MacEwen Award
2017

Foodhall Project
Carrowbreck Meadow
Comielaw Farm Steading
Westonbirt Arboretum store and mess
Broadwaters Inclusive Learning Community
The Point
Hostel, Crimscott Street
Camden Collective workspace
The Green
Mellor Primary School
Rochester Roundhouse
Hastings Pier
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1 Buildings

Highly commended: Rochester Roundhouse
A high class, deft design combined with skill transfer, hands on experience and a sense of community on the Northumbrian moors

Winner: The Point
Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt’s The Point answers virtually all the requests of a community prepared to financially back a youth centre

Highly commended: Sheffield Foodhall
Social transformation of a space catalysed by architecture, the £5,000 foodhall is for everyone

Shortlist
A strong shortlist gave the winners a run for their money

2 Intelligence

Q&A
Tom Bloxham talks about OMA’s new home for the Manchester International Festival

Future leaders
Delia Harmsn of HLM is one of three young architects that seem to have cracked the route to success

Economics
It seems our newbuild homes are getting bigger again – but why?

Legal
How a simple profit sharing scheme fell apart

Diary
Maria Smith wonders if ‘architect’ will soon be an undesirable title

3 Culture

Leader
The Pompidou Centre marked a pivotal moment in architecture. Look out for the next one

Wiles & Wainwright
Olly Wainwright finds doing nothing can be most rewarding

President
Beautiful buildings are not optional; they are a responsibility, says Jane Duncan

Profile
RIBA Royal Gold Medallist Paulo Mendes da Rocha on staying in Brazil, Osaka Expo, constructivists and creating

Review
Mies and Stirling: Two controversial proposals for a prime City site sit side by side at the RIBA

Review
French modernism brought back to life at Villa Cavrois

Obit
RMIT’s Peter Corrigan, who strove to locate architecture at the heart of social endeavour

Exchange
Readers: we want your comments and feedback

Parting shot
John Pardey thought Basil Spence’s retreat the best 1960s house in Britain

Comment
The joy – and hard work – in delivering for the common good

The MacEwen Award
The judging
Ethical procurement, common good, technical skill and ingenuity in abundance – how the judges decided

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Sheffield Foodhall, and two of its founders, highly commended for the MacEwen Award, page 24.
A different agenda

Our MacEwen Award is marked out from other architecture awards by its priorities of ethical procurement, social benefit and ingenuity. Possessing them all is the ambition.

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek Illustrations: Lizzie Lomax

What seemed to arise this year during the course of the judges’ deliberations for the 2017 MacEwen Award was the realisation that the eventual winner could perhaps not be the recipient of any other professional accolade – and that this is how it should be. Now in its second year, the award arose out of the concern that the profession is too seduced by form-making to look under its belly to address concerns about how that architecture might be procured or in whose interests it is being generated. Conventional awards work within the status quo, ask the same formal questions and they tend to reward us with the same answers.

But when we launched this award in honour of former RIBAJ editor Malcolm MacEwen – who in 1974 called for reform of the profession with his ‘Crisis in Architecture’ manifesto and who was an early champion of what we would now call sustainability – we were interested in alternative ways of constructing our world. Both Malcolm and his town planner wife Anni, one of the authors of the 1962 ‘Traffic In Towns’ report challenging the hegemony of the car, went on to be rural conservation activists. In the same vein, this award is founded on the idea that, to best serve the humanist agendas of architecture in a democratic society, it might be better to do less – or even nothing at all. Radical thinking like this is not rewarded by conventional award programmes, which are founded on generating form rather than questioning it.

For this year’s judges, ex-Cabe town planner Kathy MacEwen, daughter of Malcolm and Anni; Coin Street Community Builders executive director Iain Tuckett; Haworth Tompkins director Steve Tompkins; vPPR partner Tatiana von Preussen and RIBAJ editor Hugh Pearman, there was at least a precedent in the form of last year’s winner, the Oasis Children’s Venture. There we weren’t looking at a new building, but an old Walter Segal one in Waterloo, upcycled by two young Part II architectural students and then reassembled in Stockwell by the local community as a play centre, meeting and event venue. It hit all the buttons. The building was free, it was an almost polemical example of sustainable architecture and its social use on conversion was transformational in the long term for the local kids charity that it housed. In other words, there was a hell of a lot of bang for your buck.
Over and above the main award criterion of demonstrable and lasting social benefit, Tompkins kept returning the judges to the concept of how much architecture you are getting for your money, placing ingenuity despite limited resources in the mix alongside procurement method as key factors in the judging process. From 50 initial entries whittled down to a longlist of 24, from which the shortlist of 12 would be chosen, the collective view was that all three concerns would get equal parity in the deliberations.

It’s interesting, as a result, to see what projects fell by the wayside to arrive at the shortlist. For instance, Wintles, a Portmeirion for today by architect David Lea and others, is a seductive and considered creation of a rural idyll on the edge of a village in Shropshire. Yet it merely shows what private money, thoughtfully targeted, can realise in terms of quality contextual design – the justification that this private development brought wider benefits to the area in terms of value uplift weren’t felt to be consistent with the aspirations of the MacEwen Award.

At the other end of the spectrum were smaller public projects carried out with limited means, but which, for whatever reason, did not embody the longevity component that the judges attributed to the award. While noble in intent, Ash Sakula’s Caravanserai seemed thwarted by its location, never developing a life of its own during or after the Olympic context in which it was conceived. Likewise, Waterloo’s pop-up theatre RISE only lasted as long as its stage production. Brixton’s Remakery, Architecture for Humanity’s novel repurposing of a car park for community use, was felt to lack the general appeal that would bring the neighbourhood on board; and in London’s Nine Elms the ‘Edible Avenue’ bus stop that doubled as an urban allotment felt like an idea which, though planted, would never truly take root. Then there were the projects of undisputed architectural merit but whose wider social benefit was questioned. Verity-Jane Keefe’s Mobile Museum strayed too far into the realms of a fetishised art project while Dow Jones’ lovely Christchurch crypt and Clevedon Pier & Heritage Trust’s new visitor centre are perhaps destined to be the recipients of other awards.

Sifting through the final shortlist of 12 to identify the winner became a far more difficult process, as all were now demonstrating palpable evidence of social purpose, novel procurement and architectural merit. Sarah Wigglesworth set the bar high with her Mellor Forest School, which offered new solutions in a conservative sector which Tompkins said...
Identifying the winner became far more difficult, as all were now demonstrating palpable evidence of social purpose, novel procurement and architectural merit.

‘arose from conversations rather than dogma or some purist position.’ Less dramatically, van Preussen was keen to support Gollifer Langston’s Broadwaters Inclusive Learning Centre in London, which not only normalised SEN teaching in a conventional school but did so with ‘high civic aspiration.’ Kathy MacEwen, with her town planning background, was keen that urban regeneration projects be given due consideration, not least dRMM’s Hastings pier, drawing the positive effects of town investment like a fuse wire along the coastline towards it, calling it ‘a remarkable example of a community organisation fighting for years to secure the pier despite a fire and other setbacks.’

Enlivening a dour London artery, while the Camden Collective’s interim repurposing of the old National Temperance Hospital offered free shared workspace and ‘maximum output for minimum outlay’, the familiar typology put it in the shadow of projects like AOC’s ‘extraordinary’ The Green community centre in Nunhead, which according to Iain Tuckett, ‘scotches the myth that if you ask people what they want you end up with a confused-looking building.’

Both housing and assisted housing made it into the shortlist. Homeless charity St Mungo’s was praised by all the judges for its considered take on transition studios whose quality and detailing lent a dignity to a project that belied its position hidden away on its back garden site. Pearman, meanwhile, was struck by the Carrowbrook Meadow housing in Norfolk, built by the local council to Passivhaus standards and expertly realised in a modern vernacular ‘with a confidence rarely seen in rural areas’. With nearly half of the homes offered on a shared equity basis and the market sale homes funding a nearby construction skills centre, it epitomised the kind of joined-up thinking the MacEwen seeks to reward.

It will come as no surprise then that our final three are probably not the strongest in terms of formal design – there were certainly finer examples of architectural skill in evidence in other projects such as Invisible Studio’s gorgeous Westonbirt Arboretum projects; but remember, the MacEwen Award is, as Kathy MacEwen explained, ‘about the social transformation of space catalysed by architecture, not the architecture itself’. One of the three is more a landscape than a functioning structure; in another the building is no less impressive than the collective decision of a town to raise its own council tax to bring it about. And for the third, there was a whole protracted discussion about to what extent there was any architecture to speak of there at all. But the judges were ultimately happy with their decisions. ‘The winners all share an attractive sense of direct action politics,’ Tompkins summed it up at the end. ‘They feel like they are talking of the specific values of this award rather than normal architectural ones.’ In fact, most would probably be discounted outright using conventional criteria, but then that’s the MacEwen Award. It’s about nothing less than recognising that incremental shift in thinking about why and how we build; and that’s why they’re our winners.”
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Regarding architecture and common good, with The Point it’s there in abundance – it’s exemplary

Steve Tompkins
Assault Course. Selfie Booth. Slush Puppy machine. Popcorn dispenser. Phone chargers. Adult soft play. Trees. Dance floor. Beanbags. Hamster Wheel (size not specified). These were just some of the things on the wish list of Tadley’s Youth Council when they were called in for a brainstorming session on what should be in their new youth club. There were dozens more. And while the snack dispensers and the hamster wheel don’t seem to have made it through, plenty else has. The Point in Tadley is a proper place for people to go, a community facility. And it is the winner of this year’s MacEwen Award.

It’s not often that a town’s residents vote through their parish council to raise its council tax specifically to cover a funding gap for such a building, but that’s what happened here. In the end they didn’t have to resort to that, but their readiness to do it shows the goodwill behind the project. And since the building, with its café, halls, meeting room and sound studio, is open to all locally, it’s not just kids running around and playing pool. A group of home educators meets there, as does a local choir, the inevitable yoga and pilates classes and so on. And as it’s sited right behind a community centre from the 1980s, the two buildings can work together.

It’s not easy getting a youth building right – with the right facilities, in the right materials – without appearing condescending or big-brotherish. This is one of the things that commended The Point to this year’s MacEwen judges. And on the day I went to see the place with architects David Ayre and Dominic Gaunt, along with their client, youth leader Adrian Noad, my immediate response was – this doesn’t feel like a youth club at all. It’s more like a Grand Designs-style house.

Not that it’s on a particularly auspicious site, this being a landlocked scrap of land behind that older, distinctly tired-looking, community centre, hemmed in by the back gardens of houses, with more homes planned alongside. But the land had the virtue of coming free – donated by Hants County Council as its contribution to this £860,000 project. Other money came from Tadley Town Council, the Turbury Allotment Charity, and...
Call for entries: Colored Concrete Works Award 2017

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Colored concrete is being used increasingly as a premium building material. Numerous buildings are constructed every year around the world that are colored with inorganic pigments. Specialty chemicals company LANXESS will be presenting the third Colored Concrete Works Award in 2017 to architects who create modern architecture with colored concrete and focus in their work on the beauty and aesthetic quality of this special, natural building material. Previous winners being David Chipperfield and Akihisa Hirata.

Architects of completed building projects from all over the world are welcome to submit an entry by March 10, 2017. The most important criteria for participating: Buildings must be no more than five years old, and the concrete used must be colored with inorganic iron oxide or chrome oxide pigments. Detailed information and entry forms are available online at www.colored-concrete-works.com, or can be requested directly by sending an email to ColoredConcrete@lanxess.com.

The international jury comprises architects, representatives of the trade press, and pigment and marketing experts from the LANXESS Inorganic Pigments business unit. The jury will select the best projects from all entries. Criteria include the building's colorfulness, function and significance. The three finalists will be notified at the end of March 2017. All decisions are final.

The award ceremony will be held on May 17, 2017, at the LANXESS office in Berlin. The winning project will be presented in an international campaign in the trade and technical press, which includes multilingual publications of a case study on the building.

LANXESS is the world’s largest manufacturer of iron oxide pigments and a leading producer of inorganic pigments based on chrome oxides, which are used to color concrete, among other applications. For many years now, the LANXESS Colored Concrete Works initiative has been inspiring architects and developers to promote modern architecture through the use of colored concrete. The Colored Concrete Works Award is an essential element of the initiative and was given for the first time to architect David Chipperfield for his “Ciutat de la Justicia” project in Barcelona, Spain. The most recent winner in early 2015 was Akisha Hirata, in recognition of his design of the “Alp” apartment complex in Akabane-Nishi, Tokyo, Japan.
Buildings
MacEwen Award: Winner

The whole thing was kept as home-grown as possible, with the timber-framed prefabricated panels for the structure, including some complex angled joints to the glulam beams, being made in nearby Andover, and trusted local contractors used. The level of ambition was high. As Noad says, you could have got the minimum facilities needed in a basic single-storey hut tacked onto the existing building – since the youth club was operating out of there anyway. Instead, he said the decision was: ‘Let’s build something that’s got some legacy to it, that we can grow into.’

Involving the community doesn’t result in something compromised or of impoverished quality. It’s really contemporary and beautifully crisp

Right Laminated timber construction the building structure was made in sub-assemblies locally.

Below Cut out and keep – how the folded-plate geometry works.

the Greenham Common Trust, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, the Local Infrastructure Fund, and a Public Works Loan. All of which only goes to prove how resourceful you have to be to patch together the funding for such a project. Many local companies donated materials and resources.

You may not know Tadley – I didn’t. It is a town on the very northern edge of Hampshire, next to the county border with Berkshire. More significantly, it has long been intimately associated with the nearby Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, a big employer from the 1950s onwards. Housing for the AWE workers was mostly built at Tadley – so families settled there and their children grew up there. While the AWE had all kinds of communal facilities for its workers, the town itself lacked them – along with basic things like good shops, for quite a while – even when the town’s growth had more to do with dormitory housing associated with commuting to the nearby bigger centres of Basingstoke and Reading. A public library arrived only in 1994. A well-equipped centre for young people was seen as key to the further development of the town, which explains the way the council got behind it.

Upon which, Ayre and Caroline Ferris of ACG came in to meet an exuberant panel of their youthful clients (mostly in the 12-14 age group) for that briefing session. ‘It was one of the most frightening experiences of my life,’ says Ayre with feeling, meaning that it was a noisy, full-on event. The wish list that resulted was refined into a workable proposition. ‘Quite a few things made it into the building,’ says Gaunt, ‘particularly the desire for it to be something like a tree house.’ A lookout post, if you like, which made it a two-storey building. That, along with the need not to be too bulky an object in the sight of its neighbours, started to determine the folded-plate geometry of the building.

Tatiana von Preussen

The RIBA Journal February 2017
centres. It is pretty big at 410m². Inside are two multi-purpose halls, music room and recording studio, a café, and a series of activity pods and break-out spaces including the best break-out space of all – the hard-landscaped area around it, much used in summer when the doors open up to the outside realm.

‘Part of the brief,’ says Noad, ‘it was that it had to be quirky.’ And indeed it’s a dramatic-looking thing, clad in dark grey fibre cement panels out of which the openings are carved, with deep splayed reveals to the glazing expressed in timber veneered rainscreen cladding. The ideas were developed through a series of consultation events and workshops, using models and sketches.

And it is used, with typically 80 or 90 people flooding in on one of the key evenings, Thursdays. Noad notes that it is the younger ones who have most adopted it, with older teens at first less keen. Pretty normal, he says – a generation has to grow up in and ‘own’ such places over a few years.

As for Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt, this youngish 20-strong Basingstoke-based practice is in expansion mode, the backbone of its work being housing projects of the £15m to £20m scale. It is building in London as well as the home counties, and – with recruitment a bit of an issue, even with fast rail links – is pondering opening a London office in 2017. Educational and arts projects – including the refurbishment of the grade II* listed Marlborough College – also come into the mix.

By the standards of many of its present projects, The Point is relatively small. But the practice poured a lot of time and energy into it, and – as the MacEwen judges noticed – it shows.

The architect created a beautiful combination of inside and outside spaces that are flexible and look like a joy to use

Iain Tuckett
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Working in the round

Newcastle University students and the local community shared learning and leadership to build the highly commended Rochester Roundhouse.

Northumberland is a big place for young architecture masters students to build in. Rural, and protected as a national park, the wide open spaces circling the Rochester Roundhouse have a rolling topography huge enough to have been walked by giants. Although the more sheltered Kielder Forest to the west has attracted well established architects in recent years, at 45 minutes by car north of Newcastle, Rochester’s intimidating landscape leaves nowhere to hide. Any building makes a big impact, no matter how small.

And the diminutive Rochester Roundhouse certainly does. It remodels the stone walls of a derelict roundhouse as an open air seating and activity area and adds a new timber pavilion for indoor activities and shelter behind. The two parts are connected by timber decking that runs as a terrace in front of the pavilion and into the roundhouse walls for flooring.

The remote site is appropriate to a project called Testing Ground – a partnership...
between the Kielder Art and Architecture programme and nearby Newcastle University’s School of Architecture that is now in its fifth year. As the third in this series, Rochester Roundhouse stood out for this year’s MacEwen Award judges both for its tangible ‘high-class’ design and nice detailing, as well as its teaching and learning programme to produce architecture graduates with experience working on live, budget-conscious projects from beginning to end. Plus of course the achievement of overcoming the immense challenges of getting anything built in a national park without any planning objections.

‘Rochester Roundhouse is pretty high class stuff from students,’ said chair of the judges Hugh Pearman. ‘You see the architecture of timber but its nicely detailed and it looks at home in its surroundings.’

Students on the scheme opt in to the module not knowing what the project might be – aware only that something will happen and the university will contribute towards the material costs of building. In this case it gave the students £10,000, with a further £5,000 coming from Kielder Forest and Water.

Started in January 2015 by nine students who signed up for the Testing Ground module at Newcastle, and completed in 16 months, the project engaged with the local community to transform the site of a former educational establishment.

Under the programme, these nine were left to participate with local residents, teasing a positive response from a neglected site, while learning how to present and speak to real clients. The group organised community meetings to create a brief and proposals in response to the desire for a building that would sit between the landscape and village hall in use, and provide an in-between space to retreat to in changeable weather.

Splitting into groups, the students submitted four proposals. Three involved re-roofing the roundhouse, but the selected option created outdoor seating with a timber pavilion, integrating the two components into a sinuous whole using standard decking.

Consequently, the roundhouse’s aesthetic is simple and is designed to be entirely constructible by the students – only the skimming of the pavilion’s interior walls was done by an outside contractor. But that should not deflect from the project’s overall ambition and dexterity. The programme forces the students to resolve every niggle and corner

The plan form is really clever especially where it insinuates itself into the land

Steve Tompkins

Top The remains of a recent round wall have been filled with a seating area for activities.  Above Community uses? How about a ukulele workshop?
It’s a clever combination of internal and external space – and that roof!

Iain Tuckett

of the building beyond most architectural education, from concept to selecting which tools to build with.

The pavilion was built on site as a timber frame on 450mm by 450mm concrete foundations fitted with adjustable pads as a low-tech way of ensuring the structure was level. The frame was then boxed in, covered with a weatherproof membrane, battered down, clad in larch and planted with a sedum roof. Only the doors and windows, which were also made by the students, were built in the university workshop.

Aside from the design and plan, the judges commended the involvement of local trades and the community all the way through the project, as client and as build volunteers, which encouraged ownership of the building before handover. Local residents built the outdoor deck, and a local dry stone waller taught students how to remodel the stone walls of the house into amphitheatre seating.

This project differs from the two previous completed years of Testing Ground in its context-specific and enhancing architecture – the position of the pavilion up the hill behind the seating area, its curving front elevation, detailing on the cladding, beautifully exposed beams inside and the neat swivel hinge doors which have a purist Zen quality about them. It is a tranquil space with unpainted plaster. The fact that it is only designed for fair weather would be the only criticism. Without plumbing or electricity, it is usable for only a fraction of the year, which on my visit in January seemed a shame. It is also difficult to imagine toddlers gathering for long without washrooms.

Nevertheless the Rochester Roundhouse has already provided an inspirational backdrop for a music festival, ukulele workshop and storytelling event, and the remaining enclosure will also now become part of a further experimental project for a group of ecologists at the university.

The other side of the coin is what the Testing Ground project as a whole does for the alumni of this course in teaching how to be socially responsible architects and contractors. Although the school’s head Graham Farmer says many have gone into big practices to complete part 3, it will be interesting to see how the graduates proceed in their careers and whether the usual salaried jobs will ever fully quench their architectural thirst after producing something so commendable and all-encompassing so early on. Future architectural giants perhaps?

The project was built almost exclusively by students from Newcastle University’s Testing Ground programme.

Left The project was built almost exclusively by students from Newcastle University’s Testing Ground programme.

Above The construction phases of the project documented as simple axonometric drawings.
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Everyone welcome

Created by two architects and a planner, Sheffield’s Foodhall project is about as inclusive as you can get.
last Christmas for the first time. Those days are pretty full on – maybe 50 visitors eating lunch, chatting as they make themselves drinks, finding a quiet space to sit, working on a project, plus four volunteers cooking warming vegetarian lunches from waste food gathered from supermarkets the night before.

So I have come on a quieter day. Through Sheffield Hallam University’s campus, past new hotels and a huge casino, and along a back street with a promising hand painted sign on the wall. A church once stood on this site. Then for many years it was a Co-operative Society morgue. The deep 130m² loading bay for the hearse leads to smaller rooms including a huge fridge where bodies were laid out. The new kitchen is next to it. But the Foodhall has made the spaces wholly its own. The efforts of the three founding directors – who have also set up in practice together as Studio Temple – have been largely concentrated on making the loading bay into a welcoming space. The lease is short, the site slated for development,

If this award is about the social transformation of a space catalysed by architecture, for me, the Foodhall is it

Kathy MacEwen

Left Inexpensive OSB furniture shifts around with the activities.

Above Unexpected social interactions are becoming the norm.

GEORGINA MARTIN

Kathy MacEwen
Buildings
MacEwen Award highly commended

so everything can, by necessity, be picked up and carried elsewhere.

The team has taken the CNC offcuts of a local Wikihouse and coated them with iridescent film to make a glittering dividing wall that throws rainbows into the room. ‘Clever’ said the MacEwen judges, and ‘beautiful’. The trio has worked out the most efficient uses of OSB: three cuts and you have a rocking chair and table in one (the chair is low but comfortable and somehow lends itself to a bubble of laughter). Some of the boxy furniture was designed while Pohl worked with Studio Polpo, a Sheffield practice that has been in the background supporting this project. At first most of the furniture was begged from John Lewis but they ended up with rather cellular domestic arrangements that didn’t encourage the social interaction that has made the Foodhall so stimulating and affirming. So now simple towers of OSB are manoeuvred to make long tables and benches, or staging, or stood on their ends to

Architecture and common good per pound is very high with the Foodhall
Steve Tompkins

above The kitchen where waste is transformed into good food.
below The sensory experience of the Foodhall has proved important to certain users and means it makes a good evening venue as well.
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Care for the community

Not everyone could win, but there were plenty of first-rate projects to choose from. The shortlist made the judges work hard.

41A Crimscott Street
Bermondsey, London
Murray Mackeson Associates for St Mungo’s

This new hostel for the homeless takes the colours of the long rear garden of an existing hostel as inspiration and camouflage. The overgrown space, its outbuildings and a sub-standard hostel extension have been reconfigured: now a central garden courtyard and covered walkway sit between old and new hostels.

This apparent extension is in fact not run by St Mungo’s but by Providence Row Housing Association, which allowed other upgrades. Twelve self-contained rooms and a ground floor common room sit behind a complex pattern of brick slips which meld into the shadow of a large plane tree.

On a tight urban site with the gardens of Victorian terraces to one end and high buildings abutting the southern boundary, it was important that the building was recessive. The facade is staggered and the windows – with deep reveals – are placed to avoid addressing the neighbours’ gardens directly.

The architects point out that the sense of sheltering is ‘intrinsic in its function’. However the unexpected consequence is a lift for this neighbourhood and perhaps a softening of the stigma that can attach to such buildings.

It provides good architecture and design for people coming out of the worst scenarios

Kathy MacEwen

The Green
Nunhead Green, Southwark, London
AOC Architecture for London Borough of Southwark and Nunhead’s Voice

This 307m² public building, the Green, is the result of a long process of teasing out what was needed by the local community. AOC facilitated a co-design process with Nunhead’s Voice, a local residents’ group that was to run the centre. Ed Hammond, board member of Nunhead’s Voice, describes the process: ‘AOC’s involvement started at a difficult time. Relationships between us and the council were at an extremely low ebb. As a group we had an inchoate sense of what we wanted the centre to do. Activities which might have happened at the old centre might not be needed at the new one. AOC helped us not only with the design but in linking the design to our emerging business plan, helping us to understand how and where we would need to compromise. It would have been very easy for it to have looked like an awkward mess inside and out, but the final design looks as good on paper as it does in reality.’

The Green hosts a diverse range of activities and publics. Hatha yoga, New Wave Taekwondo and under-5s football happily co-exist under the same roof at the same time. Flexible programming allows single uses to take over the whole centre.

Open a year, the centre provides a civic presence on Nunhead Green that declares its identity and contributes to the completion of the ‘missing’ fourth side of the space. The new building has given the local community a series of distinct spaces in which to carry out a diverse programme of activities that had struggled to find a local home.
This hamlet is a fine example of joined-up thinking by a rural local authority. Carrowbreck Meadow is a development of 14 homes built and certified to Passivhaus standards, thus operating at an exemplary and, importantly, measurable level of energy efficiency. They are a mix of two, three and four bed houses (semi-detached and detached), sold either on a shared equity or open market basis.

Built at the point where the north-western suburbs of Norwich give way to countryside, the aesthetic is a contemporary interpretation of a Norfolk barn-style vernacular, focusing on clean lines and a simple material palette, while respecting the wooded location in both form and development layout.

The mechanism for delivery, local authority joint venture, meant that real energy went into achieving the aforementioned goals, while providing capital to feed into other similar ventures in the future. It also meant the development’s impact could be considered much more widely than on its immediate surroundings.

A number of people who have bought the shared equity properties have transferred from Broadland’s socially rented housing nearby. This is made affordable not only by the partially subsidised capital cost, but by the greatly reduced ongoing energy costs.

It’s an exceptional piece of architecture that works in its context
Tatiana von Preussen

It’s a modern version of rural vernacular. I’d live there – I’d feel like I’d won the lottery
Hugh Pearman
Hastings Pier

dRMM for Hastings Pier Charity
Hastings, East Sussex

Damage in 2010 to the 19th century Hastings Pier by fire after neglect gave an opportunity to redefine what a 21st century pier might be - a critique of the 20th century shanty town of commerciality it had become. A Heritage Lottery Fund grant enabled repairs below deck, while above a new visitor centre offers community space, an educational centre and rooftop viewing terrace with steps doubling as seating for outdoor events. Part of the grant was used to convert the pier’s single remaining derelict Victorian pavilion into a fully glazed, extended version of the past.

HPWR Trust (later charity) secured ownership of the pier through a compulsory purchase order to bring it into community hands. Flexibility, seasonality, and social enterprise grounded in local requirements underpin the proposals, informed by extensive public and professional consultation.

dRMM’s conceptual approach was not to create the predictable hero building at the end of the pier, but instead provide open space to allow universal access. The focus was on creating a well-serviced, strong platform that could support a variety of events. From circus to music to markets... Different users bring their own architecture to plug in.

It offers flexibility of use and revenue models, long term material and functional sustainability, while the uninterrupted panoramic vista encourages footfall.

It’s a remarkable example of a community organisation fighting over many years... and eventually achieving a scheme despite many setbacks

Iain Tuckett

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Comielaw Farm Steading Conversion
East Neuk of Fife, Scotland
Konishi Gaffney for the Balcaskie Estate

This is a 1,200m² alteration and extension of a 19th century B-listed rural steading to form 12 workshops, studios and light industrial units.

Traditional farm steadings, of which this estate has 16, are generally no longer viable for productive modern farming methods. Used for ad-hoc storage, steadings like these tend to slowly rot away through lack of use and there are few options for their future survival. Residential conversion helps maintain the structure but undermines the community. The estate decided to convert the steadings into small commercial workshops and studios to provide affordable employment space that is essential if people are to live and work in the rural community.

The existing buildings have been patched and improved; insulated, waterproofed and wired to current building standards with a shared biomass heating system; the newly constructed shed is subservient to this main structure. Materials are sympathetic and original with traditional techniques, such as coal tar paint, and local artisan skills used where possible.

Currently 10 different micro-businesses are sharing space, technology and infrastructure and collaborating to support each other. Low rents – and so returns (around 4%) – in rural sites mean this venture was not a commercial opportunity but is supported by other activities in the estate business. Construction was phased and let in sections to small local contractors, further supporting the local community and economy.

Broadwaters Inclusive Learning Community
Haringey, London
Gollifer Langston Architects for London Borough of Haringey

This project brings a children’s centre, primary school and two SEN schools together and is a rare example of mainstream and SEN schools co-locating and sharing facilities. While the new £13m, 5,800m² building needed to tiptoe around the three existing schools on the site so they could remain in operation during construction, it still had to form a coherent whole on completion.

The new primary school, ‘The Willow’, takes 420 students while ‘The Brook’ SEN primary, which combines two such schools, takes 100 pupils; specialising in ‘coeducational day school provision for children with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties and ASD, plus associated physical, medical, communication and emotional needs’.

Social spaces have been brought to the centre of the three blocks, addressing the street and Broadwater Farm Estate, offering potential for wider community use. Assembly and dining halls can open up to form one large space. To the rear is a swimming pool, changing rooms and dance/fitness facilities with dedicated access for out-of-hours use. A large area providing for shared play and engagement replaces the formerly fragmented and separated areas of earlier schools.

The campus was recently voted best community building and best overall project in the Haringey Design Awards 2016.
Camden Collective temporary workspace, Camden, London
Architects Co-DB and RARA

A rough and ready, cheap and cheerful but valuable workspace has been created in a long-empty hospital blighted by the route of the planned HS2 railway.

Camden Collective is a regeneration project that transforms vacant and underused spaces for temporary use and provides free hot-desking space, subsidised offices and training academies teaching creative and digital skills to young people. It also fosters public art, pop-up shops and other initiatives.

The project currently uses the former National Temperance Hospital, a 3,000m² art deco design by architect William Binnie on Hampstead Road behind Euston Station. It previously sat vacant for 15 years.

Camden Collective stripped out all of the various hospital accretions, leaving raw interconnected spaces. They left these pretty much alone, designing freestanding furniture units that can be dismantled and moved around as necessary.

The different elements of the design form a colourful patterned family of objects and surfaces, with a specially designed birch ply floor unifying the ground level.

Free co-working space is mixed with subsidised-rent office space so companies can grow to a point where they can move into ‘their’ office rather than sharing with others.

Steve Tompkins

It’s intelligently targeted ‘meanwhile’ use, bringing a moment of joy and playfulness to a dour street

Tatiana von Preussen

It has a high civic aspiration, bringing special needs in with an ordinary school… architecturally it combines them seamlessly
Mellor Primary School
Mellor, Stockport
Sarah Wigglesworth Architects
for Mellor Primary School

This 225m² extension to a village primary school offers a series of exciting and stimulating spaces that support a pioneering forest school curriculum: the result of close liaison between client, project partners and the local community.

The building is designed as a ‘tree house in the woods’ – a cluster of pitched roof forms set on a deck extending into the landscape. The dominant material is timber: a robust, low energy and sustainable material that reflects the school’s forest school activities and allows the building to sit comfortably in its green belt setting. Tree-like glulam frames support not only the deck but also the roofs internally and canopies externally, making visual connections between internal and external spaces.

The extension has allowed the school to expand to single form entry, and contains a new woodland-facing classroom, SEN room and library, outdoor learning and play spaces, an extended hall, a welly and outdoor equipment store and other facilities as well as a straw bale and biodiversity wall that children and parents helped to construct.

The forest school ethos holds that outdoor learning is key to helping children’s resilience, resourcefulness and ability to work together. The building is encouraging a love for the environment, while developing skills and knowledge through close connections to the outdoors.

It looks such a fun education; an exquisitely crafted building that really captures its pupils imaginations
Tatiana von Preussen

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For the client to stick with local timber and volunteers could have been disastrous. The shed is stunning!

Iain Tuckett

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**Westonbirt Arboretum Machinery Store and Mess Building**

_Tetbury, Gloucestershire_

_Invisible Studio for the Forestry Commission_

Invisible Studio was commissioned to design two buildings simultaneously for Westonbirt Arboretum that together would form its new tree management centre. The Machinery Store was a new facility to allow the tree team to operate effectively in the management of the national arboretum. The Mess Building is the welfare facility for the Westonbirt volunteers and tree team.

The key aim was to design both buildings with Westonbirt rather than for it. This meant different but parallel approaches for the two. At both the unskilled volunteer force helped construct the building alongside trained carpenters to develop NVQ skills. IS also used construction techniques that aligned with the practice’s interests in using imprecise materials assembled by low skilled people in a precise and efficient manner. Thinnings released as part of the estate’s tree management plan were used in the project.

Both buildings were brought in at very low budget but possess a high qualitative component, with volunteers learning skills that they have been able to develop and take on to other projects. One building exhibits high thermal performance and the other a development of the ‘Atcost’ vernacular that merges it into its sylvan context.
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2: Intelligence

OMA has won the competition to design Manchester’s new £110 million, 12,000m² cultural venue, Factory. We ask chairman of the Manchester International Festival, Tom Bloxham, why he thinks it was chosen for the MIF’s new dedicated home.

Tom Bloxham

Because it was based around such a simple concept. It’s always been about commissioning new work from great artists on a scale that might not have been possible elsewhere. That’s partially due to how much it’s been embraced by the City council and private sponsors, who each put up a third of the funding. The rest is made up from ticket sales for the events.

Why call it Factory? Is it harking back to Tony Wilson’s Factory Records’ legacy?

While Tony was a great guy, it would be erroneous to say the new venue was named after him. I think we were imagining it more as a place of art production in the way Andy Warhol set up his Factory in New York. But this is future facing, not about legacy. If Tony represented a continual commitment to creativity and innovation, then maybe we are looking to emulate something of that great energy.

What intrigued you about OMA’s proposal? What did it have that other names on the shortlist didn’t?

It was a great shortlist (with Rafael Viñoly and Zaha Hadid included), but I think the judges were most struck by its elemental simplicity. But it’s not just about big shapes or fancy structures – OMA really thinks about the programme and generates the form from that. Take the Casa da Música in Porto or the Fondazione Prada in Milan. With the main space 70m long and nearly 30m high it understood that we wanted an enormous shed for art – that’s what got it a unanimous verdict.

It’s going on the site of the former Granada TV studios. What’s that part of Manchester like now?

The St John area is a brownfield site squeezed between the site of the Museum of Science & Technology and Spinningfields – effectively Manchester’s central business district. Apart from the studio complex and the former set of Coronation Street, there’s a hotchpotch of rundown offices and a big car park. The 12ha site feels quite dead, but by 2020 it will be the city’s cultural centre, set within a large scale regeneration project of mixed-use residential, hotels and offices.

How do you think the Factory is going to catalyse the cultural life of the city?

It’s going to be transformational. Manchester has built up real credibility as an important sporting city, which is why we ended up staging the Commonwealth Games. But generating a reputation as a cultural centre has taken more effort. We had the Royal Exchange theatre but the success of MIF helped push the Whitworth forward and the Factory is the realisation of MIF’s aims. It should cement Manchester as one of the great cultural centres of Europe.

One of Pawlyn’s latest projects draws on the spookfish. Structural inspiration is also taken from bird skulls and cuttlefish.

In praise of biomimicry: https://is.gd/spookfish

Does a client who has paid an architect for drawings up to planning stage have a licence of copyright in those drawings to build the building?

RIBA lawyer Darren Heath on the complicated answer: ribaj.com/intelligence/the-best-laid-plans

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One destination, many roads

The effort to identify what marks out tomorrow’s leaders reveals that all routes to success are different. HLM’s Delia Harmston has honed her skills in large and small practices.
with her personality and her skills and natural talent’. He elaborates: ‘We often see people who are excellent architects with no interest or no skill for management, or vice versa. Delia is from that very small group of architects who are equally skilled in both.’

At Self Architects, Delia found a brilliant teacher and mentor in founding director Mike Self. He guided her through projects, recognising her potential and helping her to build confidence and ‘learn to be me’. Informally over lunch, they often talked more widely about life – something they continue to do to this day. At HLM, Delia has benefited from a more structured training scheme. In 2015 HLM launched The Academy, a professional excellence programme, devised, as explained by director Karen Mosley, ‘to provide all employees with the opportunity and resources to reach their full potential’.

At the heart of the academy she explains, ‘is a skills framework which describes all the competencies required to make individuals and the business successful, and a behaviour framework which outlines how we do things around here. The academy is centred around HLM’s core values of people, quality and clients, giving support and development to the right people at the right time, helping everyone to achieve their goals and build strong relationships both internally and externally.’

As part of the formal instruction available through HLM’s academy, Delia has been provided with access workshops and training routes. Psychometric testing has boosted her self-awareness while profiling has helped her understand the strengths and weaknesses of those around her. Soft skills may come naturally to her, but she also recognises the essential part formal training can play in people’s development: ‘The academy allows that complicated thing to have structure and for people to talk about where they might want to be.’

The HLM academy is facilitated by the fact that HLM is ‘a very conversational place’. People are friendly, helpful and passionate. This helps with ‘the complicated work world of the architect where there are so many different specialisms’. As an associate at HLM, Delia leads teams and runs projects, and helps the associate director run the Sheffield office, which encompasses management, staff and bidding work. It might be a university framework bid or an educational project in the Middle East. She is also part of the development sector at HLM, undertaking work with developers and commercial clients.

It was HLM’s positive culture that attracted Delia back. Even though as an individual she does not define herself as a woman in practice and has encountered no specific issues, she likes the particularly good gender balance at HLM. In her previous job, she was sometimes the only woman professional. At HLM there are strong female role models, filtering down from board level: directors Caroline Buckingham and Karen Mosley; and associate directors, such as the Glasgow office manager Lorraine Robertson, and Lucy Plumridge, who leads HLM’s education sector.

Like our two other interviewees (see ribaj.com), it was through a complex project that Delia proved her worth at HLM. Beecroft describes how, on her return to HLM, ‘we threw her in at the deep end, working on a 1000-bed accommodation scheme, the scale of which was beyond her experience. But she coped admirably, managed a happy team and submitted a very high-quality planning application which has just gained a full consent. Delia quickly became an integral part of the management team in Sheffield and through career development and movement in the business, I can see her leading our biggest office in the very near future.’

Helen Castle is consultant editor of Architectural Design and head of professional programmes at the RIBA
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In 2010 Kerakoll launched the GreenBuilding Rating Eco. This is an objective way for professionals involved in the specification process to evaluate the overall ecological and environmental characteristics of a product. It was developed with well-known research institutions at a European level by a technical committee established by Kerakoll to look into the effects of building materials on the environment and human health and the regulations and assessment systems connected with those areas. Shortly thereafter, they launched a second phase: the GreenBuilding Rating Bio. This looks at the problem of indoor environmental quality and evaluates how quickly products dilute the leading indoor pollutants to neutralise SBS, giving each product a breathability score.

Certified by SGS
SGS, the world’s largest inspection, certification, control and analysis organisation, assesses the results of the LCA studies for the CFP assessment programme. It has also certified the GreenBuilding rating systems as objective. Once tested products are accompanied by sheets showing the environmental footprint and GreenBuilding ratings in addition to data on technical performance and compliance with EN regulations.

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Intelligence
Market analysis

Bigging up new homes

Our living space is growing again, says the Home Builders Federation. But is it under-reporting its findings, and what’s behind the shift?

Brian Green

New homes are getting bigger. That at least is the claim of the Home Builders Federation in a new report titled ‘Goodness spacious me’.

The message house builders are sending in this report is that they have not only greatly expanded the number of homes they have built since the depths of a crippling recession, but they are also now building larger homes with more bedrooms.

Given the media beating suffered by major house builders over the years for building ‘rabbit-hutch homes’, not least from architects, it’s no surprise their lobbyists are making a show of their shift towards bigger homes.

And the data provided does show a substantial increase in the size of homes being built as the industry has emerged from recession. It suggests the floor area of an average new home has risen from 801ft² (74.4m²) in the year to March 2009 to 85.3m² in the year to March 2016, while the average number of bedrooms is up from 2.44 to 2.90. As a reference, it is worth noting that on average in England there are 2.3 people per home.

Geographic coverage is not made clear in the report. The data for the number of bedrooms is taken from DCLG live tables covering just England, so we must presume the estimates all relate to England.

The floor area figure is derived from estimates by the Home Builders Federation (HBF). Interestingly, we can check the accuracy of the HBF estimates using another source – the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) which has been required for all new homes since April 2008. The data collected also usefully tells us the size and type of newly built homes and homes rented or sold.

You have to be a bit cautious for a number of reasons, not least because the recorded new homes are likely to include conversions and change of use, so definitions may differ from the data collected by the HBF.

However, two immediate points emerge from exploring the EPC data. First, it would appear the HBF has perhaps undersold the size of new homes built in England of late. Chart 1 shows its estimate of the average size of homes over recent years compared with the average that emerges from EPC data. The latter suggests new homes are about 10% bigger than the average estimated by HBF. This may well be down to the sampling including too few builders of much larger homes. Either way, the HBF does not look to be exaggerating.

Secondly, new homes built in recent years compare pretty favourably with the average home in England as measured by the average recorded by the English Housing Survey over three years (94m²). What is more, the not-new homes sold or rented (dotted yellow line) captured within the EPC data have tended to be smaller than the new homes built. It would appear that, across England, new homes built have been bigger than not-new homes in the market – for sale or rent. The EPC data does of course not include a random sample of all existing homes, so does not provide a measure of the average size of existing homes.

But here the use of averages can be as misleading as it is informative. The range of sizes of homes is great (Chart 2): the English Housing Survey data points to rural homes (165m²) being more than twice the size of urban homes (76m²) and almost twice the size of suburban homes (91m²). For all that almost half of homes lie between 70m² and 110m².

So a switch in mix of location of where new homes are built or where existing homes are rented or sold would almost certainly affect the overall average size within the EPC data, as would other changes in market demand, such as a shift in the types of households moving or buying for the first time.

The HBF makes much of the shift in

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<th>EPC average excluding new homes</th>
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Source: Home Builders Federation, English Housing Survey, Energy Performance Certificate data tables NB4 and D1
Note: The HBF data was converted from square feet. English Housing Survey average of all homes was an average over three reports.

The RIBA Journal February 2017
policy away from one that pressed for higher density as one reason for the rise in the average size of new homes. There is also the suggestion that Help to Buy has played a part through encouraging buyers to ‘miss a rung on the housing ladder’ and buy a bigger home that better meets future rather than immediate needs. The relative increase in the proportion of three or four-bed homes at the expense of two-bed homes tends to support this.

There is much discussion also of the comparison of UK homes to those abroad. Here we can turn to Eurostat data. No data is perfect and we really can’t be expected to know whether the definitions and collection methods used by each country are fully consistent, but Eurostat is pretty good at this sort of thing. Unfortunately the UK does not provide data on this measure to Eurostat, but using the English and Scottish Housing Surveys we can estimate that the average size of homes in Britain is, on our calculations, 94.3m². On the assumption that this is the average home size for the UK and is comparable with the Eurostat data, it seems the size of the average UK home is pretty much on a par with Italy, France and Germany (Chart 3).

Interestingly, the UK appears to have larger homes than Ireland, but much smaller homes than the more densely populated Belgium and noticeably smaller than homes in the also more densely populated Netherlands.

Now here's a curiosity worth pondering. If we plot national population densities against national average dwelling floor areas, the suggestion is that more densely populated nations have, on average, larger homes. See the HBF report at hbf.co.uk
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Relying on a gentlemen’s agreement is no way to do business

Alistair McGrigor

Perhaps it’s just me being a lawyer, but I am often amazed at the commercial agreements reached between businessmen which are not set out in writing. The upside, as a lawyer, is that inevitably there are disputes as to what exactly was agreed, when matters go wrong.

Exactly this situation has recently been decided upon by the Court of Appeal. A property developer and a builder made an oral agreement that the developer would buy sites, the builder would design and construct housing on them to an agreed scheme design and budget, the developer would then pay the builder its ‘build costs’, and on completion the open market value of the development would be agreed, purchase and build costs be deducted and the resulting profit divided equally.

This so-called framework agreement worked well at first but the relationship broke down later, partly over exactly what build costs were the same as the budget costs. Did not require any form of cost schedule but simply proceeded on the basis that the build costs were the same as the budget costs.

However, it transpired that the builder had interpreted the build costs to include sums other than the direct cost of labour and materials and site specific preliminaries. Other costs of his business had been included in his claims, such that the build costs were too high by 22%, which amounted to nearly £300,000 across the completed projects.

In the dispute the developer argued that the overpayments were made by mistake, and therefore should be recoverable from the builder. However, the court upheld a principle of law that where party A voluntarily makes a payment to party B knowing that it may be more than he owes, but choosing not to ascertain the correct amount due, he cannot ordinarily recover that payment, unless there has been fraud or misrepresentation (neither of which were alleged here).

The court went on to clarify that the developer’s main concern was for the final costs not to exceed the budget costs (and thus ensure a handsome profit). Since the final payments were all in line with the budget, the developer was unconcerned about whether or not the sums paid accurately represented the build costs. Indeed it was beneficial for both parties to avoid the expense and effort that would be involved in auditing and negotiating the actual amount of the build costs.

The court made clear that just because the parties decided to rely on round figures in line with the budget figures, that did not mean that the figures were wrong — it was just a feature of the bargain reached. The court also made the point that anyone with experience of property developments (as these parties had) would know that the actual build costs would not be the same as the budget costs, but by equating the build costs with the budget costs, the developer was self evidently running the risk of paying more than was strictly due. The developer risked overpaying because it was satisfied with its overall profit.

Much of this dispute could have been avoided had the parties committed to writing down the terms of their agreement. As a result of not clearly setting out what the build costs were to comprise, the parties have ended up having to take their dispute to the courts and incur even more expense as a result. •

Alistair McGrigor is partner at Nabarro LLP

It was beneficial for both parties to avoid the expense and effort that would be involved in auditing and negotiating the actual amount of the build costs.

In Plain English

Restitution

Lawyers usually talk about the two chief ways to bring a claim being ‘contract’ or ‘tort’, both of which deal with the situations either with a contract in place or without, where a claimant seeks damages to compensate it for the damages suffered at the hands of the defendant. More recently, the law of restitution has arisen, dealing with the unjust enrichment of the defendant at the expense of the claimant.

The remedy for restitution seeks to reverse the unjust enrichment, by restoring the relevant benefits or enrichment to the claimant.

Broadly, a claimant asserting a claim in restitution must establish, first, that the defendant has been enriched or has received a benefit; secondly, that the enrichment of the defendant is unjust; and finally that the enrichment of the defendant was at the expense of the claimant. If any of those three aspects cannot be met, a claim for restitution will fail.

This is an expanding area of the law, and it is likely to see increasing use, especially in circumstances when no contract exists between the two parties.
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Death wish
Is the industry as we know it en route to self destruction?

Architects grow ever more frustrated with low fees. Unpaid and underpaid work abound, especially in the earlier stages of projects. For the client, until sites are bought and planning secured, every penny feels like a potentially fruitless spend. Meanwhile university fees go up, and up, and up, and employers and employees grow increasingly frustrated by universities not equipping students sufficiently for the complexities of professional life.

The non-design aspects of the architect’s role are undervalued. Architects are too busy whinging about design being undervalued to notice. Clients are too busy whinging about having to pay for unusable designs to care. Planning success fees grow more and more common so architects work on a no win no fee basis. Planning insurance comes in. Insurers offer payouts for unsuccessful planning applications. Premiums are exorbitant but reduce as practices aggregate a track record of successful applications. So architects work on spec for hefty success fees but, coupled with towering university fees, the barriers to starting a new practice become insurmountable to all but the independently wealthy.

The financial incentivisation of conservative, planning-friendly schemes and associated deft navigation of the planning system fundamentally alters the architect-client relationship. Financially viable practices negotiate expertly with planners and the client is edged out of the conversation. Developers, having capitalised on and encouraged the transition of the business of architecture into an endeavor more closely resembling their own, have inadvertently written their own obituary. The financial landscape of practising architecture now involves speculation, risk management, bank loans, investors and such like, so architects increasingly see no reason not to be their own clients. Soon the only developers left are those with enough prior design conceit to hire in-house architects.

The plan of work is unceremoniously dumped. A witty columnist in an industry magazine remarks that the architect’s role is now more akin to a lawyer’s: navigating complex, archaic processes and gloopily wading through the inertia of bureaucracy. Smart students with disdain for the procedures of their parents’ generation, notice the irrelevance of their curriculum to practice and drop out of uni to work on the factory floor of development architecture. If they exhibit the requisite aptitudes, they work their way up. Architecture schools contract to offer architectural philosophy courses to the wealthy and contrary.

The true legacy of protection of title but not function finally reveals itsef. Government responds to the apparent de-professionalisation by redoubling standards, regulations, planning processes, quality management procedures and generally attempting to treat the symptoms with the disease. Planning insurance premiums go up to compensate for the increased risk. The profits of development decrease. While the financial rewards available to both the architect-developers and developer-architects previously allowed both to take on consultancy work for private and community clients for fees more akin to those of the early twenties, this becomes less and less possible. Commercial development, private commissions and public procurement skip hand in hand over a cliff.

In an effort to reignite construction, government seeks to increase planning success rates by overhauling the planning system. Planning departments are dissolved and planning officers invited to apply for new roles as Built Environment Advocates. Architects, excited about an anticipated return to great design, unhampered by committee-minded conservatism, don’t apply. Each project is signed an advocate for the development and an advocate against the development. District judges hear both arguments and determine Consent to Build, which unofficial policy for a limited period is to almost unequivocally grant. Construction comes out of hibernation to take advantage of this window of laxity. Architects feel vilified and a ground swell of radical designs briefly emerges. Yet the inevitable return to conservative aesthetics nips this in the bud. The public can object to developments but only with petitions carrying large numbers of signatures. Social media obliges. Sexy renderers never had it so good. Consented schemes are sold to contractors whose in-house BIM-icians develop designs to construction with the supply chain.

A market for private Built Environment Advocates quickly presents itself. Universities fall over each other to provide specialist courses. The advocates become the primary gatekeepers of built environment knowledge and are soon appointed to maximise chances of success. Larger companies invest in celebrity advocates. The building industry at last becomes something worthy of TV drama. Applications for university places on the advocacy courses skyrocket: the ambitious looking to win consents for the tallest skyscrapers, the idealistic wishing to represent the city, defending it from unethical dross. In this exciting, litigious landscape, nobody uses the term ‘architect’ with reverence any more. Nobody is impressed by that job title at parties. Journalists stop using phrases like, ‘the architect behind the initiative was...’ Nobody writes books called The Architect of Victory. Maria Smith is director of architecture and engineering at Interrobang

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INSPIRING A VISION

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That was the future, that was. The Pompidou Centre in Paris opened 40 years ago, in 1977. Many will view the 1970s as ancient history – our prime minister was James Callaghan, the RIBA president was Eric Lyons of Span housing fame. This was still essentially the analogue era, despite the computing power that engineer Ove Arup could use to assist Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. But we can also find plenty of parallels with today. Government in difficulty, labour unrest leading to spreading strikes, David Bowie’s music on the airwaves, radio signals coming in from the Voyager spacecraft, stylistic uncertainty in architecture... write your own list.

As if to prove that an old guard was giving way to the new, just as Paris was unveiling its radical prefab mediatheque at the Pompidou, London was finally completing Denys Lasdun’s National Theatre on the South Bank. While the Pompidou could be seen as a built expression of 1960s architectural dreaming – all dry-assembly and visual adaptability, as if it could be taken to pieces and re-erected elsewhere – the National was the culmination of the poured-concrete aesthetic of early modernism that Lasdun had learned from his old boss Berthold Lubetkin, who had himself called upon Ove Arup. Solid, doubly tectonic, positively geological.

This was the moment when I first tiptoed into the world of architecture and I remember both events. The Pompidou was routinely referred to as an oil refinery or gasworks while the National was seen by the emerging generation of found-space theatre directors as a mausoleum, a thoroughly outmoded view of what theatre could be. Satirical performances of condensed Shakespeare, written by Tom Stoppard and directed by social entrepreneur Ed Berman, were performed outside it and (I was there) were hilarious. But it was to be years before the public space on the South Bank reached the extent where – as with the plaza in front of the Pompidou Centre – street performers became the norm.

It seemed pretty clear then where architecture was heading. Concrete was the past, high-tech was the future. You can see the Pompidou as an aspect of post modernism but that was quickly overtaken by the other kind, the mostly commercial variant we all got in the UK in the decade following the first Venice Architectural Biennale in 1980 prophetically named ‘The Presence of the Past’. The one with the 20 facades of the Strada Novissima, prefigured by Aldo Rossi’s slightly earlier floating Teatro del Mondo.

So what happened? The usual. Movements come and go. Today surviving board-marked concrete brutalism is cherished by many while glass-and-steel high-tech is even more unfashionable than newly resurgent PoMo (see this page last month). Few regard solid masonry and punched windows as a throwback any more. The next revival will surely be the fundamentalist wing of architecture: the traditionalists who are looking very bushy-tailed right now. Not something I would have predicted 40 years ago but that, if only in the interests of architectural biodiversity, will be A Good Thing.
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Mending their ways

Working with what you’ve got can be very effective

Oliver Wainwright

‘Do nothing,’ was the response of French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal to Bordeaux municipal authorities when asked to redesign one of the city’s public squares. ‘It works perfectly well as it is.’

The small patch of land already had the necessary ingredients of shade, provided by a group of trees, a few benches and a scrubby area where elderly locals enjoyed playing pétanque. ‘Anything we could have proposed would have made it worse,’ says Vassal. ‘When you go to the doctor, they might tell you you’re fine, that you don’t need any medicine. Architecture should be the same. If you take time to observe and look very precisely, sometimes the answer is to do nothing.’

It might be unusual for an architect to turn down a commission, but then Lacaton & Vassal isn’t your typical practice. It is adament when it comes to priorities, particularly about where its clients’ money should be spent.

‘We want to make more and better with less,’ says Lacaton. ‘We try to intervene with maximum delicacy. We see economy as another material in the architect’s palette.’

Lecturing in London recently, the duo filled their presentations with numbers and explained how easily you can build a 130m² home for the same price as a 70m² one, if you are clever with the budget. The project in question was a group of 14 homes for social rent, in Mulhouse in France, taking the form of a group of proprietary horticultural greenhouses erected on a simple concrete tabletop – built for just €75,000 per unit. The elegant result gives residents a basic but light and spacious open-plan shell, which they have duly customised to individual needs. ‘We offered to build partitions if residents wanted them,’ says Vassal. ‘Two years on, no one requested them.’

In the early 2000s the French government published a country-wide estate regeneration plan which proposed to spend €15bn on demolishing 150,000 flats and replacing them with 5,000 fewer homes. Lacaton & Vassal, together with fellow architect Frédéric Druot, published an alternative manifesto.

‘Never demolish, remove or replace; always add, transform, and reuse’ was their rallying cry. They argued that for the €167,000 per unit the state was allocating for demolition and rebuilding, they could redesign, expand and upgrade three of the same size.

They first demonstrated their strategy on the 16-storey Tour Bois-le-Prêtre in Paris, a 1960s tower block which they wrapped with a second skin, extending the floor plates of each apartment and providing new winter gardens and full-height windows – reducing energy consumption by half in the process.

The trio’s latest project is the biggest yet, tackling 530 apartments in three blocks on the 1960s Grand Parc estate in Bordeaux. They have erected freestanding, precast concrete structures along the facades of the slab blocks, extending the floor plate by almost 4m. Again, mean windows are opened out with full-height glazing, and partition walls sawn away to allow flexible occupation. In a miracle of clever programming and site efficiency, residents could remain in their homes throughout. The cost of this wizardry? Just €65,000 per home – roughly half that of building new.

The approach provides a crucial model at a time when many UK council estates are facing demolition or being vandalised with crass infill and over-building schemes that show little understanding of the value of what is already there. Too many local authorities are being forced to adopt commercial development models, building flats for private sale on public land to cross-subsidise the construction of ‘affordable’ homes – and usually ending up with a net loss of social rented units overall.

It is the duty of councils and architects, says Vassal, ‘to work with each plant, family, or situation that is already there. And be extremely precise.’

Oliver Wainwright is architecture critic at the Guardian. Read him here every other month and at ribaj.com

FACE VALUE

Lacaton & Vassal may be masters of economy, but it seems it must hone its pitching skills, for UK clients at least, after missing out on both the recent Museum of London and Royal College of Art competitions. ‘We don’t do this visualisation thing,’ says Lacaton. ‘We never know what the final result of our architecture will look like, and we’re not going to pretend we do.’ Potential clients simply have to trust them. It usually turns out okay.
Beauty and the best

Aesthetics are more than an add-on to good architecture, they are a necessary part of a successful design.

Jane Duncan

“When I’m working on a problem, I never think about beauty. But when I’m finished, if the solution is not beautiful I know it’s wrong.”
— Buckminster Fuller

Beauty in architecture affects all the senses — smell, touch, taste and the emotions — as well as the eye of the beholder. But I believe the importance of true beauty in a place or building is too often dismissed as ‘just aesthetics’ when it should be debated, fought for and demanded by those who perceive and use their buildings.

What a building looks like matters. A building’s aesthetics affect our decisions, emotional responses and the way we feel about ourselves. Some places make us feel happy and uplifted; others decidedly less so. We may not be able to create spaces that aesthetically please everyone, but certainly we can consciously manipulate spaces with beautiful ingredients to encourage more meaningful, satisfying and joyful experiences.

The World Health Organisation defines health not as the absence of ill-health or access to medical treatment but as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being’. The built environment is a critical part of this and designing for healthy lives in homes, public spaces and in our communities is a way to limit the increasing pressure on health services.

Conscious design of living, working and playing environments to improve health and well-being demands greater responsibility from architects, to create beauty wherever we can in our communities, and in places where social and personal interactions are important.

To ensure the wellbeing of users, clients, planners and policymakers should not dismiss the importance of aesthetics in the schemes they are assessing, and architects need to advocate strongly and clearly for the importance of beauty, in all of its forms.

Designed with passion and imagination, the built environment can improve our sense of well-being, enrich our lives, and make us healthier and happier.

That is truly beautiful.

‘Architecture is really about well-being. I think that people want to feel good in a space. On the one hand it’s about shelter, but it’s also about pleasure’
— Zaha Hadid

@JaneDuncan/PRIBA

The WHO defines health not as the absence of ill-health or access to medical treatment but as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being’.
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What were your early influences in architecture and on you as a person?

My father was a civil engineer and academic and like him I was always interested in the idea of using space. I like the discovery of the new: the idea of seeing a place for the first time – becoming immersed in a newly discovered environment – and developing a vision of how nature and the occupation of space might be best achieved. This is so important in the history of the Americas and I believe this thought was vital to my development. We need to look at nature, not as a simple landscape, but as an integration of different phenomena, a relationship of hydrology and geology for example. We cannot simply inhabit nature; humans must transform it into a liveable habitat. This has always been a starting point for me.

Brazilian architecture in the 1950s was split between the Paulista School, which favoured brutalist and industrial architecture, and the more free flowing Carioca style, championed by Oscar Niemeyer. Can you tell us more?

After training at Mackenzie University in São Paulo I was invited by the late Vilanova Artigas to be his assistant in the architecture school of the University of São Paulo. The school inherited the critical vision of the university and the technical resources of the polytechnic. This unusual foundation distinguished us Paulistas from the Carioca School. However, I never saw the Paulistas and Cariocas as clashing movements. They were complementary and were essential in forging an identity for Brazilian architecture. Both sought a symbiotic relationship between art and technique.

Paulista architecture had a close link to UK brutalism. Was the influence two-way? I don’t know if they were influenced or we were influenced. Across the world, our responses and ideas were defined by the time we were living in.

Vilanova Artigas believed in architecture as a means of social transformation. Can you tell us more about his influence?

He influenced me very much. He opened my vision and my eyes to the Soviet revolution. Soviet constructivists introduced me to the idea of cities and buildings for all which was fascinating for a young architect still training. Although I was young when I worked on the Athletic Club of São Paulo [da Rocha’s first major commission, completed 1957], the building has a remarkable formal autonomy which explores the possibilities of spatial experience and reflects my ideas and thinking at the time.

In 1964, Brazil became a military dictatorship. Niemeyer went to Paris and Vilanova to Uruguay. Why did you stay?

During the dictatorship I was banned from teaching, as were many in the civil service.
We cannot simply inhabit nature; as humans we need to transform it into a liveable habitat. This has always been a starting point for me.
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and academia who held leftist ideals or were suspected of being enemies of the regime. We suffered repression, especially in 1964, a year in which our way of life was completely dismantled. I was faced with the decision of fleeing, but finally decided to run the risk of staying. I already had five children, and did not want to abandon the country.

I could not work in my own right but my architect colleagues helped by allowing me to work with them. Thanks to that professional solidarity I was able to survive. Those years were extremely hard and, even today, Brazil is paying for the consequences of that period.

Despite that you designed Brazil’s pavilion for the 1970 Osaka Expo in Japan. How did this come about?
It was a complex situation. One part of the Brazilian government banned me from working but another part organised the competition for the Pavilion at the Osaka Expo 70. The day the newspapers announced me as the winner the justice minister quickly tried to get it stopped. But the organisers of the Expo were really interested having me build the pavilion and reached an agreement with the military government that allowed me to travel to Japan and oversee construction.

Every country had to leave the land free and clean as soon as the Expo was over, to make way for new development, but I was approached by the director of the University of Music of Osaka and asked to maintain my pavilion, so it could be used as a Dance School for Children. Of course I was delighted by the idea and accepted. Sadly, the Brazilian government did not agree and after our conversation the building was demolished. The fact that my status in Brazil contributed to the situation was devastating for me.

A blurred relationship between public and private seems to permeate your work. Is this deliberate?
I believe the concept of public space is fundamental. If it’s space, it’s public. The concept of space itself does not allow the idea of it being private. The only private space we have is mental space. If we do not make public what we have in our minds, it will remain private forever. No one will ever know about it.

This is why we feel compelled, as architects and citizens, to transform the idea into an object. In that way, we can communicate to others our thoughts; even in the abstract through poetry and literature... They are all objects we feel the need to create in order to give to make public what in fact is private.

Through the 1993 renovation of the Art Museum of São Paulo (Pinacoteca do Estado) your architecture has influenced Brazil’s sense of its artistic and cultural identity. What was the background?
This was a charming but dated 19th century building that, in my view, had huge potential. The Brazilian instinct at the time was to echo neoclassical styles through a myopic vision of colonialist architecture, but the rest of the world was doing something else, and there were interesting ideas everywhere.

Our commission was to transform the...
I hope my awards are seen as a plain and modest recognition of universal, and not nationalistic, truths.

building into a contemporary one, adapted to all the needs of a modern museum. The outcome transgressed the rigorous Palladian architecture, with clear symmetric axes. It was a corrupted vision of the internal spaces of an existing building. I enjoyed the project very much and believe it has been a success for both its visitors and the city.

In recent years you have won global recognition and accolades, perhaps belatedly. Why has that come now? Perhaps what I have said, which I try to reflect in my projects, has generated that interest. Maybe it is a recognition of a particular way of seeing architecture, coming from America.

However, the awards have made me realise that I alone could not have come up with all those thoughts. It is part of a school, of distinctly American training. The interest is not in my work in isolation, but in my work as an example of interesting subjects which are relevant to the whole world.

Not long ago we saw the mass migration of peoples from one country to another. The Second World War created problems for those who were part of it and those that came after it. We still live with its repercussions. Brazil has not been able to recover mentally from the war and we are unable to face colonialist politics clearly. The horrors of colonialist politics prevail on all that happens in the world now and we risk making the same mistakes today.

I hope that my awards are seen as a plain and modest recognition of what can be described – in the post-war era – as universal, and not nationalistic, truths.

Did you deliberately stay rooted in Brazil, specifically in São Paulo?
I was never enthusiastic about working abroad and always recognised the complexity of it, but at the same time, I found it to be stimulating, occasionally. I worked in Spain and also participated in international competitions: including the design competition organised by the Centre of Georges Pompidou, in which we were finalists.

My congratulations to Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano for that achievement by the way!

You have a unique way of working. Does collaborating with nine studios in São Paulo keep you current and up to date? Does it sustain your imagination and ideas? I think so. If we need to build what is in our mind, it is better do it as a team. There are also technical reasons. There is more administration in the world now. I do not have much interest in administering a commercial business. I am delighted my colleagues are willing to do this!

But I still enjoy architecture. Working with architects – many are former students – gives me calmness from a technical and intellectual point of view and engenders a sense of critical evaluation, which would be impossible if I designed on my own.

With your experience of working under contrasting political regimes, how do you think the latest global changes are going to affect Brazilian architecture?
First, I believe that generally disasters work as experience. As we have demonstrated in Brazil, to support politics that maintain poverty with promises and governmental policies does not work.

My one useful thought is that the key to all is education. My criticism of old-fashioned education could be extended to all the countries in the world today. We are not educating our children properly. We must liberate their imaginations and encourage their creativity. Teaching them basic facts about the phenomena and mechanics of nature would make them intellectually restless and help our future.

Paulo Mendes da Rocha was speaking to the RIBA
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The RIBA Gallery will contrast Mies’ and Stirling’s City proposals

Hugh Pearman

It’s the best of times for what might in normal times seem a rather arcane exhibition, opening next month: two office buildings (one unbuilt) on one site. But this is one of the most historic sites imaginable, involving two of the world’s great architects. For Mies van der Rohe it was Mansion House Square in the City of London, the tower and plaza in high modernist style that did not get built. For James Stirling, his successor, it was No. 1 Poultry, the triangular apex block in high post modern style on the same site which did – eventually – get built. And which has recently been declared a listed building to protect it from thoughtless alterations. There is a rich irony there, of course, given that it replaced a collection of pretty good Victorian listed buildings which found their ‘protected’ status offered them no protection in the end.

This is a long and convoluted saga to get over in one exhibition, even though there was only one client throughout: Peter, later Lord, Palumbo. In both cases he commissioned a design from a living architect and then attempted to get them built posthumously – successfully in the case of the one we see today. Palumbo knew that, if built, the Mies scheme was always likely to be posthumously – the architect was 76 at the time of the commission from young Palumbo in 1962 and everyone knew that assembling the entire site would take many years. Mies died in 1969. In Stirling’s case, of course, everyone was taken by surprise. Stirling died in 1992, as the result of a bungled operation, aged only 66. But happily for the future prospects of No. 1 Poultry, such a level of detailed design was required for the public inquiry that was held into it that relatively little design development was needed for the Stirling Wilford team – Laurence Bain being the key person – to translate into reality. It completed in 1996.

But why stage such an exhibition in the Architecture Gallery at the RIBA now? Because this is the first time that the two projects, having previously been seen chronologically, will be seen side by side. Architect speaks to architect in very different languages: Stirling was a supporter of the Mies scheme at its public inquiry, but produced an utterly different solution himself. Mies worked mainly through models as an auteur, and his study models are revealing. Stirling preferred to develop ideas through drawings, helped by a surprising level of collegiate input from his office, with endless options bound into ‘ledgers’ on display here. We see plenty of this from both men plus photos of the time, some fascinating letters between everyone, press coverage and telling objects – such as a Travertine ashtray Mies designed for the building which allegedly fits its overall module.

RIBA curators Marie Bak Mortensen and Vicky Wilson have pulled together material from private and public collections including the RIBA’s own and of course, Palumbo’s – but also from other sources including the archive of Lord Holford, who was the executive
architect for Mies in the UK, Palumbo insisted on a remarkable level of quality and detail in his models, and the large cityscape model of Mansion House Square has been fully re-assembled for the first time in over 30 years.

This exhibition gives the opportunity to study the radical stylistic shift that was happening in architecture at the time – broadly from modernist to historicist, though No. 1 Poultry – always more of a big fat hen than the ‘1930s wireless set’ of Prince Charles’ jibe – turned out to be a complete original. There were also the changes in the planning climate that led from the one to the other. One of the first actions of Peter Rees on taking up office as chief planner for the City of London Corporation was to assess the Mies scheme. He noted an obvious problem: here was a rectangular plaza proposed on a triangular site, on one of the City’s historic radiating road intersections. Was that the best idea in the circumstances?

Of course Mies had found a way, aligning the facade of his 19-storey tower with the flank of Mansion House to the east, demolishing an inconvenient triangular building next to it in addition to the Mappin and Webb triangle, and putting a dogleg in the road. Set well back from the previous apex of the site, the tower’s height compensated for the loss of buildings at ground level, as did the proposed underground shopping centre beneath the plaza. But the road still ran across the square, most of which was to be attached to the Mansion House – hence the name – rather than the tower which would have had a relatively small pedestrian apron in front of it. This alignment of the tower also meant that it did not directly address this important intersection, instead being angled slightly away from it.

What if it had been built, and had suffered the usual ravages of time? Well, that was imagined for us in the March 2013 RIBA Journal by artist Matthew Butcher and Postworks with Adam Shapland. It rings very true – the image of a somewhat altered and run-down – though still magnificent – tower and environment was very adroitly done. You would think it had been built. Read their account at: https://is.gd/mansionhouse.

After the Mies scheme was finally rejected, Stirling’s No. 1 Poultry went its own merry way. It would fill its triangular site (and more, requiring the loss of a historic alley) and would proudly march up to the apex of the junction just as the existing Mappin and Webb building with its turret and clock did. In fact, No. 1 Poultry is pretty much a reimagining of a typical segment of low-rise Victorian City of London. Crossed with Ancient Egypt, of course, this being the mood that Stirling was in at the time. The drawings show exhaustive studies for the facades, including even a gothicky one.

There are various important letters including one from Philip Johnson objecting to the proposal by his former best buddy Mies – not as good as the Seagram, appears to be the drift. And a telling one from Stirling turning down the offer of the Royal Gold Medal on the grounds that he would not accept such an accolade from the Queen when her son had been so insulting about the building. The handwritten rejection was never sent and Stirling accepted the Royal Gold Medal, but insisted his letter be filed in the archives.

This is the first exhibition to be designed by the architect of the Architecture Gallery itself, Carmody Groarke. It is a calm, simple layout, divided as you would expect into two main areas. Mies is placed on a teak plinth, Stirling on cherrywood. But this is more than a study of two design responses. It captures a moment when a battle was being fought for the very soul of architecture. •

Mies van der Rohe and James Stirling: Circling the Square, 8 March to 25 June, Architecture Gallery, 66 Portland Place, London W1B 1AD.
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Rising from the ruins

Exhaustive sourcing and reference to originals is rerooting Villa Cavrois in its modernist beginnings

Isabelle Priest

Contemplating modernist villas in France, you think of Paris, the Côte d’Azur, perhaps a scattering of others in locations you don’t remember, but the Nord département does not spring to mind. The place is generally characterised by architecture born of its 19th-century coal and textile industries – big bourgeois houses built along boulevards by factories in city centres. But this reputation is changing with the opening of the Villa Cavrois – the former home of Paul Cavrois and his family in Croix, a suburb of Roubaix near Lille – as a major historical attraction after a 15-year, €23m restoration by Centre des monuments nationaux. Apparently there’s a 1960s Richard Neutra house up the road too. It’s a good time to go as Villa Cavrois is re-acquiring original furniture that was sold off in the 1980s.

Designed by one of France’s earliest modernists, Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886-1945), Villa Cavrois is as controversial today as it was when it was completed in 1932. Curiously, it is located in a super-rich ghetto, home to the great fortunes of France, where grand estates and gated communities hide behind avenues of trees along a tiny cluster of streets. This municipality pays the second highest levels of tax on wealth in the country. When Villa Cavrois was built, the 3,800m² modernist castle was derided as an out of place ‘yellow peril’ for its straight lines and ocean-liner aesthetic in an area used to faux regionalist stately home styles; today it is unwelcome for having been saved from ruin after decades of neglect and squatting, restored and opened as an internationally significant museum in an area that would rather remain private and undisturbed.

Yet arguably Villa Cavrois is Mallet-Stevens’ masterpiece Villa Cavrois has been fully restored from a ruin and is now open to the public.
Stevens’ most complete individual work. At Villa Noialles (1928) in the south of France, he was restricted by a more controlling client and difficult terrain, while at the Rue Mallet-Stevens (1927) in Paris, where he built five houses, he had the complications of designing, more or less, a whole street.

Villa Cavrois was designed in 1929 as a modern day chateau for wealthy industrialist Paul Cavrois, who was looking to move away from the inferno of Roubaix with its 1,000 chimneys into the countryside. He bought a 5ha plot of land and commissioned a neo-Normandy style house by architect Jacques Greder before Mallet-Stevens persuaded him of the benefits of a modernist style.

Inspired by Brussels’ Stoclet Palace by Josef Hoffmann and Willem Marinus Dudok’s Dutch Hilversum Town Hall, Villa Cavrois is designed on the principles of air, light, work, sports, hygiene, comfort, and efficiency. Mallet-Stevens drew up a programme for a house, gardens, furniture, and decoration that included clocks, telephones and wirelesses all built into the walls. A kind of transitional work between the 19th century country house and the modernism of the period, Villa Cavrois’ proportions are imposing – 60m long with 1,800m² of living space and 830m² of terraces laid out very formally and almost symmetrically around an off-centre tower, and based on the dimensions of the externally-used yellow brick.

The villa brought together all of the most advanced technologies of the time, and came as something of an aesthetic shock. An entirely reinforced concrete structure, it has large windows, indirect lighting, car garages, central heating and a lift from the basement. The grounds are also set in a closely controlled layout displaying meticulous attention to proportions, including a water mirror and turning circle for vehicles at the entrance.

Inside, Mallet-Stevens paid great attention to the interior decoration and materials. Metal is found everywhere; in light fittings, radiator screens and shelving. Wood and marble from all over the world are incorporated into different decorative schemes in each room, with green Swedish marble and furniture made from varnished pearwood veneer in the parents’ dining room, and Siena marble and walnut veneer furniture in the main drawing room. There are bathrooms and sanitary ware everywhere too. All the bedrooms have a basin and many have a bidet, while the main family bathroom is a spectacular triple aspect room in white marble, chrome and black.

Like the exterior, though, the villa is laid out in both a traditional and progressive way. The hallway gives onto a vast drawing room,
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whose large window opens to the garden and water mirror so when visitors enter the villa, they pass through a series of sequences designed to result in their enchantment. On either side of this axis, apartments for the parents, children, and servants are laid out based on function – sports and relaxation areas throughout the villa include a swimming pool. An immense basement houses the wine cellar, laundry, drying room and a boiler room that would not be out of place in a ship.

The family lived in the house until the Second World War when it was occupied by Germans and used as barracks. They returned from Normandy in 1947 and began a major remodelling by Pierre Barbe to split the property into three flats – one for Paul and his wife, and one each for his two grown up sons and their families. Paul died in 1965, but his wife remained there until her death in 1985.

At this point begins the story of neglect and decline. The contents, including all the original furniture, were auctioned off in 1987 and the house sold to a developer in 1988 that planned to demolish it and split the valuable estate into separate plots. A pressure group was set up to oppose this plan and, against the wishes of the owner, the villa was rapidly listed as a historic monument in 1990. Yet the house was still not secure. Despite various legal actions, the developer allowed it to fall into neglect for over a decade.

After lying vandalised and in a state of virtual ruin, the villa was finally bought by the state in 2001 for the nominal sum of €1 along with part of the grounds – the developer retaining much of the grounds to build houses on. Since then, a major restoration programme has restored the house to its original 1932 form, not only making it secure, but reversing the 1940s remodelling.

The restoration is a remarkable feat. With 85% of the decoration lost, extensive research was needed to check and discover the techniques used – complicated by the fact that Mallet-Stevens had ordered the destruction of his entire archive upon his death in 1945. The research drew on photographs, plans and surveys, plus remains found on site.

The restoration work aimed to retain as much original material as possible, only replacing elements which had disappeared or were too badly damaged. Despite rust, two thirds of the metallic door and window frames were restored, as were about 70% of the bricks. Only the glazing was completely replaced. Nearly 90% of the original mosaic parquet was reused. Research into the polychrome interior surface claddings made it possible to identify the bright colours originally used in some rooms in accordance with De Stijl precepts, as well as green hues permeating the ground-floor reception rooms, to echo the colours of the grounds. Integrated furniture was reproduced using photogrammetric methods and by comparisons with furniture held in private collections and various public depositories; then full-scale prototypes were made to check certain hypotheses. The only original pieces of integrated furniture that could be reinstalled were in the pantry – they were donated by a private owner on hearing that the property was being restored.

And while you are there, visit the other local-built marvel with its incredible sunburst window, now La Piscine Museum, too.

Top The kitchen, a large open and airy space with the then latest gadgets.

Above The young masters’ room painted using De Stijl principles.

With 85% of the decoration lost, extensive research was carried out, drawing on photographs, plans and surveys, as well as remains found on site.
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Below Precisely handled glazing against a new concrete structure: 2016 Schueco Excellence Award winner the Albert Sloman Library & Silberrad Student Centre, University of Essex, designed by Patel Taylor working with specialist contractor HW Architectural.
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Peter Corrigan
1941 – 2016

Influential academic and practitioner whose optimistic, demanding and immersive courses at RMIT attracted students from across the world

Professor Peter Corrigan, Australian architect, theatre designer and academic, died on 1 December 2016 aged 77. He had worked as an architect since the early 60s and formed the practice Edmond & Corrigan in 1974 with his life partner Maggie Edmond. The firm became known for a new Australian urban architecture, visually colliding themes and motifs.

Corrigan taught the architecture programme at RMIT in Melbourne for over 40 years, ever since Graeme Gunn, then dean of the faculty, offered him a job ‘to come home to’ on his return from America. There he had studied at Yale and worked in a number of practices including with Paul Rudolph. Since 1993 architecture programmes at RMIT have been located in Building 8, which was designed by Edmond & Corrigan and described by Peter as ‘an attempt to think with architecture and to write those thoughts in architecture’.

For a while now we had been talking at RMIT about instigating a Peter Corrigan prize for the final year (they are usually called prizes for design excellence). There had been some debate among colleagues about what this prize would be for, so a couple of months ago I thought I would ask Peter. Without missing a beat he said: ‘Best project for which the student completely ignores the staff.’ We agreed in the end it would be for the student with the strongest, most independent vision.

Independence and the preparation to find their own individual path was what Peter ultimately taught students. He often spoke of having ‘personally tried to live a life through architecture’. This was a vision of the architect as public intellectual who is actively engaged in teaching, writing, exhibiting, publishing – among other concerns – all interwoven and striving towards a cultural contribution, a contribution of ideas.

His design studios at RMIT were ‘the stuff of legend’. Students came from all over the world to participate in them. He designed and refined an intense, ideas-rich and immersive world in the studios. He said: ‘I wish I’d been taught by people who had built buildings, who had read history, who were interested in the arts and music, who thought about politics – who could sort of make the whole thing into an exciting package that located architecture at the heart of social endeavour’.

Peter has been a profound influence on what many of us understand to be the possibilities for architecture in Australia. The work of Edmond & Corrigan, and Peter’s own insistence on the need to build up local architectural cultures and discourse alongside the architects and architectural forums that he supported in Melbourne, helped facilitate the thriving architectural culture and discourse there.

As a colleague at RMIT he could be brutally honest and had high expectations – but he was incredibly generous. There was always a sense of the importance of what was going on. Bleakness was not tolerated. Optimism was mandatory.

He received his first honorary doctorate in 1989 from RMIT, and the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) Education prize in 2013 for ‘a profound and long lasting influence on the architectural profession in Australia, through his practice, writing and commitment to teaching’. A second honorary doctorate came from the University of Melbourne in 2015. His achievements in practice through Edmond & Corrigan have also been significantly acknowledged through numerous awards, over 100 publications on the practice and with the AIA Gold Medal in 2003.

Peter will be deeply missed by all of us, but his legacy is deeply entrenched in our culture and will continue to be furthered by the many architects – now working all over the world – that he has influenced.

By Vivian Mitsogianni, deputy dean and head, RMIT Architecture & Urban Design
Exchange

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Hugh Pearman

Our aim at the RIBA Journal is always to provide the best possible magazine for members and subscribers, in print and online. Now, to help gauge and improve our progress in this, we want to set up a readers’ ‘Litmus Group’ to give us feedback and suggestions, issue by issue. Please join us, and help shape the future direction of your Journal.

We know from independent member research that the RIBAJ is regarded very highly as a benefit by its readers. We value the opinions of the architects we talk to in the course of our work, and our editorial panel already includes representatives from the RIBA membership who are keenly engaged. But we’d like more focused and immediate feedback from a larger group of readers, issue by issue, to guide us in what we cover and how we cover it.

We’ll keep this very simple. All we will ask you to do is complete a monthly online survey with a set of questions relating to the magazine, in print and online.

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…Robert Adam’s story deserves retelling, we said, reviewing his exhibition at the Soane Museum. Here’s why, said an American reader…

Philip Allsopp
@pallsoppRIBAUSA
@RIBAJ Indeed it does, especially given the dreadful results on people and communities of ‘build-it-on-the-cheap’ demands by banks.

…and our report on how young architects can become Future Leaders received approval – see this issue, p43…

Alan Jones-Architect
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…and as ever our columnist Maria Smith (p52) got people thinking as they chuckled…

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Basil Spence’s house
Hampshire, 1961

Designed by Basil Spence for his own use as a weekend retreat, this cedar-clad house on the banks of the Beaulieu River in Hampshire has a very distinctive structure: two parallel brick walls at ground level support two timber beams, which cantilever out and in turn support the first floor structure, made entirely of timber except for the flues. This solution has a precedent in two 1950s houses in Denmark by Arne Jacobsen, as well as Marcel Breuer’s own house in New Canaan, built in 1948.

A very large living area occupies more than half of the first floor, and extends towards the landscape with a balcony that runs the entire length of the room. Two small bedrooms and a kitchen are situated at the same level, while the ground floor houses a boat store, workshop and garage. Within a few years Spence had glazed in the balcony and made several other modifications to the house. Now grade II listed, it was renovated and extended in 2000 by John Pardey, who considers it ‘perhaps the best 1960s domestic space in Britain’.

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