

## Article for the AJ

### Studio in the Woods

For the Chinese, wood is the fifth element; up there with Earth, Air, Fire and Water. For Studio in the Woods, now in its fourth year, the subject is both material and its provenance. In a three day weekend at Kemerton Court Farm dedicated groups of students and tutors brought together by the abundant energy of Piers Taylor, work in wood and in the woods. It is a celebration of trees and everything they can do for us. It starts with the observation of nature and place, graduating to hypothesis and concept. The students are given recently felled trees to work with and are responsible for the milling of their timber. Then they become builders.

A group led by Gianni Botsford and Kate Darby produced an ambitious reconstruction of the shape of a carefully observed woodland under-storey space, recreated within an area of fledgling trees to represent what might be. In intriguing juxtaposition from positive to negative, a grid of posts (which might be seen to represent the trees) actually represented defined co-ordinates of the space between them.

Toby Lewis led a team whose interventions ranged across the Kemerton landscape; a series of Gormleyesque abstractions of the human form that also happen to provide lounging seats. Lofted into trees or sinking into lakesides, they were positioned by the students to provide fresh perspectives of both view and other senses, but also to create a relationship from one to another.

Erect Architecture's Barbara Kaucky and Susanne Tutsch and their students, chose to create a woven canopy out of the dying under-storey branches of a semi mature woodland like a huge linear jackdaw's nest. It was suspended from the trees which yielded the material that formed it, in some ways the most modest of interventions, in other ways the most intriguing, it involved not felling and milling but gathering and weaving.

Piers Taylor and Meredith Bowles led a team which pushed the boundaries of simple timber engineering to produce a dramatic lakeside sculpture, a wind break and a seat that celebrated the lake and sky and the moon that it addressed. In addition it provided a surprising curved enormous hemispherical frame to the view out of the crisscrossed and cantilevered bracketry of straight pieces of timber.

Surprise however is what Studio in the Woods is all about. Surprise in the discovery and celebration of relationships in nature. Surprise at the beauty, colour and smell of new sawn wood. Surprise at the astounding creative output of a group of students over only a two day project.

Ted Cullinan and I tried to summarise this extraordinary output (helped by Shin Egashira who runs a similar workshop in Koshirakura, Japan). We were reminded again of the relevance of "making" in architectural education. In an era where students so often rely on secondary sourced material and digital delusions, it is refreshing to find the principles of observation / hypothesis / fabrication / installation / revelation built into a creative design process.