Out of the darkness
Adjaye sets his museum of African American culture at the USA’s symbolic heart

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All that glitters is not gold – well of course not, we know that from a thousand chocolate coins. But magicked up from behind your ear or discovered at the bottom of a Christmas stocking it still provokes a smile. Hung in Victoria Gate, Leeds, gold lanterns give a sparkling glow reflected in the curvaceous glass. The copper and gold (and occasionally bronze) highlights of the last few years could be read as a reaction to austerity, they certainly have a warming metallic fire that reassures you all is well with the world. And when politics is throwing you a curveball and the value of Stirling and the dollar are fluctuating, perhaps a little gold is what we need.

Looking up at the ceiling and lights at ACME’s Victoria Gate, Leeds, page 18.
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Perhaps it’s the uncanny familiarity of Frank Gehry’s plan that accounts for Fernando Alda’s fascination with the atrium of Panama’s Biomuseo: it echoes the Dukes of Medinaceli’s 16th century palace in the architectural photographer’s home city of Seville in Spain. Like Gehry’s first Latin American building, that too enjoys cool, spacious, high reception halls all accessed off a central court; a formal place of display for family and, in the case here, of state. The dukes’ visits to the Holy Land and their palace’s proximity to the route of the famous Holy Week pilgrimage saw it gain the moniker, over time, of ‘Pilate’s House’ – a presumed copy of the Jerusalem original.

There was no washing of hands on this project though. Gehry, whose wife is Panamanian, was emotionally committed to the $60m museum; an angular form of fragmented, folded, brightly coloured roofs that stare out over the Amador Causeway to Panama City’s towers. Alda says he’s not particularly a Gehry fan but is struck by how photogenic his buildings are – and he was keen to document a less obvious interior view rather than the iconic exteriors the architect is famous for.

Alda was transfixed by tropical light bleeding onto the fractured soffits of its central space, held up by steel branches springing from concrete ‘trees’.

The many colours of the roofs’ exterior must have appealed to Alda’s painterly side – commercial photography originally supported his attempts to be artist. Then, needing to settle a fee with an architect who did some work on his studio, he shot the practice’s buildings as a means of paying it, something that launched his career. An ancient form of barter? Thirty pieces of silver? Either way, unlike Pilate, he never had cause to regret his decision.
What’s new under the roof?

John Pawson and OMA have shaped a spacious new building beneath Kensington’s famous hyperbolic paraboloid. Can the new Design Museum pull in the crowds it needs?

Words: Hugh Pearman
The new £83 million Design Museum in Kensington inhabits the ‘bastard’ hyperbolic paraboloid form of the grade II*-listed 1962 former Commonwealth Institute by the original RMJM, but this is anything but a refurbishment. Beneath that roof – expensively suspended in the air like an umbrella during construction while its interior was totally eviscerated and a large basement dug beneath it – is a brand new building, including the walls.

The whole thing is now a symmetrical square-plan discrete object but originally it also had a rectangular brick-and-concrete brutalist administration wing slicing across its western corner. Its listed landscape setting by Dame Sylvia Crowe has also vanished, beneath the three Portland stone-clad OMA ultraprive apartment blocks (‘Holland Green’) that have helped to pay for the new museum. And yet, while it has changed radically, it has not changed utterly. The place still has plenty of character. This is quite some achievement.

Some of this is down to OMA which was in overall charge of the whole development, and the rest is down to the interior architecture of John Pawson. Externally, for instance, what

**Left** Orthogonal, meet swoopy: Pawson’s oak-lined top floor celebrates the original Commonwealth Institute roof.

**Below** John Pawson’s sketch is all about the existing roof.
were originally concrete-block walls with opaque blue-glass cladding are now concrete-framed with translucent cladding, the blue tint achieved with fritting. The quality of landscape, though there is less of it, is good and there are echoes of the old place – such as clusters of the original commonwealth-nations flagpoles and fountains in the new entrance plaza. And although the building is now partially masked from the street by the new blocks, it does peep through because those blocks are arranged on the same grid, at 45 degrees to the street.

Inside, it’s all about lashings of circulation space. Pawson has stayed true to the principle of this being an atrium building rising to the underside of the roof with its clerestory glazing: it’s just that his atrium is rectilinear rather than curvy. There is so much space, indeed, that this almost seems an over-reaction to the problem of the previous Design Museum in Bermondsey with its tight little lobby. In contrast, the Kensington version, at three times the floorspace overall, positively sprawls. Pawson clearly sees the place as a public agora. Everywhere there are wooden benches – and leather ones, in the case of the grand staircase rising from the entrance hall, which doubles as informal auditorium seating. This is a space one can readily imagine being used for fashion shows. There’s a café and a shop on this level, and Pawson has come up with a rather elegant solution to the security-shutter problem in such places for after-hours events: the shop can be sealed off from the main space by a gold-filigree curtain that is tougher than it looks.

As for the galleries, there are three: one in the basement, one on the ground floor and one for the permanent collection on the top (second) floor. A fourth, highly flexible large ‘events space’ that can be divided up in various ways, is served by the museum’s goods lift and is capable of staging pop-up...
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exhibitions – although its primary purpose is to be rented out. A 200-seat auditorium in the basement is also aimed as much at the conference trade as at design events. As well as the café there is the new Conran-run ‘Parabola’ restaurant on level 2 – successor to the Blueprint Café in the old place – and a decent-sized members’ room. There’s also a separate design shop out towards the High Street on the ground level of one of the apartment blocks.

The museum needs to generate a lot of money by these various means because it will cost a lot to run. I was amazed by the size of the administration office, which looks like a large architects’ studio and houses an 80-strong staff – rising to 120 with volunteers. Will enough design-curious people make it out to this end of Kensington to justify the overheads? Well, the plan is for up to 60,000 school pupils a year: they get a dedicated entrance, and the first-floor education rooms are scaled accordingly.

Pawson is known as a minimalist but here, though restrained as ever, he is scarcely extreme. His materials are few and good: terrazzo flooring below, pale oak above, along with oak wall linings and bespoke furniture – loose furniture being from Vitra. Then there is the woodwool, the original lining to large parts of the roof soffit, once memorably described by Design Museum director Deyan Sudjic as ‘a material that has the same relationship to architecture as Spam has to cuisine’. The woodwool had to stay for listed-building reasons. If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em, reasoned Pawson, who has accordingly introduced new woodwool ceiling slabs in many other areas, ranging from a pale colour to harmonise with the timber in galleries to a

Will enough design-curious people make it out to this end of Kensington to justify the overheads?
black version in the members’ room.

There is also a design library and large archive storage for the collection, which you can gaze down at through a glazed wall. There’s a studio for a designer-in-residence, a digital design studio – all the nice things for such a place to have which were conspicuously absent in the first incarnation of the Design Museum.

Finally, here and there throughout the building are tantalising reminders of the building’s past – such as period stained glass in one section plus historic photos (rather lost at one end of the shop), a restored world map of the Commonwealth, a section of original textured plasterwork behind a reception desk, those flagpoles outside. Visitors will be handed a leaflet explaining the building’s history. But really, having seen the place when it was functioning as the Commonwealth Institute with its tacky displays, it was always all about the roof, Stirrat Johnson-Marshall’s ‘tent in the park’. It still is all about the roof, which is just as well since just about everything else has been replaced.

Luckily, though ‘bastard’ rather than pure, that roof has enormous visual strength. Beneath it, the sequence of spaces is generous, on a properly civic scale. Will the crowds flock there? We shall see – and we’ll be reviewing the opening exhibitions separately – but if they do, they will be impressed.

Credits
Design team John Pawson, Arup, Chapman BDSP
Developer Chelsfield Developments with Ilchester Estates
Developer’s design team OMA, Allies and Morrison, West 8, Arup and AECOM

Above left The roof structure is almost all that remains of the original building but it is made the most of.
Above Original stained glass is reinstated in the shop, though you’d easily miss it.
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The diagrid roof and patterns of the arcade are given more expansive expression in the cladding on the John Lewis store.

Syncopated brick and terracotta opposite Kirkgate Market leading down to the John Lewis store, which reads, externally, as quite a different language.

ACME’s Victoria Gate scheme at the unfashionable end of Leeds rejects the traditional approach to shopping arcades to create a somewhere place with big ambitions.

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Jack Hobhouse
A lot is talked about nowhere places. The airport, motorway services, the shopping mall. People often go through them, spending money en route to a somewhere place. Somewhere that stimulates their senses with wind in their hair, complex streets, great views, places as experience, as entertainment. But we don’t seem to demand that beauty and detail in our shops in our home towns.

Of course some shops have made more of the place they are in (Liverpool One) or are a performance in themselves (Libeskind’s Westside in Bern comes to mind). But new shopping developments are designed first and foremost to serve the retailer itself – which usually has a national brand to be applied. Once inside the mall you normally have to stretch your neck up to the roof for a sense of unity, character and place.

Victoria Gate, remarkably, has all those things from the moment you enter, although it is essentially a 5300m² loop of new shops in Leeds, with casino and restaurants above, John Lewis and a multi-storey car park.

It is designed by ACME, which was responsible for the charred timber-clad Hunsett Mill on the Norfolk Broads. Leeds is its first big project, and it has been working on it for years. It started by winning a competition for a landmark John Lewis store; this was followed by a masterplan, initially with Benoy, and two more competition successes. ACME found itself designing a full shopping mall. Some years ago, as the scheme was emerging, the excitement of ACME director Friedrich Ludewig at the idea of designing an arcade for Leeds – a city of arcades – was tangible. But that is how he talks – fast and excitedly – could it really be that this was indeed something special?

If ACME had fresh ideas to bring to the mall typology, it also had the benefit of working with a developer whose experience gave it the confidence to be ambitious. Hammerson’s aim to push Leeds up to number three in the UK’s retail rankings may not thrill – but is something it has a record in doing. Its portfolio includes Brent Cross in north London, and more recently Cabot Circus in Bristol with Chapman Taylor (an uncomfortable zoo of styles) including the beautiful stone facade of its House of Fraser store by Stanton Williams. It commissioned Birmingham’s new

Hammerson aims to push Leeds up to number three in the UK’s retail rankings
Bullring too, with its airy, if bland, routes to the silver-disked icon of Future Systems’ Selfridges. And Ludewig has some history with the developer, having worked with it on Leicester’s Highcross shopping scheme when he was with Foreign Office Architects.

Hammerson has a big stake in making Victoria Gate a success. In 2012, while it was still in planning, the firm bought the Victoria Quarter next door. With a remarkably high spend per visitor (perhaps partly due to Victorian theatre architect Frank Matcham’s designs for some of its impressive arcades) this makes a springboard for the ambitious plan spelt out in the brief delivered to ACME by Hammerson director of retail development Robin Dobson. Calling for the largest premium retail leisure destination in the north of England, with buildings of ‘architectural merit’ and ‘places people want to be in’, it is a brief that could result in a theme park as easily as a building of quality. The upsurge in the talk of ‘experience’ must play a part here.

I walked to Victoria Gate through the city’s famed, ornate arcades that weave glittering ribbons through city blocks. I browsed the down at heel Kirkgate Market, where rolls of cheap wrapping paper jostle with the Josephine hair braiding salon and stalls have LPs for a pound stacked in plastic boxes. I strolled the busy high street and the echoingly empty Trinity Leeds with its oversized glass canopies – three layers with bridges, roof, Next and Fossil. You might argue Leeds has more than enough shops already – over 1,000 in a city of 750,000.

But Victoria Gate is alive and buzzing with people. No chance of a quiet moment to stop and work out what it is about ACME’s simple list of arcade attributes that brings magic to it. Is it those curving glass facades that draw the eye seductively on? The way you linger a little on the detail as the black of the fascias at the base meets a herringbone of grey granite lengths that break up and intensify towards the threshold of each shop? The two routes that invitingly drop away from the Harwood Street entrance, following the lie of the land, their curves echoed by the gold pendant lamps dropping from the roof (and what lamps, 1.5m tall, all singing all dancing in gold)? Is it the diagrid of the roof that reads as delicate diamonds from the ground floor? The care that offsets the lack of natural light to the north arcade – buried under the casino – by the lighting behind the

IN NUMBERS

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<td>110,000m²</td>
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Left 500,000 bricks, erected as panels, went into giving the facade depth.

Above right A backlit light scoop adds interest to the northern arcade; a glass roof was not possible as a casino sits above this arcade.
The weight and materiality of the buildings reinforces the sense that this a serious, engaged part of the city.

Glass, and a dramatic scoop which does reach the sky? Modulation, rhythm and materiality combine and retail is subservient to the space which has a unity of its own, not through stripping back but by glamming up. And though you can imagine it being copied less convincingly elsewhere, at the moment this is uniquely Leeds.

There is still an element of the ersatz. The pattern moulded in glass reinforced gypsum on the upper level hints at this. Add lift music and casino signage (yet to be installed) and you might stop believing in the whole thing. But once you step outside, the weight and materiality of the buildings reinforces the sense that this a serious, engaged part of the city.

Victoria Gate sits where the shopping runs out as it meets the A61. Two large sites were assembled, one each side of the less desirable end of The Headrow, where it becomes Eastgate. It is the southern side which has been completed. ACME took brick and Portland stone and a certain preciousness at the corners as a guide.
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from The Headrow’s civic institutions, which were developed to a Reginald Blomfield masterplan from the 1920s. The Portland stone became precast and is the panellised structure on which the bricks and terracotta are embedded. Brick is stacked in dentate piers in a stock more familiar on driveways – one that can cope with water sitting on it. Onto The Headrow this is given a serious, but syncopated, facade above a white concrete ground floor, white ribs and mullions of concrete taking over at corners and entrances with calm intensity. It works, somehow, with The Headrow’s neo-classicism. The market facade is more Victorian and more fun. A black concrete base and the same brick piers are turned into a tall tap dance of rhythm and texture with terracotta. These are the warm up to the declamatory diagrid of the John Lewis. Ribs of heaving white concrete, the angles faintly recalling those of the John Lewis logo, stand proud in the city. There is sparkle with polished main ribs and acid-etched infills; a little colour may be added in the form of terracotta but this is still in negotiation. There are some oddities. One corner is just a plant screen though you wouldn’t know it – the louvres are vertical. Air handling units sit on their appropriate floors to avoid risers. A large cantilever keeps the building clear of delivery lorries while another corner is deeply cut away to allow a long-planned tram route. The car park itself was an unexpected encore, replacing a police station, its metal twists a landmark for drivers cutting through the city on the A61.

Ludewig has a long held desire to bridge this divisive road, pulling out the city centre even further out to the West Yorkshire Playhouse and Northern Ballet. A planned hotel on the Hammerson site would help. He and Hammerson also have aspirations for Kirkgate Market, though with only advocacy to drive them. Ludewig is convinced that market traders will grasp the opportunity of a ready stream of John Lewis customers to tempt them with higher quality fruit and veg, but the current neglected state of the market makes this look optimistic.

But then designing glamorous, grounded new arcades in Leeds was optimistic. Especially when it was always going to be design and build – interestingly operated with some of ACME client side, some working direct for Sir Robert McAlpine. Hammerson’s Dobson admits that the level of detail required different thinking. The dusted joints between precast panels were a case in point. Instead of looking shiny and plasticky and, well, like silicone, ACME worked with Techcrete to give them an appearance more like grout with crushed concrete powder, experimenting and experimenting until it became clear a sieve was needed to ensure the crushings were small enough to stay in place. Client and contractor bore with this uncertain process. And so another detail is ironed out and the facades can sing, along with their glittering arcades.

Modulation, rhythm and materiality combine and retail is subservient to the space which has a unity of its own, not through stripping back but by glamming up...
A bloodied crown

David Adjaye’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington makes a powerful statement in a country facing political and social realignments

Words: Beatrice Galilee  Photographs: Alan Karchmer

There are ticket touts lingering outside the museum, calling optimistically at the early morning queue for spares. The line of patient ticket holders bends around and down the Washington Mall as hundreds line up past a seemingly endless procession of pale, statuesque beaux art museum facades to the grand and vast new David Adjaye-designed National Museum of African American Culture in the near distance, its serrated ziggurat facade in the clearest contrast to all that surrounds it. There are whispers that there are no more tickets available until spring. These jostling queues are as much of a statement in this sedate and stoic scene as the building they are lining up to visit.

In the shadow of The Lincoln Memorial, the Capitol building and Maya Lin’s extraordinary Vietnam Veteran’s memorial, not to mention the White House
where the country’s first African American president is completing his second term, it is hard to overstate how much this museum is asked to do both spatially and historically in this loaded city.

Among the most famous monuments of this country, this new building must try and tell a history of a people that is often so devastating that the architecture’s efforts to hold one’s gaze is fundamentally tested by the shame and sorrow that this story must be told. In that context, and despite some frustrating moments, there is no doubt that this is a monument that, like those others, should be visited by every American citizen. Indeed, as time passes, it will.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture is the last building that will be built on The Mall. It contains 36,000 items that trace the journey of African Americans from slavery in the 1800s to the civil rights movement in the 20th century, and is the first significant building of the 21st century in this city. It is the last to complete the Mall’s 200-year-old masterplan and after a sequence of prim and tidy monuments, it is an extraordinarily vivid and powerful sight.

Spatially, one must first address the impact of the volume, colour and form of the building. It was designed by a consortium of firms led by David Adjaye, working with Philip Freelon and the engineer Guy Nordenson. Adjaye has made much of the fact that the final finish is not his first choice of material, that he would have preferred true bronze to this more muted umber – aluminium coated with a bronze alloy finish – which is in some lights redolent of Herzog and de Meuron’s Basel signal box; in other, late afternoon light, an illuminated orange-gold. From a distance the burnished metallic wrap around the building seems to appear to form the structure, but it is a screen whose repeating metal patterns pay homage to a strong tradition in metalsmithing among African American freed slaves and their impact on the architecture of their time.

Firmly part of the UK ‘starchitect’ circuit, David Adjaye can see his experience and reputation in...
IN NUMBERS
$540m project cost
39,000 m² floor space
10 storeys
3 firms of architects
61m length of entrance porch

Right: The entrance sequence up to the gallery levels on the west side of the building.
Credits
Client Smithsonian Institution NMAAHC
Architectural team Adjaye Associates (lead), Davis Brody Bond, The Smith Group JJJR, Freelon Group
Structural engineer Guy Nordenson & Associates, Silman & Associates
MEP FP WSP F+K
Civil engineer RK+K
General contractor CSR
Facade Heintges + Associates

Entrance level plan
1 History gallery
2 Contemplative court
3 Opera Winfrey Theatre
4 Cafeteria
5 Loading dock
6 Atrium
7 Gift shop
8 Orientation theatre
9 Porch
10 Education Center
11 Culture Gallery
12 Offices
13 Community Gallery

First floor plan

Third floor plan

The RIBA Journal December 2016
It was hard to prepare spatially or emotionally for the depth of suffering evocatively displayed in the lower ground level as part of the historical galleries. This part had its own very long queue system and inside, visitors clapped their hands to their mouths as they saw artifacts from slave auctions and watched film footage of a civil rights march where the protesters wore signs on their chests reading ‘I am a Man’. The images are unnervingly familiar in an age and a country where many chunks of the population take issue with the statement and movement ‘Black Lives Matter’.

The density of exhibition themes again confounds expectations. Moving back up into the main space – another whole circulation – to the top floor, culture – one meets an overwhelming cacophony of sound and senses celebrating African American achievement. The most beautiful is Obama’s iconic Correspondent’s Dinner mic-drop in a surround-sound space where culture means fashion, books, poetry and music, all combined in a dense and affecting environment carefully calibrated for both humour and heartache. It pulls out cultural icons in the American consciousness in an effective manner – though one that will surely

Right From the south side roof level terrace looking east to the Capitol.
feel dated in a short time. Adjacent to this popular culture room is a more sedate and serious art gallery with wooden floors and environmental conditioning, containing densely hung paintings by leaders of the Harlem Renaissance including Aaron Douglas and others, which will also benefit with collections as the museum’s reputation and pockets grow.

Sports achievements are similarly peppered with poignant imagery and moments of African American mistreatment and achievement; children rushed to pose next to a bronze cast of the famous black power salute at the 1968 Olympics by Tommie Smith and John Carlos.

The architectural effects are clean and clear. Adjaye’s voice and ability to implement all change is doubtless compromised in some places, yet the result is a successful museum and it will continue to be so. It is a fiercely contemporary space that one hopes will age with grace, and will continue to build its collection and voice on a national and international stage.

As one travels through the building, heavy cut-outs in the facade frame certain views and angles – the Capitol building, surrounded by tree tops, for example. There is no doubt that these postcard views are made to highlight the achievements of the classically foregrounded image of American culture, and perhaps to suggest that those views and achievements are indeed frames that can and should be looked at anew.
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2: Intelligence

The British Safety Council was founded by James Tye – what was his story?

He was a larger than life marketer who in the 1950s was struck by the fact that 1000 people a year were killed at work; that people were turning up at workplaces worried that they might be injured there. He founded the British Safety Council to put an end to it. He contributed to the Health & Safety at Work Act, and pushed for seatbelts and even for safer sex. We are not a regulatory body, but a facilitate collaboration and engagement in all aspects of worker and consumer safety.

We engage with them and have been aware for a while that it’s very commercially competitive: it can be hard for parties to share information on safety initiatives. That’s not just due to its macho culture; it’s because it’s very devolved too. Main contractors deal with large numbers of sub-contractors and suppliers, so it can be hard to communicate safety information. The core leadership has to be strong or the message can get lost.

Well, that’s a regulatory, policing role; whereas we do information, advice and facilitating. We’ve always worked in partnership with the HSE, certainly when consulting on policy issues and formatting legislation, but we’re independent so can disagree with it. James Tye was often at odds with the old Factory Inspectorate.

The main leaps have been technological. Previously, all work was manual, but automation has changed the way people interact with tasks; pre-fabrication has in some ways just changed the places where safety issues need to be considered. It was a genuine concern 60 years ago that workers could get hurt on site; that’s far less true now due to cultural changes. The act of putting on PPE is not a mindless chore but part of a bigger thought process: ‘I’m now on site. I’m entering a dangerous place.’ It’s a sumptuary expression of a new frame of mind.

We’re marking the year with events to raise awareness. We’re holding a short film competition for teenagers on the open theme of ‘risk’ to get a handle on what the young generation view as significant risks in their own lives. We also have futurologists looking at the improvements and threats to our lifestyles in 60 years’ time. There’s a way to go – last year 144 people were killed in the workplace – but even one person is unacceptable. We won’t be happy until it’s none.

Louise Ward

The British Safety Council, which turns 60 next year, has been involved in some of the major groundshifts in worker safety, including the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act. But Policy and Standards director Louise Ward tells us there’s still a way to go.
The conflation of modernity and the West in people’s minds has had a detrimental effect on the way we engage with and understand built environments globally.

Overall winner

Winner: History and Theory
Asmara – Africa’s Modernist City: UNESCO World Heritage Nomination
Edward Denison, The Bartlett School of Architecture, UK
Medhanie Teklemariam and Dawit Abraha, Asmara Heritage Project, Eritrea

Eritrea’s nomination of its modernist capital, Asmara, to UNESCO’s World Heritage List, is a first for this young and often misunderstood African nation. Asmara is a rare, possibly unique, example of a totally modernist city that has retained its physical integrity and authenticity almost entirely intact through a turbulent century. It owes a greater debt to Eritrea’s judicious approach to its colonial heritage, which transcends the reactionary attitudes that elsewhere have led to the wanton destruction of the past. Although Eritrea was conceived by colonialism and furnished by fascism, its people reserve a particular love for their capital because it has come to symbolise the creation of a nation – as much a product of modernity as are Asmara and its architecture.

The nominated site covers 481ha and contains more than 4,340 buildings, all of which have been extensively surveyed for this research. More than 80,000 documents and technical drawings from the municipality’s phenomenal archive have been digitised. The 1,300-page nomination was prepared by local and international experts and 36 members of staff at the Asmara Heritage Project (AHP), which was established in March 2014.

The trappings of modern life, given modernist expression in Asmara: at a cinema (above) and petrol station (above right).

Probing the relationship between research and reality, the RIBA’s President’s Awards for Research return with some pertinent projects.

One of the challenges of practice is keeping up to date with the best of an enormous amount of research into materials and technologies, cities and communities and history. Those who can find the most relevant thinking and apply it to their projects are rewarded with extra depth, ideas and learning invigorating new schemes – which in turn brings the research to life.

This year the RIBA re-launched its well-respected annual President’s Awards for Research, keeping in mind both those ideas and a special annual theme, Learning from Projects. There were 75 entries from 14 countries. The shortlist was fascinating with research ranging from building performance to anarchist clubs, from how those with dementia might live well in the home to historic town council refurbishment.

Now the winners have been chosen. The papers will be printed by the RIBA Journal’s academic sister publication, The Journal of Architecture, early next year, but for starters we asked each of the winners to tell us what practising architects could usefully learn from their research.

Over the coming weeks we will also be publishing the shortlist’s primer for practice on ribaj.com.
This research raises three particular considerations which may be interesting to practices. First of these is the way in which Asmara came into being. Eritrea’s encounter with modernity was particularly brutal, delaying the country’s induction to the global club of nations. The territory was claimed by Italy in the late 1800s, but it was the 20th century, the century of modernism, that defined Eritrea. Asmara was planned by the Italians before Mussolini came to power in 1922 and embarked on his fantastical project of creating a new Roman Empire in Africa. The apogee of this odious campaign was the invasion of neighbouring Ethiopia in 1935. Asmara became the jewel in Italy’s imperial crown, which also flaunted Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia. It was in this brief period, from 1935 to Italy’s defeat by the Allies in 1941, that most of Asmara’s modernist buildings were built: designed by Italians and constructed by Eritreans.

Like so many colonial cities, the conditions and consequences of colonialism displayed in Asmara are complicated. The city was no modernist tabula rasa and its planners and architects were simultaneously advocates and fugitives of empire. Asmara’s modern planning and its modernist architecture have created a charming city developed on a human scale — one that could teach the world much about the merits of good urban design, architecture, planning and landscaping. History has not been kind to Eritrea and its modernist historiography is no exception. The conflation of modernity and the West in people’s minds has had a detrimental effect on the way in which we engage with and understand built environments globally, but this appears conspicuously stark in Eritrea. The problem manifests itself variously, from the writing of history to the creation of institutions charged with researching history or protecting historical artefacts. UNESCO’s World Heritage List (WHL) is a fitting example. Italy and Spain, with 47 and 39 mentions respectively, together possess more cultural sites on the list than does the entire continent of Africa, which gets only 85 — making the WHL appear more like an international inventory of cultural prejudice.

Eritrea’s nomination to the list of Asmara therefore goes beyond merely pursuing international recognition for its cultural assets. Viewed in a wider context, Asmara’s UNESCO application — as a modernist site in Africa — challenges some of the fundamental principles underpinning the heritage industry. It calls for a decentering of modernist history to more fairly reflect and better understand global encounters with modernity, and to allow formerly subjugated territories the chance to reclaim and represent their own histories on their own terms. This is already well under way and the world — and our knowledge of it — will be richer for the change.
The camp’s ‘ordered’ layout hides a very ‘thin’ violent order, while its ‘chaotic’ layout is an expression of a much deeper cultural order.

Left: Camps, even this Kibbutz Givat Brenner, 1935, suspend their inhabitants without the possibility of planning the future.

Winner Cities and Community
The Common Camp: Temporary Settlements as a Spatio-political Instrument in Israel-Palestine
Dr Irit Katz, University of Cambridge, UK

With the Syrian refugee crisis and the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in Europe, more planners and designers became intrigued by the growing refugee camps which were declared as the ‘cities of tomorrow’.

Architects are becoming increasingly aware of camps as a complex spatial and human condition. The accelerated urbanisation processes of camps such as Za’atari in Jordan, which in only two weeks had become the country’s fourth largest population centre, or makeshift camps such as Calais Jungle which developed a town-like environment, are enthusiastically admired by some architects for the resourceful acts of their occupants who adapted these temporary spaces to their social, cultural and other everyday needs.

Others have taken on the challenge of designing the ultimate refugee shelter while international design competitions were urgently lodged for this purpose.

Looking at camps as a design problem or as an architectural inspiration can be very problematic. More than 65 million displaced people worldwide have limited access not only to shelter but also to water, food, work and education, and are caught in a legal limbo that denies them the possibility to begin new life with a safe home in a different country.

My study, ‘The Common Camp’, critically examines the role of the camp over the last century. It analyses how temporary camps were and still are being used as versatile instruments to control, manipulate and negotiate lands and populations in pursuing geopolitical interests, while camp residents sometimes use their temporary spaces as tools for their political struggles. The project focuses on Israel-Palestine as an extensive laboratory of camps – migrant camps, settler camps, refugee camps and detention camps – which form an integral part of the drastic territorial and demographic changes in the area. Yet the project’s theoretical analysis goes beyond this locality and offers a new understanding of the idea of the camp and its complex spatial and political meanings – which are inevitably related to crucial ethical questions. These are what architects must understand.

The research examines the multifaceted spatial characteristics of the camp as outcomes of the various powerful forces influencing its creation and change. The project shows that the camp’s ‘ordered’ layout hides a very ‘thin’ violent order, while its ‘chaotic’ layout is an expression of a much deeper cultural order.

Another aspect of the project deals with the political role of the camp in separating different populations according to ever-changing objectives and policies. The research shows that although the camp has varied typologies and spatial manifestations, it has distinct common characteristics such as the management of specific populations in temporary conditions outside the normal legal order. This makes it a device associated with radical and violent spatio-political practices of the modern state.

Nevertheless, it is the ethical awareness that this study calls for that may be its most important output. It exposes that excluding and separating specific populations from society – and suspending them in time and space without the possibility to plan their future – is a violent act which undermines their sheer sense of being. It explores the understanding that creating spaces in which vulnerable populations are denied basic rights and freedoms, and are dependent on others, deepens their dependency even more. It acknowledges that when temporariness becomes the rule, all that is built and everyone who lives in these spaces becomes defenceless, since in such lawless realities many forms of violence become acceptable (the dozens of unaccompanied minors left to sleep rough in Calais’ demolished Jungle is only one close-to-home example).

This research should encourage architects to act against the creation and existence of such spaces. While the creation of better shelters and better camps is perhaps a good short-term solution, it might also support a long-term problem. With their creative force, and with their sincere appreciation of the resourcefulness and creative force of others, architects should be aiming to suggest designs and policies which will enable us to host the displaced in our societies and to offer them opportunities to regain autonomy and control over their lives, rather than suspending them in spatial enclaves away from us.
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Erith Park is part of a five-year landmark regeneration scheme to create a mixed-tenure community of almost 600 family homes and apartments.

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Winner: Design and Technical
Supertall Timber: Design Research for the
Next Generation of Natural Structure
Dr Michael Ramage and Dr Rob Foster,
University of Cambridge, UK
Simon Smith, Smith and Wallwork, UK
Kevin Flanagan & Ron Bakker, PLP / Architecture, UK

The response of the public, policy makers and developers to the prospect of much taller timber buildings has been overwhelmingly positive.

The Supertall Timber project aspires to make truly tall wooden buildings a reality through collaborations between architects, engineers and the University of Cambridge’s Centre for Natural Material Innovation. The project pioneers a new model of design-led research and research-led design, where we are able to develop prototype designs and test specific structural elements in our research laboratories. The resulting designs, and the process through which they were developed, highlight a number of insights for architects.

Timber has a substantial role in large building design: our research has established that engineered timber in the 21st century is an appropriate material for new buildings well beyond the current scale of use. While there is still much research to be done, there is nothing fundamental about timber as a material that should limit its use. It is essential to design ‘with’ it rather than against it. Engineered timbers can be as strong and stiff as steel, relative to their weight. However, the structural sizes required will often be larger than for steel and reduced strength and stiffness across the grain mean that connection design can become a key consideration. Where aesthetic design embraces the need to consider the engineering and construction requirements of a new material, new architectural and structural forms are possible.

Professional diversity is essential. Each project team began with one or two days of intensive design which brought together leading architects, engineers and researchers in one room, with the sole purpose of addressing the challenge of designing a tall building using wood. These charrettes were astonishingly productive and cemented relationships, enabling the projects to keep developing. The Chicago based architect of one project observed recently that in his view, not just the project but also the team was formed in those first two days — amid piles of tracing paper, chunky markers and white foam. At various points it has been led alternatively by architecture, engineering, or research concerns. The invaluable starting point was to have a range of interested and engaged professions in a room for two days focusing solely on design.

Research and design are symbiotic: designers and researchers can effectively collaborate on projects, both live and conceptual, to think big and extend the boundaries of what is thought possible. This is particularly important on designs using timber and other natural materials where there is a huge gap between the current state of the art in practice and what research suggests may be possible. By bringing designers and researchers together to think about designing a 300m tall timber building, approaches and design solutions were developed that could also be readily applied to timber buildings of more moderate height. It has also been interesting to see that the response of the public, policy makers and developers to the prospect of much taller timber buildings has been overwhelmingly positive. While research may seem like a luxury in time-constrained practices, this project has shown such work to be a valuable investment in furthering the state-of-the-art and the capabilities of a practice.

It is perhaps worth noting that the design teams involved in the Supertall Timber project have been approached by developers interested in transferring the knowledge and understanding gained as part of this research into real projects.
My research explores the history and future of Balfron Tower, a high-rise of 146 flats and maisonettes built in 1965-7, the first phase of Ernö Goldfinger’s work on the Brownfield Estate in Poplar. In December 2015, Tower Hamlets approved plans to refurbish and privatise Balfron Tower. During the preceding three years I collaborated with the tower’s current and former residents to campaign for Balfron to remain a beacon for public housing.

Central to my work was engagement with the residents through a series of workshops to build collective knowledge, and activism which drew on this material and evidence to contribute to a more informed public debate and planning decisions. I developed an interactive online archive – balfrontower.org – and made a successful application with James Dunnett to list Balfron Tower at grade II*, which explicitly recognises Goldfinger’s social ideals and Balfron’s social purpose as a key component of its heritage. In doing so, I advanced an argument that the practice and guidance of heritage of post-war housing estates must not only pay tribute to the egalitarian principles at their foundations, it must enact them.

The rallying cry of my work, to ‘make public’ expresses three demands for practitioners working in public housing.

The first demand was material – to protect and extend public housing provision at a time when austerity measures are dismantling it in ideal and form. Demand more public housing. It is cherished. It is vital. Public housing incrementally built stability and equality into Britain’s urban fabric through a combination of extraordinary architectural progress and political aspiration. But in London, the city that pioneered these modern principles of public housing, we are doing the opposite. GLA figures released last year revealed that estate regeneration schemes had doubled the amount of new homes on existing sites – 33,000 additional units – but in this process there was a net loss of 8,300 social rented homes and only 1,800 affordable units were built.

Secondly procedure was addressed – make visible the processes of urban change that are increasingly hidden from public view. As public housing stock is increasingly privatised, so are the democratic processes and information about it is hidden behind labyrinthine planning portals or claims of commercial confidentiality. Even if you can access information, it is often difficult to understand because of bureaucratic or legal language. My research proved this lack of clarity and certainty is a source of further discomfort for those caught up in processes of regeneration.

The final demand concerns methodology – that you make public your methods. Share your experiences and resources with residents and celebrate the richness of their knowledge. We have a duty to put our work at the service of those whose lives we seek to improve. With increasing regularity, housing estates are demolished or privatised to make way for regeneration schemes where developers claim to build lively, diverse, vibrant communities. My research demonstrated the genuine liveliness, diversity and vibrancy of the communities that already exist in these estates. There is a continued and urgent need to work with residents as these communities and the qualities they bring to London are diluted or dispersed.

It is perhaps too late to reconsider the approach at Balfron Tower, but it is certainly not too late for other practitioners. We must demand affordable housing – retaining a proportion of social housing genuinely affordable to local communities; accountable regeneration – opening full access to information in order to justify decisions; and inclusive consultation – developing proposals together with residents in which everyone is able to fully participate. We must act together; for the 786,000 households living in social housing; for the 391,000 children living in overcrowded accommodation; for the 263,491 families on housing waiting lists; for the 50,490 households living in temporary accommodation; and for the 7,581 people who sleep rough every night, the project of public housing in London remains as relevant as ever.
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Brian Green

How has the landscape of architectural businesses changed since 2010 as Britain’s construction industry lifted itself out of a deep recession?

The Office for National Statistics does a count of UK businesses, and a look at the data for ‘architectural activities’ – aka sic 71111 – is fascinating. It shows some remarkable shifts.

First off, the number of enterprises fitting the bill for the sic code is estimated to have risen from 9,650 to 13,520 between 2010 and 2016 – a 40% jump. That’s faster than the 25% rise in employment within these enterprises over the same period.

This points to a rapid expansion in small firms, which certainly appears to have happened. The number of firms employing fewer than five people has leapt 50%; those employing five to nine people has risen 6%.

Perhaps more interesting, though, we have also seen an apparent doubling in the number of businesses employing more than 250 people. This figure, however, must be treated with caution and seen as indicative rather than accurate, given the small number involved and the rounding of data. Meanwhile, the number of firms in the 10 to 100 bracket has remained fairly static and there has been a fall in the number of firms employing between 100 and 250.

So the expansion in the number of architects and other staff employed within practices is resulting in an overall pattern that increasingly emphasises both larger and small operations, with established practices expanding and new practices forming, as we see in Figure 1 (overleaf).

It is also important to note that consolidation of architecture-specific practices into larger multi-disciplinary organisations means that some heavy concentrations of architects may well not be picked up in the narrower definition of architectural activities.

Messy definitions

As with all definitions, these can become a bit messy. The Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR), from which the data are drawn, classifies according to the main activity, selected by employment. So if architecture is a large but secondary activity on numbers employed, the firm is unlikely to be classified sic 71111, architectural activities.

But we can learn much from the data on the core businesses within the definition.

Interestingly, the growth in businesses has been fairly well spread across the UK, with the exception of Northern Ireland, where numbers have fallen. This can be seen in Figure 2, which compares the number of architectural activity enterprises in 2010...
The growth in practices does not seem to be influenced simply by economic growth. The North East has seen significant increase in architectural enterprises despite some of the lowest economic growth. As we see in Figure 2, however, the North East has – on a par with Northern Ireland – the lowest number of enterprises, which is not surprising given its relatively small population.

In terms of micro businesses, the North East has seen the fastest growth, with 280 enterprises employing fewer than five people in 2016 compared with 160 in 2010.

Scratch deeper and we find other intriguing trends. The legal status of architectural enterprises has shifted dramatically since 2010 (Figure 3). There are fewer partnerships, down from 850 in 2010 to 495 in 2016. There are fewer sole proprietors, down from 1,985 to 1,400. There were never many non-profit architectural enterprises, and the data are rounded, but the number was put at 25 in 2010 and now stands at 20.

Today within architecture the company structure has increased its dominance, with the number in 2016. The enterprise is basically the overall business, while a local unit is a workplace or site. Again, it can get a bit muddy.

The growth in practices does not seem to be influenced simply by economic growth. The North East has seen significant increase in architectural enterprises despite some of the lowest economic growth. As we see in Figure 2, however, the North East has – on a par with Northern Ireland – the lowest number of enterprises, which is not surprising given its relatively small population.

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Today within architecture the company structure has increased its dominance, with the number of architectural companies growing 71% from 6,785 in 2010 to 11,605. The percentage of companies among all architectural enterprises has risen from 70% to 86%.

**Looking for hot spots**

If we seek to find where the highest concentration of architectural practices are the results probably come as no surprise. Nor is the changing pattern of hot spots.

Looking at the total number of practices and local outposts (local units) by local authority it is Camden and Islington in London that top the list in 2016, with Westminster slipping from top to third. The greatest increase in numbers have been in Camden,
Hackney and Islington. But if we look where the percentage growth has been greatest we see less central boroughs like Barnet, Brent, Enfield, Greenwich, Haringey, Merton, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets popping up – along, interestingly, with the City of London (Figure 4).

Looking at the concentration of architects by parliamentary constituency, which tends to provide smaller more evenly balanced areas, we see a similar pattern. However it shows more finely the most popular and the most up and coming hotspots for architects to locate.

Taking constituencies where the quantity of local units is 40 or more, the big growth in terms of numbers has been in some of the more established areas. But it will come as little surprise to many to discover that proportionately areas such as Hackney North & Stoke Newington and Poplar & Limehouse have seen the greatest expansion proportionately since 2010, with both locations witnessing a more than doubling of local units. In London, Finchley & Golders Green also seems to have doubled the number of architectural practices since 2010.

Hot spots outside London are clearly emerging – Sheffield Central, Bristol West, Leeds Central and Manchester Central have all seen solid expansion. Were we to look deeper down the list below the table provided and outside London, we would see constituencies such as Castle Point, Harrogate & Knaresborough, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, Lewes, Winchester and Tunbridge Wells all seeing increasing numbers of architectural practices establishing. But it is worth noting that numbers in Belfast and Edinburgh have fallen.

Apart from this, from the perspective of the growth and spread of practices across the UK, the architecture industry seems to be in fine fettle. •

More figures and analysis at ribaj.com

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**Figure 4: Biggest increase by local authority, 2010-2016 (percentage and actual)**

Source: ONS Dataset: UK Business Counts
Transport projects are often at the cutting edge of great design. But by their very nature they soon begin to look shabby. Ceilings styled to capture the eye soon capture dirt and fade and because they are often designed at height in this sector, cleaning and maintenance is not always easy.

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Armstrong’s architectural specialties product manager Jeremy Sumeray said: “Transport projects are among the most visually attractive spaces for people passing through them as well as those who work in them. But what looked stunning on paper is not always what transpires in reality.

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Finish the contract

If you don’t have an agreement you at least need some acceptance before you start work

Stacy Sinclair

Does it really matter if you do not have a contract in place? The recent case of Arcadis Consulting (UK) v AMEC (BSC) demonstrates what can be the harsh consequences of not reaching a full agreement prior to undertaking your services.

In the words of the judge, this was a classic ‘contract/no contract’ case. Buchan (now AMEC) was a specialist concrete subcontractor and engaged Hyder (now Arcadis) to carry out design works on a car park. The parties expected a wider, over-arching agreement across a number of projects to be put in place, though in the end after much correspondence, this did not materialise. This was some 15 years ago. Ultimately Hyder carried out its design works and the car park was built.

Then it was alleged that the car park was defective and may need to be demolished and rebuilt at significant cost.

Hyder denied liability but also said that if it was liable, there was a simple contract in respect of its design works, which capped its liability at £610,000. Buchan argued there was no contract because the correspondence envisaged a formal agreement with detailed terms and conditions, which did not happen.

Previous case law made clear that the fact that a transaction was performed on both sides would usually make it both unrealistic to argue there was no intention to enter into legal relations, and difficult to submit that the contract is void for vagueness or uncertainty. Accordingly, the judge disagreed with Buchan that there was no contract.

This was a case where work was done and paid for on the basis of instructions from Buchan, which Hyder accepted. Works were performed on the express understanding that, if the anticipated detailed contract did not come to pass, the correspondence between the parties would create a legal relationship and ensure that, among other things, Buchan would pay Hyder for its work.

Hyder carried out the design work under an express instruction, which the judge found to evidence a binding, simple contract.

But it was not straightforward which documents were incorporated into that instruction or simple contract. There were three competing sets of terms and conditions and Hyder had not clearly accepted any of them. It was careful to thank Buchan for the instruction, but did not say that it accept it (and therefore the terms). The judge noted that there must be a final and unequivocal expression of agreement and/or acceptance and that as Hyder did not use the word ‘accept’ at all, it could not be said that there was a clear and unequivocal acceptance of the terms.

Ultimately, the judge decided that there was too much uncertainty and too much that was not agreed for the court to conclude that the parties intended to be bound by a liability cap, in the way Hyder alleged. He said: ‘The court is not entitled to rewrite history so as to incorporate into that contract express terms which were not the subject of a clear and binding agreement.’ He found that there was no limitation of Hyder’s liability, despite the fact that every set of proposed terms and conditions included some sort of provision to that effect. While the judge acknowledged that this might be regarded as a harsh result, he felt bound to conclude that: ‘This was the inevitable consequence of Hyder’s dilatory and often unco-operative approach to the proposed protocol agreement and the negotiation of the terms and conditions. This case starkly demonstrates the commercial truisms that it is usually better for a party to reach a full agreement (which in this case would almost certainly have included some sort of cap on their liability) through a process of negotiation and give-and-take, rather than to delay and then fail to reach any detailed agreement at all.’

Stacy Sinclair is an associate at Fenwick Elliott

IN PLAIN ENGLISH: LIMITATION OF LIABILITY CLAUSE

This is any clause in a contract which restricts or caps a party’s liability. As seen in Arcadis v AMEC, parties must use clear language if such a clause is to be binding. Here, the judge recalled the words of Lord Justice Briggs in Nobahar-Cookson v The Hut Group (2016): ‘The parties are not lightly to be taken to have intended to cut down the remedies which the law provides for breach of important contractual obligations without using clear words having that effect.’

In the RIBA Standard Conditions of Appointment, Clause 7.2 (Limit of liability) and Clause 7.3 (Net contribution) make the limitation is clear. In light of the case of Ampleforth Abbey Trust v Turner & Townsend (2012) parties should take care to avoid inconsistent insurance and limits on liability clauses. In Ampleforth, when the liability cap was significantly lower than the amount of professional indemnity insurance which T&T was obliged to provide, the court found that the liability cap was not reasonable and Ampleforth Abbey Trust was entitled to benefit from the insurance it had in effect paid for.
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Competitive instincts
Competitions – the gift that keeps on giving

Maria Smith

So you’ve decided to undertake a building project. What do you do next? How do you make sure you get the very best architecture? Read on for some helpful advice.

First, if you thought the best approach would be engaging an architect with a portfolio of work that strikes a chord, agreeing a fair fee that would ensure appropriate resources would be committed, and embarking on a collaborative journey to together develop a design tailored to you and the unique, complex constraints of the site, well you couldn’t be more wrong.

Silly, naïve client: why would you pay good money for one design when you can pay no money for loads of designs? This may sound like a too good to be true scam pyramid scheme, but it’s a real option for clients like you and what’s more it comes with a plethora of further benefits that bring fame and fortune all under a banner of moral high ground. So what is this extraordinary process? Why the architectural competition of course.

If you can present your project as an enticing opportunity, and write the brief in such a way as to avoid specifics (like a fixed budget) that might unduly constrain the fragile egos of the architectural community, you will have all the best architects beating at your door, more than willing to work themselves and their exploited employees into the ground for nothing more than the mirage of a potential future award-winning project. Instead of one set of sketchy proposals, you could have tens, even hundreds of sexy images and expensive models to choose from.

By running a competition, you don’t need to bother spending time researching architects and agonising over which is best for you and your project. Instead you can simply let them come to you. And don’t think you’ll just get the sub-standard desperate types putting themselves forward. On the contrary, you’ll be able to choose from the biggest names you’ve never heard of.

By running a competition, you don’t need to bother figuring out what you want or need. Instead you can let the architects do the work for you, offering up squillions of options worked up to an impressive level of detail, leaving you free to simply cherry-pick whatever takes your fancy.

By running a competition, you don’t need to worry about engaging with neighbours or other interested parties and accommodating their concerns into your design. You can simply hold an exhibition of all the entries (before choosing the one you like) and invite them to come and offer some uninformed, easily disputed opinions, thereby negating the need to ever talk to them again. They’ve had their chance, who can say fairer than that?

By running a competition, you don’t need to concern yourself with criticism from the media or others over corruption or collusion or cronynism. By inviting everyone in the world you are clearly demonstrating an unsurpassable commitment to equal opportunities. One might even call you a bastion of impartial meritocracy. All the while you can still give the job to whoever you want.

By running a competition, you don’t need to be nervous that the slow pace of politics or design or construction might hamper the narrative of progress you present to your board or shareholders or hot dates you’re looking to impress. The beauty of a competition is that you will be drowning in headway with nigh on zero commitment or outlay of any kind from your end. You hold all the cards. You have all the power. You can sit back and relax and let the architects beat each other up on their journey to your feet. When the designs come flooding in you can use them to win favour, publicity, and even elections.

Present yourself as an ‘enlightened client’ who cares about design and sees itself as a custodian of our urban fabric blah blah blah that makes architects cream, and not only will you get yourself an excellent, tireless design team for free, but you’ll be able to continue to milk their goodwill even after they’ve won. Once they’re on the hook, they’ll be in the same position as those who have already been waiting in the queue at the Post Office for 45 minutes so might as well keep waiting – or those 45 minutes of their life that they’ll never get back will all have been for nothing. They’ll come to meetings with funders and tweak their designs and do your publicity for you so long as you keep them believing they’re the lucky ones. Throw them a little bone every now and then to keep them believing the project is still possibly viable and you’ll have them eating out of your hand indefinitely.

So client, go forth. You know what to do. Clearly this is the best course of action for you.

I wonder what’s in it for the architects... •

Not only will you get yourself an excellent, tireless design team for free, but you’ll be able to continue to milk their goodwill even after they’ve won.

Maria Smith is a director of architecture and...
A striking aesthetic theme to emerge from the Spanish Tile industry at the recent Cersaie Tile Fair was the renaissance of moody black tones. Whether lending restraint or adding drama, and whether used as accents or dominant motifs, these saturated dark shades are made possible by advanced ink and digital printing technology. Available in a range of finishes from matt and textured to glossy and lustrous, and either as expansive, hi-tech floor coverings or feature wall cladding, Spanish tiles offer a resourceful combination of reliability, easy maintenance and versatility. Cost-effective and simple to install, ceramics from Spain blend the best of traditional quality and contemporary innovation.

Back to Black
Spanish Tiles explore the dark side at Cersaie 2016

Clockwise top left
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The RIBA Journal December 2016
What is our relationship with power?

Presidential politics have whipped up a furure for America's AIA

Hugh Pearman Editor

Architects want to be a strong voice in the corridors of power. Meeting ministers and their political shadows, responding publicly to government policy statements, running campaigns for a better quality of the built environment – such activities are part and parcel of the RIBA's activities in the UK. But we have not yet found ourselves in the position of our American-based colleagues, many of whom are asking: should they have anything to do with president-elect Donald Trump?

The wounds caused by the election campaign and result led to an immediate controversy. The American Institute of Architects' chief executive Robert Ivy rushed out a statement with the words: ‘The AIA and its 89,000 members are committed to working with president-elect Trump to address the issues our country faces, particularly strengthening the nation's infrastructure… this has been a hard-fought, contentious election process. It is now time for all of us to work together to advance policies that help our country move forward.’

This was too soon and left too much unsaid, according to plenty of those members – spearheaded by the independent Architect's Newspaper, which decried what it saw as ‘the inappropriate nature and myopic tone’ of Ivy's statement. The magazine pointed to Trump's ‘racist, misogynist and hateful campaign’. Where did this leave diversity in the profession? What of Trump's denial of man-made climate change? And besides – wasn't Trump's proposed anti-immigrant wall along the Mexican border the wrong kind of infrastructure? Unlike the ‘schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure’ that Ivy hopefully mentioned? Some members resigned, others threatened to.

Ivy, himself a veteran of architectural publishing, duly responded. Acknowledging the concern expressed along with ‘the right of each member to his or her political beliefs,’ he said: ‘The spirit and intention behind our statement is consistent with and in support of President Obama's eloquent call for us all to unite for the best interest of America's future.’

This wasn't enough for enraged members, and Ivy was forced into a public apology, on video, standing next to a glowing AIA national president Russ Davidson. 'The statement I issued was tone-deaf,' said Ivy, who made it clear he too was hurt by Trump's election. 'The message that went out was a mistake and should not have happened,' said Davidson. Both vowed to listen harder to members.

But what about the American architects who voted for Trump or at any rate accept his legitimacy? Soon they made their views known too, defending Ivy's original statement. 'The statement I issued was tone-deaf,' said Ivy, who made it clear he too was hurt by Trump's election. 'The message that went out was a mistake and should not have happened,' said Davidson. Both vowed to listen harder to members.

The board pointed to Trump's 'racist, misogynist and hateful campaign'. Where did this leave diversity in the profession?
LESS HASSLE. MORE CREATIVITY.
www.armstrongceilings.co.uk
As the boat turned right past Morocco and into the Mediterranean Sea, the silhouette of Lebanon's party complex came into view. Over to the left, the palm trees of Greenland formed a distant spiky clump on the horizon. 'Welcome to Switzerland,' said architect Marco Bolzoni, as we scrambled on to the sandy shores of his island. 'We'll start by looking at the villas under construction on Sweden, then head over to the concrete batching plant on Monaco.'

It might come as a surprise to learn that, 13 years after it began, The World is back. It was a vision of unparalleled hubris, the mad pinnacle of Dubai's boom-time spending spree, killed off by the 2008 financial crisis, surely never to return. This artificial archipelago of 300 islands entailed engineering feats of Ozymandian proportions, adding more world records to the UAE's brimming collection. Enough sand was dredged to build the Great Wall of China around the entire equator.

As actual Europe collapses in on itself, a new one is being reborn in the Persian Gulf – consisting mainly of seven-star hotels. The concept is the work of 'thematic architecture specialist' Creative Kingdom, purveyor of theme-park fantasy lands from Morocco to Cape Town. Here it has surpassed itself with a riotous global hotchpotch. Passing through the Empress Elizabeth Gate, to be modelled on a cross between the Bridge of Sighs and Tower Bridge, visitors will be able to choose between the Kremlin-themed Tzar hotel, Alpine cabins on Switzerland, or the Grand Palace and private beach club of Monaco. The vast villas of Sweden, to be furnished by Bentley Home, have rooftops inspired by the upturned hull of a viking ship, with luxury spas in their basements, each complete with a personal snow room.

In a surreal twist that trumps every other madcap plan, snow will also feature outdoors on Switzerland, where flakes will fall all year round on the central plaza. In a move that sounds as environmentally friendly as pumping oil into the ocean, underground cooling pipes will keep it from melting in the 40°C heat. Rain will be provided too, by pumping condensation – formed on the air-conditioning ducts – through sprinklers.

But Bolzoni's proudest creation – and the only thing of which a visitable prototype actually exists – is what he calls the Floating Seahorses, three-storey boat-cum-villas, about 100 of which will be moored around the edge of the heart-shaped St Petersburg island, designed with honeymoon couples in mind. These luxury pods feature the world's first underwater aquarium bedrooms, where guests will wake up to a panoramic of marine life (if the murky water ever clears enough to see it). To lure shoals of exotic fish, coral gardens are being cultivated nearby. They will provide an underwater complement to the groves of 100-year-old olive trees planted on the island – imported from Spain, natch. 'Pretty much everything here is a world first,' says Bolzoni. And leaving the forlorn scene, stranded half an hour from the mainland, you can't help but feel there might be a good reason why it hasn't been done before.

Read Oliver Wainwright here every other month and at ribaj.com
Developing the future
Getting together to expand our knowledge, experiences and prospects

Jane Duncan

“Nothing is as dangerous in architecture as dealing with separated problems. If we split life into separated problems we split the possibilities to make good building art” – Alvar Aalto

Developers have not traditionally enjoyed a great reputation with either architects or the general public. At worst they have been seen as wide-boy wreckers of the urban realm, trashing ancient and treasured buildings to replace them with poorly designed tall or over dense structures, or covering precious Green Belt solely to maximise their cash.

But times needed to change in a business where mutual understanding between the two central players is, as Martyn Evans, head of development company Uncommon, has noted ‘more crucial than it has ever been’.

But now co-operation is growing between some developers and their architects. Like Evans, some have prioritised quality, and are nurturing British architecture practices from their early years. They consider architects their natural partners, recognising that good design is a good investment. The trust this generates is a precious commodity in today’s tough markets, leveraging the value of buildings through the perceived prestige of the architects’ involvement.

It may be that architects have facilitated this shift by taking a more pragmatic role – presenting themselves as problem solvers within a strategic team, valued for their expertise in engaging with a site’s social, historical and architectural context, as well as creating inspired masterplans and well-designed, appealing buildings. Architects who work with a developer repeatedly become their ‘brains trust’, understanding what they expect. That trust builds repeat business.

We architects often think our clients hire us for our design skills. But for the developer, the building is part of a much larger vision, brand, investment and legacy. They make decisions differently to other clients and architects who work for them must be nimble, flexible, self-managing and disciplined.

Developers conceive projects, select their locations, acquire the land, determine the target market, obtain the financing, and oversee process and sale of the project. Because architects do not usually take development risks we rarely earn a significant share of the value created by our designs. As a result, for many practitioners the profession is one of long hours with relatively low pay.

There is, however, a different path. The architect-as-developer business model provides an interesting alternative to traditional methods of practice; an opportunity to exert greater project leadership, have more freedom in the design process, more control over what is built and the quality of its finishes, and, of course, make more money. As I have discovered through my own small property developments, this gives developer clients reassurance that I understand the pressures and opportunities from their perspective.

Traditionally teaching skirted the issue of money, focussing on the art of architecture. For many, this mindset carried on into practice, resulting in an erosion of the architectural profession and its earning potential. It’s great to see courses which now teach the economics of architecture and design – during my training it just wasn’t talked about.

I’m saddened by how little developers and architects still understand each other’s professional language and intent, but we can change that. On 24 November Evans and I launched the Young Architects & Developers Association (YADA) to foster understanding and collaboration between innovative emerging architects and property developers. By meeting, talking and understanding each other, innovative design and intelligent property development can be brought together, and that will benefit everyone.

“We build too many walls and not enough bridges” – Isaac Newton

The RIBA Journal December 2016
Shape Shifter

The exposed concrete frame at Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford, enables the use of energy efficient, mixed-mode cooling using a double skin façade. Concrete’s thermal mass is used to balance the internal temperatures, while the façade reduces solar gain and enables passive ventilation via an openable inner leaf.

The building incorporates a green roof as part of a SuDS strategy and photovoltaic panels for low carbon electricity. The project achieved a BREEAM Excellent rating and was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize 2016.

View the case study video at: www.thisisconcrete.co.uk

This is Concrete is a campaign to promote a sustainable built environment, supported by MPA The Concrete Centre
Museums might make daring plans but the reality is much more tempered. ZMMA’s Adam Zombory-Moldovan tells how the firm has carved out a quiet niche in this changing landscape

Words: Isabelle Priest  Portrait: Michele Panzeri

ZMMA defies anyone who thinks museums and galleries are a shrinking market for architecture. The practice’s director Adam Zombory-Moldovan keeps interrupting our conversation with projects the firm is working on that he forgot to mention earlier. The practice definitely wins and gets stuff done. But looking at some of the current drawings, you have to ask, is there a wider picture? It’s more than enough work to sustain a practice of 12 and not entertain other types of commissions.

That was ZMMA’s mission when it started out in 1989 with Zombory-Moldovan’s Cambridge University contemporary Rowan Moore, now an architecture critic. It wanted to do arts and cultural projects; and its driving force was an interest in collections – paintings, sculptures, museums, virtually anything.

Moore split off from the practice (though it kept his initial in its name) in 1994 while it was still deep in commercial and private galleries – Rothko, Constable, medieval and Asian acquisitions. But by 2000 the practice wanted to move on, climb the proverbial architectural pole, and do public buildings.

The first came with the Watts Gallery in 2001. Its long gestation meant that for much of the past 20 years ZMMA has taken on other projects to keep going. It always tried to connect with the creative industries and found work for a craft centre in Dorset, the restaurant and staff canteen at Sotheby’s. Today it has secured the sweet spot it wanted.

Just at the moment ZMMA has galleries at London’s Geffrye Museum, the Fry Gallery extension in Saffron Walden, a building at Gainsborough’s House in Sudbury, Guildford Museum and Castle redevelopment, the Royal College of Music’s museum, the Scottish Design Galleries at V&A Dundee and work for the National Museum of Scotland on its plate.

The question is how ZMMA has managed to get there. Others have come and gone, as have the museums and galleries they created. There is something in the steadiness of Zombory-Moldovan’s character which could be appealing. He certainly gives the impression of knowingness and understanding without elucidating a great deal. Or perhaps it is by quietly playing on client fears, exploiting an architecture instinctive to him that reassures them too. Of course for Zombory-Moldovan, it’s not about him as an individual. It’s about what he offers; expertise in two sectors which do not usually overlap – architecture and exhibition design. The practice prefers to do both, but equally can do just one part and work well with whoever else is contracted.

Zombory-Moldovan knows only one other architect that also truly bridges both disciplines, Pringle Richards Sharratt.

‘What pins our work together is the crafted, bespoke way we approach projects and the passion we have for collections,’ he says. ‘We spend a lot of time with the collections and curators. We spend days in object stores looking at the material, getting to know the objects, as part of the design process; what they are made of and thinking about how they are going to be best displayed.’ He suggests there are so many commissions because museums and galleries are getting more ambitious – daring to start projects and hoping to fund them.

And there are a lot. Did I forget to mention that the practice has completed three projects in 10 months: refurbishing the V&A London’s Europe 1600-1815 Galleries, Watts Studio (an extension), and the brand new Heath Robinson Museum in Pinner where we met? But do we need this many museums?

‘We need more,’ replies Zombory-Moldovan. For his benefit? ‘No, for everyone’s. They are life enhancing, where people can share space with objects of value and wonder. There has been a huge increase the numbers of people visiting museums and galleries. It’s become a major social activity, like living rooms for the city, a place and reason for people to gather.’

The Heath Robinson Museum is one of

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The project started through the Heath Robinson Trust which has looked after the illustrator’s collection since his daughter bequeathed it in 1992. It found a collaborator in the West House Trust in Pinner which helped it build a home on an adjacent car park. ZMMA’s building is an expression of the slightly awkward site and its slightly unattractive brother, yet makes the most of fantastic views onto the Pinner Memorial Park with a blind wall to the rear.

Inside, building services and mechanics feature alongside exhibits, as Heath Robinson himself would have done in his drawings. These expressions take place primarily on the ceilings, and despite looking contrived, particularly in the puzzle of bracing, they aren’t – they have a structural logic. The same applies to the lighting and ductwork, which aren’t just exposed, but artfully arranged for aesthetic effect. There’s a clear enjoyment in that process. Copper light fittings are made with run-of-the-mill copper pipes, walls only rendered white in the display area, recesses for electrical wires left open. The ideas are considered, collected and result in a reliable, comfortable building.

For this museum, like Watts Studio (RIBAJ March 2016), the guiding concept is right but the method of its application is just so safe and controlled. There’s no sense of letting loose, of a mad streak that makes the building itself a destination. Initial ideas might be daring but execution is more careful. This resonates with what Zombory-Moldovan says about how museums have changed since the heady days leading up to the millennium and the early 2000s when major new institutions were catapulted into unlikely spots – Middlesbrough, Bilbao, the National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield – and international architects transplanted to do them. It presents the work as a sign of the times.

‘Since 2000 things have been much better scrutinised and conceived,’ explains Zombory-Moldovan. ‘Museums and galleries are more crafted as ideas and ambitions; organisations wanting to do capital projects think longer and harder about it.’

Have they had their fingers burned? ‘Yes, people have learned that more can be gained by more modest and scrutinised schemes. There is more public consultation and engagement with community, and thought about who the audiences are. There is less expectation that people will turn up when the doors open.’

If ZMMA is seen as a practice sweeping up so many of these types of commissions, the architecture says clients are taking a more restrained, less risky attitude. ZMMA’s work makes contemporary modifications to what is essentially a vernacular language – in whichever appropriate style it sees fit for its project. While Zombory-Moldovan’s ultimate ambition is to do a big new museum, the usual loud architecture for that type of commission might still – just about – be deferred. Although Herzog & de Meuron’s Tate Modern Switch House – less interesting than its recent Hamburg Elbphilharmonie – and the recent Stirling win for Newport Street Gallery, could suggest that’s changing too.

So if he’s right, and more ambitious museums and galleries are daring to start projects and hoping to fund them, where does that leave their architecture with regards to Brexit? Few of ZMMA’s projects attract EU funding. Some do when they’re part of a regeneration development, but plenty are significantly UK funded, with US money (so far) involved too.

‘We can only guess,’ says Zombory-Moldovan. ‘There will be a readjustment – we’re not seeing any additional caution, but the thing that can affect projects is the stock market. Donors give more money when it does well, and less when it doesn’t. Brexit will change the procurement of designers because currently they go through OJEU.’

Following the US election, any extra jitters that the result causes in the UK look like making ZMMA and its architecture well placed to soak up work that does materialise – possibly in an increasingly cautious context.
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There’s something of poet Gerard Manley Hopkins about the designs of German 20th century architect Rudolf Schwarz (1897-1961). Like the poetry, his work has real spatial breadth; it’s rich in rhythm, repetition and cadence but it’s devoutly ascetic, riddled with the introspection and self-mortification of a deeply religious Catholic. Schwarz was Germany’s pre-eminent church-builder, generating a modern expression for religious architecture as a way of making sense of the chaos of Germany’s post-war period. His need to believe was understandable: in TS Eliot’s The Waste Land God was dead; for Schwarz he was very much alive and never more called for.

This new book on the architect, by Caruso St John’s Adam Caruso and academic Helen Thomas, reappraises the man and his work, picking up where German historian Wolfgang Pehnt left off in 1997. The book includes lovely record drawings of seven of the major church commissions and two public build-

ings, plus fabulously atmospheric shots of the buildings by Hélène Binet. While the book aspires to critical objectivity on Schwarz’s work, bringing in the authors’ and Pehnt’s newly translated views as well as the architect’s, in its generosity and layout there’s a sense that Caruso and Thomas are converts, approving of work that ‘engaged with the social and technological upheavals of modernism without subscribing to its utopian ideology’.

To understand why Schwarz rejected this for a more historicist and materially crafted approach, they argue, is to be cognisant of the times he lived in. A teenager during the First World War, Schwarz studied during the depression that gave rise to both National Socialism and the Bauhaus and culminated in large scale bombing of German cities. After the briefly mooted Morgenthau Plan, which proposed returning the Ruhr area to a pre-industrial state, Schwarz emerged from the devastation, along with millions of others, to a country in denial and deeply scarred – physically and psychologically.

Architect for the rebuilding of Cologne under the Marshall Plan, Schwarz was keen to eschew the ‘inappropriate’ language of Bauhaus modernity for one that was connected on a far deeper level with the nation’s memo-
ry and psyche: one that acknowledged the loss and destitution but tried to create something from it. This thinking informed his involvement in the 1950 ‘Darmstadt Discussions’, in which leading German thinkers, among them Martin Heidegger, tried to make sense of the traumatic change in the nation’s identity in the war’s aftermath.

All these notions of ‘creating something familiar from the strange and absent’ are embodied in his most significant church, St Anna Düren (1951-56), constructed from the red sandstone rubble of the original church and topped by a lofty black concrete cross-braced roof. Separated from its tower this is a space of stunning austerity, seemingly windowless from the entrance but revealing a high south wall of glass once you have passed through the dark pilgrimage hall entrance holding St Anna’s reliquary and baptismal font, each emphasised below concrete domes studded by glass lenses – a detail echoed in the ‘tree of life’ formed from the stone of the apse wall.

As with all Schwarz’s open plan churches, the complexity lies in the section. Wolfgang Pehnt argues that the open plan form was in fact ‘the architype of a homeless people’ left wandering aimlessly, with ‘the superstructure above defining the character of the building’. The ‘God/Man’ analogy here is palpable, especially considering that Schwarz’s shrines, fonts, lecterns and altars on the human plane are ‘like monuments within the urban fabric’. In clear antithesis to his inter-war church of St Fronleichnam (1928-30) in Aachen, influenced far more by the Bauhaus aesthetic, this slow transitioning from dark to light and the metaphorical rather than functional attribution of materials continued in his later works – uncompromisingly so in the case of St Antonius Essen (1956-59), where the bricks set in the insitu concrete grid referenced not the church of old but the pre-war brick housing destroyed around it. The authors call its austerity ‘tough...perhaps too much so’ but not before claiming its deceptively simple plan and section as ‘complex and mysterious.’

The sense of aimless wandering seems to be reflected in the book’s layout. Interspersing images of pre-war and post-war churches between essays by the architect, the authors and Pehnt seems obvious, but is thrown by Caruso’s drawings of the edifices at the end, each of which is preceded by Schwarz’s description. Because of their complexity you find yourself constantly flicking between essay, Binet’s stoic photos and the drawings and architect’s text. It might have been easier to put the relevant content in the same section; then again, this might not conjure the approach of gradual revelation that seems so expressive of Schwarz’s oeuvre.

The 1960s and 70s saw more critical views of his work come to the fore and while Schwarz seemed to pre-empt changes in church design evinced by the Second Vatican Council of 1962, some later critics ‘objected to his conception of the liturgy to his spatial types’ and his designs ‘grim determination’, its ‘decrees’. But the architect showed he could give as good as he got when he oddly blamed the rupture in the western tradition not just on Nazism but the ‘impertinent and overexcited terrorists’ of the Bauhaus. In the interview with Schwarz’s wife Maria you feel that, towards the end of his life, Schwarz railed against the wilful individualism of new church architecture for lacking the rootedness he felt was so critical in making peace with the past. ‘They go searching through every nook and cranny of architecture to see if they can’t find a motif that has been forgotten,’ he said disparagingly, ‘and rack their brains to see if they can come up with something that has never yet existed.’

Schwarz blamed the rupture in western tradition partly on the ‘impertinent and overexcited terrorists’ of the Bauhaus.
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Peter Willis
1933 – 2016

Engaging communicator and academic fascinated by architecture, landscape design, music and America

Peter Willis possessed an exceptional fusion of academic skill, professional breadth and engaging communication. While based in north-east England, his outreach was international. He kept in touch with friends through postcards carefully inscribed in black ink, and the old fashioned care he applied to his work was also put into his friendships, punctuated by an explosive laugh.

Born in Yorkshire on 26 August 1933, Peter took his BArch at King’s College Newcastle and then, thanks to an RIBA scholarship, studied under Nikolaus Pevsner in Cambridge in the fifties. A period at Edinburgh and Cambridge enabled him to research the life and work of the 18th century landscape designer Charles Bridgeman, and this eventually became his seminal work. Landscape design, architecture and music were his passions, threaded through with a fascination in America. He practised a little too, including early on with Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners in Edinburgh, where he worked on a scheme for Queen’s College, Dundee, and the competition for St Paul’s Choir School, London.

In 1960, after a stint in practice in Middlesbrough, he won a Fulbright Scholarship to UCLA, and from there he researched the Stowe Papers in the Huntington Library. His junior fellowship in landscape architecture at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington DC enabled him to lecture across the United States and continue work on Bridgeman. He also ran up designs for a sculpture court in Washington for the National Collection of Fine Arts.

For over 30 years from 1965 to 1996, Peter lectured in architecture at Newcastle University, teaching in the studios, supervising undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations and running courses in the history and theory of architecture. This work was recognised with his appointment as a fellow of the RIBA in 1970. He also worked as architect on a group practice surgery in Alnwick, jointly with the university project office (1984).

Peter’s links to America were lifelong and maintained through frequent academic appointments there, from visiting professor or fellow in a stint at the University of Minnesota in the late sixties, to time at Yale University in the history of art department in the early eighties, and as Frederic Lindley Morgan Professor of Architectural Design at the University of Louisville in 1994. Indeed, his fascination with the life and work of Dom Paul Bellot, the architect-monk best known for his Canadian projects, led him to take an MA at the department of theology at Durham University (awarded 1995).

Multi-talented, with a thirst for knowledge, after he ‘retired’ Peter continued to cross disciplines, taking a diploma in music, followed by his second PhD in 2010, at Durham with a thesis on Chopin in Britain.

Many working in the built environment in both Britain and America had the pleasure of knowing Peter, through his active membership of the Society of Architectural Historians and through his writing. He was co-author of the classic The Genius of the Place, writing an anthology of its principal literary and visual sources. A review of the second edition of his Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden, by Maggie Roe, senior lecturer in landscape architecture at Newcastle University, captured something of his spirit. ‘Meticulous in his referencing and generous in his acknowledgements, Willis’s approach might seem old fashioned, and yet the style of the text is lively, informative, accessible and compelling.’ She writes now: ‘I think the words I used in this review probably sum up for me much about what I loved about Peter: his old fashioned charm and manners, his meticulous scholarship, his generosity of spirit, his liveliness and compelling friendship.’

In June 1968 Peter married Jennifer Gilchrist who, following his death on 12 August 2016, he leaves with their son, Magnus, and grandchildren Imogen and Erin. Deborah Mays

To inform the RIBA of the death of a member, please email membership.services@riba.org with details of next of kin.

The RIBA Journal December 2016
wasteful, alternatives. Instead we should be regenerating these buildings to the highest possible standards for future generations, transforming their performance and the ‘city scape’ as we do so.

In context, the Bristol Royal Infirmary is a work of art and has raised the bar for what can be achieved with 1960s buildings, exemplifying the term ‘sustainable regeneration’ (view the project video and form your own conclusion at: dhfacades.com/portfolio/bristol-royal-infirmary-queens-building/).

Peter Hillyard, d+H facades

Money talks
I have just read the article by Brian Green in RIBAJ September 2016 about downsizing. One issue is that the experts and government ministers do not seem to realise what happens to the property equity that is released.

I am a 72 year old architect living on my own in a nine roomed terrace house in inner London. I also have my office at home (which would have to be provided if I moved out of the building). I may well realise £750,000 if downsized but putting that in a building society would provide less than £1000 a year in interest if I am lucky. At the moment a 10% rise in value provides at least £100,000 a year in added wealth to pass on to my daughter.

The choice is obvious; I stay put.

John T Pounder, London

Power of three
We should have three years at college followed by three years in practice, learning on the job. Simple, affordable and productive.

Peter Baker, Hemel Hempstead

Nine down
Colleges at Historic England have confirmed to me that a total of nine listed buildings were demolished to make way for James Stirling’s No1 Poultry (RIBAJ October 2016, p100).

The architect of the Mappin & Webb building was John Belcher – not Thomas Belcher, as stated in the article.

Nick Coombe

The RIBA Journal December 2016
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Wood Awards 2016
Introduction

Designed to last

Hugh Pearman enjoys, again, the remarkable and enduring properties of this most versatile, sustainable and hard-wearing of materials

What CAN’T wood do, really, architecturally and in furniture design? One of the most fascinating things about being involved annually with the Wood Awards is to see the ever-expanding range of possibilities using this versatile material, from the ultra high-tech to the traditional. Which means from the highly experimental products of one of the world’s leading architecture schools to the most satisfying and lovely hand-crafted details of a kind that medieval craftsfolk would recognise.

And let’s not forget the good everyday, since the use of strong, durable engineered wood products structurally in buildings is now commonplace where a decade ago it was rare and special. When supermarket chains and a motorway service station specify such materials, you know a corner has been turned.

Judging of the Wood Awards is always a congenial but closely-argued affair, drawing together a wide selection of specialists. It comes down to achieving a three-way equilibrium of aesthetics, structural integrity and craft. Structure is clearly a vital consideration in buildings but increasingly so in furniture as the designers become more audacious. Also common to both sections of the awards is the increasing prevalence of hybrids: sometimes unexpected combinations and juxtapositions of materials. Wood and stone is an ancient marriage – one of our category winners manages to give this tradition a very contemporary reading. Wood and steel is a more recent one, used very happily in a lively and educational treewalk we awarded. And in the furniture section, wood and soya-based resin, foamed with sawdust, is the latest wonder product to be tried.

That last one also carries another important message: the avoidance of waste through the use of what previously would have been regarded as such, namely sawdust. This is further proof of one of wood’s strongest suits: its sustainability. In other contexts ‘sustainable’ has become an almost meaningless buzzword but when one is looking at the restoration of a large timber building that has existed very happily for nearly 600 years – one of our commendations – you get a real sense of its durability.

Henry VI was on the throne when this was built in 1426. The population was around a tenth of today’s level. Another 138 years would pass before the birth of Shakespeare. And there it is, and you can visit it. What were we commending, we wondered – the work of today’s restorers or of the medieval carpenters? A similar question arose with renovated 1960s timber-built houses. Not a problem, we swiftly decided: today’s designers are themselves tipping their hats to earlier generations.

Our awards cover Commercial and Leisure, Education and Public Sector, Private, Interiors, Small Projects, Existing Buildings and Structural. On the following pages you will find our winners and commendations in each of these. Plus our Arnold Laver Gold Award winner. This year’s architectural laureate effortlessly achieves that three-way equilibrium, working at a very high level of aesthetics, structure and craft, all in the service of human co-operation and dignity. It has a look all of its own, which recalls other lightweight timber designs such as aircraft. That of course means delicacy and transparency: others of the awards and commendations prefer solidity and enclosure. Add in that potential lifespan of centuries and yes, this is a material that really can do just about anything. •

Hugh Pearman, editor, RIBA Journal

The RIBA Journal December 2016
Maggie’s at the Robert Parfett Building

This is a valuable addition to the impressive list of Maggie’s centres, which use carefully considered architecture to create a place of refuge where people affected by cancer can find emotional and practical support. The Manchester centre establishes a domestic atmosphere in a garden setting, while accommodating a range of flexible spaces from intimate private niches to a library, exercise rooms and places where people can gather and share a cup of tea.

Naturally illuminated by triangular roof lights, the building is supported by lightweight timber lattice beams. These beams act as natural partitions between different internal areas, visually dissolving the architecture into the surrounding gardens. Their structural ingenuity, which is described on the following pages, gives them a visual lightness and an actual transparency in the lattice areas which is appropriate to the setting.

Timber was chosen as the primary build-
ing material for its aesthetic and structural properties, as well as for cost and carbon efficiency. The desire to create a homely environment, far from institutional, clinical spaces, defined the approach to the building’s environmental design. Natural ventilation, daylighting and radiant floors provide a comfortable environment in a low-energy building. Passive design elements such as the deep roof overhang help to shade the building from excessive solar gain during the summer, and capture the low winter sun – minimising energy consumption.

The sustainability of the building in-use has also been considered with the use of water-efficient fixtures, waste separation and a greenhouse.

The judges were very impressed by many aspects of the building, and enjoyed the creative tension by which an architect known for rigour and elegance had achieved a gentler aesthetic that was appropriate to this use without sacrificing any signature strengths. In particular, they felt it deserved the Structural Award because of the originality of its design. They said: ‘It is a project that all engineers would love to work on. It demonstrates that a simple, coherent structural diagram, when beautifully and carefully developed and detailed, can result in a solution of considerable merit. The engineer has undertaken a rigorous analysis to reduce material to the minimum that is necessary, but has additionally engaged with leaders in the supply chain to explore cutting-edge fabrication possibilities. The result is an ingenious and original structural system of opposing CNC-cut “ladder beams” which are laminated together to create the trussed members. The moment connections required to develop the portal action have been detailed as elegant nodes, with only a concealed steel strap over the top to strengthen the timber jointing arrangement.’

Left The greenhouse demonstrates both the welcoming nature of the building and its transparency.

Below From outside, one can admire the structural tour de force.

Right The lightness of the structural system and use of timber give spaces a light and domestic feel.

Bottom right No additional bracing is needed.

Location Manchester
Architect/structural engineer Foster + Partners
Client/owner Maggie’s
Main contractor/builder Sir Robert McAlpine
Specialist contractor Blumer Lehmann AG / SJB Engineers
Landscape consultant Dan Pearson Studio
Wood supplier Metsä Wood
Wood species Nordic Spruce
WINNER

Technical study: Maggie’s at the Robert Parfett Building

In common with all Foster buildings, the design of Maggie’s is a synthesis of the brief, structure and choice of materials. This is clear from Norman Foster’s earliest sketches, a delicate filigree of timber elements which resemble the extended skeleton of a bird, its wings outstretched at the sides. Within this sketch are contained all the elements of the plan – low in scale to respond to the suburban context, long on the east and west elevations to link to the surrounding garden landscape, and with a central spine which encloses space for administration and services. The spine rises at its centre to create a continuous glazed rooflight which floods the rooms below with natural light and allows just enough headroom for a mezzanine floor. The nature of the building suggested that the material for the structure would be domestic in scale, and would emanate warmth yet be sustainable; timber was the inevitable choice.

The structure is exposed throughout the building and consists of laminated veneer lumber (LVL) trusses each with a set of diagonally opposed double web elements, creating a delicate filigree of timber. A series of LVL trusses forms the central spine; they are set on the diagonal and rise to the ridge, where the spaces between them are infilled with triangular glazed rooflights. At their bases each pair of diagonal trusses meets at a triangular LVL node; this connects them to the LVL column below and joins both to an LVL truss beam which cantilevers outwards to support the gently sloping roof, supported at its end by a slender steel column.

All the trusses taper to reflect the magnitude and orientation of the forces acting on them – any portion that is superfluous has been removed. Analysis of the stresses caused by wind load (sideways) and snow and dead load (vertically) indicated where the timber could be optimised. The 7.5m-long cantilever roof trusses taper as the bending forces reduce towards towards the cantilever tip, through the column to the pin connection at the ground, and at the central node above the spine. On the top and bottom flanges the ends become solid as the shear force increases along the section. A key component of the structure is the node, the point where vertical loads from the roof are transferred to the 3.1m-high columns below. The node also acts as a portal frame haunch to provide the rigidity required to resist horizontal wind forces which act across the structure.

LVL creates a sophisticated piece of en-
engineered, strong and lightweight, yet with all the warm tones and domestic qualities of timber. Trusses were produced from Kerto LVL provided by Metsä Wood; 3mm thick rotary-cut sustainable Nordic spruce veneers were bonded to form a continuous board and cut to suit the required basic shape. These were transported to the factory of timber specialist Blumer-Lehmann in Switzerland where they were CNC-cut to form the series of tapered layers which make up each truss. ‘By studying the process we were able to maximise opportunities to refine it,’ explains project architect Darron Haylock. For instance, although all the LVL layers which make up a single tapered truss follow a consistent perimeter profile, two inner layers were specially cut to create the two sets of diagonal web flanges; all layers were then dowelled and glued together to form the final truss. Likewise, the LVL layers of the truss columns and cantilevered beams were extended at the ends to create the triangular node; during construction the column layer of the node slotted between the cantilever truss layers of the node in a manner similar to a halved timber joint.

All fixings between the trusses are concealed; a metal Y-shaped strap along the top of each cantilever truss connects it to the diagonal roof trusses.

Waste generated during fabrication of the trusses was used as fuel to heat the Blumer-Lehmann factory. The process offered all the advantages of timber prefabrication: fast and efficient construction, elimination of wet trades and a superior pre-finished product.

This is an abbreviated version of one of more than 80 case studies on TRADA’s website. To read this and others in full go to trada.co.uk > Wood information > Case studies.
Stanbrook Abbey is a new home for the Conventus of Our Lady of Consolation, a Benedictine community of nuns who devote their lives to study, work and prayer.

Relocating from their old Victorian home in Worcestershire, the nuns’ contemplative way of life required spaces that were simple, tranquil and beautiful, or as they put it, a place where they could ‘pray always’.

The new church derives its plan from two intersecting axes significant in the liturgy of the church, its organic form rising out of the modest orthogonal domestic architecture of the abbey. Its interior, which is home to the nuns for six hours a day, celebrates the diurnal changes in daylight and takes advantage of dramatic views to the south.

Completed over two phases, from 2007 to 2015, the new spaces include private cells for nuns, a refectory and associated kitchen, work rooms, a chapter house, guest spaces and the community church and chapel.

The nuns were keen for the new abbey to be both economic to run and ecologically sensitive in design. Preference was given to renewable, recycled or low embodied energy materials, and the nuns were particularly keen to minimize their ecological footprint.

The judges called it a ‘spiritually uplifting building that sits sculpturally in the landscape with light that changes through the day so that it acts like a giant sundial’. Detailing of the church furniture was, they said, ‘superb’. 

WINNER

Stanbrook Abbey
The light in the church changes throughout the day, while the exterior has a strong sculptural form.
**Mellor Primary School**

‘A lovely little project on a tight budget’

**Wood Awards 2016**

**Education & Public Sector**

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**

**Location** Stockport, Manchester

**Architect** Sarah Wigglesworth Architects

**Client/owner** Mellor Primary School

**Structural engineer** Rhodes and Partners

**Main contractor/builder** MPS Construction

**Joinery company** Image Joinery

**Wood supplier** Vincent Timber

**Glulam frame supplier** Constructional Timber

**Environmental/M&E engineer** Watt Energy & Consulting Engineers

**Quantity surveyor/cost consultant** Wilkinson Cowan Partnership

**Wood species** Canadian western red cedar, European larch, birch ply
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Springfield, St Clare’s, Oxford

‘A thoughtful design that creates a totally new place’

Location Oxford
Architect Hodder + Partners
Client/owner St Clare’s, Oxford
Structural engineer Thornton Tomasetti
Main contractor/builder Benfield & Loxley
Structural timber sub-contractor and engineer Eurban
Timber frame supplier Hasslacher Norica Timber
Joinery companies Benfield & Loxley, D Smith Joinery
Wood supplier Timbmet
Wood species European oak, spruce

SHORTLISTED

Maggie’s at the Robert Parfett Building

Location Manchester
Architect Foster + Partners

Conservation & repair of Harmondsworth Barn

Location Harmondsworth, Middlesex
Architect Ptolemy Dean Architects

The RIBA Journal December 2016
WINNER

Stihl Treetop Walkway
The grade I-listed Westonbirt Arboretum is home to one of the finest tree collections in the world. The Stihl Treetop Walkway provides stunning new views over this landscape, enhancing the appreciation of the estate’s natural heritage. At almost 300m in length, it is also the longest structure of its kind in the UK.

Using the land’s natural topography, the walkway crosses a valley, giving easy ground-level access without the need for stairs or lifts. At four points along the route it gently widens from 1.9 to 3.7m, providing spaces for pausing, reflection, and interpretation of the surrounding woodland.

This is a hybrid timber and steel structure. Great efforts went into ensuring that when touching the handrail on either side, walking on the decking, or viewing the visible columns seen under the walkway, the visitor’s experience would be of timber. Larch was chosen as the main material, for its durability and attractive colour, with Scottish larch used for the decking and handrail and, for the columns, Siberian larch which has a tighter grain and higher strength-to-weight ratio.

Glenn Howells partnered with Ventis & Brasker Masten, a Dutch maker of ships’ masts, to deliver strong, light and elegant timber columns. The mastmaker was able to achieve in timber what could otherwise only have been done in steel. It created specially tapered columns, notching and reinforcing the ends with steel plates to ensure they could manage the loading and height. The legs were then oiled to slow the drying of the timber and to minimise cracking. Micro-nised copper was used to treat the decking and handrail, providing a 30 year warranty.

The judges said: 'Not only is this a striking composite structure of wood and steel in which wood is doing all the exciting bits; it is also an educational response in itself. It has the ability to inspire all generations to learn more about wood.'

Location Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Gloucestershire
Architect Glenn Howells Architects
Client/owner Forestry Commission
Structural engineer Buro Happold
Main contractor/builder Speller Metcalfe
Joinery company S H Structures
Wood suppliers CTS Bridges, Ventis & Brasker Masten, Russwood, Heseltine Design
Wood species Scottish and Siberian larch
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Mottisfont Welcome Centre

The judges were impressed by the way the building sits so comfortably on its very prominent site: ‘The limited palette has been used with great rigour’

Location: Mottisfont, Hampshire
Architect: Burd Haward Architects
Client/owner: The National Trust
Timber frame consultant: Constructional Timber
Structural engineer: Thomas Consulting
Main contractor/builder: Beard Swindon
Timber frame contractor: Sylva Group
Wood supplier: Vincent Timber
Timber decking supplier: Hoppings Softwood Products
Timber flooring supplier: Orlestone Oak
Wood species: European spruce, European larch, Canadian western red cedar, thermally modified Scandinavian redwood, European oak, plywood & OSB sheathing

SHORTLISTED

Alconbury Weald Club

Location: Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon
Architect: Allford Hall Monaghan Morris

SHORTLISTED

Gloucester Services

Location: Brookthorpe, Gloucestershire
Architect: Glenn Howells Architects

SHORTLISTED

Sky Health & Fitness Centre

Location: Osterley, London
Architect: dRMM
The fact that such quality material and work was being produced in the middle of a recession was very exciting and we at Arnold Laver wanted to support this type of great work. From that point on, I tracked the Wood Awards and was consistently amazed by the level of the shortlisted nominees and the winners. In 2014 we decided we wanted to become an active supporter and now sponsor the Arnold Laver Gold Award, which was won first by Ditchling Museum in Sussex and last year by the Fishing Hut in Hampshire.

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The RIBA Journal December 2016
The client wanted a replacement house that was open, light and contemporary, using high quality traditional materials. Sanei Hopkins’ design follows one of the original gently curving contours of the meadow site, rather like a dry stone wall.

Although the Peak District National Park Authority required the use of stone as the dominant external material, the architect wanted to use timber as much as possible because of its sustainability credentials and in order to create a beautiful and natural-looking home.

The structure is mainly timber frame with the stone used only as a rain screen and cladding. A local contractor, Constructional Timber, manufactured and erected the superstructure which consists of: laminated solid white wood posts, infill walls and rafters; laminated flitched beams supporting the first floor; flitched feature trusses supporting the roof over the swimming pool and master bedroom with stainless steel ties and rod fixings; trussed rafters in other areas.

Designed to maximize carbon storage while minimising carbon emissions and energy consumption, the house uses both local and renewable materials as much as possible.

The judges said, ‘The workmanship displayed is quite exceptional. The project is extremely ambitious and has been realised very successfully. It has been delivered with conviction.’

The RIBA Journal December 2016
Timber dominates internally, but stone rainscreen cladding is used to comply with local planning requirements.
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Woodpeckers

The judges were delighted by this beautiful, light and airy modernist house

Location New Forest
Architect Ström Architects
Structural engineer Barton Engineers
Main contractor/builder Rice Projects
Joinery company Industree
Cost consultant APS Associates
Sustainability consultant Eb7
Wood supplier East Brothers
Wood Species European larch, Siberian larch, softwood

SHORTLISTED

Ansty Plum

Location Wiltshire
Architect: Coppin Dockray

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The TWIST is a design and construction project developed by the Emergent Technologies and Design Programme (EmTech) at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London and built at Timber Expo 2015. It seeks to gain full control of the bending and twisting behaviour of plywood, exploiting the anisotropic properties of plywood to achieve a material system capable of producing articulated surfaces by the orientation of its elements.

The system is primarily composed of two plywood strip elements: the ribs and the wings. The former are planar arcs, which serve primarily a structural function, and are CNC-milled from 6mm plywood sheets to obtain the desired profiles with the grain direction oriented for high longitudinal stiffness. The latter are 4mm thick, 120mm wide straight strips, with the grain perpendicular to its length. These are connected to the rib elements at specific angles and distances in order to obtain both bending and twisting. The rib elements essentially work as a means to trigger the inherent physical properties of the thin wings, creating characteristic sinusoidal curves on the surface.

A sub-system of combs and perpendiculars runs along the free edges of the articulated surface, locking the geometry in place. The comb elements are milled specifically to define the angle at which a rib strikes a comb.
The judges said: ‘It shows an interesting new direction for timber, demonstrating the possibilities of using wood in a very beautiful and efficient way.’

Location: Timber Expo 2015
Architects: Emergent Technologies and Design, Architectural Association
Structural engineers: Emergent Technologies and Design, Architectural Association
Main contractors/builders: Emergent Technologies and Design, Architectural Association
Wood supplier: Hanson Plywood
Sponsors: TRADA, Hanson Plywood
Wood species: birch plywood

SHORTLISTED

Hollow

Location: Bristol
Artist: Katie Paterson
Architect: Zeller & Moye

SHORTLISTED

Doors for 55 St James’s Street

Location: London
Designer: Sarah Kay

SHORTLISTED

Kingston Ancient Market Place & Stalls

Location: Kingston upon Thames, Surrey
Architect/landscape architect/lighting designer: Tonkin Liu
This new rear staircase is designed as a distinct contemporary insertion into the old medieval service wing of Portledge House, a grade II* listed manor house in north Devon.

Replacing a damaged multi-phase service flight, the stair is part of a reordering of the house that sees this area become much more important to the flow of the principal rooms.

Staircase sections blend with wall panelling to create a homogeneous design that uses English oak chevrons between darker walnut fins. In the staircase sections, the walnut fins continue through the panelling to form spindles topped with a leather handrail. Spindle sections have arc pieces of varying sizes cut through them to create an organic flow through the staircase guard rails.

CNC machining was used to produce accurate setting out before the staircase was
‘This is an almost faultless piece of work, a surprising intervention in the historic context that works extremely well’

assembled by hand using traditional joinery techniques. While the staircase provides a practical function as one of two primary staircases in the house, its design as a bespoke sculptural piece was instrumental in winning it approval from Historic England and the local conservation officer.

There is also considerable and considered conservation of existing historic timber in other parts of the house.

The judges said: ‘This is an almost faultless piece of work, a surprising intervention in the historic context that works extremely well.’

Location: Bideford, Devon

Architect: Witcher Crawford Architects and Designers

Joinery company: Warren Hughes Furniture

Wood species: German walnut, English oak
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Christ Church Crypt, Spitalfields

The judges felt this project makes intelligent use of the previously neglected crypt of Hawksmoor’s Grade I listed church.

Location: Spitalfields, London
Architect: Dow Jones Architects
Building client/owner: The Rector & PCC, Christ Church Spitalfields
Structural engineer: Momentum Engineering
Main contractor/builder: Coniston
Joinery company: Icklesham Joinery
Wood supplier: Timbmet Group
Wood species used: European oak

SHORTLISTED

Tufnell Park Road

Location: London
Architect: TYPE Studio
Wood Awards 2016
Existing Building Award

WINNER

Ansty Plum

The judges were highly impressed by the sensitivity shown in Coppin Dockray’s modern upgrade of some of the best of 1960s architecture – a small brick and timber house designed by David Levitt and a wood-lined stone studio by Alison and Peter Smithson.

In the house, many sequential changes made over 50 years were removed to express the rigorous architectonic qualities of the original lightweight Douglas fir construction. To open up the main space, the architect removed a late addition bathroom and internal walls and, with bespoke Douglas fir joinery, created a new bedroom and study. All the single-glazed windows were discreetly upgraded with new seals and double-glazed units.

Location Wiltshire
Architect Coppin Dockray
Structural engineer Tall Engineering
Main contractor/builder J & C Symonds
Joinery company Westside Design
Wood supplier Meyer Timber Ltd, SMS Veneering Services, Oscar Windebanks
Wood Species Douglas fir, birch

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Conservation & repair of Harmondsworth Barn

The judges praised this classic restoration of the ‘cathedral of Middlesex’ following the principles of SPAB and English Heritage.

Location Harmondsworth, Middlesex
Architect Ptolemy Dean Architects
Client/owner English Heritage
Structural engineer Historic England
Main contractor and joinery Owlsworth IJP
Wood suppliers Whippletree, Coyle Timber Products
Wood species English Oak

Location Harmondsworth, Middlesex
Architect Ptolemy Dean Architects
Client/owner English Heritage
Structural engineer Historic England
Main contractor and joinery Owlsworth IJP
Wood suppliers Whippletree, Coyle Timber Products
Wood species English Oak
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Furniture is flourishing

With a greater and wider range of entries to choose from and a new judge to help the decision making, the furniture category has thrown up a rich selection of inventive projects.

Encouragingly, the furniture and product categories received more entries this year, giving me and fellow judges Ruth Aram, Corinne Julius, John Makepeace, Rod Wales and Katie Walker plenty to discuss and debate. In my second year as chair of judges, I felt the need to include another judge with specific experience in retail and so I am delighted to introduce Ruth to complement the skills of our other judges.

However, it was the skill of the entrants that we were focused on during our first round of scrutiny in late June. We selected our shortlist across the categories of Production Made and Bespoke projects as well as Student Designers, quizzing each other throughout the process until we settled on the right choice. Our eyes scanned the entries for originality, beauty, comfort, skill and material innovation – a difficult combination of criteria with this age-old and heavily-explored material. Our conversations tended to go in multiple directions, such was the diversity of entries, and this year it was felt that the Production Made category made a stronger showing of quality designs than in 2015.

The judges reconvened in September at 100% Design to view the shortlisted contenders in front of physical examples of their works. This is always a valuable moment as we’re able to touch, sit on, turn upside down (and even sniff!) the objects with a higher degree of assessment. Again, sometimes-conflicting opinions divided the panel until the moment when our judgements were filtered and finalised.

This year, we can celebrate our winning items for demonstrating a variety of functions and typology, showing us that wood remains as versatile and relevant today as it has ever been.
Wood Awards 2016
Production Made Furniture & Product

**WINNER**

**Stretch Extending Dining Table**

The other, equally placed, winner in this category is an extending dining table conceived to use the natural characteristics of formed ply. The form of the laminations enables the top to slide along a simple metal frame, exposing extension leaves stored in the table.

First designed in 2003, the original was much smaller and less successful. The 2015 redesign was based on overcoming issues with the movement of each lamination as a result of interior climatic fluctuations. The updated version is significantly larger due to these issues being resolved.

The judges were impressed by the way the design pushes the material, and by this elegant solution to a common problem.

**WINNER**

**Planks Collection**

One of two joint winners in this category, the Planks Collection includes a dining table, bench, shelving, console table and lounge table.

Common to all is the additional function of storage to which legs are attached, providing easily accessible storage and preventing clutter on the working surface.

Full-width planks are used as the defining feature, both structurally and visually, to provide generous surfaces with uninterrupted wood grain that convey the impressive scale of the tree from which they are made. Narrower planks are joined to form structural rails to support the top. By adding a fourth plank to the underside, a hidden storage box makes good use of the otherwise wasted space below the surface. Four simple L-shaped legs, structurally strong yet physically light, connect to the side of the box and support the cantilevered top.

The judges liked the way that the collection expressed the integrity of the material, using it in the most effective way and bringing rationality to its design. They felt this would work in a number of interiors and for different users.

Designer Max Lamb
Maker/manufacturer Benchmark
Wood supplier Tyler Hardwoods
Wood species: British Douglas fir or European oak
Designer Pengelly Design  
Maker/manufacturer Stonebridge  
Client/owner Montis  
Beech veneer supplier Furnierwerk Laubach GmbH & Co KG  
Wood species European beech, birch or oak

**SHORTLISTED**  
**Dyehouse Fall Bench**  
Designer Mark Lee for Dyehouse

**SHORTLISTED**  
**Ercol Flow Chair**  
Designer t.n.a Design Studio for Ercol

**SHORTLISTED**  
**Sebastian Cox Kitchen by deVOL**  
Designers deVOL design team and Sebastian Cox

**SHORTLISTED**  
**Well Proven Stool**  
Designers Marjan van Aubel and James Shaw
The American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) collaborated with Alison Brooks Architects, Arup and the London Design Festival to present a stunning cross-laminated tulipwood structure at the Chelsea College of Art’s Rootstein Hopkins Parade Ground in September 2016.

As one of the Festival’s Landmark Projects, The Smile was designed to be inhabited and explored by the public.

The spectacular, curved, tubular timber structure measured 3.5m high, 4.5m wide and 34m long. Showcasing the structural and spatial potential of cross-laminated American tulipwood, Alison Brooks’ concept was the first ever ‘mega-tube’ made with construction-sized panels of hardwood cross-laminated timber (CLT).

‘The Smile was not an installation at all, but something far more important – it’s effectively the latest stage in a 10-year project that challenges the way hardwood can be used structurally. Rather than doing our experimentation in a laboratory, we do it in public,’ says David Venables, European director of AHEC.

Three years ago AHEC worked with architects at dRMM (de Rijke Marsh Morgan) and engineers at Arup to design The Endless Stair, the very first tulipwood CLT prototype, for the London Design Festival.

‘As a result, debate about hardwood CLT spread across Europe and AHEC learnt so much from The Endless Stair that we were able to take it to industrial production,’ Venables adds. ‘The Smile has proven that hardwood CLT is now an exciting and workable possibility for innovative timber construction.’

The Smile team
AHEC commissioned Alison Brooks because she has been championing the use of timber for affordable housing for a long time and is a strong advocate for timber in construction. This project would not have been possible without Arup; the original idea to test the structural potential of tulipwood CLT (with the Endless Stair in 2013) came from the ongoing relationship with this top firm.

ZÜBLIN Timber, which manufactured the CLT for The Smile, has a reputation for specialist one-off projects and the way that it makes CLT is different from the approach of other manufacturers. It uses a vacuum press to create the multi-layer material rather than the pressurised plate approach that is most common. This allows them to create curved elements and to work with smaller quantities – both essential for The Smile.

‘ZÜBLIN Timber’s vast experience and expertise in timber construction, particularly CLT, made it possible to meet the engineering challenge of The Smile, which may look simple in form but is highly complex in terms of timber engineering,’ adds Venables.

Sustainability
The use of tulipwood is good for both American hardwood producers and the environment. To use timber in the most environmentally friendly way, it is vital to use as much as possible of what is grown and harvested and to throw away as little as possible. There is a double win for tulipwood CLT. First the timber is abundant, naturally representing a large proportion of hardwood forests. And secondly, CLT uses the lowest grades of the timber – those that are no longer exported for furniture production and so would otherwise have a very restricted market. These facts make tulipwood a perfect pioneer hardwood for timber construction.

More information: thetulipwoodsmile.info
Pantori

Pantori is an adaptable, tailor made, free-standing pantry larder, designed by carpentry intern Steph Leake and handcrafted by Jack Badger for Japanese crepe eatery, Nojō.

Inspired by Japanese joinery and its precision, the top of the Pantori has been jointed using three-way mitres and wedged tenons for added strength. These are housed in dovetails which tighten when driven in, giving strength and avoiding the need for mechanical fixings.

The ash drawers are housed and nailed with the extremely strong and durable ring shank nails used in boat building.

Shou Sugi Ban – the traditional Japanese art of burning timber to produce beautiful and long lasting products – inspired the scorching on the oak, which also preserves the timber and makes it resistant to fire, rot and insects. The entire unit has been hand planed and then finished with natural oil.

Pantori’s design finds an inventive use for the waste sawdust and shavings, by creating a substrate for mushrooms to grow in.

The judges said: ‘This project makes bespoke furniture accessible to everybody. It is so rare to see this kind of work in a public space.’

Designer Steph Leake, intern at Jack Badger
Maker/manufacturer Jack Badger Ltd
Client/owner Nojō
Wood supplier Brooks Brothers Timber
Project architect Holland Harvey Architects
Wood Species European oak, English ash

Log Stack Cabinet

Designer Byron & Gómez

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Geometry

This modern circular dining table has a frame inspired by molecular geometry, made with contemporary stainless steel rods and contrasting classic oak junctures. The table top consists of constructional oak veneer and solid oak lipping.

The judges said: ‘This table has its own definite aesthetic. It is solid and it works, using a system that does not involve any screws. It is a robust piece of furniture.’

Designer Michael Stevenson
College/university Building Crafts College
Wood suppliers: Blumsoms, Capital Crispin Veneer
Steel supplier: Parker Steel
Wood species: European oak
SHORTLISTED

Milena
Designer Juan Junca
College/university Building Crafts College

One-Sheet Dining Chair
Designer Terry Davies
College/university Rycotewood Furniture Centre

Velo Chair
Designer Jan Waterston
College/university Rycotewood Furniture Centre

The RIBA Journal December 2016
People’s choice: Velo Chair

Velo Chair was the winning piece after the public was asked to choose its favourite student design on Twitter. Inspired by the bicycle, the Velo Chair connects body and object by seamlessly wrapping itself around the user. Ash was selected for its flexibility, allowing the complex curves to be free-form laminated without breaking. The flexibility allows a more comfortable backrest which flexes and moulds around the sitter.

Designer: Jan Waterston
College/university: Rycotewood Furniture Centre
Wood suppliers: Tyler Hardwoods, Mundy Veneer
Wood species: European ash constructional veneer
The Carpenters’ Company is one of the ancient Livery Companies of the City of London. Its origins can be traced to the 13th century as a trade guild established to look after the welfare and interests of carpenters in the city.

Today, the company supports a broad range of charitable and educational interests including the support and encouragement of the woodworking and building crafts, most obviously through patronage of the Building Crafts College. The Carpenters’ Company is proud to be the home of the Wood Awards.

Founded in 1893, the Building Crafts College has a long tradition of delivering high quality education training in building crafts and building conservation.

The emphasis is to give all students the opportunity to reach their full potential and the expectations of students are high. There is a constant focus on delivering employable skills and producing work of high quality, whether full time students, apprentices or degree students.

Situated in the centre of Stratford, east London, The Building Crafts College is open to potential students every Thursday 1pm-6pm. These sessions are the perfect opportunity to see the excellent facilities, talk to tutors and find out more about the courses available.

For further information call 020 8522 1705 or visit www.thebcc.ac.uk.

The Carpenters’ Company: carpentersco.com
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- Michael Morrison (chair)
  Purcell
- Jim Greaves
  Hopkins
- Andrew Lawrence
  Arup
- David Morley
  David Morley Architects
- Hugh Pearman
  RIBA Journal
- Adam Richards
  Adam Richards Architects
- Ruth Slavid
  Architectural writer
- Nathan Wheatley
  engenuity
- John Wilkie
  Craft specialist

#### Furniture
- Max Fraser (chair)
  Spotlight Press
- Ruth Aram
  Aram
- Corinne Julius
  Design critic
- John Makepeace
  Furniture designer and maker
- Rod Wales
  Wales and Wales
- Katie Walker
  Katie Walker Furniture

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Imperial Villa
Kyoto, Japan, 17th century

‘Dear Corbu, all we have been fighting for has its parallel in old Japanese culture.’ Walter Gropius made this observation on a postcard sent to Le Corbusier from Japan in June 1954, after visiting the Imperial Villa in the Katsura district of Kyoto.

However, Gropius – who was to write an essay for the famous book on Katsura published in 1960 – was not the first European architect to be struck by the surprising modernity of the 17th century building. Bruno Taut, who visited the villa for the first time shortly after his arrival in Japan in 1933, highlighted in his writings the spare and functional nature of Katsura’s architectural elements; in his words ‘the highest art resides in the maximum simplicity’. The building subsequently acquired iconic status among modernist architects, and even before publication of the 1960 book it appeared in the pages of such influential architectural magazines as Domus and L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui.


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