

MONUMENT

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WONDERS OF
THE WORLD
2010



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+ FERGUS SCOTT, MARCH STUDIO, TERROIR, ROBERT STONE, ROBIN BOYD, ANTÓN GARCÍA-ABRIL

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Leichhardt House's main living space with kitchen, dining and lounge areas. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN



IT'S A HOUSE WRITHING INSIDE THE CAVITY OF A MISPLACED FREEMASON TEMPLE

A NEW RESIDENCE BY TERROIR RECONCILES OLD AND NEW TO CREATE A DYNAMIC AND UPLIFTING INTERIOR LANDSCAPE.



But so long ago, contemporary architecture was critically engaged with notions of disjunction, conflict and collage. Today, these ideas are so foreign that a project like OMA's 1987 master plan for Melun Senart is almost unrecognisable. The drawings are analogue monochromatic monsters, unapologetic and precise. Bold opaque forms clash with delicate line work to create a tense compositional balance. Poised at the edge of an imminent digital freefall, the critical clarity of the Melun Senart proposal feels fresh and abrupt. The Leichhardt House by TERROIR can thus be seen as rather old-fashioned. It is a building within a building, a house writhing inside the cavity of a misplaced Freemason temple. The architecture is uncomfortable and complex. This is disjunction. This is collage. This is 1987? Not exactly, but there are aspects of this house that are strangely unfamiliar. This is not pixel-smooth architecture and the disparate elements of old and new don't always get along. This dichotomy dominates the design of the Leichhardt House and creates a refreshing productive tension. TERROIR partner Gerard Reinmuth describes it as the house eating itself, however it feels more like the house is battling itself. The existing structure from 1925 is essentially two large masses: a Georgian entry foyer applied to a three-storey brick box. The new architecture winds its way through the old with a combination of reverence and heavy-handed disregard.

A four-storey stair tower at the heart of the building binds the multiple levels of the house while serving as the transitional core. The base of the tower sits in what was once the Freemasons' assembly hall, now stripped bare and resuscitated as a semi-internal landscape. The one remaining hint to its previous life is the detailed plaster ceiling above, which Reinmuth supposes will eventually decay and collapse. He's OK with that.

Ascending the winding stairs, the house slowly becomes private. The smooth concrete shell of the stair tower is wrapped in recycled hardwood that once served as the assembly hall floor. This warm surface undermines the purity of the concrete plane, while adding a direct link back to the existing building.

Bedrooms are encased in the tower at various levels. Situated on a landing, just before the concrete spiral breaks through to the spaces above, two small guest bedrooms occupy the top corners of the former assembly hall. The ornate detail of the handcrafted original plaster ceiling is now directly overhead, creating a material proximity that is unsuspected and exciting. This juxtaposition is the most contemporary gesture in the house.

The tower culminates with a twist as it injects itself into the top level of the house. Here, inside the main internal volume, the details

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and texture of the existing building are most evident. The recycled wood surface of the stair tower melds with the original timber flooring and despite the drastic difference in scale, the tower works. Bookcases designed by TERROIR organise the rectangular space and direct the view through to a new picture window in the corner.

There are surprisingly few penetrations of the existing shell. This restraint creates anticipation. In addition, the architects take advantage of leftover space to create impromptu vistas. These moments add an air of playfulness and openness.

The primary living space in the house is situated within a large room that Reinmuth assumes was originally intended for Freemason meetings. The single volume is home to an elaborate timber kitchen, multiple living and dining areas and open views to the neighbourhood. With the knowledge of the volume below, it's easy to imagine the room being divided into multi-level spaces with dramatic interior views. However, this would negate the project's concept. The house is clearly two vast spaces with an occupiable core. This clarity of concept is hidden at first, but reveals itself as you navigate the house.

The strength of the Leichhardt House is its complicated relationship with its context. There is no internal tabula rasa. The new architecture contorts, twists and folds itself in a series of precise yet exacting manoeuvres to co-exist with the original building. This may be a simple design decision, but it's also the most inspired. To empty the existing building of its history in the hope of creating a sleek (read: generic) contemporary house would have been the easy way out. Instead, the architects battle the Freemasons. The resulting truce is complex and disparate, but ultimately uniquely contemporary.



View of the north-eastern corner of the building from the garden.



Through the former proscenium arch, a gate leads to an internalised outdoor space.

BUILDING TYPE: **THE MASONIC HALL**

Masonic architecture, like Freemasonry generally, is symbolically complex and somewhat inscrutable. Both occupy a paradoxical half-way state of public and private; having an overt public presence while remaining secret and mysterious. Thus Masonic Halls may have an extroverted facade while their function remains closed to all but initiates. The order's ostensible linkages to medieval journeyman stonemasons, unaffiliated and thus 'free', precipitate an emphasis on geometry – witness the square and compass – that resonates with Neoclassicism. Similarly, its qualified revival of the Knights Templar includes an aim to rebuild the Temple of Solomon. This accounts for the term 'Masonic Temple', though its quasi-religious overtones can complicate an already slippery public image.



The south-eastern corner, showing the building's facade.



ARCHITECT STATEMENT

"The site for this project is an existing hall located within a suburban context. The hall was used for gatherings of the Masonic Club, whose secretive nature resulted in a building with large internal volumes but which resisted connection with the exterior. The brief was to convert the building into a single-occupant house. When considered as an empty shell in the context of its site, the building and site together constituted the landscape for the project. This idea of the site as landscape is relevant given its scale, which is suggestive of an entire landscape as opposed to the suburban-scale character of the surrounds. The new residential occupation of this building significantly changes both the pattern and use of the site. The landscape is gathered up into a vortex that presses into the building, while inside, a series of nested spaces address scale and occupation. These interiors operate like Russian dolls with linings that speak of an alternate exterior. Insertions into the existing building take the occupant further and further into an embedded interior until, in a moment of unexpectedness, they press against the exterior and break through to the garden." TERROIR

PROJECT TEAM:

DIRECTORS Gerard Reinmuth, Scott Balmforth,
Richard Blythe

PROJECT ARCHITECT Tamara Donnellan

PROJECT TEAM Anita Morandini, Camilla Jensen-Thorup, Emma Trask, Natalie Ward, Felicity Wheeler, Moritz von Stuenzner, Kristina Kusel

ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ENGINEER
Steensen Varming

HYDRAULIC ENGINEER Warren Smith & Partners

QUANTITY SURVEYOR Chris Bylett & Associates

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER Simpson Design Associates

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT Aspect Studios



From the entry, the view of the tower element and music room to the living space beyond. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN

THE PRACTICE:

Conceptual origins

"TERROIR began as a collaboration of three Tasmanian-born and trained architects: Scott Balmforth, Richard Blythe and myself. Underpinning each of our personal approaches, we have found, are very similar themes and concerns. How is it that three people could so comfortably share a common approach and spatial sensibility?

"The answer appears to date back to our childhoods, which were played out against the backdrop of the Franklin Dam blockade. Though not yet teenagers, we were drawn to the debate along with everyone else, developing a passion for addressing complex issues in our work. To this day, we remain intensely interested in projects with complex ethical parameters.

"As architecture students, our teachers had fought on the river and coloured our education with a concern for the natural environment and humanity's role within it. Our education favoured design solutions with operative potential such as the deconstructionist school of Hadid and Libeskind. As such, we continue to explore how

ethical dilemmas can be spatialised, opening up questions of cultural consequence beyond mere formal or technical dexterity.

"We each spent the first 20 years of our lives in Hobart, and Mount Wellington formed an essential part of our spatial awarenesses even as children. As teenagers, recreation involved camping expeditions to inhospitable but spectacular alpine areas. In our current work, zig-zag plans, jagged roof forms and mute exteriors with strong interior spaces seem to be borne of a spatial sensibility founded in those jagged mountain paths and dark skies punctuated by bursts of light on distant mountains."

Gerard Reinmuth

This is an edited extract of the catalogue essay from the Building Blocks exhibition at Färgfabriken, Stockholm, from 24 April until 12 September 2010. fargfabriken.se



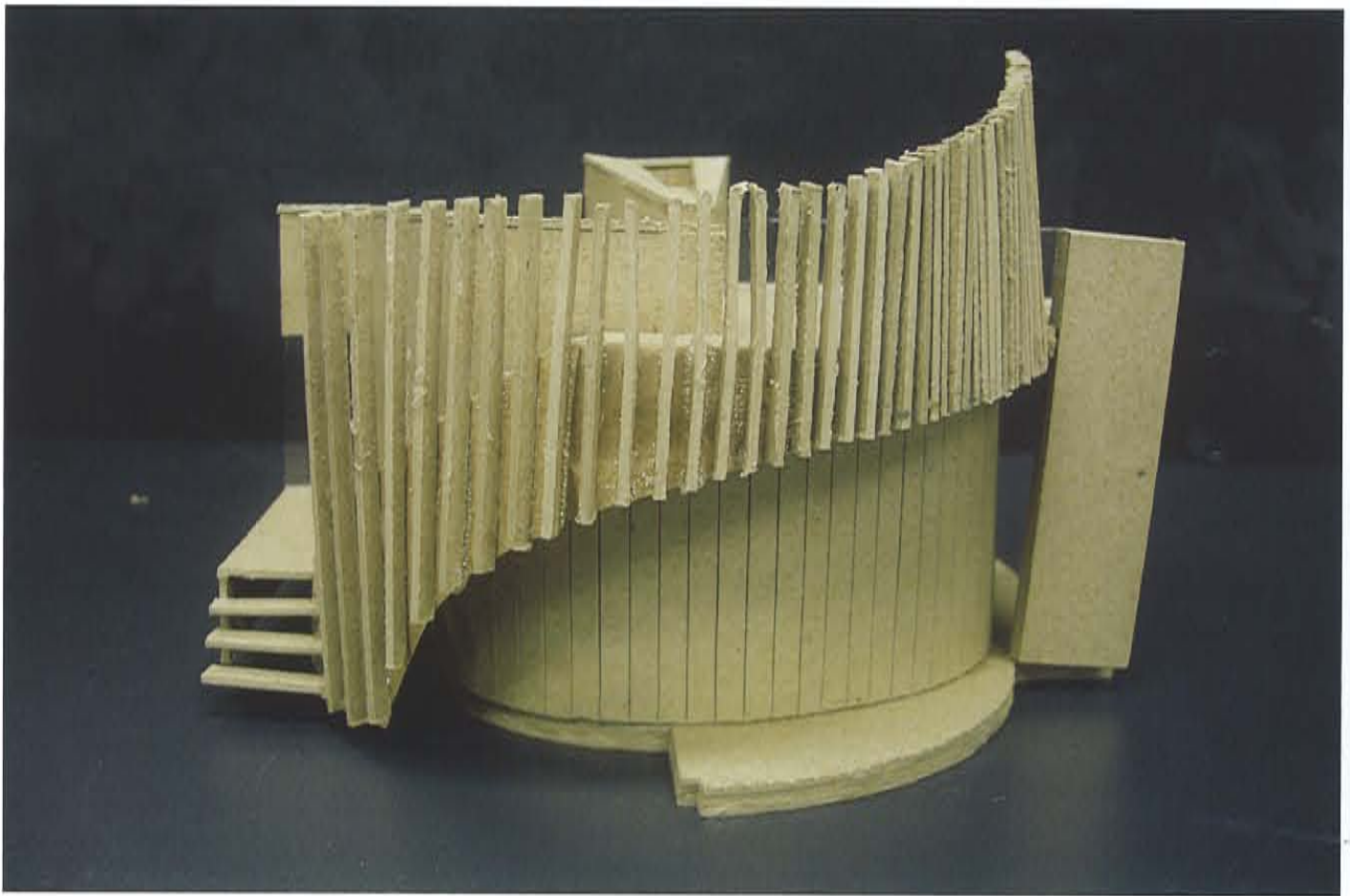
Leichhardt House's sculpted kitchen, consisting of timber wall and island units. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN

SITE NOTES: CREATING A LANDSCAPE

While conceiving of the site as a landscape is a central strategy of many TERROIR projects, it proved to be particularly appropriate for the Leichhardt House. Within the context of the suburb's modest workers' cottages and narrow streets, the large scale of both the building and the site itself demanded a certain consideration, amplified by the challenge of repurposing a semi-public structure into a residence. This approach also provided scope to address the intense interiority of the original building and the bounded garden. Within the cavernous interior, contrasting smaller spaces create controllable environments for heating and cooling. A tower element links the ground to the upper level, harmonising the new interventions with the public presence of the existing building.



The top of the tower element viewed from the music room.



A sketch model of upper level of tower element showing master bedroom and mezzanine study. COURTESY TERROIR



A bedroom cantilevers over the internalised lap pool.



Concept model testing the lower levels of the tower element, COURTESY TERROIR



The study sits atop the tower element.



View towards the entrance from the internal tower staircase.





Construction: The lower level internalised outdoor room and with garden bed in the foreground (below left detail), as well as the former proscenium arch (below right view).



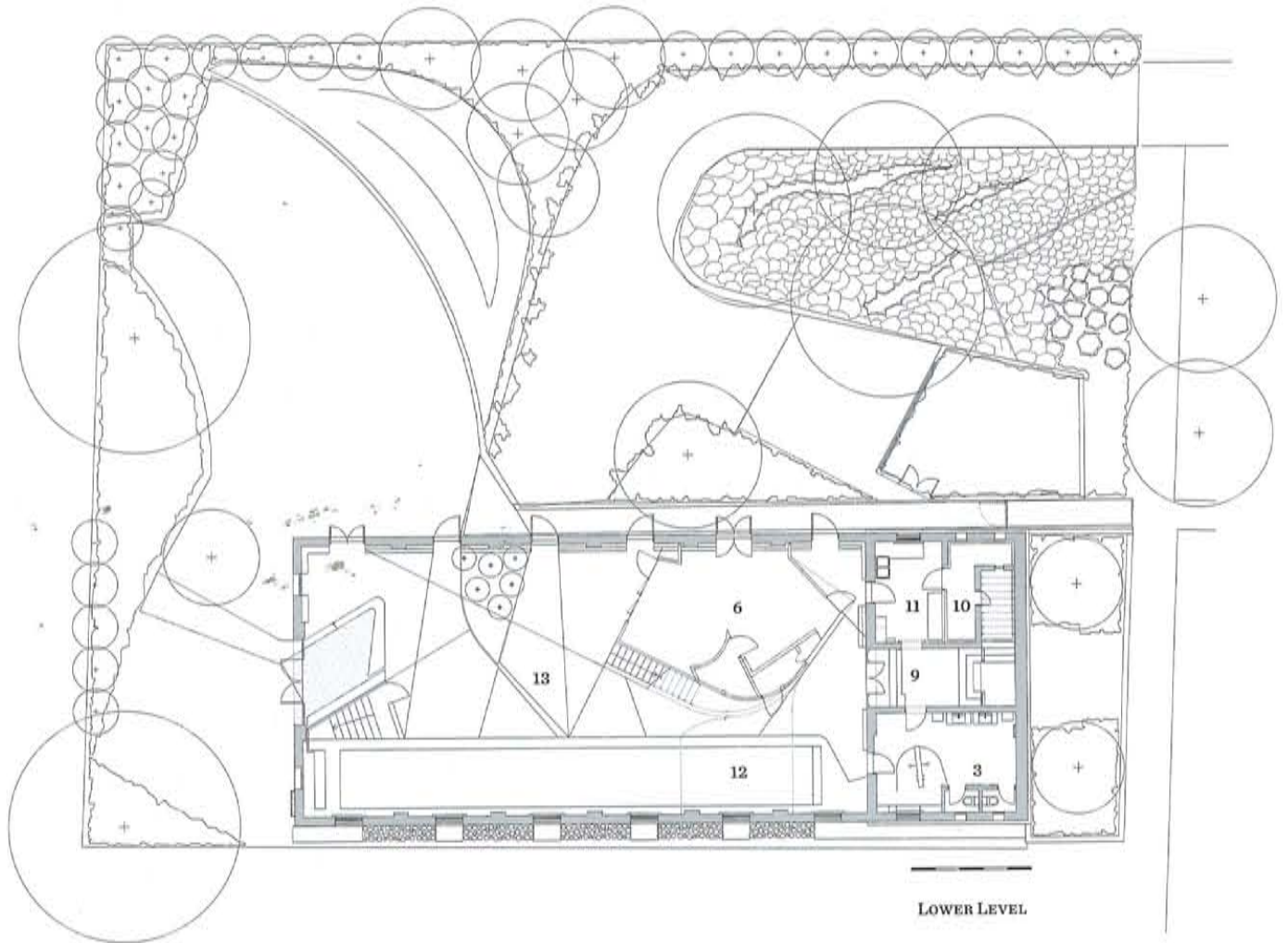
PROJECT DETAILS:

DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION
 10 months design, 6 months design development and documentation
CONSTRUCTION 20 months
FLOOR AREA 840sqm

KEY MATERIAL INFORMATION:

BALUSTRADES Existing timber French polished in shellac by Feast Watson, painted steel
BATHROOM Subway basins and toilet suite from Villeroy & Boch, reconstituted stone tiles, Classic Duo enamelled steel bath/shower from Kaldewi
BENCHES Tasmanian Blackwood, polyurethane
CEILINGS Original plasterwork
DOORS Refurbished existing and recycled timber, oiled or French polished in shellac
FACADE Existing masonry refurbished
FLOORING Existing timber refurbished with modified tung oil by Feast Watson
JOINERY Tasmanian Blackwood

KITCHEN Tasmanian Blackwood, reconstituted stone, colourback glass, existing plasterwork
KITCHEN Hansgrohe (tapware)
PAINT Dulux Fair Bianca half strength
STAIR Tasmanian Blackwood, polyurethane
STRUCTURAL SYSTEM Existing masonry, timber floor and roof structure; new concrete and steel elements
WALLS Existing masonry, plasterwork and timber linings
WATER TANK 20KL Acton Tanks
WINDOWS Custom-designed steel framed window with Tasmanian Blackwood and zinc sills



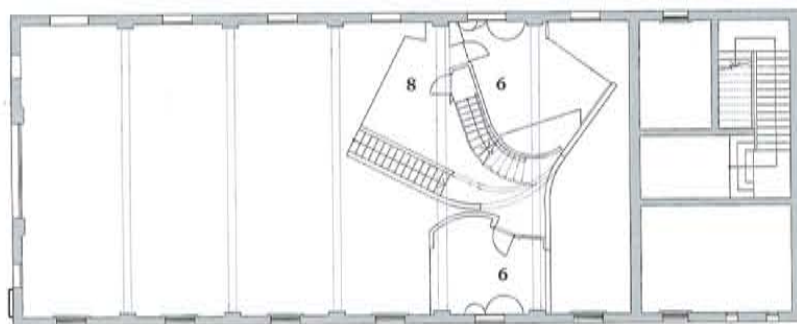
LOWER LEVEL



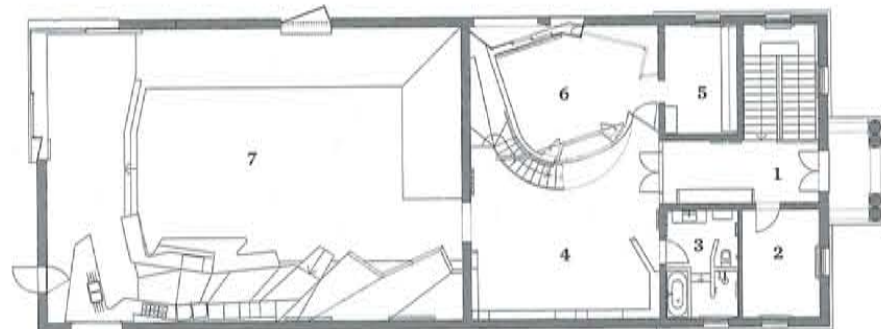
SITE PLAN:

- 1 Entry
- 2 Office
- 3 Bathroom
- 4 Music room
- 5 Dressing room
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Living/dining/
kitchen
- 8 Balcony
- 9 Foyer
- 10 Cellar
- 11 Laundry
- 12 Pool
- 13 Indoor garden/
pool deck

NOTE: THE UPPER
MEZZANINE STUDY
(NOT SHOWN) SITS
ABOVE THE UPPER
LEVEL BEDROOM (6)



LOWER LEVEL MEZZANINE



UPPER LEVEL



The music room viewed from the entrance to the master bedroom.



View from the kitchen of the corner sliding window.



LOWER LEFT TO RIGHT: LOWER LEVEL MEZZANINE; CORNER NOOK WITH LARGE SLIDING WINDOW; REAR ELEVATION; DETAIL OF MUSIC ROOM JOINERY PHOTOGRAPHY (PAGES 62-63) HERTT BOARDMAN



View from the music room of the adjacent tower and into the living space. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN



FOLLOWING TERROIR'S BODY OF WORK FEATURE IN ISSUE 95, MONUMENT QUIZZES DIRECTOR GERARD REINMUTH ABOUT THE PRACTICE'S EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.

MONUMENT: *In addition to TERROIR's built work, you contribute to the profession's discourse through articles, lectures and so on. What motivates you to make this contribution, verbal and written?*

Gerard Reinmuth: I'd say there're actually two motivations which are connected but quite different. One is probably to do with generosity, a view that any profession should share knowledge and work together to understand itself better. And as anyone who does that sort of work knows, you don't do it for income. What I'm still shocked by is the difference between architects who do that and those that think their knowledge is somehow secret and you can't do anything without being paid. So that's a very outward reason. The inward agenda is that by doing these activities, you also understand yourself and your agenda better. So the second motivation is very much about building capacity in the office: better intellectual capacity, better design capacity and a better understanding of what we do, with the idea that, in the end, there are very few good architects who don't do that. It's part of why they're good, because they're constantly thinking about and researching around what they do in practice.

M: *What kind of role do theoretical projects such as creative exercises and competition entries play in TERROIR's work?*

GR: Again, the answer is twofold. And again the outward one is that it provides very exciting opportunities for people in the office to do things. It's good for morale; it's good for thinking about things slightly differently in a safe space. In a real project, you have to control your speculation within certain limits; in a competition you can do whatever you like. The second side of the mirror is that we build capacity in solving problems, which then affects future projects. In the case of Moens Klint for example – a very early competition for us – its lessons were applied directly in Peppermint Bay, which is still one of our more successful projects. Competitions are like playing scales in music, or training for the Olympics. You can't get your gold medal without training. So when a client comes to us with a project, we're better at doing it because we've already thought through some of the key issues four or five times. Whereas, if you don't do competitions, the first time someone comes to you with a problem, you think, "Gee, how do I do that?" So, I think that architects who don't invest in competitions are actually perpetuating a false economy.

M: *TERROIR exhibited recently in the Building Blocks exhibition in Stockholm. What motivated you to get involved?*

GR: Again, twofold; it's becoming a theme. On the one hand, it was simply very exciting to be invited to participate as one of seven

new architects from around the world. And it's also good because Färgfabriken has become in Sweden – and particularly Stockholm – a key organisation for the discussion of urbanity and architecture. We want to support them and their agenda. I think they're just a fabulous bunch of people and a fabulous organisation. They're basically trying to make a place where there can be debate about the city away from the town hall and its political pressures. So we thought the exhibition was very interesting.

We deliberately chose our client at the youngest age they would allow because a young child has the most primal spatial understanding. For example, if we're sitting at a table, you might see a child hide under it and make a little house. And so we were very interested in the possibility of working with spatial perception in this direct and almost fundamental way. We said, "What house would you like?" Now, Alma is a six-year-old dressed in a little pink princess dress. "I'd like a princess castle." So, effectively, the building is an 'architecturalised' Disney princess castle. But then we asked more detailed questions about the sort of spaces she responded to. She would say, "I really like attics because they're just so beautiful." So okay, "What other spaces do you like?" And she was just, "I really like basements because they're creative and exciting. It's where the big kids play." And we thought, that's Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*: the attic and the basement. So one of the main observations of the 20th century's key spatial philosopher is neatly summarised by what this six-year-old is saying. That gives you an idea of the way they tap into, if you like, the unconscious desire for things.

M: *How do you determine TERROIR's future direction?*

GR: That's the hard question. Being in Denmark teaching has opened our eyes to a culture that has little oil or natural resources and, therefore, has to invest in the capacity of its people. They can't sell anything to China except bacon. So they've become expert in dealing with the currency of the mind. They sell consultancy services; they sell creative thinking. And so they 'get' TERROIR. In Australia, there's more focus on service delivery than creative thinking. We argue that being a creative thinker gives better service delivery. If someone asks you a question and you give them an answer, you're only telling them what they already know. If you say instead, "I think there's a better question," it might lead to a different but better result. So being in Denmark has given us greater confidence; it is telling us to hang on and keep doing what we're doing. It's just a matter of finding those people who understand and value what we do, no matter where in the world they are. That's the future.

