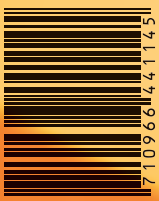


FRAME

THE GREAT INDOORS

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**HIGH-DENSITY
HOUSING**
How we will live
tomorrow

Everyone Together

SIBLING ARCHITECTURE
advocates a more inclusive
approach to spatial design.

Words
ENYA MOORE

Portrait
CHRISTINE FRANCIS



The Sibling directors (from left to right):
Nicholas Braun, Amelia Borg, Jane Caught,
Qianyi Lim and Timothy Moore.

SIBLING ARCHITECTURE is a collaborative practice with five directors – Nicholas Braun, Amelia Borg, Jane Caught, Qianyi Lim and Timothy Moore – and offices in Sydney and Melbourne. We speak to Moore, Lim and Borg about Sibling's vision and its efforts to create environments that 'make people's lives better'.

Your practice covers a diverse range of projects, from civic buildings and residential units to exhibition design. With five directors, how does Sibling work on a practical level? Does each of you have a speciality? QIANYI LIM: No. We possess different qualities, so our collective knowledge feeds into different typologies. When we start a new project, we all sit around the table developing concepts and adding input. I think that's our strength.

TIMOTHY MOORE: What's important, and why you see a diversity of projects, is the result of five people following their individual desires. It has the potential to feed back into our work in unexpected ways.

You recently received a pretty sizable grant from the Creators Fund in Victoria to investigate age-friendly cities. This is obviously a huge topic. How are you tackling the necessary research? TM: When we start a project, we like to do as much design research as possible. It's often difficult to make architecture that's dominated by the market, leaving you with no time or money for speculative research. The Creators Fund allows recipients to speculate on a problem. We don't want to rush into it. We're using public programming as a way to generate knowledge. We're not experts, but we're getting smarter by speaking to people who already have the knowledge we need.

Why did you choose to work specifically with the issues facing elderly urban dwellers and not, for example, accessibility in general? TM: I guess we're looking for ways to frame the conversation. We think of the pro-

ject as a lens that will let us unlock questions that apply to everyone, not just older people. We're driven by the fact that it won't be long before a certain percentage of the population will be 'elderly'. It's about more than adapting the city spatially; it's also about affordability. There's so much diversity within groups of seniors. Even in the case of a couple, one person might have access issues while the other doesn't. Using a conceptual lens gives us more leverage, not to mention a much broader look at conversations pertaining to equity, justice and inclusivity.

QL: On a personal level, our parents and their generation are entering this realm, so the project is related to our own experiences.

TM: We're thinking about ourselves as well. The future we have to look forward to doesn't resemble the current lives of our parents, who have assets, own their homes and collect superannuation. They're not part

'We have to consider our own future and design for our own tomorrow'

of the gig economy. Those benefits won't exist for us. We have to consider our own future and design for our own tomorrow. Maybe our solutions will work for everyone.

New Agency, an exhibition featuring your work, included solutions that covered a wide range of scales. TM: A big component of that participatory exhibition was our attempt to get people to think about what they saw and heard. Speculative design research is about working through different futures and inviting people to make decisions now. It's also about recording and generating knowledge, but equally important is to examine the choices we make today that will affect the future. It's an activist approach that gives people the agency to think for themselves.

QL: Another point of difference lies in asking our generation, millennials, to think about where they're going to live and to compare it with what an even younger generation might have in mind.

You addressed accessibility in the Frenches Interior, a project that offers clients an incorporated furniture line. How did these objects come about? QL: Our clients were an elderly couple who work at home as occupational therapists. The brief asked for a live-work environment and a suite of purpose-designed furniture that would provide universal access. They were great clients who saw an opportunity to rethink the way too many people view disability and ageing. They really pushed us to develop playful elements for the space.

Did they guide you in a certain direction with regard to aesthetics? TM: We knew we could push it. There's a pragmatic way to approach accessibility that doesn't have to involve standardized furniture. The circular table, for instance, makes it easy to get a wheelchair underneath. The couch is another example: it's like a pizza with wedges, and »

QIANYI,
TIMOTHY

&

AMELIA



A live-work environment for an elderly couple, Frenches Interior rethinks the way too many people view disability and ageing. Sibling Architecture included custom furniture for easy manoeuvrability.



it has a pink handle that helps wheelchair users to manoeuvre themselves onto a softer surface. The feedback from their friends was positive. Even when they couldn't move to the sofa, they managed to separate two wedges and wheel themselves into the gap, becoming part of a conversation instead of being an outsider. We couldn't have predicted such outcomes at the start.

Besides residential projects, your portfolio includes retail spaces. How do you see retail interiors changing? AMELIA BORG: Online shopping gives people access to products and services all over the world, right at their fingertips. More and more people are shopping as part of their everyday social experiences on Facebook and Instagram. Rather than going to physical stores, they rely on algorithms to pick, purchase and deliver. This means that retail outlets on the high street need to do more than just present and sell products. They have to be experiences in themselves.

How does your interior for Dot Comme Collection achieve this goal? QL: We treated the space like a gallery. The owner, Octavius La Rosa, has one of the largest fashion collections in the world. The store carries cult brands like Comme des Garçons, Walter Van Beirendonck and Yohji Yamamoto. La Rosa wanted the space in Melbourne to present the collection in the same way that a gallery displays works of art. The logical solution was a white cube, but we pushed the typology by playing with silhouette and texture in much the same way that fashion designers play when draping, cutting and stitching.

AB: What makes La Rosa's collection so special is that each piece is individually picked and curated to become part of the collection – unlike a standard retail concept, where shoppers find multiple sizes and colours of the same style.

Dot Comme Collection bridges digital and physical retail. Was this a factor in your interior design? We knew that showing too many pieces at once was the wrong way to go. The online shop does that very easily. We wanted to focus on giving each piece enough breathing room to be viewed as the unique creation it was. We placed furniture by Gaetano Pesce and Memphis Milano from La Rosa's personal collection throughout the boutique. The idea was to have shoppers linger in the space, browse the online archive and perhaps discover fashions to try on. The extended collection is in an archive room that can be reached via a concealed door.

Do you feel that members of the greater public are developing an understanding of the possibilities of design and architecture that goes beyond the surface level? TM: I think people are always interested in design. They may not know it, but everyone is interested in housing prices and transport. It's about how you frame the conversation. Architects make buildings, but everyone together produces architecture. We try to have a conversation with our projects – not always about how a building is constructed, but definitely about the element of participation. We're interested in bringing people together – ordinary people who make architecture – in a discussion that is more helpful to the advancement of design than a conversation among architects. ●

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Hybrid Retail

The interior of Dot Comme Collection references Rei Kawakubo's first Comme des Garçons shop, opened in 1975. The Japanese designer's collection was tucked away in a back room, out of the sight of visitors to her Tokyo boutique. The store in Melbourne displays a curated selection of owner Octavius La Rosa's pieces and, behind a concealed door, an archive room that holds 3,000 garments, all of which can be seen at Dot Comme's online store. Shoppers can scroll through the entire collection while sitting on iconic furniture by Gaetano Pesce and Memphis Milano. After making their selection, a door carved into the store's bulging white walls allows staff to retrieve the items. – KG