



# In Absence Of;

Methods of Minimal Intervention  
Brooke Lazarus





# Perpetual

The Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship Journal Series is a library of research compiled by architects, students and graduates since 1951, and made possible by the generous gift of Sydney Architect and educator, Byera Hadley (1872-1937). Byera Hadley was a distinguished educator and NSW architect.

As Lecturer-in-Charge of the architecture course at Sydney Technical College, Hadley built “one of the finest schools of architecture in the Empire” and is credited with gaining Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) recognition of the course, which gave post-1923 graduates exemption from the RIBA examinations.

As an architect in private practice, Hadley drew from a wide range of revival styles in his designs for significant urban and suburban commissions, which included two town halls, several multi-storey city warehouses, numerous suburban churches and Sydney University’s original Wesley College and chapel.

Hadley’s “greatest contribution to NSW architecture remains his insistence on the importance of travel in Australian architectural training.” In 1928 and 1929, Hadley sponsored two £25 scholarships through the Board of Architects of NSW. The success of these must have provided the catalyst for his 1937 bequest.

The Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarships have been awarded since 1951 as a result of the Trust established by the Byera Hadley estate. The list of scholarship recipients over the years includes many architects who have contributed enormously to the profession and the broader community.

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Brooke Lazarus was awarded the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship in 2022.

Cover image: San Gimignano, Lichtenberg, 2023

Photo by: Brooke Lazarus

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The goal of this research was to trace the changing landscape of alterations and additions within new age minimal approaches from five architects across Europe within 1990-present

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## 1

## Introduction

My topic of research for the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship sought to explore a specific methodology applied to existing buildings or established contexts, through which adaption or alteration would be produced in a fiscally positive and minimal approach to revive buildings which have seemingly "reached" their life spans.

During 2022, I was working for a young small practice, which was actively seeking to exercise similar approaches to built work, as Sydney itself was, and is, still enduring complexities which this report hopes to illustrate and discuss. The discourse throughout, is precluded by examples of both well established and highly accoladed practice's, and some of their younger contemporaries - making a large impact with elegant and highly considered interventions throughout Europe.

What I had first envisioned for this report, was that the outcomes and responses would book end what would be a "periodic" growing pain that Australian practices would simply catch up with and evolve past. Unfortunately, I had found that the more questions I asked, the less answers I actually had. It became clear that there existed a complex network of issues which were contributing factors to the sum of its parts. And, frankly, none of which would be solved by this report.

I have however learnt in retrospect, that any amount of attention given to a topic, is still beneficial. Any contribution to the discourse of contemporary issues is a vehicle to the evolution of it. And so I hope that this report is my contribution to the zeitgeist happening at this time.

Minimal intervention is not a novel approach, and neither is the absence of necessities.

What this report will aim to reveal is the corresponding attitudes, vernacular development and politics which also surround the group of Architects . The particular approaches each practice garners for their work is also apart of a larger, and growing movement we are seeing, a call to a quality of living within economic constraints, limited resources, and changing policies impacting everyday life.

During 2022, I was fortunate enough to study under Lacaton and Vassal here in Sydney, in a studio at The University of Sydney, almost exactly a year after they were awarded the 2021 Pritzker Architecture Prize. It was during this experience that their radical and perhaps generous applications to design, was apart of a larger ongoing dialogue in Europe. This is not to suggest their work had directly spawned a whole movement, but it was sensitive in such a way that was potentially ahead of it's time, and yet to resonate as gratefully as it should, until the decade.

It became clear, a kind of dissonance between their attitude and the building industry here. In 2022 when I first workshopped this topic, the timing seemed to be right for this. A wave of young architect's in Sydney popped up, engaging on projects of much smaller scales, which were largely rectifications or additions of the terrace typology - ones reaching their cyclical life span and needing some elbow grease.

These were projects typically brought forth by younger clients, city dwellers with growing or young families, and conservative budgets. It was therefore young architects and young clients navigating how to improve the living standards of these old houses within an impossible economical housing market. None of the clients and projects I have personally known, have treated housing as a commodity, but necessity. And so the results of these projects were personal - reactive and genuine. There's a deep authenticity to be found in these projects, and as the saying goes - constraint fosters creativity.

Moreover, the visible shift in projects and new wave of architectural practice in Australia can be followed by its delayed embrace and recognition within the Australian Institute of Architect's chapter and national awards circuits. The Eleanor Cullis-Hill Award for Residential Architecture, Houses (Alterations and Additions) was first established 10 years ago in 2015, and it is only in the past number of years that the winner's of this award seem to truly exemplify restraint in both scale and finish.

This report also sheds light on the bureaucratic constraints that planning instruments play within the ability to successfully alter existing buildings. From Council zoning to certifier and development consent requirements the process is made exceedingly complex, costly and often results in over-engineered alterations with loss of functioning and useful structural elements found during excavation and demolition stages. Perhaps a restructuring of the development application process to allow for exploratory measures and amendments to the application in a timely manner would minimize the strenuous complacency of an ill-

fitted result determined before builders "break ground". The fact that the application processes in NSW for developments both new builds, and alterations is identical is somewhat flawed. As the NSW Government looks to fast track new developments with the recent Pattern Book released in 2025 for housing, a focus on improvements to building alteration processes would be widely beneficial in terms of utilizing what existing building stock we have.

Since embarking on the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship, more than ever there has been a focus on alterations and additions here and elsewhere - with an unprecedented amount of entries to this category in the National Awards, and the release of numerous relevant publications.

Post 2022, we have seen the rise of alterations or adaptive reuse in conversation via magazine issues, publications and talks presented by those such as The Architectural Review, Architecture Australia, Houses Magazine, and the premier of the Australian Grand Designs: Transformations Series. Both BAST and +b have since released 2G magazines, showcasing their bodies of work on this topic - a sign of the times and an indicator of extreme interest in these methods right now.

I hope to discuss in the forthcoming case studies and architectural practice reviews, not simply solutions via means of construction or aesthetic, but also the ideas relevant from 1990 to now, the growth of this movement as a different means of restoration, and both the politics and reactive intent of five architects across Europe.



Brooke Lazarus, Jodie's House II, Casey Brown Architecture 2024

# 2

## Case Studies

The case studies throughout this report have been carefully selected by myself, and guided by the five architects involved.

Across Germany, France and Spain I was able to meet with a partner at each of the offices to discuss their direct intentions of practice, catalogue of works, and correlating philosophies.

Not all of the case studies sit perfectly within the curated collection, and not all offer literal physical solutions. Some of these, upon visiting offered minimal answers whilst others were entirely conclusive. They should also not be viewed as a technical catalogue individually but, as mentioned, a curation of selected works to be read together, between 1990-present that continue the speculative dialogue of minimal intervention. Hopefully a common thread will be revealed between them.

All photographs throughout have been taken by myself, on medium format film. This was something I wanted to specifically adhere to throughout my research, as a uniform exploration of the projects and their sites. This ended up being far greater of a laborious exercise than I had anticipated, but a curatorial choice none the less.

I hope that the selection of works offers a kind of capsule for this topic, and exposes the awe-filled creativity I was able to witness throughout my visits.



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# b+, Berlin

## 2006-present

Established in 2006, previously known as Brandlhuber+, the practice has established itself as a well known champion of adaptive reuse.

What makes them highly relevant to this body of work is the nature of their projects, and the activism within politics which their projects case study of. There are four partners which make up b+: Arno Brandlhuber, Olaf Grawert, Jonas Janke and Roberta Jurčić.

Whilst in Berlin, I was fortunate to meet with Olaf at San Gimignano, Lichtenberg to discuss their works and practice. Their office and operation is within this project, two towers located in the Lichtenberg district (cont. further).

Olaf spoke fondly of the work ethos around the practice, although quickly delved into the driving force for the reactionary attitudes they have. He explained the systemic change happening in Berlin, and the structure of it. The City of Berlin is a state and a city, every district has its own mayor and they all have their own agenda's.

Olaf continues regarding the current policies toward building in Berlin "It all stems from money. Berlin post wall sold much of its owned properties in an attempt to recoup the large debt and this has directly contributed to the situation at hand[sic]."

There is a kind of "Sehnsucht" or as Olaf described it a "nostalgia for the East." Currently, Berlin has protected rents in the Eastern side, and not much has changed. Certain areas are therefore in a state of protection - left frozen to change. There are certain observations that a scepticism exists towards the West and a deeply engrained Identity politics plays a huge

role in German architecture but more specifically housing in Berlin.

Now, Berlin is currently a petri dish for left politicians or as Olaf mentioned "proving grounds" for changing policies.

He looks to Brussels in how they are looking to abolish zoning, and what might come of this. As of August 2025, Brussels has produced a reimagined reform under the name the "Good Living" reform which would overhaul the current urban planning policy to reflect the current needs of the city, and implement a more flexible regulatory tool.

We discussed b+'s Europe Citizen's Initiative (ECI) called HouseEurope! advocating for reforms in how existing housing stock is treated, with three tiers of policy focus: 1. Tax and VAT reductions on reused materials, and renovation works 2. Fair rules to assess potentials and risks of existing structures and 3. New values to recognise embedded CO2 in existing buildings. Their goal is to reach 1 million signatures by January 2026 which will trigger an EU legislative review. This initiative would essentially provide a right to reuse under EU law.

From this, Olaf also states "We are potential gentrifiers" openly, with an understanding that a push towards housing reform, even positive, directly implicates the existing occupants of cities and poses them as casualties of change. B+ as a practice and collective only wants to take on adaptive reuse projects, with the only exception being huge scale housing - a common thread between all 5 architects within this research - where the additional new build

build would improve the housing stock in certain urban areas, and therefore be in its own right an act of minimal intervention to the city.

b+ sees existing buildings as "intelligent ruins" and all new buildings need to be able to be adaptively reused with this forethought in place. Like all of their work, pragmatism and a precision to reading the existing has allowed the practice to foster a body of work hallmarked by retention of key structural elements, minimal additions and hard working fixtures, glazings and services.

It is through the lack of attention to aesthetic that has inadvertently provided the work with a recognisable one regardless. Previously, projects such as Antivilla, Casa Storta and Ninikowo offered a smaller scale - mostly residential - approach to adaptation, which provoked a discussion of experimental everyday living. These projects, mostly completed 2015 onwards, harnessed a visual identity for the practice's work like the use of rendered walls, shotcrete and irreverently punched out windows. This work set a precedent at the time for the potentials of alteration to smaller scale buildings, and likely can be attributed to the aspiration of younger architectural studio's today.

Now, the projects of b+ have grown slightly in size - nevertheless they are typically industrial buildings retained and touched lightly for transformation into more often than not non-for-profit or community use, spaces for the arts, culture and sciences. How b+ sits within the catalogue of this report is pertinent to the timeframe of their political activism and built work. A lead example in the 2010's for their approach and a pioneer in utilizing the projects themselves as a direct example of their policies is an integrity actioned but rarely seen so.



Brooke Lazarus, St Agnes Berlin, 2023

## 3.1

# San Gimignano, Lichtenberg

2012-2021

## Project

I first studied about Sangimignano, Lichtenberg during my undergraduate degree, as a project which posed challenges toward the typical ideals of alteration.

The story goes that Arno Brandhuber wanted to live, and work in the two towers even though zoning at the time forbid it. The two towers, which are of the former VEB Elektrokohle stood vacant after the fall of the Berlin wall, too expensive to demolish and little interest for new life or an idea on what to do with them.

Brandhuber adorned the towers with the name San Gimignano, after the picturesque town in Italy as a way to ironically entice the bank to fund the purchase for him. It worked. The towers at the time represented what I assume, for the b+ practice, both a political protest and a narrative of possibilities which have hallmarked the practice's work since they moved in.

An experimental and highly divisive, long transformation to the site, the project captured the sentiment of the time post GFC and attempted to address industrial areas that had plentiful building stock with no real aspirational opportunities to transform for future economically feasible uses because of zoning laws. As for the construction works, the towers are 46.85m and 42.60m tall respectively, meaning they fall within high-rise building codes and must be treated with extensive fire-resistance measures, and energy conservation rules.

The first tower has been converted to a prototyping

workshop, and storage for archives, models and materials. The second tower will only serve as an unheated storage space up to 22m. To make the transformation financially feasible, the silo tower has only retail three levels. The circulation was converted into a semi outdoor enclosure by leaving openings unglazed as a way to circumvent fire-isolation measures. No new openings were added and existing ones reinstated to allow maximum ventilation and light to the towers.

The two towers have now transformed into a busy office and workshop, a small token of creative solutions and a part of a larger conversation b+ is exemplifying through their work about the legislation on architecture and building.











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# Lacaton + Vassal, France

## 1987 - present

It would be an understatement to proclaim Anne Lacaton and Jean-Phillipe Vassal as key pioneers to the movement of adaptive reuse within the past 30 years.

Throughout their practice, architecture and the related attitudes has seen a significant shift, and this is a direct result of their contribution to the industry via their philosophies and application to built work. Alterations and additions in the 90's looked very different to now - with a stronger focus on this work through a heritage lens. Construction methods and policy within this category of work heavily relied on the ideas that to adapt a building, either complete restoration through faux-heritage means was applied, or the complete opposite whereby potentially unsympathetic adaptive works were encouraged and promoted to strongly delineate new from old.

An example of work, Maison Latapie, 1993, was a radical approach to extension and adaption at the time - a greenhouse logic applied through very cost effective means to extend a residence in rural France. At the time this work was seen as somewhat brazen, lacking the finish many expect from architects and not typically seen in published architectural works. Heroing banality was a new concept, and building within constraint was not met with enthusiasms of possibility.

Jean-Phillipe has discussed the impact his time in Niger in 1980 had on the genesis of their practice and work - the first project being a simple hut constructed of locally sourced and raw material- a rudimentary structure but just enough. This hut faced extreme climate conditions, lending to the philosophy of design intent with extreme sensitivities

to the environments within site, and an understanding of resourcefulness. The hut was essentially the start of a do more with less approach adopted throughout all the practice's projects and utilisation of what is already there.

Their minimal intervention attitude and the philosophies they operate within are very aligned to latter formed architectural practices - one could argue contemporary collectives seen throughout this report are an extension and continuation of this work through the political activism and moral conscience.

Unlike any other architectural practice seen in the past 30 years, from the 90's onwards, Lacaton and Vassal have employed a consistent dogma, which seeks to "Never demolish, always add, transform and reuse." Whilst studying under Anne and Jean-Phillipe, it was made clear this would be applied to all and everything involved. A tree should be revered, a parking space a catalyst for planning arrangements. The level to which retention is met is perplexing. Such a feat has been made through many of their larger scale housing projects throughout France, where not even the inhabitants are displaced throughout the build.

Their work is most predominately focused on philanthropic endeavours related to public housing, and "Living in the City". An idea related to the fact that as our cities grow, we must understand methods to house everyone well. A good quality of living can be achieved for everyone - but it must be performed with good intent. Once housing is commodified or incentivised the house of cards will fall. One might see these as a slightly naive outlook what with developers and career landlords rampantly seeking

any opportunities to expand operations and fast track economic returns - particularly as public housing stock continues to be sold off to private entities by the Government - but Anne and Jean-Phillipe have succeeded in their endeavours to build well and house well, without demolition, and displacement.

In fact, many arguments have been made by Lacaton and Vassal in which demolition and new construction works are far more costly than utilising what exists already.

Most projects are - as expected - incredibly reliant of hard working materials that are inexpensive and cost effective. Thermal curtains on wintergardens, open living arrangements with clean and succient floor plans are all typical elements to their work. The use of polycarbonate - a highly lightweight, easily produced and thermally engineered product which is quick to assemble, has become a signature material throughout. You could argue that Lacaton and Vassal, along with Jean Nouvel and Toyo Ito, heavily contributed to embrace of polycarbonate as a wall and roof material in the 1990's in experimental architectural applications for domestic uses. The material has become synonymous with adaptive reuse works today.

Lacaton and Vassal are also heavily involved in teaching, which is likely another reason for their continued and extended philosophies adopted by younger architectural groups. Lacol and BAST have directly attributed many of their practice principles to Lacaton and Vassal's teachings, and their socio-political consciousness. The exemplification of mundane elements is a catalyst for exciting and radical revisions to existing buildings, as is conservative and simple approaches. No other architect within this report perfectly synthesizes alteration in a physical, structural, economical, philosophical and political matter quite as succinctly as do Lacaton and Vassal.



Brooke Lazarus, Tour Bois-le-Prêtre, Paris, 2023

## 4.1

# Tour Bois-le-Prêtre, Paris

## 2005-2011

### Project

Originally built in 1961, the transformation to 16-storey social housing block Tour Bois-le-Prêtre took a number of years to complete. Following the urban renewal initiatives of the city, the building was slated for demolition.

Lacaton and Vassal were asked for alternative solutions to the potential demolition, and instead proposed to add, and improve the existing.

No residents were displaced during the process of rectification works. The use of pre-fabricated elements allowed the transformation to take place without the displacement. Each apartment doubled in its usable space, providing the existing residences with upgraded and contemporary standards of living. A self-supporting structure allowed new wintergardens to each floor, and the existing facade was carefully removed to allow for this extension to the buildings perimeter.

The building also received new lifts and an upgraded entrance on ground level. The use of polycarbonate and glazing greatly improved the light and climatic condition throughout the apartments.

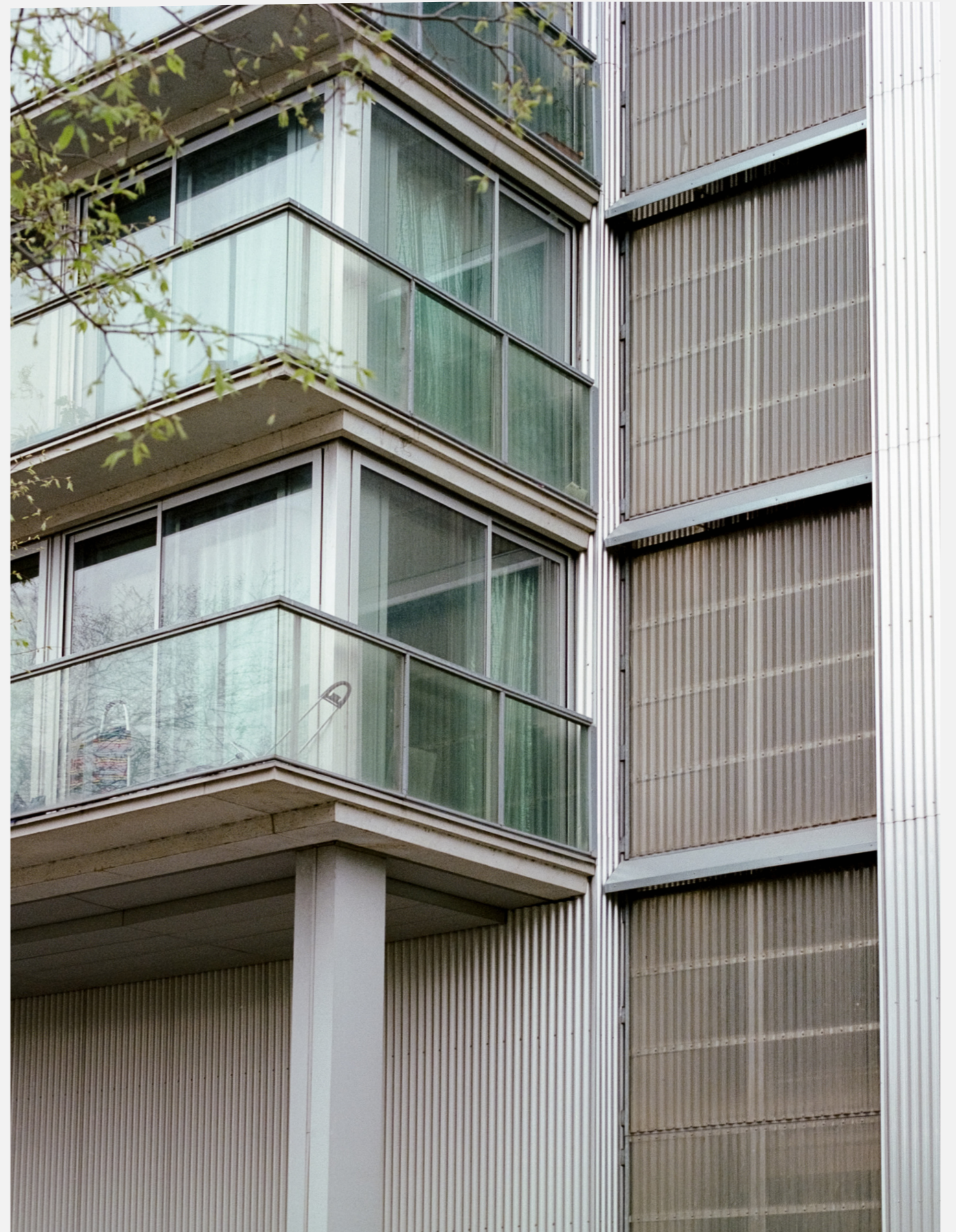
There was no increase in rent as a result of the works, and the methods used utilised small structural changes with less cost incurred than to demolish and rebuild on the same site at €11.25 million excluding VAT/net across 8,900 m<sup>2</sup> existing plus 3,560 m<sup>2</sup> extension.

This project has become a significant case study in ways to treat existing social housing projects needing intervention. Within Waterloo, Sydney's own public housing towers of similar scales could utilise similar minimal methods

and manner of works to rectify the significant issues they currently face of dwindling funding, and questionable living standards. Key strategies improving spatial requirements using the existing core structural elements, and prefabricated systems offer economical feasibility which can be applied to many existing housing projects of the same scale.







## 4.2

# Place Leon Aucoc, Bordeaux

1996

## Project

A very small and potentially questionable project to include, it perfectly summaries the importance of intention and the reading of a site.

It is one of Lacaton and Vassal's most iconic works which could barely be classified as works in some senses. Place Leon Aucoc, Bordeaux is situated in a quiet neighbourhood, just outside of the main city. New beautification efforts were being commissioned at the hand of the new Mayor as the park was in disrepair. Rather than proposing a grand, new concept Lacaton and Vassal simply proposed the most slightest of interventions. "Embellishment has no place here."

At the time a rebranding of public spaces with grand gestures was common thread and through rejecting the opportunity for gratuitous or indulgent measures, they garnered much speculation for their minimal approach.

They essentially repainted the seats, cleaned the gravel and applied small repair works to the original street lamp in the centre of the park and tend to the needs of the existing lime trees.

It was a key early work which symbolised their belief towards minimal intervention.







5

# BAST Architectes, Toulouse

2013 - present

I had already been acquainted with BAST's work and practice during my time studying at University, prior to meeting with them at their office T12 in Toulouse. Their project M26 had completed during this time, and because of its radical/anti-radical approach to adaption, they're work had become somewhat of a favourite around the architectural studios and students.

This project is a fine example of their commitment to hard-working materials and finishes, whilst striving for structural or planning radicalism that may only utilise three or four key changes to drastically improve and alter a building to new uses, "Within this multiplicity of ideas, we try to take the clearest, most radical approach." Like M26, their catalogue of built work, and in some ways their politics, could be compared to another French architectural practice, Lacaton and Vassal. Visual cues like Aluminium glazing systems and Aluminium thermal curtains can be seen throughout numerous projects, with a highly acute skill at reading - abstracting - an existing project and thus transforming it in a restrained process.

There is an honesty and economically aware, perhaps ultra-restrained, application taken to each project.

Formed in 2013 in Toulouse the team consists of Louis Leger, Laurent Didier and Mathieu Le Ny. Having formed five years post GFC, one could hypothesize that there were still lasting impacts from this, which drove, or enhanced their vernacular. They are also heavily involved in research, teaching, and collaboration of peripheral industries such as engineering and industrial design.

I was fortunate to meet with Louis and Laurent at their office during my time in Toulouse. Better known as T12, a converted garage space with an unsurprisingly obscure frontage which has been mostly untouched on the exterior, and experienced minimal and experimental changes internally to improve the function a busy small office.

Over the course of the day I was taken to numerous sites with them - some complete and some still in progress, which gave a better look into their practice and work. Visiting their office gave some clear first impressions, including their commitment to testing and attention to detail. As mentioned earlier, their testing of key structural moves and enquiry into abstracting each project is apparent in the time consuming work they undertake for such sophisticated succinct outcomes. "The projects we take on are very simple, because they are about daily life and the realities of people who want to improve their living spaces."<sup>1</sup>

BAST also operates in a site sensitive, contextually aware manner. Toulouse has a distinct typology of building and materials like the use of brick, hiped roofs and small to medium scale buildings and it's own set of bureaucratic rules for building. The replication of this vernacular in a contemporary manner is highly specific to their catalogue of work.

Speaking on economies of scale "There is also the matter of the projects economics. Keeping a loadbearing wall that already has a foundation is a significant decision. If you demolish it to put in another wall or column, you will have to rebuild the foundations, which implies significant cost."

No two projects by BAST undergo an identical process, and the works always evolve once site has broken ground and construction commences. I wonder if this aspect threatens the final result, to a degree, of projects in areas like inner Sydney where there are strict and structured pre-planning applications to meet, where works must be exactly carried out as prescribed, when buildings have only gone through research and speculation phases. The more flexible approach means that what is uncovered during investigative and careful demolition can allow for reconsidered details if needs be, where cost and structure can be advantageous. In some ways, the building can be understood best here and intervention can be its most honest.



Brooke Lazarus, T15, Toulouse, 2023

## 5.1

## E54, Montjoire

### 2021-2023

#### Project

E54 is transformation on the Garipuy house and barn into a community centre.

Very minimal additions and alterations have been performed on the existing, including a few sliding doors to amend the access points, and a new shed-like single sloped roof has been added with light timber structures and louvered windows to allow dramatic light and airflow through.

I was fortunate enough to visit this site whilst still under construction, where very few construction materials were present and the over-grown garden untouched. After completion this project featured on the cover of BAST's 2G magazine issue, in which the garden still very much remained as I had seen.

The light touches to the building seemed organic to the original, with minimal glazing added to existing punched out window openings on the facade, and reuse of the original bricks in minor areas as restoration efforts.

The logic was to essentially open up the space and make it's use more practical as an adaptable community space, rather than a previously antiquated house.









## 5.2

## T12, Toulouse

2018-2019

## Project

T12 is a clever alteration, to a pretty unassuming garage space, as part of a 1960's building block. Converted into the BAST architectes office space, very little resources were used to transform the garage into a productive space.

What was existing had been retained an structural posts and beams simply exposed. The use of ply panels and concrete blocks create new bench and work surfaces, utilising stacking to create stair access up to a loft level.

The insulation has been added internally and exposed - as needed, and timber framing also throughout the interior. The original garage facade has been retained and a minimal addition of thermal curtain has been added to the entrance.

The project is perfectly simple and uses the minimum amount of resources to use the space practically with appropriate thermal comfort within. It provides an insight to some alternative uses of material, and resourcefulness at its core.

Although I didn't capture nearly enough of the space whilst there, it was a pretty good indicator of their approach to projects and ingenuity to transformation.



## 5.3

## M30, Roquemaure

2020-2022

## Project

M30 is a delicate, single-family home situated in a rural setting just outside of Toulouse. Upon arrival I was greeted by the very kind client, whose family lives on a nearby farm.

The intention of this project was to touch the ground very lightly - without modifying the natural terrain on site which bleed into the distant hills. It is a restrained and idyllic single home, featuring a courtyard and clear, succinct planning.

The project is made up of 3 x 4 segmented grid like plan, which circulate an outdoor garden, and an above ground pool. to the South. The steel work frames forms the buildings grid structure, and frames each view.

Operable louvered windows are used throughout the house to allow for ventilation, with timbers and sandwich panels lining the interior.

Although this project is newly built on site, it seemed to fit in with the sentiment of adding without removing, and minimal intervention on a different scale. It has intervened on the existing land so quietly, and the small house uses very little resources. The framed views and glazing allow the project to disappear into the horizon line at every perspective, it actively engages with it's environment rather than detract from it.







## 5.4

## M33, Toulouse

2020-2023

M33 is a small townhouse rehabilitation project, about a 10 minute drive from the BAST offices and city centre in Toulouse.

Our visit occurred during construction, where the project had predominately undergone its interior restoration, and the conservatory was not yet complete. Louis had explained the additional component to their intervention on the townhouse was through this conservatory - as an almost wintergarden-like intermediary space connecting the existing by occupying the void.

This wintergarden was constructed with an aluminium frame MIG welded, not dissimilar to previous projects (like Maison Latapie) where light frames and semi-opaque materials could filter light and offer a semi indoor/outdoor extension of space.

The logic of the townhouse could be split into three components constructed at different periods. Within the main house the upper wooden frame and flooring was reconstructed at a new height, and a new timber-framed wall resumed the existing load of the conserved roof.

Thermal and climatic elements were managed through a strategy of awnings, operable openings and material characteristics. The project is a contemporary model on an established domestic alterations vernacular, with an exciting response to varied structural logics on the same site.











6

# LACOL, Barcelona

2014 - present

I met with Cristina Gamboa at the LACOL office in Sants district in Barcelona at the very end of my trip. LACOL is a collective which was informally formed around 2009, around the time of the GFC, and all of them had studied together at ETSAV.

The collective's working model is hugely reactionary to the GFC fallout, and led them into pursuing architecture. Cristina mentions that the idea of operating in a collective is not new, however the effect of the financial crisis led the collective to seek a new role for the architect within society, and the practice itself. One where practice looks to local economies and resources - where they have all lived and harness the cultural accumen to feed back into the communities they are servicing with works.

There was brief discussion about gentrification and role this plays in alterations and additions. However they are interested in all kinds of solutions - actively seeking alternative narratives to transformation.

It was very clear that Cristina and the collective office understand architecture as a political act through physical means, and that the two are not mutually exclusive. Lacol as a young practice operates very much under the pretense as architects and citizens - heavily focused on both civic buildings public and housing initiatives. I had been made aware of their work through word of mouth from Lacaton and Vassal whilst studying. There is a clear political position throughout each project by the ambition of construction, and use of materials in clever ways. With little budgets all projects have moments of divine sophistication, which echoes their obsession to fight constraint.

Their efforts on adaptive reuse, and minimal intervention within established districts and industrial areas offer an insight into their polemic, not dissimilarly to Lacaton and Vassal and b+ they have also been involved in the HouseEurope! ECI in order to reform legislation and provide citizen better tools to equitably reuse existing building stock for the sake of housing.

The cooperative structure also informs Lacol's wider ambition: to offer back a working-class identity to collectives and to empower community purposed initiatives to self-organise. Their projects frequently emerge from neighbourhood assemblies, cultural associations, or housing cooperatives, where decisions are made not only by architects but also by future users. This participatory design process allows communities to claim ownership of the process and outcome, challenging the speculative logics of conventional housing markets. In this way, Lacol demonstrates that architecture can be a tool of social cooperation, creating spaces where democratic decision-making and shared responsibility are embedded in the very operation of the final product.

An important aspect of LACOL's work is the understanding of buildings as a byproduct within the endeavour to improve quality of life across , with their projects being "spaces for consumption and collectiveness."



Brooke Lazarus, La Borda, Barcelona, 2023

## 6.1

# La Comunal Espai Cooperatiu, Barcelona

2019

## Project

LACOL's offices are situated within La Comunal Espai Cooperatiu, where I first arrived to meet with Cristina Gamboa. The very first thing I noticed about site, was the anchoring of the new additional structure hugging the existing.

A brightly coloured orange metal framework adorns new offices and a circulatory space which cleverly box into itself to form a new courtyard. The building was once a factory for sails manufacturing, and the intention was, from the very beginning to create a new facade, and a central square that could be essentially donated to the commons for sharing.

The original facade had been in very poor condition whilst it was privately owned, although it was totally protected. LACOL decided to recreate this with the removal of any decorative elements in order to sympathetically revive the building within the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood was heavily involved in it's reorganisation and planning as a way to successfully develop its uses. Now, LACOL's office is located within the building and they work alongside their neighbours. Many of the materials were retained throughout the works for reuse. The aim of the building is to offer a self-management for the users and provide greater opportunities to the local community.











## 6.2

# Coopolis, Barcelona

## 2019

### Project

Coopolis began as a collective community lead pilot project. It was transformed in stages, and the concept was to experiment with replicable applications of prefabricated dry constructed elements and modular office + work spaces for the community.

LACOL's intervention to the original 1880's industrial block 8 of the Can Batlló complex was to remain as simple as possible - only essential repairs were applied to the roof and building envelope in order to minimise costs.

The wooden internal boxes are produced to allow flexibility in use, with a focus on the community needs and collective shared spaces.

Three solar chimneys were added as a key intervention to improve the circulation passively throughout.

The project can be seen as an example not only of restraint to alterations, but also a generosity to revive spaces for the sake of community use and engagement through minimal means.









## 6.3

## La Borda, Barcelona 2018

### Project

La Borda, likely LACOL's most recognisable project to date is not an existing building, however I decided to include it in my list of case studies, as a minimal intervention within a larger context in which it is situated.

The large housing project is situated on public land with a 75-year lease, a pioneer in cooperative housing models. It was one of a number of recovered sites within its industrial neighbourhood, and is a direct response to the housing crisis in Barcelona.

It consists of 28 apartments of varying sizes and is centred around a central courtyard. Primarily constructed using cross-laminated timbers, it is Spain's largest timber structure using a near net-zero energy consumption with passive strategies to control the climate throughout.

The design phases were heavily community-led and the building now offers a number of shared facilities including kitchen, dining, storage and terraces. Cristina lives within one of the buildings apartments and discussed the actuality of the community engagement that the project has manifested through its design. There are shared meals scheduled throughout the week where residents take turns to cook and clean. It is like its own microcosm - everyone knows and looks out for each other. I was grateful for the opportunity to see inside these apartments, and they are brilliantly organised.

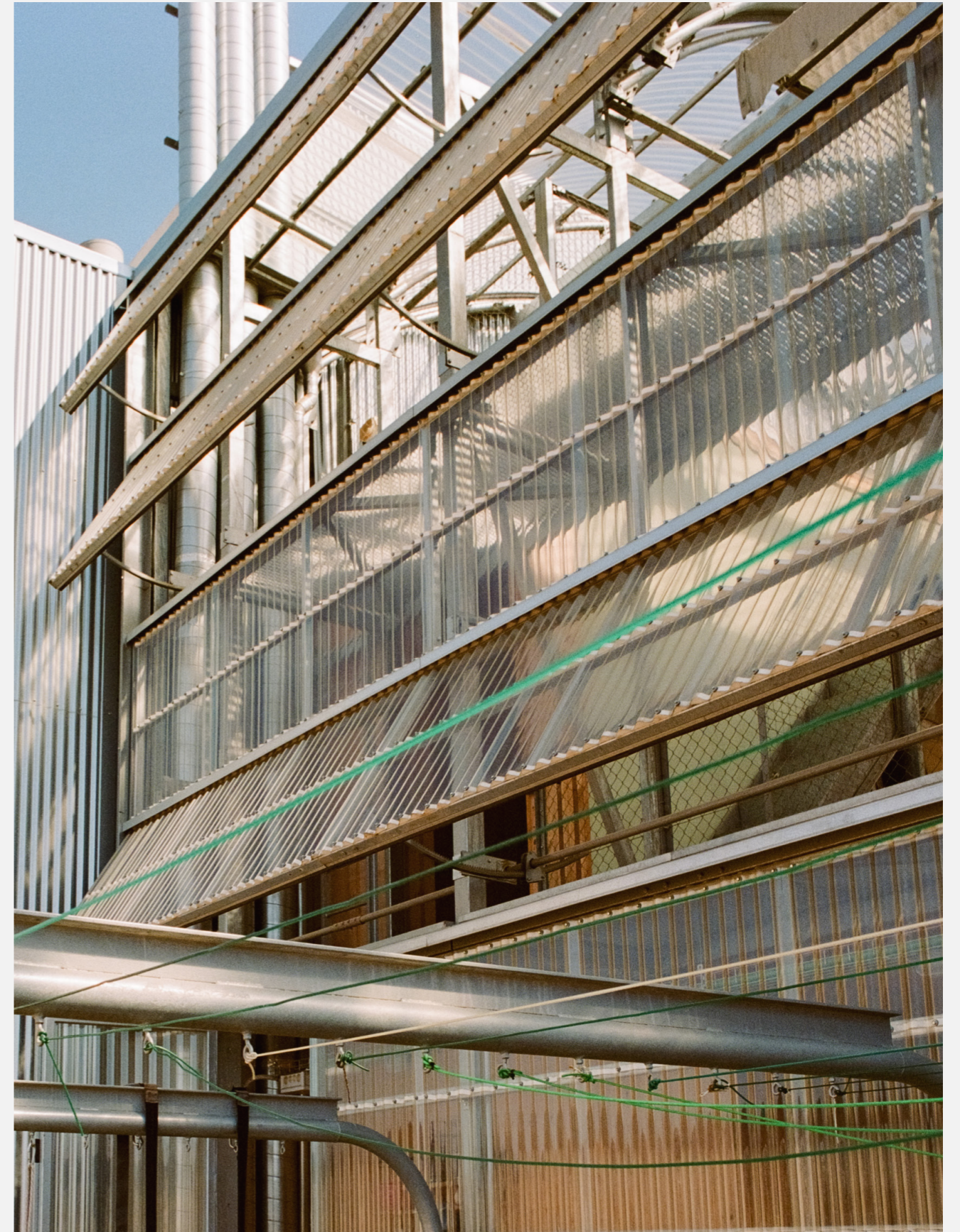
The rear facade to the building features long external operable blinds, hung over balcony railings to provide

partial shade in the afternoons which is nostalgic of local Catalan apartment vernacular. There is a very new and old convergence of local planning logics with contemporary solutions which seems to work successfully throughout.

The success of the project will likely see more cooperative housing throughout Barcelona take place in the coming years.









# HARQUITECTES, Sabadell

2000 - present

During the Spanish leg of my travels, I was fortunate enough to meet with Xavier Ros Majó, one of the four founding partners of HARQUITECTES. He works alongside David Lorente Ibáñez, Josep Ricart Ulldemolins and Roger Tudó Galí

We met at their office in Sabadell, and ventured off to a small cafe nearby to discuss their practice.

Xavier Ros discussed the early years of the practice, between 2003 and 2005, as a kind of take it as it comes period - it wasn't really until 2005 onwards that the work resembled more so the practice we know today. During this period of 2005-2007, they began to produce projects of what he notes as real quality, some of which still remain on their website as part of their portfolio. The team became heavily selective in which projects they would take on in order to shape the ethos each work portrayed as a collective catalogue of work. By 2005 they were winning their first public commissions, and between 2005 and 2010 several important works were built. This was a really transformative time for the office: their work became more selective, and the trajectory of the practice was set on an highly structural and contextual focused path. The GFC was both a particularly difficult period in practice and by 2010 Spain was experiencing deep financial strains across both public and private sectors, however Xavier contributes this moment in the zeitgeist as a catalyst for changing attitudes from clients and industry for enabling designing like they do today.

From 2010 onwards the practice matured, although they admit that not all attempts were successful - "sometimes we

fail; it's not easy." Yet their work became more firmly aligned with sustainability and understanding of climatic needs. While they never considered themselves especially engaged with social politics, they began to work with city entities to recover older buildings. Many of these projects came about through pressure from residents who were committed to preserving local buildings in disrepair. These collaborations, however, were not without difficulty. As they themselves note, "It's difficult to make good decisions when there are other people involved." Mediating between different intentions is always a challenge. Their interest has remained primarily in the building itself rather than in wielding social power however much of their work to date includes public works, with clients and citizens providing input into the design process.

They often reflect on their architectural references, particularly Lacaton & Vassal, while also recognising the differences in intent between the two practices. Unlike their French counterparts, they are disinterested in a kind of social rectification. Instead, they compare their role to that of doctors: if a building is injured, it should be treated. Their approach is guided by honesty, free from personal vanity, and aims to future-proof buildings for the use of many generations. For them, quality and the full potential of a project are paramount and manifest in a physical manner by the action of construction.

Their earliest projects, visible on their website and dating from around 2007, already show an interest in sustainability, even before the financial crisis had reshaped architectural priorities. Again drawing from Lacaton & Vassal, they adapted those lessons to the specific climatic needs

of Spain. After the 2010 crisis, private clients began to understand the real value of saving energy and resources, both financially and environmentally. Today, this attitude is widespread, and many younger practices—such as Lacol—have continued to develop sustainable strategies in close collaboration with adjacent sectors of the built environment like engineering and specific trades. Harquitectes, while still pursuing these ideas, have since advanced their own internally used strategies for sustainable architecture.

HARQUITECTES work typically operates at a scale between 3,000 and 10,000 square metres, where there is a comfortability in scale and they have garnered years of trial and error experience. After more than 15 years, the office now can work independently, bringing in consultants primarily for software support and technical modelling unless clients require further input. Their process always begins with an understanding of the unique landscape and the opportunities it offers.

Xavier Ros discussed the need for obsession within the process, and open-mindedness to adjust a project during its construction. Many structural elements are unearthed and must be poured over to find the most fitting resolutions and no two existing projects are identical.

There is crossover between their work and Lacol's, as a local younger practice they are operating within the same stratosphere. Both had worked on the Civic Centre Lleialtat Santsenca at different stages as Lacol was involved in the city led competition prior to the project being awarded to HARQUITECTES. Xavier Ros describes Lacol's crossover involvement by their prior investigative works and existing documentation preparation which they then inherited. He believes they share a similar methodologies of low-cost and hyper efficient interventions, seen from Lacaton and Vassal but highly specific to the warmer Catalanian climate and

cultural history.

Their practice is characterised by a dual perspective: they study like architects but approach problems with the pragmatism of engineers. The process is not always smooth - sometimes "things fall down" - but they stress the importance of understanding the culture of a place in order to build meaningfully. Small private houses are no longer economically viable for the office, so their focus has shifted to larger and more sustainable projects. What remains constant is their concentration, persistence, and obsession with seeing projects through to the end, ensuring each work embodies their abilities and beliefs - the final buildings are at the mercy of the intent.



Brooke Lazarus, Civic Centre Lleialtat Santsenca, 2023

## 6.1

# Civic Centre Lleialtat Santsenca, Barcelona

2017

## Project

The Civic Centre is an 1928 industrial building located in the Sants district of Barcelona. The project was awarded to HARQUITECTES under the competition, run by the city in order to provide restoration works and adapt the current building for new programs.

It was important that the architects had a real understanding of the working-class history of the area and the history of the building to fully understand its potential.

In preparation for the competition, Xavier Ros explained they originally were not allowed inside the building and existing architectural drawings were prepared by LACOL in conjunction with the city.

The project harnesses a strong vertical logic. Three parts of the facade was totally protected, and it is now hard to discern new and old with restoration only where absolutely necessary. All the columns and trusses were retained and were provided reinforcement where needed, with a steel beam added for extra measures. In its entirety, almost 50% new structure was added throughout.

Xavier Ros also spoke about the importance of retaining nostalgia for a space, balancing what to preserve, and what elements may be roadblocks for a new opportunity.

Although this project featured likely the largest amount of demolition than any of the works within this report, the

approach was driven by a balancing of sentiments and visual identity, where sometimes it's not a one rule fits all scenario and reworking of buildings requires losing some remnants of the past to allow for new opportunities to exist.











6.1

# School 906, Sabadell

2014-2015

## Project

School 906 in Sabadell is a light alteration project, mostly driven by the 500 or so parents as part of a community effort.

HARQUITECTES are part of the existing community, and endeavoured to perform conservative small works to the school in order to improve its use and thermal comfort.

The building which was altered on the school site was originally built in 1959, and features a very minimal 240m<sup>2</sup> addition of space, including internal renovations and a new Southern facade, new playgrounds on the roof level and on the sports centre roof, and enhancement of the entrance.

The sentimental value of the existing patina and wear on materials was seen as bonus, and so the ceilings cerami vaults, concrete beams and masonry walls were retained.

A solution to sunlight issues on the Southern Facade included a passive system of slat blinds and a facade system which consists of an intermediating 500mm air chamber layer.

Although I was not able to capture much of this school due to privacy for the students, the school has retained a nostalgia for the community, and the sensitive adaption is passive enough to remain harmonious to the original elements.





## 8

## What lessons are there?

### POLICY

It is clear that policy and legislation is, as many of the architects I met with had mentioned, the true architects of our cities. The initiatives which are currently underway, and being pushed for in places like Berlin, foster an opportunity for change to urban planning and development consent processes. A closer look at our tax models in relation to reuse of resources, land and existing buildings would greatly increase the interest and openness to alterations and additions within construction. Architects in Australia are often times not vocal enough compared to our international counterparts, and our designers need to push for change.

Each state in Australia has its own specific processes toward DA's and CDC's, however treating alterations and additions in urban areas and on compact sites requires a flexibility in adjustment to the approved proposed works according to findings on site. This is what has proven to be the best and most meaningful approach across the board, from the projects within this report. Whether that means revisiting the application process entirely or introducing fast tracked options, either would provide efficient processes. Modification applications on average in inner-city Council areas take an average of 4-5 months to be processed which, for an active construction site, is not feasible. This leads to:

1. Avoidance of clients taking on existing buildings for reuse rather than demolition and new build from the very get-go
2. This is why clients would perhaps avoid submitting a modification altogether and settling for a potentially ill-fitting solution upon works commencing.

### INTENT

The intention from clients, and from architects is crucial in order to work with the existing and to realise a building's full potential in a meaningful manner.

This may seem trivial, however most if not all of the five architects interviewed had very clear ethical boundaries and strive to practice within them. Integrity and consistency provide a platform to change attitudes overtime. Striving for sustainability and practicing cultural sensitivities to site and context allow for creative contemporary works to succeed.

### BUILDING

Clever, minimal interventions can be achieved through little output, however they need educated responses from architects and builders. Utilising existing load bearing structure, prioritising space according to climatic and environmental factors, and reuse of resources over aesthetic offer the ability to make the most out of existing buildings.

Education on intervention works is not focused on within architectural studies enough - from understanding how to bridge new and old construction methods and materials, to what investigative works must be done in preparation. Universities are slowly integrating focus of alteration into the curriculum, however the reality is that in the coming decades, the largest majority of works in main cities across Australia will indeed be on existing structures.

## 9

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Lastly I would like to thank Benjamin Wynn-Taylor for his unimaginable amount of support, creativity and unbridled humour throughout.

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## About the author Brooke Lazarus

I am currently practicing at Casey Brown Architecture, working under Rob Brown as project lead on a complex, mixed use alterations and additions project in Balmain which is under construction. I have previously worked for Architect George, where I was fortunate to work on numerous award-winning alterations and additions projects across Sydney in a small team. Upon completing my undergraduate studies in Design of Architecture in 2020, I have continued my education by taking part in Lacaton and Vassal's Master's design studio at The University of Sydney in 2022 and the annual Glenn Murcutt Masterclass in 2024.

I have held sessional academic roles, teaching Architectural History and Theory at The University of Sydney in 2024 and The University of Technology, Sydney in 2025, and I was an invited guest critic for UNSW design studios previously.



As this paper should illustrate, my interest lies predominately in alterations and additions, sustainable restorative works to existing building stock and social housing in Australia.

I have worked hard and selectively to continue my practical experience, working only on existing buildings from a personal ethical standpoint. I have found the past four years operating within the niche of alterations and additions has greatly fed into my scholarship and vica versa. It has been an incredibly fulfilling experience to practice, teach, and research through this specific lens.

I hope to continue working across this field in a variety of contexts and scales, across other mediums both in Australia and overseas.

## 11

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