Well orchestrated  Herzog & de Meuron’s compromised but striking Elbphilharmonie  24
Home game  Will the Housing White Paper make a difference?  63
It’s a wonderful world  Friedrich Ludewig explains Acme’s secrets of success  76
Today's contemporary intervention is tomorrow's historic addition. Visitor centre 08 Wadden Sea Centre merges into the landscape under Dorte Mandrup’s guiding hand.

There’s a twisted beauty to Ben Murphy’s photo, Crusty Mark Hospice 14 Architype designed from the patient’s perspective at St Michael’s Hospice.

Disorientation gave way to excitement as I realised the possibilities, I felt like an architect version of Robocop and looked the part too.

Stephen Cousins’ out of body experience: ribaj.com/products/microsoft-s-hololens-glasses
In 2015 International flooring specialist Gerflor announced their acquisition of Connor Sport Court International in a move that subsequently expanded the company’s global market reach and sports product range portfolio.

Founded in 1872, Connor Sports is the leader in hardwood sports flooring and in 1974 Sport Court was formed, providing the market with the original modular sport surface used for outdoor athletics. With 250 employees Connor Sports Flooring® and Sport Court® are registered trademarks of Connor and have two manufacturing sites in the USA. The company has sales in more than seventy-five countries and installations on all seven continents.

With a large global reach and presence, it’s no wonder that Connor Sports products feature heavily in the Olympic story.

The 2016 Rio Olympic Committee sought to buy eight courts for basketball and wheelchair basketball arenas. They would specify a total of 75,000m² of flooring that would need to undergo the rigours of top-flight performance. The criteria stipulated that it had to be an FIBA level 1 floor, be removable for re-use after the games, and provide outstanding on-site support. They selected Connor Sports QuickLock floors. Roberto Siviero General Manager, Sport Competition said at the time, “We used Connor Sports courts for Basketball/Wheelchair Basketball at the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games for competition, warm-up and practice venues. We received very positive feed-back from the players, coaches and officials on the court’s look, feel and play characteristics”. He went on to add, “The Connor team were great to work with, the communications were always timely and our messages responded to right away. The personnel sent down to support the event were technically knowledgeable, professional and friendly.” He concluded by saying, “The Connor basketball courts will remain in Brazil as a legacy of hosting the Olympics”.

Bertrand Chaumet, Managing Director, Gerflor UK commented, “Being involved with the Summer Olympic Games in Rio last year was again a testament to the quality of our overall sports flooring offer and the ongoing development we do as company to produce the very best products we can”.

Connor Sport Court International is the US market leader in sports surfacing and has built systems for many elite associations including the NBA, NCAA, FIBA, USTA, FIVB, US Youth Futsal, and USA Volleyball. The group specialises in wood, synthetic, rubber and modular sports surfaces and has the appropriate solution for every type of athletic, park, school, arena or multi-use facility. The company is the only sports surfacing firm in North America whose manufacturing facilities are independently audited and verified as “zero waste” and fully ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certified. They are also the only sports flooring company in the US to have Environmental Product Declarations on all their products. Their athletic surfacing experts have developed more DIN certified systems than any other sports surfacing manufacturer, delivering a complete line-up of products which are perfect for gymnasiums and athletic facilities of all types in the education, leisure, fitness sectors, as well as Military facilities and Sporting Arenas and Dance floor studios.
The UK will be introducing four systems from the Connor Sports family providing a host of high quality sports flooring solutions for a myriad of markets. Available now are the following: NeoShok, Rezill Sleeper and Alliance, with stock levels held in France. The fourth available product is the QuickLock portable system, also held in France, it is ideal for temporary use in a multitude of sporting events. All the above systems can be finished in 3 different grades of 57mm x 20mm North American Hard Maple strip.

Peter Daly, Sales Manager Western Europe & Key Accounts, Gerflor, commented, “In truth, grades of wood have a zero effect on performance. The grades are determined by strict grading outlines as set out by an independent association of maple manufacturers called the MFMA [Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association]. The “first grade” is closer to the bark of the tree; then multipurpose grade (“third grade”) is closer to the core. All the technical properties of the wood strip are identical irrespective of which part of the tree the wood is cut. The closer to the core the darker the wood and the greater the shade variation. The closer to the bark the whiter the wood and the lesser the shade variation”.

Peter Daly went on to further comment, “All our products are made of North American maple, the same tree that’s used for maple syrup and is harvested above the 35th parallel in North America where they have long, cold winters (with slow growth rates/cycles). This wood is the hardest, most durable of all species except for exotic wood species such as mahogany”. He went to add, “It is not to be confused with European sycamore maple or beech, both of which are much softer species”.

The huge bonus is that all Connor Sports products are sealed and varnished on site which produces a host of advantages in evenness and longevity. It’s a sports flooring solution that’s built to last half a century or more...even through the long cold winters!

Installations in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom include: KUBS Basketball Club, Dublin-800m², Third Space, Canary Wharf-1000m², Prince William of Gloucester Barracks-2000m².

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Que sera sera, whatever will be will be. Once something exists it takes on an air of inevitability. As if being is also a statement of intent, of the past as well as the future. The 13th century wall of a Venetian palazzo (P46) is a fact, no matter the concrete rebuilding in the 1930s. Compare this to when physics takes us by surprise. Bricks caved in on themselves, a roof consumed by flames, space inside liberated into nothingness; destruction shocks. What was a building is now a pile; diminished beyond belief. It rocks your foundation. Is my world so ephemeral? Until, as the emotional scar slowly fades and is reassured by walls, firmed by floors, you can believe in solidity again.

Fondaco dei Tedeschi palazzo in Venice, an evolving historic building (P46).

Salvaged physical remnants find a new use and their visible presence ‘gives story and memory back to the people who live there’. What drives China’s Wang Shu? ribaj.com/culture/the-architect-s-studio-wang-shu

The case can be made for squatters’ roles as positive guardians of buildings that might once have been redeveloped but are now regarded as valuable, and thus for their role as urban regenerators. Pamela Buxton looks into architectural appropriation: ribaj.com/culture/architecture-of-appropriation
‘It will all be grey... and merge into the landscape,’ says Dorte Mandrup, designer of the Wadden Sea Centre. The flat planes of this Unesco protected tidal area that runs from Denmark to Germany are the mud and sand that each day are hidden and revealed, hidden and revealed, by the cold waters of North Sea, the rhythm that defines the worlds of the lugworms, cockles and mussels that are in turn closely watched by terns and red knots stopping between Africa and the Arctic tundra for short weeks of refuelling.

Planes of robinia and thatch on the visitors’ centre draw on the character of the tidal flats and ancient traditions of Viking vernacular in this south eastern edge of Denmark. Overcladding a red and white 90s farmhouse pastiche, the timber is used in long lengths across roof and walls. The new exhibition building faces seaward, thatch almost touching the ground, preserved by the salty sea air in which it grew and now keeps visitors insulated against. Eleven thatchers laid, sewed and patted the straw into the roof and walls. Hung from lightweight timber panels over a steel frame, it looks like collage or patchwork as you can see the work of the thatchers’ hands.

Inside the wings of a sheltered courtyard a slice of ‘tundra’ will give visitors an idea of the sort of environment the birds around them are flying off to. An exhibition under a large span steel structure explains the life of the largest contiguous area of tidal system in the world, while in one of the smaller buildings visitors don waders to walk out on the mud flats to watch birds and gather oysters.

Dorte Mandrup’s own journey mirrors the migratory flyway of some of the birds. Over 200 miles away in Greenland is her next remarkable project, the Icefiord Centre at the snout of the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier, where scientists study the rate of icebergs calving to ascertain the effects of climate change. Won in competition last year, it will be fascinating to see how these two buildings in all-encompassing landscapes compare.
Below The building is protected from the sea by its low slung, saltily grown thatch of straw.

Right Within, a courtyard builds on the previous centre and offers a place out of the wind.
Crusty Mark, 2006
Photograph Ben Murphy
Words Jan-Carlos Kucharek

The caravan and Chappell’s removals truck might lend this photograph an initial familiarity, but the particularly parched nature of the landscape and curious dilapidated horse buggy to the right add a creeping sense of the uncanny to Ben Murphy’s 2006 shot – ultimately borne out by the absence of the protagonist himself. This is one of the images from his show ‘The Riverbed’, a pictorial study of the habitats of counter-cultural communities in remote areas of Almería in south eastern Spain, and being someone who since his teenage years had an interest in those on society’s fringes, the subject matter seems close to Murphy’s heart.

And in that interest it has been possible for him to engage with the more nuanced tribal aspects of those allying themselves with a rejectionist identity, be they hermit or cyber-punk. ‘You’re always compromised by the network of entanglements with the hegemonic,’ he declares. Although these anti-conventionalists are drawn to each other under the same banner, ‘some are there to live off-grid, others to indulge in a hedonistic lifestyle.’ He adds that the incompatibility of the two notions can lead to frictions within these small, nomadic communities.

The detritus that surrounds Mark’s home amounts to the definition of the extent of his and his family’s domain on the patch of land 5km along an unmarked road off a highway; a form of self-expression to his neighbours. But there’s a twisted picturesque beauty – and Englishness – to the Iberian composition that he’s caught, ‘like a punk version of Constable’s The Haywain’: a subversion of the bucolic landscape.

Ben Murphy’s ‘The Riverbed’ is showing at the Architectural Association, 18-31 March and 19 April-27 May 2017, aaschool.ac.uk
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Step back from the hospice and you see, perched at bedroom windows, bird feeders. Those staying here may have the strength to go out into the garden and walk around the small pond but their main view is likely to be from the bed or easy chair. Here they will hear reeds rustling and water trickling into the hollow that the hospice sits in or, on my visit, rain cascading musically off gutters into raised pools. And they’ll see the feeders, placed by loving relatives, that in better weather bring lively visitors to animate the scene.

St Michael’s Hospice in Hereford started out on this convent site with a curving 1980s building under a deep pitched roof. But it outgrew this both in demand – it serves Herefordshire and its surrounding counties and medical need. Architype, based just outside the city, has designed a new limb for the hospice, each room on it facing out to the landscape. In a second phase of work it has re-configured the existing buildings, including digging down into them on this sloping site, to provide extra day care services and outpatient services and training.

The hospice movement has been bringing care and delight to healthcare buildings for 40 years, paid for by private donations, tireless fundraising and charity, often by those who have experienced their value and nearly always by those in the local area. The hospice mission to give people a ‘good death’ and better end of life care often encompasses the widest understanding of palliative. There are drugs and treatments, of course, and all the trappings of modern day healthcare, but they attempt a more holistic approach. Here rooms are set aside for physiotherapy and massage. The architecture, at its best, is understood in this context.

While working on this hospice, Architype project director Mark Barry’s own father died in another. So St Michael’s was informed by very real experiences. When Barry took me to the entrance first, to explain the
Timber curves up to meet the light in the delightful central spine which breaks into coloured entrances for each of the bedroom clusters.
importance of the threshold in a place such as this, it came from the heart. ‘People are not sure about coming in, especially the first time when it is highly emotive... often people well up,’ he says. So it has a soft approach, first sweeping you in with a long blue rendered wall then allowing a moment to pause and compose yourself under the shelter of a canopy. Similarly, once inside, the reception desk is pulled back from the entrance. Barry describes this area as the ‘gasket’ between old and new: 20 hospice bedrooms to one side, refurbished day care spaces to the other and between them a café. Running across the double height space is a bridge that joins the teams of the two sections. But it is intentionally calm with a minimum of signage. In fact you can choose to look straight through the building to the hillside beyond.

The language of the architecture is partly modern healthcare – the rendered wall and pragmatic border planting very much in this tradition – but inside a softer aesthetic takes over, with the timber structure lending texture to the space. The homely pitched roof of the original, and hospice supporters’ attachment to the building they had invested in only decades earlier, was one reason for refurbishing rather than clearing the site to start afresh.

Warm, tactile finishes are impressively maintained in the in-patient wing. Timber slats sweep the high ceiling up to the roof lights along the central spine which gives drama and a lightness to this high space and pulls together inevitably cellular bedrooms. The colours bring a welcoming warmth to each cluster of rooms, and along the walls panels of engineered oak have been substituted for standard issue bulbous plastic bump rails. Furniture has had the same care: surprisingly stylish chairs have been brought in that support not only patients but also the arms of relatives as they clasp the patient’s hand in bed.

Over-bright lighting and medical paraphernalia are some of the greatest offenders to homeliness so bedroom lights are dimmable and hoist tracks recessed. One storage wall hides a multitude of mess; the hoist beam...
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Ground floor plan

Ground that has been built up, rather than falling away steeply as before, is made into a useful extra space by the terrace and canopy.

Site plan

Credits
Client St Michael's Hospice
Architect Architype
Landscape and planning consultant Churchman Landscape Architects
Structural engineer Integral Engineering Design
M&E consultant Couch Perry and Wilkes
Quantity surveyor Osbournes
Main contractor Speller Metcalfe

IN NUMBERS
5,130m² gross internal floor area
£11m total cost
£9.6m build cost
£1,690 cost per m²

1 Main entrance
2 Reception
3 Shop
4 Office
5 Bedrooms
6 Rest area
7 Viewing room
8 Chilled room
9 Kitchen
10 Relatives’ bedroom
11 Therapy room
12 Café
13 Spiritual space
14 Volunteer hub
15 Activity and group area
16 Dining room
17 Lounge
18 New in-patient wing
19 Existing hospice and out patients wing
20 Convent
21 Terrace
22 Quarry
23 Loading bay
24 Service yard
25 Ambulance drop off
26 In patients drop off
27 Out patients drop off
28 Conference room
tucks into it as does its motor unit – with drugs locker, wardrobe, supply air and services – it’s a hard working wall. Avoiding the engineering clutter that comes with illness makes for a different space. The precise white of the walls was chosen in accordance with research showing how certain whites make people look more or less ill, to give a sense of wellbeing without masking symptoms.

On plan, the bedroom wing of the building looks inefficient: rooms growing out of the spine in clusters with a complex set of walls and layers of roofs. But across the whole project the cost was a reasonable £1690/m². And, informed by its experienced client, Architype has built a nuanced understanding of the psychology of users into the building. Previously the hospice had four single rooms plus 12 beds in three wards. Now the 20 beds each have a private room, giving privacy for drugs to be administered and wounds dressed. But to combat isolation the clusters open onto a shared lounge where tea can be made, so that visitors and patients can benefit from small moments of interaction as well as, perhaps, a release of tension.

Alcove seats in the hallway are equally based on observed behaviour. The tendency to catch the doctor as they leave the patient, to ask the most delicate questions, can leave people discussing these in a corridor. These give a place to perch, out of the way.

The old building has absorbed offices, daycare, a children’s room and education – for training West Midlands health services in palliative care. Here the programme and existing structure makes it harder to navigate than the new building. Perhaps the most successful space is the office under the eaves where the roof has been pushed out into a continuous dormer to give headroom and light. Spaces tend to be rather squeezed between new layers of insulation and ductwork and existing levels, but a large training room has been dug out, extending the buildings terraces above which take in the views.

The land St Michael’s is set in is part of its appeal – it was once owned by the neighbouring convent, itself designed by a lesser Pugin. Its new, more navigable gardens have raised beds that are easy to cultivate. Set on the side of a hill but dug in at the back thanks to a small quarry, the question was how to stop the car park – and possibly more – flooding, without spending a fortune on drainage. Instead, with Churchman Landscape Architects, the water has been turned to advantage, cascading down the steep quarry face in an energetic rill with reed-filled retaining ponds giving a dreamy softness to the views from the hospice and the surrounding accessible path. On the north side of the hospice gutters drop rainwater into giant pots to add more water and sound to the landscape, the sun reflecting ripples on the walls. Rolling hills and ranks of fruit trees carpeting the fields below bring a sense of fecundity, perhaps bittersweet to many here, but also somehow life affirming.

Patients stay 14 days on average; half die in the hospice. It is a small comfort that as the world shrinks around them, and distant views dim, they might still see a blue tit pecking at a bird feeder with their family beside them.
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Sound investment

Herzog & de Meuron’s Elbphilharmonie certainly makes a statement for Germany’s second city, but part of that speaks of Hamburg’s essentially commercial nature.

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek  Photographs: Iwan Baan

If Hamburg residents are still wondering how they came to stump up €789 million in taxes to pay for Herzog & de Meuron’s (H&dM) staggeringly delayed Elbphilharmonie, they might put it down to their past as a maritime free city state and a continuing sense of Hanseatic independence. At least, that seems to be the story from Elbphilharmonie spokesman Tom Schulz, who actually hails from Berlin. I’d assumed the comment was piqued with schadenfreude, but it turns out that his head and heart are very much in Hamburg. Unlike Berlin, Hamburg receives no federal handouts to guard the nation’s cultural assets. ‘It might be Europe’s biggest non-capital city but we’ve never received their kind of state funding,’ Scholz reveals. ‘But Hamburg has a long history as a proud merchant city; with a cultural life funded through taxes and philanthropy. In fact, the mayor would never have dreamed of going to the federal government for the money for its concert hall.’

Then again, I don’t think they’d have got it even if they’d asked, as the €866 million building was the result of both this ‘city-state’ attitude and unconventional procurement. The idea for a concert hall was that of Hamburg power couple, architect Alexander Gérard and art historian Jana Marko; who 15 years ago spotted the cultural and commercial potential of the rundown 1960s Kaispeicher A brick warehouse, at the prominent western end of the central harbour regeneration area. Gérard had gone direct to his old mates H&dM for inspiration, to be presented with the napkin sketch of a wave-like glass concert hall aloft on its massive brick plinth. This sketch proved so persuasive to Hamburg’s Senate that it not only paid off Gérard for his idea but canned a competition win for an office tower on the site. To all intents and purposes the cultural project was a private commission, out-

Above The 80m long escalator provides a three minute caesura from the world below as it takes concert-goers up the 37m to Elbphilharmonie’s public plaza level.

Right Sandwiched between a luxury hotel and apartments, the Elbphilharmonie is denoted by the presence of two arched forms, part of the plaza lobby.
Buildings
Concert hall

Section
1 Main entrance
2 Escalator
3 Parking
4 Ancillary performance studios
5 Conference area
6 Restaurant
7 Lookout
8 Plaza
9 Plaza void
10 Recital Hall
11 Foyer
12 Main Concert Hall
13 Hall canopy and acoustic baffle
14 Air intake unit
15 Structural and services void
16 Luxury Hotel
17 Hotel void
18 Residential apartments
19 Residential void
20 Plaza lobby

Credits
Client Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, Germany
Architect Herzog & de Meuron
Associate architect Höhler + Partner Architekten und Ingenieure
Main contractor Hochtief Solutions
General contractor Adamanta Grundstücks-Vermietungsgesellschaft
Engineering (structural, HVAC, M&E) Hochtief Solutions
Acoustics Nagata Acoustics
Building physics Dr Flohrer Beratende Ingenieure
Vertical transport Jappsen Ingenieure
Fire protection Hahn Consult Ingenieurgesellschaft
Fire safety planning HHNP/ord/07 Beratende Ingenieure
Crowd flow Happold Ingenieurbüro
Facade maintenance Dr Manfred Helmus Ingenieurpartnerschaft
Noise control Taubert und Ruhe
Restoration brick facade Jüger Ingenieure
Thermal simulation (main hall) Hausladen
Wind engineering consultant Wacker Ingenieure
Facade engineering (2005-2013) R+F Fuchs
Climate consulting (2005-2013) Transsolar
Facilities management SPIE
Signage Ruedi Baur
Sprinkler consultant Itega GmbH Ingenieurbüro
SAA consulting and AV Peutz Consult ADA, Ahnert Design Acoustic

Level 8 plan
Level 10 plan
Level 12 plan
Level 15 plan
IN NUMBERS

125,500m²
gross floor area

5,745m²
building footprint and plaza area

29
floors

80m
escalator length

6,200m²
roof area

Left There’s an Escher—like quality to the main hall’s lobbies, stacked closely on top of one another, and accessed by a multitude of staircases.

The quasi-external lobby to the auditoria at plaza level has an almost Expressionist aesthetic and feels like it wants to be social heart of the complex.
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With its interconnecting levels and 10,000 coral-like acoustic panels and organ, centre right, the 2,100 seat main hall is highly impressive, despite its restraint.

With the civic expression of the hall itself so encased, it falls to the external ramparts and quasi-internal ante-lobby to create the theatrical arrival one expects of a concert hall.
Concert hall

Above

The stained oak lobby of the Recital Hall is both atmospheric and intimate.

Below

Acoustic walls formed of thousands of oak dimples enliven the conventional box form of the Recital Hall.

with their unobstructed river views; and below, behind solid brick walls, by a multi-storey car park. Given that the civic expression of the hall itself is so encased, it falls to the external ramparts and quasi-internal ante-lobby to the auditoria above the Kaispeicher A’s roof – accessed by a slow, tantalising ascent on a sexy curved escalator via a long white tunnel, bypassing all this other stuff – to create the theatrical arrival one expects of a concert hall.

It’s another world here past the grand west-facing brick picture window. Raised 37m above harbour level, it feels the Baltic’s winter air whistle through gaps between the tall curved glass panels separating lobby from plaza. Materials are few, simple and robust; glass, plaster, oak, brick. But the section is complex; wide brick floors step up from the escalator, the distended belly of halls above swooping down. Linking these, like giant white umbilical cords, run the sculptural volumes of the auditoria staircases. If the architect was paying lip service to the peaked roofline of Hans Scharoun’s Berlin Philharmonic, it’s in this grand lobby far below that H&dM puts its expressionist money where its mouth is.

Passing from Lutheran decadence up the wide staircases to the auditorium levels above, the sense of material indulgence is reserved more for the recital hall lobby than the grand hall’s. Schulz claims that H&dM wanted the former ‘to feel like a jazz club or a cigar case’, and with its dark Maduro-coloured oak walls spreading out like fingers and low ceilings soaking up the voices of concert-goers, the space feels so intimate you can almost smell the tobacco on its breath. This sultry feel lingers within the box-form recital room, itself made of angled walls of sensory and highly tactile coupes of French oak, as if Marie Antoinette rather than noted acoustician Yasuhisa Toyota had modelled them.

The haptic qualities of the auditoria are really what define Elbphilharmonie as an entity. The main hall’s vineyard form and its materials might be Toyota’s concept and specification, but the final arrangement and execution seems very much that of the architect. Rising internally over 30m past the huge funnel-shaped acoustic baffle, those 10,000 unique acoustic panels lining the hall conjure polarised associations that range from diaphanous to dead-weight. In one view it can appear massive, of hewn and scabbled concrete; yet simultaneously as delicate and brittle as coral. And overriding all is the organic geometry that has the varying levels meld one into another, a subtle spatial democratisation running all the way from the stalls to the gods; satisfyingly Teutonic, modern and civic. The hall’s impressive organ at first is lost in the composition. Like geological striations that
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have drip-formed down its sides, its function too reveals itself gradually to the observer.

It’s perhaps only in the main hall’s circulation areas that the commercial trade-off becomes most apparent. With hotel and apartments book-ending the main hall, access lobbies are piled one on top of the other in vertiginous succession. So where Scharoun could indulge concert-goers to luxuriate across the low stepped rise of his public areas, here narrow and curiously stark lobby spaces are concertinaed together by a mass of Escher-like staircases to the point that from the plaza it feels like scaling Jacob’s Ladder. It results in visual drama, but with bars on every level, the critical mass required to produce a palpable buzz of anticipation was dissipated across the section. It was also preceded by a ‘starter’s orders’ dash up the stairs from the plaza after being corralled there waiting for those leaving an earlier performance. This could be due to the intense programming of the venue, but in reality the heavenly ascent to the plaza level was replaced by a purgatorial bottleneck on leaving. Schulz concedes it’s a nuisance; with both escalators sometimes having to run one way to deal with the crowds. User experience thus becomes defined by not only the time it takes to enter the hall but the manner of leaving. The architect’s justification for a protracted grand entrance feels more like a sophistry on exiting. Post Gershwin, I excused myself early from German pop sensation Tim Bendzko’s bubbly second-half turn for a slow escalator ride down, just to avoid the final kettling.

Perhaps it’s all just part of the Hanseatic spirit in which Hamburg conducts itself, but passing down through the lobbies of light oak, white polished plaster and fluorescent strips, the tasteful restraint seemed too much, too minimal. Schulz insisted I visit the infamous Reeperbahn in St Pauli district before I leave; the city’s neon-soaked, booze-fuelled, sleazy underbelly, unequivocally reminding visitors that Germany’s second city is first and foremost a port. Close by and despite the freezing mist, it was a riot of neon, shocking and buzzing with energy. Elbphilharmonie might be a product of its place but raised aloft on its plinth, it exemplifies restraint without that hedonistic alter-ego. Whether the world’s concert-goers and weekenders respond to this sensibility as much as local residents do remains to be seen, but I sense they don’t care anyway. ‘Elphie’s’ head, if less than passionate heart, remains very much of Hamburg.
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The National Memorial Arboretum, near Alrewas in Staffordshire, is a work in progress – a landscaped setting for memorials – mostly to those to those who died serving their country since 1948. It is run by the Royal British Legion although it is not exclusively military. A corner of the National Forest, its site is former gravel pits and meadows by the Trent, and the aggregates industry continues visibly nearby. Although the 30,000 trees planted here have yet to mature and the landscape plan is still developing, it has become a very popular destination since its launch in 2001, numbers
Above The entrance facade, surmounted by the limestone clad drum of the audiovisual room, recalls the stripped classicism of Asplund. Image: Paul Miller

Credits
Client National Memorial Arboretum/Royal British Legion
Architect Glenn Howells Architects
Structural engineer Techniker
Services engineer Yes Engineering
Landscape architect Fira
Exhibition design Real Studio
Main contractor Stepnell
Cost consultant and project manager Edmond Shipway

Ground floor plan
1 Entrance
2 Exhibition
3 Audiovisual room
4 Café
5 Shop
6 Offices
7 Education rooms
8 Existing chapel
9 Events space
10 Heroes Square
11 Car park

The RIBA Journal March 2017
Critique
Remembrance Centre

What architecture is suitable for such a place? Although it is definitely not a cemetery, the sprinkling of some 330 memorials of hugely varying type, quality and scale across the landscape, along with the presence of a chapel, does call to mind the varied mausoleums and family vaults associated with some British Victorian examples, as well as – an acknowledged reference for Howells’ building – Asplund and Lewerentz’s Woodland Cemetery outside Stockholm. The neoclassical impetus for Howells’ building, however, was reinforced by the most prominent of the pre-existing memorials on site – the circular Portland Stone focal point of architect Liam O’Connor’s superscaled Armed Forces Memorial, elevated on its grassy mound, dating from 2007.

The Remembrance Centre was always going to be subservient to that but – says GHA project director Mike Cruise who I meet at the Arboretum – the plan rapidly outgrowing its previous visitor centre. Now – officially opening this month (March) it has a new Remembrance Centre by Glenn Howells Architects.
was to set up a visual relationship between the two buildings. Hence the limestone drum at the centre of the colonnaded composition – which in its first form, before the project was trimmed along with its budget, was a larger Asplundish affair. As built, the frontage of the building, with its unifying colonnade connecting to the existing chapel by Architype, is still pretty imposing. The drum houses the audio-visual part of the exhibition displays in the building. But behind this facade the centre turns out to be an L-shaped building with a courtyard (‘Heroes Square’) opening up to the landscape beyond and connecting across to the chapel.

The Howells practice, known for organically-shaped buildings such as its Gloucester Motorway Services or the Savill Building at Windsor Great Park, also returns at intervals to the colonnade and grid plan, and the 4m grid is followed through rigorously here. This plan successfully absorbs two remnants of the preceding Architype complex – the chapel, effectively untouched but for the new colonnade, and the curved laminated-timber beams of the earlier visitor centre, which have been cleaned and re-used as part of the main interior and continue as a projecting wing at the rear.

Inside, all the usual ingredients of a visitor centre are present and correct: exhibition space, café/restaurant, toilets, shop. One wing is occupied with the administration offices of the NMA – 60 full-time staff plus 250 volunteers – and another with education rooms for the many school parties visiting:

**Right** Much work went into the concealed metal fixings for the laminated timber columns.

**Far right** Inside the audiovisual drum.
Last year’s ‘Ride to the Wall’ brought more than 7,000 motorbikes and 20,000 people here in a fundraising act of remembrance.

The presence of the chapel across the ceremonial square reminds you that this place has multiple functions. At its most informal, the centre caters for family days out, like a public park, its theme of remembrance educational and carefully calibrated for all ages by the exhibition designer. Then come people with connections to those commemorated, including the directly bereaved. And finally it is a place of solemn commemorative occasions, particularly by the military.
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Critique
Remembrance Centre

Though it is not a cemetery, some 330 memorials and a chapel call to mind the mausoleums and family vaults of some Victorian examples

Cruise relates that his own father, a veteran of the Korean War, used to be a regular attender.

So the colonnade and drum speak of architectural high purpose. The arboretum management also wanted timber to be expressed in the building, so the colonnade and the building’s cladding are of larch, treated with a sacrificial stain to give a weathered finish, requiring re-application every few years. Structural engineer Techniker worked hard, says Cruise, to make the metal connections of the laminated columns invisible. Some columns also contain concealed rainwater downpipes behind flush access panels in the same material. A bronze finish to the anodised aluminium-framed glazing works well with the timber.

Inside, the layout is logical. Visually the presence of the curving roof beams of the previous building does feel slightly odd in this otherwise sternly rectilinear composition, and although this came about as the result of value engineering, one wonders how much money was actually saved in the end, and whether the old building structure could have been re-used elsewhere.

Interior design – a less sober affair than the exterior, again with a Scandinavian feel, though with added woodwool slabs to the ceiling soffits – is also by GHA, which remains involved in the project. The practice has designed a Phase 2 building, to take the place of ‘permanent’ marquees for large events, pitched behind the building. Inspired by pavilion-like buildings such as Mies’ Farnsworth House, raised above the flood level here, it will have a double-width column grid of 8m. This will help to resolve the present slightly unfinished feel of the back of the building – which is not a rear view at all, when you see it from the vantage point of the Armed Forces Memorial. The second building will provide an end-stop to the composition.

This is a well-judged piece of architecture. You can tell it wants to be an all-new building; perhaps it should have been but it has ingeniously incorporated fragments of the (not so) old. More importantly, it strikes the right tone: serious while not gloomy, a proper introduction to the landscape and meaning of the place.
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Categories
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Cindy Walters, director, Walters & Cohen Architects
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Steve Mudie, partner, Alinea Consulting
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Chair, Eleanor Young, executive editor, RIBA Journal

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History in the making

OMA has added its own chapter to the rolling historical story of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi palazzo in Venice

Words Stephen Cousins  Photographs Delfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti, courtesy of OMA

The Venice of 300 years ago, famously captured in the paintings of Canaletto, was a place for hedonistic pleasure seekers, where beauty, wealth, and indulgence drew in thousands of tourists from across the globe.

Today tourists still flock to the city, drawn more by its sights and shopping than earthier pleasures. Now one of its most iconic historic buildings, the Fondaco dei Tedeschi palazzo, on the banks of the Grand Canal, has been transformed into a very 21st Century symbol of indulgence – a high end department store filled with a plethora of seductive brands including Gucci, Prada, and Versace.

OMA’s vision for the 9,000m² store combines respect for the multi-layered history of the 13th century palazzo with a series of limited architectural interventions intended to open it up and incorporate all the modern circulation and servicing requirements of a retail development. OMA’s design was created for client and landlord Benetton, ready for occupation by leaseholder DFS as the T Fondaco.

Located next to the Rialto Bridge, the Fondaco is comparable to a physical document recording several centuries of construction and modification work. The original palazzo was used as a trading post for German merchants, destroyed twice by fires, and rebuilt in its current form in 1506.

In the 17th century, the building was converted into a customs house, then in the 1930s, under Mussolini, significant structural changes saw it turned into a post office.

A key driver for OMA’s team, led by founder Rem Koolhaas and partner Ippolito

At the top of the 15th century building a modern corridor leads to the new pavilion space above the old courtyard.

Above Fondaco dei Tedeschi facing out over the Grand Canal.
Pestellini Laparelli, was to demystify the idea of the historical building as an immutable monument free of transformation or adaptation - the default approach to most old buildings in Italy. Instead, the aim was to expose the many historic layers to view, alongside new architectural interventions.

‘The project makes visible the idea of the historical palimpsest,’ says Laparelli, ‘in many places exposing the accumulation of layered and historic materials, to encourage people to acknowledge that it is both a historic monument and modern building. We didn’t want to declare one phase of the Fondaco’s history more authentic than another.’

Two years of survey work revealed a patchwork of historic alterations: The original stone towers had been removed, the 19th century saw the central courtyard covered over with glass, and in the 1930s the building was almost entirely reconstructed in concrete.

Despite its lack of architectural authenticity, in 1987 the Fondaco was granted the legal status of ‘Monument’, restricting the scope of any structural changes.

Every proposed alteration was debated at length with the city, says Laparelli: ‘Step by step we were able to gain back some ground by demonstrating that certain areas of the building were not very authentic but stable enough to support structural changes.’

New entrances were carved into facades facing the Campo San Bartolomeo and the Rialto, while a large cut-out on the Grand Canal elevation increases permeability and circulation space. There is a new central lift and stair core, a large feature escalator with wood panelled sides and red steps and a new wooden terrace on the roof provides breathtaking views of the city.

The most striking new addition is a Miesian steel and glass-floored pavilion, suspended above the courtyard, used as an events and exhibition space. The 20m-wide gridded structure replaces the old glass ceiling, with just a shadow gap separating the pavilion from the edge of the historic cornice.

‘Visually we wanted to create something that looks like a pure insert, but it had to adapt to the irregularities of a historic building,’ explains Laparelli.

City authorities were unflinching on the requirement to retain the cellular sequence of rooms in the galleria surrounding the courtyard – the regulation dictated that a concrete wall built in the 1930s at the same
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location as a stone wall from the 16th century had to be treated as historic.

Thus the department store is divided into a series of internal ‘shops’, each one separate and accessed via a single gated door, a highly unusual arrangement for a building typology normally associated with large open plan spaces and easily visible merchandise. Instead, visitors are encouraged to discover different brands as they are glimpse between the gates from the galleria.

Conversely, large retained windows in the facades encourage visitors to look out towards the city. Laparelli comments: ‘We wanted to create an osmotic relationship with city so visitors don’t feel they have to buy anything, they can just enjoy the view of Venice and its architecture.’ OMA was wary of creating another tourist ‘profit generating machine’ in Venice, where increasing tourism and escalating property prices have resulted in an exodus of the local population.

The T Fondaco has several spaces suitable for use by Venetians. The courtyard and pavilion will stage concerts and exhibitions, an existing route through the building used by locals has been retained, and there are commercial components related to local food and craft.

A respect for the past influenced the choice of materials, finishes and fixtures, many of which are a contemporary twist on classic Venetian design. The courtyard floor is covered by blocks of Red Verona marble and highly durable Istrian stone, typical to many courtyards and covered passageways in Venice, but laid out in a contemporary geometry of diagonal stripes.

Brass, a common feature of Italian architecture, is oxidised in the Fondaco to create different surface tones of blue, orange or more traditional gold. Visitors pass through a brass and mirror wall on the fourth floor to reach the pavilion, which itself features brass walls oxidized in a gradient from blue to gold.

This intermingling of past and present extends to the interior fit out, where DFS’ architect, UK-based Jamie Fobert, developed nine sets of furniture inspired by the city. Tables in the womens’ accessories department are formed from classic grey, pink and yellow Italian marbles, sand blasted to the point where colours appear powdery white like the weather-beaten facades of local churches.

Elaborate patterns on metal grilles covering many windows in Venice were cast in negative in brass to form the structure for kiosks dotted around the courtyard floor. Their sophisticated folding furniture recalls traditional kiosks seen many local piazzas selling food and souvenirs.

‘Like OMA, we wanted to pay homage to Venice, without it being a pastiche, or over simplistic,’ says Fobert. ‘We looked at materials dominant in Venetian palazzos, such as grilles and traditional glass making, and made reference to historical things through the colour palette and materiality.’

A more direct historical reference is the use of large tapestries, hung over courtyard balconies, sown with the names of products sold on each floor. Developed by Italian graphic designer Tapiro, this recalls the Renaissance practice of hanging carpets with family crests sown into the surface from palazzo windows during regattas on the canal.

It’s another layer to a historical tapestry of a building that, thanks to OMA’s reimagining, should entice pleasure seekers to Venice for many years to come.
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Geoff Pearce

We need more, better homes – now. Geoff Pearce, executive director of regeneration and development for Essex-based Swan Housing Association, is opening a factory for the offsite modular construction of its homes using cross-laminated timber. We asked him why and how...

Are you the first housing association to make its own homes this way?
I think we’re the first to go into modular construction from our own factory. Though there’s a housing association in the Midlands which does panellised construction.

Isn’t this a real leap for a social housing provider?
We’re slightly different to most in that we have our own in-house construction management team anyway, directly procuring homes rather than going through a contractor. That means we are fairly used to being close to the supply chain, and off-site construction is something we can manage.

Who are your architects and engineers?
For the first project at Beechwood in the Craylands Estate, our architects are Pollard Thomas Edwards and btpw partnership. The next will be the regeneration of Basildon’s Laindon Centre (PTE with CF Møller) for which we now have planning permission. Our brief was to design for modular construction. Then we engaged Arup to look at the pros and cons of different methods.

What made you decide on CLT?
Our initial thought was to build in light-gauge steel frame. But in the Arup study CLT emerged as very rigid and dimensionally stable. We don’t want any cracking, for instance, on the fully-finished modules which can be up to 5m wide and 15m long – the maximum for road transport. They are designed for stacking up to 12 storeys. Beyond that, craning the modules gets trickier as CLT is quite heavy, and you have to start reinforcing the lower floors.

How fast can you build?
For houses it’s typically 12 weeks from end to end, from foundations to finished, of which six weeks is the factory production of the modules. We don’t do cladding in the factory, that’s typically a brick skin done on site. We still have brickies! There’s not a massive time or cost implication for that.

What’s your factory’s capacity?
We can do 20 modules a week, 1,000 a year, translating to 300 homes. We’re not ruling out expanding if need be, perhaps working with other partners. Our pipeline of homes is 3,500 – overall 50% social and affordable – but we won’t use modular construction for all of them.

When do you start?
Factory production will start late spring for delivery of completed homes this autumn.
Hull joins the culture club
Hugh Pearman takes a rewarding journey north to find a city that’s discovering its self-belief

The programme of cultural events, of course, is only part of the purpose of the City of Culture designation. As with the rather larger stimuli of Olympics or Expos, the events give cities a deadline to get themselves looking good, to improve their facilities, to have some ‘legacy’. Funds are available or can be leveraged. Minds are concentrated. So it is with Kingston-upon-Hull.

It’s not as if Hull hasn’t had numerous smaller cultural and urban regeneration initiatives in the past. I’ve been visiting the city at intervals since the late 1970s, when it was first grappling with the problems of post-industrialisation – not least the collapse of its once huge fishing industry. Wander the streets of the Old Town – a great place now, as it always has been – and you come across the fragments of forgotten public art projects beneath your feet or on the walls, just as you do in London’s Southwark, say. These things have a shelf life.

Over decades, various architectural and cultural interventions have taken place – be they Terry Farrell’s huge aquarium The Deep, Wilkinson Eyre’s bus station grafted into the city’s fine Paragon railway terminus, Wright & Wright’s Hull Truck theatre, McDowell & Benedetti’s rotating bridge over the River Hull at Scale Lane or Sheppard Robson’s recent radical reworking of the Hull University Library as built by librarian/poet Philip Larkin (RIBAJ, November 2015). We’ve covered them all, and even devoted a complete issue of the RIBAJ to the city in May 2009. More recently (April 2016) we examined the city’s architectural culture in the light of the Hull City Plan and how it dovetails with the City of Culture jamboree. So when I went this time, I was looking for signs of positive and permanent change.

The cultural events are fine, and popular: visit the art galleries, take in the large public art projects such as Nayan Kulkarni’s monumental installation ‘Blade’ in Queen Victoria Square – a single 75m wind-turbine blade, made locally, hovering like a colossal scimitar right across the square. The largest found-object imaginable, it is curiously unphotographable. The Ferens Art Gallery, always good, has been technically refurbished and has a good set of Francis Bacon’s ‘Screaming Popes’ series. Up at the university, the Brynmor Jones library is showing a popular exhibition of drawings, ‘Lines of Thought’, including an enchanting elephant by Rembrandt.

What you first notice on arriving in the city, though, is the £26 million worth of reasonably nice new stone paving and hard landscaping in the pedestrianised parts (way better than the previous concrete-block iteration) and the fact that the pedestrianised or traffic-calmed parts have expanded to connect the key areas of town. Manchester-based Re-form landscape architect is the designer. There are lots of new timber-slat benches, lots of rather lumpy new lamp poles and lots...
of work still going on. But a better indication of the city’s improving cultural health is the new artisan chocolatier on Humber Street.

Humber Street is in the city’s Fruit Market area, a few streets with water on three sides (Humber, River Hull, and Humber Dock) which is isolated from the main city by being on the wrong side of the thunderous dual carriageway of the A63, taking a seemingly endless stream of trucks to and from the newer docks downstream, because this is also the E20 highway to Rotterdam. The Deep, on the other side of the Hull where it flows into the Humber, is similarly cut off, though at least there is now a pedestrian bridge linking it with the Fruit Market. For years there has been a plan to improve and bridge the A63 and so re-link the city for pedestrians, but this is in the lap of the Highways Agency, which is not going to hurry itself just because of an arts festival. In consequence the Fruit Market district, more than a little blighted, has been hanging on by a thread for years, not helped by a failed unbuilt housing scheme in the 1990s, and too much has already been demolished. But enough remains – especially the largely intact part of Humber Street where auctions for fruit and veg off the boats used to be held, and bananas ripened in lofts. Now, like the maritime Covent Garden it was, it is coming back to life. Some of it – Thieving Harry’s café on the corner, Cocoa chocolatier/patisserie, an upmarket Indian restaurant facing Humber Dock – happened anyway, but have benefitted from the tide of street-scape improvements which has washed along and made them look a lot better. Light-touch refurbishment has prepared units for future tenants in a joint venture with local developer Wykeland Beal. The same team has provided an outdoor auditorium built over an old dry dock by the Hull, right in front of a new building for digital industries. That

Above There goes Blade, appearing unexpectedly.

Below Out by the River Hull an amphitheatre perches in an old dry dock in front of new commercial buildings.
does have a City of Culture link, as does one permanent bit of ‘legacy’ – the new Humber Street Gallery for contemporary art. Luckily there wasn’t much money so this is a simple scrape-and-reveal exercise on what was a sound 1950s fruit warehouse. Good lighting and essential services was all it needed beyond the pre-provided large spaces.

In the Humber Street Gallery you’ll find a retrospective of Sarah Lucas downstairs, and another upstairs of the slightly alarming 1970s Hull-based ‘Coum Collective’ which was much into highly sexualised performance art and which later morphed into the industrial shock-band Throbbing Gristle. It was all so long ago – the fanzine-style printed material is charmingly dated – but the images and videos still have the power to shock as well as amuse. Not for children! Keep them downstairs with the rather sweet ‘Dead Bod’, a seagull graffito painted on a rusting shed decades ago by a mariner which became an alternative symbol for Hull. Now it is preserved indoors for ever.

In the end it all comes down to attitude. Whatever you go to see or hear in Hull, make sure to wander the streets of the Old Town as well as the Fruit Market, try the boardwalk up the Hull and the Wilberforce Museum towards the top end of the High Street. The city has still got a way to go urbanistically, but after all this time I’m sensing confidence now – the feeling that at last it is starting to come together.
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A long-term collaboration on the upgrade of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home (BDCH) in south London. Standing in the middle of the four acre site, it is a low rise island trapped in a rising inferno of modern development. As a passenger passing by on the train, you wonder how it manages to stay on its split site between the railway tracks behind Battersea Power Station, where it has been for 147 years, and how it resists the temptation to accept a huge sum of money and move. ‘I have been invited to countless lunches by developers trying to get us to move out,’ says CEO Claire Horton. ‘The organisation is very clear that this is very desirable real estate. We have had multiple offers to buy, but as our name tells us, we have to be located in the capital. And we own the land.’ Nevertheless, BDCH does have two small sites outside London and has costed – and rejected – the option two or three times. ‘An alternative was a trading estate, but no one would have known we were there and employees would have left. You cannot pick up an operation this big and move it easily somewhere else. Twenty-two animals arrive each day – that’s about 150 a week.’ Walking around the site with the architect and client, a very respectful and supportive relationship between the two is apparent. The PR wanted them both to be here and it is clear why – the rebuilding project has nurtured both organisations. The relationship doesn’t feel transactional. It makes sense to learn that the projects have not been commissioned through the usual channels – JCA turned up to do a job at BDCH’s Windsor site, flipped onto a Battersea project and stayed for three projects more. The architect is putting a new 1000m² intake kennels building through planning again for Windsor, but can expect to be considered for the redevelopment of the rehoming building in the next couple of years. It’s a long-term type of client-architect relationship that many would argue leads to questionable results. There are hints of that here with the grey plinth to the blue building which lacks context and the unrefined concrete elevation to the intake kennels, but altogether it feels like the relationship/work has been about weathering the storm of disruption that its enviable location and the roaring forces of development have thrown at it. BDCH’s commitment to staying has been embedded in a series of estate redevelopment projects that will have touched every corner of the site by the end of this decade. It secures the organisation to the site for the next 30-40 years. In the last six years alone Battersea has built a new cattery, entrance gatehouse and rehoming reception, a new 170m single-storey intake kennel block, clinic kennels and combined veterinary hospital and head office administration building – the latter three designed by Jonathan Clark Architects. Due to start on site in the next few months is the transformation of seven railway arches into a new café, indoor paddock and hydrotherapy centre. The 1907 cattery designed by Portmeirion architect Clough Williams-Ellis will be turned into a heritage space and the rehoming kennels will be overhauled too. BDCH’s commitment to staying has been embedded in a series of estate redevelopment projects that will have touched every corner of the site by the end of this decade. It secures the organisation to the site for the next 30-40 years. 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The TfL situation made us think differently. Dealing with that grew into an effort to future-proof the organisation and site as a whole – to develop services as a way to teach others. In the case of recent and forthcoming developments, the primary aim is to improve facilities and animal welfare, to continue to be a world-leading, physical example of how to rescue and rehome animals well. A major change was to implement the seemingly contradictory idea that BDCH could rehome greater numbers of animals by reducing the intake and amount on site at any time.

‘In 2010 BDCH was a sleeping giant,’ says Horton. ‘It was a phenomenal organisation on a fantastic site but with facilities that needed upgrading. But it had reserves it could spend. The cattery had just been completed and was critical in proving that rehoming could be quicker and more sustainable if facilities were improved, welfare prioritised and capacity reduced. Rehoming rose by more than 40% almost overnight. It showed that rebuilding the rest of the site was the right thing to do.’

So part of the work has been about consolidation to enable improved animal welfare. The whole site can hold up to 600 animals at full capacity but on a normal day it would have 400. Just 15 years ago there would have been 500 dogs at any one time and 20 years ago 40-50 dogs went through the door each day. Other parts have been more technical: the design of kennels for animals; infection control, outdoor space, single storey buildings, underfloor heating, floors that drain the right way, one-way glass not bars, music, and non-facing kennels. Then hot water taps for washing down and dog-safe offices, even low-level windows.

When Jonathan Clark Architects took on the Windsor job, it hadn’t designed for animal welfare before and had no idea about the sites and processes, but it was open to understanding the client’s need. It took the job as a JCT Construction Management contract, because the finer detailing of technical elements was too important for design and build.

‘It was a fascinating brief, how the animal journey interacts with the customer and staff journeys,’ says Clark.

Beyond that, the brief was for a clean and efficient architecture: ‘We did want it to be a statement building too,’ explains Horton. ‘That’s why it has the Battersea blue ceramic tiles. But we had to be careful with money and create clear messaging. The pressures on the site demanded something important. It had to be completed cheaply and on time to meet TfL’s strict schedule too. As a national charity we negotiated many things for free.’

While JCA is ‘safe for some time’, that’s not to say BDCH doesn’t recognise the importance of moving on when necessary. Each new CEO and head of estate questions the existing architect. Horton insists: ‘We are never so wedded to an architect that we wouldn’t change. It has to be ethically managed.’

For architects, the partnership between Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Jonathan Clark Architects raises questions about both the potential lifespan of an architect/client relationship, and the value of a long-lasting one – especially where in-depth technical knowledge is slow to acquire and difficult to brief.

‘We don’t want to spend our time rebriefing architects,’ summarises Horton. And with this client it’s crucial to remember, but easy to forget, that ‘BDCH doesn’t want to be a builder’ either. It wants the site done in the next five years so it can continue doing its job and help other organisations do theirs, including as a show piece on how to design for the best possible animal welfare.

What the BDCH team has learned about procuring buildings is that it is important to get the right person, who shares values and works as a team. There’s no room for egos.

‘The architecture isn’t about styles and creating a legacy for an architect, but about the users. We have to work closely and honestly; self-promotion suspended,’ says Horton.

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By Brian Green

Housing policy is nothing if not highly political. It touches every aspect of life. We even tag distant ancestors with their housing – Cave Man. Scan Maslow’s hierarchy and housing is pertinent to each level of human need. From basic needs to self-fulfilment, housing plays a role. Security, health, welfare, education, investment, social status, contentment, each is affected by where we live and what we live in.

Housing has to be political. Its rise up the agenda should be welcomed.

But the increasing politicisation of housing is also problematic in a world that seems increasingly defined by goldfish-like attention spans. Political fads and their fixes are ephemeral, and housing is very permanent.

You needn’t be a cynic to sense when Chancellor George Osborne’s redefinition of ‘housing crisis’ as ‘a crisis of homeownership’ was informed, at least in part, by 2015 research suggesting that home owners were twice as likely to vote Conservative as Labour.

The result is there are more housing initiatives than a mad man can shake a stick at, or a sane man can sensibly recall. Into this confusion comes the Housing White Paper.

Judging the book by its cover, the task set was: ‘Fixing our broken housing market.’

That’s a huge task, considering its failings: from lacklustre building rates to young adults blocked from home ownership, from a boom in boomerang kids to the old and disabled living in unsuitable sub-standard housing. That’s besides the rising tide of homelessness and anger over foreign investors leaving prime residential empty.

But for all its complexity, at its heart the answer to the housing policy challenge lies in achieving two things – having an appropriate stock and distributing it satisfactorily. All the rest is a means to those ends.

What is appropriate and what is satisfactory are, of course, determined by political, social and economic norms.

In the mesmerising spin of the political whirligig, this simplicity and clarity is easily lost in the race for cheaply-won applause for quick-fix answers, rather than long-term solutions to intractable problems. Symptoms alleviated, perhaps; causes left untreated.

Encouragingly, the White Paper was remarkably empty of smarty-pants policies to tackle narrow immediate high-profile political problems. The fingerprints of HM Treasury or No10 advisors were far less visible than has been the trend. The control behind the policy seems to have been recaptured from the Treasury and well-rooted once again in the Department for Communities & Local Government and its more intimate connections with the industry, local authorities and its wider group of ‘stakeholders’.

For all that, the document has been welcomed with what sounds like one-handed claps from much of the industry and criticism from those not obliged to be polite.

It looks flimsy, despite the significant repetition obscuring the kernels within. Detail is limited. Devoid of any ‘big ideas’, it might easily be dismissed as ‘feeble’. That was the word chosen by John Healey, Labour’s opposition spokesperson, which will be picked up by much of the commentariat.

However, its effect could prove more profound than it may appear, less because of what it is than what it isn’t – a shopping list of detailed wheezes dressed up as a policy prescription offering a ‘radical and unashamedly ambitious’ solution. It is a statement that appears, politically at least, to reset the government direction on housing policy to a bearing that – compared to what it displaces – is more likely to meet the key aims of providing an appropriate stock that is distributed satisfactorily.

While it is unlikely to be applauded as a success, since it is not how fast you paddle but the course you take than matters, it is a step (or perhaps a stroke) in the right direction.

Communities secretary Sajid Javid, as he introduced the White Paper in the House of Commons, recognised there was no magic bullet but stressed that the aim should be to build the right houses in the right places.

All politically uninteresting. All seemingly obvious. Nothing vaguely matched the pre-release hyperbole.
What! No quick fixes? No shiny baubles to toss to the media for endless analysis of the implications?

His selling point, if that is what it was, appeared to be a more collegiate approach. We discovered this (or at least I think I did) only when he responded to Healey’s criticism that the document was ‘feeble’. Javid accused Healey of playing party politics when a cross-party solution was on offer.

With such emphasis on consultation, the document itself seems in some ways to be a hybrid of a Green and a White Paper. But within the minced meat of the document, while detail is slight, there are important signposts to where the government is heading.

There is the well-trailed shift from an emphasis on home ownership to a more tenure-neutral approach, with renting placed centre stage for attention. Starter homes have been kicked as far into the bushes as was politically possible, with stress placed on higher-density development and more use of brownfield land, plus more active use of compulsory purchase to free stalled sites. There’s also a push for more diversity among those building homes – more input from smaller builders, housing associations and custom builders. A new methodology for determining housing need plus support for offsite construction and help with skills shortages sit alongside encouragement for area-wide design codes and the imposition of a statutory duty to meet the needs of older and disabled people.

For the housing cognoscenti there was also a pledge to make land ownership and interests more transparent. That may seem incidental, but it may prove a powerful tool in improving future policy.

There were many more ingredients, though the recipe seems anything other than exotic. But the pie is still to be cooked. The results remain uncertain. There is little detail on how the aspirations will be met and no grand overarching vision.

But there are hints that we may be heading back on the dull path of evidence-based policy rather than what often appeared to be post-policy-prepared ‘evidence’. This dullness is in many ways encouraging.

It would be wrong to dismiss the potential for change latent within the document. And if the aspirations are pursued with vigour the change could be significant.

By way of example let’s take two small not greatly discussed elements: the greater emphasis placed on increased density and using brownfield land. These had pretty much disappeared off the political radar. One sign of this is that many house builders had stopped recording in their annual accounts the proportion of homes built on brown land.

In the early 2000s housing density increased, as did the use of brownfield land, particularly following the March 2000 version of PPG3 (planning guidance). The more recent trend has been towards less dense development and a greater proportion of homes built on green land. The chart shows these trends clearly. Indeed, the post-recession slump in brownfield land and density is, perhaps, more significant than the chart shows given the heavy focus on building in London.

If the government plans to reverse this trend it will influence what and where homes are built. It is worth noting how more higher density and brownfield development went hand-in-hand with a rise in flat-building.

NHBC figures show that between 2002 and 2008 the proportion of flats rose from below 30% to just above 50%. That has since returned to around 30%. In the north flats now account for a lower share of the housing mix than they did at the turn of the century.

Politics is paramount in determining the appropriate stock and its satisfactory distribution. Too often the political machine distracts attention from what really has to be done.

The Housing White Paper may lack vision, be bereft of big ideas. It may be a long way short of ideal. It is definitely not radical. But it does seem to offer an important correction politically. Whether it will greatly improve matters is another question.

FROM THE INSTITUTE
RIBA’s latest housing policy document, ‘Housing Matters: #20 ways to tackle the housing crisis’, advocates better use of public resources and public sector land, more locally-made decisions, greater focus on good design, increased support for new types of housing development, sustainable and resilient homes and a more transparent housing market.
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Evidence in adjudication

Should you approve that time extension? What will be the cost? What contract administrators should know

Doug Wass

A key part of the role of architects who act as contract administrators is to determine whether or not contractors are entitled to an extension of time for the completion of their works. This can be extremely complex, usually requiring the contract administrator to do two things.

First they must review the building contract and assess what events entitle the contractor to an extension of time if it delays the works. For example, while the building contract will almost certainly require the contractor to be granted an extension of time for delay caused by the instruction of additional works, it may not do so for delay caused by adverse weather conditions.

Secondly, they need to assess whether or not, as a matter of fact, a particular event has delayed the works. For example, while some information has been provided by the employer later than it should have been under the building contract, this may not do so for delay caused by adverse weather conditions.

In practice, most employers accept that extension of time claims are factually complex and that an adjudicator might reasonably take a different view to a contract administrator based on the same evidence. However, adjudication can be expensive and a contract administrator may find itself facing a claim from an employer to recover its costs if the adjudication resulted from the contract administrator making a decision without proper care or without keeping the records necessary to defend its decision.

Rejecting an application can result in the employer claiming liquidated damages from the contractor; and granting one can result in the contractor claiming costs incurred as a result of the delay from the employer.

Large sums of money often rest on the contract administrator’s decision. This is because rejecting an application can result in the employer claiming liquidated damages from the contractor; and granting one can result in the contractor claiming costs incurred as a result of the delay from the employer.

Given the impact liquidated damages and irrecoverable prolongation costs can have on cash flow for contractors, it is not surprising that they often seek to challenge adverse contract administrators’ adjudication decisions.

The short timescales available for adjudication proceedings (between 28 and 42 days unless both parties agree a longer period), mean that the employer usually has just 7-10 days to produce the evidence on which it wishes to rely in order to defend any claim for an extension of time. The employer must, therefore, usually rely almost entirely on the contract administrator being able to justify its decision rather than on independent programming experts – as might be the case in arbitration or court proceedings.

As a result, contract administrators should ensure that they keep a properly collated copy of all of the documentary evidence they have considered when making their decision; and a record of why they reached particular conclusions based on that evidence.

As well as enabling the employer to respond within the required timescales, a clear, concise and reasoned analysis from a contract administrator often gives the adjudicator an initial impression of a well-run project on which the contractor is being treated professionally and fairly. The importance of first impressions should not be underestimated in adjudication, given the short timescales within which parties have to change those impressions.

The term ADR (or alternative dispute resolution) is usually used to refer to all forms of dispute resolution which are cheaper and quicker alternatives to court and arbitration proceedings. Such alternatives include adjudication, mediation, conciliation, early neutral evaluation and dispute boards. The courts encourage parties to seek to resolve their disputes by ADR rather than incur the costs of court proceedings. Costs penalties are sometimes imposed on a party who the court considers has unreasonably refused an offer by another party to undertake a form of ADR.

Doug Wass is a partner at Macfarlanes LLP

IN PLAIN ENGLISH: ADR

The RIBA Journal March 2017
I NEED TO IMPROVE ROOM ACOUSTICS COST EFFICIENTLY

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Superior arguments

Fashion and equality suffer the same unisex problems

Google ‘1950s office’ and ‘1950s bedroom’ and the distinction is clear. The offices look like suits, the bedrooms like frilly dresses. One the dominion of men, the other of women. Today office design and bedroom design are much closer, even indistinguishable if the printer or pillows are out of frame. But they both look a lot more like the 1950s office and bedroom. Isn’t this the same unisexification we’re seeing in fashion? Again the message is that the traditionally masculine is suitable for all while the traditionally feminine is suitable only for women. Are we inadvertently propagating the hierarchy of masculine over feminine by plastering it all over our environment?

There’s an excuse about undecorated, honest modernity but this is just an excuse. The biscuit boys and their disciples are prolific purveyors of structurally irrelevant, environmentally questionable, style-led designs. Somewhere along the way, exploiting a material’s inherent properties and simply being able to see what something is made of became conflated. Just because you can see something is made of concrete and you’re getting all holier than thou about how it’s honestly expressing its concreteness, doesn’t mean that it should be made of concrete. Bricks are one of the worst offenders: structurally rubbish, embarrassingly unsustainable, and a relic of a time when being able to hold a bit of building in one hand was important in a way it’s not now. Yet bricks are still held in tremendously high esteem, not only on account of their heritage value, but ethically as a good honest material. This kind of ethical gazumping of style dressed up as integrity over pragmatics and environmental concerns is architecture’s equivalent to unisex over stilettos. The restrained and conservative aggressively denigrates the decorative, fancy designs supposed to be beneath our evolved selves. This argument is subjective at best.

Sure, patchy ideology presented as incontrovertible fact is evidently the order of the day at the moment. Subjective asser-
tions are taking the place of verified facts in all walks of life. This is not only a concern to world leaders. We’re all complicit, even lowly architects on lowly matters of style. From concrete to copper, materials we should altogether are still morally glorified. Couple our exposed material fetish with our lazy environmental jargon that lets us feel good about ourselves merely for being less bad (think 100% recyclable materials) and we’re talking about seriously distorted ethics. Is this unisex ‘truth to materials’ dross perpetuating the use of delicious concrete and glorious metals that offer deluxity of finish without girly decoration against. It also makes it easy to hide behind.

For decades, we architects and designers have been effusively rolling out unisex design under a false banner of material honesty. While the argument may be a little holey for some, it’s comfortable, certainly less contentious than gender issues. But what if it belies our saturating our environment with subliminal support for archaic gender hierarchies, not to mention damaging the environment? From concrete to copper, materials we should be minimising the use of (if not eliminating altogether) are still morally glorified. Couple our exposed material fetish with our lazy environmental jargon that lets us feel good about ourselves merely for being less bad (think 100% recyclable materials) and we’re talking about seriously distorted ethics. Is this unisex ‘truth to materials’ dross perpetuating the use of delicious concrete and glorious metals that offer deluxity of finish without girly decoration against? It also makes it easy to hide behind.

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Perhaps if we allowed ourselves the joy of ‘feminine’ extravagance we’d feel huge relief at the relaxing of an increasingly tenuous pretence and save the planet while satiating our thirst for aesthetic interest. Perhaps.

Maria Smith is director of architecture and engineering at Interrobang.
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Love, hate and speculation
The housing crisis is about more than supply and demand

The UK housing crisis is usually presented as a simple matter of supply and demand. Free up enough land and build enough homes of the right kind where people want to live – problem solved. That’s always the attitude: attention then shifts to the how and the where of it. But this is not just a matter of supply and demand, never has been. Overlaid on that are two other incredibly important factors: financial speculation and human emotion.

The government has produced a Housing White Paper. It describes the UK housing market as ‘broken’. Arguably it has been broken ever since, for reasons mainly of 1970s political ideology, councils largely ceased to be housing developers in their own right – so removing a huge chunk of provision from the economy that has never been satisfactorily replaced.

In this issue of the magazine (P63) you will find our economics guru Brian Green’s measured reading of the White Paper in which he finds a gleam of hope. For the RIBA, president-elect Ben Derbyshire’s official response (https://is.gd/ribawhitepaper) flags up the need to maintain good design – and space standards, hard fought-for and now coming under threat – while he suggests the government needs to look harder at ‘the future role of the Green Belt’. Controversial, and he knows this needs great care. Developers will always push to build on green or greenish land, often at low density, because that gives them maximum profits. Once the fields are gone, they are gone for ever. But not all Green Belt land is green.

Remember Spain and Ireland, where, in the last boom, vast amounts of new housing supply were fuelled by speculative investment. So the increased supply did not feed through to lower prices, quite the reverse – until the crash, which left ghost towns. We saw a less extreme UK version in the buy-to-let boom, oversupplying one kind of formula apartment, that also ground to a halt. So those who place all their trust in unfettered capitalism, beware. Speculators distort the market and do not automatically provide the necessary variety of homes and tenures. Similarly, shortage of supply does not prevent house-price crashes either: that’s something we’ve previously experienced in the UK. It’s all to do with market sentiment, which is as mysterious as the Holy Spirit.

The absolutely necessary emphasis on using brownfield land as much as possible is a given. Too many UK towns and cities see housing developers building gleefully over fields on the outskirts while available post-industrial sites in the centre remain unbuilt. That’s just stupid, weak planning control. But the nettle that needs to be grasped firmly and immediately is a radical densification of existing suburbia. This is tricky, as those already living in suburbia don’t like it. Here’s where human emotion comes in, and it’s understandable. But the suburbs must be densified, and this must be done well. Who have all the necessary, demonstrable skills to achieve this? Architects. •

Hugh Pearman
Editor

Once the fields are gone, they are gone for ever. But not all Green Belt land is green.

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Come into the garden village

... but it’s not as rosy as it sounds

Will Wiles

The term ‘garden village’ brings to mind the words ‘polite notice’. If you have to say it like that, do you really mean it? In the first days of January, the Department for Communities and Local Government announced the locations of 14 new ‘garden villages’ to supplement the ‘garden towns’ that have already been announced several times. ‘Garden villages’ were dreamed up by the Policy Exchange think tank – a housing pill for the Tories so small and floral-scented that even the nimbiest NIMBY might be able to swallow it.

The distinctive aspect of the scheme was that these would be distinct units with their own identity, not additions to existing towns or villages. This adds ‘far away’ to ‘small’ and ‘unobtrusive’, completing the holy trinity of NIMBY planning stipulations. But nevertheless we appear to have drifted fairly far from Ebenezer Howard’s original ‘Garden City’ vision, in which ‘city’ was at least as important as ‘garden’. It was not an escape from town to the country, but combined the better aspects of both. It was very much a place to work and spend money, not a distant dormitory. The out-of-town office park and industrial estate are as much a part of Howard’s legacy as Letchworth and Welwyn.

It’s too early to be entirely dismissive, but we can be reasonably certain that ‘garden village’ is a political euphemism. It is designed to soothe rather than enthuse, functionally identical to its conceptual predecessor, Labour’s ‘eco-towns’.

The ‘garden village’ announcement came at a time of anniversaries. Milton Keynes turned 50; the British science-fiction comic 2000AD turned 40; and my parents celebrated their ruby wedding. My long promised attic clearance for them on the occasion turned up boxes of 2000AD from the 1980s. Many of these would have been bought in nearby Milton Keynes at its annual comic sale.

The epitome of the bolder ‘new towns’ that followed the garden cities, Milton Keynes has spent its first half-century as a punchline, serving as a comedian’s archetype of a terrible place to live. Part of the problem was the name, Milton Keynes. It had that same whiff of euphemism. Too villagey, too gardeny. Its Englishness is a little off-the-shelf – not so much Bypass Vernacular as Civil Service Bucolia. This was at odds with my impression of it, formed entirely by the plaza approaching the central station, a wireframe isometric come to life. Somehow both flashy and restrained, it was a morsel of Superstudio dropped into Buckinghamshire. It was interesting, for a Briton accustomed to urban form as a matter of accretion and compromise, to look at a place planned from scratch. I couldn’t understand why the kind of generosity its boulevards and rain shelters showed towards pedestrians wasn’t more widespread.

Both utopian and provincial, Milton Keynes was a gift to 2000AD. In the strip ‘Strontium Dog’, for instance, Milton Keynes was the homeland of the mutant population of an irradiated, theocratic, mutant-hating Britain: a despised ghetto with a gleam of liberation and transgressive licence. Not quite the image that the Commission for New Towns was striving to project but a little more exotic and promising than the dreary image the town had unfairly acquired.

It was, however, still being played for laughs, and part of that problem must have been that mealy-mouthed name. Euphemism might soothe concerns, but it also throws a damp cloth on expectations. By contrast one of the newly announced settlements has the intriguing name ‘Infinity Garden Village’. If only 2000AD had been around 10 years earlier to give Milton Keynes’s planners some inspiration. We might have ended up with Mega Bucks One.

Will Wiles is a journalist and author. Read him here every other month and at ribaj.com

NEFARIOUS PLANNERS

I understand that Steve Bannon, President Trump’s chief strategist, has a degree in urban planning. Alongside a jolly interest in global religious war, this is a characteristic he shares with Mohamed Atta, one of the mass-murderers who struck the USA on 11 September 2001. At a time when the reputation of planning is at a fairly low ebb, this is the last thing the profession needed.
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Breaching the fortress

How can architects help mitigate the conflict between privacy and security?

Privacy is no longer a ‘social norm’
– Mark Zuckerberg

Security versus privacy must be one of the most critical debates of our times. But is one more important than the other? How much privacy are you willing to give up for security?

As architects, we use design choices to define privacy in our physical environments shaped by the cultural contexts and the preferences of our clients. With many people living in closer proximity to each other in packed urban locations, design becomes even more important in protecting privacy.

Research suggests that a hierarchy of spaces in the home is most appropriate with rooms for public, semi-private, private, and personal functions all delineated and zoned. What I find interesting about investigating privacy and security in architecture is the creativity with which it can be explored, researched and manipulated with everything from specification of building materials, to shape and form, to landscape used to create a perceived sense of privacy and separation.

Technology is forcing us however to become less private and less secure in our own homes in subtle and sometimes disturbing ways unrelated to the physical world which we as architects so carefully craft. It changes what it means to be private, and forces us perhaps to consider security first in this post truth age of growing uncertainty and insecurity. The Internet of Things (IoT) is growing every day, with 24 billion IoT or smart devices expected by 2020. This growth has benefits, simplifying everyday tasks like educational research or saving energy through insertion of smart meters and controls. But with benefit comes risk, since more connected devices give hackers and cyber criminals more entry points, increasing the danger that personal data is leaked and then traded. Walls thus no longer provide privacy.

Perhaps there is conflict between a building’s openness on the one hand and the reasonable control of access to it and to the detail of our lives on the other. What are the parameters for designing for privacy and security in the future?

Contemporary buildings celebrate openness, light and free-flowing movement. Designs that constrain and restrict are not high on the wishlists of owners and are rarely in the minds of their architects. In order to embed a comprehensive security perspective, we need to take into account the inter-relationships between buildings, technology, security and other equipment, and the routines and exceptional activities of their users. Careful design can reduce the incidence and fear of crime and increase the quality of life, but this will need specialist training.

Architects play a key role in shaping the environment and inserting the cues and signals that places and buildings send to their users and visitors. Whether a building feels safe, secure and comfortable reflects how well the architect understands the context, lifestyle and intended uses of the building over its lifetime, including increasingly its users’ relationships with the good and bad of the cyber world. That’s a growing responsibility, and one that we must both equip ourselves for and embrace.

I don’t know why people are so keen to put the details of their private life in public: they forget that invisibility is a superpower – Banksy

@JaneDuncan/PRIBA
“The planners had firm ideas for the finish. The brick had to be a light colour that would brighten up the area, so the products were chosen around that specification. They also had to be cost-effective and provide the lifespan that we required.”

Brad Coker - Project Director

After the London riots of 2011 the local council drew up a plan to transform Tottenham. The regeneration package known as “A Plan for Tottenham” was ambitious and key site Brook House was one of the first milestones in the 15-year programme...

With the largest of the blocks rising 21-storeys in an area of low and mid-rise buildings, the site is a very visible representation of the transformation of the area.

The point of all the works taking place is to breathe new life into Tottenham, making it a sought-after place to live and work, and as a result the planners had very specific ideas on how the new buildings should look.
Friedrich Ludewig revels in internationalism – his own, his employees’, his practice’s. In a changing world how does Acme adapt to survive and grow?

Words: Isabelle Priest  Portrait: Dennis Gilbert

No stranger abroad

When the government announced its intention last autumn to make companies declare and publish their foreign workers, Friedrich Ludewig, director of Acme Architects, based in London’s Shoreditch, did just that. He reviewed the practice’s ‘About’ section on its website and added a list of all employees past and present in a proud display of diversity.

The exercise revealed troughs and peaks of different nationalities arriving to work in London that correlated with economic shifts elsewhere: the Spanish crisis, Greek crisis, Italian crisis. But being from Germany and a student in 1990s Berlin, he remembered when British architects in the depth of recession here sought to do the same thing there.

Ludewig is a German-born architect from Lübeck, who through searching for the best tutors for his higher education ended up in the UK – he studied, worked and stayed. We’re sitting in the library of his spacious two-floor office near Old Street roundabout. Around us is a substantial collection of architecture books arranged by country, the odd couture book or artist monograph slipped in. We’ve walked through a Alice in Wonderland foyer/lunch space to get here, drawn along by soft light seeping through layers of rippling off-white full-length curtains in the distant corner.

That entrance space has gloomth and is filled with an assortment of textures, colours and objects that provide inspiration. Dried eucalyptus leaves and flowers hang from the ceiling, a huge vase overflowing with fresh mimosa sits on a museum cabinet stuffed with models and building part prototypes. Vintage cut glass bowls and cake stands line shelves above a wall of gold fitted cabinets and a mirror splash-back. Unfolded golden heat blankets above the work surface rustle when anyone walks past. The bespoke coffee machine has pride of place in the middle.

Ludewig has a definite sheepishness about him. He shuffles around, hands in his pockets, and is reluctant to smile even if you can see he wants to. His lurid gold shoes shine loudly, and his lime green jumper is made of such a curious plasticky material that it is impossible not to keep looking at it. He’s masterfully in control. He knows his office is pretty genius and strange – beyond the entrance there’s a miniaturised operatic handmade timber stair to the studio upstairs.

Ludewig decided he wanted to be an architect aged six as he ‘really liked making sandcastles’. Having settled that, he spent the rest of his youth being a film projectionist, selling ice creams, restoring furniture and making jewellery – all before the age of 16.

‘I don’t think my pocket money was particularly plentiful,’ he jokes.

At 18, he went to study architecture in Berlin, explaining ‘1995 was an interesting time to be in Berlin. Renzo Piano was doing Potsdamer Platz, Libeskind had won the Jewish Museum. Grimshaw was building the Stock Exchange, and Foster was building the Reichstag. Matthias Sauerbruch and Louisa Hutton [who became Ludewig’s tutors] had just won the GSW Building and moved from the Architectural Association.’

When that stopped around 1999 – ‘as it became obvious there were no tenants because most people had gone to West Germany for the jobs’ – Ludewig decided to ‘get out’ too. Farshid Moussavi and Alejandro Zaera-Polo had won the Yokohama Ferry Terminal project as Foreign Office Architects four years earlier. He had been recommended to go to the AA where they were teaching and felt that they would be a more natural fit. Over the next seven years he worked for FOA in Tokyo and London, on projects in Leicester (John Lewis), London and Istanbul.
Friedrich Ludewig, director of Acme, in the practice’s idiosyncratic entrance, gathering and kitchen space.
Once described as a ‘star in the making’ at the AA, Ludewig set up Acme in 2007. So what of the architecture?

Acme’s first project was a small house extension, which the practice was careful not to get published as it was worried about being typecast. When asked to describe his architecture Ludewig insists it is specific to place, a kind of subverted vernacular: ‘We would love people not to say “that is a building by Acme”, but rather that it is a building that makes sense in Norfolk or Kent, or wherever. I don’t find it hard to do this, though some people in the office do. I really enjoy working with the quirkiness of materiality that you find if you spend more than five minutes anywhere.

‘If you go to Norfolk, they do all kinds of weird stuff in flint,’ he summarises in his quickly spoken voice. ‘They’re really good at it and have done it for more than 500 years. They also like to use black timber. And in Kent they do oast houses and think that’s normal. Oast houses are not normal to me, they are really awkward – everything is round.’

Ornament is what sets Acme’s architecture apart; Ludewig believes that it generates space and activity. He has fought for it on his several retail projects – Watermark West Quay in Southampton, Robina and Eastland centres in Australia – and says that developers still don’t allow enough of it. At Victoria Gate in Leeds (RIBAJ December 2016) the practice enjoyed working with brick in different ways, as well as exploring a 21st century version of the shopping arcade.

Yet despite the ornament and contextualisation – demonstrated for example in its Chester city centre masterplan, now in planning – Ludewig doesn’t think ‘a style verging on PoMo’ is a useful reference, seeing that as an academic exercise disconnected from place.

Rather nationality and language are at the centre of what Acme does. Ludewig explains that’s how his practice became so international so quickly. The first year of starting out in practice felt like ‘life was your oyster’, but 12 months later banks were collapsing and economies were on the brink.

‘Our way of dealing with it was to expand internationally,’ explained Ludewig.

With competition from other London practices, Acme used the resources it had available: its people – native speakers from places other practices couldn’t reach. It exhausted competitions in areas such as Colombia and South Korea. Celebrating its 10th birthday this year, that’s how a young Acme won projects in places like Russia and Bahrain and has already worked on major projects in 10 different countries. It grew through the credit crunch and now employs around 65 people. Like others, though, Ludewig struggles to know how to gear up to run a large practice – which he attributes to being descended from a long line of former OMA employees.

Such an international office does, however, have drawbacks – mainly that people arrive planning to stay only a few years. Ludwig
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With satellite offices in Berlin and Sydney, both set up in the past three years to ‘keep a closer eye on contractors’, is Ludewig saying the office might not stay in the UK forever?

‘We weren’t even thinking about this a year ago,’ he says. ‘It’s a great shame for London.’

On closer inspection, there’s a temporariness to Acme’s office – little is built-in. It gives the worrying impression that one day employees might turn up to find it has been packed up and shipped off elsewhere, with just a ghost of office remaining to please international clients.

‘Clients are happy to come to London. That’s the biggest thing,’ he says, citing a client who recently turned up from Pakistan. ‘We haven’t built much in London, but getting international work is easier here. There are better architects in Berlin who have not done so well because it has a local context, which is very hard to create in London.’

What for the future? As Acme’s etymology says: ‘be the best possible’. I’d add: ‘rule nothing out’.

Ludewig with colleague Stefano Dal Piva, who has also worked at FOA, in one of the upstairs studio meeting spaces.
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Step inside

Full size recreations rethink architectural shows and invite visitors in at The Japanese House exhibition

Pamela Buxton

The problem with architecture exhibitions is that rather than experience the buildings, you’re peering at models and images, however compelling these may be. Not so the Barbican’s enticing-sounding show on the Japanese house, which opens later this month complete with a full size recreation of a Tokyo house and a specially-commissioned tea house by Terunobu Fujimori, both somehow squeezed into the gallery.

‘I wanted to rethink the architecture exhibition,’ says curator Florence Ostende. ‘I wanted to have faith in the materiality of what the architect creates.’

The house she’s recreating is particularly special. Ostende describes the Moriyama House, by the Office of Ryue Nishizawa (2005), as one of the most important of the 21st century. Rather than a single house it could more accurately be described as an assemblage of 10 domestic units – one simply houses a shower – scattered in a garden to create an anarchic, mini-neighbourhood. Visitors to the exhibition can wander around its components and see a film about the house and its owner, Mr Moriyama, who commissioned it so he could rent out some of the units and retire.

‘He’s a very quiet man – he lives as a bit of an urban hermit. He has a beautiful way of occupying the units, like choreography,’ says Ostende, adding that the collection of buildings has become a portrait of Moriyama.

This exhibition, created with the help of chief advisor Yoshiharu Tsukamoto of Tokyo practice Atelier Bow-Wow, is the first major survey of the Japanese post-war house and features the work of approximately 40 architects. Told in 10 thematic sections that will unfold around the 1:1 exhibits, the show’s angle is the way that domestic architecture has responded to changes in societal and family structures over 70 years by proposing new, often radical types of domestic environment. It’s a story of experimentation, no doubt spurred on by the extraordinarily short lifespan of the average house in Tokyo – just 26 years.

In the first decades after the war, as Tokyo was rebuilt and the urgent need for housing addressed, the architectural focus was on the debate between tradition and modernity. By the 1960s and 70s figures such as Kazuo Shinohara were beginning to question the focus on mass-produced housing and explore more adventurous forms, helped by a creative use of reinforced concrete. In his 1962 manifesto ‘A House is a Work of Art’ Shinohara explored the idea of a large home as a personal art form in opposition to the more compact and functional housing of the day. It is this concept in particular that Ostende hopes visitors to the
The exhibition will take away with them. The exhibition includes work from the metabolism movement of the 1960s – including by Kisho Kurokawa and Kenzo Tange – which explored the idea of architecture and cities as living organisms. By the 1970s, pressure on land led to ingenious solutions for slim sites. It also prompted ever-sprawling suburbs, and the rise of the capsule hotel for workers who weren’t able to return home every night. The exhibition will include some of the bunker-like homes of the time, such as Toyo Ito’s introspective White U (1976), which turns its back on the expanding city to create a highly insular environment.

Other projects questioned gender stereotypes such as Ito’s Pao: Dwellings for the Tokyo Nomad Woman (1985). Designed for the liberated woman-about-town, this takes the form of a fabric tent containing three nomadic settings for ‘intelligence’, ‘styling’ and ‘snack’.

The show also includes more recent examples of architects who have instead been exploring openness and lightness. Tezuka Architects’ Roof House (2001) uses the single storey house’s roof as one of the main living areas. And Sou Fujimoto Architects’ House NA (2011), is as far away from the bunker-approach as one could get – a completely glass-walled house with a stacked, platform-like structure that has minimal barriers between residents and the city, opening up their lives to the city, and the city to them.

Privacy issues within houses are tackled in different ways. Kazuyo Sejima’s House in a Plum Grove (2003) for example, a small home for a three-generational family, is a series of nested spaces, one just large enough to contain one bed exactly, that meets the differing privacy needs of the various residents.

The Japanese domestic house is still evolving in many directions. Looking ahead, there are even signs of interest in renovation rather than the usual new build, says Ostende.

While visitors will find much to engage with in the thematic displays, it’s the two houses that inevitably will initially grab attention. Within the gallery, the Moriyama House is being reconstructed at a 1:1 scale up to three storeys high but built in timber rather than in its original materials. Where it encounters an inconvenient structural element, the house is simply revealed in section.

While the Moriyama installation is all about structure, the tea-house, created with students from Kingston University, is more concerned with materiality and craft. It will be clad in charred timber, the dark exterior contrasting with the white plaster of the interior. The tea house will be open to visitors, six at a time, with a number of tea ceremonies taking place throughout the exhibition to give visitors the full architecture + tea experience. Sounds like a good way to round off what promises to be a stimulating show – save a place on the tatami for me.
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Richard Burton
1933 – 2017

ABK founder partner, best known for the British Embassy in Moscow, public housing – and of course the National Gallery Extension design that famously drew Prince Charles’ ire

Richard Burton met Peter Ahrends and Paul Koralek at the Architectural Association in 1951, when the three students vowed to form a practice. This they did in 1961: when Ahrends designed a house in Devon, Koralek won a competition for a library at Trinity College Dublin and Burton secured a commission through his mother’s third husband for the Kasmin Gallery – described as the trendiest gallery in Bond Street. The partnership lasted until 2012 and the three remained friends thereafter, surely a record.

Burton’s father was half-Irish and the manager of the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street. Richard was introduced to architecture through his grandmother, who commissioned FRS Yorke to build a modernist house, Torilla, and his mother’s second husband, Gerald Barry, director general of the Festival of Britain.

As students ABK shared an enthusiasm for Frank Lloyd Wright, then newly fashionable and most influential on the house Burton built for himself in Kentish Town in 1986–8. The practice perhaps never bettered Trinity College Library, but in the 1960s it designed many fine buildings for higher education. Powell & Moya passed on two jobs to Burton as a former assistant – he readily acknowledged how much he learned from Hidalgo Moya’s attention to detailing. ABK’s brutalist Chichester Theological College was followed by an expansive business in Oxford, built in seven phases by Burton between 1967 and 1990. Unusually, all three partners were designers, but Burton’s compositions are distinctive for often being broken down into segments.

Burton was also the partner who specialised in public housing. When in 1968 ABK was commissioned to design 1344 housing units in Chalvedon, Basildon, Burton employed a social psychologist to interview the first residents, whose findings informed simpler planning and cheaper heating for the later phases. This led to a second neighbourhood, Felmore, commissioned in 1974 and the first major housing project in Britain designed around energy conservation, with heavy insulation for the time. It led to Burton’s appointment to the RIBA’s first energy initiative and his chairmanship of its low-energy group.

ABK struggled after the Prince of Wales criticised its competition winning design for an extension to the National Gallery. Ahrends turned to teaching and Koralek to work in Ireland, while Burton designed St Mary’s Hospital, Newport, Isle of Wight. This was a rarity among hospitals for its good looks, where energy was recycled and its shiny steel cladding reflected heat on warm days while bouncing light into the wards.

Burton also took charge of ABK’s last major commission, when it was invited in 1988 to design the British Embassy in Moscow. This was an opportunity for public redemption after the National Gallery and to connect with his Russian roots – he may have appeared the perfect English gentleman, but in fact his mother was Russian, Vera Poliakoff, who acted under the stage name Vera Lindsay. He designed a series of separate pavilions housing residential and office accommodation linked by high-level bridges, rich in detail and with the ceremonial spaces filled by specially commissioned furniture and works of art. His own house was similarly a series of pavilions, designed for energy efficiency and regularly opened for Open House. Its greatest feature was a south-facing conservatory that stored heat in winter and shielded the house in summer.

Burton retired in 2002, but remained involved with Hooke Park, Dorset, where he designed two buildings for the Parnham Trust set up to research the sustainable use of timber. He was instrumental in saving the estate and securing it for the Architectural Association.

In 1956 he married Mireille Dernbach, daughter of the sculptor Jupp Dernbach-Mayen; they had four children. •

Elain Harwood
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Care about your RIBAJ? There’s still time to join our reader panel and get your voice heard

Hugh Pearman

Our aim at the RIBAJ 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 to guide us in what we cover and how we cover it.

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Our report on the state of Hull in its City of Culture Year (P54) won approval online…
David Atkinson
@DavidAtkinson
A thoughtful piece on Hull’s gradual transformation as UK City of Culture 2017 (and why it wasn’t so bad anyway…)

Jane Duncan’s President’s Debate on the gender imbalance in architecture stimulated discussion…
Robert Corr
@RoyGeddesBricks
30 yrs in and it’s changing far too slowly. Inequality still prevails

But anyone can be a Future Leader as our article on the RIBA’s role models (February issue) demonstrated…
Tom Foggin
@tfoggin
Being a leader doesn’t require a promotion – it’s a mindset. Great @RIBAJ article setting the scene for @RIBA’s #FutureLeaders 2017 series!

Our columnist-provocateur Maria Smith (P69) got ‘em going with her warning vision of a future profession (Feb issue)…
Atomik Architecture
@AtomikArch
Death Wish? @Mariaisasmith article in the @RIBAJ is a real blast – cheered us up no end

And a lot of the social media action this month concerned the announcement of the MacEwen Award winners. Here’s a generous response from one of our much-admired shortlisted practices:
Invisible Studio
@invisiblestudio
@RIBAJ thank you! We’ll take that. And you picked a worthy winner in the brilliant ‘Point’ for the #ribajmacewen
John Donat is revered for his humane, photojournalistic approach to architectural photography, but when he accepted a commission from Peter Palumbo in 1968 he was required to embrace a different technique.

The property developer required a series of images to support his controversial proposal to build an office block designed by Mies van der Rohe on Mansion House Square. Donat used photomontage, fittingly a method Mies himself had employed to visualise his designs for a Berlin skyscraper in 1921, to show the unbuilt glass and steel tower in situ – and worked painstakingly to achieve a high degree of realism. Despite the scheme’s eventual rejection, Palumbo declared Donat’s work a ‘brilliant presentation, which could not have been bettered’.

The project earned Donat a reputation as a skilled practitioner of montage photography and he was later appointed to similarly represent the competition entries for London’s National Gallery extension. These included the design by ABK which famously attracted Prince Charles’ ire. Donat, with characteristic humour, composed a satirical business card describing himself as ‘By Royal Dis-Appointment / Monstrous Carbuncles and Giant Stumps a Speciality’.

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