

## CULTURAL MEANINGS EMBEDDED IN THE FAÇADE OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS' HOUSES IN BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

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### Abstract

*In the Post-WWII period, while industrial production in Italy had diminished and millions of people were unemployed, Australia was facing the opposite problem of shortage of labour, due to a rapid agricultural and industrial development. By virtue of the immigration policy adopted by the Australian government in the 1950s, assistance with the cost of migration to Australia was provided to those Italians willing to migrate to Australia. Italian migrants, as well as diverse migrant groups, brought with them cultural practices and a way of life, which are nowadays part of the multicultural Australian built environment and society. This research study focuses on the domestic dwellings built in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Brisbane by the Italian migrants. Namely, it is argued that the façade of migrants' houses is embedded by cultural meanings. The study is of qualitative nature and as primary sources of data uses (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) photo-elicitation interviews and (3) focus group discussion, which were conducted both in Australia with twenty first-generation Italian migrants, and in Italy with ten informants, indigenous to the Veneto region, where they built their homes. Visual data about the houses was collected with (4) photographs and drawings. The findings reveal that Italian houses are concurrently a physical structure and a set of meanings based on culture: these two components are tied together rather than being separate and distinct. Namely, the Veneto migrants chose two models for the construction of their houses in Brisbane: (1) the rural houses built in the 1970s and 1980s by their ancestors (2) and the villas designed by Andrea Palladio in the 15th century in the Veneto region for noble families.*

**Keywords:** Australia; migration; housing culture; physical factors

### BACKGROUND

Migration is a relevant topic for Australia, as this nation implemented one of the largest immigration programs in the second half of the 20th century, in order to double its size within a short period of forty years (Jordens, 1995; Jupp, 1996; Murphy, 1993). Of all migrant groups who came to Australia during this period, the Italian group has been one of the most numerous (Baldassar, 2005; Church, 2005; Cresciani, 2003; Pascoe, 1987), and its physical presence in the urban territory is observable in public places with, for instance, pizzerias, restaurants, ice-cream parlours, food shops and so on (Laura & Finch, 2008; Sagazio, 2004). The Italian migrants are seen to have annexed their characteristic culture to the Australian society, a *modus operandi*, which concurrently offers continuity with their native country and adds variety to Australian life (Laura & Finch, 2008; Sagazio, 2004). Yet the effects of Italian migration on the Australian urban landscape are visible also in migrant's private places, such as their homes (Faggion & Furlan, 2016; Furlan, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016; Furlan & Faggion, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Furlan & L.Faggion, 2016). Therefore, the aim of this research study is to study the domestic dwellings built by a group of Italian migrants who emigrated from the Veneto region to Brisbane after WWII. It is argued that the material realm of these domestic dwellings in their physical form, namely their

facades, is embedded with a symbolic realm represented by the various cultural meanings that the Italian migrants have attached to their homes in Brisbane.

### **Dichotomy between High-Style and Vernacular Architecture**

The international academic discourse about architecture has long been rooted in a dichotomy dividing the nature of buildings. More than four decades ago, Rapoport (1969) distinguished between “the ‘important’ buildings or monuments, especially those of the past” often recognised as masterpieces belonging to the “grand design tradition”(p. 2 emphasis added)(Rapoport, 1969), and “the ‘unimportant’ buildings or houses” (p. 2 emphasis added) belonging to the “folk tradition in which the majority of people live” (p. 2). This dichotomy still persists. Klaufus (2005) offered a similar distinction dividing “buildings designed by academically-schooled architects, trained in ... architectural thought and values” (p. 9) referred to as “ high-style architecture” and “Architecture with a capital ‘A’” (p. 9), from buildings produced by ordinary laymen and referred to as vernacular, traditional, folk or popular architecture.

High-style architecture is embraced mainly by architectural historians and theorists, who, in their treatises, emphasise the extraordinary, the atypical and the work of men of genius (Rapoport, 1969). Therefore, the investigation of vernacular houses has been neglected by architects with some exceptions (Alexander, 1964; Andersen, 1977; Ardelan & Bakhtiar, 1973; Blair, 1983; Fathy, 1973; Guidoni; Moholy-Nagy, 1957; Nabocov & Easton, 1989; Oliver, 1997, 2003; Prussin, 1969; Rapoport, 1969; Rudofsky, 2003 [1964]; Tjahjono, 1989). Architects have conducted research on vernacular, ordinary buildings looking at their spatial form, design, decoration, aesthetic, material and construction methods with a wide approach comprising nations (Andersen, 1977; Ardelan & Bakhtiar, 1973; Blair, 1983; Fathy, 1973; Lee, 1989; Moholy-Nagy, 1957; Prussin, 1969) and the world (Guidoni, 1989; Oliver, 1997, 2003; Rapoport, 1969; Rudofsky, 2003 [1964]) or drawing explicitly on anthropological theories (Alexander, 1964; Nabocov & Easton, 1989; Tjahjono, 1989). In fact, vernacular architecture is most studied in anthropology as well as in archaeology, sociology and human geography (Asquith, 2006; Klaufus, 2005; Rapoport, 1969). Therefore, vernacular architecture has been chosen because it is considered to be more autochthonous, spontaneous and authentic compared to that designed in a professional environment. Therefore, its form can be examined as evidence of the way the users influenced it in response to both specific cultural needs and physical factors.

### **House Form: Physical and Cultural Factors**

Physical form, one of the component of Relph’s model for the investigation of the built form is analysed with the theories of Senders (1997), Rapoport (1969, 1997) and Oliver (2007). Sanders (1997) summarises the factors which influence the form (and use) of domestic structures as: climate; topography; materials; level of technology; economic resources; function; and cultural conventions. In turn, Sanders groups these factors into three categories: naturally fixed; flexible; or culturally fixed.

In the first category, Sanders considers climate and topography as two factors which affect the form of the house. These factors are fixed by natural conditions at the outset of construction of the building. The next category corresponds to those elements (available material, level of technology and economic resources) whose degree of influence on the form and use of domestic structures vary greatly. The third category includes function and cultural conventions. Similarly to the first category, the two factors included are also fixed at the outset of construction, however, unlike climate and topography, these are determined by cultural conditions. Sanders argues that, of all factors, cultural conventions must be retained as the most important because they have the greatest impact on the architectural form (and use) of the house. For him, cultural conventions are represented by the values and the worldview possessed by a cultural group, which demarcate the choices and the decisions of the group for the final arrangement of the form (and

use) of the house. Sanders' conceptualisation of domestic architecture in relation to cultural conventions is based on Rapoport's theories (1969).

In his book, *House Form and Culture* published in 1969, Rapoport discusses the forces acting on the form of the house. As Rapoport (1969, 2003) argues, numerous examples of domestic architecture worldwide show that climate, site, construction, material, and technology are all important variables affecting the form of the house, but they do not determine it. As he explains, similar climatic zones can present different forms of houses as, for instance, the houses with courtyard plans and heavy masonry built by Chinese migrants in Malaya and found beside the autochthon houses, or the mansions constructed of brick and marble in Brazil's Amazon jungle in strong contrast to the houses of the local Indians. At the same time, different climatic zones can present the same forms of houses, for example, the dwellings of the Native Americans in California who lived on the coast in summer and in the hills in winter, however the form of their houses did not change. Similarly, same site conditions can result in very different house forms. For example, on the same hillside of a mountain, a house plan can be developed to take advantage of the view or the plan can be oriented taking into consideration the Chinese practice of feng shui. At the same time, the same house forms can be built on very different sites, such as a house raised on stilts that can be found on the shoreline and also on dry sites. Analogous reasoning is applied to the construction, which involves materials and technology: the same construction materials and tools can lead to different forms of housing, and different construction materials and tools can result in the same form of housing. According to Rapoport (1969), all these factors are considered to be modifying rather than form determinant, because they facilitate and make possible or impossible certain decisions, but they never decide what to build nor the form of the building. For Rapoport (1969), house form is ... the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors seen in their broadest terms. Form is in turn modified by climatic conditions (the physical environment which makes some things impossible and encourages others) and by method of construction, materials available, and the technology (the tools for achieving the desired environment). I will call the socio-cultural forces primary and the others secondary or modifying (p. 47 emphasis added).

More recently, Oliver (2007) shared Rapoport's conceptualisation on the form of a house in relation to secondary forces, stating that climate, soil, vegetation, seasons and other natural resources "do not determine shelter forms but they do condition them" (p. 3). In addition, Rapoport stresses that 'Once the identity and character of a culture has been grasped, and some insight gained into its values, its choices among possible dwelling responses to both physical and cultural variables become much clearer. The specific characteristics of a culture - the accepted way of doing things the socially unacceptable ways and the implicit ideals - need to be considered since they affect housing and settlement form' (pp. 46-47 emphasis added).

Thus, the 'accepted way of doing things' is understood as being the customs and traditional ways of a culture. It is argued that these elements, together with the ideals, determine the decision by Italian migrants as to what form the façade of the house will take. Therefore, customs, traditional ways and ideals are the specific elements of a culture that need to be investigated in order to fully understand the form of the façade of Italian migrants' domestic dwelling.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design clarifies the knowledge claims and the qualitative strategies of enquiry underpinning the research study. The experience of migration and building a home in a host country (Australia) with the cultural meanings associated to the facades of their artefacts are investigated within an Italian group from the Veneto region, who is currently settled in Brisbane. The Veneto region has purposefully been chosen to narrow the study to only one Italian regional group, rather than concentrating on the large pan-Italian community of Brisbane, not only

because there is paucity of research on this particular population in South East Queensland, Australia (Baldassar & Pesman, 2005), but also because in Italy, life, people, language, culture, style of cuisine and architecture have a regional character. In fact, each of the twenty regions in Italy has a distinctive culture. This is confirmed by the writings of Mangano (in Kruse, 2006), Pascoe (1987), Mecca and Iozzi (2000).

The data was collected from in-depth interviews conducted both in Australia and Italy. While the interviews in Australia were carried out among ten families (natives of the Veneto region) who migrated from Italy to Australia during the 1950s-1960s, the interviews in Italy were performed among five Veneto families, who had never migrated from their native region and were friends of the interviewed informants in Australia. The latter were interviewed in order to co-validate the information given by the former. The material presented here comes also from the first focus group conducted at the Italian Club in Newmarket, a northern suburb of Brisbane. The data, derived from transcriptions of the interviews and group discussions, was coded into three themes: (1) the house's location, (2) the way it was plan and built and finally (3) the composition and/or the features of the façade.

To gain a deeper understanding of the themes originating from the first level of analysis and to facilitate the relationships between themes, hermeneutic analysis was used (Stake, 1994; Yin, 2003; Zeisel, 1984). After being subjected to hermeneutic analysis, the findings have been validated by the informants. Armstrong (2000, 2003, 2004) argues that concepts associated with place and migrant people are complex to extrapolate and often have different layers, requiring skilled interpretation. Thus, she used hermeneutic analysis. The way Armstrong utilised hermeneutic phenomenology in her analysis provides insight for this study, where a form of phenomenological interpretation based on the philosopher Madison (1988) was adopted, as explained on table below.

Table 1: Criteria for hermeneutic Interpretation (Source: Authors - adapted from Madison 1988, pp. 29-37).

Criteria	Text interpretations
<b>Coherence</b>	The interpretation must be coherent in itself; it must present a unified picture and not contradict itself. This holds true even if the work being interpreted has contradictions of its own. The interpreter must make coherent sense of all the contradictions.
<b>Comprehensive</b>	This concerns the relation of the interpretation in itself to the work as a whole. In interpreting texts one must take into account the author's thoughts as a whole and not ignore works, which bear on the issue.
<b>Penetration</b>	It should bring out a guiding or underlying intention in the text i.e. recognising the author's attempts to resolve a central problematic.
<b>Thoroughness</b>	A good interpretation should attempt to deal with all the questions it poses to the interpreted text.
<b>Appropriateness</b>	Interpretations must be ones that the text itself raises and not an occasion for dealing with one's own questions.
<b>Contextuality</b>	The author's work must be seen in its historical and cultural context.
<b>Suggestiveness</b>	A good understanding will be fertile in that it will stimulate further research and questions.
<b>Agreement</b>	The interpretation must agree with what the author actually says. This is in contrast to reductive hermeneutics characteristics of Marxism or Freudianism.
<b>Potential</b>	The interpretation is capable of being extended and continues to unfold harmoniously.

## RESULTS

### Location of Last Houses and Culture as the Way of Doing Things

As a result of the decision taken by the interviewed migrants to settle permanently in Australia in the 1980s, a series of investments in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, including the purchase of land for the construction of their current homes, was pursued. In searching for the best location for their new houses in Brisbane, respondents did not converge on the suburb of New Farm (two kilometres from Brisbane's Central Business District - CBD), distinctive for its high concentration of Italian migrants (Benjamin & Grant, 2008). Instead, the desire of the informants to construct new dwellings led them to the outer suburbs, where in the 1980s plenty of land was available. These expanding residential suburbs were located in Woolloowin (6 km from the CBD), Stafford Heights (8 km from the CBD), Wavell Heights (9 km from the CBD), Bridgeman Downs and Aspley (both 13 km from the CBD), Calamvale (15 km from the CBD) and Bracken Ridge (20 km from the CBD) (see Figure 1). From the interviews it was discovered that the proximity to the city was considered to not be crucial (see Figure 2). These outer suburbs in the 1980s and 1990s were less urbanised and considered to be more attractive and/or an ideal choice for people like the interviewees, who had peasant origins, worked for decades on farms and had lived all their lives in small towns. For the interviewed migrants, if proximity to the city was not of great interest, the vicinity with members of their family, when possible, was considered to be an advantage. In fact, very often the informants purchased land in suburbs where other relatives already settled some time before them. This factor demonstrates how the vicinity to family members was cardinal in deciding where to purchase land in an attempt to replicate the proximity of families existing in their native villages.

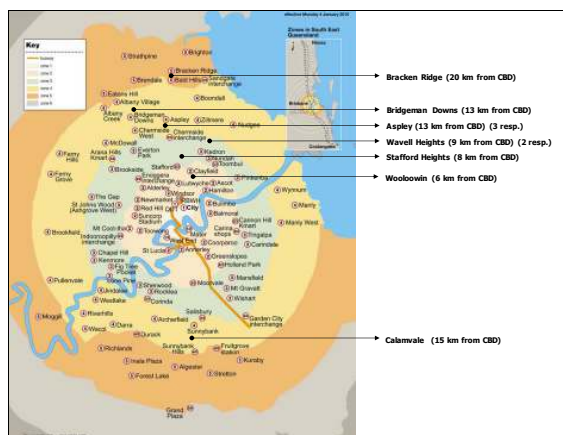


Figure 1: Locations of houses built by the interviewed Veneto migrants in Brisbane (Source: Authors).



Figure 2: 1980' Migrant House. View from the back yard (Source: Authors).

### Planning and Building the Houses

After purchasing the land, the interviewed families started the construction of their new homes. This occurred between 1985 and 1993. In explaining the process of planning and building their houses, it was revealed during the interviews that the houses were not only designed, but were also constructed by the informants. The respondents made it clear that in the process of planning their house they first prepared a sketch with all the significant and desired characteristics. They also specified that these plans were inspired by the new houses constructed in the 1970s and 1980s in the Veneto region by their relatives and friends, which the respondents had visited during their various return trips to their hometowns. In one case, a migrant brought drawings of

her sister's house, which was built in rural Veneto in 1988 back to Australia and Paola's family constructed the same domestic house in Brisbane. The author is not suggesting that the domestic premises built in Brisbane in the 1980s and 1990s by the migrants in this study are copies of the houses in rural Veneto, but only that the latter were the models that the respondents had in mind when planning and constructing their homes in Brisbane.

After the migrant couples prepared their drawings, they then had to rely on a professional builder, who looked after the regulations and permitting. This process was followed by all informants and it acknowledges the vernacular nature of these Italian migrant houses following the definition given by some scholars (Klaufus, 2005; Oliver, 2007; Rapoport, 1988; Rudofsky, 2003 [1964]). Shifting our focus to the process of building these houses, they were constructed with help received from a number of people.

According to respondents, these houses had been built by the owners with the assistance of relatives, 'paesani' and Italian friends, who had various areas of building skills and expertise. During the interviews, the pride and joy expressed by the male respondents in enumerating the various work carried on the house was noticed. As observed by Sciorra (1989), pride in craftsmanship and the labour of one's hands is central to the Italian ethos and is especially important to Italian migrants artisans and workers. This holds true also for the Italian migrants interviewed in this study, and it is demonstrated, not only, through their interviews, but also by the photographs in family albums, depicting husbands working on the houses with the help of their friends (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Friends working on the tiling of the balcony in Elio's new house (Source: Authors).

### The Façade's Key Features

Taking a random walk on the streets of the residential suburbs of Brisbane one would observe a predominance of 'Queenslander houses' (Saini, 1982). This specific regional domestic architecture is popular throughout Queensland from Brisbane to Cape York, and consists of a timber dwelling on vertical stumps, with wide verandas on at least the front and the back, a galvanised iron roof and low timber paling fence around the boarder of the property (Saini, 1982).

As can be seen from the photographs presented below (see Figure 4-5), the houses constructed by the migrants differ quite strongly from the typical Queenslander houses.



Figure 4 and 5: Typical Queenslander house in Brisbane and one Italian house under study (Source: Authors).

The following sections explore the most significant facade characteristics of Italian houses constructed in Brisbane: brick-face wall, arches and columns.

### **Brick Face Wall**

As visible from the façade of migrants' houses and as asserted by respondents, the most striking external characteristic of their dwellings is represented by the material adopted to erect the external walls. All migrants' properties were built in masonry with solid brick walls. Externally, the facade presented a brick-faced finish with the brick colour varying from light to dark shades. Inside, with the exception of the garage, the bricks were plastered and in some instances covered with wallpaper, especially in the living rooms and the bedrooms. As explained by the informants, the outside walls of these homes used the construction technique called 'cavity brick' wall, consisting of two layers of bricks, both 13 cm, with a cavity of air in the middle for insulation purposes, as shown in Figures 6-7-8. The method of construction is explained below by a respondent:

*Because, you see, in the 1970s and 1980, we built the blocks of apartments for the Italians. The ones that are called 'six-pack-block' you know? All in brick, with the cavity in the middle and the floors in reinforced concrete ... The Italians wanted them like this and we built them. Then, later, we built our private houses like this. We made the houses with the same technology that we used in the blocks, with the bricks, the cavity, and the floors in concrete ... The difference between the blocks and the houses is that, in the blocks some walls are in brick and others are in reinforced concrete, while in the houses all the walls are in bricks because of the smaller dimension. A lot of Italians, the one that could (economically), made their house like that with brick and concrete ... in the 1980s, my generation, used brick, both in the blocks and in the houses ... All the Italians that I know made their houses like I made here (Elio, Tr. 1:45) (Please see also Figures 6-7-8).*

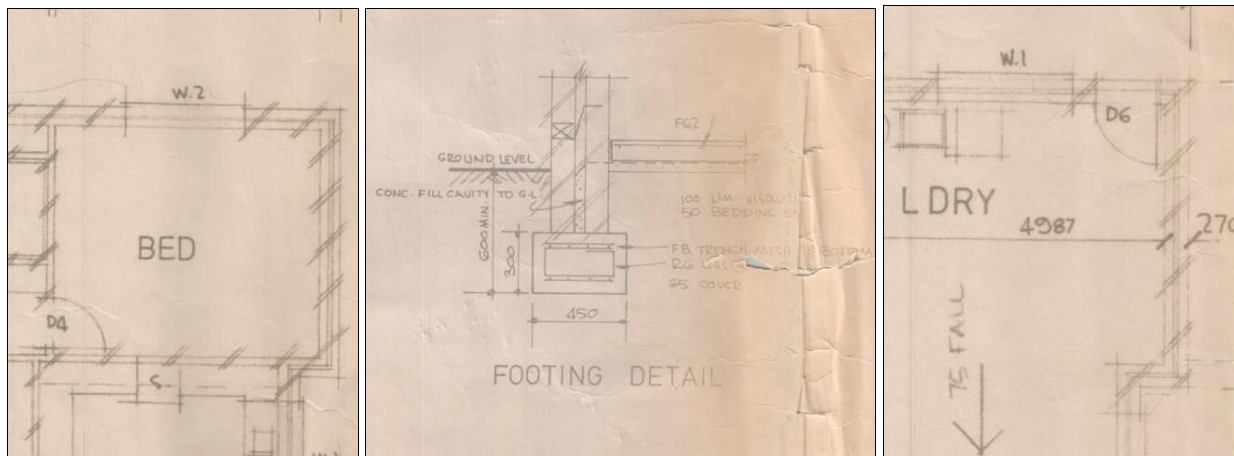


Figure 6-7-8: Original drawings of a migrant's house representing the plan for the first floor of the house (Fig. 6), the footing section (Fig. 7), and the laundry's plan (Fig. 8).

The materials of brick, and by extension concrete, used for the construction of these houses in Brisbane, were sufficiently unusual and therefore deserve a further investigation. In particular, the interest laid in understanding the reasons why migrants chose these particular materials for the construction of their homes. The received responses were related to advantages that the informants associated with these materials: structural, thermal, acoustic and maintenance. The first aspect, structural, was highlighted by a number of the informants:

*My house is stable ... durable ... it is secure for my family (he knocked on the wall of the garage to demonstrate the solidity of the construction) (Danilo, Tr. 1:41).*

*With these bricks and the concrete, this house is pretty resistant ... It has got a solid structure ... (Liberto Tr. 1:28).*

*For me a construction in brick is better ... Laura, think about the cyclones, for example. The house in brick and concrete stays standing, it is firm, is not swept away. Or think about fires ... if there is a fire ... you lose everything, your house and what you have inside ... all destroyed very quickly ... Or think of the flood we just had here (in Brisbane in 2011). All these houses in timber, with all that water have been damaged, seriously ...with all that water they got rotten, destroyed ... Think for a second also about the termites we have here (in Queensland) that eat the timber. Termites don't do anything to brick or concrete. The house in brick, instead, saves itself from all of this, cyclones, fire and ... water and insects. Once the construction is done, it lasts forever ... (Paoletto, Tr. 1:29).*

According to the informants, brick and concrete were chosen because these materials assured solid structures that, in turn, protected their residents from the forces of nature and local insects. The migrant couples also pointed out that houses built with these materials offered a thermal advantage since in summer their houses were cool inside while in winter they were easily warmed. The advantages offered by brick and concrete pertained not only to the thermal aspects but extended also to acoustics. Finally brick construction offered the advantage of being easily maintained in the long run.



Later interviews revealed a more profound dimension for why these particular materials had been chosen. This related to the cultural background of the informants. In fact, in their discussions about the penchant for the use of brick and concrete, the respondents said that they used these materials because for them they were synonyms of Italianess. The following words of one respondent captivated the real essence of this last point:

*I lived in timber houses but I never got used to living in them. The house in wood does not belong to our culture ... All the houses in Italy are made with hardy materials, always stones, concrete, bricks, since ancient Rome. ... Also in our hometowns, we come from a culture that built and still builds in stone and brick ... not in wood ... stone and brick ... It is in our culture to do so. At least, this is what I think (Liberto Tr. 1:25).*

Other informants noted this correlation between materials and cultural background. This relationship confirms Inguanti's (2010) observation that brick and concrete are the quintessential materials of choice for Italian migrants living in North America. For them, these materials recall the masonry walls of the Old World, and by using them the Italian migrants keep alive in the New World the culture left behind (Inguanti, 2010). Also Del Giudice (1993), in her worthy paper about Italian villas in Toronto, arrives at the same conclusion. Del Giudice (1993) in fact writes that wood is not regarded as a noble material by Italian migrants due to their cultural prejudice as they come from a largely stone and earth culture in relation to building materials. It is then argued that, like the Italians in North America (Inguanti, 2010) and Canada (Del Giudice, 1993) the cultural background of Italian migrants living in Australia was a key reason for their strong preference for certain building materials.

### Arches

Arches, another element of the facade considered important by all interviewed couples, were found on the majority of the migrant houses (see Figures 9-10). Arches could be used on the ground floor to mark the entrance to the double or in some cases triple garage and the principal entrance to the house and/or on the first floor, where the arches created arcaded balconies. Both on the ground floor and on the first floor, these architectural elements were never found in isolation, thus they were always in series.



Figure 9-10: Italian houses with arches on the first floor, and on both floors (Source: Authors).

In her discussion about arches on the facades of houses belonging to first generation Italians in Toronto, Del Giudice (1993) argues that this element is a powerful Italian cultural icon. She

argues that while the use of arches in Italian architecture has been continuous since Roman times, it is the Roman world mediated by Fascism to which the arch in the Italian villas of Toronto refers. She explains that, the arch, symbol of Imperial Rome, was one of the primary representative symbols of Fascist architecture, especially in the main cities. She also argues that this element was assimilated by her informants when they lived in Italy under the Fascist government and later it was re-proposed in their houses they built or renewed in Toronto (Del Giudice, 1993).

Because respondents in this study are different from those in Del Giudice's paper (1993), in that they are at least a decade younger, the reference to Fascist architecture is not relevant. People interviewed in this study were born a few years before the fall of the Fascist dictatorship in 1943, therefore they were too young to absorb the influence of this - or any other government - with its architecture. More importantly, during the years in which the respondents in this study were born, the Fascist dictatorship was already in decline and the Italian population was living in a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction, manifesting sentiment of oppositions to the regime, so that the fall of the Fascist dictatorship was welcomed with immense jubilation (Treccani, 1991). Thus for the group studied in this thesis, rather than Fascist architecture which was as a symbol of a negative period in Italian history, other references led on the choice of incorporating the arch into the facades of their houses in Brisbane. During our interviews on the possible origins of the arch in their homes, many informants advanced comments, such as the two quoted below:

*No, I don't think that the examples of Fascism had an effect on us. We lived in a small village. Of that architecture we didn't see much at all, it was more in the cities ... Neither the house where I lived when I was little (in Vedelago), has affected on the arches we built in this house (in Brisbane). The house where I lived (in Veneto) didn't have arches ... Maybe, for me, it has been the noble villa of the zone (Veneto) that we had tried to copy ... with that arches and columns, you know? ... They were designed by the Veneto architect ... these villas were much nicer than the houses of us, peasants ... and here in Brisbane, we migrants, wanted all to build a nice house (Danilo, Tr. 2:01). (See Figures 11-12).*

*See, I come from Maser (town in the province of Treviso). The house where my family lived didn't have arches. It was rare to have peasant houses with arches. But near where we lived, there was a villa, beautiful, with a lot of arches. The villa has been built by that famous architect ... and this villa is really magnificent ... I remember my father used to bring me and my siblings to admire that villa from the outside. So impressive and rich (Grazia, Tr. 2:05) (See Figure 13-14-15).*



Figure 11-12: Villa Emo (Palladio, 1558) in Fanzolo di Vedelago (Tv), Danilo's hometown (Source: Authors).



Figure 13: Villa Barbaro (Palladio, 1554), Maser (Treviso) to which Grazia referred in her discourse (Source: Authors).



Figure 14-15: Another example of a Palladian villa (Palladio, 1542) in Caldogno (Vicenza) (Source: Authors).

For the vast majority of informants the arches present on the facades of the villas built by the ‘famous architect’ remained imprinted in the collective memory as a mark of high status and aesthetic beauty. The ‘famous Veneto architect’ to which the respondents referred to is Andrea Palladio, one of the most influential figures for the quality of his production, his simplicity and rationality, not only in the Italian history of architecture, but also in the world history of architecture (Puppi & Battilotti, 2006). Born as Andrea Di Pietro della Gondola, on the 30th November 1508 in Padua (Veneto), Palladio became chief architect of the Republic of Venice a position held until his death in 1580 (Rigon, 2009). All of his works are located in the Veneto region and include numerous private villas which are scattered throughout the provinces of Vicenza, Padua and Treviso. His work also consists of public buildings (palaces in Vicenza) and sacred buildings (churches in Venice) (Gregotti, 2003). Considering the statements of the Italian migrants interviewed in this study as well as what has been said on Palladio, it is believed that it is not the Roman architecture mediated by Fascism, which was constructed away from the rural reality of the respondents to this study, but it is the classical Palladian architecture built in the respondents’ native region of Veneto closer to their eyes, to which the arch in Italian migrants’ dwellings built in Brisbane refers.

### Columns

The use of large and small columns is the third distinctive facade characteristic discussed by interviewed migrants. Large columns were found on the ground floor to mark the principal entry to the house or to the garage, as well as on the first floor on the balconies. These columns had a static function being required to bear the balconies above if on the ground floor, or the roof if on the first floor (Figures 16-17). The small columns were used in conjunction with the large columns on the ground floor, to delineate the patio and signal the main entry to the house or on the first floor on the balcony as a railing. Therefore these columns had both a protective and a decorative function (Figures 18-19).

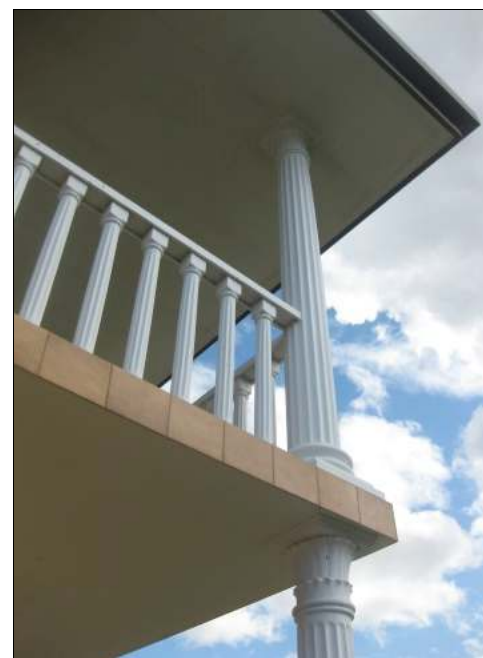


Figure 16-17: Examples of large columns on the ground floor and the first floor in one informant's house (Source: Authors).

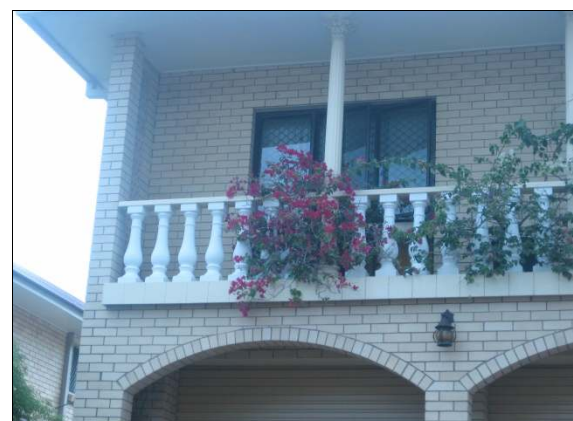


Figure 18-19: Examples of small columns on the parapets on the ground and first floor of two respondents' homes (Source: Authors).

On many occasions, the male interviewees spent considerable time explaining the process involved in the fabrication of these columns. Below is a compelling explanation:

*I prepared the small pole, in wood, then a friend of mine did the box, the mould. Once I had the mould, I put iron inside it, then sand and cement ... I pressed very hard ... let it dry ... then, at the end, when I made all of them, I fixed them on the balcony and on the ground floor ... the core is a bar in iron, and that keeps them attached to the railing ... Count them: they are 213 in total, 192 small and 21 big ... I prepared one column per day. It took me seven months and ten days to finish the job ... I have the mould under the house, in the garage, I show you later ... today you can buy the columns in specialised shops but I wouldn't buy them ... I like to make things by myself ... (Elio, Tr. 2:05).*



Figure 20: Mould of small columns at Elio's house (Source: Authors).

One respondent, Elio, displayed the mould of the small columns that he had kept for memory in a cabinet in his garage, and shown in Figure 20. Apart from the detailed explanation of the construction of these columns, what emerged from Elio's conversation was pride taken in his own labour, a topic already discussed above. Similar to the use of bricks and arches, my interest in columns was in comprehending the inspiration for their use. On this topic another respondent, Vincenzo, clearly and concisely expressed his point of view:

*... we didn't have decorations in the family house (in Piombino Dese). Nothing ... no columns, small columns, nothing ... that house was poor, for peasant people... In my opinion, the big and small columns, come from memories of the prestigious villas that we were used to seeing in our towns (see, for example Figures 21-22) ... See? The columns in my house are also white, because in this way they are like the noble houses at home (the Veneto region) (Vincenzo, Tr. 2:02).*



Figure 21: Villa Cornaro (Palladio, 1552) in Piombino Dese, Vincenzo's hometown. (Source: Authors).



Figure 22: Villa Porto in Vivaro (Palladio, 1554) in another respondent's hometown. (Source: Authors).



Figure 23-24: New railing on the balcony of an Italian house and old balustrades conserved in a portion of the front garden (Source: Authors).

Vincenzo's comment was consistent with that of other study informants which were that the columns, both large and small, were not elements of the rural vernacular houses where the respondents had lived before their departure to Australia. Instead, they referred to the villas built for the Venetian nobles by the local architect Andrea Palladio. These elements, together with the arches, remained in the collective memory of this migrant group and were re-proposed in their homes in Brisbane, signalling once again, their cultural architectural background.

It is worth mentioning here that in some of the houses belonging to the interviewed migrants, modernisation occurred brought about the children of the interviewed couples. This involved dismantling the parapets with their small columns and replacing them by elements in steel, as shown in Figure 23. However, the respondents in this study preserved the balustrades in their front gardens (Figure 24) demonstrating how much these elements mean to them.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### Two Ideals as a Model

The exploration of the domestic dwellings built in Brisbane in the 1980s and early 1990s by the Veneto migrants uses a structured approach based on the model of analysis proposed by Relph (1976), who recognises the physical form as one of the components of a home. For the analysis of the physical form of the house, Relph's formula (1976) was coupled with the cultural theorisations of Rapoport (1969). The theories of the latter on the form of a dwelling imply a consideration of two major elements: the cultural forces (primary forces), and the physical forces (secondary forces).

In addition, according to Hage (1997) "[P]eople always live in an approximation of the ideal home" (p. 104) and in Rapoport's study (1969, p. 60) we learn that in constructing his house, man's desire is "to come as close as possible to his ideal model". From the case explored in this paper it has emerged that there are two ideal models chosen by the Veneto group for the construction of their houses in Brisbane in the 1980s and 1990s. The first corresponds to the typology of rural houses built in the 1970s and 1980s by their relatives and friends in the Veneto region of Italy. This building typology was an improvement in comparison to the houses in which the interviewees lived when they were young - in the periods before, during and after WWII. In fact, with the end of mezzadria and the advantages brought by the economic improvement in Italy (Dalla Zuanna, Rosina & Rossi, 2004), Italian households of the Veneto region became wealthier, their lifestyle considerably ameliorated and this was reflected also in the private houses they owned. These, therefore, constitute the ideal model that the respondents took as architectonic reference for the organisation of the internal and external space of their houses in Brisbane.

If the first model influences the internal and external spatial organisation of the houses in Brisbane, the second model, instead, affects the facades of these houses, the most important part of the building. For this paramount element, the ultimate model to follow was that constituted by the noble residences designed by the local architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80) as found in the respondents' native region. Palladio created for the private architecture of this region a distinctive architectonic style known as Palladianism, which later in history influenced architecture in France, England, Ireland, North America and Russia, making him one of the most influential architects of all time. The respondents to this study were fascinated by the charm of the private buildings created by this architect, now under the protection of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In fact, the respondents remembered these buildings as a mark of high status and aesthetic beauty so much so that they have re-proposed their major external architectural elements on the facades of their homes in Brisbane.

The fascination of the respondents' youth with Palladio's work remains, however, confined to the external aspect of these villas. The reason for is that the informants when young could never pass through the gates of the villas. This has done nothing but augment their fascination. The replication on the facades of their homes in Brisbane of elements from the Italian high style architecture, does not surprise since, as put by Albert Manucy (1992 [1962]) "homeowners have always been notorious property-improvers" (p. 44) and, as asserted by Rapoport (1969), a peasant culture must be considered in a context comprehensive of the high culture. He writes: "[T]hey are ... influenced by the high culture because they are aware of it and the high and low cultures are interdependent and affect each other" (p. 4) . Moreover, in this last context, there is an architectural example very pertinent to us, corresponding to "the influence of the (French) Baroque on the wooden farmhouses of Switzerland" (Rapoport, 1969, p. 4).

Similarly to the previous example, the findings reveal that the Italian Palladian style of the noble residences in the Veneto region influenced the migrant's houses under investigation in Australia. These re-propositions of architectural elements, agrees with the 'additive quality', intrinsic to vernacular buildings, which (quality) enables the latter to accept additions that instead "would visually and conceptually destroy a high style design" (Rapoport, 1969, p. 6). It is,

however, important for this discussion to stress that these additions “occur within a frame of given heritage” (Rapoport, 1969, p. 5), that is they are coming from the Palladian architecture found in the respondent’s region of origin.

### **Culture as the way of doing things**

After exploring the two ideal models taken as reference by the Veneto migrants for the construction of their homes, the second category of cultural force, that is, the accepted way of doing things, is discussed. The latter, as theorised by Rapoport (1969), bases itself on traditions and customs. Therefore, the discussion that follows explains the various accepted ways of doing things for the Veneto migrants taking these two elements into account. The accepted way of doing things for the migrants is traceable in two main ways explained here in succession. As previously discussed, the first accepted way of doing things for this group of migrants corresponds to the process chosen for planning and building their houses in Brisbane. The respondents, in fact, have actively participated in the design of their homes, relying on a professional figure of a builder only for regulatory reasons. Equally, they have been very involved in the construction of their dwellings, which were built with the cooperation of tradesmen, whether relatives, ‘paesani’ or Italian friends, depending on their area of expertise. This cooperative act can be traced back to the tradition of the peasant society that relies on mutual help and solidarity (Harper & Faccioli, 2009) a way of life still very present in the life of the interviewed migrants, especially in periods requiring heavy work.

The subjects involved in this particular process of planning and constructing the migrant houses in Brisbane allow us to label the latter as ‘vernacular dwellings’, which, by definition are traditional (Klaufus, 2005; Oliver, 2007; Rapoport, 1988; Rudofsky, 2003 [1964]). Since these dwellings are constructed by migrant people and in a migrant context, perhaps a new, more adequate definition for this type of architecture is “migrant vernacular dwellings”.

Lingered over the process of planning and building the houses in Brisbane and linking this with the ideals belonging to the Veneto migrants, it was revealed that the second accepted way of doing things that corresponds to adhere, as close as possible, to the two ideal models explained previously. This clinging to architectural ideals during the planning and the construction of their houses makes discernible the influence of the two models on the facade form of the houses of Brisbane.

The facades of migrants’ houses are characterised by an extensive use of brick, arches and columns. These architectonic elements can be traced back to the grand design tradition of the noble Palladian villas in the Veneto region, villas that, in turn, refer to the classic Roman architectonic tradition. All of these elements used on the facade of the migrant houses in Brisbane (brick, arches and columns), in their external spatial organisation (back and side yards with kitchen gardens and fruit trees, front gardens with flower beds and sculptures) and in their internal spatial organisation (the division of sleeping-living areas and the presence of dual environments) constitute the evidence that makes discernible the high degree of influence of the models taken as reference by the Veneto migrants for the form of their Brisbane houses. These elements are maintained in their houses because the elements have roots in customs and traditions that the respondents to this study considered to be important to conserve in Australia.

### **Physical Factors**

From the evidence gathered, the form of the domestic dwellings built in Brisbane by the Veneto migrants are not the result of physical forces native to Queensland (climate, construction, material and technology) as the migrant dwellings differ from the typical local domestic architecture (the Queensland house) and since we have found that the form of the migrant houses in Brisbane correspond to the area of origin of the informants (the Veneto region), where the physical forces are completely different from those in Queensland. Therefore, the form of the



Brisbane migrant houses is not a response to physical forces within Australia. Instead, another factor has influenced the form of these houses together with the cultural force, and this is the economic factor. The major expenses of these migrant houses relate to building materials (brick and concrete). Without adequate funds, such materials could not have been bought and these houses could not have been constructed in the way they are, both internally and externally. Therefore, the economics also contributed to the form of these houses. Indirectly, this helps in understanding how bricks and concrete are regarded as important by the respondents, considering their high cost.

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