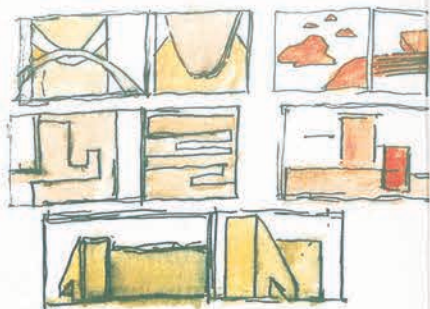


DESIGN



Back to the drawing board... Marshall at work; (above) some of his sketches. Photos: Rodger Cummins



Between the lines

Three architects, happiest with a pencil in hand, discuss the joy of drawing.

PETER STUTCHBURY

PETER STUTCHBURY
ARCHITECTURE

LINING the walls of Peter Stutchbury's Newport office are about 50 lever-arch files containing all the sketches he has drawn since he was a student. He sketches every day, on loose-leaf paper, sometimes writing poetry, too. He used to do meticulously detailed site drawings until five years ago, when he was doing one in a hurry.

"So I did it without taking the pencil off the page. And I looked at it and I thought, 'That's the best drawing I've ever done.'"

Now he does almost all his landscapes with just a single line. It's faster and, instead of ending up with a single detailed drawing, he has a folio of different thoughts. His trajectory is a common one, he says.

"If you look at the career of great artists, their drawings usually go from quite accurate, fine, time-consuming drawings to almost graphic representations of what they're seeing." It's more evocative that way, he says. "Because, at the end of the day, a drawing is to communicate to yourself what you're seeing."

Drawing on a computer doesn't develop your thinking or perception in the same way, Stutchbury says. He draws to resolve details about a building, rather than to conceptualise one.

Nearly 20 years ago, he heard a story about Frank Lloyd Wright carrying his famous house, Fallingwater, in his head for six months before taking a single afternoon to draw it, almost perfectly. Stutchbury decided he would train himself to design in his head, too, rather than



Starting point... Stutchbury's Avalon Headland (top) and site drawing for Issey Miyake's house.

on paper. "The great asset about doing it in your head is you can change it really quickly," he says. "So I've been practising that for a long while."

He's become good at it, too. When he was asked to create a house in Japan for fashion designer Issey Miyake, Stutchbury did a simple site drawing of a cave and a

tree. Then he constructed the house in his head, finally putting it down in a tiny drawing that closely resembles the now-finished house. Only then did he really start sketching. "To understand it and detail it and qualify it, you have to do all these drawings," he says. Sometimes it takes only a few; sometimes hundreds.

Stutchbury sometimes frames his landscapes to give to friends and rarely gives concept drawings to clients or employees. Otherwise, his collection of drawings is a complete record of his career, which he intends to leave to his children. He doesn't always carry paper around with him. He tends to draw in concentrated periods – as a tension release, he likes to go up to Newport Beach and draw the headland. "I might have already done it 100 times and I still haven't finished," he says.

He also likes to sketch on holiday and flicks through pictures of a Kimberley gorge, a fire at night, a desert bush.

He is happiest sitting in nature and drawing is, for him, a way of enhancing that connection. "When you draw something, you have to start to understand it," he says. It gives him a sense of natural composition, which he thinks plays back into his buildings.

NEIL MACKENZIE

MACKENZIEPRONK ARCHITECTS

NEIL MACKENZIE'S sketchbooks are more like beautiful visual diaries.

He started keeping them just after he finished university and still takes two wherever he goes: one small book (good for drawing in on the bus) and a larger one (for when he can spread out at a cafe). He

keeps two plastic crates full of these old books in his office, an intimate record of his working and personal life. They contain sketches of buildings he's worked on, portraits of friends, writing, his daughters' passport photographs, newspaper cuttings about the monorail, a ticket to a Paul Weller concert, another to Rolf Harris, and a beautiful watercolour of Varanasi in India that he spent 2½ hours doing when he was young. There's a painting next to it of the Ganges, looking down from the same spot.

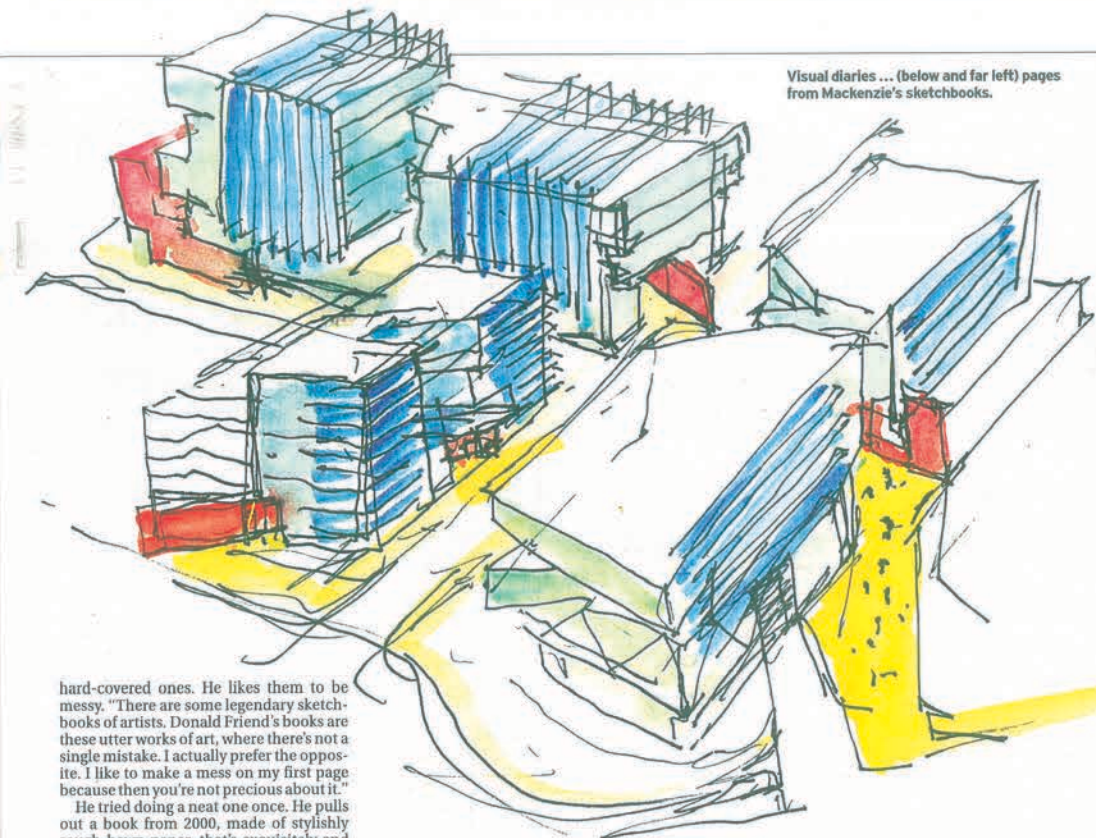
"It's a total meditation," he says of the painting process. "It's that whole thing that to draw it is to truly know it."

Painting fixes the scenes in memory for later use. "In the time since looking down and drawing those ghats [stepped embankments], I've probably had five conversations about morphologies of that type of river edge. You're immediately there because you know it, you've felt it with a pencil," he says.

Mackenzie keeps his current sketchbook, and the one immediately before it, on his desk at work because he often dips into them. He draws at every stage of a building's progress.

"Going to your sketchbook is a way of solving problems," he says. "Sometimes if I can't solve a problem in one medium, I'll change medium. I'll use a soft, fat pencil or I'll use watercolour. It's a bit like the adage that if you can't solve a planning problem, you turn the plan upside down. It's just a different way of looking at it."

As he has grown older and had less free time, the books have become less like journals, more like workbooks. Their size has changed, too. He used to favour soft-covered, passport-sized ones he could carry in a back pocket; now he likes bigger,



Visual diaries... (below and far left) pages from Mackenzie's sketchbooks.

hard-covered ones. He likes them to be messy. "There are some legendary sketchbooks of artists. Donald Friend's books are these utter works of art, where there's not a single mistake. I actually prefer the opposite. I like to make a mess on my first page because then you're not precious about it."

He tried doing a neat one once. He pulls out a book from 2000, made of stylishly rough-hewn paper, that's exquisitely and carefully drawn. "On one level I was really enjoying having the different paper but then I remember feeling it was limiting. I was treating it too well. The paper was too nice."

That phase didn't last long. Soon he was back to messy. Yet even now, he'll occasionally start a book and decide the first few drawings are too good. Then he'll call one of his young daughters over and say: "Can you make a mess in this for me?"

BARRIE MARSHALL

DENTON CORKER MARSHALL

A PILE of sketches lies scattered in a corner of the long, thin room in which Barrie Marshall translates ideas on to paper. The sketches of one of the team behind the internationally renowned Denton Corker Marshall range from free-flowing conceptual works to meticulously detailed streetscapes. Unlike many architects, Marshall eschews the notebook, preferring to carry ideas and inspirations in his memory until he is ready to commit them to the page.

"Drawings are, for me, just a means of expressing an idea, so when I go around looking at things, rather than sketch something that I think looks good, I'm looking at it and thinking about whether it works or

not but it doesn't become too specific," he says. "Later on, when you start designing a building, you're not remembering them clearly, you just remember that one material worked against another, for example. It's almost irritating in that you can't remember exactly how they achieved it but this way, you put your interpretation on what was a good idea. In a strange way, I do drawings after the event – it's almost to confirm an idea."

"People think that as you're sketching, the ideas are popping into your head and the sketch is sort of inspiring you but you can't put a line on a piece of paper until you've got a reason for doing it. On the other hand, you can use sketching, once you've got that idea, to look at it from different views and angles and make sure that it is working."

"A lot of our architecture is based on a simple, strong sculptural idea and the trick is to hold on to that. It's no good having a great idea for a building just because the shape looks good, if it doesn't work. So you've quickly got to run through in your head all the parameters – you've got a brief, a budget, it's got to be buildable, it's got to function properly. A sketch is a lie if it doesn't express the possibility of what you can achieve."

"The drawings I try to do are all about conveying what the essential idea is, not so much the details. Once you've hooked on to that idea, it becomes much easier to then sell the rest of the project to the client because they're already part of the process."

"So what I do is just sit at the drawing board with bits of butter paper and the project starts and you do lots and lots of sketches. I'm about the only person in the office who's got a drawing board. I don't use computers at all. I've resisted it probably because I'm pigheaded but also because the trouble with computers is your drawing is too precise."

Marshall says the nice thing about drawing by hand is that it allows time to think. "If you sit down at a computer, you've got the decision straight away; where does that line go from here to there," he says.

"A lot of architects can work that way but... I prefer to just think about things and then do a little sketch of it. If you're happy with the little sketch that you've done... if it's a strong idea and everybody likes it, then they go away with confidence, rather than thinking maybe there's a better idea or we should try something else."

Interviews by Catherine Keenan and Linda Percival.

Objectivity

DOSH WALLET 2007

They say necessity is the mother of invention but what about a good old-fashioned case of derring-do? That's what led industrial designers Mark Armstrong and Henri Spille to launch a new wallet.

After all, do we really need a money holder that is UV-resistant, made of sonic-welded food-grade plastic and immune to such abuse as being left at the bottom of a pool for three months?

But, says Armstrong, designing the Dosh wallet gave them the opportunity to turn a relatively uninspiring and utilitarian product into a stylish chameleon.

The range of wallets – which hold bills, up to six cards and, in some models, keys and coins – has been designed with virtually every possible subculture in mind.

Hipster? Go for the one with an illustration by pop art darling Jonathan Zawada. Mid-century modern die-hard? "Whisky", a mahogany-coloured confection, features a sleek stainless steel wrap-around band. And for surfers, there's a bright collaboration with *Stab* magazine that incorporates a technical harlequin pattern.

"We said, 'Look, leather wallets have been made of leather, and stitched around the corners, and here we are in 2010 and they're still made the same way as when my grandfather's grandfather bought a wallet,'" Armstrong says.

For some Dosh fans, though, the primary appeal lies with the need for a wallet that can better withstand the hazards of daily living. "These pieces are extremely durable," wrote one reviewer, on killahsheez.com. "Honestly, I'm not a clumsy person, but I think the boozing partly had something to do with all the mishaps."

www.dosh.com.au
\$69-\$99

Samantha Selinger-Morris

