

# MONUMENT

## SOU FUJIMOTO TALKS TO TONY CHENCHOW ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND HOUSE N



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**+** TONKIN ZULAIKHA GREER,  
 ARKHEFIELD ARCHITECTS, TERROIR  
 AND SUGAWARADAISUKE

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The practice of

# TERROIR

OPERATING FROM THREE DIFFERENT CITIES IN AUSTRALIA, THESE ARCHITECTS HAVE A STRONG COMMITMENT TO ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE AND A VIGOROUS INTELLECTUAL FIREPOWER. HERE THEY CHOOSE THEIR SIX DEFINING PROJECTS.



The Sydney office of TERROIR (like Hobart's) works as a studio, covered in cardboard models generated by different projects. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN

It was a gamble, inviting a hyperactive Slovenian philosopher fond of smutty jokes and with a permanent, intensely itchy nose to Melbourne as the headline act for an annual professional architecture conference. The man in question, Slavoj Žižek, dominated the conference and while a great deal else transpired over the course of the event, the lasting impression was of the philosopher that came to tell a hall of building industry professionals what he thought of the motel in *Psycho*.

Seated on stage throughout, clearly unsure as to whether the gamble had paid off, the creative directors of the conference – the three principals of TERROIR – appeared simultaneously bemused, uncertain, intrigued and visibly excited by what might emerge after injecting such an alien element into a situation traditionally dominated by slide shows of buildings. What transpired was three days of discussions where, fittingly for a meeting that took its name from Žižek's essay *The Parallax View*, architecture was prodded from multiple directions, and more questions emerged than answers offered.

It was a strategy that fit neatly into the architecture practice of TERROIR, where ideas and projects are dissected in earnest, from multiple viewpoints, cities and communication devices.

TERROIR's three directors met at the University of Tasmania with Gerard Reinmuth and Scott Balmforth students of Richard Blythe, but it was years later when Reinmuth was teaching with Blythe at the same school and making the round-trip long drives from Hobart to Launceston that the idea of working on projects together and of starting an office coalesced. Shortly after forming the office on the back of a project for a gallery space in the roof of Sydney's QVB, Reinmuth left for Edinburgh, and so communication on the project was conducted by fax and email, with drawings sent back and forth, accumulating notes and sketches along the way.

This situation, it turns out, was prescient, with the office dispersed from its inception and with long distance communication an integral design tool to this day. Indeed, the longest period of time Reinmuth and Balmforth have spent in the same office is the six weeks the two spent documenting the practice's first realised project, the Masonic Hotel in Hobart. Since then the three directors have been located in different cities: Balmforth in Hobart, Blythe in Melbourne in the position of Chair of Architecture at RMIT, and Reinmuth in Sydney. Recently, a fourth office has appeared in Copenhagen, and within months of its inception a prize was won in a significant competition for the Danish Natural History Museum in Copenhagen Botanic Gardens, which will proceed to a second stage.

The directors of TERROIR, speaking about their practice, present the office as ultimately interested in the specific qualities of place, citing the damming of the Franklin River, and the associated politicisation of landscape as a formative moment for the young Tasmanians. Borrowing a viticulture term used to describe the quality that a specific landscape imparts on a wine for the practice's name situates this interest in the qualities of place front and centre.

TERROIR has a diverse portfolio of projects ranging from public buildings to residential, exhibition designs, hotels and two kiosks on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. In responding to the individual qualities of a place, TERROIR utilises a set of strategies to mine the »

## KEY AWARDS

### 2009

86–88 George Street,  
Sydney, NSW

AIPM: Sustainable Projects  
(State Winner),  
CCAA Public Domain  
Awards: Precincts  
(Commendation),  
Property Council of  
Australia Awards:  
Heritage & Adaptive Reuses  
(High Commendation),  
BPN National Sustainability  
Awards: Large Commercial  
Smith St (Ware)House,  
Hobart, Tas  
AIA State Awards (Tas):  
Residential, New Houses

### 2007

Peppermint Bay Centre, Tas  
2007 Kenneth F.  
Brown Architecture  
Design Awards:  
Honourable Mention

### 2006

Fish349, Hobart, Tas  
2006 NIDA: Hospitality  
Interior Design (National  
Commendation),  
Commercial Interior Design  
(Best of State)  
Liverpool Crescent  
House, Tas  
2006 NIDA: Residential  
Interior Design, Colour in  
Residential Interior Design  
(National Commendations),  
Residential Interior  
Design (Best of State)

## CONTRIBUTOR: MARCUS TRIMBLE

is a Sydney-based architect who established his practice, Super Colossal, in 2007. He is the organiser of Sydney's PechaKucha, and his blog is a mustread: [supercolossal.ch](http://supercolossal.ch).



The front of the Peppermint Bay Retail, Restaurant and Function Centre's dining space features a complex glazed wall. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN

### PEPPERMINT BAY RETAIL, RESTAURANT AND FUNCTION CENTRE, TASMANIA, 2003

"Peppermint Bay was a 'lighthouse' project for a developing tourism industry in Tasmania, and while the client was an experienced tourism entrepreneur, this was the first time he had used architects to assist in delivering a signature experience. From an initial meeting in August 2002, the project was completed by November 2003. This was only possible because of the close relationship that developed between us, the client and builder in the first few months of the project.

Although it is now six years since we completed Peppermint Bay, it remains one of the most important projects for us. It signalled our entry into larger projects, having spent the first three years of practice on residential and small commercial. It was also a major project in Tasmania, our home state, which was an 'announcement' to the local and national architectural fraternity that a practice called TERROIR was emerging.

More important than the peer and industry recognition of this project has been the general appreciation of Peppermint Bay by locals and visitors." **Scott Balmforth, Director**





The kiosk's form reveals colourful detailing. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN



A detail of the autumnal-coloured soffit. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN



The kiosk looking towards Black Mountain. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN

» possibilities in these projects and their sites. The line is one such recurring device in TERROIR's projects; it is used as the trace of historic overlays, it follows mountainous horizons, it weaves in and out of projects, sometimes it delineates demarcations between public and private, inner and outer, other times it knits the two together. At Peppermint Bay, the line traces a path through the building, defining a public corridor and the external perimeter of the building while a second line connects the landscape to the project's interior.

TERROIR invests heavily in what they term 'architecture culture'; the bits of practice that are not buildings. Blythe's position as Head of Architecture and Design at RMIT and Reinmuth and Balmforth's Adjunct Professorships at UTS and the University of Tasmania respectively bring an unusually academic focus for a practising office. TERROIR has a Masters by Design at RMIT, curates exhibitions, lectures internationally, staff are AIA chapter councilors, you get the idea. The culmination of this extracurricular pursuit was 2009's AIA National Architectural Conference, Parallax, where practice, culture and projects combined in a program that brought diverse presenters together and challenged the profession.

Given the breadth of its project work and the ambition of the practice, it is significant that TERROIR has so few projects in Sydney. Those familiar with the building industry here will know that it can be risk averse when it comes to procuring architecture, particularly when compared to its Melbourne and Brisbane neighbours. It is fitting then for an office dispersed across three states, deeply concerned with place, to find cities such as Burnie, Prague, Canberra and Copenhagen more receptive to their work, as well as the sites of some of their most significant projects built and soon to be realised.

### COMMONWEALTH PLACE AMENITIES, CANBERRA, 2007

"This project carried with it a great responsibility, locating a few toilets and a cafe/kiosk at the edge of Lake Burley Griffin, just off Griffin's axis. This responsibility was institutionalised to some extent given the elaborate design review and consultation process that extended from stakeholders to the client and finally Federal Parliament, who signed the project off.

Thus, despite being small, these amenities were a real focus in the office and had significant input from Scott and Richard, in addition to myself as director-in-charge. This focus had its benefits; it was probably a key turning point in our self-understanding as a practice and how we best work. While we were always aware of the benefits of a three-way negotiation and debate around the various contexts of a project, this small task bought into relief just how important this negotiation can be. Since this project we have come to understand more precisely that our real specialty is working on very complex projects. There is a particular analytical skill and conceptual rigour, underpinned by a very high time commitment to projects, which is particular to us and enables us to address these projects."

**Gerard Reinmuth, Director**



## KEY AWARDS (CONTINUED)

**2005**

**Peppermint Bay Centre, Tas**

RAIA State Award (Tas):  
Commercial Award

**Tolman's Hill House, Tas**

RAIA State Awards (Tas):  
Residential, New Houses

**2004**

**Peppermint Bay Centre, Tas**

RAIA State Award (Tas):  
Interior Architecture  
(Commendation)

**2001**

**Tranmere House, Tas**

RAIA State Award (Tas):  
Residential

**2000**

**Hobart Boutique Hotel, Tas**

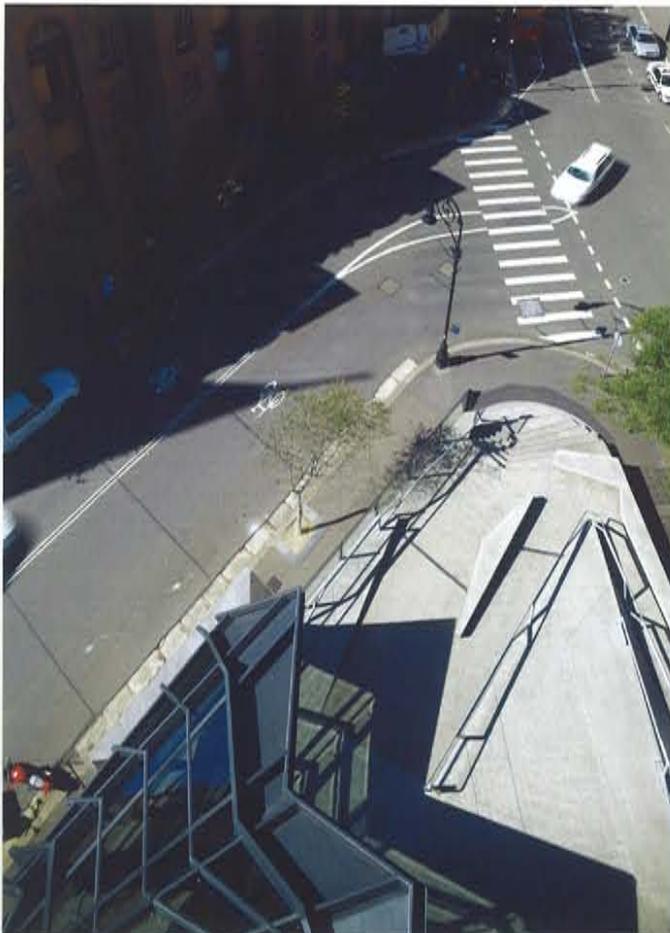
RAIA State Award  
(Tas): Interiors

## 86-88 GEORGE STREET, SHFA, SYDNEY, 2007

"It was rewarding to be involved in a project where the client had a sophisticated vision and then to see the various aspects of that vision realised. The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA) had a series of objectives that included establishing the building as a precinct landmark, refurbishing it to 'A-grade heritage' commercial office standards, enhancing the heritage significance of the item and demonstrating a commitment to sustainability initiatives. Above all, they wanted to stake out a position as to how heritage sites within their portfolio could be developed with a contemporary design sensibility. These overarching ideals drove the delivery of the design, documentation and procurement of the project and became key drivers for the entire project team.

The existing building consists of two interconnected warehouses, both of which have heritage listings with the heritage fabric consisting of the perimeter and dividing walls, with the foyer and the external public space becoming the key points of design intervention. It has been fantastic to see the project achieve so many of the client's goals, including achieving the first ever GBCA 5 Star office design rating for a state heritage-listed building."

**Tamara Donnellan, Associate**



The sculpting in the concrete platform. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN



Steps and ramps deliberately engage the public. PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT BOARDMAN



The Makers' Workshop, Burnie, sits on a headland that overlooks the township's beach and beyond to Bass Strait. COURTESY BURNIE CITY COUNCIL

## 2009 National Architectural Conference, Parallax Melbourne, 2009

"The conference was a great honour. As serious architect-junkies, it really was a delight that the AIA thought it could trust us with the task of providing the primary 'architecture culture' event for the national profession for 2009.

We took real risks with this, particularly in a speakers' list that was not so much a rollcall of famous architects but rather a series of provocateurs, including a philosopher, critic, blogger and some quite young architects. The AIA was very supportive – to their credit – despite a nervousness that was plainly visible at times. I think this choice of speakers meant that the conference crept up on everyone. Zizek, for example, was known to very few, yet by lunch on the first day he had everyone buzzing.

I think the conference was a good example of a TERROIR design process working out and it was useful to us, as the success or otherwise of a conference is in some ways easier to gauge than a building. Setting up a structure that resulted in detailed conversations, provocations and the building of an intelligence across the event over three days (with speakers appearing in different modes) really worked."

Gerard Reinmuth, Director

### MAKERS' WORKSHOP, BURNIE, 2009

"Makers' Workshop, Burnie, is an important project for a community that, until recent times, has been known for its large-scale industries, with the largest of these being the pulp and paper mill. In recent years, a local initiative has developed a value-adding business off the town's paper production in the form of creative paper products and techniques. Thus, the twin focus – part creative paper industry, part museum – provided the basis for the active local council to seek to develop an 'iconic' project.

We saw an opportunity to instil a strong community stake holding in this project via the establishment of the centre of the building as a year-round 'living room' for the town, around which the various functions are arranged, each directed to a specific vista from the prominent waterside site.

The delivery of this project within tight time and budget constraints – \$4.5 million for 1500sqms and completed 14 months after the first client meeting – called for an unorthodox approach. We operated at speed, buoyed by massive investment in design research over the past decade that allowed us to respond very quickly to this unique problem." Scott Balmforth, Director





SNM's glass tower and concrete cells. **RENDERING TERROIR**

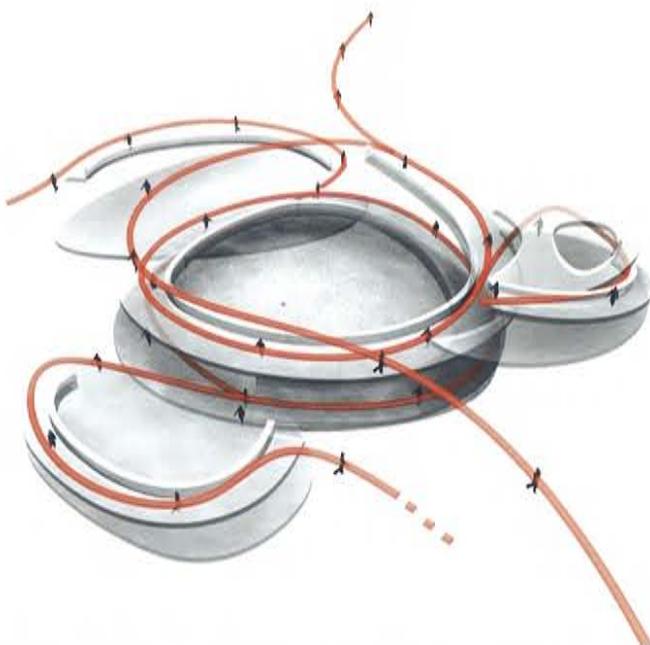


SNM ideation image showing cellular gallery arrangement. **COURTESY TERROIR**

### STATENS NATURHISTORISKE MUSEUM, COPENHAGEN, 2009

"This project just appeared on the competition websites and seemed to be made for us. It was a classic TERROIR problem – that is, an impossible problem that needs a solution!

The idea of building a major new piece of museum infrastructure in the much loved Copenhagen Botanical Garden is highly problematic. Further, this desire to make it 'invisible' directly contradicted a desire to announce the existence of this institution across the city. So, the problem really put our concept of a contextual surface – a sort of ideas machine that negotiates the various competing contexts of a problem and provides a mechanism for making the various prioritisations and negotiations particular to that project – to work. These competitions give us a window out of the dreary and limited opportunities that constitute architectural practice in Sydney as it is currently configured. It's a bit like high-altitude training for an athlete: pushing yourself and your team to the limit in the pursuit of an outcome of the highest quality. I think that is one of the values of our practice, that it is a sort of research machine which gives clients great value. The trick is just finding people who see the value in ideas." **Gerard Reinmuth, Director**



SNM's circulation system binds together its three collections. **COURTESY TERROIR**

