

Re-Centering Architecture's Humanistic Principles of Home

An Explorative Study into the Architect-Client Relationship across Private Individual Dwellings

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To my grandfather, *Francis*

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I take full responsibility for any shortcomings in this dissertation.

Abstract

“Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling.”

(Heidegger, 1971, p. 356)

Architects have the capacity to design dwellings that inform our inner world, and conversely, our inner world can shape the way we perceive and interact with these dwellings. Traditional architectural practices have often emphasised a clear distinction between the architect and the user, treating users as passive recipients rather than active participants in the design process. However, architecture does not exist in isolation; it is lived, interpreted, and continually reshaped by a deeper understanding of the occupant's needs, desires, behaviours, and beginnings.

This dissertation draws on the social complexities between architects and users in the design process, taking a phenomenological and post-analytical approach to the architect-client relationship, challenging the conventional notion of the architect as the sole author of the creative process and emphasising the central role of the user. Investigating the role of memory, identity and emotional experience in shaping our interaction with and understanding of architectural spaces allows the creation of environments that are attuned to the physiological, psychological, and emotional needs of their users. Emphasising that the concept of *home* does not respond to a singular, fixed definition but is a result of an ongoing process influenced by our emotional understanding and shaped through a process of co-creating, negotiation, and shared authorship. In doing so, the study reframes the *home* as a site of relational meaning, creating a link and value in combining architect knowledge and human knowledge.

Through semi-structured interviews with architects and clients, this study explores themes of; embodied narratives and absent pragmatism; how liminality and foresight frame *home* as both a present condition and a space of future potential; and how spatial thresholds reflect control and identity. It also examines the ethical tensions as architects balance professional guidance and personal autonomy. The research ultimately calls for a rethinking of the role of the client, repositioning architecture as a process that prioritises well-being, identity and participatory engagement, towards domestic architecture that prioritises both spatial intention and lived experience.

Keywords: *architect, client, dwelling, memory, home, identity, ethics*

Unless stated otherwise, all pen & ink illustrations, photographs and diagrams are of the author.

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Glossary

Architect / Perit:

As a preliminary note, it is important to clarify and understand the roles of the ‘Perit’ and the architect within our local context. As outlined in the Periti Act (1999), the term ‘Perit’ is a collective term which covers warranted architects, structural engineers and civil engineers responsible for the design and construction of our surrounding built environment (Periti Act, 1999, Chapter 390). In contrast, the solo term ‘architect’ refers more specifically to professionals within this broader group, but who are trained more towards architecture and the visual arts, focusing on spatial design that is attentive to lived experience, social dynamics and the active role of inhabitants in shaping their environments.

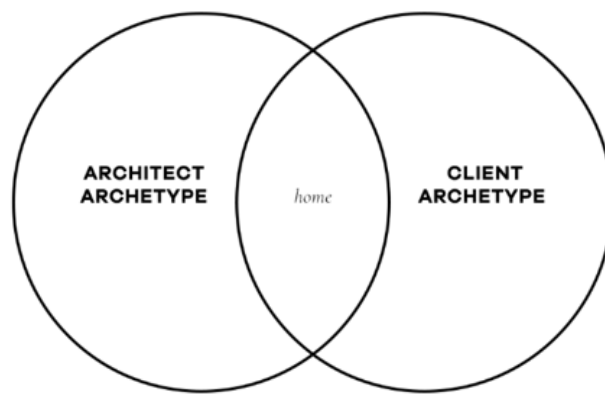


Figure 1: Architect-Client Dynamic

Client / Dweller, Inhabitant:

In contemporary architectural discourse, the terms ‘client’, ‘inhabitant’ or ‘dweller’ go beyond merely the end user or recipient of a project. These denote individuals or groups who actively engage with and influence/shape their living environments through their personal values, needs and lived experiences (Hertzberger, 2005; Pallasmaa, 2012). However, with the increasing urban density and the pursuit of the ‘minimum dwelling’, housing design has often become more standardised, prioritising efficiency-driven solutions, creating a detachment from its inhabitants, treating them more as passive occupants with predictable and manipulable needs (Lerup, 1977; Till, 2009). This approach diminishes the richness of spatial engagement, consequently diminishing the agency of those who live in these spaces from a ‘dweller’ to a ‘user’ (Smith, 2001). **Therefore, this study adopts the terms ‘client’, ‘dweller’ or ‘inhabitant’ in place of the more reductive term user, using them interchangeably to highlight the active, situated, and co-productive role people play in shaping domestic space.**

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“The locus of privacy and comfort, the dwelling is a form of second skin, providing you with a degree of ownership and spatial agency within your surroundings, and, in this scenario, fully defining where you can move freely. The boundary of what is yours and theirs has never seemed more pertinent, as the in, in-betweenness of these spaces becomes fraught.

Living in this real-estate world, the guiding principle has always been the maximisation of space, squeezing in as much as possible into the area available, many times disregarding quality completely. From post-war architecture and the *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, to the densification of cities and the building booms – the search for the “minimum dwelling” – the least space needed to exist and feel comfortable - has been underway and constantly altered. Due to the denser environments, increasing population, lack of space and the hiking up of prices, this so-called “existence minimum” has become smaller, outsourcing most of our domestic routines to the public sphere. With the public realm all but unusable, this minimum might not be entirely sufficient. **In turn, for many people, their *home* becomes the least desirable place in which to be barricaded.**” John Bajada, Text Catalogue, 2021

Increasing Population > Densification of dwelling > Lack of Space >
Change in Mentality > Lack of User Validity

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter describes the intent of the research, outlining and addressing local concerns which motivated the study, situating this within a broader architectural context and its intended direction moving forward.

1.1 Background and Motivation

“...until we can begin to understand how buildings affect individuals and communities emotionally, how they provide people with a sense of joy, identity, and place, there is no way to distinguish architecture from any every day act of construction.”

(Bloomer & Moore, 1977, p. 41)

The relationship between humans and our surrounding environment is symbiotic. Where humans are constantly shaping their surrounding spaces through their everyday rituals, rhythms, cultural practices and emotional attachment, the space that surrounds us is in turn shaping our human behaviour, identity and well-being (Tuan, 1977). This reciprocal relationship underpins the core argument of this dissertation; focused on an exploration of the reciprocal relationship between architects and their clients, rethinking our understanding of the role of inhabitants within the architectural process. While there is an extensive body of theory supporting the notion that inhabitants actively shape their *home* environments through routine behaviour and habits, the incorporation of person-centred approaches into contemporary design practices is not as commonly embraced as one would expect (Dovey, 1996; Sanoff, 2000), often prioritising efficiency and densification. This has in turn resulted in a reductive, mechanist approach which risks overlooking the nuanced experiences of inhabitants (Lefebvre, 1991; Augé, 1995). Furthermore, the notion of *home* transcends its material structure, responding to deeper emotional conditions of; attachment, belonging and familiarity (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001), which attribute personal meaning to their environments, thereby transforming the notion of a house as a mere form of construction, into a *home* of expression of identity. (Bloomer & Moore, 1977)

Today, in a time of rapid construction and urban development, developers and policymakers find themselves in a constantly evolving quest to find the “minimum dwelling”, a continual response to the denser living conditions, growing population and limited available space on our islands. Consequently, for many individuals, their *homes* have become the least desirable places to be confined (Text Catalogue, 2021).

Our approach to housing today is not shaped purely by architecture alone but represents an interdisciplinary process. The design and formation of housing typologies, how it is imagined, developed and then realised, has a profound impact on the lives of those who dwell within them. At a time when the concept of *home* is becoming increasingly fragile, this implies that the way in which these environments are experienced does not exist independently, but is profoundly shaped by the shifting sociocultural, political and economic landscape of our islands (Kroll, 2022).

During the post-war period, Malta’s built environment was heavily impacted as a result of the widespread, mass-produced, standardised housing which rose in a bid to tackle critical housing shortages. The urgent demand for cost-effective, efficient and mechanised construction resulted in extensive lengths of uniform housing that prioritised quantity over quality (Figure 2). While addressing the urgent needs of the time, this also created a lasting conflict which we see carried to date; on the one hand, there is the notion that a *home* has the ability to go beyond a house, where the *home* serves as a deeply personal expression of the identity of its inhabitants, looking into physical, social and cultural dimensions. However, on the other hand, mass production and homogeneity of our urban landscape have largely excluded this individual agency from the design process (Grosz, 2001; Kroll, 2022). This shift towards visual abstraction and functional rationalism made way for a disconnection of users and their environments, reducing architecture to a purely functional discipline. (Bloomer & Moore, 1977).

The role of the architect and their design process is ever more relevant in this context. This dissertation is driven by the notion that our *home* environments have the capacity to represent more than static structures, positioning the *home* as a critical example of architectural space that represents both pragmatic needs and emotional realities of its inhabitants and how these inhabitants can participate and experience in the process of their *homes* on a conscious and unconscious level.

“architecture inhabits us as much as we ourselves inhabit it”

(Grosz, 2001, p.11)

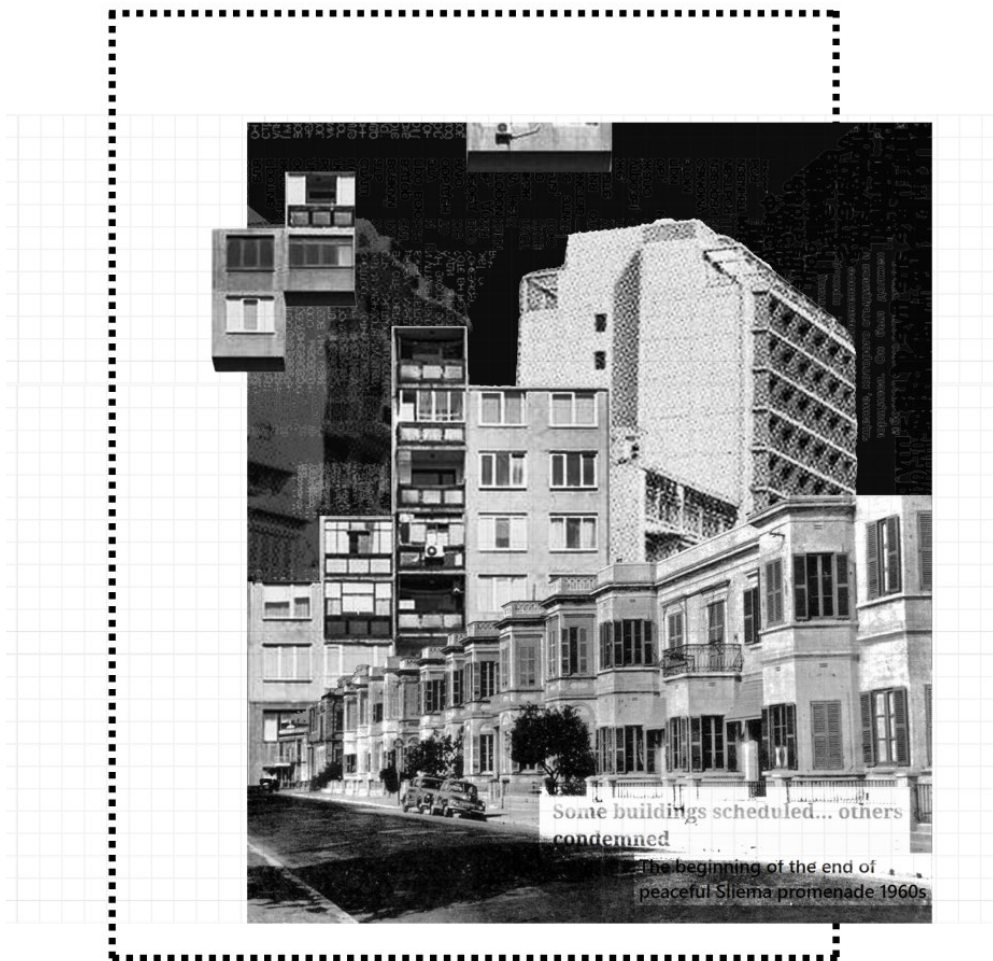


Figure 2: Personal Collage representing building boom of the Post-War Period

1.2 Goals and Objectives of Research

At its core, this dissertation seeks to highlight how architects can meaningfully engage clients in the design process, analysing and rethinking how one approaches the architect-client relationship to create spaces that function both physically and emotionally for their inhabitants. This process can be tied down to four main objectives within the study.

1. Analyse how architects navigate the challenges of balancing creative autonomy with client input, to design *homes* that are reflective of the lived realities and needs of their occupants.
2. Explore the reciprocal relationship between clients and their *homes*, investigating how everyday practices, experiences, and memories influence architectural design and foster a sense of belonging.
3. Identify and analyse the challenges within the architect-client design process.
4. Reposition architecture as a process that prioritises human well-being, identity, and engagement, ultimately transforming the role of architects from creators of static forms to facilitators of dynamic, user-centred spaces.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do architects and clients navigate the co-creation of domestic space through dialogue, negotiation, and shared authorship?
2. In what ways do a client's past experiences, routines, daily routines and emotional memories inform the spatial and symbolic meaning of home?

What challenges and opportunities emerge in the participatory design of homes, and how can architects support more inclusivity and emotionally attuned design processes?

1.4 Methodology & Research

As Bloomer and Moore (1977) suggest, architecture must account for how buildings are experienced bodily and emotionally, not merely functionally or visually. Thus, understanding the creation of *home* requires research methods sensitive to interpretation, subjectivity, and temporal depth. Given the deeply personal, interpretive and evolving nature of the research topic, a qualitative methodology, based on interpretivist and phenomenological principles, has been adopted (Creswell, 2022).

This dissertation combines reflective semi-structured interviews with architects and clients individually, as a primary data collection method, where an analysis of realised case study projects and personal accounts were used to develop a holistic understanding of the architect-client relationship at present, and how this is shaping the creative process and the lived experience of *home*. Therefore, the study will be analysed and interpreted based on both the tangible and intangible dimensions of how our *homes* are conceived, designed, and inhabited.

The diagram below illustrates the stages followed throughout the research process, which was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic through a qualitative methodological approach.

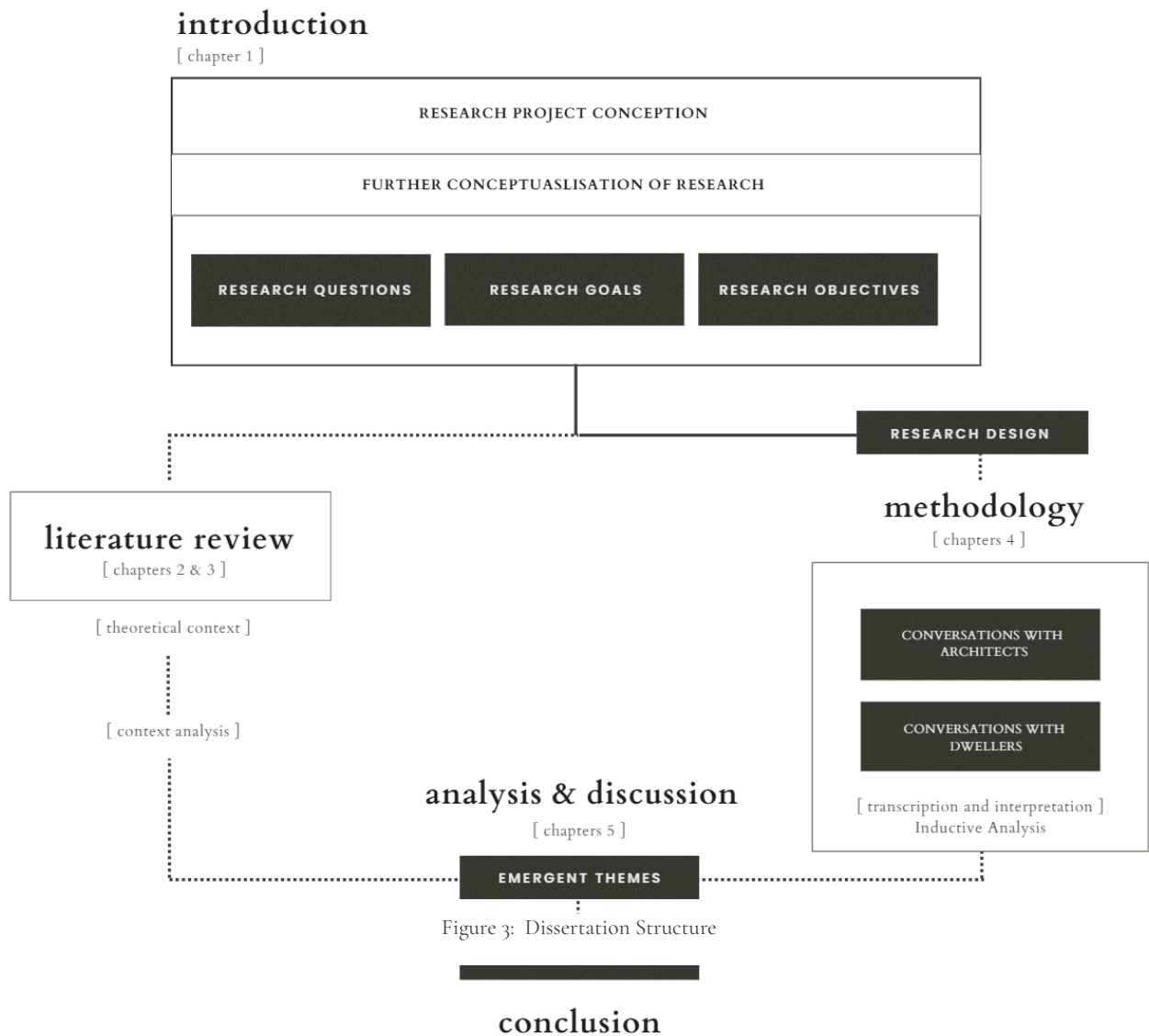


Figure 3: Dissertation Structure

1.5 Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to motivation for the research, discussion and formulation of goals and objectives.

Chapter 2: More than a Shelter

Provides a theoretical review of the first section of key literature which informs this dissertation. In this chapter, topics are targeted towards theory related to the concept of '*home*' in each of its past, present and future contexts of domesticity, touching up on its emotional, psychological and physiological dimensions and finally their implications on the course of research direction.

Chapter 3: Co-Creating Home

The second chapter of key literature examines literature related to the architect-client relationship. It examines how contemporary approaches to co-creation move beyond traditional, hierarchical models of architectural authorship, positioning the client as an active participant in the design process. It draws upon themes of participatory practices and ethical considerations of the design process, outlining the challenges and constraints faced by both parties and brings to the discussion the concept of architecture not as a static product, but a collaborative process formed on trust and translation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Provides a detailed outline of the method used to carry out the dissertation, detailing the method of data gathering and analysis. This involved a number of interviews carried out with architecture professionals who specialise in residential design, and clients in reference to the same case study project. These separate interviews were analysed in parallel, alongside concurrent further consultation or literature.

Chapter 5: Conversations with Architecture

This includes the theorising and discussion of results gathered, in which the interpretation of results is carried out in search for answers to the previously set out research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Concludes the research by drawing together the central findings from the research, noting any limitations, constraints and recommendations for further research possibilities.

Chapter 2: More than a Shelter

The following chapter provides an overview of the first section of literature informing this dissertation - the concept of '*home*' under its emotional, psychological and physiological dimensions. The chapter touches upon themes of dwelling as an existential experience shaped by lived experiences, memories, identity and embodied attachment to space, moving beyond the mere functionality of it. Informed by theories of phenomenology, cognitive psychology, domesticity and anthropology, the chapter will explore how rituals, rhythms and unconscious processes inform the meaning of our relationship with our surroundings.

2.1 What it Means to Dwell

The concept of a 'dwelling' has had a longstanding presence in architectural theory, but its meaning transcends far beyond its physical structure. In the past, the *home* has had a dual purpose, acting as both a shelter and a symbol of protection and daily habits, whilst also serving as a reflection of personal cultural values and social hierarchy. Phenomenological thinkers challenge the view of habitation acting as merely a product of function and spatial arrangement, by insisting that a dwelling is not merely a space we live *in*, but a space we live *into* (Heidegger, 1971). Our experience in a dwelling is what makes it so, as it ties together body, memory and meaning.

(Heidegger, 1971) argues that the act of dwelling is to be in a harmonious relationship with the world. This idea creates a shift in the role of the architect, no longer acting as simply a creator of objects and spaces, but rather the enabler of environments which possess emotional depth and meaning. In this view, to dwell is to develop a relationship with a space that evolves due to familiarity, repetition and presence. A dwelling is formed over time and cannot be achieved instantly or quickly - it is a continuously evolving negotiation between the inhabitant and the built environment around them.

Ultimately, by viewing the concept of a dwelling in this way, we no longer view architecture as creating an 'object' but rather towards architecture as creating 'lived experience', providing a foundation to distinguish between the idea of a house and a 'home'. The former is the physical structure in which habitation occurs; the latter can only emerge through the process of dwelling (Bachelard, 1994; Seamon, 1979).

By understanding dwelling in this way, this allows us to move beyond viewing architecture as 'object' and towards architecture as a lived experience, providing a critical foundation for distinguishing between the concepts of house and *home*. If a house is the physical framework within which habitation occurs, then *home* emerges through the act of dwelling (Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980)). The following chapter builds on these theoretical underpinnings to explore how personal identity, memory, routine, and emotional investment transform architectural space into something far more intimate - a *home*.

2.2 The instability of “home” as a concept

The distinction between a house and a *home* is more than semantic; it speaks to fundamentally different ways of understanding domestic space. On the one hand, a house refers to a physical structure: a measurable entity created from textiles, walls and various functions. On the other hand, the definition of a *home* is that of a symbolic space that is charged with emotions, varies with context and is gradually shaped by the experiences, personalities, and memories of its inhabitants (Mallett, 2004).

This variation thus reflects the complexity through which people construct their own sense of a *home*. It can be understood as purely an extension of the self, or a reflection of collective identity that may transcend boundaries of the physical dwelling altogether (Bachelard, 1994). Figure 4 illustrates this, as Bodgan Girbovan uses photography to illustrate the way in which a *home* is never experienced in the specific way twice, and its meaning is not dependent solely on architectural form, but on the lived and felt experiences that unfold within and around it. (Mallett, 2004) (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

This idea echoes what poet Jack Underwood (2015) writes about, where he implies that meaning is not static or predetermined, but constructed through interaction, imagination, and interpretation. Just as poetry opens space for uncertainty and multiplicity, so too does *home* become a site of layered meanings, a dynamic, co-authored environment where emotions, relationships, and memory intersect. A house may be designed with intention, but it only becomes “*home*” through the embodied practices of those who dwell in it. The house is not just a shelter but a “container of dreams,” a space that reflects and absorbs the interior life of its occupant (Bachelard, 1994)

While the more abstract dimension is central to the discourse, this dissertation purposefully narrows its focus towards private individual dwellings, curated, inhabited domestic spaces that act as physical manifestations of our sense of identity, belonging, memory, and emotional attachment.

2.3 House vs Home: From Object to Experience

Contemporary architectural opinion has increasingly acknowledged that a ‘house’ as purely a container represents only one half of the true domestic equation, forcing a turn toward phenomenology to serve as a means to explore how individuals emotionally and spiritually inhabit their personal space.





Figure 4: 10/1 2008 Bogdan Girbovan

When we think of home, we don't just imagine its physical attributes but also the feeling that being at home gives us. Nuar Alsadir's, *The Map of Four Kisses* (2019), refers to the simplicity and intimacy of a kiss - a small gesture can communicate emotions and meanings that words often fail to express, and which shapes the relationship between the parties involved (Alsadir, 2019). This is a striking parallel to how we experience architecture, implying that, just as a kiss can speak volumes without saying anything, so too can a space create meaning beyond its physical components.

Alsadir's (2019) insight reminds us that architecture isn't only about function or aesthetics, but rather the emotional atmosphere that the space creates. When one enters a room, it is not just the physical traits of the room and its design that leaves an effect on us but also how that space feels emotionally, reflecting a subconscious language of attraction where elements as subtle as the light filtering through a window, the texture of the floor underfoot or the warmth of the walls, all shape how we feel in that space (Alsadir, 2019). In this manner, architecture operates as a kind of emotional language, one that is felt rather than spoken.

"The piece of paper (a placemat from Jimmy's) had embedded within it a cross-section of time: the uncertainty of the moment, the touch of our bodies, the strip of 55th Street a block away from the house I grew up in, the foot, shaped stones in the front garden... the smell of the garbage truck that provided kiss 4's cover, the worry that I would be seen, wouldn't be seen, miss curfew, follow the map's road leading uphill into possibility, risk, the unknown."

(Alsadir, 2019, p. 38)

Alsadir's (2019) recollection in the above quote provides a poetic example as to how ordinary physical settings can store lived experience in a way that goes beyond their material form. In a similar manner to architecture, such objects and places operate as emotional containers, silent yet expressive, passive yet deeply active in shaping our inner lives.

This aligns with architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa's (2005) assertion that "we behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire body and being." Pallasmaa (2005) dives deeper into the conversation by looking at how the physicality of space intertwines with our sensory memory, grounding emotion in the body's reaction to material and atmosphere. Homes, then, are not merely designed; they are lived into meaning. It is where we can feel our most authentic selves. Similarly, Martin Heidegger's (1971) concept of "dwelling" expands the idea of home beyond just occupation, offering a philosophical look into the way that space becomes integral to our way of living in the world. For Heidegger (1971), dwelling is an existential

act of being, rooted in how we care for, attend to, and interact with space over time. When we think about home in these terms, it's clear that the emotional and sensory experience of space is just as important as its physical structure.

For architects, this means that the most meaningful *homes* aren't just those that serve the most aesthetically pleasing look or efficient function, but rather those that resonate with their occupants emotionally. In this way, a space speaks to us on an emotional level, often beyond our conscious awareness (Pallasmaa, 2005; Alsadir, 2019). It is important for architects to acknowledge this nonverbal communication and embrace it in their work. When designing a *home*, they must pay attention to the emotional cues a space gives off, how light shifts throughout the day, materiality, or how a room's layout invites certain types of activities and interactions (Heidegger, 1971; Bachelard 1994). These elements are the "silent language" of a *home*.

"The fact is a person is so far formed by his surroundings that his state of harmony depends entirely on his harmony with his surroundings."

(Alexander et al., 1977, p. 96)

2.4 The Unconscious Mind

Looking at the relationship between the self and the surrounding built environment, this can ultimately be traced back to its source: the human mind and how it perceives, processes and relates to space. Cognitive psychology has recognised that a significant portion of our daily decisions and behaviours operate beneath conscious awareness, driven not by rational deliberation but by automatic, intuitive processes shaped by our past experiences and environmental cues (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). This implies that these unconscious processes are critical to understanding how people engage with architecture, as they suggest that spatial experience is felt long before it is understood. Take light exposure as a general example, one will intuitively respond to the atmosphere of a room before consciously being able to identify why. The warmth and welcoming nature of natural daylight versus the glare of artificial lighting, these automatic reactions are rooted in our sensory perception and physiological rhythms (Craig, 2002). This process is referred to as interoception.

Similarly, is the process of *homeostasis* which applies the body's capacity to maintain balance in environments which possess positive or negative spatial properties (light, airflow, sound, etc.), creating a state of ease or discomfort (Craig, 2002).

Over time, these embodied encounters do not remain surface level, but this repeated, felt experience of space sediments into deeper emotional relationships with place. This is how dwellers come to form a sense of place attachment, belonging and identity within their *home* (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). As space becomes more familiar through daily rhythms and rituals, the *home* transforms into a meaningful environment. In this context, the *home* becomes a site of ongoing identity formation. Daniel Miller (2008) emphasises that identity is actively expressed through the objects and routines embedded in our domestic environments. He observes that "the way people order their possessions, the things they choose to display or hide, and the narratives they attach to these objects, all contribute to the construction and expression of their identities" (Miller, 2008, p. 13). The act of arranging, decorating, or caring for a space becomes a form of appropriation, making space one's own.

In this case, when we mention appropriation, it extends far beyond mere possessions, but it is the connection that is fostered between the inhabitant and the lived environment through personalisation of space, which creates a link in repetition to memory and emotional attachment to space.

Place attachment describes the deep emotional connections which people form with specific locations, particularly those tied to one's memories and identity (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). This attachment signifies more than just nostalgia, but it encompasses affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions, "Place is not only where we live, but also where we become" (Low and Altman, 1992, p. 7).

The concept of belonging describes an internal sense of feeling 'at home', a feeling of ease and identification with one's surroundings - physically and emotionally. It developed through a mutual process where we shape the space we inhabit, and they, in turn, shape us. For an architect, fostering this sense of belonging goes beyond listening to the client's practical and functional needs and listening closely for their lived experiences, symbolic attachments, and past associations, even though more difficult to articulate. This relational association is often what differentiates between homes that simply function for their inhabitants, and those that sustain relationships (Relph, 2008; Manzo, 2005).

2.5 Domesticity & Identity Formulation

Anthropological studies have long emphasised that domesticity encompasses more than just habitation; it involves the intricate relationship between social practices, rituals, and material culture that collectively shape both collective and self-identity (Cieraad, 2010). The *home* provides a space in which daily routines and interactions become rituals imbued with cultural significance that serve to reinforce social norms and individual roles within a community (Miller, 2001; Pink, 2004). As previously outlined, such social practices

set the stage for identity to be constructed, negotiated and performed, transforming a house into a cultural and psychosocial shared entity.

Anthropologists Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh Jones (1995) explore the deep connections between architecture, society, and symbolic meaning. They propose that the purpose of a *home* is not merely to act as a shelter, but to serve as a site where relationships can be moulded through both intentional and intuitive practices.

Social and cultural norms define the type of behaviours deemed acceptable within a given setting and time period. These shared conventions influence how individuals perceive, navigate, and interact with the spaces around them in every society (Hunter, 2021). As a consequence, the way in which people experience their dwelling stems from a combination of memories of their family *home* together with the anticipation for their future *homes*, suggesting that the “psychological link between memories of past *homes*, present *home* situations, and projections of future *homes* also changes with age” (Cieraad, 2010).

“What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”

(Tuan, 1977. p.6)

According to Pierre Bordieu (1990), in the concept of habitus, it is our past experiences and social conditions that shape our perceptions and actions, which in turn structure our engagement with space. Bourdieu (1990) elaborates that habitus “ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time” (p. 52-53). Habitus becomes spatialised; the placement of furniture, the dynamic layout of rooms, and the rhythms of household life all serve to reinforce cultural norms and social hierarchies (Bourdieu 1990).

Memory, as experienced through architecture, is often spatial: a room, a plant, the smell of a hallway - all these factors allow for the recollection of events, people, or emotions in the human mind. Built environments thus act as repositories of memory, reinforcing the continuity of identity through time (Forty, 2004). Domestic rituals reveal power dynamics within the *home*. Memory is often shaped through routine and repetition, daily practices that inscribe personal and collective histories into the space. Bedrooms could symbolise privacy or hierarchy; kitchens can function as communal spaces or daily labour. These meanings are rarely universal but oftentimes culturally produced and actively cemented into society through repetition and use (Mallett, 2004). Although with time, domestic frameworks have changed and

previous associations of particular areas of the home have shifted, these distinctions not only influenced how space is used but also how it is remembered and emotionally inhabited.

Beyond objects and rituals, domestic space is where relationships are lived. Miller (2001) furthers this line of inquiry by examining how material objects within the *home* become an unconscious act of self-narration. “People reveal themselves through the objects they choose and the way they arrange them,” (Miller, 2001) he writes, emphasising that *homes* are self-curated expressions of identity. This connects strongly with theories of appropriation, wherein people will personalise space not solely for functionality, but rather to claim emotional ownership of their home and cultural presence.

Bringing this chapter to a close, ultimately, the home is revealed to be more than a mere structure, but a dynamic, emotionally resonant space which is shaped by the memories, the identities and the lived experiences of its inhabitants. The theoretical formation and narratives presented illustrate the diverse and intricate ways in which dwellers come to know and inhabit these spaces.

Chapter 3: Co-Creating Home

The following chapter focuses on the evolving nature of the architect-client relationship, specifically in relation to the concept of '*home*'. Drawing on themes of participatory, relational approaches to design and how these shape the design process, it considers the architect's role from sole creator to both interpreter and co-author, recognising the client as a vital contributor of lived knowledge and emotional insight. It brings to discussion evolving, process-oriented approaches that reposition architecture, not as static, but as an ongoing practice, shaped by the collaboration between both parties. The chapter also touches upon ethical and practical dimensions of the relationship, expanding onto power dynamics and the value of trust and communication.

3.1 *Home as a Shared Construct*

The fluid and interpretive nature of home calls for a reassessment of how domestic spaces are designed - rather than as finished products imposed upon users, they should be viewed as evolving processes that are lived into meaning. If home is, as theorised by Mallett (2004) and Bachelard (1994), a space of layered memory, emotion, and attachment, then the creation of necessitates collaboration. It cannot be the result of a unilateral architectural vision, but rather a negotiated, iterative dialogue between the architect and the dweller. This is the foundation of co-creation; not merely as a participatory design method, but as a philosophical shift in how we think about authorship, agency, and meaning in architecture (Dovey, 2005).

Co-creation involves more than just providing and collecting feedback; it is a process of shared authorship, where the client is acknowledged not as a passive recipient of architectural form but as a contributor of opinions based on lived experience. The architect, in turn, assumes the role of facilitator or translator, relying on their professional expertise and in order to understand and satisfy the emotional, cultural, and psychological realities of the user. Sanders and Stappers (2008) describe this shift as a movement from “designing for” to “designing with,” a fundamental shift in power and creative control.

This relational stance is particularly significant in the context of home, where meanings are deeply subjective and formed over time (mallett, 2004; Bachelard, 1994). As such, co-creation reflects not simply just a procedural change, but an epistemological repositioning: acknowledging that an understanding of space cannot lie solely in technical drawings or professional discourse, but also in memory, routine, and embodied experience (Seamon, 1979; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The client’s everyday experience and daily knowledge together with past lived experience become an essential part of the design process, informing how spaces are imagined, adapted, and eventually inhabited (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Dovey, 2005)..

With this being said, one can turn back to the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), to understand the context of the architect-client relationship throughout the process of creating a home. Proper dialogue and understanding will not only reflect the client’s view but the potentially contrasting views and

predetermined expectations set by both parties. Architects, moulded by their professional training and creative culture, can approach projects with a design-driven mindset, technical terminology, and a sense of authority in design decisions. Clients, on the other hand, often come from completely different occupations and life backgrounds, with limited knowledge of architectural processes and different expectations about their role in relation to the completed project. When these two distinct habituses come together, clients often experience what Siva and London term 'habitus shock' - a concept similar to culture shock. This refers to the confusion and overwhelm clients may feel when navigating the unfamiliar areas of design and construction. Successful relationships are made possible when the architect and client share compatible habitues; meaning their values align, and they understand that mutual respect and clear communication are necessary for the project to succeed. Ultimately, the ability of both parties to bridge their habitus differences and work collaboratively determines the success of the project (Siva & London, 2011).

From a design perspective, this creates a critical tension in the architect-client relationship: the architect designs with aesthetics in mind, whereas the client approaches their future space experientially, defining their identity through the way in which a space is inhabited as opposed to the way it is visualised. A misalignment here risks reducing the client's identity and ideas to a passive afterthought, rather than an active principle of design (Bourdieu, 1990; Siva & London, 2011).

3.2 The Architect-Client Relationship – Through Trust & Translation

3.2.1 The Architect's Lens

Architects bring with them a wealth of professional knowledge, aesthetic intuition, and design precedent, adopting different roles throughout their career - that of the builder, the artist and the philosopher (Banks, 2013). That being said, the architect-client relationship in this day and age within domestic architecture requires the architect to play a role that goes beyond that of purely being a designer. Rather than imposing a predetermined vision, the architect must frequently act as a creative mediator, balancing technical expertise with emotional intuition. This mediation involves interpreting unspoken or abstract client desires and translating them into meaningful spatial solutions. Particularly in the context of the home, where spaces have the responsibility to reflect deeply personal experiences, this interpretive capacity becomes a central component for a successful design (Pallasmaa, 2005).

“Architecture is not about space but about time and memory,”

(Pallasma, 2005, p.52)

This divergence leads to a negotiation between precedent and perspective. While architects reference precedents drawn from education, history, or style, clients may draw from their own childhood homes, cultural rituals, or moments of comfort and familiarity throughout their lifetime. Such encounters provide a challenge for architects to reconcile their frameworks with the client’s subjective reality, shifting from authorship and autonomy to what Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) terms “relational aesthetics,” where meaning is constructed collaboratively, rather than being imposed. In this framework of relational authorship, the architect’s role becomes that of an empathetic co-author as opposed to being a solitary creator (Kester, 2004).

This approach also invites a form of creative negotiation, wherein both the architect and the client have a mutual understanding and thus adjust their expectations and visions without sacrificing their ideas. These negotiations are not just about resolving creative or cultural differences but often generate new insights into spatial and emotional strategies.

3.2.2 Mutual Dynamics

The relationship between an architect and client within the design process is critical to any project’s success. However, as time passes, contemporary architectural practice is increasingly recognising the complexity of such, with traditional practices often emphasising a clear distinction between the architect and the user, treating users as passive recipients rather than active participants in the design process (Pederson, 2020).

At its best, the architect-client relationship is symbiotic, meaning that both parties derive benefit from the association - the architect gains exposure for their work and creative satisfaction, while the client receives a space that reflects their identity and supports the life they want to build (Pederson, 2020).

Building on this foundation of reciprocity, it becomes essential to consider the psychological factors that underpin the client experience. By examining clients' cognitive, emotional and sensory habits and needs, architects can better tailor their designs to support wellbeing, satisfaction, and personal expression (Gifford, 2007). Understanding how clients emotionally engage with their environments - what makes a space feel safe, inspired or comfortable - enhances the collaborative process and results in better, more user-centric architectural outcomes that provide more meaning to the user (Kaya & Weber, 2003).

3.3 The Design Process

This architectural process is inherently social as it requires a basis of trust, dialogue and mutual respect. The architect must therefore act as an interpreter and communicator, as opposed to just being a designer of space. Considering this, the architect-client relationship cannot solely rely on a linear transmission of knowledge between both parties but must present itself as a two-way interaction in which meaning, memory and aspiration are discussed and negotiated through space. This again emphasises the integral role of the client in the design process, which in the case of private dwellings, also become the users of the space (Pedersen, 2020).

3.3.1 Participatory Practices & Ethical Considerations

By including mutual learning between designers and users (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012) or even among a collective of involved actors (Østergaard, Simonsen, & Karasti, 2017), researchers from the Scandinavian participatory design tradition actively invite users and other actors to contribute to the design process. According to Sanders (2008, p. 13) participatory design researchers view a variety of users "as the true experts in domains of experience such as living, learning, working, etc, and build upon collaboration. The fundamental principles of this specific design tradition are democracy and change; participative design encourages the notion that individuals who will utilise the solutions should be involved in their creation as co-designers (Manzini, 2015).

Narrowing down the brief will allow both the architect and the client to find a common ground where they can understand each other and work together as a team. Budget limitations are a key factor that affects the idea and the deliverability of the whole project, different types of requirements the client has and how the architect can fulfil those requirements, then comes the ideas and giving those ideas a suitable physical

form is the work of an architect (Pederson, 2020). Then presenting those ideas and how they make the client feel, and understanding the feeling behind that response also makes the architect get more conversant with the client's psychology. This pattern helps the architect maintain feasibility, the deliverables get more flexible, issues such as temper, time constraints, and schedule matching can be overcome by following a proper procedure of psychoanalysing the client and building a work relationship. (Thareja & Nayak, 2025)

Psychology plays an important role in the architect-client relationship, providing insights into human emotions, behaviour and thought processes which underpin the overall design journey. Having an understanding of psychology helps architects better cater to what their clients want, enable teamwork, and solve problems effectively (Thareja, Nayak, 2025). Participatory models underpin the value of users as experts in their own lives and stories. They recognise that real design takes shape from embedded emotional narratives, as opposed to just aesthetics or planning (Sanders, 2008). Co-design embraces users as collaborators rather than dismissing them, ensuring that lived experience shapes design outcomes. However, miscommunication, a shift in views and expectations, or cultural misunderstandings can derail even the best of projects (El, Gammal & Omar, 2012). Trust and transparency are essential to navigating these hurdles and moving forward.

3.3.2 Mutual Interest

At the heart of the architect-client relationship lies a principle of reciprocity. As Till (2009) argues, architectural practice should start to shift away from the model of unilateral authorship toward one of spatial agency, where clients are empowered participants in shaping their environment. This reflects a broader truth: sustainable and meaningful collaboration requires a mutual benefit for both parties rather than self-interest. As Blau (1984) notes, professional-client relationships work best when both parties contribute and derive value, fostering a shared goal and establishing trust on both sides.

Several participants in this study described the frustration experienced when working with architects who imposed their own ideas without fully listening to their (client's) needs - reflecting what could be described as a "win/lose" dynamic. In contrast, the most rewarding experiences arose when architects encouraged an open dialogue, considering the client's lived experience as a form of expertise (Luck, 2012). Such reciprocity transforms the relationship from transactional to collaborative, allowing the design to evolve through ongoing conversation (Schön, 1983).

In this co-creative process, architects offer knowledge in the form of materials, spatial awareness and construction practices, while clients explain their intimate understanding of their lifestyle, emotions, and aspirations (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). When both roles are valued, the result is a home that reflects both aesthetic excellence and prowess but also deep personal meaning (Dovey, 2010). Conversely, when architects prioritise their own vision, or when clients feel marginalised, the process risks breakdown - echoing the broader principle that any “unbalanced” collaboration frequently results in dissatisfaction or failure (Sennett, 2012).

Everything considered, designing a home is a relational act that depends on empathy, cooperation and mutual ideas and respect for the parties involved - like all human exchanges necessitate (Till, 2009; Luck, 2012). This dynamic forms the ethical foundation for a more reflective and responsive architectural practice.

3.4 Architecture as an Ongoing Process

This fluid and interpretive quality of home naturally lends itself to discussions on the effect of co-creation in the design process. If home is not a fixed entity but an ever-evolving construct shaped through the lived experience of its users, then the act of designing a home is not a one-sided affair. It emerges through a process of dialogue, negotiation, and shared authorship between architect and client. The user (or dweller), whose emotional and sensory interactions within the space will continue and persist long after construction is complete, plays an integral role in generating meaning and value within the architectural environment. This aligns with contemporary participatory design methods, which challenge the notion of the architect as sole author, instead proposing that meaningful space is co-produced through a sustained interaction between the designer and the user (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Kiyota, 2014).

Co-creation, in this context, recognises the uncertainty embedded within space itself rather than just being a method of inclusion. Just as a poem is open to interpretation by the reader, a home evolves in tandem with its inhabitants (Underwood, 2015). The design process, therefore, derives benefit from encouraging ambiguity, creating room for the client’s lived experience, memories, and future aspirations to shape the final outcome. As such, co-creation is not simply a participatory technique, but an epistemological stance: one that acknowledges that meaning in architecture, like poetry, is relational and never fully complete (Till, 2009). It resists the notion of architecture as a timeless object and instead envisions it as an ongoing negotiation between materiality and meaning (Underwood, 2015; Till, 2009), meaning that architecture must be regarded as a contingent and negotiated process rather than a fixed outcome.

Till's (2009) theory of spatial agency places emphasis on the ability of all participants - including users - to shape their built environment through their lived experiences. This perspective aligns closely with the co-creative process, where users are not simply consulted but are empowered to act as co-authors of a space. Rather than being treated as recipients of professional expertise, they become central agents in defining the spatial, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of their home (Underwood, 2015).

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The following chapter provides a detailed account of the theoretical foundation for this methodology, the reasoning behind the selection of IPA as an analysis method, the sampling strategy, design structure and process of interviews, and the analytical procedures which will be used for data interpretation. Collectively, these components construct a methodology aimed not only to view architecture as a tangible product but to understand and explore it as an ongoing, relational and emotionally significant process. Additionally, this chapter presents a descriptive analysis of the interview setting and brief to each case study.

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter details the research methodology that guides the development of this dissertation's central framework, understanding the emotionally embedded relationship between individuals and the spaces they inhabit, and how these relationships can be expanded upon within the context of residential design. Building on the theory introduced in chapters two and three, this research model will set out to answer the research questions set out at the start of the study, developing and refining our understanding of the architect-client relationship.

The research process follows an exercise of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative, inductive approach that prioritises the meaning individuals attribute to their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Further below is outlined a detailed explanation on the reason for choosing such a method, the aim of the study, the research design, the process of data collection, and the analysis of such.

4.2 Aim of the Study

The central aim of this research is to explore the relational dynamics between architects and clients in the co-creation of domestic architecture - outlining the integral roles both parties play in shaping and defining each the process, the result, and the lived experience within the concept of '*home*'.

Grounded in a phenomenological and interpretive framework, the research holds dwellers at the centre of discussion, framing them as subjects rather than static objects, and placing value on memory, emotion and experiential knowledge. In viewing dwellers as active agents of the architectural process, the design process becomes an ongoing, relational process shaped by this dynamic exchange between architect and client. This

contributes to a broader rethinking of architectural authorship, shifting the narrative, and repositioning architecture as a responsive, participatory, and emotionally informed approach to residential design.

This research presents as a qualitative and inductive research approach, with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) serving as the core framework. IPA was chosen to be appropriate for such as it prioritises individual perspectives, interpretation and meaning-making, as opposed to researcher-led assumptions. This allowed for in-depth exploration and analysis into how participants shape, are shaped by, and make sense of their daily lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

4.3 The Research Design

Given the study's central concern with how *homes* are emotionally and psychologically constructed, not just physically designed, this study employs a phenomenological (IPA), inductive framework through which to capture and interpret these nuanced and personal reflections. The aim is not to generalise broadly, but rather to offer rich, case-specific insight into how different people make sense of the co, co-creative architectural process and the spaces that emerge from it.

As opposed to a deductive approach, which employs a predefined hypothesis, an inductive research strategy presents an open-ended inquiry, a bottom-up approach, where research questions are refined through iterative immersion into participant narratives, allowing for themes to naturally develop, rather than imposing pre, pre-determined themes (Creswell, 2022). The flexible nature of the structure itself reflects the architectural process, where meaning unfolds in response to dialogue (Thomas, 2003). To support this approach, a qualitative, interview-based strategy has been employed. The primary data collection method shall consist of semi-structured interviews based on existing case studies of pre-defined parameters, which will be analysed alongside further theory. These interviews are designed to gather two perspectives on the same experience - that of the architect and the client - allowing for a more layered, complementary understanding of the design process. As such, this approach can be described as a dual narrative inquiry, where both the professional and the personal sides of the co, co-creation process are given equal weight.

The IPA research method is grounded on three key focuses. Firstly, is idiography, which puts forward attention to the particular, which is reflected in the study through the careful sampling of specific individuals (in this case, architects who specialise in residential design) for an in-depth analysis of unique context (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). Secondly is phenomenology. Phenomenology puts forward a philosophical approach to the study of our lived experience to better examine and understand that of the individual (Husserl, 1967). Lastly is hermeneutics. Heavily influenced by the work of Heidegger,

hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, which aims to uncover, understand and interpret underlying meanings throughout data collected and existing literature. (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009).

Ethical approval for the aforementioned was granted through the University Research and Ethics Committee for Architecture (URECA) under application number BEN-2024-00114.

4.4 The Research Process

4.4.1 Role of the Researcher

The interpretive nature of the research positions the researcher in both an active and reflexive role within the process, constructing meaning and value from human knowledge and sentiment. In taking on this role, it is important to acknowledge how perspective may be shaped by one's personal and social background and lived experiences. In this case, the researcher is an architecture student studying at a postgraduate level with limited working experience, approaching the subject with a receptive mindset, allowing the participant's voice to take precedence and therefore reducing the bias towards the subject. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that an element of bias is integral to the nature of the study and the personal and social background of the researcher. A conscious effort was made to maximise objectivity; however, the study recognises that personal objectives intrinsically influence the analysis and understanding of data. The role of the researcher in this qualitative enquiry consisted of the collection of data, interpretation and synthesis of emergent themes.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, first-person language is employed throughout the interpretation of data to reflect the active role of the researcher in interpreting participants' experiences. This conscious choice to use the first-person narrative allows for transparency and depth of analysis, gaining insight into the researcher's perspective (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009).

4.4.2 The Participants

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as a primary method of research to analyse the experience of a broad spectrum of professionals; "in-depth interviews are the best way of facilitating the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon" (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009, p. 56). Taking two perspectives from the same experience - two sides to the same story - the interviews are designed towards the architect and the client, in a way to guide but not dictate the conversation, allowing it to flow freely and giving participants the chance to present their ideas and observations at length. The interview

structure (Appendix A) was used as a guide to aid in the focus of the participants' thinking and was adapted to each individual in order to encourage them to speak comfortably through their knowledge from their personal background. Throughout the interviews, each question could be adapted according to the flow of the conversation to guide the discussion towards an understanding of the true essence. Questions were scripted but allowed flexibility by being paired with several prompts, which would encourage tangents of the discussion to be taken in a controlled manner, creating the opportunity for dialogue and exploration.

The aim of doing a two-part interview process was to take a post-analytical stance on the architect-client relationship. Architects were sampled by the researcher, looking specifically for architects who specialise in residential design. Before moving forward, a form of predefined project parameters are set (as outlined below), which will help to maintain consistency and comparability across the research, as well as manage potential biases. This was done to reduce the likelihood that any subjective influences will shape the selection of case studies, in this case, favouritism or skewed selection by the architects acting as gatekeepers. According to these parameters, the architects will then be able to act as a gatekeeper, connecting the researcher with clients and projects who specifically have resided in a dwelling of approximately up to 250-300 square metres for 1-6 years minimum.

As indicated above, the selection of case studies in the research was guided by three key parameters: the type of dwelling (in line with the research's focus on private individual dwellings), the length of occupancy and the building's footprint. Apartments and short-let investments were deliberately omitted from the study as more often than not, they limit the amount of client engagement within the design process, particularly when acquired on-plan or as part of larger scale residential developments, where client involvement is picked up at a later stage of the project, thereby reducing the potential for direct and meaningful collaboration between the architect and the dweller, which is central to the focus of the study. Therefore, the study concentrates on private individual dwellings, either newly built or adaptive reuse, where the client was an active participant from the project's outset. Furthermore, for the research to adopt a post-analytical lens, a minimum occupancy period of 1-6 years was set to enable a more reflective understanding of the architect-client relationship, not just during the design process, but a deeper understanding of how the *home* has been lived in, adapted and experienced over time. This would intentionally allow a buffer period for inhabitants to identify any intended spatial adjustments, relational dynamics and routines and fundamentally, a first-hand perspective of the success, or shortcomings, of the architectural interventions from the inhabitants' point of view.

4.4.3 The Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was used, developed to allow flexibility while still directing conversation around key themes such as belonging, memory, communication, and architect/client input. Open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect freely and offer narratives rather than brief responses. The same structure was adapted slightly for architects and clients to reflect their distinct roles.

4.4.4 Data Collection

Architect participants were invited to participate in the study through a formal information letter (Appendix B). Upon agreement of participation, architect participants would assume the role of gatekeepers within the process by facilitating contact between myself and their respective clients, where I would share a similar information letter (Appendix B) to confirm their interest in participating in the study. Once both parties had confirmed their willingness to participate, they were each presented with a consent form to be signed (Appendix B). With all participants, it was made explicitly clear that their participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw their participation at any stage of the process or refrain from answering a question.

Following the receipt of all necessary consent, semi-structured interviews were carried out, each ranging for a duration of approximately 60 minutes to 90 minutes each, depending on the depth of discussion reached. With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded to capture precise language and voice intonations, which add to the analysis, thereby minimising any risk of data loss, and then transcribed for full transparency.

4.4.5 Results Analysis

The initial stages of the qualitative data analysis consisted of the translation of phenomenological abstract data from observations, conversations and lived experiences into textual data (Lincoln & Guba, 2010). This process was done through the transcription of interview data. Following IPA guidelines, data analysis was done by identifying recurrent themes which emerged from each transcript (Smith & Pietkiewicz, 2014). As previously mentioned, the method presents a double hermeneutic relationship where the researcher layers the data in a way that it becomes a reflection of the process; the researcher interprets the participants' reflections, which inherently is a reflection of their own personal experiences and frame of reference (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, the results of this analysis allow the researcher to characterise and articulate the intrinsic nature of these experiences. This was achieved through the identification of

phrases and latent meanings within the transcript, which were then translated and grouped into themes and sub-themes for discussion (Smith & Pietkiewicz, 2014).

Parallel to the procedure of conducting interviews, ongoing reading into relevant theory, which deepens thought and discussion of such themes, is advised, allowing the researcher to examine and ground the themes in relation to existing literature. The thematic analysis is to be shared in a narrative form, making use of transcript excerpts to situate the discussion within context (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Throughout the research process, all thematic analysis was carried out manually, in accordance with the interpretive principles of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), rather than through the use of qualitative analysis software or digital coding tools. This manual approach allowed for a more embodied, reflective and emotionally attuned engagement with the data, making it suitable given the emotional, psychological and phenomenological nature of the themes under investigation (Smith & Pietkiewicz, 2014).

Following the transcription of each interview, each architect and client interview transcript was subjected to multiple close readings and revisited and analysed in detail, independently annotating and allowing meaning to unfold progressively through line-by-line interpretation - emotionally resonant phrases, narrative cues and/or metaphors. These were then grouped into preliminary subthemes. It is important to note that throughout the analysis, particular attention was given not only to the content of what was said, but also to the manner of expression as a means of valuable interpretative cues - the intonation, hesitations, emphases or repetitive imagery (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Each transcript was initially treated on its own terms, before any cross-case abstraction, allowing for a more idiographic and grounded understanding of one's lived experience, and making way for individual meaning-making, before linking any shared themes across cases (Smith et al., 2009). Following this, the process of coding of themes itself was an iterative and reflective process where themes were continuously refined, expanded or collapsed based on the evolving data. At each stage, care was taken to ensure that interpretations were not shaped by prior assumptions but were deeply rooted in phenomenological data of participant narratives.

The recursive and responsive nature of the coding process was central to maintaining methodological rigour, allowing the analysis to remain open to new data without closing a pattern prematurely and reducing interpretative bias. This created a basis of trustworthiness and transparency within the data and subsequent themes presented. Subthemes were then continuously cross-checked and tested across all

transcripts, confirming patterns grounded in participants' accounts rather than the researcher's projections onto the study.

A key strength of this methodological process was the dual-perspective structure. This process allowed the researcher to gather parallels from the interviews with both the client and the architect for each case study and respective design process, allowing for triangulation of results and creating a multi-layered insight into how spatial experience can be interpreted, inhabited and emotionally constructed through two different yet interconnected lenses (Yardley, 2000; Smith, 2011). Altogether, this process ensured that the coding process remained not only interpretative but systematic, transparent and faithful to the experiential complexity embedded in each inhabitant's lived narrative.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Faculty for the Built Environment and the University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were informed that their participation would be on a fully voluntary basis and that the interviews would be audio recorded for research and record purposes. This information and more details on the objectives and methodology of the research were detailed in the Information & Consent forms (Appendix B).

In approaching participants, it was made explicitly clear that their participation was voluntary, and it was possible to withdraw their participation at any point or refrain from answering a question. In the case of clients, it was noticed that by assuring anonymity, clients were more comfortable contributing more directly and honestly about their lived experience. In addition to this, gaining access to the private dwellings of client participants' interiors was entirely voluntary and ensured that no photo or video material would be taken or published in the study - bar the general plans of the properties, which were stated in consent forms and produced in a unique style for anonymity of the architecture studio. Written consent for all the above was obtained from all participants.

4.6 Reliability and Validity

While this type of qualitative research does not seek to produce results that apply to everyone, efforts were made to ensure the study is trustworthy. Credibility was supported by spending enough time with the data, allowing participants to review their transcripts where requested, and keeping reflective notes on the

interview sessions. The findings can be applied to similar contexts because the participants' experiences were described in detail.

The credibility of this qualitative study relies on the trustworthiness, integrity, and authenticity of its participants (Given, 2008). As the findings are derived through inference and inductive reasoning, they are not definitive, and counterexamples may challenge the resulting theories (Given, 2008). However, the credibility of the study's key findings is reinforced through the alignment with the established themes extracted from existing literature.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the possibility of potential researcher and sampling biases. These were proactively addressed through the implementation of predefined project parameters, which were consistent from the outset. These parameters (detailed in Section 4.4.2 The Participants), served to maintain consistency and comparability across the selected case studies and ensuring the possibility that any arbitrary or subjective influences will shape the sampling process, managing the risk of any selection bias associated with the involvement and role of architects as gatekeepers - where favouritism, personal bias, or unrepresentative case selection could compromise the reliability of the findings. By establishing clear guidelines and inclusion parameters, the research was able to maintain a degree of control over participant selection while upholding the naturalistic context and authenticity of the phenomenological approach adopted.

4.7 Case/s Overview

Emotional & Spatial Conditions

For *Architects*, interviews were typically conducted in their respective architecture studios, with one exception being [Architect 06]. These studio environments - often surrounded by intricate models and conceptual drawings - offered a glimpse into the design process and practice of these architects, and ultimately, the environments which support their creative processes. Here, interviews tended to hold a more professional tone, offering practical insight into the design concept and collaboration process with the client, their approach and interpretation of the brief, any professional challenges from their perspective and ultimately how they feel that the *home* will contribute to the client's long-term satisfaction and emotional connection.

For *Clients*, on a general note, all interviews were held at the clients' private residences. The following is a brief introduction to the brief of each case study and a narrative account of the interview setting - setting the context for analysis to follow.

(A full breakdown of case study specifications can be found in figure 10)

Case Study of: TJ & Jenny // Architect of

“A space that I would not need to leave for days on end if necessary.”

TJ [Client of] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

The following home was designed for a young couple and two cats. Both inhabitants were present for the interview, which offered a unique and valuable dual perspective to the discussion, where one client had a strong repository of architectural knowledge, another was originally less attuned to this process but used it as a means of learning how to approach and understand their home. Although I had not known the clients beforehand, they were very open and inviting to communicate their honest and personal reflections about the project and their experience throughout the creative process and lived experience alongside [Architect of]. The home itself is designed in a non-traditional spatial configuration, swapping main spaces to accommodate the site and their lifestyle, with a particular focus on natural light ingress, internal sightlines and visual continuity. The interview was held in the informal kitchen/living space with music in its background, setting the space for a calm yet reflective and honest conversation, touching on themes of memory, negotiating roles in the architect-client relationship and architecture as an evolving process.

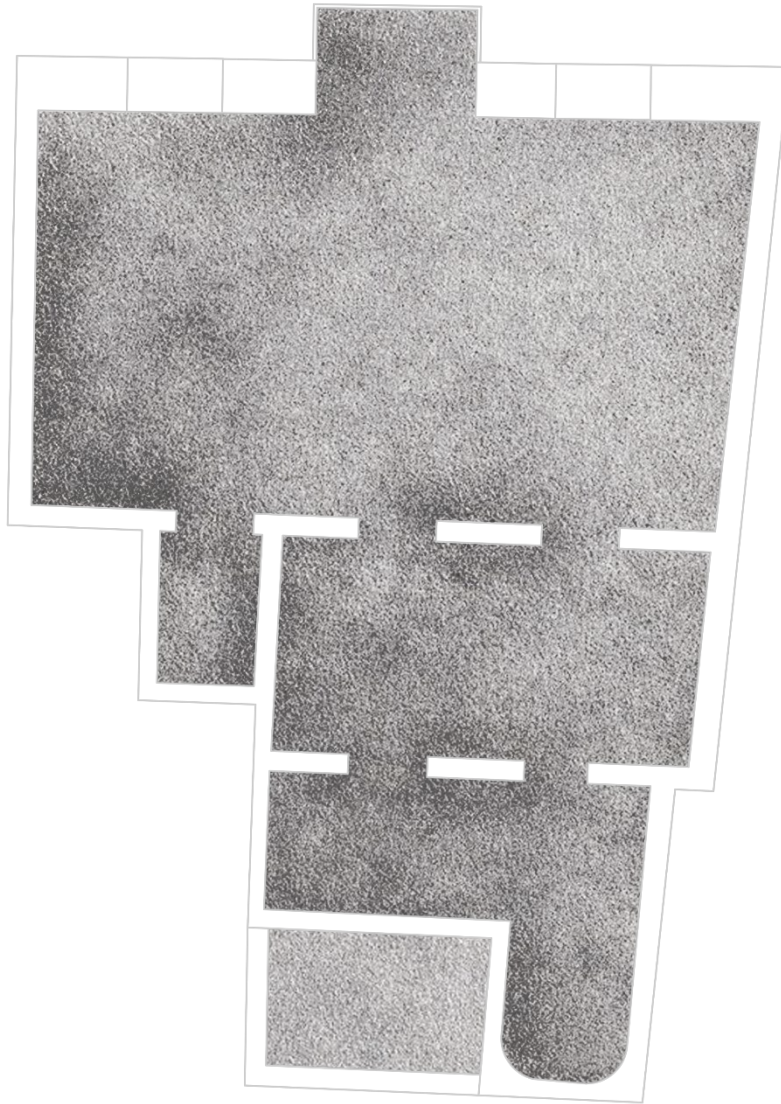


Figure 5: Case Study 01 - General Plan Layout

Case Study 02: Colin & Rose // Architect 02

The home of Colin and Rose is an adaptive reuse of a traditional limestone terraced house, enhanced by a large intricately designed garden. Originally direct neighbours to this home, Colin and Rose, a retired couple, approached this project with the intention for it to be their 'forever home'. Although only Colin was present for the interview, both clients took on different roles throughout the design process. Coming from a place of strong appreciation for architectural understanding and clear communication with our spaces, Colin was involved in the design and planning of the space, however due to mobility limitations, Rose would take the lead when it came to on-site coordination. Visible from any point within the home, the garden is one of the most exciting aspects of this project, and so the brief was clear; the clients wished to carry this feeling throughout the interior of the home - an element of both practical and sentimental value. Upon entering the home this feeling is immediately evident, with a direct line of sight to the back garden. The interview was held in the formal sitting room of the room, sunlit through the large apertures and a carefully created space which incorporated artifacts that reflect and honoured their family. The interview was warm and insightful touching upon central themes of home.

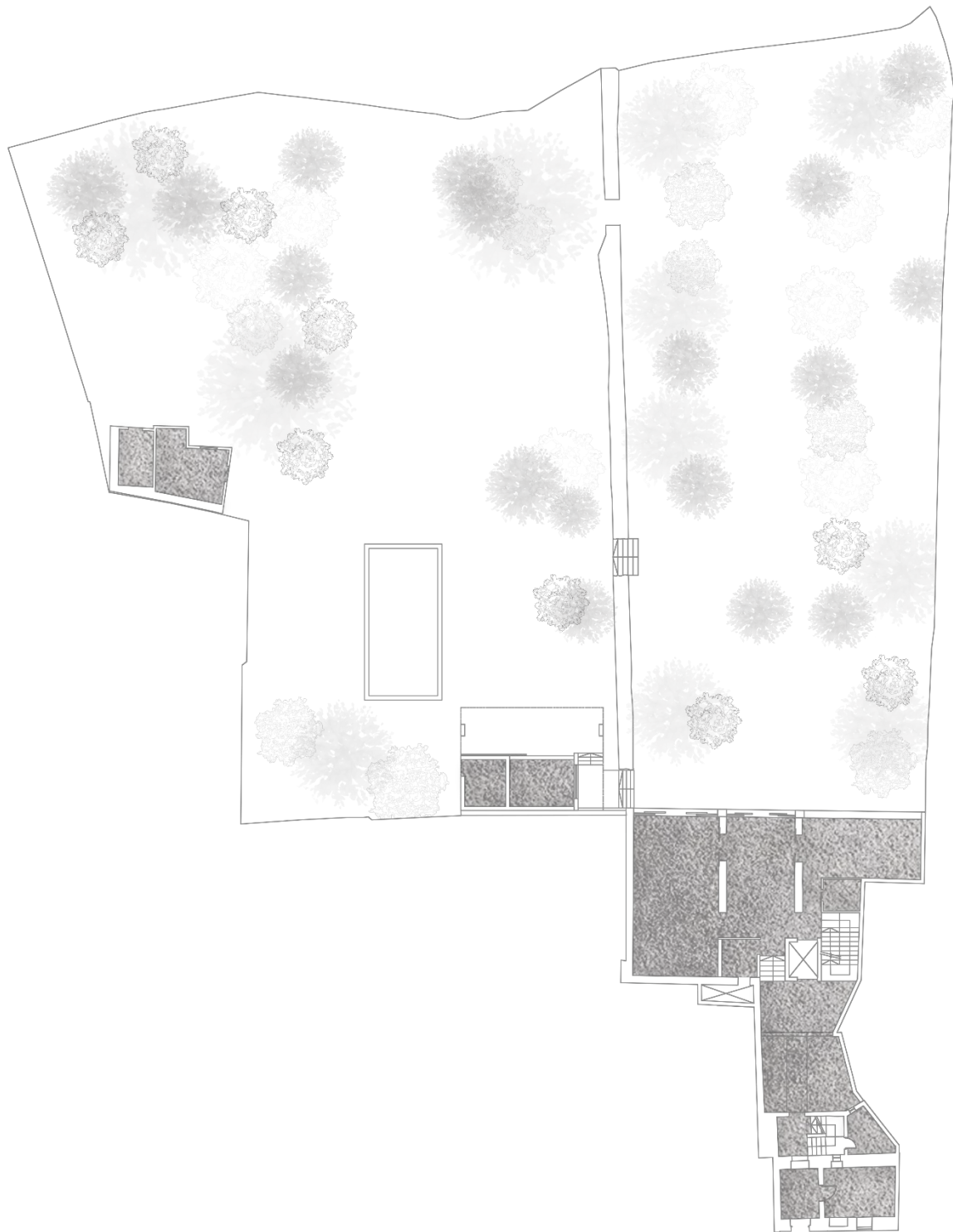


Figure 6: Case Study 02 - General Plan Layout

Case Study 03: Louis // Architect 03

The interview with Louis was held in the informal kitchen/dining room of his modern new build home. The dwelling is a two-story house with a flatlet beneath, which is sublet, designed to accommodate a young family with two young children. The home, although it doesn't grandly announce itself, its success lies in how it is used by its inhabitants. As a researcher, I was very appreciative of the honest and true-to-talk nature with which the client approached the interview with - a slightly disorganised home which shows echoes of a lived-in space. Louis was upfront in sharing that from the outset of the project, he had faced challenges with the design process. But nonetheless, despite these challenges, the space offered valuable insight into the project. The project was described by the client to be an ongoing process, this was due to the problematic nature of the dwelling, but also a hesitance from his end in completing certain features, as simple as the sofa, due to the apprehension of children playing around and affecting the space.

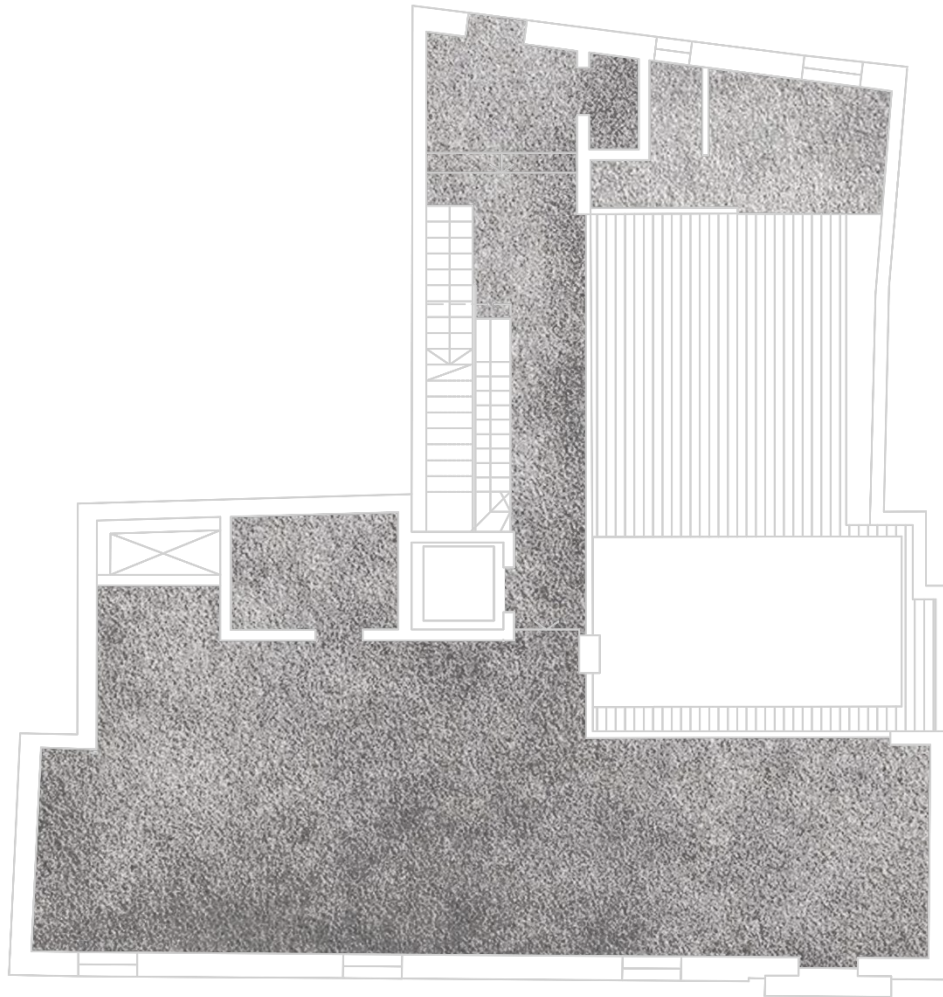


Figure 7: Case Study 03 - General Plan Layout

Case Study 04: Stacy // Architect 04

The home of Stacy and her family presents a two-storey home, originally purchased as a set of ruins on an ODZ land and reconstructed to bring new meaning to the space. This design was for a family of five with three teenagers, and the main brief of the client was to incorporate the surrounding garden, which held so much embodied history and value, into the home - a concept which was surely met. As you enter the home, one's attention is immediately drawn to the exterior garden. The interview was conducted in the main living space of the home, and I felt the most interesting note about this was the orientation. Whereas any living room would generally be inward-facing, this living space was completely open, with floor-to-ceiling glass fixtures, and the garden acting as a live canvas. Stacy approached the project with an intent not merely to convey her wishes but with a conscious intent to engage as an active participant within the design process.

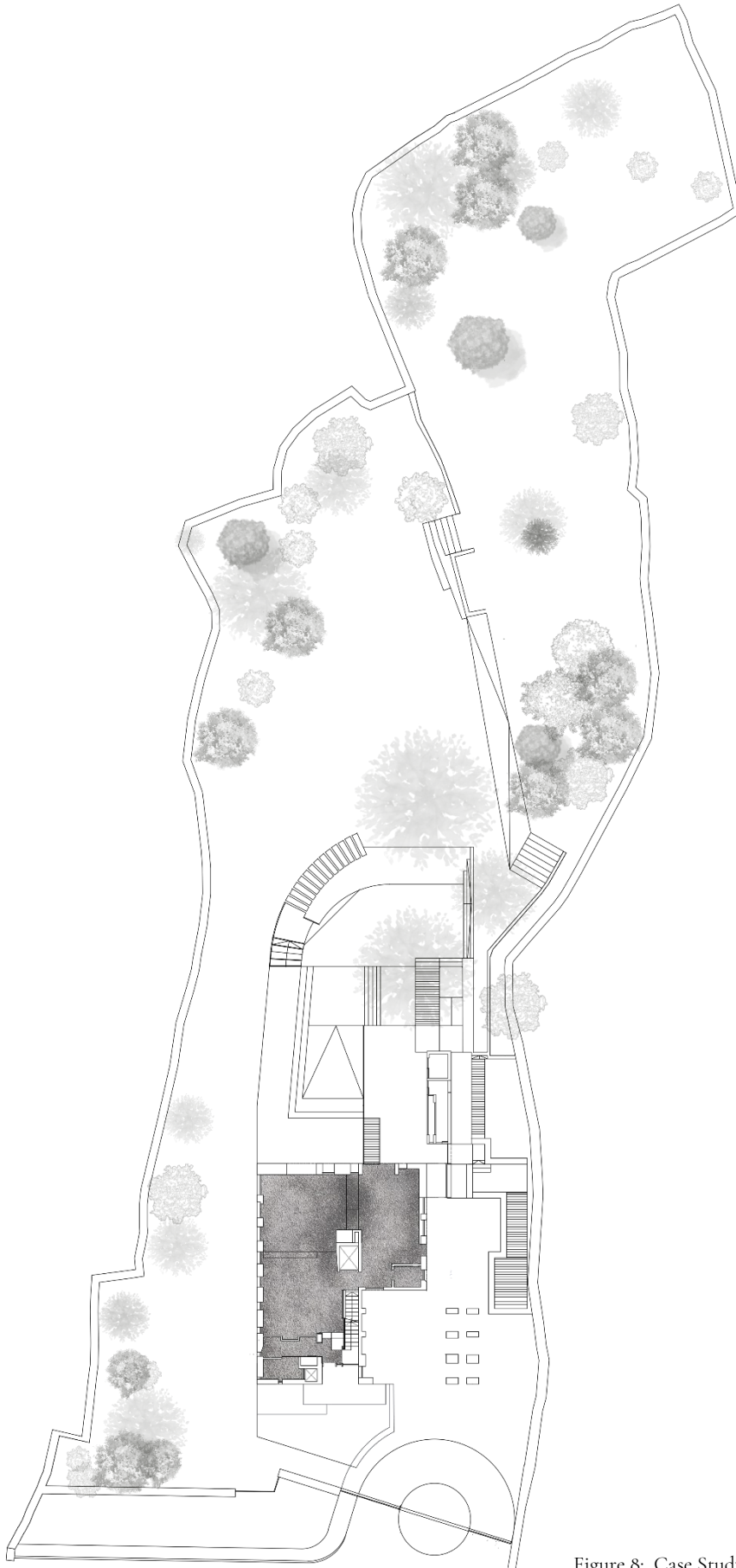


Figure 8: Case Study 04 - General Plan Layout

Case Study 05: Ella // Architect 05

This home was designed for a young family with four young children. Nestled in an Urban Conservation Area, in choosing their site, Ella immediately recounted how she was looking for something that reminded her of her childhood home - a traditional townhouse structure with a closed plan for individual functions, and most importantly, to have a large garden. The interview was conducted in the main kitchen space at the back of the home, a sunlit, informal setting which created a calm and reflexive atmosphere. As the primary client engaged with her architects, Ella was very open and inviting to communicate her honest and personal reflections about how they live, how the project has shaped their daily experiences and how the project continues to grow and change with their family.

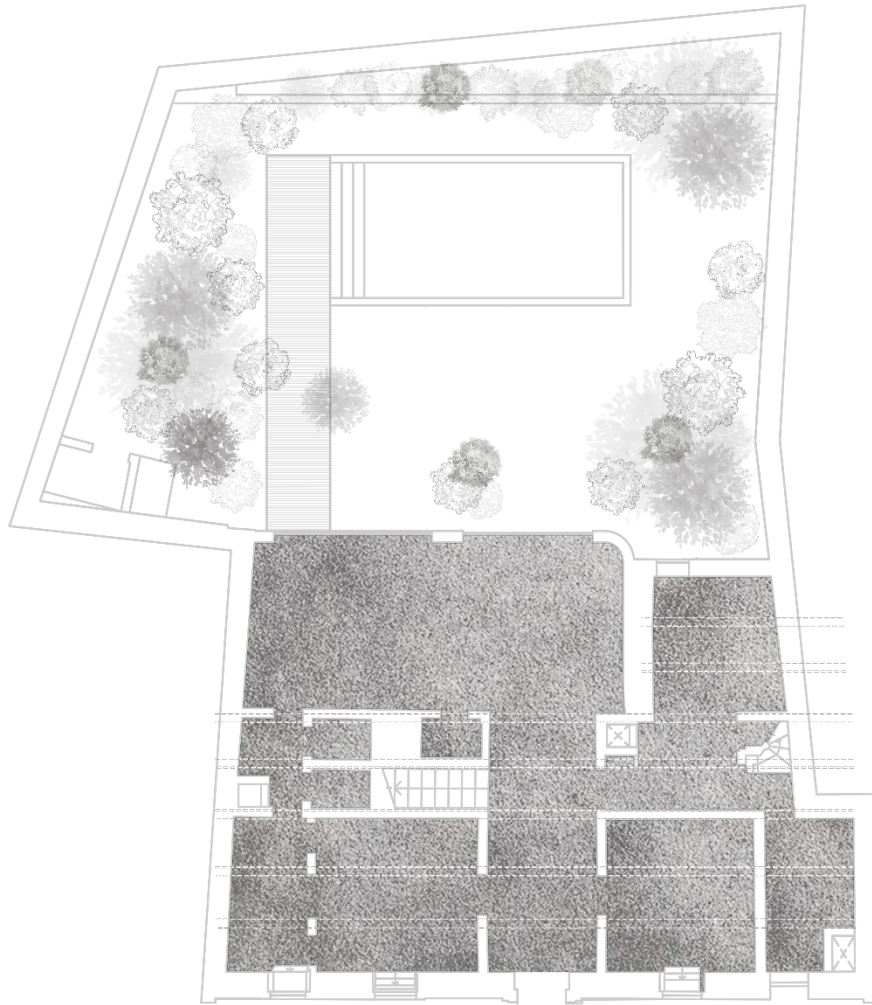


Figure 9: Case Study 05 - General Plan Layout

Case Study 06: Jess // Architect 06

Jess' home presented as a canvas of deep, layered embodied attachment, carefully curated by her defining characteristics and daily routines, artwork, curated spaces and bespoke furnishings. Jess lives in a four-story townhouse with her two children. The home was not always as it is seen today but has undergone expansions done at a later stage with another architect, which, for this dissertation, we will be focusing only on the initial interventions done by [Architect 06]. Our conversation took place in the second-floor open-plan dining area. At the time, I had no better words to describe it than a one-of-a-kind home. The home truly exhibited Jess's charismatic personality and deep understanding of design, curation and architecture. While Jess did not necessarily take on a proactive level of engagement within the design process, as she lived and learnt about her space, she spoke not as a client who simply lived in the dwelling, but one who understood the significance of what she was living in. The home became a canvas for her personality and life.

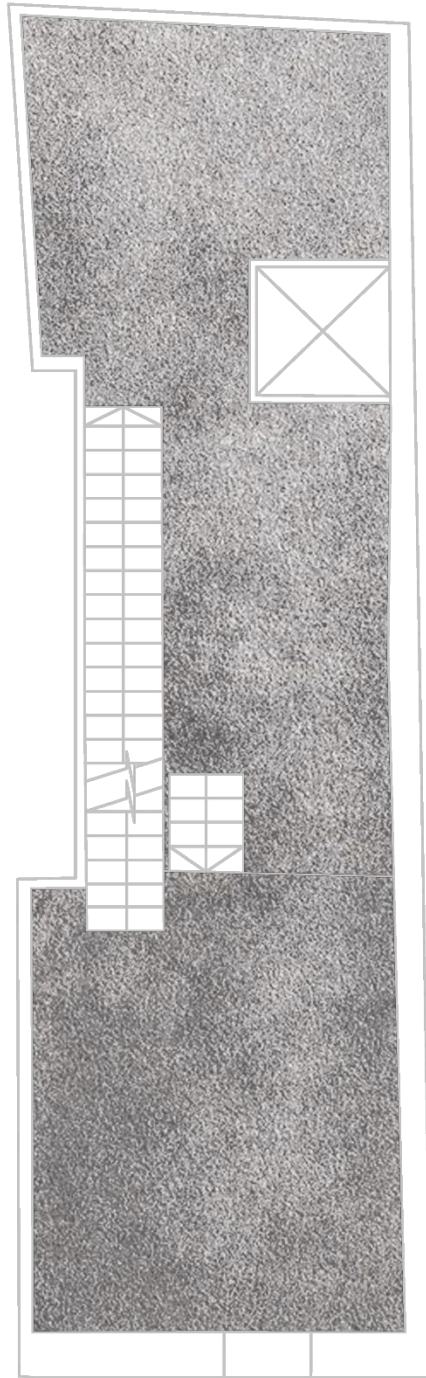


Figure 10: Case Study 06 - General Plan Layout

		DURATION OF INTERVIEW	TYPE OF PROJECT	AREA		YEAR OF COMPLETION	DURATION OF RESIDENCE	NUMBER OF INHABITANTS
				BUILT	UNBUILT			
01	ARCHITECT 01 TJ & JENNY	1hr 42 mins	Adaptive Reuse Traditional Townhouse	76 sqm		2022	2 years	Young Couple + 2 cats
		1hr 49 mins		76 sqm	/			
02	ARCHITECT 02 COLIN & ROSE	2hr 10 mins	Adaptive Reuse House of Character	2229 sqm		2021	4 years	Retired Couple
		1hr 19 mins		253 sqm	1976 sqm			
03	ARCHITECT 03 LOUIS	1hr 25 mins	New Build Project	186 sqm		2022	2 years	Young Family with 2 children & dog
		1hr 23 mins		141 sqm	45 sqm			
04	ARCHITECT 04 STACY	1hr 01 mins	Restoration of Existing Development ODZ Land	2858 sqm		2022	3 years	Young Family with 3 children
		1hr 20 mins		190 sqm	2668 sqm			
05	ARCHITECT 05 ELLA	1hr 35 mins	Restoration & Extension of existing House of Character	418 sqm		2022	3 years	Young Family with 4 children
		1hr 18 mins		198 sqm	220 sqm			
06	ARCHITECT 06 JESS	1hr 01 mins	Adaptive Reuse of Existing Townhouse	56 sqm		2012	13 years	Single Parent with 2 children
		1hr 13 mins		56 sqm	/			

Figure 11: Case Study Overview Table

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research methods used to investigate and understand how architects and clients approach the collaboration process in the creation of '*homes*', as well as presenting a brief overview of each case study and the interview process. Rooted in phenomenology and using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study aims to offer fresh perspectives on how feelings, memories, and the client's involvement influence what a *home* means and how it's experienced.

The thematic analysis will follow in Chapter 6, where the themes and insights obtained from the interviews conducted will be outlined.

Chapter 5: Conversations with Architecture

The following chapter focuses on the evolving nature of the architect-client relationship, specifically in relation to the concept of '*home*'. Drawing on themes of participatory, relational approaches to design and how these shape the design process, it considers the architect's role from sole creator to both interpreter and co-author, recognising the client as a vital contributor of lived knowledge and emotional insight. It brings to discussion evolving, process-oriented approaches that reposition architecture, not as static, but as an ongoing practice, shaped by the collaboration between both parties. The chapter also touches upon ethical and practical dimensions of the relationship, expanding on power dynamics and the value of trust and communication.

5.1 Living into *Home*

Home as an Emergent, Temporal Experience

From the previous literature examined on home, we know that home is not solely defined to be a physical structure or utilitarian function, but by the lived experiences and emotional meanings that dwellers attach to it (Mallett, 2004). Different spaces within the home often take on this emotional meaning, less from their architectural significance, and more from the personal or symbolic associations they carry (Bachelard, 1994). This implies that emotionally resonant architecture emerges when such spatial elements invoke a feeling of comfort and identity connection to the inhabitant - a type of affective resonance (Dovey, 1985; Manzo, 2003).

“I don't think an architect creates a home. I think an architect creates a house. It's the users who create the home. I think what you do is try and understand what their wish is for their home and then try and find a way to translate that into a space that would create a platform for them to live and then create those narratives.”

Architect 02 (personal communication, April 2025)

Seeing that this resonated quite strongly with the ways that client participants spoke about their homes, this thematic framing strongly influenced how I began to make sense of participant accounts in this study. What became clear here is that this sense of feeling at home was not an immediate outcome of the design; therefore, looking into how dwellers live into' their space and this gradual process of forming emotional bonds with their homes, over time, habit and routine. Home is not only inhabited but internalised.

The concept of time is crucial to understand here, where architecture and feeling at home are not an immediate condition. While discussions of space often omit temporal language, time is implicit in every lived spatial experience, in movement, effort, repetition, and rhythm. Tuan (1977) supports this view through his concept of spatialised time, a material rhythm which examines space as inhabited through human feeling and memory. As participants reflected on how they “grew into” their homes, they were articulating this emotional dimension of place. The home does not arrive fully formed in experience; rather, it becomes meaningful through the gradual layering of moments, actions, and associations that accumulate into memory (Tuan, 1977).

These daily, often unconscious bodily habits are simple repeated spatial practices (for example, reaching for a light switch) which slowly build one's familiarity and emotional rootedness - habitual gestures of

dwelling (Seamon, 1979). As these rituals and routines become internalised through repetition, deeply rooted in bodily practice, our spatial awareness becomes intuitive, the home is no longer navigated but inhabited - a felt extension of the self. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Such observations highlight how the home is constructed through a build-up of lived moments.

“It took time, I think, to settle into the house... it took time to learn to use the space, to enjoy the space.”

Jenny [Client 01] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

“Now I do it subconsciously.”

TJ [Client 01] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

In Jenny’s extract above, she makes use of the particular words “settle,” “learn”, and “enjoy”. Her language here reveals her personal experience of attuning to her home over time. She attuned this reasoning to the fact that in her previous residences, she never had the space to make her own, so she almost felt at a loss for what to do. Therefore, implying that the process of this becoming home was not immediate and neither simply about architectural function, but it began at the beginning of the design journey, and she learnt to understand architecture its embodied functions throughout the process, and then had the opportunity to accumulate her understanding, familiarity and attachment to her home. TJ’s comment, **“Now I do it subconsciously,”** illustrates this shift from conscious navigation to bodily familiarity - a slow process of gradual embodiment of space through our daily (Seamon, 1979).

Memory plays a primary role in this process, as participants reflected on how the home has become to them a layer of lived moments and memories, as simple as sharing meals, light patterns signalling routine, and family experiences. These recollections are not stored neutrally but are actively re-experienced, saturated with personal memory that is both collective and individual to each inhabitant (Tuan, 1977).

“It’s grown with us, basically.”

Ella [Client 04] *(personal communication, May 2025)*

“A house is something which needs to grow on someone slowly and incrementally.”

Architect 04 *(personal communication, May 2025)*

The relationship of dwellers with their home emerged to be a deeply layered construct. The focus moved away from viewing architecture as the sole entity and to a more autobiographical and emotional dimension. Home, in this light, became something which is shaped through the lived experiences, routines and presence of its inhabitants - creating a co-constructive narrative between the architect and the client.

5.1.2 Spatial Autobiography

This theme revealed a connection with home, which aligns with symbolism, memory and identity, that is, the notion of intrinsic value (Verbeke, 2013). The spaces we inhabit carry autobiographical weight (emotional associations), reflecting to us the past experiences and traces of inhabitants, the origins of both its inhabitants and the space, and the memory of how one wants to be remembered - on top of its functional or aesthetic qualities. Verbeke's perspective on intrinsic value in artistic research helped to ground this analysis, where he argues that creative practice's theory is tacit and embodied, emerging through the act of making. Therefore, this reshapes our analysis in this theme, orienting it to view the home as an autobiographical process, where affective and narrative significance take precedence, and responding to how different clients respond to the question about whether the home is a reflection of the self (Bachelard, 1994).

“A home should definitely be the mirror of the self... very few people are lucky enough to have such a big transformation created to please a lot of aspects of their self.”

Jess [Client o6] *(personal communication, May 2025)*

For Jess, this link was clear and intentional. She explained that the design of her home emerged directly from the most defining aspects of her personality and daily routines. During my visit, even as someone unfamiliar with the space and her character, it felt extremely natural, as if I knew her life story and the kind of person she was. This strong sense of identity was completely embedded into her home on first impression - the space functioned as a true mirror to her character, with a highly personal visual language, and which I think is something so rare and special.

[Architect o6] designed a space which revolved around her main interests. Artwork, curated objects, nooks and bespoke furnishings extended across every room. What once were double-height blank walls, left intentionally by the architect as a canvas, were now transformed into vibrant displays. It is these carefully curated objects and arrangements that bring this concept of intrinsic value to life (Verbeke, 2013). These objects hold emotional, epistemic and expressive value, transcending functional functions, and aid in visually communicating who she is, what she values and how she has lived (Verbeke, 2013).

“Renovation actually started off from literally the strongest elements of my personality, my habits. So, in this case, it’s a complete mirror of the self... It was a beautiful process of someone who got some elements of me and my personality, my habits, my loves, and started with that.”

Jess [Client 06] (*personal communication, May 2025*)

Furthermore, I think what is interesting to note is how this spatial autobiography does not only act retrospectively, but it is also generative. It generates discussion, it helps to articulate her identity simply through spatial expression, and one can tell that it was not designed simply to house her life, belongings and identity, but rather, it was shaped directly *from* them.

Examining more in-depth the memory dimension, Stacy [Architect 04] speaks about the nostalgic factor of architecture and how her home has come to form a vessel of continuity between her past, present and hopes for the future as she expresses that **“the house had a lot of meaning... I wanted the house to be connected to all of that.”** This implies that the home to the client represents more than the design and aesthetics, but it is a manifestation of family memory and emotional resolution to carry forward. Similarly, [Architect 04], touches upon his experience with his personal dwelling when speaking about the concept of home and he notes that **“it belonged in the family for 160 years... each room had a lot of meaning”** touching upon how one’s spatial perception shifts according to our autobiographical knowledge, making a mere room, a repository of its past memories. With this being said, a home is rarely remembered as a whole, with inhabitants instead recalling fragments of spaces or atmospheres (Tuan, 1977). These often represent familiar and subconscious memories that are shaped by accumulated use or resonance and, therefore, leave lasting impressions on the user (Tun, 1977).

“In smaller, more familiar things, memory weaves her strongest enchantments, holding us at her mercy with some trifle, some echo, a tone of voice, a scent of tar and seaweed on the quay... This surely is the meaning of home—a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it.”

(Stark, 1948. p. 144)

These three examples each frame the home as a space of personal continuity, becoming a living archive of inner life (Dovey, 1985). The intrinsic value of these spaces does not lie purely in its aesthetics or function, but from their capacity to enable personal histories and memories to unfold and actively live, not just a recollection, and be experienced through their spatial form (Tuan, 1977).

This depth of meaning can be closely linked to the level of client involvement established between the architect and client throughout the design process. The projects of Jess and Stacy referenced above demonstrate how a highly collaborative architect-client relationship enables the development of home as an intimate and meaningful place. By actively engaging the client within the creative process, this ensured that their memories, identities and values would be effectively translated into the home, resulting in a home which serves to support its inhabitants (Lawson, 2005). One must note that, client involvement and participation varies amongst different case studies, and although not all case studies were discussed for the purpose of this theme, the examples discussed outline the value that client participation and collaboration hold in the success of a project both physically and emotionally, emphasising the importance of co-creation in designing spaces which are attuned to the unique lives and narratives of its inhabitants.

5.1.3 Attachment to Childhood and Past Homes

Building on the previous section, the concept of emotional familiarity reveals that the experience of home is caught in a tension between the emerging nostalgic attachment to past settings or childhood homes, or our imagined ideals. Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006) talks about a pursuit for the ideal, the unknown but more compelling option, in this “search for home.” This then emerges as an ongoing, lived negotiation, where these nostalgic desires continually inform and complicate present experiences of the dwelling. One should note that the ideal in this scenario does not represent a simplistic longing, but the battle to find a balance between material realities and the desires formed by our memories (Blunt & Dowling, 2006) - navigating what their homes are, and what their homes mean.

The process of meaning-making here highlights how dwellers actively use their homes to reconcile and reconfigure their sense of belonging and selfhood, with memory operating as a generative force that moulds their experience of space, often through unconscious ways, figure 11 (Casey, 1987; Miller, 2001).

This theme of the influence that childhood and past home environments have in shaping our identity and emotional security has come up as a strong theme amongst participants. Early spatial experiences, whether positive or negative, form internalised thoughts that shape the way individuals relate to the home later in life (Dovey, 1985), either fuelling our impression of the idealised home or creating a resistance to the home, making creating a sense of belonging or attachment inherently difficult (Dovey, 1985).

Ella was one of the clients who touched upon this dynamic quite directly. Her description even went so far as to describe her pull towards the direct familiar spatial forms, as her embodied memory guides her spatial preferences. In this case, this does not represent a conscious design ideal, but it comes from a space of comfort, something already internalised as a lived experience that she wished to carry through and adapt



Figure 12: The Corner (Bachelard, 1997)

to her own family, implying continuity and how such internalised patterns shape our future notions of home (Dovey, 1985). Here we see a negotiation between past experiences, present desires and adaptability.

“...it's very similar, just mine is smaller. My parents live down the road, and in my head, that's what I wanted. I wanted an old house, with a hall and two rooms on the side - a traditional arrangement because that is what I was used to.”

Ella [Client 05] *(personal communication, May 2025)*

This is also echoed in Jenny's account as she recognises an unconscious connection. This was not a chosen design but was recognised after completion when they were already living in the home, illustrating the complex nature with which identity and memory interact with the home.

“Downstairs reminds me of Aunty Mari's house a lot. I didn't design it to be like that however.”

Jenny [Client 01] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

With this being said, it is not uncommon to grow to have a negative connotation to the home. Dovey (1985) warns against idealising the home since, as much as it comes from a positive ideal, for some, it may represent a space of trauma and conflict, as expressed by TJ.

“I grew up in terrible nineties corridor houses, terraced houses, the ones with the same layout...so no, to me there is no nostalgia in this actual house.”

TJ [Client 01] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

These direct accounts from participants illustrate the intricate relationship between our memory, identity and the home, where the home becomes a site embodied in continuity and change. Whether conscious design or unconsciously shaped, these spaces reflect an ongoing negotiation between our past experiences, present circumstances and imagined ideals. Rather than emerging as a fixed entity, the experience of home navigates the evolving expression of one's identity through space (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

5.2 Ethics of Influence

5.2.1 Negotiating Influence

To what extent should client feedback be prioritised over architectural aesthetics? & Who holds more decision-making power during the relationship? Does this change at different stages of the process?

A recurring theme from participant interviews was the tension between architectural authority and client autonomy. Client participants voiced discomfort at the sound of being told what the architect's initial intentions for their home "should be", often before even getting to know and understand the client's physical and psychological desires for the space.

Stacy reflected on an experience she had with an architect, where she recalled being told what her house would look like immediately from the first visit: **"I'm not a good client for you and you're not a good architect if you're not willing to really listen"** (personal communication, May 2025). This imposition on the client led to an immediate breakdown of trust, prompting her to seek a more collaborative relationship - this highlights that if there is friction in the relationship from the outset, it is to no benefit for either party in the relationship to move forward as neither will be fully invested or connected to the project.

This imposition onto the client prompted a broader thought on the ethics of influence within the architect-client relationship for me. Where is the line between guidance, influence and imposition? In order to maintain such balance, architects must be open, responsive and view client input as a valuable addition, rather than an obstacle on the way to the architect's vision. Therefore, influence can be described as a mutual dialogue which allows for ideas to be exchanged, challenged and refined. Here, architects and clients are collaboratively designing outcomes, creating a participatory process which blends professional knowledge with lived experiences (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Till's concept of spatial agency echoes forward here as we come to understand how the most successful projects were those created in collaboration, and the clients had the chance to learn and become more attuned towards spatial thinking.

"I've always loved design, but design and architecture are different. He taught me architecture. Wherever I go now, I look at architecture and how elements function together, how I scrutinise some architecture. Because he really did teach me... I think I should have been an architect."

Stacy [Architect 03] (*personal communication, May 2025*)

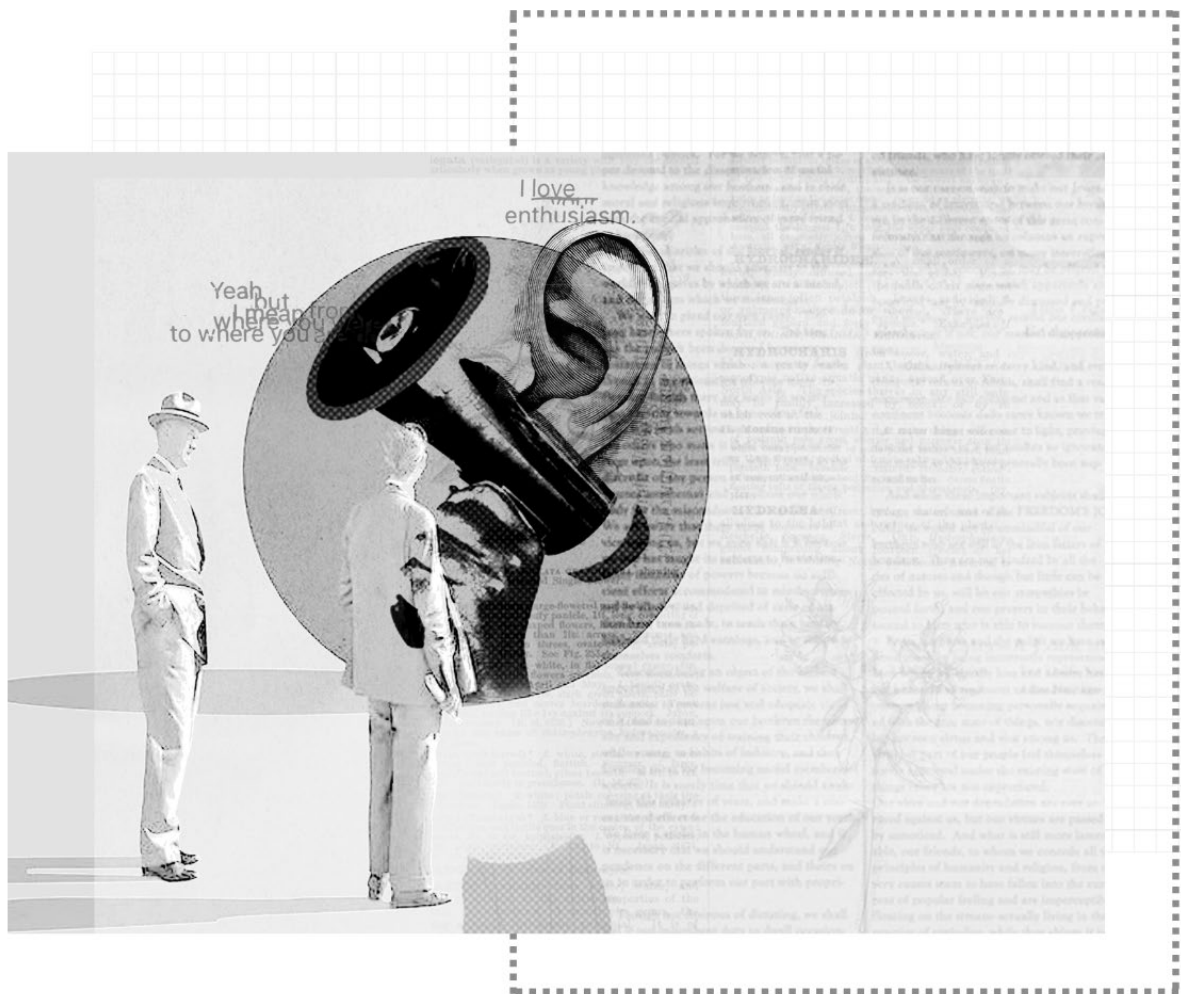


Figure 13: Ethics of Influence (personal collage, Jun 2025)

The way Stacy described this self-reflection she had as to whether she was meant to be an architect, I felt, was special, as we see her taking this gradual exchange from a reactive participant to a proactive contributor (Till, 2009).

5.2.2 Limits of Language

A recurring challenge or constraint that surfaced within the design process was the two-way process of language. From the client's end, it is the lack of knowledge on how to communicate their needs and desires for a project in clear, pragmatic terms, and instead communicating through vague memories, feelings of bodily responses as design prompts. This instinct to reflect one's embodied intuition is generally a reflection of the person's preferences existing in a pre-verbal or unconscious state, waiting to be confronted with a spatial prompt.

"I couldn't explain it, but I knew it when I saw it."

Jenny [Client 01] (*personal communication, Feb 2025*)

This statement reflects a core theme of affective recognition and embodied knowledge, where the client found it difficult to fully articulate or anticipate the intended spatial form from beforehand, creating a gap between feeling and form (Bachelard, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 1963).

This created space for architects to take the role of emotional translators, interpreting not only words, but attending to clients' intonation, hesitation implying uncertainty or commitment and emotional intensity. Participants described various methods of engaging with communication processes, but interestingly enough, visuals were the least chosen path. This is due to the fact that with realistic visuals, there is no guarantee, as they can be manipulated. Another note to mention is communication from the client's end at initial project stages. Architects interviewed were all in agreement that they preferred programmable techniques with questionnaires or observation and discussion to get to know a new client and what they want from the space, as opposed to visual content. Otherwise, drawings or materials would be used to create a "conversation with the situation", where meaning emerges through iteration and mutual interpretation and discussion.

The intuitive nature of clients to opt to express their needs through emotional terms yet not specify in material or spatial terms, presents a broader issue of absent pragmatism (Schön, 1983). This is not necessarily a flaw within the client but as a characteristic of home-making itself. I came to view this absent pragmatism not as a flaw in the client but as characteristic of homemaking itself. Home is not merely functional; it is autobiographical, emotional, and atmospheric, and these qualities rarely lend themselves

to easy language. Clients often cannot articulate exactly what they want until they are faced with it, and even then, their reactions are affective rather than analytical (Dovey, 1985; Bachelard, 1994).

Furthermore, this raised a further question for me at the fact that, if changes were made down the line in post-occupancy, either structural or soft-furnishing, does this reflect badly on the architects understanding and interpretation of the client, a miscommunication within the process, or simple the fact that, as Stacy mentions; “People change, circumstances change,” and to a further discussion on how to create homes to cater for sure layered adaptability that the brief could not have anticipated.

Combining these elements together highlights the limits of language that pose the greatest challenge to collaborative architecture. Clients will not always be able to express their requirements, needs and wants from a space, and this is where the architect's role as interpreters of affect pushes through. In this sense, the co-creation of home becomes an interpretive process where the home and the relationship are shaped by both expressed needs and silent cues. - a dynamic that forms the basis of architecture as a phenomenological study.

5.2.3 Proactive vs Reactive Clients

Throughout interviews, it was noted that all clients varied in their approach to the design process - some were able to conceive clear spatial configurations and ideas, and more often than not, others had to develop this skill over time and therefore gave feedback mainly reactively, contributing to key decisions after they have been made.

“I couldn’t explain it, but I knew it when I saw it”

Jenny [Client 01] (*personal communication, Feb 2025*)

Participants revealed a challenge where clients find difficulty in articulating spatial desires before seeing them in physical form. This highlights the challenge which clients face in expressing their spatial desires.

In a process of architectural collaboration, clients tend to find their way through a spectrum shifting between reactive and proactive roles, reflective of the client’s evolving relationship with their home and the architect. This ladder of participation comes from the theory of Arnstein’s (1969), where he theorises that genuine empowerment within the architect-client relationship emerges as clients move past this passive mind thought and towards active participants in the co-creative process.

We immediately notice this subconscious shift with Colin & Rose. Colin explained that coming from a very designer-led mindset, he was able to communicate freely with different mediums, taking the primary proactive stance during the planning phase of their home and thus informing many of the decisions. However, due to Colin's mobility limitations, it became difficult for him to carry through this active role once the project moved into the construction phase - it was here that Rose, as a generally reactive client, assumed the proactive role, taking it upon herself to visit the site every day and update Colin. This to me illustrated how clients are able to take on different degrees of agency at different stages within the design process.

“For me, it's just been educational. I say learning how to live in a space that makes sense, which I was not exposed to. But the outcome I feel for me at least is that I've evolved in this sense. Now, if I walk into a space, I can see a bit what's wrong with this and why it's wrong. Whereas before you could show me a photo of something and tell me ‘look how terrible’ and I would not know what you mean. But now, walking into a restaurant, for example, or walking into a hotel room, I can immediately see whether it's the lighting, the colour of the light, the tiling, soft furnishings, immediately.”

Jenny [Client 01] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

Jenny, who otherwise was seen to take a reactive stance within the architect-client process, here speaks about the self-transformation she felt as throughout the design process she went from being highly reactive and slowly began this learning curve, as she began to develop an idea of spatial literacy and the ability to acknowledge certain complex and embodied design cues throughout spaces (Dorst, 2011). In general, clients who take on a proactive role become more involved in the design process, becoming more fluent with architectural language and consequently being able to shape the design in ways that create a more meaningful, emotional attachment, echoing personal narratives and satisfaction within their final home.

Architects here act as facilitators to the design process, by encouraging open and responsive dialogues and valuing client contributions as essential expertise rather than interference (Brandt & Messeter, 2004), empowering them to become active participants. Here we see the architect-client relationship shift, from one of dominance and influence, to one of trust, mutual learning and co-authorship.

5.2.4 Post-Occupancy Stance

“The reality of things is that they move on. They move on, and unless they're friends of yours, sometimes they become friends in the process, but sometimes they just lose touch...It's like a testament to the design process.”

Architect 01 (*personal communication, Feb 2025*)

Despite unanimous agreement amongst both architects and clients about the value of post-occupancy evaluation, none but one of the architect participants interviewed, [Architect 02], had formalised such practices. Many admitted to this being a result of a lack of time, however, [Architect 01] offered a thoughtful reflection on the process. His theory noted that a good architect-client relationship builds a form of friendship throughout the process, which implies that communication is sustained informally post-project completion. Whilst this represents a desirable vision of practice given the architect-client relationship, this introduces a limitation. What happens when the process does not end in friendship? A model designed based on personal relationships might necessarily be excluded from the specific cases where post-occupancy evaluation could be of most benefit. There is an assumption that silence means satisfaction; however, this may just as easily be an indicator of disengagement, discomfort or unmet expectations. Moreover, friendships may obscure clients from giving honest feedback so as not to jeopardise their private relationship.

Yeah, I think these things are important because it's a relationship at the end of the day. So it's a transaction because it's a business. But ultimately, it's homemaking and building relationships with people.

Architect 02 (*personal communication, April 2025*)

“Unless it's really related to something terrible - it might be fun or positive for the architect to see the manifestation of its use two years on, five years on, whatever it is. Absolutely. But I also think that should also be the case in the non-quality-of-life dwellings. To know what quality of life they've delivered to the occupants of their terribly designed blocks of apartments, for them to feel some of that discomfort.”

TJ [Client 01] (*Personal communication, Feb 2025*)

Without a structured understanding or the mechanisms to do so, meaningful progress that offers opportunities for growth and improvement remains limited. If architects wish to create homes that genuinely support people's well-being, both physically and emotionally, then architectural involvement can not simply end once the home is complete. Architects must encourage ongoing conversations, listening to clients and how these spaces are being lived in, long after completion.

5.3 Value of Privacy

Across the interview process, I noticed that a common trend amongst participants where a big priority to them was the value of spatial independence for inhabitants of the home on different scales, as in Figure 13). This value of privacy is not necessarily defined only through visual isolation, but in this case, through the way they spoke, I interpreted this as a space to oneself where family members are able to coexist without the forced nature of constant interaction or surveillance - a negotiation of boundaries within family life (Altman, 1975). As Stacy explained:

"I needed it to feel like a home, that I wanted to visually look good, but I also wanted it to work for us. So, creating spaces that then become one together. And if I am in the kitchen, the kids can be here, we can be. But it always feels connected."

Stacy [Client 03] *(personal communication, May 2025)*

This means that it's about giving inhabitants the option to choose their level of engagement. Altman (1975) describes a good home framework to consist of three areas, per inhabitant, that support this flexible nature of engagement: personal space, for autonomy and identity formulation; communal space for engagement; and the freedom to navigate between. Several other participants noted that design strategies such as split levels, closed plan, or distinct circulation routes enabled a form of passive privacy. Participants valued the thought of having organic spaces of withdrawal within the home, but without affecting their familial interactions. In the case of Ella, this was one of the primary motivations that she wished for a traditional townhouse layout, or the reason for Architect 04's emphasis on split levels to designate areas within Stacy's home.

From this discussion, it became clear to me that this idea of spatial autonomy sparked as a key contributor to the psychological well-being of inhabitants within the home. The ability to choose one's preferred level of engagement and withdraw to personal spaces when needed facilitated positive emotional regulation and

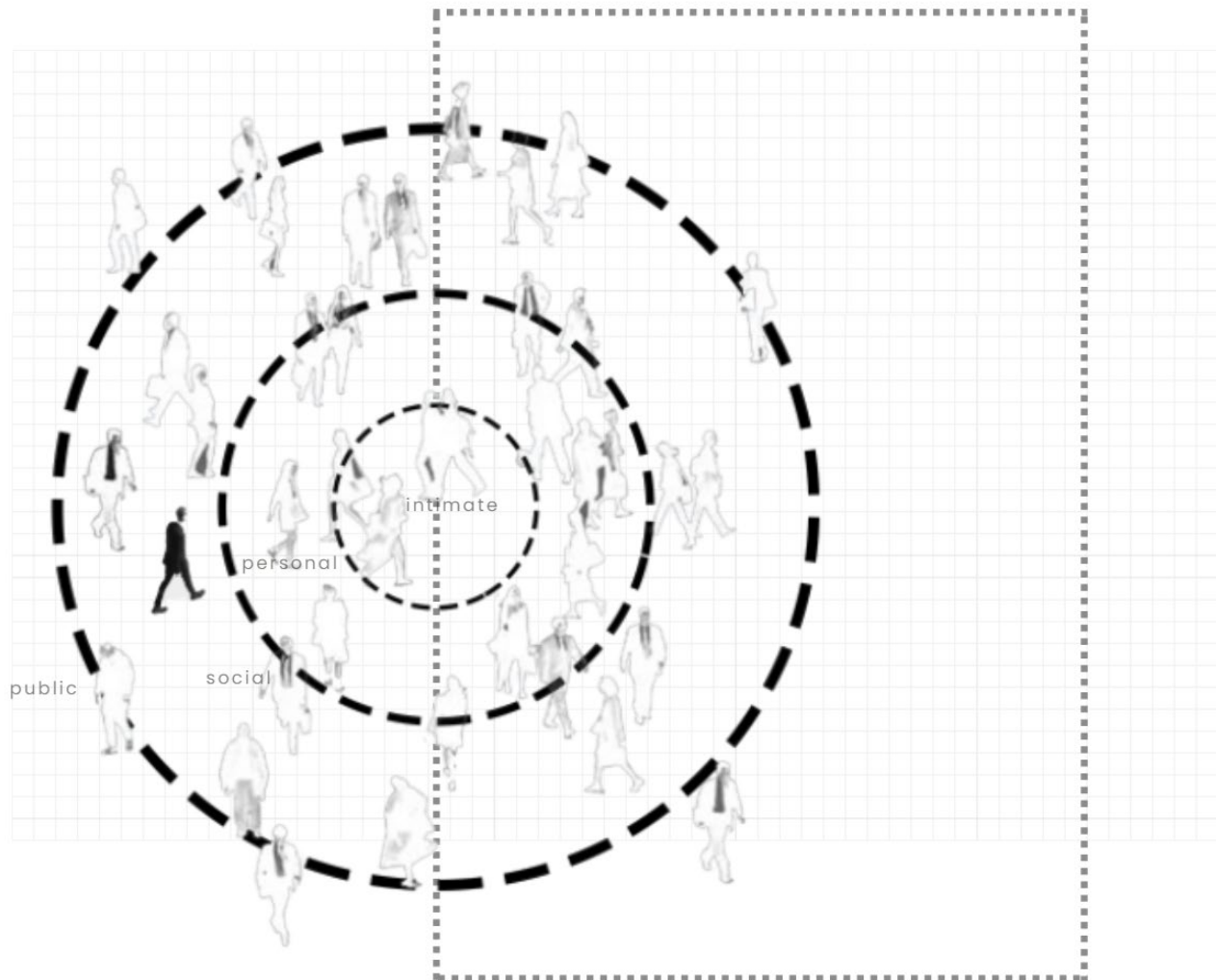


Figure 14: Value of Privacy (personal collage, Jun 2025)

a sense of personal agency. This was seen to have larger benefits in family homes with diverse generational needs (Evans et al., 1996).

In my view, both architects and clients viewed privacy not as a luxury but as a necessity of everyday life and well-being. Private spaces allow an individual to reflect and grow, establishing their personal identity (Pallasmaa, 2005) and promoting positive relationships in a home (Altman, 1975).

5.4 Liminality, Temporality and Foresight

Many participants, both architects and clients, resisted the implication that the home is a static object. Rather, participants described the home to be understood as a flexible, adaptable framework that evolves with its inhabitants. This may include minor changes as room functions, or it may include larger interventions, such as the inclusion of a lift down the line, or downsizing spaces. It was noted that in some instances, it was observed that architects, despite clients resisting their input, proactively incorporated plans for potential future modification. A notable example of this was the home of Louis and Architect 03, where the architect was of the opinion that the development had a much larger footprint than required and requested by the client. This was met with hesitation by the client, and therefore, the Architect designed a way in which the home can be divided into two separate dwellings if the need arises for downsizing in the future.

This kind of forward-looking approach will allow inhabitants, the spatial agency, to actively shape their environments in response to their needs as they move on in life (Till, 2009). In other cases, this was a proactive stance from the client's end in the case of the inclusion of a lift, such as Stacy, as she recognises the possibility of mobility changes in older age, viewing this as her final residence.

“And it's going to become less and less of a white box. So, the first phase is [what you wanted] an experiment with a little bit of semi-minimalism or as much minimalism as my holding tendencies allow me to have. But quite literally, as of today, another four or five pieces of furniture are ready, and things are going to start reconfiguring and the walls are going to fill up, and it will start becoming a bit more maximalist.”

TJ [Client 01] *(personal communication, Feb 2025)*

The above follows earlier discussion, acknowledging how home is imbued with temporal depth, representing a lived narrative which is continually being unfolded and revisited. TJ and Jenny described their house as being in an incomplete state, recognising that the project is still ongoing, and has become a testing process to determine if what they believe they want will function for them, and adapting along the way according to shifting preferences.

Ultimately, rather than being seen as something conflictive, the analysis positioned the home as a space where continuity and change naturally exist as a collective, embracing both the permanence of memory alongside the impermanence of daily life.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The concluding chapter of this dissertation presents a summary of the observed key findings of the study, observed limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Conclusion

Reviewing the Study

Linking this theory back to our goals and objectives, this research set out to examine how architects and clients navigate the social complexities of the design process to co-create homes that are emotionally resonant, functionally responsive and reflective of the lived experiences of their inhabitants. The analysis revealed that meaningful architecture emerges not through aesthetic imposition but through a process of shared and negotiated authorship, where client input is valued as an essential part of embedded knowledge (RQ1). The dynamic that unfolded was less about power and more about reciprocity and mutual exchange. In a position where architects actively listen and place trust in client participation, client input was seen to enhance the design, rather than compromise it. In this way, clients felt acknowledged and involved in the process, which led to a higher satisfaction rate and, subsequently, more successful projects. This shared authority allowed for spaces to be designed more emotionally attuned to the lives they live. These findings address the first research question outlined, demonstrating how client involvement and feedback need not conflict with architectural authorship but rather shape a collective vision, leading to a more resonant outcome.

The analysis highlighted the concept of home moving beyond viewing architecture as a mere shelter for being, but as a repository of one's memories, identity and routines. These daily experiences form a living archive, shaped by time and habitual use rather than fixed to your identity on the day of completion. These emotional and symbolic associations carry over even to the most functional spaces, reinforcing the idea that design must go beyond utilitarian need to accommodate the autobiographical layers of dwelling (RQ2). However, where we saw meaningful client involvement manifest itself, witnessing passive recipients (reactive users) become proactive contributors, this was not an automatic practice, but it was a culmination of time, patience and adaptability from the architects, who, at their most successful project, facilitated a process of learning and empowerment (RQ3).

The overwhelming lack of post-occupancy evaluation amongst architect participants exposed a lack of intuition and a lost opportunity for critical reflection and improvement. In the case where personal relationships formed throughout the design process endured, informal updates persisted. However, this approach excluded architect-client relationships that ended in silence or those of unresolved dissatisfaction. In the absence of systematic methods to assess the level of success of a project, how well a home can support its dwellers' physical and emotional well-being, and therefore, risking mistaking silence for success. Fundamentally, this dissertation reinforces the need to reposition architecture as a

collaborative, relational practice where the lived experience of dwellers acts at the centre of the process, inviting participation and assigning value to homes, not based on aesthetic functions but based on how they are felt, adapted and inhabited .

“Knowledge is always better than the absence of knowledge.”

TJ [Client or] (*personal communication, Feb 2025*)

This study offers a timely contribution to architectural discussion by highlighting the lived experiences of both clients and architects. Through unpacking the emotional, relational, and temporal dimensions of home-making, it highlights architecture as a co-creative process rather than a purely aesthetic product controlled solely by the architect. The findings benefit the architectural community by encouraging more participatory, empathetic approaches that place great value in client insight and consider it not as interference but as expertise. Clients, in turn, are empowered to have been given the opportunity to act as co-authors of space.

This research arose from a longstanding interest in the emotional and ethical life of architecture. In an environment where construction is increasingly viewed with scepticism on our islands, these stories of care, collaboration, and transformation offered a quiet form of optimism. Witnessing how deeply some clients were moved by the process, how empowered they felt, and how much joy their homes gave them has created a sense of purpose. It served as a reminder that architecture is not just about buildings, but about lives shaped, held, and sometimes healed by space, and such principles should form the foundation for any architectural design.

6.2 Limitations

As with any qualitative and interpretative study, this research is subject to certain limitations and constraints that may have shaped its findings. In an attempt to incorporate and present participants' insights, the study necessarily relies on the author's interpretation of such accounts. Whilst every effort was made to analyse the data as uniformly as possible, there remains a natural but unintentional emphasis towards the perspectives of those whose contributions aligned most closely with the thoughts of the researcher themselves, and the theoretical concepts being explored. In addition to this, since the study incorporates perspectives from individuals both within and outside the architectural profession, the study

is inherently influenced by the contribution of professionals who operate within the field to pose opinions on the theory which resonate more directly with that of the researcher, coming from a similar background of theory and assumptions. In the case of dwellers (non-professionals), the analysis and interpretation of lived experiences and client perspective remain mediated through the lens of the researcher, in this case, an architectural student.

For these reasons, during analysis, efforts were made to provide a clear distinction between the researcher's interpretative lens and the participants' authentic voices, providing direct quotations to ground the research where necessary.

As outlined in the methodology, in the case of client interviews, access to the private dwellings was granted on an entirely voluntary basis, with each client offering different degrees of privacy respected. Whilst not imposed in respect of client privacy, certain clients generously facilitated brief tours of the home, thereby affording the researcher a more nuanced and embodied understanding of the architectural intentions and spatial qualities. Conversely, in other instances, no such invitation was extended, nor was it sought or implied, implying the investigation relied primarily on participants' narrative description, architectural drawings and photographic reference*, possibly limiting the depth of spatial comprehension for such cases on the researcher's end.

* Photographic reference here refers to photos provided during the architects' interview. Any photographic materials have been omitted from the study to uphold confidentiality and ensure the anonymity and privacy of the architect and client participants.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the lack of a pre-established sequence between the architect and client interviews could have possibly impacted the researcher's interpretation of results. This difference in entry point shaped the tone and direction of subsequent conversations, potentially introducing interpretative bias depending on who was encountered first.

6.3 Further Research

The conclusions of this study may be further examined in alternative contexts that similarly foreground the lived experience of architecture as brought forward through the architect-client relationship. This offers

the potential for new insights and perspectives to emerge in different aspects of architectural co-creation and user engagement, setting a foundation for future investigations which substantiate the applicability of these findings to be scaled, adapted or restructured to extend beyond the confines of private individual dwellings.

a. Applicability to Varying Residential Settings & Broadening the Socio-Economic Scope

While this research was intentionally limited to a specific range of private individually commissioned dwellings within a specific socio-economic context, it nonetheless offers a valuable foundation for a broader investigation into how similar co-creative processes may be adapted to different degrees of housing typologies. These may include smaller-scale projects or different housing typologies, such as apartments, large developments or social housing. These typologies typically offer minimal or absent opportunity for client engagement and are shaped by stricter budgetary and spatial parameters.

Such environments introduce different scales, rigid parameters, ownership models, and cultural dynamics that can significantly limit design agency levels for dwellers. This limited scale of engagement may, in turn, influence the emotional and psychological nature and process of home-making. This represents a significant portion of our Maltese built environment, thus inviting further inquiry into a discussion on how architects who work within these contexts can navigate these limitations, whilst still meaningfully engaging in a participatory design process with dwellers to create homes that reflect their specific needs and experiences.

Such thematic insights make way for a potential framework for understanding the architect-client relationship in a multi-actor scenario, in a position where co-creative processes are limited or absent. Given the variation in housing typologies, occupant's demographic and socio-economic conditions, future research may possibly consider exploring how routine, memory and emotional resonance manifest differently across these different contexts and thus, identify which methodological or architectural tools can be adapted to best support a more inclusive and emotionally attuned form of engagement. This would require significant adaptation of the present framework, making direct replication impossible due to the entirely different challenges of engagement level and authorship with each typology. Thus, one's aim is not to create one universal model for participation, but to highlight the value of interpretative and case-sensitive approaches towards the lived experience and design agency of inhabitants.

b. Development of a Relational Framework

The research at hand suggests the potential to develop a more dynamic and relational lens through which architecture can be understood and shared - one that moves past traditional or prescribed notions of authorship and recognises the home, in all forms, as an ongoing, co-produced process. This research invites further investigation into how such a framework can be theorised and developed in a way that can be grounded in our emotional and attachment values, and how this would influence and change the way architecture is shared, critiqued and practised. The objective is to advocate towards a more inclusive model of practice that invites and encourages all dwellers to contribute meaningfully to the creation of their home, irrespective of socio-economic status - thereby reaffirming the humanistic core of architectural practice.

In conclusion, the researcher's objective is to advocate for a more inclusive model of practice. One which enables dwellers, irrespective of any socio-economic status, to participate in creating meaningful architecture within their home - reinforcing the humanistic core of architectural practice and supporting a wider rethinking of the meaning of architectural authorship as shared, situated and emotionally responsive.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interview Research Questions_Architect

Rachel Flores

The following served as conversation points but interviews are to be kept flexible and open enough to be guided by the architects and clients themselves:

Introduction about Dissertation

The motivation for this research stemmed from the discussion on how Architects hold the capacity to design dwellings that inform our inner self, and conversely, our inner self can shape the way we perceive and interact with these dwellings. However, traditional architectural practices have often emphasised a clear distinction between the architect and the client in the design process, treating clients as passive recipients rather than active participants. And therefore, in general, im proposes a re-thinking of the role of the client within the process of creating architecture.

So, my aim is to examine these social complexities between architects and clients in the design process. I will be taking a post-analytical approach to the architect-client relationship to explore how the 'home' environment both affects and is affected by its inhabitants. The aim is to gain a bit of a deeper understanding into the roles that the architect and client take on and their perspectives throughout the creative process.

For the architect, the interview is looking to explore more their view/how they interpreted the client's initial vision, how the client was able to communicate their wishes, how these influenced design decisions, and sort of some questions on client involvement and any subsequent challenges.

Introduction about 'Home'

Home & Belonging

"Home is a multidimensional phenomenon, neither unidimensional nor created from a set of standard qualities pertaining either to the person or the place. "

Despite a growing body of research, the complexity of "home" remains not fully understood. Home is both a tangible place and an emotional construct. It merges the physical shelter with layers of emotion, memory, and identity, making it deeply personal yet universally significant. Home is where we build a sense of belonging, form connections with family, and feel grounded in the world. It is shaped by the people who live there, just as the space itself shapes their experiences and well-being, fostering a profound sense of comfort and attachment.

1. What does "home" mean to you, personally and professionally, as an architect?
2. How would you differentiate a "house" from a "home," moving beyond its physical structure?
3. Gaston Bachelard describes the home to be a "mirror of the self". What is your opinion on this
OR To what extent do you think home functions as such? reflecting an occupant's identity, values, and personal history?
4. Is home more of a process or a fixed place? - [How do you think a person's actions, habits, and rituals contribute to their experience of home over time?]
5. What elements of a home do you think best anchor a dweller's sense of identity?

Emotional attachment OR How do you think emotional well-being can be supported through architectural design?

Introduction about 'Post-Covid Scenario'

1. How has the pandemic reshaped expectations of home [sanctuary and multifunctional space]
AND how has this impacted psychological well-being?

Many people were forced to spend extended periods at home during the pandemic. Do you think this affected what people want or need from their living spaces / How?

2. Did COVID-19 deepen the role of home as a psychological refuge
OR did covid 19 create pressures or expectations on architects to create homes that function in different ways?

Introduction to the 'Architect-Client Relationship'

1. How would you define the architect client relationship in this day and age?
2. What are the typical qualities an Architect looks for in a Client?
3. How do you see the architect's responsibility in shaping social spaces?

In what ways do clients influence your architectural vision or decision-making process?

4. How can architects meaningfully engage client's in the design process to ensure their needs and experiences are reflected in the home?
5. Do you feel gender or age affect how a person receives a space?
6. What is the role of social dialogue in the architectural design process?

How important is it to understand a client's past living experiences before beginning a new design?

7. In what ways do you adjust your communication style to match the client's level of design understanding?

What methods of representation do you feel best explain a professional's intentions? Should these change depending on the Client? Visuals, plans, videos, etc.

8. Context vs Client - what comes first? How do you address conflicts between clients' desires and architectural standards?

To what extent should client feedback be prioritised over architectural vision and aesthetics?

9. In general, who do you think holds more decision-making power in the design process? And does this aspect change during different stages of construction?

10. What challenges do you face in understanding and aligning with the client's expectations, especially when their ideas might differ from your professional judgement? How do you resolve such conflicts?

11. How do you navigate the balance of authority in the design process, ensuring both your expertise and the client's vision are respected?

12. How do you feel about clients altering the work of an Architect after the work has been completed? Does it reflect badly on the Architect's understanding of the user? Or make them angry because the space has been ruined?

About Project

NB: Question wording may vary slightly according to the project's parameters and design.

Introduction on 'Project Background and Brief'

1. What would you describe to be your personal design philosophy at_____?
2. Can you tell me about the project? (*ask to bring physical material about project*)

How would you describe the client's initial vision for this project from your point of view

How did they communicate their main intentions and expectations (physically and verbally)?

3. Can you take me through the process of the design stages and communication that you went through?

[how do you get to know the client, are there any specific methods or informal tools outside of architecture that you use to interpret the needs of the client that may not be so obvious to themselves etc.]

4. What were the client's most significant priorities in the design which influenced functional design choices?

5. Were there any points where the client's ideas challenged or expanded your usual design approach?

6. How does the design foster a sense of psychological well-being and comfort for the client

7. In what ways did the client's vision evolve throughout the project, and how did you adapt to these changes?

8. Were there any challenges or constraints faced in the design process (budget, parameters, limitations etc.)

How do you navigate the limitations of space and resources in creating meaningful designs?

9. Was there any scenario where your relationship with the client was compromised or heightened as a result of the quality of work of the craftsmanship?

10. POSSIBLE

How did the design address the importance of boundaries (personal, social, spatial) that allow the client to control their engagement with different spaces within the home?

11. POSSIBLE

How does the project navigate the tension between home as a private sanctuary and as a projection of identity outward, visible to guests and the community?

12. POSSIBLE

Were there any specific cultural, personal, or emotional elements the client wanted to incorporate, and how did you go about addressing these?

What design choices support the client's lived experience of space?

13. After the project's completion, did you keep in contact with the client? If no, is there a particular reason as to why not?

Introduction to 'Reflection'

1. What elements of this project do you believe will contribute to the client's long-term satisfaction and emotional connection to the space?
2. How do you envision the space adapting to the client's social/cultural life changes - while maintaining this core sense of "home" ?
[flexibility and adaptability] [people's definitions of "home" change over time due to life transitions or personal growth]

3. Do you think that it is important to remain in contact with the client to be able to measure or assess the success of a project beyond the completion itself?

Are there particular indicators or client feedback methods you prioritise? How do you measure success when a space is meant to empower its users?

4. What role does time play in truly understanding the success of a home's design?
5. Have you received any feedback, if any, from the client about how the space impacts their emotional and mental well-being?

Conclusion

If you were given an unlimited budget, what would you have implemented differently to enhance the project within these same parameters?

Interview Research Questions_Client

Rachel Flores

The following served as conversation points but interviews are to be kept flexible and open enough to be guided by the architects and clients themselves:

Introduction about Dissertation

The motivation for this research stemmed from the discussion on how Architects hold the capacity to design dwellings that inform our inner self, and conversely, our inner self can shape the way we perceive and interact with these dwellings. However, traditional architectural practices have often emphasised a clear distinction between the architect and the client in the design process, treating clients as passive recipients rather than active participants. And therefore, in general, im proposes a re-thinking of the role of the client within the process of creating architecture.

So, my aim is to examine these social complexities between architects and clients in the design process. I will be taking a post-analytical approach to the architect-client relationship to explore how the 'home' environment both affects and is affected by its inhabitants. The aim is to gain a bit of a deeper understanding into the roles that the architect and client take on and their perspectives throughout the creative process.

For the architect, the interview is looking to explore more their view/how they interpreted the client's initial vision, how the client was able to communicate their wishes, how these influenced design decisions, and sort of some questions on client involvement and any subsequent challenges.

Introduction about 'Home'

Home & Belonging

“Home is a multidimensional phenomenon, neither unidimensional nor created from a set of standard qualities pertaining either to the person or the place. “

Despite a growing body of research, the complexity of "home" remains not fully understood. Home is both a tangible place and an emotional construct. It merges the physical shelter with layers of emotion, memory, and identity, making it deeply personal yet universally significant. Home is where we build a sense of belonging, form connections with family, and feel grounded in the world. It is shaped by the people who live there, just as the space itself shapes their experiences and well-being, fostering a profound sense of comfort and attachment.

1. What does the term "home" mean to you, personally?
2. How would you differentiate a "house" from a "home," moving beyond its physical structure?
3. Gaston Bachelard describes the home to be a “mirror of the self”. What is your opinion on this
OR To what extent do you think home functions as such? reflecting an occupant’s identity, values, and personal history?
4. Is home more of a process or a fixed place? - [How do you think a person’s actions, habits, and rituals contribute to their experience of home over time?]
5. What elements of a home do you think best anchor you to your sense of identity?

Emotional attachment OR How do you think emotional well-being can be supported through architectural design?

Introduction about 'Post-Covid Scenario'

1. Has your understanding of home changed since the pandemic? Has your home changed at all as a result?
2. How has the pandemic reshaped expectations of home [sanctuary and multifunctional space]
AND how has this impacted psychological well-being?

Many people were forced to spend extended periods at home during the pandemic. Do you think this affected what people want or need from their living spaces / How?

3. Did COVID-19 deepen the role of home as a psychological refuge
OR did covid 19 create pressures or expectations on architects to create homes that function in different ways?

Introduction to the 'Architect-Client Relationship'

1. How would you describe your relationship with the architect during the design process?
2. What are the typical qualities as a Client that you look for in an Architect?
3. How important is it to understand a client's past living experiences before beginning a new design?
4. What challenges do you feel are most prominent in the design process when it comes to communication methods, vision and understanding?
5. To what extent should client feedback be prioritised over architectural vision and aesthetics?
How did the architect balance their personal judgment, your personal preferences and architectural standards? Did you feel that compromises were made? How do you resolve such conflicts?

6. In general, who do you think holds more decision-making power in the design process? And does this aspect change during different stages of construction?
7. How important do you feel your feedback and lived experience in the home are to the overall success of the design? Should it take precedence over the architect's original vision?

About Project

NB: Question wording may vary slightly according to the project's parameters and design.

Introduction on 'Project Background and Brief'

1. What does a typical day at home look like for you? (*to be illustrated on plan*)
2. Can you tell me about the project?

How would you describe your initial vision for this project from your point of view?

How do you feel these were realised in the final result?

3. What were your most significant priorities in the design of the home?

How did you communicate your main intentions and expectations (physically and verbally)?

How did you envision the atmosphere of this space? (colour, materials, and spatial arrangement)

Architectural Programming Process (lifestyle-based design questions); [how do you usually start and end your day at home - do you like to host people or prefer intimate settings - how often do you entertain guests at home - do you need privacy - where do you spend most of your time when you're at home - what do you do as work - when you think of your ideal home, what's the first thing that comes to mind]

4. Can you take me through the process of the design stages and communication that you went through? As a client, did you want to be involved in the process?

5. Were there moments where your ideas or approach evolved or were shaped by the architect's insights, building off of each other?
6. Which rooms or spaces in the home were most important to you during the design process, not only for functional purposes, but in creating a true sense of home and belonging, or nostalgia factor and why?
7. Are there any specific elements in the home (structurally or physically) design that you feel capture or reflect a sense of emotional or psychological comfort for you?
8. In what ways did your initial vision evolve throughout the project, and how were these changes adapted to?
AND How do you envision this space adapting to changes in your life or lifestyle - adapting to meet both your current and future needs?
9. Was there any scenario where your relationship with the architect was compromised or heightened as a result of the quality of work of the craftsmanship?
10. After the project's completion, did you keep in contact with the architect? If no, is there a particular reason as to why not?

11. POSSIBLE

How does the project navigate the tension between home as a private sanctuary and as a projection of identity outward, visible to guests and the community?

12. POSSIBLE

Were there any specific cultural, personal, or emotional elements the client wanted to incorporate, and how did you go about addressing these?

What design choices support the client's lived experience of space?

Introduction to 'Reflection'

1. Reflecting on the whole experience, would you say the final outcome of the design aligns more with your original vision or with the architect's influence?

Do you feel your vision and ideas were fully understood and respected?

2. Did the architect's explanations and visual presentations help you understand the design choices? Did these tools help you feel connected to the project? Were there methods they used that made your ideas clearer?
3. Did you feel your emotional and psychological well-being was a priority during the design, and how was this reflected in the layout and atmosphere of the space?

What elements of this project do you believe will best contribute to your long-term satisfaction and emotional connection to the space?

4. Were there moments where the architect's professional vision didn't fully align with your own ideas? How did you navigate those differences together?
5. Did you feel comfortable expressing your ideas or concerns during the design process? Were there any points where you felt your input was particularly valued or vice versa?
6. Were there aspects of the project where you felt more knowledgeable or connected to the decisions, and other areas where you relied more on the architect's expertise?
7. Has the home undergone any changes, structurally or materialistically? If yes, was the architect involved? And does this reflect badly on the Architect's understanding of the user?

Has your home adapted well to your evolving social/cultural needs over time? Would you have done anything differently?

8. If you could change anything about the design process now, what would it be?
9. Do you have any feedback directed towards the architect about how the space has impacted your emotional and mental well-being?

If you could change one thing about your current space, what would it be?

10. Do you think that it is important to remain in contact with the architect to be able to measure or assess the success of a project beyond the completion itself?
11. Would you consider working with the same architect for future projects or recommend them to others?

Conclusion

If you were given an unlimited budget, what would you have implemented differently within these same parameters?

Appendix B

Consent Forms & Information Letters



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Architect's Consent Form

Re-Centering Architecture's Humanistic Principles of Home

Dissertation submitted for the attainment of the degree of
Master of Architecture (Architectural Design).

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by **Rachel Flores**. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in **a one-on-one interview as part of an ethnographic study** in which the researcher will ask questions related to **the key themes of this dissertation in order to explore the inter-relationship between the architect (object) and the dweller (subject)**. I am aware that the **interview** will take approximately **1-2 hours**. I understand that the **interview** is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation **does not entail any known or anticipated risks**.
5. I understand that **there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study**. I also understand that this research may benefit others by: **contributing to a deeper understanding of how architectural design can better reflect the emotional and practical needs of its occupants, potentially guiding architects to create spaces that foster a stronger sense of belonging and well-being**.

6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that any unpublished data collected which has not been included in the final dissertation will be **stored confidentially** on completion of the study, and **erased** following publication of results within **two years** of completion of the study.
8. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
9. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
10. I am aware that, by marking the first tick box below, I am giving my consent for this **interview** to be **audio recorded** and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this **interview** being **audio recorded**.
- ☐ I do not agree to this **interview** being **audio recorded**.

11. I am aware that, by marking the first tick-box below, I am asking to review extracts from my interview transcript that the researcher would like to publish (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or present (e.g., during conferences, meetings), before these are published or presented. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider these to be necessary.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I would like to review extracts of my interview transcript that the researcher would like to publish and/or present, before these are published/presented.
- ☐ I would not like to review extracts of my interview transcript that the researcher would like to publish and/or present, before these are published/presented.

12. I am aware that by marking the first tick box below, I am giving my consent for the inclusion of general plan layouts related to the **discussed case study to be featured in the dissertation**. These layouts will be artistically replicated in a distinctive and unique style to the dissertation.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this **data being included**
- ☐ I do not agree to this **data being included**

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

[Student's name]
[Student's email address]
[Student's daytime phone number]

[Supervisor's title and name]
[Supervisor's email address]
[Supervisor's office number]



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ta' Malta

Client's Consent Form

Re-Centering Architecture's Humanistic Principles of Home

Dissertation submitted for the attainment of the degree of
Master of Architecture (Architectural Design).

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by **Rachel Flores**. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in **a one-on-one interview as part of an ethnographic study** in which the researcher will ask questions related to **the key themes of this dissertation in order to explore the inter-relationship between the architect (object) and the dweller (subject)**. I am aware that the **interview** will take approximately **1-2 hours**. I understand that the **interview** is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation **does not entail any known or anticipated risks**.
5. I understand that **there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study**. I also understand that this research may benefit others by: **contributing to a deeper understanding of how architectural design can better reflect the emotional and practical needs of its occupants, potentially guiding architects to create spaces that foster a stronger sense of belonging and well-being**.

6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that any unpublished data collected which has not been included in the final dissertation will be **stored confidentially** on completion of the study, and **erased** following publication of results within **two years** of completion of the study.
8. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.

FILL IN ONLY IF PREFERRED

For the purpose of this study, I wish to be referred to by the pseudonym:

9. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
10. I am aware that, by marking the first tick box below, I am giving my consent for this **interview** to be **audio recorded** and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this **interview** being **audio recorded**.
- ☐ I do not agree to this **interview** being **audio recorded**.

11. I am aware that by marking the first tick box below, I am giving my consent for the inclusion of general plan layouts related to the discussed case study to be featured in the discussed case study to be featured in the dissertation. These layouts will be artistically replicated in a distinctive and unique style to the dissertation.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this **DATA BEING INCLUDED**
- ☐ I do not agree to this **DATA BEING INCLUDED**

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

[Student's name]
[Student's email address]
[Student's daytime phone number]

[Supervisor's title and name]
[Supervisor's email address]
[Supervisor's office number]

Information letter

14/01/2025

Dear Participant

My name is Rachel Flores and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a M.Arch in Architectural Design. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Re-Centering Architecture's Humanistic Principles of Home, this is being supervised by Dr Alexia Mercieca. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

In taking a post-analytical approach to the design process, the aim of my study is to examine the complex and evolving architect-user relationship. By moving beyond viewing users as passive recipients, I aim to uncover the emotional bonds between people and their homes, highlighting how these environments can shape - and be shaped by - their inhabitants to foster a greater sense of belonging and well-being, emphasising the central role of the user in this process. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of the social complexities between architects and users in the design process. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to engage in a one-on-one interview focusing on the key themes of this dissertation being; the concepts of "home", belonging and identity, the architect-client relationship, and user-centred design. Furthermore, The architect will be asked to bring with them a completed case study of a residential dwelling of predefined parameters. This will take you approximately 1-2 hours to complete.

Data collected will be treated confidentially. Raw identifiable data will be encrypted and stored offline on an external hard drive or flash drive, or a secure UM server (not the UM Google Drive). Any material in hard copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard. Only my supervisor and myself will have access to this data.

The findings which emerge from this research may be published (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or presented (e.g., during conferences, meetings). Your name (or any other identifying information) will not appear when the findings are reported.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your

interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

All data collected will be stored confidentially on an external hard drive and on completion of the study, any unpublished data not included in the final dissertation, will be erased following publication of results, within two years of completion of the study.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

[Student's name]
[Student's email address]
[Student's daytime phone number]

[Supervisor's title and name]
[Supervisor's email address]
[Supervisor's office number]



**L-Università
ta' Malta**

Information letter

31/10/2024

Dear Participant

My name is Rachel Flores and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a M.Arch in Architectural Design. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Re-Centering Architecture's Humanistic Principles of Home, this is being supervised by Dr Alexia Mercieca. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

In taking a post-analytical approach to the design process, the aim of my study is to examine the complex and evolving architect-user relationship. By moving beyond viewing users as passive recipients, I aim to uncover the emotional bonds between people and their homes, highlighting how these environments can shape - and be shaped by - their inhabitants to foster a greater sense of belonging and well-being, emphasising the central role of the user in this process. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of the social complexities between architects and users in the design process. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to engage in a one-on-one interview focusing on; (i) the key themes of this dissertation being; the concepts of "home", belonging and identity, the architect-client relationship, and user-centred design, and (ii) discussion on your personal experience of what defines "home" for you, exploring how these qualities and values are reflected in the architecture of your dwelling. This will include questions about how well your home meets your needs and your experience of living in it over time. This will take you approximately 1-2 hours to complete.

Data collected will be treated confidentially. Raw identifiable data will be encrypted and stored offline on an external hard drive or flash drive, or a secure UM server (not the UM Google Drive). Any material in hard copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard. Only my supervisor and myself will have access to this data.

The findings which emerge from this research may be published (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or presented (e.g., during conferences, meetings). Your name (or any other identifying information) will not appear when the findings are reported. If preferred, you will be given the choice to provide a pseudonym of your choice to be used throughout the study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

All data collected will be stored confidentially on an external hard drive and on completion of the study, any unpublished data not included in the final dissertation, will be erased following publication of results, within two years of completion of the study.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

[Student's name]
[Student's email address]
[Student's daytime phone number]

[Supervisor's title and name]
[Supervisor's email address]
[Supervisor's office number]

