”Frendin Architektur – Ett projekt om en arkitekts praktik – Examensarbete”

”Frendin Architecture - A project on the practice of an architect – Degree Project”

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On the verge of completing my architectural studies, I was enthused by the prospect of establishing an architectural practice. With only a limited network of contacts and practical experience, without commissions in the pipeline or a portfolio of works, this project approaches the city as a site for architectural practice and explores strategies for establishing an architect’s practice.

At the core of the thesis is a belief that a viable strategy for establishing a practice is to locate a potential within a given area, unlock that potential within a given site and position a practice at the heart of the potential with which we wish to engage.

As such, with the main objective to design an architectural practice, the initial stages of the project aimed to formulate a series of strategies for establishing, operating and marketing an architectural practice, these strategies and the speculative process of the project were developed within the context of a given area and the framework of a typology.

The project uses the realm of architectural design to engage with the design of architectural practice.
S.trategy

S.0 All the things I have
S.I The single family home - a classical architectural start-up project?
S.II Is the architects’ home an initial strategic project?
S.III Home at the front, office at the back.
S.IV In the business of appealing to a common condition.
S.V What if everyone did that? The urban impact of small architecture.
S.VI Architecture without clients.
S.VII What the added value?
S.VIII Establish an uncompromising portfolio of works.
S.IX In search for an architectural profile.
S.X Architectural merit.
S.XI As a matter of making a living.
S.XII In-situ practice - to live, work and build locally.
S.XIII Going large(er) with private investors?
S.XIV What can my office do for me - strategic design and mode of operations?
S.XV Start small, stay small - the advantage of size?
S.XVI Making a living off architecture.
S.XVII Pro bono publico.
S.XVIII Publicbuilding.org - the business case of working free of charge.
S.XVI The public project.

M.apping

M.I Roaming the streets of Google Maps.
M.II A compact urban fabric of narrow plots.
M.III A local typology of single storey terrace houses.
M.IV A network of laneways - Right of Way.
M.V Monopoly - properties for sale.
M.VI The prospect plan.
M.VII Local Amenities.
M.VIII Architectural offices.
M.IV Regulating programme.

L.ocal

L.I Marvellous Melbourne.
L.II The Australian Dream.
L.III Urban Backyard.
L.IV Urban Character.
L.V Dual Citizenship.
L.VI Changing lanes.
L.VII Planning Directives.
L.VIII Planning initiatives.
L.IX People in numbers.
L.X Hippos and suits.
L.XI Homeowners.

T ypology

T.I The domestic wall & The central courtyard.
T.II The free wall of an open plan & dividing courtyard.
T.III The walls of proportion & the multiple courtyards.
T.IV The boundary wall & linear courtyard.

A.dvertising

A.I A practice starts with a name and point of contact.
A.II Going public - shaking hands.
A.III Like a vacuum cleaner salesman we knock on doors!
A.IV A matter of talking to people - Ask an Architect is the formal invitation.
A.V Architecture and the everyday - a matter of illustration.
A.VI Real estate agents - Another point of entry?
A.VII Establish a practice profile of architectural merit and shunt it!
A.VIII On-site On-line - a gimmick or valid advocate of what we do?
A.IX Please judge my book by its cover - the role of architectural media.
A.X Architectural media - a logical instrument?
Through a series of written reflections at the outset of the project I examined some of the strategies and marketing concepts potentially applicable to the process of establishing an architectural practice.

At the core of the thesis project is a belief that a viable strategy for establishing a practice is to locate a potential within a given area, unlock that potential within a given site and position a practice at the heart of the potential with which we wish to engage.

This statement translates into three key strategies of the practice that have been explored in the threefold structure of the project: firstly, as participants in and builders of society, to live, work and build locally; secondly, to appeal to a common condition by working within the framework of a typology; and thirdly, to initiate projects on a small scale and as an enlightened architectural developer as a means of establishing trust and generating clients.

All together, the three strategies present a means by which Frendin Architecture endeavours to establish trust and hopefully gain the interest of private clients as well as the extended local community.

To read about the complete series of strategies see the appendix titled Process. This document is not intended as an academic essay, but is merely a very personal document through which I was able to keep track of thoughts and ideas. Its content is dealing with issues of gentrification, economics, politics, planning policies, and with some vague reference to inspiring documents, articles, practices and projects.
While the generic strategic statement could potentially be applied to any location, the specifics of my speculative process is placed in Melbourne, Australia, and the inner city suburb of Fitzroy. Being a relatively new city, Melbourne provides an eclectic mix of architecture and an exciting field for architectural practice.

The urban structure is very much the aftermath of both historic planning such as the strict Hoddle grid established at the city centre, coupled with the Australian Dream of a privately owned home with a backyard hosting a hills hoist and the quintessential Australian barbecue, that formed the suburbs.

Between the urban and suburban condition, the inner city suburbs present an interesting and rather unique situation. At the immediate outskirts of the high-rise Central Business District, the building stock drops to predominantly one and two storeys within a fine and compact grid of long and narrow plots ranging from 4 to 5 by 20 to 40 meters.

Being the first suburb established around central Melbourne in 1839, Fitzroy, once the home to workers, factories and industries, and for some time even a slum, has experienced extensive gentrification in recent years. The phenomena is mainly signified by the appearance of small private cafes, boutiques, galleries, restaurants and bars, and as town planners realise the detriment of the extensive urban sprawl (although contested in the name of preserving urban character) this is coupled with developers that continue to pursue medium size redevelopment of industrial property into modern apartment and town-house style living for an increased urban density. And as the suits of the suburbs begin to value the charm of an inner city home of particular interest is the single storey attached workers cottages and terrace houses.

Built for workers over a century ago to host a family of ten, these houses typically comprised of two rooms with a detached washroom at the rear end of the plot. While the original bluestone and brick front facades are subject to heritage overlays and remain largely untouched, these houses have been poorly appropriated over time resulting in compromised layouts that in many cases do not meet the standards of contemporary living conditions, particularly relative to prevailing property prices, not to mention a household greater than two.

Given the long and narrow plots, the typical problem found is the lack of natural light and more often than not the bathrooms once detached, have been merely attached to the back of the house blocking the relationship between the living spaces to the back yard. However, there is also an interesting and surprisingly uncultivated possibility presented. Behind the well-regulated residential streets of heritage-protected front facades, lies a network of laneways, the so-called Right of way.
Delightfully restored Bluestone beauty

This delightfully restored Bluestone classic located meters away from Brunswick Street and the Carton Gardens on a quiet street, is the perfect choice for those seeking a compact but spacious modern inner city abode with convenient links to public transport and the CBD. Thoughtfully restored by locally based Swedish design firm, Frendin Architecture, this reworked classic cottage boasts a clever design of compact and light filled living spaces rarely found in vintage cottages. Features include: original Bluestone wall, gorgeous front and central courtyards ensuring an abundance of natural light through the property, a cleverly arranged open plan living space with direct access to and obscured views of the rear laneway, modern kitchen, two master bedrooms with built in robes, innovative bathroom design and polished floorboards.

This opportunity should not be missed!
With the ‘character’ of the existing urban condition as the foundation for the practice and the fundamental source for inspiration, through a series of mapping exercises I began to find bearing within the living condition of the area, identify the existing urban structure and quantify the specific potential to be developed. It is a single and live document I endeavour to continue to add to. Aside from roaming the streets of Google maps, reading local planning policies, academic papers, architectural and general media, I begun every morning with a cup of coffee whilst scanning the local property market. This was part of an exercise through which I began to form an understanding of an urban condition and its typology and as an architectural developer a way of selecting projects.

There is a compelling prospect of a private piece of land. A house, small and attached as it may be, but with a backyard nonetheless. In a neighbourhood firmly anchored within the living tradition of the city, only a stroll from Brunswick Street, one of Melbourne’s infamous commercial strips. A five minute bike ride from the CDB in a metropolis of four million people. An interesting prospect for me both as a homeowner and architect.
M.V
Monopoly - properties for sale
While the initial stage of the practice is based on an architecture without clients, taking on the role of a small scale architectural developer with the aim to gain the interest of local residents, the foundation of such endeavour should not solely be based on the praxis of capital investment and return but be built on the basis of creative thought, concept and idea. As such, in search of an architectural profile, using four speculative projects I begin to formulate a strategic response and architectural approach to the opportunities and constraints presented by this particular typology and its context. Given the issues of natural light and existing wet areas, the opportunities presented by the back yard and the right of way, all sample houses deal with three core principles of design.

Drawing on a variety of spatial components of the existing houses, the plans explore various architectural interpretations of the innate proportions of the typology and considers the service and storage facilities of the home - both re-occurring issues within the existing building stock. In the first sample the location of the domestic services became the inspiration for two alternative layouts for a free standing wall that house bathroom facilities, kitchen, laundry and storage. Endorsing the typical long and narrow corridors, while utilising this as an active space for domestic utilities, leaving all inhabited rooms uncluttered. In the second, the existing attic ladder centrally positioned in the original part of the house became the starting point for the design of joinery units that are centrally located and detached from the boundary walls to create a seemingly open plan. In the third the expressed proportions of the cellular spaces of the existing home were translated to an open plan with architecturally expressed openings to maintain the proportionate sense of each room, with the joinery strung along one wall. Similarly, the fourth project uses a linear expression of domestic services. However in this case, this was the solution to a very different scenario. Although a corner plot with the luxury of windows along the side of the façade, the windows are in fact blocked by brickwork to the interior defeating the purpose of their intent. As a result the domestic joinery is placed along the boundary wall to the street with operable doors that enables the fenestrated façade only if desired.

More significant is the architectural interpretation of the courtyard as a practical means to remedy the issue of light intake on deep and narrow plots and a way to create an intimate connection to our beloved back yard. In the first house, a central courtyard is complemented by a skylight taking in light and visually tying together the original home and new extension. In the second, the central courtyard divides the property in two units, either used as a studio space and master bedroom or retrofitted to host two tenants. The third project appropriates the idea of the already multiple courtyards. Finally, the fourth applies the idea of one linear courtyard that allows natural light to all interior spaces and provides an initially external entry to the house from both sides of the plot.

In turn, with the belief in the potential of architecture to foster positive social environments for all scales of building, the spatial reconfiguration from backyard to courtyard introduces not only an additional source of natural light, but also an active architectural façade to the often-underutilised laneways at the rear of each plot. As such, the projects aim to engage an additional mode of place making with an active façade of residential dwelling to the rear right of way. In one sample house the kitchen and living spaces make an animated but filtered facade to the laneway. In another, a separate dwelling unit presents the option of a studio space or the living spaces of a separate tenant. In the third, the rear porch is unfenced and serves as an additional principal entry to the house. In a fourth, the rear space can be retrofitted as a bedroom, home-office or shop front. Aesthetically, the extensions to the back of the plot respect, but not simply copy, the historic precedents, examining a contemporary treatment that exploits the innate qualities of the modular brick, reflects the physical and aesthetic durability of the historic brick structures, but also ties it into the history of the utilitarian setting that proliferates in back lanes.
T.J
The domestic wall & the central courtyard
T.II
The free walls of an open plan & the dividing courtyard

First floor plan
Ground floor plan
Section
Heritage listed street facade
New facade to rear laneway
Section
T.III
The walls of proportion & the multiple courtyards
T.IV
The domestic boundary wall & linear courtyard

Existing and new street facade

Ground floor plan

Section

Heritage listed street facade

New facade to rear laneway

Section
I believe that when laying the foundation for an architectural practice, what could be better than starting the endeavour than in your own back yard?

The home project for the architect is not only is it the first project of a future portfolio of built works and a vehicle through which I become the architect of my own education it also has strategic advantage. I believe that to live in a project is a healthy lesson for all architects. It also forms a vantage point from which we can advocate our product. Unlike any given house project designed for any given client, the home project is not rendered inaccessible for marketing purposes post completion, beyond of course the extent of well manicured images, but serves as a live display home in use.

While the first home project sets out to improve the spatial layout of existing amenities within the existing footprint of the house, the second and third sample houses I approach the task of design as a developer, by adding a second floor, bedrooms, extending living areas and introducing the potential of a studio. However, more intriguing is the final sample house. I sell my first home, to examine the possibilities of added bedrooms, living areas and a studio space for Frendin Architecture at the back within the existing parameters, in a compact living arrangement that questions some of the parameters of living that we may take for granted.

Secondly, with the aim to establish a parallel mode of operations based on a more traditional client architect relationship Frendin Architecture goes public! I believe that commissioning an architect is a personal matter, to know someone. Although, practicing with a local profile is an important aspect of Frendin Architecture, it does not necessarily generate projects by default. As such, upon acquiring a property and prior to commencing any development we knock on doors. Informing neighbours of the intended project may assist in preventing complaints and stalling the planning application process. The project next door is a conversation starter - a means through which Frendin Architecture actively work to inspire homeowners in the same block.

If conducting architectural practice is a matter of talking to people, Ask an Architect is the formal invitation! Every Tuesday afternoon between 5 and 7 we open our doors and offer one initial meeting free of charge. It is a way in which we introduce a transparency in the way we work and is aimed towards the potential client that hasn’t yet developed a brief and taken the step of making contact with an architect. These are what I would like to call a ‘thick-pen meeting’ where we sketch on the spot leaving the client with initial ideas on a Frendin Architects piece of sketch paper.
A.IV

Architecture and the everyday
Ask an Architect!

Do you have a project in mind? Frendin Architecture can help you brainstorm ideas and formulate a brief using our unique problem-solving skills and design and construction experience. Come chat with us over a coffee.

Frendin Architecture is a Fitzroy based Swedish architecture firm renown for our proficiency in implementing spacious designs in narrow inner city plots and compact spaces and for our creative construction and design solutions. We seek to address human needs through the built environment and to seamlessly blend the physical and natural environments in a sustainable and cost-effective manner.

We offer free 1/2 hour consultation sessions. Tuesdays from 4-7pm.

For more details and to schedule a ‘thick-pen’ meeting visit www.frendinarchitecture.com

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1. Exhibition on compact living.
2. Architects terrace house and studio, Fitzroy.
While the four sample houses presented as part of this project are rather radical and extensive in nature, these have been developed with the idea that the concepts of central courtyards, walls of domestic appliances and active facades to the laneway, are design principles that can be ‘reverse engineered’ and applied to smaller extent suitable to a client’s individual aspirations.

Working locally within a neighbourhood, and within the framework of a typology is not only a means by which we establish local relationships and appeal to a common condition. It also raises the question of the collective impact of small-scale private projects within an urban context. I would like to extend the question asked by local Professor Kim Dovey: “What if everyone did that? Not as a normative rhetoric prohibiting transgression but rather intended to extend architectural thinking beyond the focus of the unique and individualistic.” Typologies whose repetition is greater than the sum can lead to a built environment conducive to difference, exchange, vitality, and urbanity. In light of the active façade to the laneways, I believe that small-scale private residential development can contribute to a positive intensification of urban planning strategies.

All in all, to design and develop is a (somewhat controversial) mode of practice that short-circuits the traditional client architect relationship. A means by which we can reimagine the typical condition, explore ideas in the real context and establish an uncompromised design aesthetic. Frendin Architecture believe that architecture can add value. This value is multifaceted, a combination of architectural merit, the standard of everyday living, and the smallest impact within a greater scale. The practice pursues an ongoing interest in pure, well crafted space as a means to unlock the latent ambitions of client, site and city.
The first project in the portfolio of Frendin Architecture

The home and office of Frendin Architecture

The prospect plan