A PERMEABLE FIELD OF POSSIBILITIES

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BOUNDARIES
How to describe the discipline and the university course that launches individuals on their career paths?—a question that is fraught because of the delight, aspirations, ambiguity, and illusions in the eyes of those for whom it was their beginning. For us, the curators, being within interior architecture is not a career but a lifestyle. It is a way that we understand the world around us because our philosophies of life enable a seamless merging of design with the experience of place, of home and family. The narratives of others are intertwined with environments through nature’s design and the designs of others. Each narrative is therefore unique and often unpredictable for the creator.

As a consequence, a career in interior architecture has the potential to merge with the broader internal and external contexts of nature, community, and/or the ‘spirit’ in many ways. It is at these edges where the most exciting potential arises. For the pulling back and forth between what we, as a discipline, have to offer and what the outside realms demand or give, provides opportunities to strengthen, to evolve or to radically change. The edges of the field have a double benefit: their coherence and definition give structure, and their permeability allows enrichment and sustenance to infuse from outside, while eliminating the superfluous—in much the same way membranes of the cells in our body operate.

No longer do we see the university as a place that protects our knowledge of the discipline as a static entity. Rather we recognise that knowledge is gained throughout the life of individuals, collectives of people, and organisations. The university is a place where the development of ideas and the critique of society and its practices must be able to occur in order to enable future improvement and address emerging unfamiliar situations. These responsibilities work in tandem with a desire to reach out to, and be informed by, broader contexts. More and more learning occurs on-location or through projects based in reality (albeit hypothetical), involving relevant stakeholders. The physical edge of the university is also morphing to become much more permeable, and we seek to create and embrace these opportunities. This century already foreshadows what the impact of societal and environmental changes may be for interior architecture (or interior design).

FIELDS
Therefore imagine a field—rich in texture, wide, open, and appearing endless. Now consider that we appropriate a section of it; for example, with a picnic rug and associated paraphernalia. We have established the place of the activity—the picnic—but also have impacted upon the remainder of the field. As Heidegger described, concepts which are relational and spatial emerge—beside, under, over, beyond, before, after, within, outside the picnic zone. In much the same way, if we look at the profession of interior architecture, we can create a zone, define it, use it, and protect it.

Or we can envisage interior architecture as the field itself. Given its array of possibilities, this field comes into existence through the way in which it is imagined and used by those who make up the field. Fields are sites, according to the sociologist, Bourdieu, of struggles for legitimisation of one’s knowledge and practices, and thereby, its distinctiveness from others. The field encompasses the widest range of variables that shape behaviour. Interestingly, Bourdieu also identifies that even though power games may exist, and new additions may cause upsets to those established within the field of a discipline, all concerned have an interest in preserving its existence and a belief in its worth.

If we consider our alumnae, and in particular the leading graduates presented within this exhibition, then the field of interior architecture is very broad and open, and yet its values and beliefs are consolidating. As a relatively young profession in comparison with architecture, medicine or law, during its emergence it has demonstrated contested boundaries with those in close proximity such as architecture and interior decoration. However, if we look within the field as it has matured, it is fluid and the edges somewhat permeable. Diversity and difference exist, but as the alumnae from both Australian and offshore courses indicate, there are common beliefs about what the role of interiors is. This is the mandate to improve the quality of life for those who are in relationship with what we design—particularly as we impact at an intimate level, even if the consequences of the work reach beyond to urban or environmental agendas.

A degree in interior architecture has enabled these graduates to stride across the field in many directions—some pushing through the boundary while others have crossed the boundary, and therefore, the field, to transform it and themselves. If we name a few of the practices engaged in—retail design, workplace design, hospitality design, fine art, jewellery design and making, fashion accessories, set design, teaching, higher degree study, project management, editing, writing, furniture design, medical facilities design, luxury yacht design, graphic design, residential design, facilities management, retail, reality TV star and producer, as well as being members of families and parents—it is evident that the degree is a starting point for myriad possibilities. The graduates profiled have recognised that their attitudes and personal attributes, acquired during their discipline education, are instrumental in their ability to define interior architecture in a way that complements their needs and passions, as well as allowing them to succeed.

INSIGHTS
In short, they also realise that university was just the beginning of their learning. The alumnae, through their reflections for the exhibition, have highlighted a number of insights gained since starting on this path that have influenced their mode of operation. For example:

• the importance of engaging with and in the profession
• the satisfaction of being able to assist or mentor others in their office or from associated professions
• the integration of past knowledge of interiors with current non-interior activities enriches these experiences
• the value in finding one’s passion within the field of interiors either through university or the offices one chooses to work in
• the benefit of a range of creative expressions in achieving
  life balance
• the potential of other art forms to generate ideas when returning
  to interiors
• the importance of communication across cultures, to clients,
  and with self, and the need to cultivate the skills required for a
  breadth of situations
• the requirement for empathy with those for whom you
  are designing
• the significance of role models—parents, bosses, colleagues,
  and sometime clients in development of values, interests,
  and work ethic
• the significance of place—places of origin and home—in fostering
  an awareness of attributes needed to be a responsive designer
• the realisation that interior architecture is not just what is
  bounded by walls.

Of interest is the focus on personal skills and attributes in these
examples. It would appear that education, in the field of interior
architecture, is best focused on the individual in relationship to the
field rather than focusing on the acquisition of knowledge such as
technical skills. Our course’s strength has been in fostering the ability
of graduates to question, explore and to mould situations to create
opportunities while serving their clients’ needs.

Implications for future education strategies are numerous. The
complexity of working within contemporary industry means that
students can no longer know ‘all the facts’. In the area of materials
for example, products are created every day that are available for
specification. Therefore, our responsibility is not to teach the product
names but to enable students to confidently work out strategies to
identify problems, construct relevant questions, navigate information
quagmires to find accurate data, and source reliable assistance in
order to select appropriate materials that fulfill the design concept
and meet functional and aesthetic needs. Also in this area, INTERIOR
Architecture’s doctoral students are confronting issues—as diverse
as innovation, as process and historical patterning—in order to assist
future design practice. Creative practice as well as more traditional
forms of research are required and encouraged to explore the aspects
of the profession.

REALISATION
The field of possibilities emerging is exciting. Through their
emergence, the clarity of INTERIOR Architecture becomes stronger
while simultaneously becoming less rigid in its outcomes. At Curtin
University within INTERIOR Architecture we are driven by two
core principles. Firstly, a need for equity of access to good design for
all, privileging social justice; and secondly, a need to engage with
community through student and staff projects, so that we increase the
relevance of interior architecture and foster positive change.

In addition, through the integration of the alumnae’s practice with
our Discipline Statement of Operation we have identified nine areas
of focus through which these principles can be applied. The mode
of engagement may by abstract, conceptual and theory-building to
foster new insights and practices. However, engagement may also be
through more mainstream design practice where solutions are sought
to current situations. An adjunct to primary research, these practical
projects bring opportunities to research ideas and generate new
understandings during the design process and resolution.

Within the exhibition we refer to these areas via nine Totems.
According to Durkheim, a totem is a symbol that represents the traits
and values of a group, normally through the figure of an animal, and
is essential to their religious rituals. We make no claim to totemic
associations—instead we have created a series of expressions that
capture each one’s characteristics. The totems are:

on the move (capturing the transient environment); business
(relating to commercial design as well as interior architecture as a
business); wellbeing (designing for all aspects of mental and physical
health); furniture and objects (using fittings, furniture, furnishings
as well as designing them); critique and exposure (ways to display,
analyse, comment, or reward design activities or issues); learning
(educational environments, teaching and mentoring); social justice
(equity and design for the marginalised); cultural heritage and social
sustainability; community engagement.

The totems represent the ongoing evolution of the core aspects
of INTERIOR Architecture for Curtin University, as well as
demonstrating the trans-disciplinary characteristic of our modes of
practice. Once again there are implications for education. Our course
is designed to reflect this evolution of meaning and practice, with the
focus on students developing their areas of passion through exposure
to a variety of learning opportunities and through self-directed
learning. Accompanying this are opportunities to consider how
interior architecture can embrace other disciplines to create improved
quality of environments and/or interactions.
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20 GONE, 20+ COMING

Our responsibility is not to solve all issues now, but to build a solid foundation and to set the scene for the future of interior architecture to take its place as a leader in understanding and addressing issues of occupation. As Joan Harland relates, the future has already begun. Its form is influenced by the attitudes and actions that we foster now. At 95 she wrote:

As I “get on” I think about the future. I go to St. George’s Anglican Church because it is in a beautiful modern building, with colourful stained glass windows....Our funeral service has a part where it says—“in my father’s house there are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.” All right for the men, who were writing the bible, to think of owning a house but I have never liked the idea of “dusting” some “house” throughout eternity. My philosophy is that I will be continued on in the “ideas” I have been able to give others, which when combined with their own thoughts and abilities, produced results, enabling others to live better, happier lives through the interiors they inhabit. My after-life, which has already started, lies in our combined efforts.\(^4\)

And as we set the scene for future possibilities, we may have to question some of the assumptions and positions that were inherent in the field and be prepared to contest them while accepting responsibility for maintaining the permeable nature of interior architecture.

This exhibition marks a point in our history where change is imminent. We see this as a turning point, an opportunity to reflect back and to recognise developments and successes, but to also recognise how the shifting educational and global contexts mean that what has been successful in the past needs to be reconsidered in a new light. This event—the launch of the twelve month program—is a beginning.

A beginning that embraces the best of interior Architecture and recognises the benefits of belonging to the profession. The job, in a typical week—and sometimes day—is diverse, and can involve managing client briefings, visiting construction sites, checking subcontractors’ work, preparing or checking drawings, guiding juniors in the design team, overseeing contracts and variations, selecting materials, helping with the finishing aspects on site, attending product launches, pitching for new jobs, and celebrating at award evenings. That is, a job that simultaneously encapsulates glamour, hard work, and the grit of the site work. Therefore, managing projects and work practices requires a diversity of personal attributes, knowledge and skills.

At Curtin University, INTERIOR Architecture staff are foregrounding particular aspects of the interior field, however, at this moment in time we are launching our philosophy and chosen path. Over the oncoming year we envisage that through the input of alumnae, students, sessional staff drawn from many disciplines, professional consultants within and outside the University, our aims will be consolidated and enacted. We invite you to contribute to this process. In addition, our close relationships with professions such as architecture and design will extend naturally to include, for example, health, sociology, fashion, science and business. Strategic partnerships are required for environments that address societal and environmental needs in an informed manner, and can be achieved.

Many practices may need to be reviewed, and collectively, to work with and educate clients as well as government, we need to be informed as to how we can confront issues such as the resource wastage in interior architectural practice associated with rapid fitout turnover, and generate new ways of improving the quality of occupation. We invite you to reflect on the 20 years gone through the exhibition and this catalogue and to contribute to the 20 years and beyond that are ahead.
WHERE FROM & WHERE TO?

WHERE IN THE WORLD DID THEY GO?

Coming from and going to is not just a matter of geography. This section explores the personal and professional lives of leading alumnae, in the context of a developing discipline. A timeline beats a rhythm of memorable events, milestones and turning points across 20 years. A story unfolds of place of origin, familial role models, life experiences, culture, mentors, preferences and interests that led these alumnae to interior architecture. Their individual stories influenced their educational experience, making it their own. For many the integration of past knowledge with interiors gained them a richer degree. They speak of their opening up though new ideas and exposure. And then we see how they flower, and grow and diverge in unexpected ways as some follow familiar pathways, others seize opportunities in adversity, and still others determinedly clear a path less travelled. A sense of self led them though diverse life-experiences where their personal and professional trajectories criss-cross and connect over the years. We unearth nine totems, which reveal the potential of the discipline, through photos and text.

The top graduates from each year (based on a grade point average) were invited to share their life-career experiences. Exhibited alumnae are: Fleur Watson (FW), Brendan Wong (BW), Lisa Ciccarelli (LC), Tanya Sim (TS), Penelope Forlano (PF), Patrick Chong (PC), Cherie Kaptein (CK), Sarah West-Davies (SW), Jodie Duddington (JD), Narelle Yabuka (NY), Vanessa Galvin (VG) Sonia Tomic (ST), Leonie Edwards (LE), Richelle Doney (RD), Renee Parnell (RP), Amy McDonnell (AM), Sheena Molloy (SM), Ebony Marshall (EM), Tshepo Magdeline Selaledi (TMS) and Kim Chin Sin Ching (KC).