

## **Lifestyle, design process and the creative practice of do-it-yourself (DIY) as a transformative experience**

### Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the connection between design, do-it-yourself (DIY) and lifestyle, taking into account the influence of the media and the separate interests of project stakeholders—designers, builders and homeowners. The research explores the concept of lifestyle as a way of living influenced by design process and DIY activity, and further how lifestyle is created or altered by individuals through direct engagement with changing the fabric and/or aesthetics of the home.

The home improvement market continues to expand, yet building industry designers rarely work with clients on DIY projects. This reluctance reinforces a division between professional and amateur home improvement practices, contributes to the narrowing field of domestic architectural commissions, and misses an opportunity for designers to take a more significant role in the transformation of client lifestyles. While DIY is promoted as a way of creating the dream homes conveyed in magazines and lifestyle television programmes, as a self-navigated design-build practice directed at realising dreams of a better life, it remains unexplored. Additionally, lifestyle as a concept at the centre of the study remains a nebulous term of little use to designers. This thesis addresses these gaps and limitations, arguing that by taking a bricolage approach, professionals with design skills can influence a much broader group of stakeholders, and engage with the process of home making to a greater extent than is normally possible. Further the thesis proposes a way to map lifestyle as a dreamscape, identifying and promoting greater connectivity between people, places and practices.

Qualitative research methods, including practitioner observation, survey, interview and case study, are used to investigate past and present DIY projects in the homes of designers and non-designers, and the relationship between imagined and actual lifestyles. Data is examined for differences in the way designers and non-designers

conceptualise, plan and realise DIY projects, and compared with the process taken by design professions on contract projects.

This study reveals an entanglement of creative and collaborative practices influenced by personal and social values and everyday skills such as resourcefulness, improvisation and adaptation. Practitioners were seen to engage with DIY as a way of connecting with others, including designers, and with their own aspirations and capabilities, and to experience personal transformation. The concept of lifestyle was found to be much more than a marketable set of aspirations and ideals and a new definition is presented; lifestyle is articulated as a kaleidoscope of realised and imagined transformations, a complex collage of activities, values, visions, roles and skills. Notions of self-actualization and self-place became a crucial part of the ongoing cycle of change and renewal that is seen to epitomise contemporary day-to-day lifestyles.

This thesis presents original interpretations of participant home renovation experiences, and provides valuable insights on: (i) DIY as a transformative activity, (ii) the process of design in home improvement projects, and (iii) perceptions of ideal and real lifestyles. Through facilitating co-design projects and generating more participatory and innovative practices together with non-designers, this study, as one of the first in the field, proposes ways in which design professionals working with others as hybrid practitioners have the opportunity to play a key role in translating value into transformative experiences.