

Communicating with the Other 99%

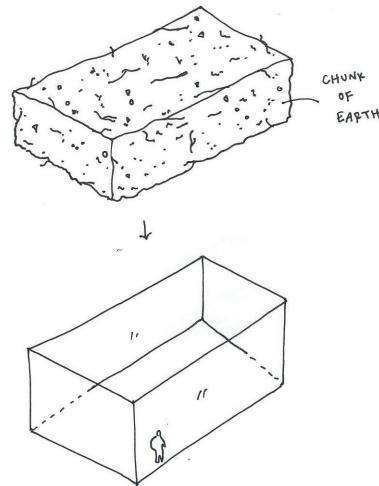
FOOD New York

An interview between Dong-Ping Wong (Partner) and Bella Janssens (Studio Manager)

BSJ: From the short time that I have been the Studio Manager at FOOD, the topic of surfing has come up a lot. You come in from the weekend and talk about a great surf, and as the work-week moves along you reference back to the visceral experiences you had out in the water. To me, it shows a confidence that you have to express your personal and every day desires in architecture, rather than responding purely to your clients' professional desires. How do you see your personal desires or the personal desires of your team in relation to the work of responding to a client's desires?

DPW: Hmm, funny I never really connected the relation of surfing and the work as a personal desires sort of question, but obviously it is. Keeping with that analogy, it's basically that that visceral experience is so great that I want everyone to experience it. So, in relation to client or collaborator desires in relation to my or the office's desires, it's in some ways as simple as I have things (ideas, feelings, experiences, observations) that are great and I would want everyone to share in them. And I don't mean "great" in the "oh man what a genius with his great ideas" kind of way, but that I really like certain things, and would love it if other people could also get joy out of those things.

I also realized that there's just a lot of architecture and design offices, enough to suit what everyone needs



Off - White Singapore, 2016

or wants or likes, and how everyone sees the role of the designer. In FOOD's case, we are definitely not the best office to talk to if you are looking for a studio to simply execute your own ideas. There are offices who are much, much better technically and economically than we are for that. Go there, save your money.

Our understanding or interest in the design process is not that the architects are a purely service industry, but that the best ideas come out of collaboration, so inevitably desires from both sides of the table are going to not only be satisfied, but something completely new will be made from that combination.

What was a point when you felt you were successful in realizing a part of



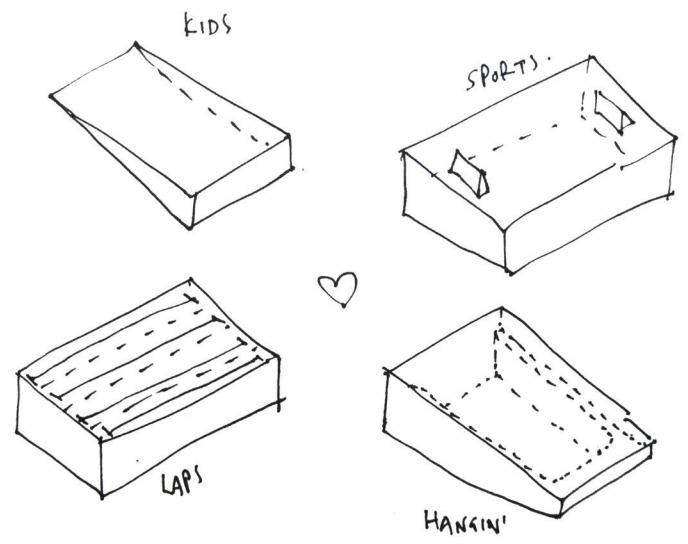
your vision together with a client? And what was a moment when you felt those desires did not coalesce?

I'd say for the first point, virtually all projects. What's nice is by the end of the design, you can't even recall who came up with what idea. For the second, we did a very fast project with a retail brand, and though they are an incredible brand, they are also huge and have a very set way of what is needed to build a space that is properly branded. We had done some projects with a smaller team within that brand and it was much more free, but in this particular project we were working with the corporate headquarters, and that, combined with the speed of the project, very much limited how much feedback they wanted from us. Whether it was

a better or worse project in the end is another question all together, but I do think it did what they needed it to do even though we weren't all that proud of it.

You have expressed frustration with architects in general only being able to communicate to 1% of people, and that in turn you strive to always be able to communicate with the other 99%, if not 100% of people. You are sketching all the time and seem to use it as an alternative mode of communication.

There was even a moment in a meeting when you explained to me everything that was going on through sketches, as not to interrupt the others. Do you see sketching as another way of communicating with clients? As a medium that is more effective in



+ Pool, New York, NY 2010



Gösta Serlachius Museum, Mänttä, Finland 2010

building trust or excitement around an emerging idea?

More generally, what modes and mediums of communication do you choose to work with and how do you see them as working more or less effectively?

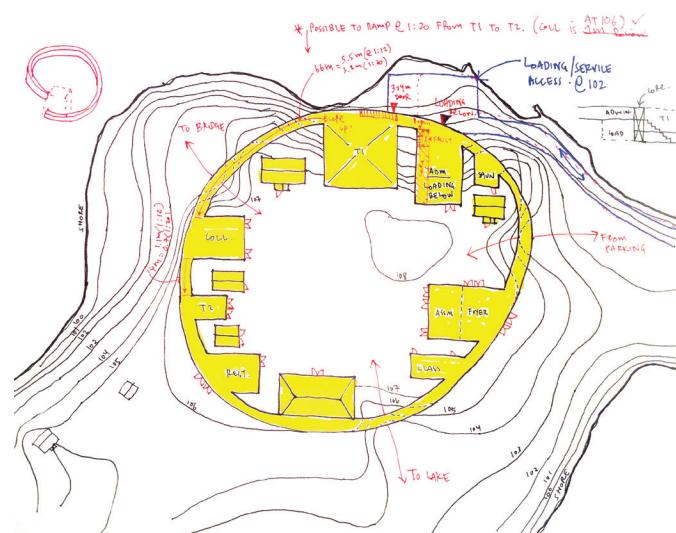
Sketching has been great for us. I actually only started using sketches in any professional capacity within, like, the last five years I don't think I ever used them in school presentations or anything or with offices I worked at, they definitely weren't a popular or contemporary seeming medium at the time, or still? They have a magic quality of being at once fast, compelling, clear, and not con-

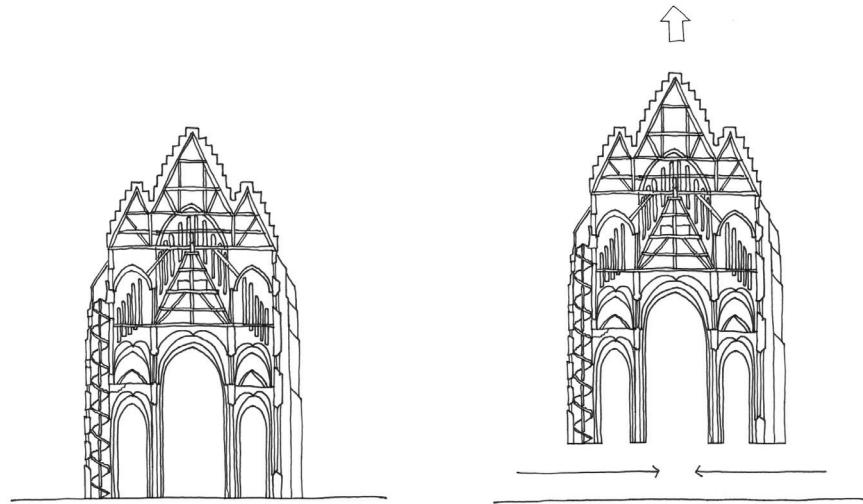
cretized. Renderings, for example, can accidentally or purposefully promise things that can tie your hands, or that the client will see as fully determined when it isn't yet, especially early in the design.

We generally work with sketches, collages, physical models, 3D models, renderings, and drawings. Nothing all that out of the blue. We're pretty tech simple.

Have certain expectations, whether from clients, your own office, or others, helped develop your vision?

Yes, all of them.





Sydhavnen Church, Copenhagen, Denmark 2016