



The handshake of House Dedel.





### **Stranded in isolation.**

*While stranded in isolation in South Africa due to Covid-19, I started to observe door handles from a different perspective. I was surrounded by fences. In South Africa where security is a serious issue, fences are an important architectural element. Because fences were so prevalent in my surrounding in South Africa, my attention was diverted in my observation of door handles and their doors. Before my time in South Africa I described door handles as the touch of the building, but in this country the fences are barriers to keep people from being touched. As a result, the function of the door handles on their doors take on a new meaning. They become appendages to the function of the fence. In other words, an extra barrier to enhance security. One will enter a place where there is no warm welcome.*



1. South Africa, 2020, surrounded with fences.

*"It is pleasurable to press a door handle shining from the thousands of hands that have entered the door before us; the clean shimmer of ageless wear has turned into an image of welcome and hospitality. The door handle is the handshake of the building. The tactile sense connects us with time and tradition: through impressions of touch we shake the hands of countless generations." (Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005.)<sup>1</sup>*

In Pallasmaa's quote he argues precisely the opposite of my perception of doors and door handles in South Africa. Pallasmaa reasons: the door is to welcome people, not to keep them out. A door handle is one of the smallest details of the architectural elements. While with many architectural elements the visual sense is important, with a door handle another sense takes the leading role. It is not for the eyes only, but it is about the touch with the building.

Juhani Pallasmaa is a Finnish architect, but is mainly known for his theoretical texts related to architecture.<sup>2</sup> He argues that architecture cannot be experienced through only one sense, the visual, but that experiencing space is about the cooperation of all five senses.<sup>3</sup> One of his most famous books is "The eyes of the skin." where he discusses that the touch of architecture is totally underestimated and underexposed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The eyes of the skin", Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005, JOHN WILEY & SONS, p.56 part 2 - The shape of touch.

<sup>2</sup> "Juhani Pallasmaa, The Soft-Spoken Finn With Big Ideas.", Jackie Craven, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/juhani-pallasmaa-finnish-architect-177421>

<sup>3</sup> "The eyes of the skin", Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005, JOHN WILEY & SONS, p.41 - Multi-Sensory Experience.

<sup>4</sup> "Juhani Pallasmaa, The Soft-Spoken Finn With Big Ideas.", Jackie Craven, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/juhani-pallasmaa-finnish-architect-177421>

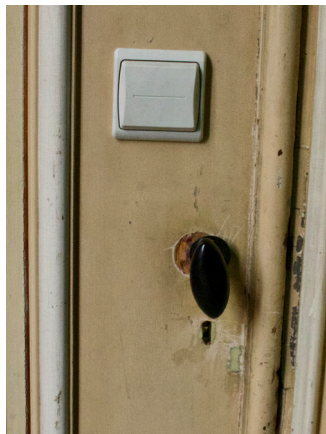


### ***My first acquaintance.***

The first time I walked through House Dedel, I was fascinated by the variety of doorknobs. Each is shaped, colored and attached differently. Sometimes one door even has a different doorknob on each side of the door. The doorknob to me represents the handshake of the building, which means the doorknob allows you to hold, touch and feel the building with just one small movement.



*2. A different doorknob on each side, House Dedel.*



*3. Doorknobs, different shapes colors and attachments.*

I refer to doorknobs instead of door handles, as in this house there are mostly doorknobs. The reason that House Dedel's doors have mainly doorknobs is probably related to the time period in which the house was built (17th century). In this period door handles also came into use. *"According to Leonhardt, a collector of all ancient building materials, but mostly door handles, the door handle used to be the most expensive part of the house, and it was customary to take them with you when moving to a new house (like windows in the Middle Ages)."*<sup>5</sup> Because in House Dedel several moves haven't taken place, the doorhandles, because of their value, were probably moved as well. One could deduct that in all likelihood the door handles were replaced by door knobs and are therefore not original.

Door handles can be roughly divided in three categories: Lever handle, doorknob and pull/push handle.<sup>6</sup> So, the movement a user is required to make to open or close the door is varied - either press, pull down, turn or slide. In House Dedel where the doorknob is most commonly used, requires a turning action.

### ***The limp handshake.***

This handshake reveals the character of the next room you are about to enter or the room you leave behind. To me, the doorknob represents the most sincere touch with the building and it is the first acquaintance with the space. It's like meeting someone for the first time. That limp hand or the firm handshake; it's the first impression of the person across from you. That's how I regard the doorknob, it is the first introduction to the space you are about to enter.

I noticed that in the House Dedel the doorknobs have been neglected. The doorknobs are loose in their fittings and look as if they could fall apart. It is also debatable whether they are original. To me, this represents the limp handshake. There is no warm welcome when entering the rooms, this seems a shame as each room could have a story to relate.



4. Neglected doorknob, House Dedel.

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<sup>5</sup> "Elements of architecture.", Rem Koolhaas, Irma Boom, 2014, Marsilio, p. 94, "Door", 8. Handle.

<sup>6</sup> "Types of door handles.", Carolina Neves, 2019.



*"The skin reads the texture, weight, density and temperature of matter. The surface of an old object, polished to perfection by the tool of the craftsman and the assiduous hands of its users, seduces the stroking of the hand." (Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005.)<sup>7</sup>*

On the other hand, the fragility of the doorknobs suits this house. Many elements of the house are in a fragile state, the fireplaces, the wallpaper and also the doorknobs. This fragile condition of the doorknobs, can also warn you that you are entering a space that is vulnerable.



5. Fragile condition of the doorknobs, House Dedel.

### ***Experiencing space through material qualities.***

The doorknobs, or doors in general, are elements of architecture that we are in contact with on a daily basis, consciously or unconsciously. I imagine that these elements could be easily overlooked or fall into the background, especially in a house like House Dedel which leaves behind so many impressions to wonder about. While I believe that in this house these "handshakes" could guide the visitors more effectively and sensitively, through its different spaces. The design of the doorknob could for example prepare the visitor for the fragility of the space he or she is about to enter.

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<sup>7</sup> "The eyes of the skin", Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005, JOHN WILEY & SONS, p.56 part 2 - The shape of touch.



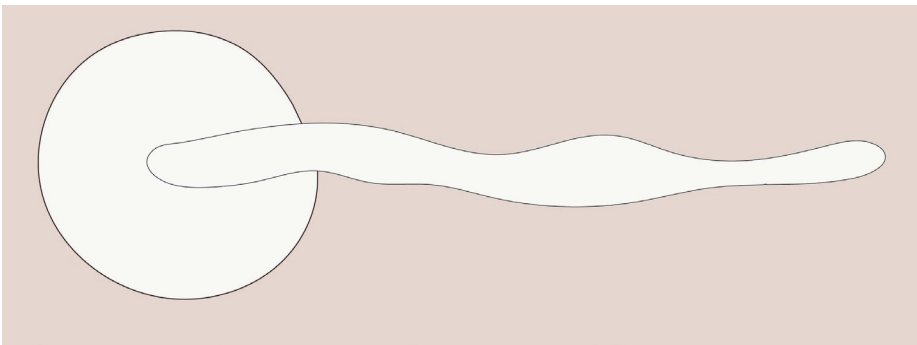
6. Door with doorknob and pull handle, House Dedel.



7. Fragment of Japanese wallpaper, living room House Dedel.

House Dedel is full of wonderful elements awaiting the visitor. Every room entered is another surprise. After the living room with the beautiful Japanese wallpaper, one passes through the hallway into the dining room. Here attention is drawn to the ceiling painting and all the secret places of the former servants. All these qualities which could be translated into the doorknob of each space.

The different rooms in House Dedel have different sensory qualities. For example, the passage is windy, light and small. And the dining room is dark, fragrant and highly decorated. These qualities together form the experience of the room. The greeting. *What kind of materials suit these qualities? And how can these be transformed in the handshake of the room - the doorknob - the first impression?*



8. Sketch of possible door handle hall.



9. Sketch of possible doorknob dining room.



### ***Navigating with care.***

Navigating through House Dedel, looking for surprises, is something that reminds me of the documentary “Koolhaas Houselife.”<sup>8</sup>

“Koolhaas Houselife” is a documentary about Koolhaas’ house in Bordeaux. One expects Koolhaas himself to guide you through the house, but you experience the house through the eyes of the cleaning lady, Guadalupe Acedo. The house is full of doors, both automatic and manual. When the doors are automatic, there is still that touch with the building, but through a button that will open the door. The button will then function as the doorknob. The cleaning lady takes you through the house and keeps you in suspense in what you find behind the doors. This is what I like about the house, there are so many doors and only when you open them, with the button or the doorknob, you will find out what the next room will look like.

I see a resemblance in the fragility of House Dedel and Koolhaas’ Bordeaux house. This fragility in Koolhaas’ house doesn’t stop the cleaning lady from going through the house quite roughly and cleaning everything heavy-handedly. Which at times leaves the viewer feeling tense. Doesn’t she know how valuable this house is? This also applies to the owner of House Dedel. He wants to modify, hide or expand elements of the house. But doesn’t he understand that with the house in its current state he already holds a treasure in his hands?



Photo by Ila Bêka & Louise Lemoine

10. Still from “Koolhaas Houselife.”, Louise Lemoine, Ila Bêka, 2008.



11. Still from “Koolhaas Houselife.”, the bollard, Louise Lemoine, Ila Bêka, 2008.



***Conclusion.***

I hope that in the future House Dedel will become a place that is appreciated precisely for its beauty and its stories. That they may be told loud and clear. But that secrets will also remain, to be given their own interpretation by those who walk through the house in wonder. The handshakes of the rooms whether firm or delicate, will always be a warm welcome and a good introduction to the house and the rooms. And I strongly believe, that by approaching doorknobs in a sensorially way, that in the future they can play an important part in guiding visitors and can give a first impression of the different spaces.

### ***Sources.***

- 1 "The eyes of the skin", Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005, JOHN WILEY & SONS, p.56 part 2 - The shape of touch
- 2 "Juhani Pallasmaa, The Soft-Spoken Finn With Big Ideas.", Jackie Craven, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/juhani-pallasmaa-finnish-architect-177421>
- 3 "The eyes of the skin", Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005, JOHN WILEY & SONS, p.41 - Multi-Sensory Experience.
- 4 "Juhani Pallasmaa, The Soft-Spoken Finn With Big Ideas.", Jackie Craven, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/juhani-pallasmaa-finnish-architect-177421>
- 5 "Elements of architecture.", Rem Koolhaas, Irma Boom, 2014, Marsilio, p. 94, "Door", 8. Handle.
- 6 "Types of door handles.", Carolina Neves, 2019.
- 7 "The eyes of the skin", Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005, JOHN WILEY & SONS, p.56 part 2 - The shape of touch.
- 8 "Koolhaas Houselife.", Louise Lemoine, Ila Bêka, 2008.

### ***Images.***

1. South Africa, 2020, surrounded with fences, Mae Alderliesten.
2. A different doorknob on each side, House Dedel, 2020, Mae Alderliesten.
3. Doorknobs, different shapes colors and attachments, House Dedel, 2020, Mae Alderliesten.
4. Neglected doorknob, House Dedel, 2020, Mae Alderliesten.
5. Sketch of possible doorknob dining room, 2021, Mae Alderliesten.
6. Sketch of possible door handle passage, 2021, Mae Alderliesten.
7. Door with doorknob and pull handle, House Dedel, 2020, Mae Alderliesten.
8. Chinese wallpaper, living room, House Dedel, 2020, Mae Alderliesten.
9. Hidden sink of the former servants, dining room, House Dedel, 2020, Mae Alderliesten.
10. Still from "Koolhaas Houselife.", Louise Lemoine, Ila Bêka, 2008.
11. Still from "Koolhaas Houselife.", "the bollard..", Louise Lemoine, Ila Bêka, 2008.





