed 20 June, 2013).







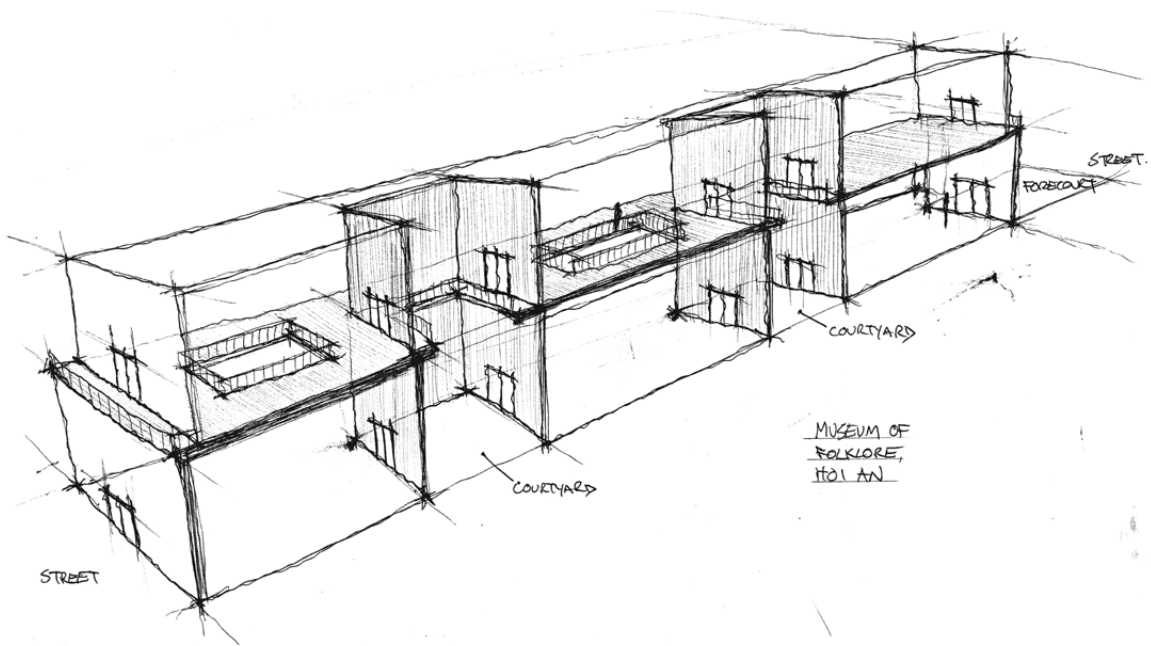
plate 3.34
jeweler at work in Hoi An

HOI AN (AND ITS REPUTATION)

Hoi An has a stellar reputation as *the* place to go for custom tailoring in SE Asia. Even *Top Gear* picked up on this as the boys made a stop here for some absurd suits. I fell prey to this and opened my wallet for a pair of off-white linen pants that I'll probably never wear (they were cheap). I'm sure the town's reputation was founded on demand back when the city was famous as a trading port, but now it exists largely as a tourist trap for those looking for tailored clothes.

There are seemingly hundreds of tailors in Hoi An, and they all operate out of shops that look exactly the same. Much in the same way that markets across the world all seem to have the same "locally" produced products, these shops all managed to stock/make very similar articles of clothing. There is no doubt in my mind that the craft once inherent to Hoi An has been lost and has been replaced by a cheap alternative fueled by the demand for quantity, not quality.

Thankfully i had no plans to shop for clothing—I went to relax and enjoy good company. My impressions of Hoi An were quite good—I recommend it to everyone that visits Vietnam. It really is a beautiful UNESCO city that comes alive at night with lanterns and candles lighting up the streets. It also has a terrific beach and the food is incredible. For my fellow architecture aficionados, it has more than its fair share of buildings to see—the courtyard house typology in particular is quite interesting.



The Museum of Folklore of Hoi An: typical example of the courtyard home typology

bánh cuốn

THE COURTYARD HOME OF HOI AN

As a UNESCO-protected town, Hoi An has a unique architectural style that I haven't seen anywhere else. Once a major port for trading and diplomacy, at the height of its prosperity in the seventeenth century it was perhaps the largest port in Southeast Asia. A considerable number of large homes were constructed for wealthy diplomats that were an amalgamation of traditional Vietnamese and international styles, most often Japanese and Chinese.¹⁶ The most prominent of these constructions was the courtyard home, a typology that was new and exciting to me.

As the city blocks were long and narrow, these lengthy homes stretched from one street to the other with entrances at either end. Two or three courtyards would be hidden within, giving the homes a sequence of intimate spaces that one would experience linearly. As the homes were two stories, mezzanines (of which I am particularly fond) were incorporated into the designs in much the same way as the courtyards. While the courtyards were large and surrounded on three sides on the upper level by a covered walkway, the double height spaces on the interior were smaller and centered for the most part in the middle of the upper floor.

VIETNAMESE CUISINE

Incredibly delicious.

I'll take it over Thai food any day. I can't say it tops what I experienced in either Peru or Italy, but it's close. My favourite dish is *bánh cuốn*, which is minced pork, mushroom, and shallots rolled into a large rice noodle of sorts. It is served with some tasty dipping sauce and I want it in my mouth.

Bún cha or *bún bò* are also very good.

18 UNESCO, *Hoi An Ancient Town*, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/948> (accessed 13 Nov, 2013).



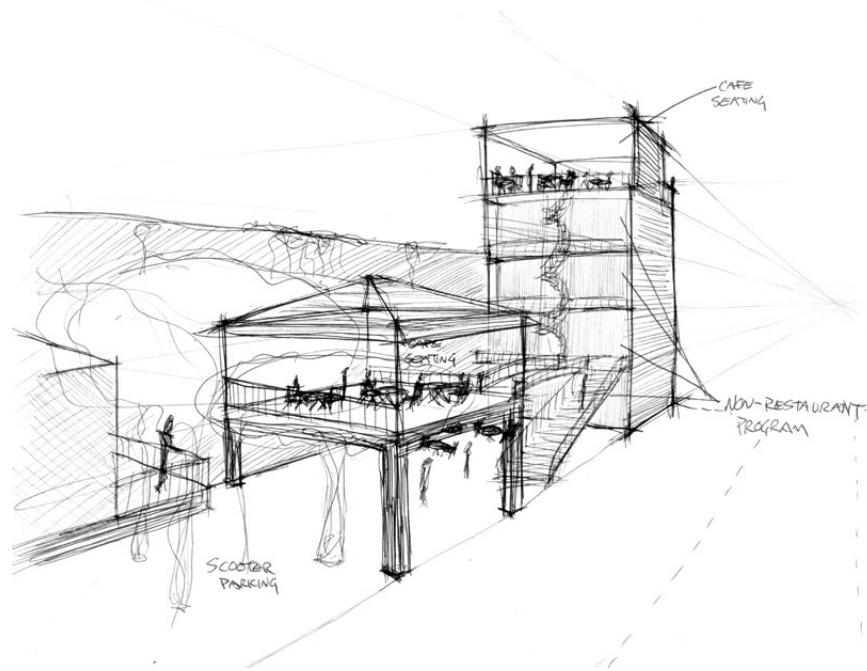
ON THE USE OF VEGETATION SIMPLY

My favourite cafe in Hoi An was just that because of the atmosphere. It was quiet, intimate, and had a beautiful canopy made of vines. I had seen this before in Laos, where one of the locals had it above his car port. When the vines draped over his parked car the effect was quite elegant.

In this particular cafe, when combined with small hanging planters and soft lighting, the hanging vines made the patio dining area a terrific place to enjoy a meal. I went there twice; once for dinner and then again to sketch. Similar to Paley Park in NYC, the seating area was elevated several steps off the street, lending it a sense of separation, privacy, and calm. I suppose all that was missing was the waterfall, although the noise can't really compare to that of fifty-third street in NYC.



looking down upon the courtyard space from the upper level of the café



SECRET HIDDEN HANOI CAFE

Hidden in a similar fashion to the trendy telephone booth bars & restaurants, this nameless cafe was my favourite space in Hanoi. The charm is that it is completely hidden within the hectic city and exists as an oasis amongst the sensory assault that is Hanoi. Once one locates the nondescript signage, a silk and trinket shop must be traversed (with scooter in hand if necessary as the parking is inside) before one can pass through a narrow hallway. At the end of the hallway, space suddenly expands to reveal a secluded courtyard where birds are singing and sunlight is filtered through a canopy of leaves. A cast-iron spiral staircase leads up three floors to a small room where one can enjoy views of Hang Gai lake. The beverages served here are almost as good as the spaces.



plate 3.35

SCOOTERS IN VIETNAM

The scooter culture in Vietnam is unique. Definitely the best way to get from A to B, renting or buying a scooter to see the country is a great idea. Affordable, flexible, easy to repair, and fun, driving a scooter is a critical part to the Vietnamese experience.

Anh-Thu taught me how to drive a semi-automatic (drives like a manual, but without a clutch) in the hills of North Vietnam. It was actually quite difficult terrain since the villages had rocky roads that were very steep. I only dropped the bike once—when I had Ricarda as a passenger—but there were no injuries as we were only travelling at walking speed down a steep, muddy path.

When I return to Vietnam I'll do the road trip from north to south on a motorbike.

TOP GEAR: VIETNAM SPECIAL

A very entertaining seventy-five minutes, this special episode of Top Gear featured the boys travelling from Saigon to Hanoi on an assortment of motorbikes. It was really interesting to see how they portrayed the country to their (primarily) UK audience—there were some very large inaccuracies that helped sell the story. For example, the final destination ended up being Ha Long Bay, which they portrayed as an unspoilt hidden gem. This of course is far from true as during the peak season the park can see over ten thousand visitors per day. This is an incredible number of people and no doubt would've made the finale of the TV special less climactic.

The special did a good job in conveying how one travels through the country on a motorbike, which I did very little of, but enough to know what it was like. There were many stereotypes cast, and definitely not enough credit given to Vietnam in terms of its portrayal as a developing country. Again, for the sake of the storyline, they cast the country as if it were far less developed than it actually is. They avoided any shots that would have included anything resembling the western influence, and they made the food seem bizarre and ridiculous. Sure, having pigeon on the menu is a little strange, but nobody in their right mind would travel the country eating only rice if they didn't have to.

But at the end of the day it was good fun and I was entertained. While the show may have presented a skewed version of Vietnam, it successfully captured some beautiful parts of the country.

INTERVENTION #13

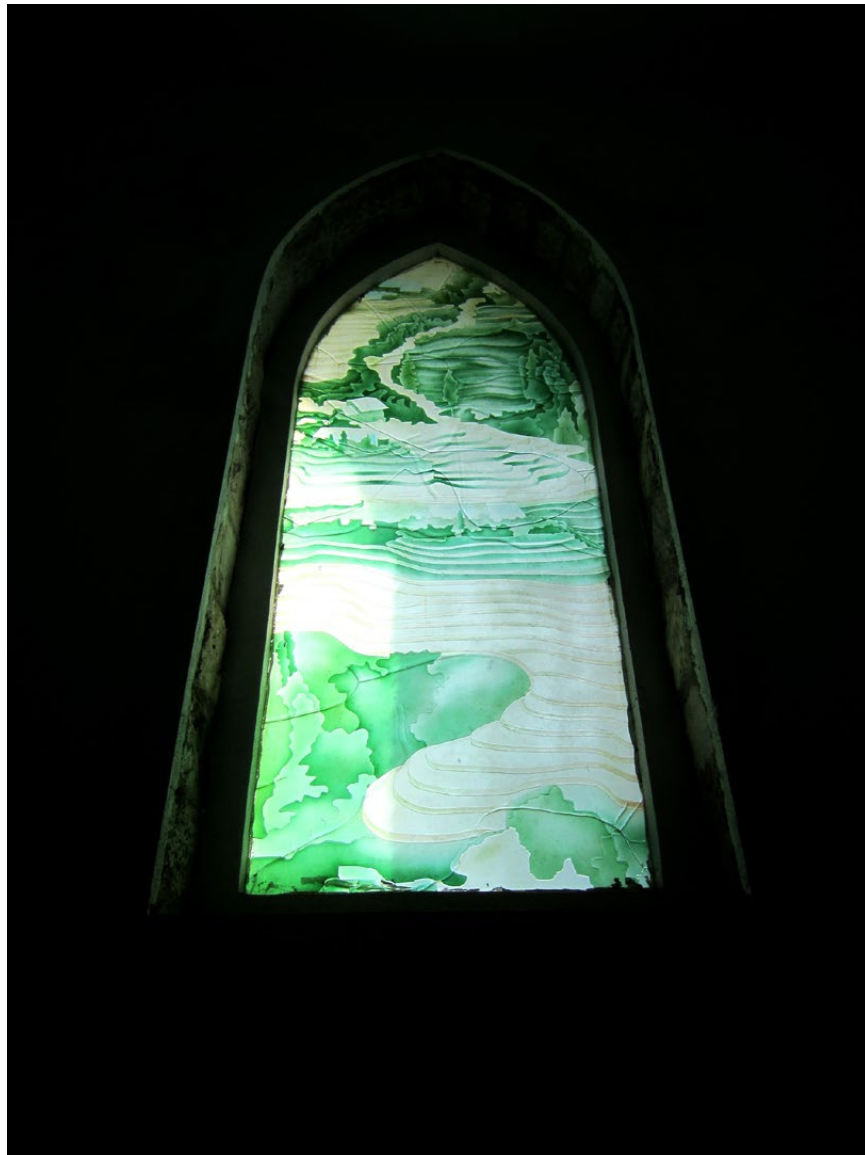
June 27 - July 9, 2013



LAO CHAI, VIETNAM

Knowing full well that time had become a valuable commodity, I made the decision to do one final Intervention, and that it had to be unique. After the pursuit of several leads in Hanoi failed to yield any results, I decided to travel north to Sapa, a region close to the Chinese border that is home to a number of Vietnamese minorities. My goal was to work in a homestay of some sort, where I could use local techniques and vernacular styles to construct a final Intervention that would help a family who was less fortunate than the homeowners I had previously worked with.

Many of the communities of this region continue to struggle with their sense of identity as an influx in tourism in recent years has persistently threatened their traditions and culture. The Lao Chai village in particular has seen significant cultural upheaval as tourism is slowly replacing agriculture as the primary source of income.



*the mountain town of
Sapa*

*stained glass of the main
church in Sapa: rice paddies
in lieu of religious icons*

SAPA

Sapa is a small town that has seen a huge increase in tourism in recent years as it has become *the* place to go for exploring Vietnamese minority villages and valleys through organised treks.

I was originally planning on starting my search for a project in the nearby town Bac Ha, as it reportedly has fewer tourists, but a last-minute dinner with Anh-Thu and her friend John yielded the phone number of a girl who lived in Sapa. I've learned never to turn down a potential opportunity, and so this phone number was enough to convince me that Sapa was a better destination.

After arranging a meeting with my recently-established contact Susan, it emerged that she actually volunteered for Sapa O'Chau, a non-profit organisation that has received a lot of press in recent years for their efforts. Founded by Shu Tan, a young woman from the Black H'Mong tribe, Sapa O'Chau focuses on educating the local youth in an effort to keep them off the streets. They run a small school in Sapa where there are up to forty students who live in residence at any time.¹⁷ Teaching the children their heritage and cultural history is a primary goal of the organisation as the children are given the tools required for becoming tour guides, arguably the most promising career available to them. The school only accepts students over the age of ten since they all receive education up until that age in their respective villages. This is often the time when children begin to drop out of their local schools to either assist on the farms or work as vendors in Sapa, selling trinkets to tourists.

And then there is the child trafficking. While I haven't been able to find any information from a reputable source, I've heard that the Sapa region is often targeted by salesmen with promises of income or education in distant lands. Saigon and regions of China are the places where children have been taken, and Sapa O'Chau is one agency working hard to educate the local youth so that these crimes come to an end.

While Sapa O'Chau was unable to find a project for me directly within their organisation, they were able to introduce me to a family hoping to renovate their home to make it more appropriate for homestays.

19 Sapa O'Chau, "About Us", *The Organisation*, <http://www.sapaochau.org/about-us> (accessed 27 June 2013).



*the homestay in its setting
in the Muong Hoa valley*

*local children playing with
wood chips at the entrance
of the homestay*

INITIAL SITE VISIT

A homestay is undergoing some major renovations, and so I'm hoping to stay there for ten days to lend a hand. A number of walls will be knocked down, some patio space added, and a lot of cedar (not brick, thankfully) will be used.

And so began a two week period in which I lived, ate, worked and relaxed with a family of the Black H'Mong tribe in the highlands of Northern Vietnam. The family treated me extremely well, and for that two week period I was well integrated into their culture. I can't say that there were any great surprises or culture shock, but these two weeks certainly had their impact upon me—it was an experience I recommend to everyone.

The family was headed by Xú (pronounced “Shue”), a thirty-one year old woman who was one of the hardest workers I've ever met. She worked as a tour guide (as often as possible), and had recently renovated her home into a homestay for travellers seeking a more involved cultural experience. Her husband Dúng was a pastor, and spent much of his time at home, taking care of their four children while Xú was away leading trekking tours of the valley. The eldest son and daughter, who were thirteen and eleven respectively, worked almost as hard as the parents, and rare was the instance in which they revealed how young they really were. The youngest two sons were aged five and seven, and they were really good at playing. Aside from Xú, none of them spoke any English and so when she was absent, I relied upon my drawing abilities for communication. I was lucky enough to have a translator present for much of the time I was there (Xú's sister usually filled this role), which while enabling communication, also meant that everything had to go through a third party, something particularly hindering when the translator didn't understand the task.







LIFE

For whatever reason the mother cat was having a hard time feeding the last surviving member of its litter. The children were instructed to catch the cat whenever possible and to hold it down so that its kitten could feed. She offered quite a bit of resistance—I'm surprised the cat's maternal instincts were so poor. I suspected malnutrition played a large role, but she also lay around the fire all day—only once did I ever see her catch anything. It was a small snake, and she ate it in its entirety in front of me before promptly bringing it back up. Judging by the amount of thrashing around done by the snake, she had started with the tail.

This morning I awoke before the others and found the leg of her small kitten under the table.

The tiny kitten was my friend; while I worked at night it would curl up and sleep on the top of my foot as it was the warmest, most accessible place it could find.

Papa cat must've returned hungry last night, although I didn't hear anything which is unusual as I sleep lightly here. As Xú said though, the kitten would've died eventually given the lack of food its mother was providing.

This is just life I guess.



*before and after the roof
repair over the kitchen
sink*

There were a number of challenges that presented themselves including the language barrier, availability of tools and building materials, and the premature arrival of the wet season. Construction was slow, but this invariably meant that more time could be dedicated to design. There were several amendments to the home that were required, and it seemed as if the presence alone of an architect was enough to initiate progress on these accumulated tasks. The home itself was extremely rustic; a simple post and beam structure, it had slowly increased in size over the years as the family's income afforded small additions over time. The thin bamboo walls had most recently been replaced with cedar boards, while a small mezzanine had been added for the purpose of providing additional space for overnight guests.

The first task we completed was the simple repair of a portion of roof that had collapsed over the kitchen sink several months prior. This was relatively straightforward and we were able to complete it in just a few hours. While this simple project contributed to a far healthier living environment, there were still several other projects that I identified as important.

Several renovation schemes were also discussed as Xú's top priority was to create a more comfortable homestay environment. Schematic plans were drafted up, and several important design strategies were explained to guide future work. The benefits of design concepts such as views, sense of community, daylight, structure, and drainage were discussed.

As these renovations wouldn't occur for several months yet (given the inopportune time of year and lack of funds), I focused the bulk of my efforts towards addressing the interior air quality. The current method of cooking and heating was particularly dangerous, and the family wasn't aware that the smoke and fumes from the fire pit in the middle of the kitchen was slowly poisoning them. The fire pit was also incredibly inefficient at heat retention as there was no thermal mass to prevent the warmth from disappearing into the earth.

Plans for a large fireplace and chimney were drawn up as I convinced the family that in addition to improving air quality, the house would become far warmer during the cold, rainy winters. This would then result in a better homestay experience, and Xú was fully on board with the project.



ON WAITING FOR MATERIALS

This is a picture of a truck traversing a river. This is how the Lao Chai Village receives supplies. Since it was the start of the wet season, it took several days for the water levels to recede low enough for the truck to cross with our materials. This was incredibly frustrating, and one of the major reasons why I wasn't able to see Intervention #13 through to completion. So I fine-tuned the design—again and again—while I waited. This invariably led towards significant redesigns once Xú started thinking about how she might use the fireplace in different scenarios.

BAMBOO FOREST

Such a calming space. I've never been in a bamboo forest before, and it felt like I was in a landscape from a kung fu movie. Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon comes to mind. If I knew how to meditate, I would've done it here.

The canopy was quite high up, and of course there were absolutely no branches beneath which left an uninterrupted space only for bamboo stalks. At one point I scrambled up one of the trees, but stopped my ascent at around seven or eight meters for fear of the tree breaking (there were some sharp looking stumps in the ground below). The stalks weren't quite as flexible as I had anticipated, and it was fairly easy to snap one of the smaller ones by pulling it towards the forest floor.

And then at one point we were startled to see a cow running towards us through the forest. Thankfully, before its horns could gorge us to death, a small boy shouted at it to stop and it obeyed.







MATERIAL MOVING DAY

Today was one of the best days of my trip thus far, and certainly the most labour intensive. Last night the truck arrived with our massive load of supplies, leaving them at the top of the hill. This was as close as it could get (I was impressed it made it that far), but this was still a good ninety second walk uphill from the house, and something I missed in my planning. From some admittedly pessimistic calculations, I estimated that we would need some thirty man hours of labour to transport the materials, and so I went to bed slightly stressed as time was no longer on my side. This morning while I was eating breakfast and preparing for a long day of labour, the village youth began showing up at the house as they were off from school on account of it being the summer break. The volunteers ranged from an eight year old girl to a fifty year old woman, and they worked as hard as anyone I had ever seen. It took us a total of six or seven hours to transport everything and afterwards we were all rewarded with dinner by Xú and her husband.

Even the youngest were able to carry four concrete blocks at a time using the deceptively sturdy bamboo baskets made in the village, and the two men who assisted could manage up to a dozen or so blocks on the back of their motorbikes. Not only could everyone carry a heavy load each trip up and down the path, but they did it without stopping and with only a bit of tea as sustenance. We did break for lunch, but it wasn't nearly as nutritious as the work necessitated.



REPAIRING THE DRIVEWAY

While I was busy knocking the wall down and digging out the foundation (a mere layer of brick), Dũng decided to capitalise on the availability of volunteers and the productive energies inherent to the day by repairing a portion of what one might call a driveway.

While I respect his decision to boldly move forward to complete a job that needed to get done, he definitely should have thought it through a little more.

The foundation underneath the new concrete pad was unstable and consisted of dirt and rocks carelessly tossed into a pile. The “formwork”—a couple of boards—was angled such that the pad was cantilevered slightly over the foundation, which was a poor decision as cattle often use this route in their daily commute to greener pastures. The edge of the pad was destroyed just a few hours later by the first bovines to pass through. The surface of the pad was sloped in such a manner that a large pool of water formed, as it had been poured with no thought towards drainage. As it rained throughout the night, the concrete only had a few hours to cure and was soft the next day.

All in all, a bit of a mess. But at least he’s not afraid to try.



plate 3.41

ON COMMUNICATION & THE RESULTANT PRODUCT

Upon the realisation that I wouldn't be able to see Intervention #13 through to its completion, it was decided to bring in the local builder (for a paltry ten dollars a day!) to complete the job. His background of experience and construction knowledge was far different from mine, and he had a very difficult time understanding how to build the chimney as I had designed it. Xú and Dúng had anticipated this, which explained their hesitation to begin work on the foundation—if he decided to do it his own way, it would be best to be uniformly different. With a structure in excess of a ton sitting on the side of a family home, it's best to play it safe by maintaining consistency.

When the builder arrived, he spoke no English, and I had to use a combination of drawings (which could only be drawn up in front of him, not prior to his arrival), a digital model on my laptop, and the help of a translator (my friend Anh-Thu who came all the way from Hanoi) to convey something I believed to be extremely simple. It took a couple of hours to convey the design and I left confident that he had understood everything.

When I received the final photos however, it was clear that some changes had been made. I'm not sure if this was a result of Xú changing her requirements again or the builder making adjustments. The component of the hearth to be constructed on the ground (a desperately needed thermal mass for the winter months) was omitted, and the opening was far larger than what I believed was the maximum area required for a properly-functional fireplace. This problem was then compounded even further by the reduction of the opening at the top of the flue – it was simply too small for the size of the fireplace opening. However, this problem can be easily solved by placing boards in front of the fireplace to limit the amount of air intake, thus encouraging the smoke to ascend up the chimney as opposed to inside the room. Despite this concern of mine, one can see from the photos that there is indeed smoke emerging from the top of the chimney, and this is reason enough for optimism.



*testing out the spacing
of the foundation (notice
the large boulder that has
been assimilated into it)*



plate 3.42

INTERVENTION #13

the resultant construction



PALM THATCHED ROOF

While I didn't get the opportunity to build a thatched roof myself, I worked on two designs that used this method and was impressed by the benefits of a thatched roof.

Benefits:

- a) locally-sourced materials make it an economical choice, especially in developing countries (like rural Laos and Vietnam)
- b) air pockets formed between the layers of leaves provide good insulation
- c) given a slope in excess of forty-five degrees, rain will not collect; the leaves are designed to shed water naturally
- d) it doesn't actually burn that quickly—several layers of leaves packed together take on the properties of a closed book when on fire and burn remarkably slow
- e) it is very light, and so the supporting structure can be far smaller
- f) it is extremely versatile and can be easily used for covering complex roof geometries

Drawbacks:

- a) it must be replaced every few years. The roof in the photos will last for seven years in a very wet, cool part of North Vietnam
- b) in countries where we're fortunate enough to have insurance, these roofs bring about higher rates due to a perceived increase in the likelihood of fire

This technique is actually becoming more and more popular in developed countries as people begin to realise the benefits. Apparently there are over sixty thousand homes in the UK that utilise this roofing system.¹⁸ It would be a great experiment to build a small structure with this type of roof. Something small, but I would still construct it with all the necessary membranes, insulation, and structure. Something at the scale of Adam's Bunkie would be ideal.



the bull pen

*the stove, completed with
no fasteners*

CONSTRUCTION WITHOUT FASTENERS

While certainly more labour-intensive, the construction method of the Black H'Mong people (also quite common in Southeast Asia—I had noticed its extensive use in Laos, for example) yields a stronger building that has relatively few fasteners. The majority of large buildings are done this way—post and beams are notched to fit together—but this isn't a practice reserved for large timbers only.

The man with whom I had repaired the roof busied himself with some scrap pieces of wood and a power saw for the next couple of days. It was quite an interesting process to witness him build a reasonably robust frame and countertop to house a gas stove element. He would notch the pieces, assemble them, and verify that the dimensions had been accurate. If any pieces weren't perfect, he would disassemble the entire unit, shave off some more wood, and try again. While I did give him my tape measure, I had the impression that this was a rare luxury.

The final product was quite impressive, and had I known that the family was receiving a stove, I might have reconsidered my plans for the fireplace. Ah, communication.



plate 3.43

ON THE SPEED OF LIFE IN LAO CHAI

Since the mountains of Northern Vietnam are arguably the least developed in the country, the people live far differently than what I'm accustomed to. For example, the average family in the Lao Chai village do not have a refrigerator or stove. Refrigeration is an incredible time saver; imagine harvesting the vegetables and herbs for each meal fresh prior to cooking. And then never having leftovers. The result is that an incredible portion of the day is spent towards food preparation. Introduce a refrigerator, and suddenly hours upon hours are made available for one to invest into other vital tasks, such as home improvement or farming.

Everything seems to move much slower here, but the people don't seem to mind. Priorities are certainly different from those of western society, and I'm not sure that's a bad thing. They are able to take the time to understand how something is made, and where it comes from. There are no foreign ingredients in their food (usually), and if something is made, then they must collect the wood or hemp (for clothes) directly from the source. But refrigeration would just make things so much easier...

It took nearly two weeks for construction on the fireplace to even begin, and this was the source of incredible frustration for me. Power outages, poor weather, delayed material shipments, tool procurement, and language barriers all played a role in these mounting delays. I wouldn't have minded so much, but considering my tight schedule, these delays prevented me from building much of the project, and for the first time in my thesis I was unable to see the final product.



ON RICE

The rice padys are simply stunning. I can't remember the last time I was so taken by the landscape (this excludes natural phenomena such as Uluru in Australia). When the lighting conditions are perfect and the weather is cooperating, rice paddies are nothing short of breathtaking. I've been told that this type of landscape is scattered throughout SE Asia, and so many of the people I met here had seen padys before. It's amazing to think that the lush green of the rice plants that blanket the hills represent pools of water. Entire valleys are surfaced with a foot of water that the farmers have meticulously created with containment banks and irrigation channels connected to the overflowing mountain streams.

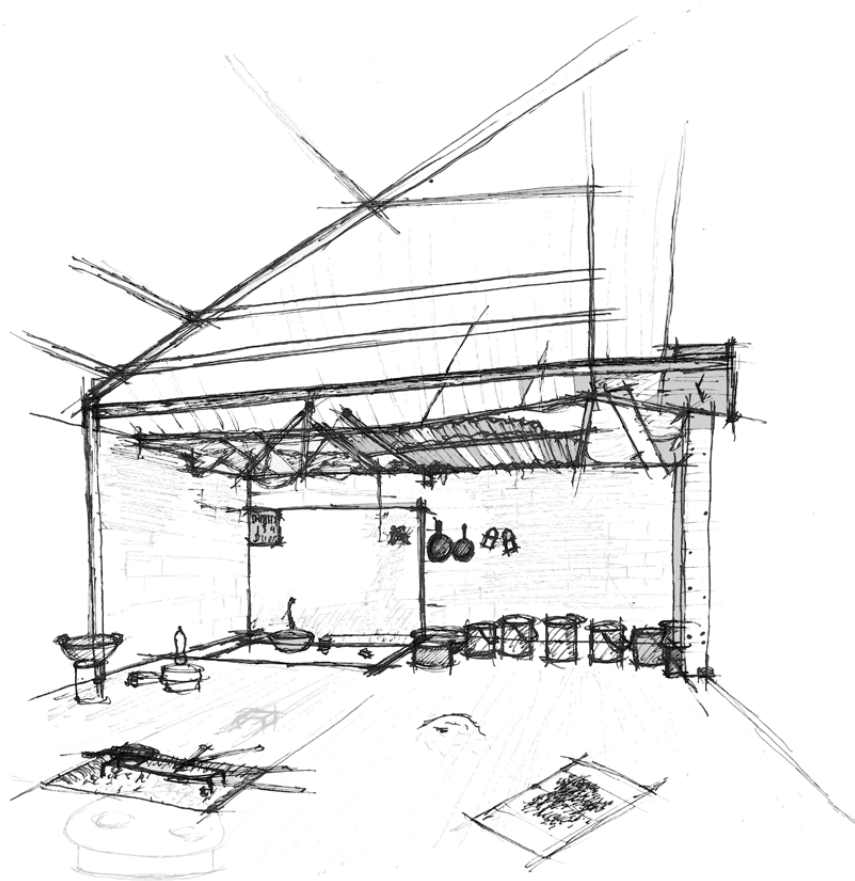
Rice is an incredibly labour-intensive crop which is surprising as white rice is primarily empty carbohydrates – I'm sure the farmers could be spending their efforts growing something more nutritious.

This is how they do it:

The field is first flooded as the initial step in what is called wet rice cultivation. The water isn't actually necessary to grow the rice, but it makes the job easier as pests cannot get to the crops and the soil is unspoilt. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Vietnam yielded 5.6 tonnes of rice per hectare in 2012. Since this means very little to me, as a comparative tool, Canadian wheat sells at roughly half the rate of rice. Last year, Canada produced 2.8 tonnes of wheat per hectare – again, half of what Vietnam produced. Put these numbers together and a unit of wheat farm is worth twenty-five percent of the rice equivalent.¹⁹ I really have no idea what I'm talking about, but it would seem as if we should all be switching over to brown rice.

The rice seeds are then planted in the water. After a month's time they'll become a small plant, which is then harvested in bunches and set out in the sun to dry. It is then replanted again in another submerged field, but given more space as it will grow much larger this time. This second growth takes three months, after which the grains are separated from the husks. The grains are milled to remove the husks, and white rice emerges. Good to know.

21 "Production," FAOSTAT (online, n.d.), in *Crops*, <http://faostat.fao.org/site/567/DesktopDefault.aspx?PageID=567#ancor> (accessed 15 Nov, 2013).



HINDSIGHT

After working on this project in the Lao Chai village, I felt really good about helping a disadvantaged family—I should have been doing this throughout my thesis. But as good as it felt, I still could have done better. Relative to most of their neighbours, Xú's family was fairly well off: they had cedar walls (most had bamboo), a concrete floor (as opposed to dirt), a mezzanine level for guests, and a fully functional outhouse and shower. If I were to do it again, I would learn how to fashion together wood-burning stoves from scrap metal, and then teach many of the villagers how to do it themselves, explaining the benefits of having clean air inside their homes. The money I spend would have to be put towards metal flues as I think these would have to be ordered from Sapa.

KWASHIORKOR

There were several children in the Lao Chai village who suffered from this disease. It arises from a poor diet that is lacking in protein, but is full in carbohydrates (such as the white rice that everybody ate three times a day). It occurs when a child is taken from a protein rich diet (breast milk), and introduced to one with very little (rice). The stomach becomes bloated as the body's tissues begin to retain water, the immune system is weakened, the skin becomes flaky, and the child becomes weak and irritable. If untreated, the liver can also swell, and stunted growth (and even death) can occur.²⁰ There was a child next door to Xú's homestay who suffered from Kwashiorkor as she was under the age of two (danger zone age), and had several sores on her face—probably the result of a weakened immune system. I felt really bad that her family was sleeping on a dirt floor and were clearly faring far worse than the family I was working with.

22 "Kwashiorkor,"
Encyclopaedia Britannica
(online; 16 Aug, 2013)
[http://www.britannica.com/
EBchecked/topic/325852/
kwashiorkor](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325852/kwashiorkor) (accessed 25 Nov,
2013).



*duck: no fewer than six
deposits*

ON THE CHALLENGES IN LAO CHAI

There were a number of challenges to working in the Lao Chai village. I'll do my best to describe some of them without sounding like a moaning wimp:

1) *Three rambunctious boys under the age of five.* I don't mind kids, but when it's raining outside and the boys have to stay in, getting anything done can be difficult when you share a large open space and have nowhere to hide.

2) *Rainy days with no power.* Since I had to do a lot of internet research (on how to construct a functional fireplace—not so simple actually) and drawing, I was pretty reliant upon my laptop to get things done. These days dragged on, especially since it would get really cold and damp. In hindsight I should've used this as an opportunity to practice architecture with no electricity.

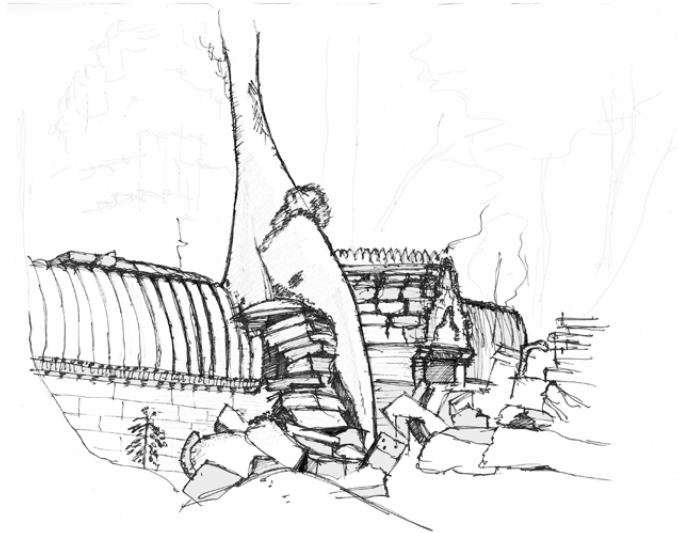
3) *Food.* After a few days of being the special guest and having incredible feasts prepared for me, the family became accustomed to my presence and served me the food they typically eat themselves. I consumed dangerous amounts of white rice and instant noodles. After ten days of this, it can grow tiring, although I always made sure to eat as much as possible as I was constantly working up a large appetite.

4) *Wandering animals.* This was the worst actually—ducks, cats, and dogs from all over the village would wander into the home, often during mealtime looking for handouts. I would try to kick them if they got close to the dinner table or rice cooker which was on the floor. The ducks were the worst as they would defecate like it was going out of style wherever and whenever they wanted.

5) *Cleanliness.* I went completely feral during this time. I showered at least once a day, but as I saw no point in ruining *all* my clothes, I chose to ruin only two sets. This meant however that these clothes were less than presentable given how much time I spent covered in mud and sweat. In general though, I found overall hygiene to be lacking. I don't think people understood the value of washing hands, or wearing pants (children running around naked was very common), or even keeping the animals and bugs away from food. The fully functional outhouse was essential, and the children used it often—something the neighbours weren't so privileged to have.

INTERLUDE: CAMBODIA

July 13 - 18, 2013



DAY I:

Angkor Thom
(Bapuon, Bayon, Elephant Terrace, Leper King Terrace, Preah
Palilay, Royal Palace)

Ta Prohm

Pre Rup

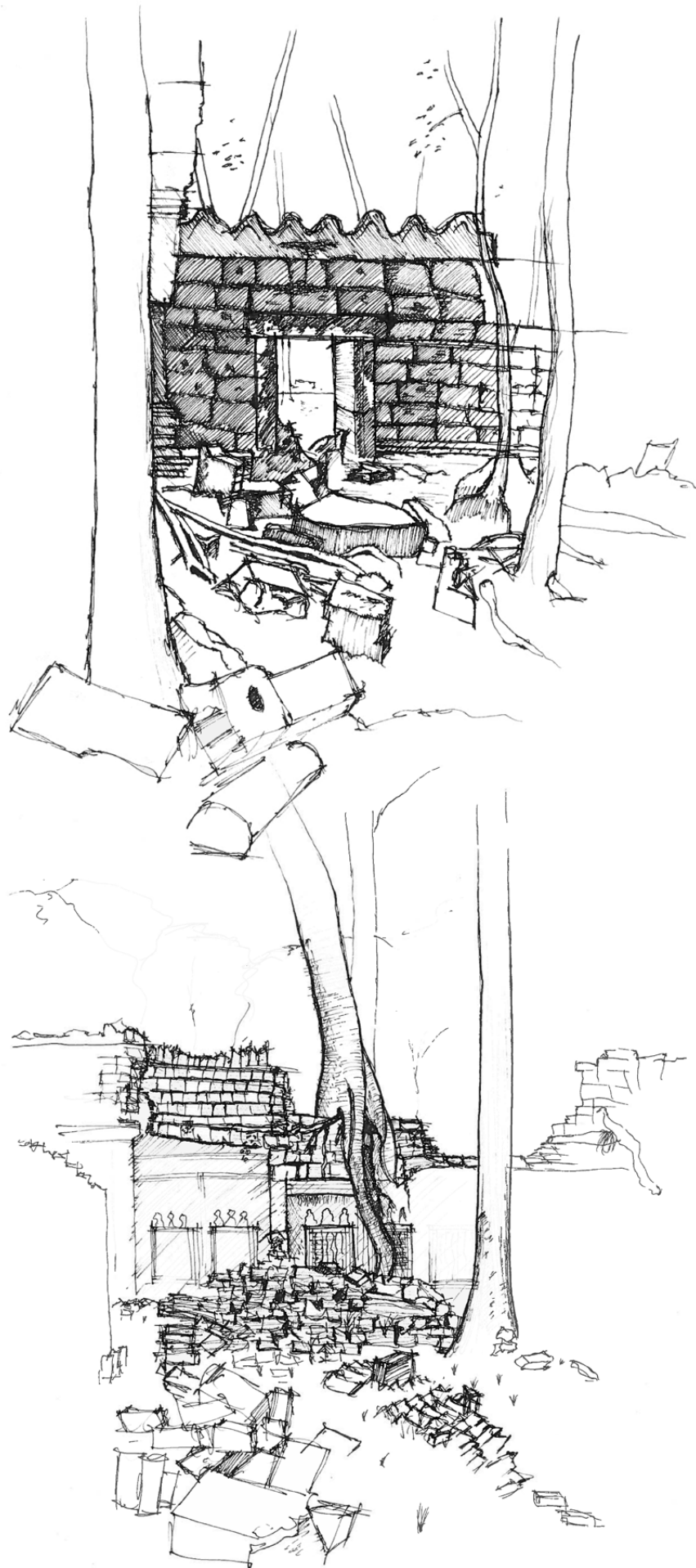
opposite:
Bayon
Ta Prohm
Preah Palilay

subsequent:
Royal Palace

JULY 14, 2013







DAY II:

Angkor Wat

Preah Kahn

Ta Som

Neak Pean

East Mebon

Prasat Kravan

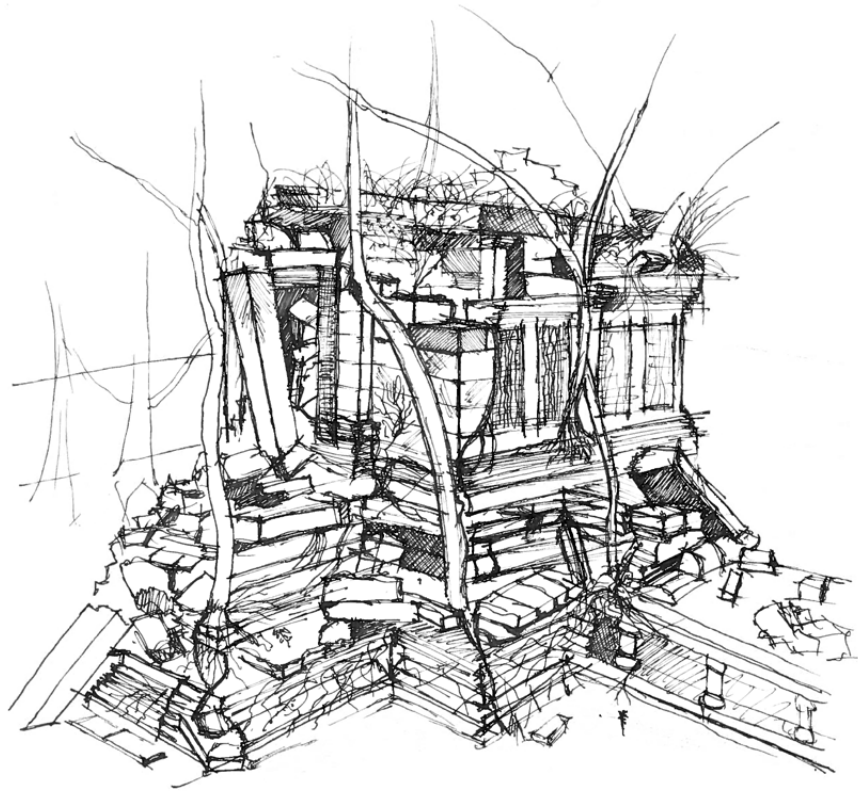
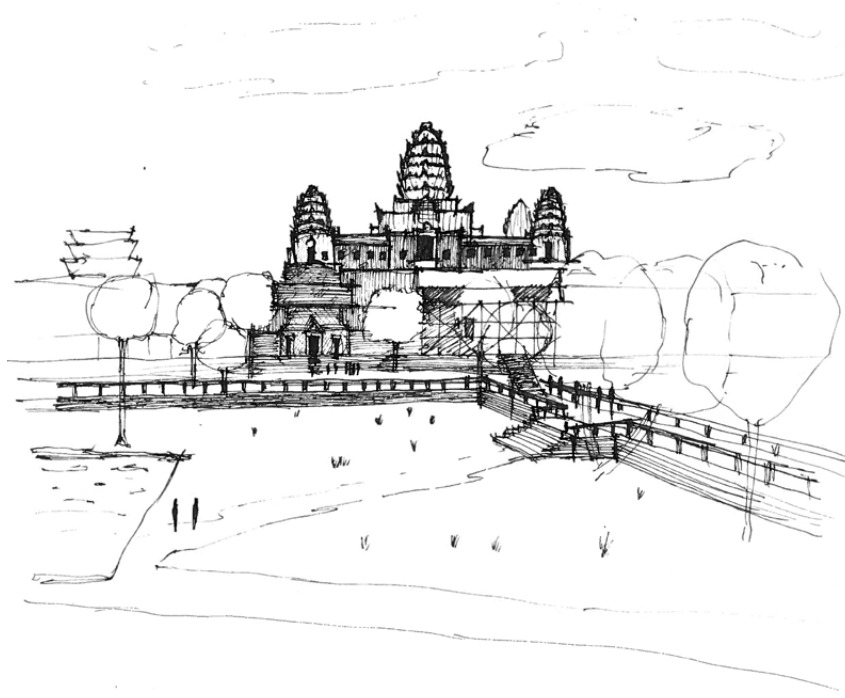
opposite:
Ta Som
Preah Khan

subsequent:
Ta Som

JULY 15, 2013







DAY III:

Beng Mealea

Banteay Srei

Angkor Wat

opposite:
Angkor Wat
Beng Mealea

subsequent:
Beng Mealea

JULY 16, 2013







ANGKOR

When I originally planned my Southeast Asia trip I had no intentions of visiting Cambodia. Upon conversing with some of my fellow travellers along the way, it became clear to me that existing for any amount of time in this part of the world and missing out on Angkor would be a terrible mistake. And so I made plans to visit the temples as the final “holiday” or finale to my fourteen weeks abroad, much in the same manner that I had concluded my Peruvian experience with Machu Picchu.

The spaces at Angkor were some of the most inspirational I’ve ever encountered. I’ve never felt a strong urge to sketch before, but in this environment, I felt compelled to take out my pens and capture some essence of the ancient ruins. I do enjoy photography, and for the first little while I took quite a few photos. At a certain point however it just grew tiring. I became less interested in capturing the temples with my camera and more interested in exploring, sketching, and napping. There were some terrific hiding places in which I napped, sometimes twice a day. Since there were so many temples, it was with relative ease that I avoided the hordes of tourists. Sometimes I just sat down until they left. I don’t mind people in my photos—however when I’m photographing ruins I’ll go out of my way to ensure that only the buildings and nature are in the photo. Crowds are definitely frowned upon, unless they’re the subject. My favourite temples were the ones that the *National Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap* (APSARA) had allowed to be reclaimed by the jungle.²¹ The Piranesian aesthetic of these ruins was just so inspirational, and scrambling over the fallen masonry—which I would do without encountering anyone for long stretches of time—felt surreal. And it was humid. I had to continuously dry my forearm as the sweat would often threaten to ruin my sketches as I sat amongst the trees of the jungle.

I was a bit disappointed in the number of fellow artists. I felt so compelled to sketch that I assumed other creative sorts would be drawing or painting in a similar manner. I saw only two people sketching: one was drawing unrelated manga cartoons, while the other sketched (unsuccessfully) with pencil crayons—at least he was trying. The criteria for my sketches was often seclusion as whenever I sat in a visible location I felt like an attraction as tourists would take my photo. This became annoying, especially when they would come over to take a look and see that the sketch wasn’t looking so hot. I didn’t mind talking to them though.

In all, an exhausting three days, but some of the best I’ve ever had. A great way to conclude my trip to this part of the world.

opposite: Beng Mealea

23 APSARA, “History and Organisation,” http://www.auriteapsara.org/en/apsara/about_apsara/history_organization.html (accessed 8 Nov, 2013).



tourists wait for the rising sun on the western side of the picturesque pond at Angkor Wat

I DON'T UNDERSTAND

...people's fascination with sunrise/sunset photos. I really enjoy these times of the day, but I think that people put far too much effort into taking that postcard photo, especially when they're not in the photos themselves. Take Angkor Wat for example: one of the busiest times is at sunrise—5:30am—when people crowd around the small pond in front of the temple, hoping to photograph it with the rising sun in the background. I don't think they are aware of the internet, and that a million of these photos could be downloaded after they sleep in. Or better yet, they could walk around to the other side of the temple and photograph it (as opposed to the sun) as it is illuminated by the morning light. This is what I did, and I had the entire temple to myself as it was bathed in the early morning light.

In a similar instance I walked up a hill in Laos to see a sunset that was reputedly really good, but I discovered that the only thing to photograph was the actual sun setting. There was no city or mountains in the foreground. I think there really wasn't much difference between seeing the sunset from the lookout and seeing it from the ground—and yet there were hordes of tourists taking photos. I just don't understand. I must be missing something...



plate 4.12

Cambodian family

*100 houses in varying stages
of decay*

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh is a really interesting city in terms of history, culture, and design. Instead of spending two weeks in Bangkok, I should have spent more time here. Sure, it's noisy, dirty, and more than a little disorganised, but before the Khmer Rouge regime tore the city (and country) apart, it had a lot of promise. As an architecture student who hasn't thoroughly examined the economy of Cambodia prior to Pol Pot, I'd say that the Cambodian architecture of the sixties is a great indication of the economic success of the country at that time. Called New Khmer Architecture, Phnom Penh produced enough buildings to become the only SE Asian city I know of to feature architectural tours, which says a lot as it's supposed to be the least developed. Some projects of note (all designed by Vann Molyvann):

Chaktomuk Conference Hall (1961): arguably the best example of the New Khmer style, this building has a unique fan-shaped roof.

Olympic Stadium (1964): built for the 1964 GANEFO games, this complex is supposedly quite good.

100 Houses (1965): these one hundred identical modular homes are a unique example of traditional Cambodian architecture mixed with a modern style.²²

²⁴ Lina Goldber,
"Vann Molyvann's
Architecture in Phnom
Penh," *Travelfish: Cambodia*,
12 Aug. 2011, [http://
www.travelfish.org/blogs/
cambodia/2011/08/12/
vann-molyvanns-architecture-
in-phnom-penh/](http://www.travelfish.org/blogs/cambodia/2011/08/12/vann-molyvanns-architecture-in-phnom-penh/) (accessed 17
July, 2013).

SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1) ANGKOR WAT
- 1300m x 1500m
- stay until after 2pm
PHNOM PENH
- 1) VIETNAM EMBASSY
- 2) TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MUSEUM
- 3) OLYMPIC STADIUM
- 4) NATIONAL MUSEUM
- 5) " LIBRARY
- 6) CENTRAL MARKET
- 7) CHAKTOMUK CONFERENCE HALL

TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MUSEUM

AN ARCHITECTURE OF BANAL TERROR. THE SITE IS QUIET, SAVE FOR SOME BIRDS SINGING AND THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY WHICH ARE MUFFLED OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE COMPOUND. IT APPEARS AT FIRST AS ANY SCHOOL MIGHT, BUT EXISTS IN A STATE OF SOLEMN REFLECTION. SEVERAL ~~OLD~~ MEN, RANGING FROM ~~EARLY~~ TWENTIES TO LATE SEVENTIES I'D SAY, SHED A TEAR AND SEEK OUT A SECLUDED BENCH UNDER A FLOWERING TREE. AN OLD MAN ENJOYS A CIGARETTE.

THERE ~~IS~~ ARE WHAT ONCE WERE EXERCISE EQUIPMENT IN THE YARD, ADORNED NOW BY HOOKS AND OTHER INSTRUMENTS OF TORTURE. TOURISTS SNAP AWAY WITH THEIR DECS, BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT TO REMEMBER THIS PLACE IN THIS WAY.

THE LOWER CELLS ARE BARREN SAVE FOR A METAL BED AND A PHOTO ON THE WALL OF A PERSON TORTURED TO DEATH. SOME LEG IRONS MAY BE ON THE BED, DEPENDING ON THE ROOM. SOME WINDOWS HAVE GLASS, AN ATTEMPT BY THOSE OF THE KHMER ROUGE TO PREVENT THE SCREAMS OF SOME 20 000 VICTIMS

FROM REACHING THE STREET. NOT A VERY EARNEST ATTEMPT. THE WALLS ARE BARE, STILL COVERED BY THE YELLOW CHISEN FOR THE CLASSROOMS. SOME DOORS STILL HAVE MARKS ON THEM.

IT IS JUST TOO MUCH. I SIMPLY CANNOT COMPREHEND HOW OR WHY SOMETHING LIKE THIS CAN HAPPEN. AND JUSTICE STILL HASN'T BEEN DONE BECAUSE OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS - HAVE POLITICIANS BEEN HERE? DO THEY KNOW?

THE MODERNIST BUILDINGS WOULD BE NICE IN ~~THE~~ ANY OTHER PLACE. OVERLAIN BY EVIL AND ITS BARBED WIRE AND CRUDE INSTRUMENTS OF DEATH IT HAS A SURREAL YET TERRIBLE PRESENCE. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF A CITY AND THAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY LIVE A FEW SHORT METRES AWAY. HOW CAN THIS BE? IT'S AN INDICATOR OF THE IMPROVERISHED STATE OF THE PEOPLE - I'M ACTUALLY AMAZED THE COUNTRY CAN FUNCTION AT ALL.

THERE IS BARBED WIRE STILL STRUNG ACROSS THE ONE FACADE, A GRIM REMINDER

THAT SUICIDE WAS THE LUCKY WAY OUT. INSTRUMENTS OF TORTURE? A SHOVEL, LOPE, REBAR, AND STICKS. IT'S AS IF THE REGIME WERE SO DESPERATE TO KILL AND MAIM THAT THEY ~~USED~~ USED THEIR BARE HANDS. THE CELLS WERE HASTILY ASSEMBLED; BRICK AND MORTAR ~~ARE~~ ^{FORM} A MESS OF A MESS. WITHIN THE CELLS MEASURE $\sim 1.5 \times 2m$ ON AVERAGE.

I MADE IT THROUGH THE EXHIBITION, BUT NOT BARELY. THE STORIES OF THE CHILDREN WERE REALLY HARD TO BEAR. I JUST CAN'T IMAGINE. AND TO THINK THAT LAST 14 PRISONERS WERE HASTILY TORTURED AND KILLED AS THE VIETNAMESE ARMY CLOSED IN - THE BODIES WERE LEFT ON THE METAL BEDS.

TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MUSEUM

Cambodia's Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is probably the most intense place I've ever been. Words simply cannot convey the experience. I didn't feel right taking photos or sketching either, so just my memories will exist to remind me of this afternoon. A blog isn't the right forum either to describe it. Maybe a thesis.

JULY 18, 2013

CONCLUSION

All making in the arts is also a way of knowing or understanding... in a profound sense, it is only through the embodiment, the physicality, the materiality of what you do, that you can know something about the world.¹

¹ Ed Levine, "On Making", *On Making, Pratt Journal of Architecture* 3 (1992), 13.

WHY?

Many people have asked me this, and I must formally address it.

When I began my graduate degree, I had no idea that my thesis would transpire as it did. I began by analysing several topics of significant personal interest, and gradually refined the scope of my attention over a number of weeks. This was not a quick process; I explored several detours, dead-ends, and traveled around Europe before I was able to identify the best way to pursue my academic interests.

It has turned out remarkably well for me.

I enjoy travelling, and in the past decade have been to some two dozen countries, living briefly in a quarter of them. Most of these international ventures have occurred while I've been a student of architecture, and so I understandably have a keen interest in the varying architectural styles, both vernacular and contemporary, in the places that I visit. The early thesis research that led me across Rome² was particularly successful, and it became evident that I had discovered a far more engaging and insightful way to experience places.

It is common knowledge that to truly understand a culture, one must communicate with the population in their language. I am regrettably poor at learning languages despite my best efforts. However, I will argue that living—and more importantly, *working*—with the local population is a more insightful way to experience a place. My venture across Rome alluded to this, and during the subsequent research periods this became increasingly apparent.

I had found a more engaging way to travel while practicing architecture. This wasn't architecture as I had ever known it: this was an architecture that fell within the parameters that *I* dictated. Gone were the studios; the office environments; the comforts of working for only part of the day. This was far more genuine, and involved the practice of architecture from first principles. I found my own clients, convinced them that they needed a product we had yet to decide upon, and then somehow build it using whatever local supplies I could find. This was a different way of practicing architecture, and the only tools I could use were those I had within. Architecture doesn't traditionally happen this way; architecture involves materials, equipment, teams of workers. Time. I had none of these. Was I practicing architecture? Perhaps; perhaps not. What I *was* doing, was improving *space*. Stripping the profession back to its fundamental elements and working with the essentials.

The undergraduate program at Waterloo, while very good in some ways, can become so stressful at times that the important things are often overlooked. While I was proud of my work, I never felt that I had taken the appropriate amount of time to do anything properly. However, the graduate program with its open-ended thesis is the complete opposite—students are given a seemingly unlimited amount of time to pursue almost any interest of theirs. This is what drew me to the graduate program in the first place: there were a number of important skills that I had ignored as an undergraduate student, and I saw in the thesis an opportunity to develop them. These include, and are not limited to:

Sketching

I insisted that sketching and drawing by hand would become an integral part to my thesis. Some of these drawings have been included in the final thesis, but certainly not all. In years past I had always felt pressured to sketch, and so I rarely did, if at all. During my thesis however, it came freely, and my sketching abilities improved dramatically. I've included some early sketches, as embarrassing as they are, as they indicate just how much I've improved.

During my excursions amongst the jungle temples at Angkor, I found great calm and inspiration in my sketching sessions. I began the three day itinerary with fervour: I scrambled over ruins, moving quickly, and photographed every minute detail of even the slightest interest (of which there were many). As time wore on however, I began to slow down, feeling and observing with my body as much as I had with my eyes. Instead of exploring the ruins—which I still did, of course—I became preoccupied with finding places of solitude within the silent ruins in which I could sketch and rest. Naps were frequent. Sketching gradually replaced much of my photography as I felt I could understand the ruins more thoroughly. In contrast, my photography just seemed so fleeting and superficial. Far more than any photo ever could, the Angkor sketches are a mnemonic tool that reconnect me to the moments of solitude and inspiration I experienced in the jungles of Cambodia.

Doing Things

One of my flaws is that I don't do things. I find it difficult to initiate a project, regardless of the scale or level of difficulty, and have a tendency to meticulously plan out every minute detail before I get my hands dirty. I addressed this personal shortfall (some might not consider it as such since it is often a matter of context) directly with my thesis: in removing myself from established comfort zones and journeying forth to build, I forced myself to design and build on very tight schedules. And to build *quickly* without planning out every detail—architects must be keen problem solvers as there is always a million ways to get a job done, and problems often arise with the first several solutions.

Now, eighteen months later, I have fewer inhibitions when faced with something I would like to accomplish.

Building

Closely related to “*Doing Things*” is my hesitation to undertake the construction of my designs. I used to perceive building anything larger than a scale model as a fairly daunting task—not for lack of skill, but because of the fear of failure or the creation of something unsightly. I attribute this tendency to my inclination to work digitally, as I become far too comfortable with the ability to “undo” or renege upon work that I don't feel is beautiful. Those who build however are comfortable with failure because they know just how easily it can be overcome. Those who spend much of their time creating in the digital realm lack this perspective, and are used to believing that the perfection attainable digitally is a standard that one must maintain when constructing a design.

*The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one.*³

3 Elbert Hubbard, *The Note Book of Elbert Hubbard* (Illinois: University of Illinois Library, 1927), 129.

Exploration

One of the great benefits of an open thesis is that one can use it to become a specialist in a particular topic of interest. This of course has the potential for becoming a terrific segue into a highly specialised career. Upon much reflection and some years of experience, I have decided without any qualms that my interests fall within the greater umbrella of “architecture”, as opposed to a more refined specialisation. Architecture as a profession is what I’m most interested in, and I embarked upon this thesis with the goal of gaining experience globally while establishing as many professional contacts (or opportunities) as possible.

In addition to the body of work I completed, I submitted papers to a number of conferences, publications, and journals. I even held a brief stint as a freelance writer for a Vietnamese magazine. Perhaps the most unexpected means by which my career has been pushed is the realisation of *Intervention #10*, which is currently under construction.⁴ I never expected to design a building during the course of my travels, but the opportunity arose and I obliged. While I haven’t been offered any job opportunities or serious financial offers along the way, I believe that my career has already begun, and this series of projects will serve me well as I begin to practice in the near future.

Experience

When asked by younger students for advice, I often recommend that they abandon the office job in favour of a building project of their own selection. This is something that I would pursue were I an undergraduate student again as I feel this learning experience to be far greater than those found within the desks and computers of an office. It should come as no surprise that the pursuit of independent projects is the route I decided upon in my experience as an itinerant architect. I can now proudly claim to have completed a series of *real* projects for *real* clients, some of which I believe are quite good, if modest. More importantly to my own career however may be that I now have experience in the pursuit, construction, and completion of projects, as opposed to the actual built constructs themselves.

I can now look back upon the past eighteen months and say that I did indeed achieve my goals. Some more than others, but they were all fulfilled with some measure of success. In addition to the goals I set out to realise, there are a number of additional benefits that I am continuously realising as I compile and reflect upon my experiences.

Perhaps the most immediate way in which I've benefited from the past eighteen months is that I'm now more relaxed. I may not know exactly what I'll do when I graduate, but this doesn't bother me.

I like to think that I have perspective, perhaps for the first time ever.

I'm now more focused on doing what is best and healthiest for me, and I sincerely believe this occurs when I am creating objects of beauty. This could entail designing or building—even problem solving, in which I consider myself to be well versed—within the loosely defined profession of architecture. I have come to realise that there are many options out there for someone with even the smallest traces of creativity,⁵ and so there is absolutely no excuse to settle for anything I don't enjoy. I've perceived that there are a large number of dejected architects and designers in the offices I have experienced, and after each short internship I have always been happy to be a student with a school to escape to. These spaces are not healthy for me; I refuse to spend my career in an environment surrounded by depressed colleagues who spend their time looking forward to the weekend.

Part III of my thesis initiated a strong desire within me for simplification. As I spent much of my time practicing architecture from first principles, I developed a greater appreciation for the process and recognition of its importance in the end result.

Upon my return from Asia I experienced some form of reverse culture shock as I was bombarded with unnecessary news, information, advertising, and events that I considered to be completely unnecessary. I also noticed that this clutter existed within my own psyche as well: there was just far too much *stuff* on my mind, distracting me, that I couldn't concentrate properly on what was important.

I have begun to remedy this, but there is much purging yet to be done.

⁵ see p330-1: *On Design Initiatives*

This thesis is not about a travelling architect.
It is not about one who traverses foreign lands, testing his mettle
against the challenges he encounters.

This thesis is about self-discovery.

Yes, I adopted the role of an itinerant architect, but this thesis is far
more about my growth as an individual than about what I have left
behind. Perhaps only revealed to me in hindsight, this thesis has
grown to become primarily about my understanding of the world and
how I can contribute. I have come to understand that I must design
and create.

I have also learned that if I am to spend time doing something, then
it must be done holistically. Free from redundancy, my designs will be
simple and elegant.

This is my task.

“I know very well”, said Candide, “that we ought to look after our garden.”
“You are in the right”, said Pangloss, “for when man was placed in the
garden of Eden, he was placed there, ut operatur cum, to cultivate it;
which proves that mankind are not created to be idle.” “Let us work,” said
Martin, “without disputing; it is the only way to render life supportable.”⁶

POSTSCRIPT

μηδέν ἄγαν
“*nothing in excess*”

γνώθι σαυτόν
“*know thyself*”

Ἐγγύα πάρα δ'ἄτη
“*pledge, and mischief is nigh*”

The ambition of an itinerant architect is simply too large for a graduate-level thesis designed for completion in under a year. One cannot practice appropriate architecture as a serious architect with this timeframe. Using my model as an itinerant architect as an example, two weeks in any given place is simply not enough time to even begin to understand the social and cultural contexts in which an architect must operate. If appropriate architecture is to occur, then the context of the project must be fully understood—a process which often takes years. This is why the cultural history curriculum is central to the undergraduate degree at Waterloo's school of architecture. Beginning with a critique of contemporary society in its darkest hour, the cultural history of Western society is taught as this understanding is critical for those charged with designing for it. This greater context is not something that can be grasped in just a few short weeks, and because of this, the feasibility of an itinerant architect cannot be examined using the model I proposed. By definition a traveller cannot be a good architect. Designer or builder maybe; architect no.

Appropriate architecture takes time.

To think that I could be a travelling architect, serious about effectual design would be somewhat naive, but this was never my intent. Rather, I sought to reach out to those without any formal design education, and I believe I succeeded in several instances to broaden people's perspectives. More importantly however I sought to educate myself, and as a self-serving exercise this thesis has been incredibly successful. This thesis has been an excellent preparation tool for my career as an architect.

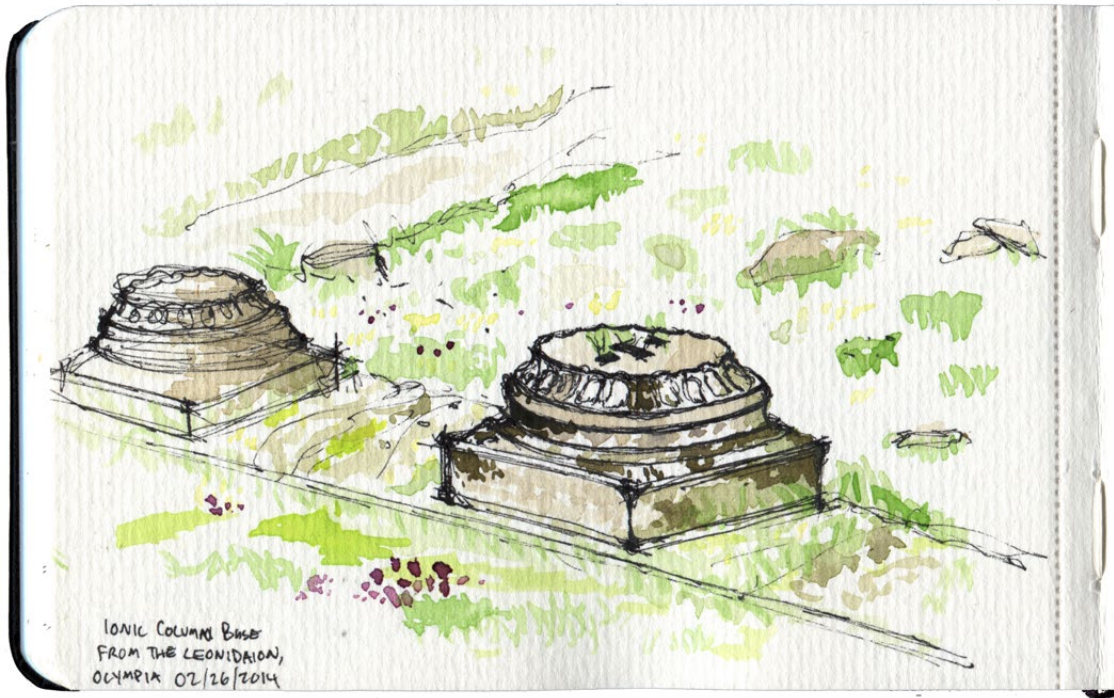
In hindsight, I should have been more particular about the projects I undertook, identifying the reasons why there were unsuitable. Certainly, I didn't complete an Intervention in every place I attempted—there were instances in which I decided not to act as I knew the timing or location was inappropriate. But in some cases I did continue the project when I felt that the design wasn't optimal due to the scheduling restrictions of my thesis. I ultimately had my own agenda that I never lost sight of—perhaps to the detriment of what I intended to represent as a travelling architect.

I know that one or two of the Interventions have already been forgotten as the homeowners have since changed abodes, leaving what remained of the constructions behind. Several of the projects (particularly the larger ones) have been assumed by other designers or builders and have undergone changes, for better or worse. But some Interventions will last. At the end of the day however, regardless of the successes or failures of each of the Interventions, this thesis has predominantly benefited me. While the projects may be modest and by no means permanent, they have been of a secondary importance. The self-education has been of my primary concern, and it is realised in this document. This is what matters, and if I want my efforts known beyond a few scattered Interventions, I have the responsibility make it known to a wider audience.

The etymology of that oft-used term, “Intervention”, can be traced back to the latin *inter* (between) and *venire* (to extraneously come). While I had spent much of my travels modifying established living spaces, “Intervention” actually refers to the entire experience surrounding each construct. These experiences were very much foreign and strange to me, and they had a significant impact upon my education and early architectural career. When considered in such a light, it becomes apparent that the actual “Intervention” was an experience upon *my* education as opposed my long-held supposition that they were small design projects. After all, I was the primary benefactor of this odyssey, this thesis. And so upon the successful defence of my work I shelved the hands-on approach (for the time being), choosing instead to push forward with my education in a slightly different manner. Immersing myself in the ruins of ancient Greece, I attempted to draw inspiration from the founders of Western thought and architecture. But instead of an itinerancy of construction, I adopted a more passive role on this trip, choosing instead to study and learn through drawing. I picked up a watercolour set for myself and tried to capture some of what I experienced.

Those Greeks had it figured out. Their pure philosophy and way of living is clearly evident in their temples and monuments—the hallmark of a great architect. Their important buildings were made to last through the ages, and they were meticulously detailed to match. How could I even attempt to construct an Intervention as before in the shadows of what remained? I couldn’t. And so I continued much of the essence behind my itinerancy and Interventions through the act of drawing.

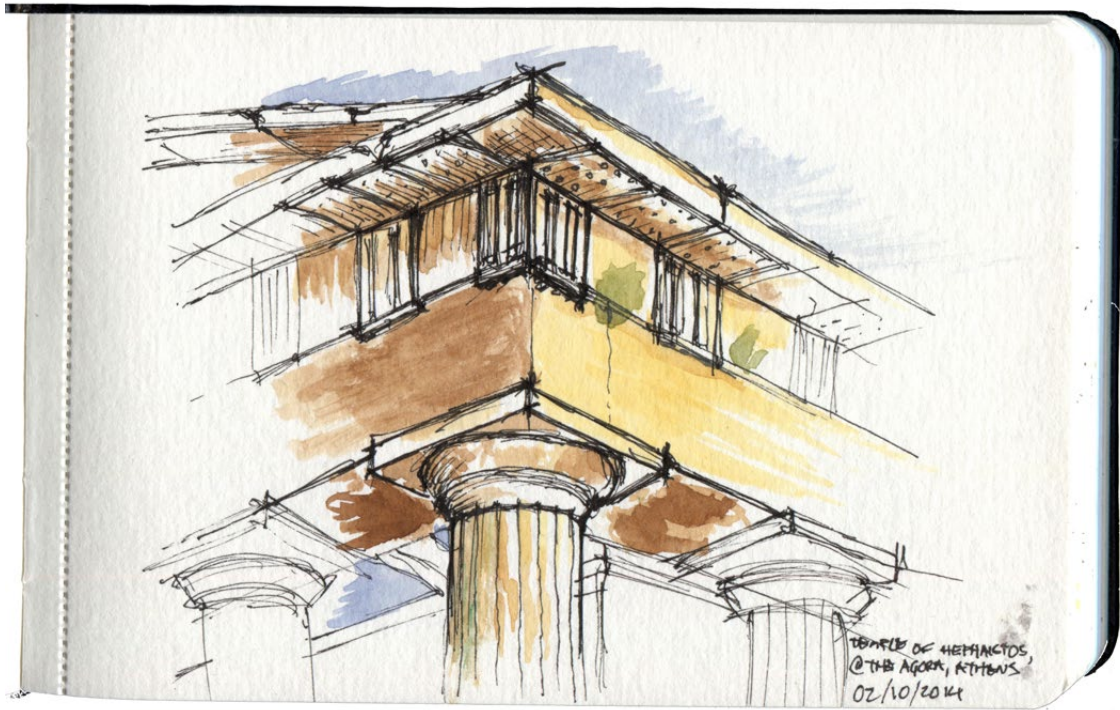
I initially began my foray into watercolours by attempting to capture the most important elements in a scene, such as the valley behind the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, or the size of the fallen column drums at the Athenian Temple of Zeus. I experienced moderate success. It is true that architecture is in the details, and I soon noticed that my most successful drawings were of these smaller elements. I was even able to capture the most important aspects of a scene more accurately through these renderings. The subterranean mystery of the Oracle of Claros can be captured quite effectively by drawing the dark shadows that lurk underneath the seasonal flood waters of her inner chamber. Perhaps the best way to represent the Library of Celsius at Ephesus (although Roman, it is the only building outside of ancient Greece to feature entasis) is to focus on the incredibly ornate carvings upon the facade. It is no secret that classical Greek architecture is incredibly complex, yet subtle. I knew this prior to landing in Greece, and I won’t profess that I came to realise it through the act of drawing. However, I will claim that it was only through rendering the finer details of ancient Greek architecture that I realised just how much of their culture and complexity is evident in even the smallest elements of their designs. They were masters of purity, proportion, form, and complexity through simple moves, and this can be clearly understood through a reading of just their architectural details.



IONIC COLUMN BASE
FROM THE LEONIDAION,
OLYMPIA 02/26/2014



LIBRARY OF CELSUS,
EPHESUS 04/09/2014





THE TETRAPYLON @
APHRODISIAS, 04/16/2014

When compared to the ancient Greek lifestyle, much of what we have today seems so fleeting and superficial; one need look no further than upon our architecture to see this. The purity of Apollo's temple has no equivalent today—our society appears to have taken a turn in the wrong direction. It's not that designers cannot create beauty anymore, but rather it's the system that has no appreciation or desire for it. Unless it can be turned into a tidy profit, there is simply no room for architecture or permanence as the Greeks understood it. By experiencing the architecture of today, it is clear that our capitalism is one of constructs that last just a few years before being discarded into a heap of waste. All that matters is the profit, but with few exceptions. But I can reject this—it just takes vision and a clear set of values. While I can't recreate the Greek temple, I can learn from it and allow it to shape my ideals. I must create my own ideas of permanence and realise them with my designs.

Whether it's through great buildings or temporary constructs that represent greater ideas (my thesis ambitions were of the latter), each architect desires to create something meaningful, something beautiful. I find that the best designers invest part of themselves, and it is carried through in their architecture. My most successful projects are the ones that emerge when I'm at ease and healthy; when my intention is clear and my mind present, I create good things.

While my Interventions may fall under the broad umbrella of a fleeting architecture, they are not the architecture that I am proud to have produced.

My architecture is this book; it is the first real architecture I have produced.

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