

2020

EQUAL

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## About the author

Sarah Ackland is a writer and fully-funded creative practice PhD researcher & ARB qualified practising architect based in London.

Her research interests explore gendered bodies in public space through a feminist lens using methods of embodied, feminist and auto-ethnographic practices. She is also an active design tutor & lecturer across the UK and Europe

This project was consciously created by entirely female identifying contributors.

All graphics by Mackinnon Byrne

# Aim and Objectives

To create an online accessible database of interviews highlighting significant women in architecture. Interviews are a younger woman in architecture interviewing a woman of more experience.

## OBJECTIVES

- To understand the values of feminist practice
- To create knowledge which is accessible and open source
- To create a record of women in architecture as a learning resource
- To understand how meaningful change for women in architecture could occur
- To uncover what roadblocks have been met historically for women in architecture and how we can create change

# Methodology

Initial ideas:

Firstly the project proposed to create short films, (around 3-8 mins) however as the pandemic enclosed us, a podcast format was deemed more appropriate.

Final strategy:

- Prominent female-identifying women in architecture identified and contacted
- Agreements with Part W made
- Website established [www.29percentequal.co.uk](http://www.29percentequal.co.uk)
- Interviews recorded between Part W members and significant women

Key Questions the interviews were based around:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman? How have things changed?
2. Do you see activism in your work?
3. Please tell us of a forgotten woman who has inspired you or your work
4. What advice would you give your younger self?
5. What do you think an equitable city looks like?

Outcomes of methodological adjustments:

Part W members interviewed these women which allowed a rich discussion to develop and more nuanced insight from each side. The podcast format allowed for a long-form interview and more in-depth discussion. The results of these interviews are summarised in the following pages.



EPISODE 1  
Kate Macintosh

# 29%

## EQUAL

INTERVIEWED BY  
Alice Brownfield



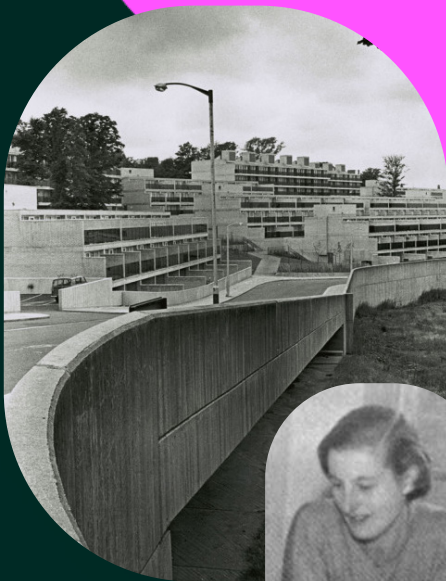
Fig. 1 Dawson Heights, designed by Kate Macintosh, Image: The AJ



# EPISODE 01

## Key findings:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman?  
How have things changed?
  - When she was studying at Edinburgh College of Art she notes that she felt like a 'foreign body' as few women studied architecture, she reflected that this has improved.
  - She travelled to Scandinavia where she noted that you could 'forget about the sexual politics and just be a woman architect'
2. Do you see activism in your work?
  - Activism has always been embedded in her work, from her student days to today where she is active in saving social housing and the climate crisis
3. Please tell us of a forgotten woman who has inspired you or your work
  - Rosemary Stjernstedt, for her work on Central Hill. Rosemary was an important public sector architect but remains largely forgotten. Rosemary was an important public sector architect, working firstly designing furniture and then moving to join the London County Council. She designed and built the Alton Estate in Roehampton, which houses 13,000 people and is one of the biggest social housing estates surviving today.
4. What advice would you give your younger self?
  - Kate's advice was 'don't be a shrinking violet' and to 'seek out the best because, in the best offices, you will meet confident people, who will not be petty-minded enough to try and take you down.' She reflects throughout the episode that a good office will raise a young marginalised voice and work as 'it is very hard to build up your self-belief in a hostile environment'
5. What do you think an equitable city looks like?
  - Kate refers to Scandinavia for best practice in design and equality throughout
  - For an equitable city, Kate suggests we 'suppress the car' and all amenities should be within walking distance. She notes that if a design is good for children, it is good for women, and then it is good for men.



'because until you have somewhere safe and secure to live you cannot even begin to think about maintaining your health'

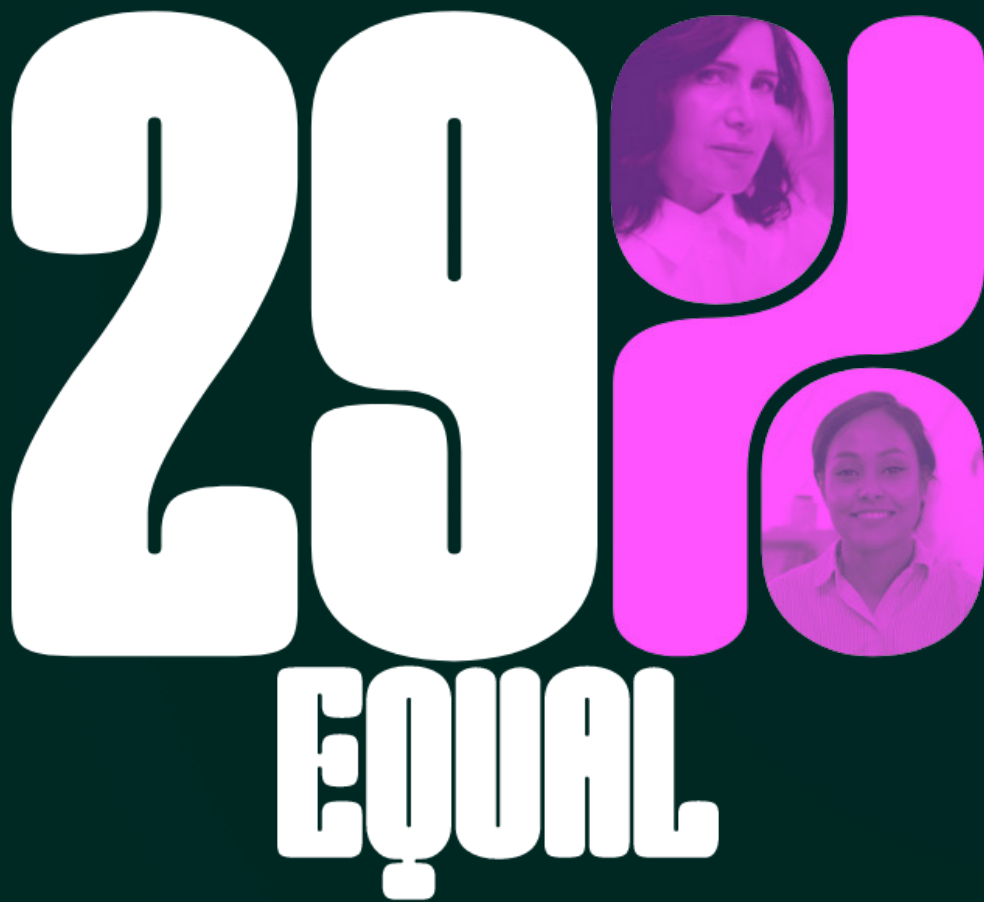
Fig. 2 Central Hill, Image: Arup archive 1974

Fig. 3 Rosemary Stjernstedt, RIBA archive

EPIISODE 2

Farshid Moussavi

2018  
EQUAL

The graphic features the year '2018' in a large, white, rounded font. The '1' and '8' are white, while the '0' is a vibrant magenta. The '0' is stylized to contain two circular portraits of women. The top portrait shows a woman with long dark hair, and the bottom portrait shows a woman with short dark hair. Below the year, the word 'EQUAL' is written in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

INTERVIEWED BY  
Tahera Rouf

Fig. 4 Yokohama Port in Japan, designed by Farshid Moussavi, Image: Rasmus Hjortshøj - Coast





'I personally think it is very important to work for other architects, I think you learn how to be a good employer later on, when you are yourself an employee somewhere else, its important to see it from the other side'  
Farshid Moussavi

## EPISODE 02

### Key findings:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman?  
How have things changed?
  - Farshid refers to the Yokohama Port Terminal in Japan as a significant project, her first competition, which she won. It was also her most challenging as it was their first, but notes that most projects take 6-10 years and face the volatility of politics and the economy- each project is challenging in its own way
  - Farshid mentions her experience of marginalisation and how this should be considered an advantage, like a tourist in a city they don't know- they approach things differently.
2. Do you see activism in your work?
  - Yes but through her research mostly and her book Architecture and Micropolitics, how through the built environment, the politics manifest themselves
  - She sensitively refers to her refugee experience where she notes 'you carry with you a set of attitudes which are subconsciously there'
3. Please tell us of a forgotten woman who has inspired you or your work
  - Renee Gailhoustet, a French social housing architect and winner of the 2022 Royal Academy Architecture Prize. She was well known for the design of Le Liégat, Ivry-sur-Seine, (1972) where she lived until she passed away in 2023. The scheme held 80 duplex social housing units and featured 'interior streets'.
4. What advice would you give your younger self?
  - Farshid advises- 'don't let anyone decide what architecture is for you'
  - Be clear about what you do and don't know. Learn and unlearn.
5. What do you think an equitable city looks like?
  - Farshid states that it is a city which is not defined by finance, how diversity is spread horizontally, not by borough and how it is the architects' responsibility to introduce subversive moments and approaches to projects, to make space for diverse people.

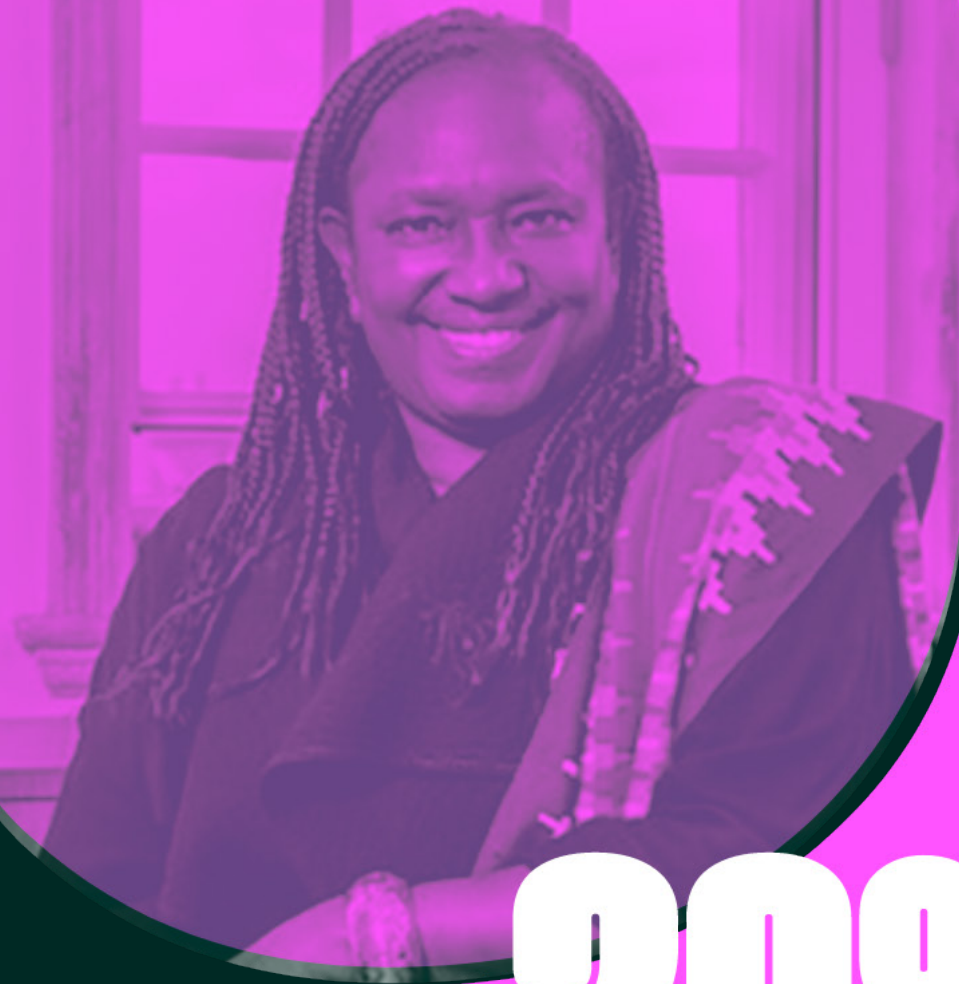


'the position of minority- what freedoms does it give me?'

Fig. 5 Les Étoiles d'Ivry-sur-Seine.

Image: Federico Novaro

Fig. 6 Renée Gailhoustet, Image: Valerie Sedoun



EPISODE 3  
Elsie Owusu

# 29%

## EQUAL

INTERVIEWED BY  
Yemí Àlàdérún





Fig. 7  
The Supreme  
Court, designed  
by Elsie Owusu  
Image: Morley  
Von Sternberg

## EPISODE 03

### Key findings:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman?  
How have things changed?
  - Working on the Supreme Court
  - Elsie always avoided away from working in large companies and preferred working for herself or in collectives as 'if there was going to be a hierarchy, she wanted to be at the top of it!' She advises us never to work for people we don't like or admire.
2. Do you see activism in your work?
  - Elsie talked about how her work followed the work of Doreen Lawrence, Stephen Lawrence's mother. She asks- would Stephen have been welcome here? (At the RIBA) She speaks of how this work became the RIBA +25 campaign (2017) which Yemi was involved in. This encouraged diverse people to run for council so the RIBA was more representative. Elsie asks us why our profession isn't as diverse as the England Football team.
3. Please tell us of a forgotten woman who has inspired you or your work
  - Ladi Kwali, a famous potter. She is featured on the Nigerian note. Her work was threaded with mathematical undertones, with continuous use of symmetry and her pots soon became known as art pieces, her works are held in collections globally, including in the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and the Victoria & Albert Museum.
4. What advice would you give your younger self?
  - Elsie describes how women are told to be 'good girls' instead she advises us to be confident, to put yourself forward and to 'show off'- like Zaha Hadid.
5. What do you think an equitable city looks like?
  - Elsie talks about the pandemic and how we had an opportunity to rediscover the city with fewer cars, less business and less pollution. She mentions that perhaps it is how we appreciate spaces more than anything else. It is more our perception. Here she also mentions decolonisation and that we should all become aware of how the empire lives in London.
  - Elsie suggests that if we are to diversify our profession, we need to access children of school age and bring architecture into the classroom.



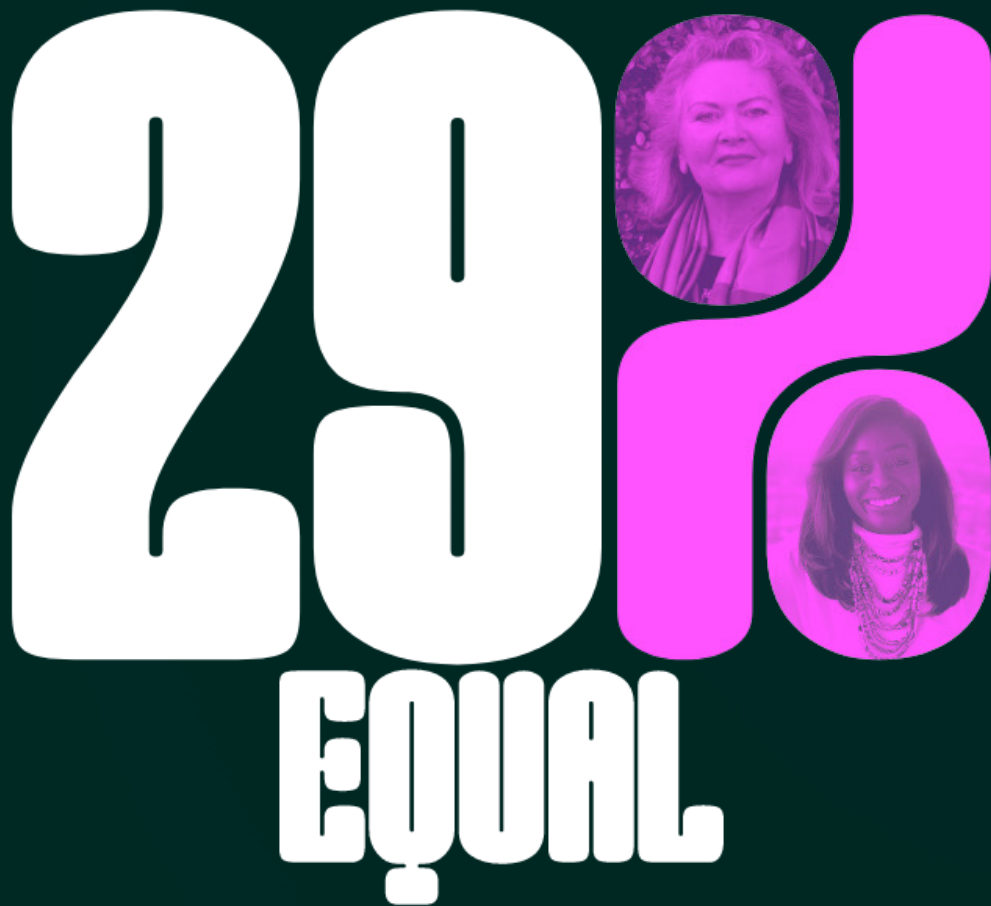
'become aware of  
how the empire lives  
in London'

Fig. 8 Water Jar, 1960, Image: Oxford Ceramics Gallery

Fig. 9 Ladi Kwali, Image: AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions

EPISODE 4  
Angela Brady

29  
EQUAL

The graphic features the number '29' in a large, white, rounded font. To the right of the '9' is a large, stylized number '8' in a vibrant pink color. Two circular portraits of women are integrated into the design: one is positioned within the upper curve of the pink '8', and the other is within its lower curve. Below the '29' and the pink '8' is the word 'EQUAL' in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

INTERVIEWED BY  
Tara Gbolade



Fig. 10 Brickworks Community Center, designed by Angela Brady, Image: Brady Mallalieu Architects

'Architecture is a great profession for women. My motto has always been that men and women together make the best architecture & place and it isn't all about 'the building' its about the people who are using the building.'

Angela Brady

## EPISODE 04

### Key findings:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman? How have things changed?
  - Getting into Architecture School. She noted that they had to stick up for themselves and that there was always an underlying sexism. She notes things are vastly better for women today.
2. Do you see activism in your work?
  - Angela often went to the RIBA with issues and they suggested she should chair for Women in Architecture. Angela was RIBA President from 2011-2013. She ensured that unpaid internships were stopped. She was part of the 'Architects for Change Group' (around 2000 with Sumita Singha) and held the Diverse City exhibition. They asked- what does diversity mean to you? The exhibition travelled to 34 cities. She also worked on 'Adopt a School'
  - During her time as RIBA president, Angela took part in the 'Drop the Ban' campaign to name the designers of the 2012 London Olympics who were not allowed to promote their work as part of a marketing agreement. Her campaign dress is now in the Museum of London.
3. Please tell us of a forgotten woman who has inspired you or your work
  - Ina Boyle, a composer. Her music was lesser celebrated because she was a woman. Angela also talks of the lesser recognised Eileen Grey and Charlotte Perriand & how Patti Hopkins was airbrushed out (right). She also mentions Venturi's Pritzker Prize and the lack of recognition for Denise Scott Brown's contribution.
4. What advice would you give your younger self?
  - Learn to listen, engage and get your communication skills out there- to all walks of life. (Not just architects!) Angela discusses how she found starting her practice with her partner progressive. She advises you to take the chance to get out there on your own if you can.
5. What do you think an equitable city looks like?
  - Where everybody feels safe 24/7, where there isn't privatisation of public space or parks only for the wealthy. A city where you can move about and preferably without any limitations. To generate change, Angela encourages us all to adopt a school.



Fig. 11 The Brits Who Built The Modern World, BBC



Fig. 12 Ina Boyle, Image: Trinity College Dublin



Fig. 13 Eileen Grey, Image: Barnabus Journal



Fig. 14 Charlotte Perriand, Image: FLC/ADAGP, Paris 2019

'retrofitting is key- drop the VAT on refurbishment, make it in parity with new build'



EPISODE 5  
Parlour

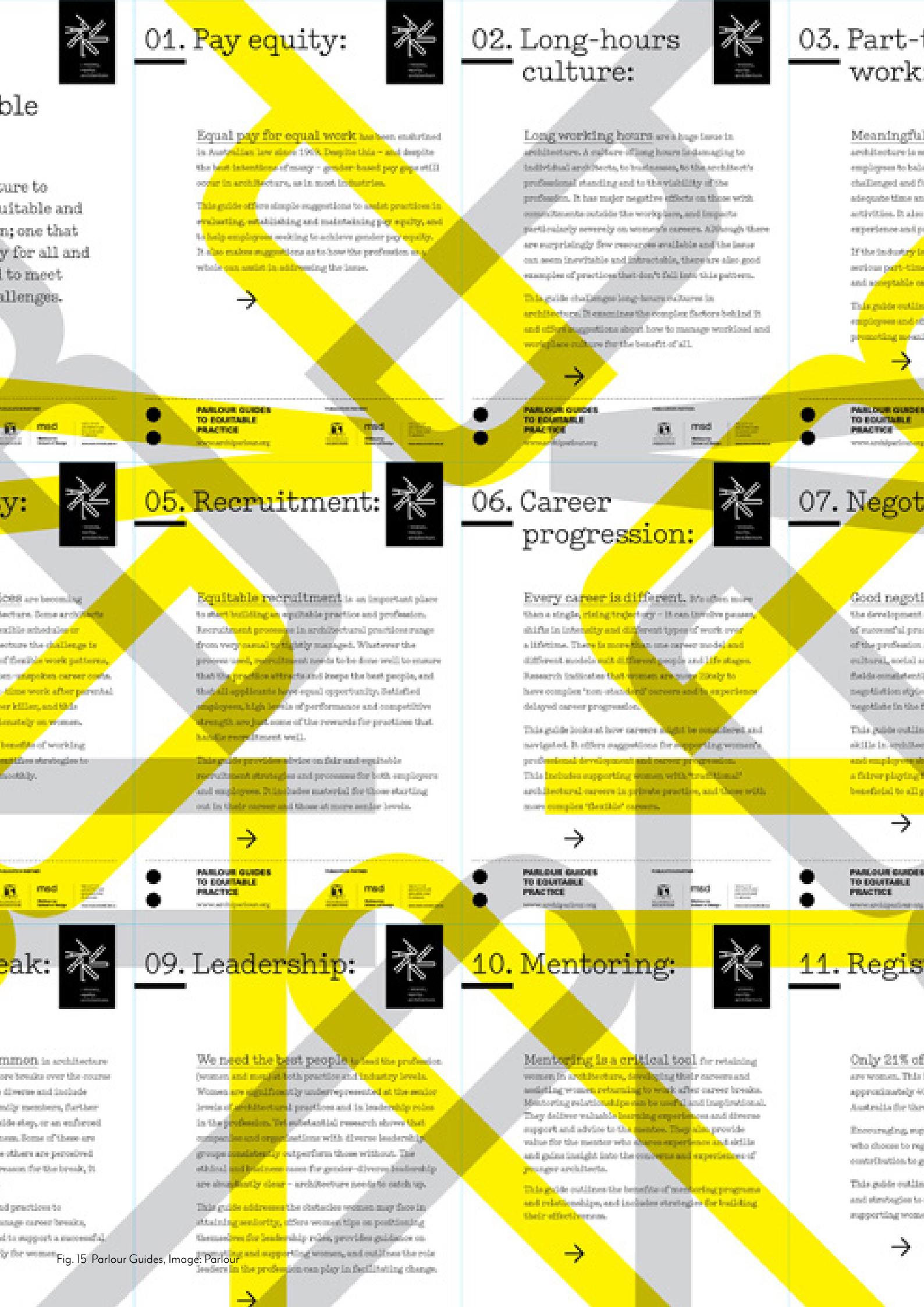
# 29%

## EQUAL

INTERVIEWED BY  
Zoë Berman







# 01. Pay equity:

**Equal pay for equal work** has been enshrined in Australia's law since 1969. Despite this – and despite the best intentions of many – gender-based pay gaps still occur in architecture, as in most industries.

This guide offers simple suggestions to assist practices in recruiting, establishing and maintaining pay equity, and to help employees seeking to achieve gender pay equity. It also makes suggestions as to how the profession as a whole can assist in addressing the issue.



# 02. Long-hours culture:

**Long working hours** are a huge issue in architecture. A culture of long hours is damaging to individual architects, to businesses, to the architect's professional standing and to the viability of the profession. It has major negative effects on those with commitments outside the workplace, and impacts particularly severely on women's careers. Although there are surprisingly few resources available and the issue can seem intractable and intractable, there are also good examples of practices that don't fall into this pattern.

This guide challenges long-hours culture in architecture. It examines the complex factors behind it and offers suggestions about how to manage workload and workplace culture for the benefit of all.



# 03. Part-time work:

**Meaningful architecture** is a challenge to be engaged and to be challenged and to have adequate time and activities. It allows experience and...  
If the industry is serious part-time and acceptable...  
This guide outlines...  
employees and...  
promoting...  
→



# 05. Recruitment:

**Equitable recruitment** is an important piece to start building an equitable practice and profession. Recruitment processes in architectural practices range from very casual to tightly managed. Whatever the process used, recruitment tools to be done well to ensure that the practice attracts and keeps the best people, and that all applicants have equal opportunity. Detailed employees, high levels of performance and competitive strength are just some of the rewards for practices that handle recruitment well.

This guide provides advice on fair and equitable recruitment strategies and processes for both employers and employees. It includes material for those starting out in their career and those at more senior levels.



# 06. Career progression:

**Every career is different.** It often more than a single, rising trajectory – it can involve passing skills in intensity and different types of work over a lifetime. There is more than one career model and different models suit different people and life stages. Research indicates that women are more likely to have complex 'non-standard' careers and to experience delayed career progression.

This guide looks at how careers might be considered and navigated. It offers suggestions for supporting women's professional development and career progression. This includes supporting women with 'traditional' architectural careers in private practice, and those with more complex 'flexible' careers.



# 07. Negotiation:

**Good negotiation** is the development of successful practice of the profession's cultural, social and fields consistently negotiation style...  
This guide outlines...  
skills in...  
and employ...  
a fairer playing...  
beneficial to all...  
→



# 09. Leadership:

**We need the best people** to lead the profession (women and men) at both practice and industry levels. Women are significantly underrepresented at the senior levels of architectural practices and in leadership roles in the profession. Yet substantial research shows that companies and organizations with diverse leadership groups consistently outperform those without. The ethical and business case for gender-diverse leadership are abundantly clear – architecture needs to catch up.

This guide addresses the obstacles women may face in attaining seniority, offers women tips on positioning themselves for leadership roles, provides guidance on promoting and supporting women, and outlines the role leaders in the profession can play in facilitating change.



# 10. Mentoring:

**Mentoring is a critical tool** for retaining women in architecture, developing their careers and assisting women returning to work after career breaks. Mentoring relationships can be useful and inspirational. They deliver valuable learning experiences and diverse support and advice to the mentee. They also provide value for the mentor who shares experience and skills and gains insight into the concerns and experiences of younger architects.

This guide outlines the benefits of mentoring programs and relationships, and includes strategies for building their effectiveness.



# 11. Register:

**Only 21% of**... are women. This... approximately 40... Australia for the...  
Encouraging...  
who choose to reg...  
contribution to g...  
This guide outline...  
and strategies to...  
supporting women...  
→

Fig. 15 Parlour Guides, Image: Parlour

# EPISODE 05

## Key findings:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman? How have things changed?
  - The Parlour website going live allowed them to open up the conversation more globally. Rosa Sheng made contact and set up Equity by Design. It was a springboard for them and allowed women to realise that it wasn't them that was the problem. When they were invited to be keynote speakers at the Australian Institute of Architects Conference, as they had launched the Parlour guides, they felt at this point that they had 'entered the mainstream'
2. Do you see activism in your work?
  - Parlour describe themselves as a research-based advocacy organisation. They try to do research into action. They would love to do an international summit with all the groups who are working for change- asking how they can be stronger together?
  - Parlour explain their work as advocacy more than activism.
  - They are no longer a volunteer organisation, and they could not have done it without the funding they received. They try to pay people for their work now. They mention that they have not burnt out as an organisation because they are paid for their work.
  - They say they may be considered the 'friendly feminists'. Naomi asks- What do we do with anger? Justine mentions that there is often a question of tone and how anger will only get you so far, she advises only to use anger in a way that cuts through when you need it
  - Naomi & Justine explain that having established careers before starting Parlour helped them to have agency to get people to listen. They describe how they have used their outside position to the best effect, whilst also acknowledging that they are not as 'outside' as many of the firmly activist groups/individuals. Justine warns us not to get too cosy, that this will cause us to lose our outsider perspective.
  - Justine states that 'if all Parlour does is make it more comfortable for middle-class women then you are contributing to the problem' and they are mindful of this in their work.

The interview focussed on this question, and we didn't reach the rest- but it felt important in this interview, a meeting of two advocacy groups- that the discussion they wanted to have was held.

‘There were so many people who thought that their inability to stay in the architecture profession was their own fault, which it clearly was not’

EPISODE 6  
Jos Boys

# 29 EQUAL

The graphic features the number '29' in a large, white, rounded font. To the right of the '9' is a large, stylized pink shape that resembles a bracket or a large 'R'. This shape contains two circular cutouts, each showing a portrait of a woman. The top cutout shows an older woman with short grey hair, and the bottom cutout shows a younger woman with long brown hair. Below the '29' and the pink shape, the word 'EQUAL' is written in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

INTERVIEWED BY  
Fi Macdonald



Fig. 16 The DisOrdinary Architecture Project, Image: Jos Boys

## EPISODE 06

### Key findings:

1. Can you tell us about a defining moment for you in your career as a woman? How have things changed?
  - Jos did not feel she had defining moment, she was more exploratory in her approach to architecture school and her career. She was told she wasn't allowed to be a photographer, so she had to be an architect, but she was never sure she wanted to be an architect. Jos highlights how class has been an issue for architecture in the past and still prevails today.
2. Do you see activism in your work?
  - Jos is inherently activist, she discusses her work with Matrix and how they were trying to work out what was going on for women in construction and architecture. She describes how when she started looking into designing for disability, how there were no disabled people in the discussion. She enjoyed the anger that started both these movements, and how they were just trying to work out what was going on and why injustice kept happening.
  - Jos speaks passionately of disability activism and its poetic nature, she urges us all to be involved. She wants to reclaim the disability rights movement and states that Part M is not technical but is a distorted translation of disability activist ideas.
3. Please tell us of a forgotten woman who has inspired you or your work
  - Maggie Davis, who was a big part of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and was campaigning for disability rights at the start of the Independent Living Movement and was very central to the movement and the design of Grove Road, Ashfield which had housing designed by wheelchair users.
4. What advice would you give your younger self?
  - It's alright not to fit into these normative models, you don't need to waste a lot of energy worrying about that. Stop letting social policing & unconscious bias bother you.
5. What do you think an equitable city looks like?
  - We need to look at what is deemed normative. We need to work towards spatial justice, not access and inclusion. Jos states that to her an equitable city is always emergent, it's never finished. She discusses gender budgeting and using it to create more equity. She discusses how the investment in cycling isn't necessarily 'bad' but invests more in men and the able-bodied. We need to be more aware of our unconscious bias when designing.



‘being the only woman on site, where the site offices still had naked images of women draped over building products and getting wolf whistled all the time’

# REFLECTION:

‘Biography is a central tool for providing these counter-narratives of architecture.’  
- Brown & Burns, 2020

Why is it so important to record interviews with Women in Architecture?

The lack of documentation about women architects and designers in the RIBA archives reveals the limitations and biases which exist within archival materials. The archive collection documents many architects who fit the traditional canon (white, male heterosexual and cisgender), and reveals processes that prevented the inclusion of others. For example, the nomination forms to join the RIBA included only male pronouns until at least 1968, and it's unclear when female pronouns were introduced. This archive is not open access.

Consequently, there were questions from some participants about ensuring the interviews remained accessible, many of the participants were passionate to ensure that material created about them was not trapped behind archive pay walls. This creates more inequality. We waded through issues of intellectual property and who 'owned' the podcast. This was an unexpected hurdle but completely understandable as we look across the landscape which has been created for women in architecture. A landscape which routinely excludes women.

There were some trust issues throughout the project as the women I was speaking with (some who chose not to take part). Some questioned working with an institution which historically has not progressed women's active participation in the profession. Clarifying that the interview would be open source, and owned by the researcher, eased some participants' concerns.

Interestingly, some women didn't think they had enough to contribute to the series. This is why recording these women's contributions is so important. When looking back across archival work, many men have retained extensive archives of their work, noting their importance, and ensuring they live beyond their years through their drawings. As Beatriz Colomina highlighted in *Privacy and Publicity*, Le Corbusier saved everything, down to electricity bills and receipts, to memorialise himself. These men would also encourage others to write about them, again boosting their notability. Today, it is easy to see the lack of documentation of women's work in architecture, for example only 17% of biographies are about women on Wikipedia. Despina Stratigakos in her infamous book *Where are the Women Architects?* highlights how 'women editors who submit new entries on women's history routinely find that male editors question their sources and the significance of their topics and are quick to nominate such entries for deletion.'

To counter this discrimination, Minette De Silva (1918-1998) wrote her biography to battle this exclusion 'The Life & Work of an Asian Woman Architect' to ensure her contribution was not lost. De Silva herself explained her battle for recognition: "I was dismissed because I am a woman. I was never taken seriously for my work." (Pinto, 2019) She situated herself not just in architecture, but in history and culture. Her 'gendered labour' was discussed by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi in their paper *Crafting the Archive: Minnette De Silva, Architecture, and History*, here the biography is described as an additional labour that De Silva undertook work to ensure her notability was protected.

It is important to note that the exclusion of other marginalised groups in the archive is an even more prevalent issue than that for women in architecture, and it is the work of us all to address this inequality.

For more information on archives at the RIBA please read:

<https://www.architecture.com/explore-architecture/inside-the-riba-collections/revisiting-the-collections-the-forgotten-women>

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# Image Credits

For participants

Alice Brownfield: Morley von Sternberg

Farshid Moussavi: Paul Phung

Elsie Owusu: Grant Smith

Zoe Berman: Agatha A. Nitecka/RÅN studio

## With thanks to...

Katie Lloyd Thomas, my PhD supervisor and academic support for this project.

Part W Collective, led by Zoe Berman and Alice Brownfield for being such engaged interviewers and for taking this project in their stride.

Gillian Harrison at the RIBA for all the support and reassurance.

This project could not have come to fruition without the relentless support of the following individuals: Emma Clark, Iona Morton, Viviana Garcia, Christina Pettingale, Jess Robinson, James Mackenzie, Fraser Morrison, William Barker

Funding was awarded in 2019 and the project developed throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, I would like to thank all involved for their persistence during this demanding time.