

## A Cover Version:

# Approaching Design through the Living Topography of Turkey

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### INTRODUCTION

Shortly after our first introduction to Turkey in 1992, the authors of this article established and directed a study abroad program in Turkey for the School of Architecture at Carleton University in Ottawa Canada (our home institution at the time). Our program offered a thirteen week term of undergraduate architectural study at the fourth year level. This study term involved travel, throughout the Western half of Anatolia, and design studios established in Istanbul and Cappadocia. The following article will briefly describe the general intentions of our teaching and study in Turkey, some of the design projects we devised to accomplish these intentions, and concludes with an outline of the academic and logistical structure of the program.

### INTENTIONS

At the risk of repeating the standard cliché, one cannot begin any discussion about this part of the world without re-emphasizing that the history and culture of Anatolia embodies the entwining and wrestling of 'Eastern' and 'Western' cultures and sensibilities. This unique condition may be felt most acutely in the city of Istanbul, which lives both physically and metaphysically within the continents of Europe and Asia. The past and the present also remain emphatically entwined here. In the modern metropolis of Istanbul one can easily find the seemingly unbroken rhythms of Anatolian village life enduring as a counterpoint to the industrial and post industrial rhythms of the machine, information transfer, and the global flow of capital. Traditional Turkish culture is a communal culture, and its structures of exchange and support are still alive here, even as free market capital and a growing consumer culture take root. The ways in which this complex mix of cultural conditions works, and the kinds of structures this requires (both architectural and interpersonal), provides vivid and invaluable insights to the attentive North American student.

Most of our students had very little experience outside Canada - in fact, many of them had never traveled outside their home province. An important part of our job as teachers was to make these students comfortable in their new surroundings, and then to lead them as deeply and fully as we could into the new worlds they would find themselves immersed in. We tried to find ways to help them overcome, as much as possible, the observer status of the tourist.

In his article *Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes* James Corner, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, discusses the distinction between "landskip" - referring to a scenic landscape or an aestheticized experience of a primarily visual nature, and "landschaft" - referring to a working community, including the inhabitants of a place as well as their obligations to one another and the land - an experience which depends much more on tactility and use over a period of time.<sup>1</sup> It is precisely this environment of a working community, or living topography as we have come to call it, which includes the relationships between the land, the people, their built structures and history, that we found so compelling and inspiring in Turkey. It was our desire to develop a program of study and a series of design investigations that might tap this kind of deeper understanding and appreciation of this foreign context.

How or why one builds, and the virtues or insufficiencies of one kind of architecture over another are questions that are brought into clear focus in such a living topography. It should be emphasized that no answers are offered in Turkey; the dilemmas of our time are simply placed before us in an extraordinarily straightforward and accessible way. The student of architecture immersed in the living topography of Turkey is left to contemplate and work out issues of late Twentieth Century (early Twenty-first Century) material culture within the resonance of its ancient origins.

Several unique aspects of present day Turkey encourage and sustain this approach. The great wealth and extraordinary accessibility of ancient architectural sites and cities brings life to the study of history in ways that cannot be duplicated elsewhere, and the well known generosity and hospitality of the Turks themselves makes access to contemporary Turkish culture available to us in ways that would be unimaginable elsewhere.

Additionally, contemporary Turkish life and culture is in a palpable state of flux. This is an important point, not easily described to those unfamiliar with this cultural terrain. We found this sense of flux saturating nearly every aspect of our life there, from the very fluid manner in which business relationships are established and maintained, to the sense of Turkey as one huge construction site. The constant, and sometimes seething change that occurs, takes place in the midst of timeless traditions and physical environments. This condition puts any design intervention 'into motion', as it were; conditions of both historical and contemporary culture are amplified in every program and site, shattering any attempt to make architecture a merely three-dimensional, or visual enterprise.

## STUDIO DESIGN PROJECTS

Over the years we developed many different projects. One approach entitled the Cover Version, outlined below, emerged as a defining feature that lies at the core of our program.

This approach to design takes the pop music model as an analogy. This same analogy might also be made from the Jazz tradition of playing "the standards". In both cases a well known (and well loved) song is performed again by new musicians. The point of a good Cover is the way the original, and its previous versions have been altered, quoted, expanded, rediscovered, or reinvented by the new performers. Using this approach as a departure point, we began with a very careful reading/analysis of a pre-existing context, i.e. the 'song' or 'standard' the students are asked to 'cover'.

### THE COVER VERSION IN CAPPADOCIA

Our first attempt to explore this way of working took place in the rural setting of Cappadocia, with its many extraordinary and ancient rock-cut caves, troglodyte dwellings, churches, and monasteries. We set up a studio in Urgup, Cappadocia in a hotel where the students lived and worked. The breakfast room, balconies and the front courtyard became our studio space. We arranged for a fleet of six mopeds and four trail bikes to assist the students' investigations of the surrounding environment.

We did not tour the students around as a group, and we did not offer formal lectures on the history of the region or its architecture. Instead, we asked each of them to travel through this landscape to discover by themselves a place they would like to draw and investigate. The goal was to allow these students the means to learn from the land. The living topography of this unique landscape/architecture became the impetus for our work. The hospitality of the Turks we met here enriched their adventures with invitations to share tea, food (being harvest season), and conversation. In a typically Turkish way, these experiences opened new horizons and understandings that simultaneously embraced humanity, history, and the terrain.



Fig. 1. Danielle Dewar - Cappadocia Cover Version - Site located between Urgup and Mustafapasa, 1995.

Each student found a particular place to study, measure and draw over a period of fourteen days, thereby immersing themselves in the 'original' they would be asked to 'cover' in their studio work. Many layers of time have come to shape these sites, and it is precisely these layers that became the focus of our attention. In the investigations of their sites, students came across rock-cut spaces that were still in use, as well as ones that were on the verge of disappearing. In many cases, different interventions and alterations could still be clearly read, particularly in those caves that had been transformed from ancient dwellings or churches into less ancient dovecotes, apiaries, or stables, as well as through the natural events of erosion.

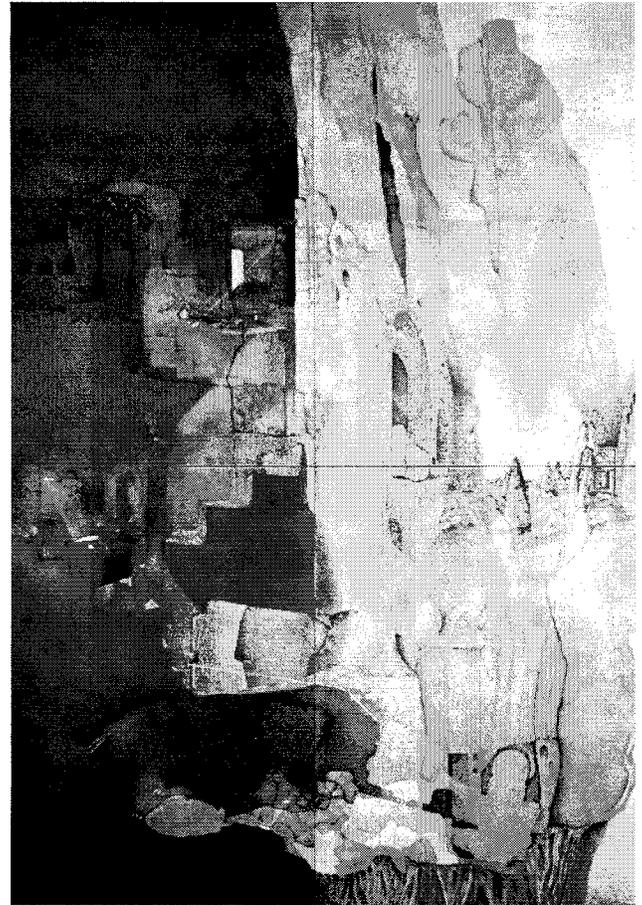


Fig. 2. Peter Caudle - Cappadocia Cover Version - Site located near Goreme, 1995.

The students were asked to document their site using all the evidence available from the site itself, as well as what they could imagine about the lives lived in these sites. Inhabitation of people, birds, the fruits of harvest as well as the elements of light, wind, water, sound etc., all formed part of the palette that made up the various lives of these spaces and became central to the project. The project was to draw out (in graphite) the lives that the students found embedded and resonant within their sites. These drawings were at once accurate and painstakingly rendered representations of an actual place, as well as the student's Cover Version of the atmosphere and past lives still resonant within the sites living topography. This investigation lasted a total of three and a half weeks.

### THE COVER VERSION IN ISTANBUL

A second attempt to explore the cover version approach was undertaken in the urban setting of Istanbul. Once again we used our hotel as both residence and studio space. Two different sites were investigated and are summarized below, followed by descriptions of the projects given for each of them.

The first site was located in an old but still active Ottoman commercial building (Han) called the Cuhacilar Hani (Han of the Cloth-Dealers) located next to the Grand Bazaar in Stamboul. This han was built in the first half of the eighteenth century by Damat Ibrahim Pasa, Grand Vezir in the reign of Sultan Ahmet III. It was built, following the tradition for such buildings, as a kind of urban caravanseri. Its original plan presented an open rectangular courtyard defined by a two story enclosure of domed spaces on all four sides. Originally used for textile

trade as it's name indicates, it has, over the years, adapted to a wide range of commerce and trade. Indeed, the transition and adaptation has never stopped, and continues today.



Fig. 3. General view of Cuhacilar Han interior courtyard, Istanbul.

The courtyard and ground level of the han is filled with small retail shops selling gold jewelry. These are all contemporary in design with well appointed and brightly lit interiors. The second floor of the han surrounding the courtyard below, is packed with tiny gold ateliers that produce the jewelry sold below and in the Grand Bazaar. We were told by the men working here that there were over 800 tiny gold shops and ateliers packed into this old stone building. There are also two gold foundries, one Turkish and the other Armenian, reflecting the clear cultural distinctions existing within the larger community of the han, along with a few currency traders, a mosque, eating and recreational facilities, and a jewelry box maker.



Fig. 4. Interior photo-collage of an 'original' gold atelier, Cuhacilar Han.

The gold ateliers are very small, usually about 2m x 3m, accommodating anywhere from 2 to 5 workers. These shops are extraordinarily dense spaces, and are highly efficient and productive little operations. They are also unlike anything to be found in Canada. The typology of the original Han has been invaded over time with the insertion of these conglomerate ateliers and shops, adding a density and labyrinthine complexity that boggles the mind. Most of the insertions and anomalies to the original building form have been provisional and dependent on whatever materials were readily and inexpensively available. It is difficult to describe this han as a building. It is essentially a micro city in both function and feeling, and provided us with an ideal setting for investigating a multitude of urban and architectural conditions. We were particularly interested in the minutia of each shop's functioning, the professional daily lives of its inhabitants, and how the scarcity and modesty of available materials in these vernacular/informal constructions might offer lessons for us about invention with limited means.

The second site was chosen from among the many ferry boat terminals that stitch together this maritime city. The waters of the Golden Horn separate old Stambul from the 'Galata' side of Istanbul's European half, and the waters of the Sea of Marmara separate the European and Asian halves of the city. Outlying portions of the city also lie along either side of the Bosphorus. While a small number of bridges provide roadways connecting these disparate regions, a large fleet of government run ferry boats and privately run water 'taxis' provide crucial links that hold this extraordinary city together.

In both the Cuhacilar Han and the Ferry Terminal projects the sites were quite fluid in nature. The dense interpersonal space, and the constant exchange of raw materials and goods throughout the Han, or the arrival, passage, and departure of boats and passengers, and the rhythmic connection of otherwise remote portions of the city gave a fluid pulse to these living topographies. In each case we were looking for a careful documentation of the actual inhabitation of these places. The intention was to draw upon the living program of existing life and actual working relationships (physical, social, historical, cultural, economic) to inform each student's work.

Each student was responsible for finding his or her own site to 'cover'. In the case of the ferry terminal sites, this naturally involved many days of traveling around the city by water, and a great deal of time observing and noting how it functioned at various times of the day or night throughout the week. Its position and presence in the city as well as its facades to both water and land, and its implicit connection to other points in the city were all taken together as the 'tune' to be 'covered' by their own version of that ferry terminal. Also included in this phase of the project was a study of the classic navel architecture of the boats themselves, and a visit to the shipyard on the Golden Horn that constructed these ships - an historical site in its own right, with its original Ottoman stone dry-docks still in use.

In the Cuhacilar Han sites, students had to establish a fairly close relationship with the proprietor and workers in these tiny ateliers. Here the minutia of how individual spaces functioned was noted and drawn, resulting in a complete set of plans, sections and elevations showing the location of each person, tool, workbench, water jug, coat hook, tea pot - everything.

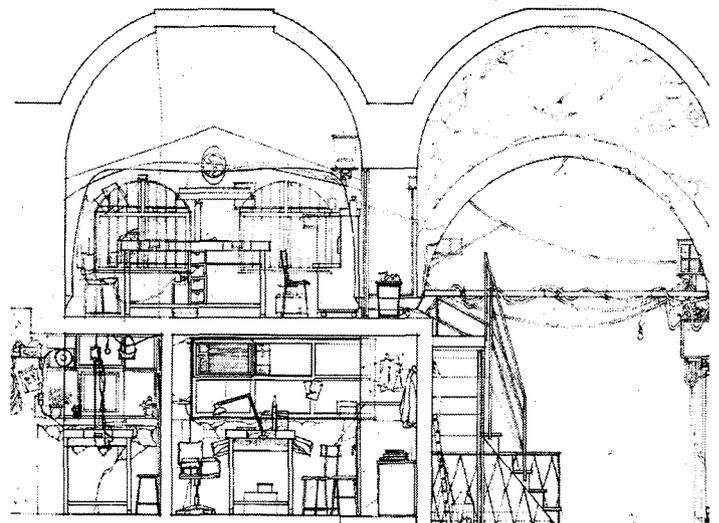


Fig. 5. Brad Chase - Inhabited section drawing of an 'original' gold atelier, Cuhacilar Han., 1995

This in-depth study of 'the original' was intended to avoid producing projects that imposed a program as understood in Canada, with a Canadian sense of space, materiality etc. Instead, we were searching for a way to help our students establish their own 'take' on an existing

program and content already in place. Their analysis of the inhabitation became the defining program for their project. The basic tune - a Turkish tune - remains the same, however the version offered by the student's design was to be their own.

The new version had to accommodate all the existing functions and parts of the original, in so far as they were deemed to be fundamental to the life of its program, site, and inhabitants. This included every minute detail observed and understood from the initial analysis. Each and every aspect of the 'original' had to be accounted for in some way. This could be done through any means a student found best: quotation, transformation, rejection, excision, etc. In the end it was their own version, but they were not composing from scratch.

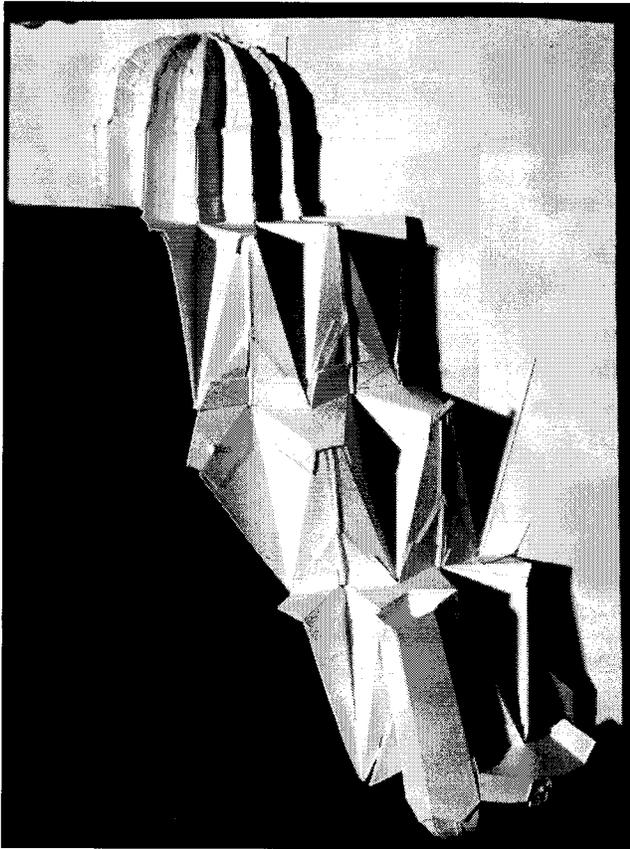


Fig. 6. Paper model replica of an Ottoman muqarna, 1995

In the case of the Han project, we specifically focused the work along material lines, insisting that modern indigenous materials be used in their Cover Versions. For example, concrete and sheet metal were to replace stone, iron, and lead. Preparation for this work was provided by an earlier (and diabolically difficult) four day project where students were asked to replicate the geometry of an Ottoman muqarna using folded paper. This served not only to open the intricacies of Islamic geometry, but to prime the students for the imaginative use of sheet metal, which is conveniently and accurately modeled by sheets of paper (Paper is also an ideal material for model making in a nomadic studio environment).

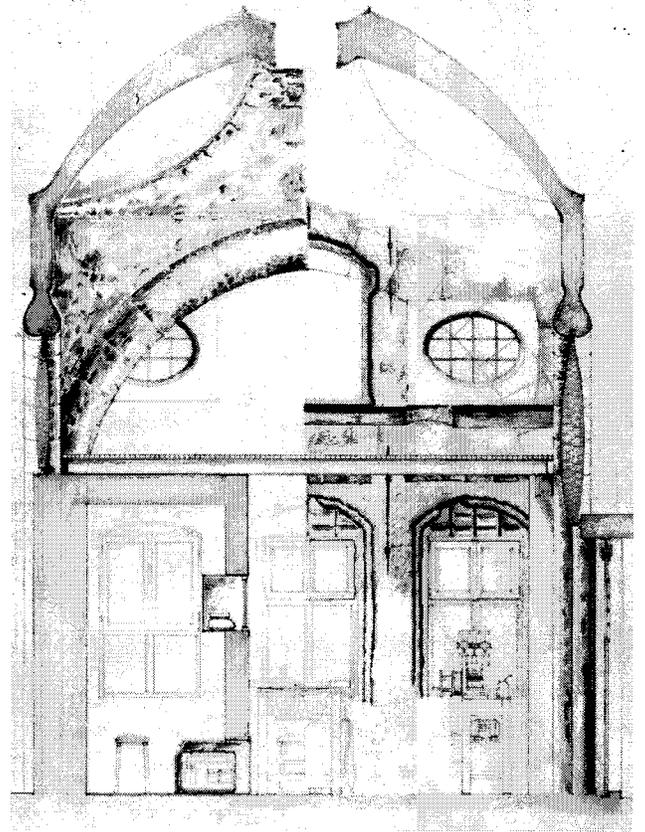


Fig. 7. Thomas McKintosh - Cover Version of Cubacilar Han gold atelier, section / elevation, 1995

One important advantage of doing a project in this way is that issues of construction, materiality, detail, texture, sound, colour, facade, interior elevations, light etc., are made part of the design process from the very beginning. The all too common, and debilitating fixation with tweaking the parti or plan ad nauseum, until time has run out, did not occur in these projects. This alone, we feel, recommends the approach.

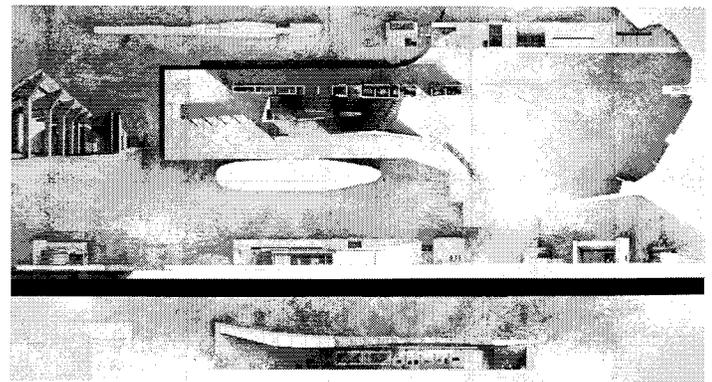


Fig. 8. Ching Luk - Cover Version of Kadikoy Ferry Terminal, Istanbul, 1997

Beyond the expectation that such projects are of value to a professional education in architecture, it was our hope that the difference(s) between the Turkish original and the Canadian cover version might have some value in itself - both to us as visitors and to our hosts. With this in mind, the Cappadocia and Istanbul cover version projects both received public exhibitions - in Urgup at the Offices of Argeus Travel, and in Istanbul at the Istanbul Technical University (ITU) School of Architecture.

## ACADEMIC AND LOGISTICAL STRUCTURE

We took our first group of students to Turkey in 1993. In 1994 another professor from the school went with a second group, and we returned in 1995 with a third trip. In 1995 we made connections with ITU and continued to develop these in 1997 with our final trip (which we made with our three month old daughter). Each of these trips was made with approximately 15-18 students. We have since moved to the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg Manitoba, and are in the process of beginning a new program from there.

Our students were in their fourth year of studies, in a professional five-year BArch program. Our program to Turkey provided a full term's curriculum - a design studio and three courses. We also arranged non-credit introductory language lessons for our group prior to our departure.

The course offerings were structured as follows: One of the elective courses was completed independently over the summer prior to leaving for Turkey. The intention of this course was to provide an introduction and orientation to Turkey, its history, and its relations to North American and European culture in general. An extensive reader was prepared containing a series of excerpts from travel journals that spanned from Byzantine times to modern day Turkey. A written interpretive account of a Turkish miniature was also required.

Upon arriving in Istanbul in late August, we taught a one and a half week block course on the History of the City that took place throughout the city itself. During the rest of our stay in Turkey the students completed the studio and one additional course consisting of a comprehensive sketch book and journal.

We organized our travel around the studio program which was subdivided into two distinct parts: a four week rural studio held in Urgup Cappadocia and a six week urban studio held in Istanbul. We traveled for one week prior to the rural studio, through the interior of Anatolia including Bursa, Kutahya, Cavdarhisar, and Ankara. Following this studio we traveled for two weeks, along the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts including Konya, Egirdir, Aspendos, Thermessos, Olympos, Chimera, Cirali, Myra/Demre, Kas Patara, Selcuk, Ephesus, Aphrodisias, Priene, Miletus, Didyma, Bergama, Assos, Troy, Canakkale, and Edirne ending up back in Istanbul for the final urban studio.

We traveled using a combination of both public transport and a hired bus. It was very important to us that the students didn't see the country from behind the windows of a tour bus. We took as many

opportunities as we could find to immerse them in the country, language, customs etc. Although we organized hotel and studio accommodations in Cappadocia and Istanbul, for much of our travel the students were responsible for finding and negotiating their own accommodations, as well as for all their meals and other necessities of life.

The operating budget for these programs, excluding faculty expenses, was \$6,000 CN (approximately \$4,000 US). This covered the basic collective expenses such as renting studio space, paying a teaching assistant, guests critics and lecturers. The personal student budget for the entire term including airfare, accommodation, meals, travel, supplies etc. was about \$5,000 CN (\$3,200 US).

Our program received invaluable assistance from many individuals and institutions in Turkey, including: Istanbul Technical University, The German Archeological Institute and The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (I.R.C.I.C.A.), and Argeus Tourism to name a few. These included library access, research expertise and historical reference materials as well as many valued visiting lectures, visits and guest critiques as well as the opportunity for our students to meet and work with Turkish students.

As our knowledge of Turkey and our familiarity with Turkish culture increased over the years, we naturally made changes to the structure and logistics of the program. However, the theme of the Cover Version approach to our studio projects, which emerged out of our first impressions of Turkey in 1992, continued to reaffirm its appropriateness and value through a number of site and project variations. These eventually included several Canadian versions that have helped us make similarly attentive explorations here at home.

Finally, we must mention the students who traveled and studied with us over the years. We have been very fortunate to have seen Turkey through their eyes and hearts as well as our own. Their lives have been changed by the experiences they had in Turkey. The same is true for us.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Corner, "Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes," in *Recovering Landscape - Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999: 154).