

# SECTION E

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## FINALE

**This section summarises the intentions and outcomes of the study, lists references used and includes appendices that provide additional and referenced information for the study.**

# Chapter 11

## CONCLUSIONS



House Beyers (1998) (Author, 2009), House Ida's Valley (1975) (Author, 2009), House Swanepoel in Cape St. Francis (1980) (Author, 2005).

### **This section will conclude the study:**

The purpose of the study will be summarised.

Important results from the enquiry will be outlined.

The effect Fagan has had on architecture in South Africa will be described.

Issues that require further investigation will be pointed out.

### 11.1. Purpose of the study

This study has set out to undertake a critical analysis of the domestic architecture of Gawie Fagan so as to define its uniqueness in the South African architectural landscape, and assess the contribution the architect has made to the establishment of a place-specific architecture that is nationally and internationally recognized. This was done to increase the limited written knowledge on South African architects' work and to add to the critical debate on South African architecture.

### 11.2. Results of the enquiry

#### 11.2.1. Problem one:

The first problem was the determination of a research strategy. *It was hypothesised that Fagan's domestic architecture mediates between architectural dichotomies and relies on a typological approach that exhibits formal and spatial tensions; that the architecture can be described as heterotrophic and attenuative; and that a research strategy needed to be formulated that could highlight these attributes.*

##### 11.2.1.1. Result one:

A literature survey of international and local architects whose work bears similarities to Fagan's approach highlighted the importance of practical skills, technological inventiveness, pragmatic design approaches, an appreciation of local vernaculars, and a Modern Movement architectural education.

It was argued that an investigative approach will be undertaken through case studies and written work. This approach has built on the existing texts on the architect's work in a critical manner, by mediating between descriptive and normative approaches. In a similar way it has attempted to complete the study through a synergetic analysis that combines 'laws and instances' and 'cases and interpretations' research strategies.

An investigative strategy of heterotrophic syntheses was proposed which suggests that mediation occurs between dichotomous architectural influences such as the Modern Movement and the inherited Cape vernacular. Fagan sits at the centre of this mediatory process. His tools are his influences, design talent and imagination. The resultant attenuative solutions are not static outcomes but shift (in a formal sense) on an imaginary scale that links the two polarities.

As Fagan's work demonstrates typological tendencies, a summary of historical and productive typological approaches identified a close alignment with vernacular and Modern Movement

influences.

### 11.2.2. Problem two:

How will Fagan's architecture be contextualised? *It was hypothesised that the domestic architecture of Fagan displays similarities to international examples of regional modernism, and exhibits linkages with post-Second World War regional-modern attitudes in South Africa, as well as close similarities to a 1950s and 1960s neo-vernacular in the Cape region.*

#### 11.2.2.1. Result two:

Vernacular architecture has been defined as a traditive process that demonstrates a consistency, repetition and development of an approach to establish a new architectural tradition. A seminal neo-vernacular emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in the Western Cape, South Africa. The inherited Cape Dutch tradition was adapted through the influences of the British occupation along with Arts and Crafts influences through Baker and his later following. Architects such as Fox and Pahl attenuated replicative and interpretative approaches to merge inherited vernacular principles and Modern Movement influences to form a fourth Cape vernacular.

Mediations between an already mediated Modern Movement canon and local circumstances gave rise to a sophisticated regional modern architecture in Pretoria during the 1940s and 1950s. The problems stemming from the stylistic application of the International Style, climatic effects, available materials and the economic legacy of the Second World War forced architects to find innovative ways of dealing with the exigencies of place and modern functional requirements. The legacy of a third Modern Movement in Pretoria provided a solid foundation for the development of Fagan's reflective modernism. His pragmatic education and the influence of a cohesive and powerful group of regional practitioners and teachers in Pretoria paved the way for an architecture that would mediate a centuries' old tradition with new ways of living and alternative technologies.

Regionalism has been defined as a conscious architectural choice that reacts to universal and revivalist standardizing tendencies. It has been argued, in a Mumfordian sense, that mediative approaches seek to resist and accept standardizing tendencies to form a regionalism that straddles the boundaries of tradition and modernity in both imitative and inventive ways. The legacy of a strong mediative regionalism in Pretoria formed the basis of Fagan's architectural approach.

### 11.2.3. Problem three:

What aspects (personalities, activities, events) have influenced Fagan's architectural responses over time? *It was suggested that important influences such as upbringing, education and experience impact on the development of architectural philosophies and approaches.*

#### 11.2.3.1. Result three

Fagan's heterotrophic architecture was initiated during an inventive childhood. The nurturing environment and inherited skills fostered creativity and set the platform for mediation. An engineering and regional-modern architectural tertiary education furthered Fagan's ability to reconcile contradictory influences, and this finally found expression in his first house - Keurbos built in 1951 – that expressed a mediation between tradition and modernity. Later at Volkskas Bank Fagan reconciled the necessities of corporate expression and the vagaries of context. Thereafter a personal and unique architecture developed through the mediation of new and restoration work.

### 11.2.4. Problem four:

What architectural philosophies (theoretical or practical attitudes) has Fagan developed as responses to the inherited vernacular, the Modern Movement and regionalism? *It was suggested that philosophies or attitudes lead to the development of architectural strategies and design approaches and that Fagan has developed a fourth Cape vernacular, a reflective modernism and a relative regionalist approach to architecture.*

#### 11.2.4.1. Result four:

Fagan's first house, Keurbos (1951), set the tone for the exploration of a domestic architecture that expresses a mediated condition between the inheritances of the Cape vernacular and an already mediated Modern Movement. Fagan's mediations have resulted in the development of a fourth Cape vernacular in which he uses both replicative and interpretative design strategies to mediate the polarities of the rational and the corporeal, familiarity and strangeness, and new and old.

Fagan has mediated orthodox Modern Movement influences with those of the third Modern Movement in South Africa to produce a fourth strain of modernism. This reflective modernism mediates the polarities of the universal and the local, economy and spirituality, modern and traditional spatial typologies, technology and craft, and background and foreground approaches.

Fagan's relative regionalist approach has been formed through lifelong exposure to varying contexts. His childhood exploits, regional-modern university education, bank design in far-flung regions of the country and conservation work have all sensitised him to the effects of climate and its reactions with natural elements. Fagan's philosophies most closely align with those of Mumford in their common criticism of tradition and modernity and their support for an architecture that is 'both-and' and not 'either-or'.

#### **11.2.5. Problem five:**

What is Fagan's design process? What is his approach to the development of architectural form? What are the architectural responses that Fagan has made over time? *It was hypothesised that Fagan's design process mediates between the polarities of intuitivity and rationality and that he has developed architectural strategies to mediate formal, functional and spatial polarities, generated by the principles of the inherited vernacular and modern day functional and technological requirements. It was also suggested that he has developed a new set of architectural typologies.*

##### 11.2.5.1. Result five:

Fagan's design process is a rational pursuit that is initially divergent with nuances of convergent thinking. Later, design development processes become convergent through Fagan's use of tried and tested typological solutions. This method of working does not dilute the uniqueness of solution that is aptly suited to each site and program. Fagan mediates 'external' and 'internal' design influences to deal with the exigencies of site and program, his education, and life experiences.

Fagan's heterotrophic architecture has been formed through the mediation of two influences, namely an inherited vernacular tradition and a mediated Modern Movement education. Further mediations have been made between these influences and the exigencies of site and client requirements, with Fagan acting as the mediator in a process of conversion and assimilation. A series of formal tensions is created that allows the resultant architectural form to reverberate on an imaginary scale of resolution and opposition.

The dialectics of science and experience are mediated through the use of familiar architectural forms such as the chimney and sheltering roof, and haptic experience through the establishment of the architectural promenade. Formal and contextual dichotomies are mediated through classic and organic formal manipulations, the acceptance of commonalities between Cape and Mediterranean architectures, classic and romantic contextual relationships, and static and dynamic form making. The oppositions of inside and outside space are mediated through

considerations of approach and entry, the vehicle and the pedestrian, front and back, thresholds and boundaries and introverted and extroverted spatial arrangements. Formal and functional oppositions are reconciled and contrasted by the tectonic means of frame and enclosure, space and volume, and focus and function. Lastly, the polarities of traditional technique and technological invention are mediated by the abilities of an individual with years of experience in inventing and making to create new stereotomic and tectonic relationships and to merge age-old techniques with modern materials and practices.

Fagan has manipulated the formal, spatial and functional canons of a mediated Modern Movement and the Cape vernacular to create his own unique typologies. The design solutions alternate between generative interpretation and productive invention, and in so doing create a new and appropriate local architectural language that synthesizes the new and the old. The new patterns are convergent solutions in the sense that they are constantly used but are reworked in each new design. The typological solutions provide the architecture with a recognisable signature but avoid stylistic monotony.

### **11.3. The effect that Fagan has had on architecture in South Africa**

The award of a Gold Medal to Fagan for his contribution to architecture in South Africa in 1988 is a testament to the regard in which the local profession holds him. This is confirmed by the sixteen other awards from the South African and Cape Institutes for Architecture and the many other national awards received from bodies such as the National Monuments Council and the South African Academy of Literature and Science. The honorary membership of the American Institute of Architects in 2009 demonstrates Fagan's international standing.

Fagan has contributed to architecture through his respect for tradition, the development of a design methodology of 'first principles' and the manipulation of technology as craft. Fagan's deep understanding, knowledge of and experience with the 300 year old inherited Cape architectural tradition has allowed him to develop and refine a series of formal and spatial principles that he uses in his domestic architecture. These have fostered new typological solutions that have the Cape tradition as their foundation but which are manipulated to suit modern conditions. The effects of Fagan's inventive childhood and pragmatic education at the University of Pretoria have inculcated a working methodology of 'back to basics'. The architect approaches each problem with circumspection, eliciting requirements and elucidating inherent possibilities. His knowledge of traditional construction methods and new technologies from his sailing exploits have fostered an approach to making that borders on craft but in which the advantages of both are presented in the houses.

The importance of an architect's work can also be measured by the influence he has had on a

younger generation of architects. In a direct sense he has influenced the approaches of architects that have worked for him such as Lourens, Dodds, Rennie and Wilson-Harris. It is interesting to note that Fagan has affected and impacted all of the architects that have worked for him through his approaches to the making of architecture and not through stylistic influence. Lourens (2012) highlights the experiential qualities and importance of the architectural promenade:

Most of the influence ... is subconscious, I think. Therefore difficult to put a finger on. When I think of one thing then other incidents in other practices come to mind also. However, I think he had a large influence on me in two aspects of my work. Firstly, in my understanding that architecture is an experience and not an object. Elements thereof were present before I worked with him, but in his office it developed relevance. Hence my obsession with arrival! Arrival at any point outside or inside. Secondly, how space is read. I used to throw everything at each individual space ... But, it is the overall space which matters and how it is defined. These are always simple and understandable. Yet, once these are defined, they are manipulated to satisfy a multitude of options. I am not suggesting that my work reflects this, but I think of these while I am working and I try to at least recognise this.

The renowned Cape Town conservation architect John Rennie comments (2012b) that

it was an education. Both of Pearse's books were at hand as well as construction manuals. Fagan had just begun with the restoration of La Dauphine and I had to measure up these old buildings. This experience and Fagan's 'looking over my shoulder' presented many learning opportunities.

Dodds notes (2009) that "thorough research led to appropriate decisions from the larger picture to the finest detail like door handles. Designs were reworked until a refined quality had been achieved and this was far more important than worrying about how much time it took". Dodds also notes that Fagans' contribution to architecture has "extended beyond just his buildings".

Wilson-Harris explains (2012) that

from Fagan I have learnt that there is value in designing buildings to suit the site, to working with weather constraints, orientation, topography, context, views and human scale. These primary concerns support responsible design but there are also the unmeasurables of creativity, wit, modesty, restraint, clarity of thought and perhaps even left handedness that make his work unique.

Indirect stylistic influences can certainly be noticed in the work of architects such as Martin Kruger, Piet Louw and Heinrich Wolff. Martin Kruger (2012) highlights the influence of the tectonic qualities of Fagan's buildings:

I am always inspired by Gawie's thinking about finishes and simplistic detailing methods ... Eenvoudige "Karoo details" as I call them (farm-like, workman like). Gawie made a point once about European architects that want everything "perfect" – and said



but here in Africa it's different (as in South America) - referring to his own "unfinished" house(!). His determined attention to detail is inspirational. Where old meets new in architecture - e.g. Boschendal and the Castle. I would like to think that this unpretentiousness has influenced our work where appropriate: understated, simplicity, Karoo details.

Lastly, many an architect has been inspired by, as Kruger puts it (2012), "[i]ndirect influences from seeing and experiencing his buildings". On a regular basis, student groups from universities around the country and visiting groups of international architects make a pilgrimage to Die Es. This author was personally party to a visit by German architects to the house in April 2008, two weeks after a visit by a student group from Bloemfontein. On subsequent personal visits the spaces and tectonic qualities still excite the senses and inspire one to push the boundaries of form and space.

#### **11.4. Issues that require further investigation**

This study is limited to an analysis of Fagan's domestic architecture. But the oeuvre of Fagan's architectural work is broad and extensive, ranging from conservation projects to new work and domestic to commercial and institutional buildings. It is beyond the scope of this study to directly correlate the influences of other concurrent non-domestic work on the design of Fagan's houses, a study which would directly highlight other, more external, yet related design influences.

The development of a Fourth Vernacular in the Cape Region has highlighted the work of other architects working in a similar vein to that of Fagan. A more in-depth study of architects other than Fox or Pahl (such as Munnik and Abramson) would provide critical insight in the seminal work undertaken in that part of the world in the 1950s and 1960s, and would bolster the limited published work that exists on this period.

The influence of Karl Jooste on Fagan was touched on in a very limited way and concentrated on their mutual admiration for the work of Le Corbusier. Jooste's untimely death put paid to a talented architect's career but the limited built work in the domestic sphere warrants an in-depth study that can highlight another path taken by a Pretoria graduate that, in a way similar to Fagan's, has synergised a regional-modern education with the exigencies of place and climate.

#### **11.5. End note**

The analysis of Fagan's work is inevitably distanced and draws on direct experience of the buildings, readings (in both senses of the word) of his texts and my discussions with him and his wife. As Fagan once remarked "*ek is te na aan die werk om so daarna te kyk*" [I am too close to the work to look at it like that] so my critiques may be layered with issues that are less important or

relevant to the context, time or circumstances in which the buildings were created. My interpretations are personal and I have endeavoured to limit an over-academic analysis of the work.

I am hopeful that the study will be of benefit to the architectural fraternity at large and students in particular who wish to develop their own unique way of working. Fagan's work is seminal in the South African context and, although not without its idiosyncrasies, sets a high standard to emulate. There is yet to be another South African architect who has created such a consistent, yet innovative, body of domestic architecture that expresses so clearly the development of a regional vernacular that mediates two inherited traditions, namely the Cape vernacular and a mediated Modern Movement, and in such a sophisticated manner. Fagan's domestic architecture is truly timeless and expresses his wish (1983:1) that architects (in the Southern region of South Africa) should be striving for an architectural language that "belongs and is appropriate to the Cape".