

review / ESTHER MEOREDY

# Mike Davis' Lang Doors: A commentary on time, material and practice

*I have salvaged a lot of material from the old house.*

*I have de-nailed and transported 600 metres of Rimu match-lining  
and 100 metres of Kauri weatherboards.*

*Why? I don't know what I will use it for ... it feels like treasure.*

*My wrist has jammed up.*

*The builders are laughing at me.*

—**Mike Davis**  
excerpt from project sketchbook,  
7 January 2012



Fig. 1 The initial house on the Langs Beach site. [Photograph, Michael Davis, 2012]

Fig. 2 The new bach at Langs Beach [Photograph, Simon Devitt, 2012]



After being in the family for four generations, a loved, yet dilapidated house at Langs Beach, Northland, New Zealand was dismantled and a new bach was built in its place. The clients were two sisters whose parents had passed away leaving them the place where they had spent their family holidays together as children. Architect and main contactor Michael Davis was involved in both the demolition of the old house and the design of the new one. Much of the native timber

structure and cladding was extracted, transported, sorted, stacked, processed and returned to the site to be reused.



Fig. 3 The initial house being disassembled. [Photograph, Michael Davis, 2012]



Fig. 4 Salvaged Rimu match-lining. [Photograph, Michael Davis, 2012]

Langs Beach is a coastal holiday subdivision fronting a strip of golden sand running between Mangawhai and Waipu in Northland. The nearest town is 11km away. Given the region's limited transport infrastructure in the 1940s, and the likely difficulty of getting material to site, it is reasonable to assume that the timber used to build the original bach came from the immediate surrounds. Cognizant of the embodied material history of the timber, and the rarity of its availability now, its reuse became key to the project.

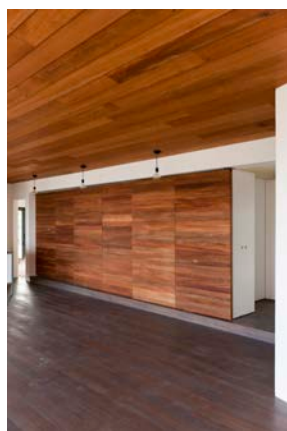


Fig. 5 The Doors viewed from the living room. [Photograph, Sajeev Ruthramoorthy, 2012]

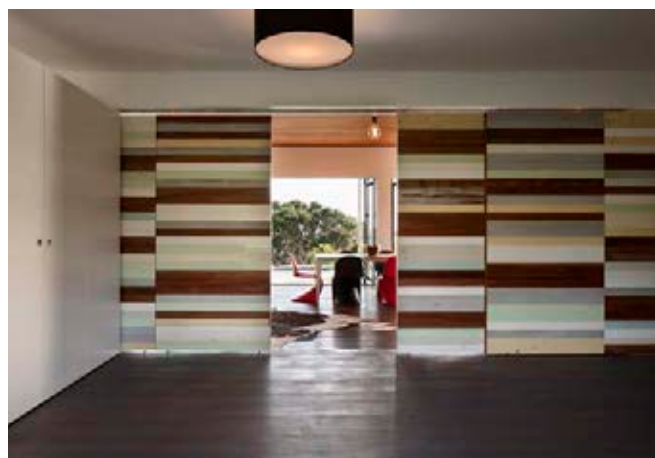


Fig. 6 The Doors viewed from the living room. [Photograph, Simon Devitt, 2012]

The resulting doors comprise six, 2.1m high x 1m wide panels that slide between two central living spaces within the new bach. The side facing the main living area presents a relief milled by a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine. The other facing a children's space contains stripes of timber painted peppermint green, French vanilla cream, matt grey, muted turquoise blue, and flaking white—a colour palette representative of the “service” spaces of the original house. Yet well before summoning up kitchens, bathrooms or laundries, the doors recall summery confectionary.



Fig. 7 Detail of the CNC relief  
[Photograph, Sajeev Ruthramoorthy, 2012]

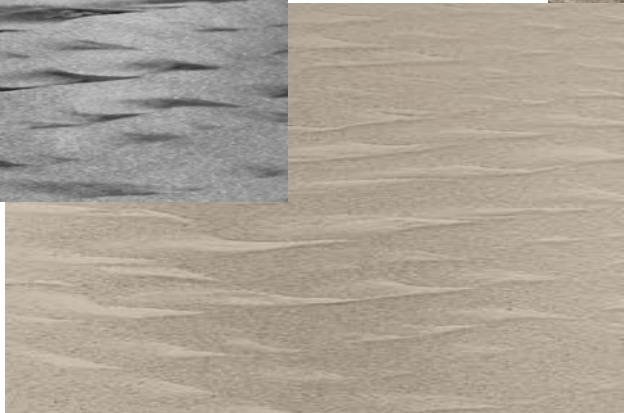
Fig. 8 CNC relief over tonal variation in the Rimu. [Photograph, Sajeev Ruthramoorthy, 2012]

Fig. 9 Sand pattern [Image, Sajeev Ruthramoorthy, 2012]

Fig. 10 Displacement map [Image, Sajeev Ruthramoorthy, 2012]

Fig. 11 CNC cutting head working from rough to fine cut. [Photograph, Michael Davis, 2012]

Having been de-nailed and machined, the old match-lining was fixed to both outer faces of hollow core door leaves. Care was taken in selecting the material for surfaces facing the children's space ensuring that there were no blemishes other than those present in the grain of the timber, or the peeling paint. The other surface was CNC milled to create a relief derived from photographs of patterns left in the sand by the receding tide.



The mannered skin of the *Langs Doors* now sit in relation to the recycled Kauri weatherboards lining the ceiling and the recycled Rimu framing laid as flooring. This abundance of timber and its attention to grain, provides the bach with a sense of surplus; perhaps within this kind of surplus memory thrives. Certainly, the match-lining is evocative for those who have previously occupied the site. For Davis working with the materials and drawing out this surplus was key.

The demounting, denailing, sorting and stacking of the timber called for care and a certain interrogative engagement. What does the paint conceal? What sort of beauty might exist in the grain and blemish gifted by earth and atmosphere? Despite the stark precision of the CNC cutting head passed over the timber, each panel slowly came to reveal unique, inherent qualities. Like a new relationship overcoming neglect, revealed is something of the timber's inherent, long building potential.

Issuing from the doors is an appreciable sense of time and its variant effects. As a species, Rimu boasts wild differences in grain between heart and sap wood. The undulating CNC surface intensifies the beauty of this tonal variation and sensitively incorporates signs of the previous use. Its presence as a building material is only its more recent incarnation. Prior to felling, the trees likely defined the Langs area for up to 300 years.

Such a project, focused as it is on a care for, and with, material practices, shows us how to potentially connect to times and even worlds beyond the immediate. The *Langs Doors* provide a means to encounter embodied energy, embodied place qualities, but also repertoires of tradition and invention, old technologies and new materials

## NOTE:

This text is related to another by Esther Mecredy, Alessandro Melis and Mike Davis titled *Ark and the Agency of the Vessel: A reflective case study on the role of the installation in design-led research*. It is to be published in *DrawingOn* in late 2017.