

Final reflection

15.05.2025

## **Values in the Making**

Exploring ecologies of making for Architectural Education

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AR3EX115 | Explore Lab 39

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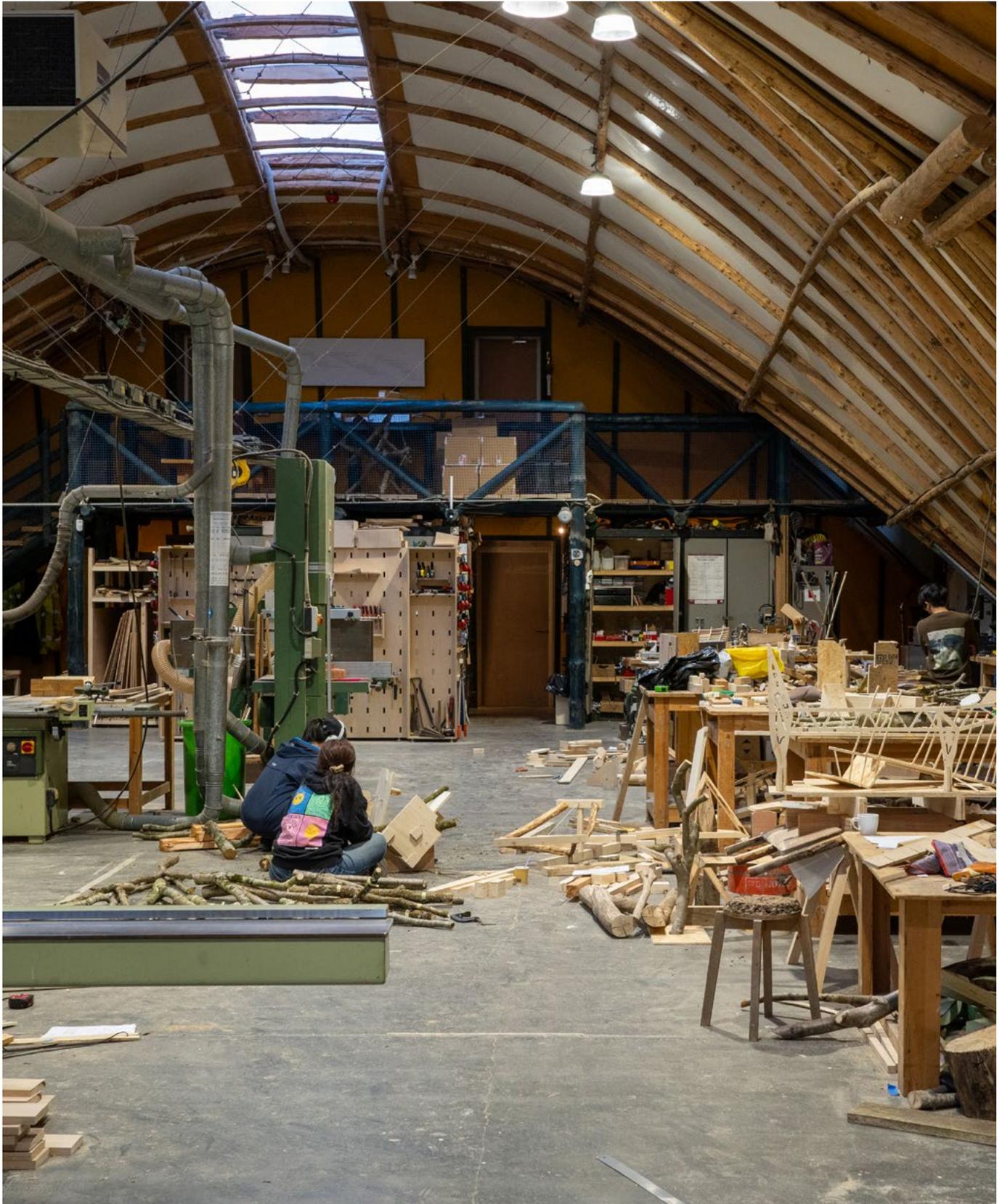
## Introduction

Reflecting on the past year requires me to recreate an overview of my thoughts, approaches, and directions that shaped this graduation project. At its very initial core was my observation of a sense of disconnection from materials that I experienced in both architectural education and professional practice. I began my research by stating that this disconnection from materials is problematic, especially given our goal of shifting the mainstream building industry towards sustainability and responsibility. Against this backdrop, I delved into the potential of 'making' as a value within architectural education, as a means to establish a more sensitive and situated approach to architecture in closer relationship with materials.

To engage with this question, I immersed myself in specific materials and their associated working processes. These material explorations, immortalised into the format of vedute, led to interesting insights that physical material engagements possess the ability to transfer and develop a specific kind of knowledge which is implicit, also referred to as tacit knowledge, which I consider a valuable gain for architecture education. The focus on individual materials led to interesting conversations with my research mentor, Mieke Vink, about the relationship between architects and craftspeople. These discussions helped me better understand the distinction between the two roles. Architects are not craftspeople; they do not possess the same depth of material expertise. Instead, their work involves bringing different materials together into assemblies. I came to see that the architectural task is less about mastering a single material and more about combining materials in ways that allow for expression of their specific qualities within the whole. In this regard, my experiment with reed thatching emerged as the most closely aligned with architectural concerns, as it involved the interplay of two materials in a way that maximised their respective qualities and efficiency.

**Fig. 1** – A diagram showing the flow of implicit knowledge between different people through the act of making, in the presence of material, tools and a skilled person. →





In parallel, I investigated infrastructures that support hands-on learning within architectural education by visiting three established institutes. This approach aligned with my broader research aim to draw conclusions from direct, embodied experiences rather than purely observational or theoretical analysis. Through these material investigations and site visits, I was able to distil a set of spatial and organisational characteristics that support a culture of making. Key among these were the immediacy and accessibility of materials, tools, and expertise, alongside the presence of generous, adaptable spaces that enable experimentation and accommodate flexibility through the establishment of a strong served, servant relationship in their typology.

These findings informed the formulation of a design brief in which I critically reflect on the context of our faculty building in Delft, a space that has been the context for my education over many years, making it again a lived experience. In this brief, I sought to bring the personal exploration in ecologies of making into a physical design, combined with the more general demand and collective need for expanded educational infrastructure. The proposed design strategy aims to create open and flexible spaces that support material experimentation by working with materials that are already present on site rather than introducing new ones, thereby grounding the design in its existing material context.

← **Fig. 2** — The wood workshop at Hooke Park, a satellite woodland campus far from the main campus of the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London.

## Reflection

Opting for the Explore Lab graduation studio provided me with the space and, in a sense, the luxury to delve deeply into a subject very dear to me: making. In the early stages, my project almost took the form of a critique of what I saw as the overly academic nature of our architecture education and the lack of physical engagement I had experienced throughout my studies. This resonates with an illustration (Fig. 3) extracted from an essay that my research mentor shared with me. It depicts 'The Bad Architect' who is blind to its environment and indifferent to the tactile experience. However, as the process unfolded, I came to recognise not only the value of hands-on making but also the importance of abstract thinking, discussion, and reflection. A spontaneous conversation with Oscar Rommens, a teacher in another graduation studio, stayed with me throughout the process. He described how good engineers and architects develop the ability to move fluently between scales and levels of abstraction. You start by encountering a problem in the real world, for example, how to create openings in an existing brick wall. Then you step back, abstract the problem from its immediate context, translate it into drawings and calculations, before finally returning to the physical world to test and refine the idea. This made me realise that academic education and physical making are not opposites, but rather complementary modes of learning, each strengthening the other and both being essential parts of a broader learning environment.

**Fig. 3** — 'The Bad Architect', from Philibert de l'Orme, *Le premier tome de l'architecture*, Paris, 1568, p. 281.

The woodcut shows an architect who is blind and has no hands, wandering in a barren and desolate landscape. The image is an allegorical warning to the architect against indifference to a tactile and engaged experience of the world. (Forty, 2020) →

I felt the strong need to practice what I was preaching, ensuring that my research and design processes were themselves hands-on. I found little value in just observing 'making' through an ethnographic lens. For me, it had to be experienced first-hand. During this phase, I was very satisfied with the opportunities I found to actively engage with materials and processes, and to visit inspiring places that strongly support making practices. However, I also recognised the importance



of documenting and communicating my findings in a way that would be accessible and educational for others. The result is a research report balancing between an academic paper and a personal journal, capturing the experiential and reflective aspects of the process.

Building on the experiences from the research phase, I was able to distil key design principles that informed the next steps of the project. Having been engaged in physical experimentation throughout my research, I hoped to develop a design process that reflected this same attitude by including 'making' in the design process and maintaining a direct relationship with the materials I was working with. However, I found it challenging to carry over the joy I had experienced during the research phase—talking to craftspeople, discovering materials through their knowledge—into the design process. Not knowing how to approach this, and feeling the urge to move the project forward, I noticed a tendency to return to the tools I was most familiar with: developing the project through sketches, plans, and sections, fully aware that I was working at a scale abstracted from materials. The development of sketch models could, to a certain extent, counter this tendency and helped me stay connected to the materiality of the project. In particular, working with found objects, without creating anything new, allowed me to let go of questions of scale and focus instead on principles rather than precise representation. These models became a way of thinking through making. However, looking back now, I believe there was more potential in exploring alternative design approaches that would have been more in line with the experimental attitude I had adopted during the research phase.

Overall, I hope my work contributes to the broader and highly relevant conversation about material sensitivity in architecture and how we shape the education of future architects accordingly—both in general and, more specifically, within the Faculty of Architecture at TU Delft. Of course, there are many different perspectives within this conversation, and I am fully aware that my belief in the value of making is not necessarily shared by all stakeholders involved in shaping our faculty's education. Nevertheless, having benefited from the freedom offered by the Explore Lab graduation studio, I hope that the insights I have gathered provide valuable arguments that can contribute to this dialogue and perhaps convince others of the 'values in the making' as a means to establish a more sensitive and situated approach to architecture in closer relationship with materials.