

TERROIR started as a collaboration between three Tasmanian-born and trained architects. After an initial period focused in projects in our home state, the practice grew into a medium sized practice with offices in 4 cities.

During this growth period, we undertook some research into the basis of our approach, to ensure that as we grew and diversified with new team members and partners, we would not lose sight of that quality which led to successful outcome in early projects.

We were able to agree that three key concerns underpin our work. Firstly, we are intensely interested in complex projects, where difficult ethical decisions need to be made about what might be prioritised, or suppressed, in a brief or a design solution. Secondly, we were interested in how these ethical dilemmas could then be spatialised, such that the buildings which result might stretch beyond displays of formal or technical dexterity and instead may be able to open up questions of cultural consequence. Finally, we realised that a particular spatial intelligence was shared by the three original Directors, such that we tended to resolve design dilemmas via the deployment of a particular spatial sensibility. Specific techniques or formal predilections – such as zig-zag plan geometries, jagged roof forms, a mute exterior presence, and the deployment of strong interior spaces in contrast with these mute exteriors – repeated again and again.

We asked ourselves, how is it that three people, with similar but not identical professional trajectories could so comfortably share a common approach and spatial sensibility? We found the answer in our childhood.

It was suggested that we refer to the music of Bjork as a reference. While Bjork is well known as perhaps the most radical and experimental person in the pop industry, there is a consistency underpinning her various changes of appearance and technique over the last 15 years that owes much to her childhood. During an interview approximately 10 years ago, Bjork noted that when she was a little girl in Reykjavik she would walk to school in storms and take shelter behind buildings along the way, singing softly as she shielded herself from the wind and snow. Then, she might run up to the top of a hill and scream a song as loud as she could into the face of the wind. What she was describing was a process of mapping the landscape through song. When one then thinks of her music over the years, it is fairly easy to conclude that despite various stylistic and technological changes, Bjork has made a career singing about her home and mapping it again and again through song.

We were aged 10-12 years old in the early 1980s, when a major debate raged regarding development in the Tasmanian wilderness. In particular, a proposal to dam a major wild river system in the service of a hydro-electric power scheme caused major protests (both in the wilderness and as far away as London). The debate grew to such an extent that the Australian Government of the time lost power largely due to their refusal to block the development.

Although we were not yet teenagers – the same age as many of the “clients” involved in this exhibition – we were drawn intensely into the debate. Everyone was. Brothers stood against brothers as workers on one side of a protest line and policeman on the other. Everyone had an

opinion, and everyone's parents had an opinion. Whether we had a rational opinion on the development or not I can't remember, but what is important is that from a very early age we developed an awareness of the complexity of these issues and a passion for addressing complex issues like this in our work. Hence we could explain the first of our three concerns.

As architecture students training in a Tasmanian school some 8 years later, we were taught by people who had fought on the river in protest at the proposed dam. Thus, our education was heavily coloured by a concern for the natural environment and the role of humans in it. We were taught from within a tradition that favoured design solutions with some operative potential in regard to these issues, rather than the heavily formalistic tendencies internationally at that time, such as the deconstruction "school" centred on architects such as Hadid and Libeskind. Hence we could explain the second of our three concerns.

Finally, we all spent the first 20 years of our lives in the city of Hobart, a city dominated by a 1270m high mountain and sitting within 60 minutes drive of a range of exceptional wilderness tracks. Therefore, even as very young children, the mountain formed an essential part of our spatial awareness, while, as teenagers, recreation involved camping expeditions to inhospitable but spectacular alpine areas. Hence we could explain our third concern, and how the zig-zag paths through jagged mountain forms, and dark skies punctuated by bursts of light on distant mountains had come to influence a spatial sensibility across all three of us.

These discoveries led to a series of research projects into children and space, children and design and children and imagination (in particular in regard to the idea of the "toy" as a concept in architecture). Thus, rather than see "Building Blocks" as a novel idea or a new take on the role of the architect we see it as a profoundly important undertaking that asks questions fundamental to the development of architectural thinking and the practice of architecture itself.