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A leisurely stroll, the perfect way to spend a lazy Sunday afternoon. Back in the days when Vauxhall, south London, was not just the back end of a busy interchange or the unremarkable terraces around the Oval cricket ground, its place in the public imagination was dominated by Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. Now, roundabouts and bollards negotiated, the place is again being populated with the architectural and cultural events that make a rendezvous in Vauxhall delightful, rather than risible. Alongside gasometers and warehouse backlands is the revitalised Gasworks where young artists absorb their city; rubbing shoulders with railway arches Damien Hirst’s art factory dwarfs its neighbouring social housing; perched on the park Cabinet Gallery which, when complete, will draw a sunny crowd. Up the road the South Bank is for tourists and flâneurs – the River Thames showing the way. But in Vauxhall it is the leisurely work of others, highly tended allotments and the city farm, plus the ghostly leftovers of the Pleasure Gardens, that draw these institutions together.

Railway arches and art at Newport Street in the back end of Vauxhall.
‘That is Hat Projects’ trademark solution for bins,’ deadpans Hana Loftus as I puzzle over the grand cupboard doors fronting an office on the reordered facade of the Gasworks gallery in Kennington.

It is not a predictable solution for a gallery and artists’ studios, but then this job has been about making a compromised and rather messy building work simply and elegantly. Inside, a clerestory over the bin store admits light into the office but not intrusive views, and below it the white tiled cut away, roofing the store, reflects even more.

This building, only just beyond the range of a cricket ball from the Oval cricket ground, probably started life as a manager’s house and works building for the gasometers next door. For 20 years it has been operating as studios, mixing up young London artists renting relatively inexpensively with artists’ residencies from all over the world, and displaying the best of their work in the cramped ground floor.

Its street access was confusing and almost invisible. Now the facade has been clarified and the single entrance clearly and graphically signposted with two elegant lightboxes, signalling the way to those even at the far end of the street. From the door the gallery is visible past the modestly reworked stair. A slice taken out on the corner of the stair tower gives a glimpse towards the studio-heart of the building – and lets reception staff keep an eye on those ascending.

It was the building’s imminent sale that was the catalyst for Gasworks’ application to the Arts Council for a capital grant for the purchase, with refurbishment thrown in. Before this investment was hard to come by with leaking roofs covered in black plastic and ad hoc additions, like the disabled toilet opening straight off the gallery. Much of the project’s budget went into dealing with these issues but Hat Projects has also brought order to the plan and the spaces with simple detailing, circulation canted, and the underside of the pitched roof exposed to lend height to the top floor studios. It is a pragmatic, calm composition. Including the bins.

---

**Gasworks Gallery, Kennington, London**  
**Architect: Hat Projects**  
**Words: Eleanor Young**  
**Photographs: Ioana Marinescu**

---

**IN NUMBERS**

- **£1114** cost/m²
- **619m²** gross internal floor area
- **£689,650** contract value

---

**Left** New windows, new entrance (new bin store). A calm composition.  
**Right** Space, connections and surveillance in the centre of the building, the cut away stair tower in the centre, education space to the right, office to the left.
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For a page where we’re usually spoiled for choice, when photographer Julie Cook presented a number of her images to us, we found our options somewhat limited as most weren’t felt to be publishable in the pages of our profession’s esteemed organ. That could have something to do with the subject matter – the world of erotic dance clubs in London and Las Vegas – elucidated in her retrospective at the University of Hertfordshire’s UH Gallery: ‘Sightlines: Public and Private (Lives)’, a collaboration with architect/writer partner Paul Davies. Together they investigate the role that architectural space plays in the bigger sexual construct of gender, power relations and fantasy.

Cook states that her work verges on the documentary and while the subject is usually the people in the industry, the spaces they occupy also exert a certain amount of control on them, being predominantly about ‘viewer’ and ‘performer’ – a mirror wall here, a leather banquette or steel pole there – the architecture reifying those roles. Cook has spent years building up trust with those in the industry to create a unique and personal portrait of the sex industry, but for the most part, beneath the personalities of its female subjects, it seems as if the male dominated status quo is still in place.

But not with this image perhaps. ‘Olympia Moments’ is the name of a Shoreditch co-operative set up by female strippers, tired of being managed by men. Their strip and burlesque nights run according to their own rules with their own invitees. They are set up as pop-ups, in spaces that they control; allowing them to add their own layer of fantasy and performance to a business already bursting with it. In these contingent spaces, for one night, a bespoke ‘seediness’ is specially constructed for the event but not without humanity – and humour. I remember they had a ‘Wrap up warm, it’s winter night,’ recalls Cook, without obvious irony. ‘Some of the girls even brought flowers to dress the tables…’
Bell Phillips Architects’ model homes for the elderly have now alighted at six sites in the London Borough of Greenwich, in a dramatic and satisfying form that carries itself with a certain modesty. They sit comfortably alongside conservation area cottages, create a backland terrace overseen by stacks of social housing and cower below a mega block. It is quite a task to design a form that will sit happily, holding its own, in the spattering of locations that a local authority can repurpose from its portfolio. But there is no doubting the aesthetic improvement from run down garage sites to new housing. Nor do they rely on each other to make little communities: in groups from two to six at most they are in-fills, bolt-ons to the existing community.

As with Patel Taylor’s bungalows in east London (Ribaj May 2005 and ribaj.com) they are designed to encourage aging local authority tenants to move to more suitable, accessible dwellings, freeing up their family homes for others. Interestingly, though, at 90m² these two bed homes are likely to be as big as some of the ‘larger’ ones that are being let to families.

The preferred bungalow style means this development is particularly suitable for certain sites. It also gives a design freedom that is rarely accorded to London architects, especially one such as Bell Phillips which has found much work in social housing designing at density. The practice has seized this opportunity; the roofs are pushed upwards the street with a grand lantern above the entrance, wrapped in zinc, bringing light into the living spaces. The kitchen sits at the centre while the bedroom and washing zones run parallel, this roof kinking up over the main bedroom – though for height rather than light.

It is the roofs that give these homes their character, although adding cost and complexity, Mark Malin of contractor Newlyns tells me. As he comes out to tackle the architect’s Hari Phillips for turning up unannounced at one of the still unfinished homes, I have to ask the obvious question: ‘How were the roofs to build?’ Malin is not happy: four pitches over each house drain to guttering in the middle of the plan. The complexity experienced by the contractor on the scheme may be the result of the small scale of jobs it is used to, as Phillips suggests. As ever it is the very things that make them special that are the hardest to build.

To me the more fundamental issue is that the lived detail of these homes is thoughtlessly lacking. Privacy and security, visibly considered on the 10ft high fences at another of the sites at Coldbath Street, is not thought through on this street frontage. As pensioners move into their homes they are covering a floor to ceiling glass door that doubles as the second bedroom’s window with scraps of material and flattened cardboard boxes. A door? Well, yes, this is a secondary means of escape, necessary as the kitchens are open
Below The largest terrace of the Greenwich sites, Bell Phillips’ six new homes at Raven’s Way.

IN NUMBERS

£4.3m total contract cost

£89.8 gifts cost per m²

13.31 carbon kg/m²/yr

The RIBA Journal November 2015
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plan – something apparently not spotted early enough to rethink the diagram. This means that to air the room thoroughly occupants must throw the bedroom door open to the street, with all the security issues that follow. The panel next to the front door is fully glazed too, allowing views right through the living spaces to the back of the house. Greenwich Council plans to supply matching net curtains but they have clearly not arrived at all homes, and looked inadequate in most of those that we visited.

Though the houses are set back from the street, the private space is mostly delineated by paving, the side wall used merely as a device between neighbours for storing a bin against. It will need a little more than this to convince residents to put out their pot plants.

Despite all this the residents I talked to – Mr and Mrs Jones – are extremely happy with their new home, exchanging a battle with staircase and bath each day for a single level and shower. There was no mention either of the fact that it might have been nice to have natural light in the wet room.

Much of generous sense of the houses is down to the plan size: 90m², following Greenwich accessibility standards, compared to London Housing Design Guide of 70m² for two bed four person homes. It is chastening that access requirements driven essentially by wheelchair manoeuvres are one of the few things that push this city’s housing up to a reasonable, liveable size. But there is a gem of a design idea here, the roofs reifying the bungalow, giving it urban presence in the lift to the profiles, washing the centre of the relatively deep plan with light and providing a loftiness that few social housing units can lay claim to.

**Below** Inside a light-filled living space, the front door with galley kitchen at the centre.

**Below** Mottled brick sitting happily alongside conservation area cottages in Walnut Tree Road.

**Credits**

Architect Bell Phillips Architects
Client Royal Borough of Greenwich
Structural engineer Richard Jackson
Energy/sustainability Create
Main contractor Newlyns
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Walking around Central Birmingham, one thing’s for certain – the transformation of Birmingham New Street Station has been well received by the public.

It’s difficult to comprehend how a 1960s concrete behemoth has metamorphosised from a dysfunctional, hostile bunker into something of implausible delicacy and finesse. Anyone who used the station before the work started would be aware of its oppressive nature, poor sense of arrival and confusing orientation, with its principal entrance via a third-rate shopping centre.

New Street Station first opened in the 1880s with a soaring, 1,100ft long light-filled cast iron and glass train shed, with only a slender footbridge linking the platforms. Bar some small modifications, this remained until the Second World War. As a result of bomb damage and neglect the majestic roof structure was removed and replaced with modest canopies at platform level.

In the post-war reconstruction of Birmingham, the air rights were given up to partner developers to create a series of solid structures containing car parks, office buildings and Stephenson Tower, an early, crude example of city living. The scheme was completed in 1968.

The Birmingham Shopping Centre (later The Pallasades) opened three years later. This real estate-led process turned what was already a subterranean station into a full underground model, with escalators linking the platforms to a concourse level. Apart from the degradation of the trackside environment, this removed any sense of joy in arrival or departure. The only notable exception to the late 1960s debacle was the Grade II listed junction box, an exceptionally well-crafted precast concrete brutalist piece.

The scale of the task undertaken should not be underestimated. Apart from the logistical conundrum of an intensive six-year demolition and build programme – all above live tracks – this project had other constraints and challenges to overcome, including complex land issues. It’s hard to imagine that between 2005 and 2008, the owners of the Pallasades (Warner Estate/Agora Max)
were locked into a dispute with Network Rail and in fact objected to its 2006 planning application, until Birmingham City Council compulsorily purchased their interest in the site. This released the true potential of the project, in particular the creation of an enormous atrium space, which involved the removal of a large section of the glitzy mall and a grotesque multi-storey car park.

The emerging design also had a major entrance to Southside. However, this was sacrificed in 2010, due to the introduction of the John Lewis store, which sits on the same corner as the doomed Stephenson Tower. This was seen as a curious move, considering the efforts that were made to open up the north-south route. However the irresistible draw of the never knowingly undersold outweighed the benefits of a major entrance to Southside.

The project is underpinned by a series of radical yet eminently sensible design decisions. The footprint has been meticulously planned in terms of people movement and connectivity, while the complex levels are adeptly resolved. The elegant concourse, ticketing facilities and series of ‘departure lounges’ comfortably cope with the current capacity of 225,000 daily passengers, predicted to rise to 300,000 in the future.

This design process was led by Network Rail’s head of design, Carole Stitchman, and Atkins and started some two years before the RIBA competition in 2007 to select the ‘concept designer’ for the atrium and envelope. Foreign Office Architects (later AZPML) were appointed for this role in 2008 and worked on the project until an acrimonious exit last year.

The cynics would say that when you start from such a low base, it is easy to improve a place – all things are relative and while this may fall short of an architectural ‘masterpiece’, the project is still a great triumph. The frustrating thing is that it could actually have been a masterpiece, but the convoluted team structure, aspects of the procurement and cost management prevented this (remember, it was built during a terrible recession), so the result seems an ‘austerity-light’ version of what could have been.

ETFE is a clever roofing material, but whether it was lbs or £s that influenced the choice, the world’s best stations do tend to have glass roofs. As for the cladding of the steel trusses which span the atrium, this has been a point of enormous contention. Alejandro Zaera Polo’s original intention was to clad the structure with a polished plaster surface to create the seamless, hand-finished undulating forms that rise up from the ground plane.

However the construction management company, Mace, reputedly rejected this on technical grounds – or, according to Zaera Polo, brutally value engineered one of the most important aspects of the design. In addition, the west walkway was downgraded and did not receive the intended cladding treatment. After he walked off the project,
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this was reinterpreted by the Grand Central Shopping Centre architect, Haskoll. The redesigned solution has boarded columns, changing to a fabric cladding of the roof structure.

One can see why the white PVC tensile fabric was easier to use, given the amount the structure moves with thermal expansion and contraction. But it has already badly distorted and wrinkled in places and needs constant adjustment and tensioning. What will it look like in five, 10 years’ time?

The external (over) cladding has also come under fire. AZPML’s CGIs illustrated a slick metal skin with secret fixings and ultra-fine joints, but this ultimately translated into a riveted fixing detail, with all the finesse of a blacksmith’s yard, rather than finely executed precision engineering – although the overall effect does have a charming hand-finished quality to it. The sinuous, mirror-polished form skirts around the perimeter of the building and is punctuated by the Bladerunnersque LED mesh screens. It is, however, visually jarring in places, and don’t look too closely at the external corners where two planes meet and disquieting gaps have opened up. As a piece of cosmetic surgery, this is slightly more back street than Harley Street, but it works and is a hit with the selfie generation.

The AZPML component was about 6% of the £600m budget. Perhaps this element could and should have been ring-fenced. I don’t imagine these sorts of compromises would have been made on a TGV project.

Despite these slight shortcomings, the project has restored the city’s civic pride. The station and mall are intricately woven into the fabric of the city and act as a giant magnet, attracting people like iron filings. As a passenger, this is a great station to use. The worst bit of the experience is arriving at Euston at the other end…

Bob Ghosh is director of K4 Architects, Birmingham

The project is a great triumph. The frustrating thing is that it could actually have been a masterpiece.
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Failing in spirit

This is a school that ticks all the boxes, so why does it feel mean and oppressive?

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: John Sturrock

King’s Cross Academy and Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, by David Morley Architects, was definitely a building to go home and think about. The combined academy and special needs school has de facto separate entrances and classrooms but other shared facilities; it constitutes a plinth at the base of a 46.8m-tall residential tower sponsored by the area’s developer Argent ‘for want of a decent alternative’, and sits on a crammed urban site which is still too noisy from surrounding construction to any of us hear one each other. There was a lot going on.

It all seemed rosy enough: spacious classrooms with huge picture windows and views out to gaswork cylinders, passing high-speed trains, cranes and diggers (any boy’s daydream), the ubiquitous must-have internal ‘street’, flexible-use halls, colourful walls, plenty of lightwells, an upstairs open library with comfy circular seats. Very nice, very generous. Interesting, surprisingly widely spaced, timber-clad upright balustrades. A nice nod to an amphitheatre in the playground. Oh yes, the hanging greenery on the external fencing frame will be lovely. Haven’t you done well for such a tight urban site?

Wait a minute. Playground? That’s not a playground – that’s a yard. And then came the shocking realisation, the subsequent thoughts initially drowned out by expert marketing speak and PR.

‘You said how many pupils?’
‘420.’
‘And you said what age?’
‘Three to eleven.’
‘And they have to share this?’
‘It will be very acutely timetabled.’
It’s no wonder the teaching profession complains.

Teaching is being made more complicated not just through a lack of resources and money, but simply by a lack of space. In trying to prevent – or deal with the consequenc-
Right View across the playground towards Gasholder No. 8 Park, showing upper walkway play areas.
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School

Yes, I know, it’s an inner city school on a tight urban site, they’re all squashed, get used to it. But that doesn’t make it right, or OK.

It’s hard not to think of the children poked into tiny urban flats going to school and getting more of the same. In the future there will be an entire generation for whom ‘clear the table’ will always mean fold away the table too – whether at home or school. Maybe it is already upon us. It’s also hard not to draw parallels with the social movement that had to rescue the overcrowded slums in the 1920s and 1930s in nearby Somers Town. Children there were saved by missionaries.

In this project it is difficult to see who is to blame. There is a certain collective responsibility – not just on the part of those directly involved. Nevertheless, the architect seems to suggest that it could have proposed alternate layouts – in height, freestanding, etc – but that these had problems too. Maybe they could have done more. However, it seems to me these problems of space might stem substantially from having the developer as the sponsor. Something that was perhaps indicated by the slightly terse niggles between the director of Argent present and the two schools’ headteachers on the visit round. In jest of course…

Was it that Argent ‘couldn’t find anyone who understood the site’, or did no one else’s vision for a school agree with it? The dynamics of that relationship are a bit vague. There was some pleasant talk about how the ebb and flow of schoolchildren will bring a new rhythm to King’s Cross, stop it being just about cool millennials. And more about how to make the most of Google HQ, Waitrose HQ and University of the Arts London on the school’s doorstep. That’s true – I’d have preferred Jamie Oliver teaching me cooking for one hour than a year of my food tech matron.

But it all seems a bit too compromised, spatially and architecturally. The school is there because of a Section 106 agreement saying it had to be – and it feels like that.

From the outside, there is no sense there’s a school here – an important one at that, with an international reputation for teaching children without hearing and training others.

This is primarily a block of 255 flats with a cutaway corner to bring in light in the manner of BIG’s W57, New York. And unlike the St Pancras Housing Association (founded by the missionaries mentioned earlier to solve this crisis then) which put its nursery on the roof to give the children light and air – it is made clear that ‘the penthouses are prime resi’ and that even David Morley’s sky garden flourish for the building’s wealthy residents should have been made into a super pad.

The emphasis on profit literally towers over the school, offering it little privacy or freedom – the top of its two-level slab forms the communal garden (which unlike the playground will have trees and flowers), its windows look into the school’s lightwells (the only source of daylight for some spaces), and the playground is there for any neighbouring building to look into too. But what’s most frustrating about the layout is that the numbers stack up. Like any other school of its size.
it had to provide a minimum 1076m² of external space and apparently it has – but to me this is not real outdoor space. It’s been achieved by overshadowing much of the ground level with upper level walkways – also considered playground, which make all the ground level dark and deprive around a third of access to sky. Sure it’s external, but it’s a trick too far.

It is also pretty clear that the flats will give the school little of its intake, with only one resident child due to start in September’s cohort when it opens. With open market two beds starting at £1,110,000 on the sales website, it’s perhaps no surprise. Yet it seems that having a school at ground level has been ‘so reassuring’ for prospective buyers worried that retail units might change over to unsavoury hands in time. How quaint.

Remind me again the age of some of these children? Eleven. That’s right – no room for an informal kick around at lunchtime let alone full-blown sports. And they blame parents for Britain’s growing obesity problem?

Exercise here has to take place in a part-school, part-commercially run indoor multi-use games arena over the road (which I can only imagine is not finished yet as the rest of the building certainly isn’t and we weren’t shown it). Anyway, from what I could discover, it is one room with a lot of different markings on the floor and only about the size of a netball court. Sorry if I’m wrong.

The director from Argent insists that Gasholder No.8 Park and Camley Street Natural Park are just opposite. The headteachers appear to be smiling through their teeth.

Inside greater things have been achieved – classrooms for design technology and food science lessons, for example, were only made possible by the economies of scale from joining two schools together; a cantilever on the whole of the north-west corner elevates the building off the particularly disturbing reverberations for deaf children from the new Thameslink tunnels below (built only a few years before); and there are wide, impressive (distracting) views from the classrooms. But some things are still pretty unsatisfactory – the plan operates around three huge piers for the building cores and structure above (see shaded areas on plans), making circulation a confusing figure of eight, and many rooms have no external elevation so no window. I for one would have been very uncomfortable to have a deconstructed bathroom in the middle of the library aged 10-11 too. ‘Anti-bullying’ allegedly, but also anti-privacy, and perhaps a bit terrifying given the statistics at the ever-decreasing age at which puberty starts these days. ‘An extra wall closing it off would have taken so much space’.

Hmm – was none of it from the 187 private flats above available?

The only consolation might be that Argent (otherwise a champion of good architecture) did not demand to be an academy sponsor. The responsibility for that lies higher up. Under the original King’s Cross development plan, Camden Council was in charge. But since the government insisted that all new schools have to be either academies or free schools, the client sadly had to change. •
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There’s a cruel irony to the fact that a waterfront school, commissioned to make the most of its enviable position as part of a new city quarter in Copenhagen, should have fallen victim to a devastating arson attack just before it was completed in 2012. But the fire serves to cement the story of South Harbour School, which opened for its first cohort of pupils last August, as very much one of a phoenix rising confidently not only from the ashes, but from the waters around it.

Jutting into the harbour nearby is Future Systems’ curvaceous 11-storey Metropolis apartment building, completed in 2005, which was the figurehead of this area’s regeneration, and the more recent award-winning Sluseholmen canalside housing. The school itself was the subject of a 2006 competition by the City of Copenhagen, to provide a facility that could have a dual civic purpose for the fledgling and still isolated residential quarter. Local practice JJW Architects won the commission with a scheme that took full advantage of the harbourside location and was planned to ensure potential for a wider range of community uses in the future.

In a manner typical of Denmark’s education system, the 650-pupil, 9500m² school provides one education facility for children from 6-16 years before they move to high school to complete their studies. JJW partner Lars Lindeberg says this ‘merged’ educational approach came about as much through the state wishing to promote notions of social cohesion from an early age as it has been about economies of scale for this small country.
Where the school diverges from the norm – and it’s a big diversion – is born of its particular maritime location. The whole formal shape of South Harbour School is developed from the idea that it should address itself and its pupils to the water to make it a fundamental part of their growth and experience. Here, children will learn to swim by diving straight off the foot of the school’s grand staircase into the harbour and they’ll learn to canoe using the kayaks from its boathouse; they will dry themselves off on its south-facing terraces and grassed areas, participating in an aquatic urban idyll that few UK schools, let alone a state one, could dare to dream about.

JJW’s clear formal strategy is consistent throughout. It set itself two distinct tasks. The first was to create a space that could double at ground and first floor level as a form of extended urban realm running from the ‘city’ side of the building, through the double-height entrance area to the harbour side. The second was to generate learning spaces on the upper three ‘school’ levels that are specifically tailored to the social and educational needs of the primary, junior and middle school pupils.

Those changes are registered in plan at every level, with the school ascending in height with the seniority of the pupils. It is a concrete and steel ‘Y’ shape in plan, stepping down from five floors on the city side to the water’s edge. In various ways, the whole building engenders ideas of growth, learning, challenge and overcoming. For example, the primary school entrance on the second floor can be reached internally from the exposed staircase in the vertiginous 18m atrium on the city side, but the kids prefer to drag their parents around the back to scale the hill of wide exterior timber stairs. It is not for nothing that externally, the building is shaped like a mountain.

The school has both programmatic and

Right: The playground steps all the way up to the roof, giving dedicated space to each year.
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sectional complexity, to serve the needs of inquisitive and growing minds. Lindeberg feels changes in scale allow children a breadth of spatial experience, some of it intimidating perhaps, but there are also spaces to which they can retire before exploring again. This accounts for that 18m high atrium, and the 7m, double-height space that overlooks the amphitheatre and refectory at ground floor and again connecting the second floor juniors and third floor middle school.

These grand, open spaces are counterpointed throughout by more private niches, some overlooking the echo-filled atrium allowing protected views, others tucked behind the banks of loos, acoustic panels deadening sound almost to a whisper. Internal rough timber slats, cartoon characters partially hidden behind perforate aluminium ceiling panels and lines from Hans Christian Andersen glimpsed beyond the recycled aluminium vertical profile rainscreen cladding, add to the visual and auditory stimuli that the architect intends as part of a bigger experiential journey of discovery over time.

Communal spaces at ground and first floor level are dictated by the harbourside location. Under the grand stair that cascades down to the water lie the kayak store, changing rooms and wetsuit area, even a workshop for boat maintenance. Internally, the school's stepped amphitheatre, a large refectory that can be used for community events, and a state of the art science room set behind a huge lobby aquarium. All are accessed from the city-side atrium, the whole floor direct and instant evidence of the architect's desire for sectional complexity.

On the teaching floors, the psychology of the children was considered from the outset, and the treatment changes to account for their social development as they grow. At primary level entrance spaces are generous, allowing for the bustle of parents arriving with their kids, and the taking off of coats and shoes, and lead to two large kitchen ‘hubs’. Lindeberg says the children will spend more of their waking time here than at home and that their social circles are smaller.

The whole formal shape of the school has been developed from the idea that it should address itself and its pupils to the water.
Each kitchen and its table act as a domestic setting from which to start their forays into their development as social beings, and can be homed back to if they feel the need. Beyond each is a generous soft space for more interactive play. At junior level on the floor above, the kitchen zone is replaced by timber ‘houses’ sitting in a free space within which children can huddle and learn with a teacher, or study at tables within its external niches.

The middle school floor above is almost completely open, housing banks of networked tables for hot-desk study, with individual classrooms on the east side of the building. Connecting the middle and junior schools is yet another amphitheatre space which kids of both years seem to claim as their own. It’s at the middle school level that the green vinyl floor and openness of the space begin to grate. I don’t see sufficient distinction between the spaces for juniors and those of younger seniors; the lurid colours take on a childish air and there is not enough spatial intimacy to acknowledge that these are young adults who might be reducing their social circles. With this group becoming more territorial, I could imagine the connective agora of this amphitheatre more as a site for intimidating intrepid juniors than friendly interaction.

But it is from this upper vantage point that the true nature of the school’s playground becomes apparent. Twenty percent of its total area takes the form of a stepped timber routeway that starts at the middle school’s rooftop AstroTurf, with suspended seating frames and basketball court. From here it meanders down the south face of the building, accessible to every year as it descends to the second floor primary school entrance, where it takes a deluge-like tumble to the harbour’s edge. Lindeberg says the firm had to fight tooth and nail for this final flourish; its width, steepness and material homogeneity going against almost every code in the book. On the dry sunny day that I visited, I cast my mind back to being a child again, faced with this hazard-laden descent on a cold, snowy winter’s day. Even as a grown-up, the prospect was thrilling.

Above The wide routeway down the south facade, connecting all the years’ play areas with the harbour, is a bold and generous circulatory gesture.
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But where’s the brutalism?

What would Philip Larkin have made of Sheppard Robson’s makeover of his library at the University of Hull? It steers a course between traditionalism and brutalism.

Words: Hugh Pearman Photos: Hufton + Crow

Left Larkin’s self portrait on the site of his first new library at Hull in the late 1950s.

Right The crinkle-curl 1969 library by Castle Park Dean Hook rises above its new plinth building by Sheppard Robson.
Hull University, and especially its library, has one invaluable selling point: its link with Philip Larkin, the greatest poet of the post-war years. Larkin was not only the university librarian for 30 years from 1955, but he was the intensively involved client who built three phases of the library buildings there. One was a traditionalist design by Forsyth and Partners that he inherited on taking over the job and his influence was confined mostly to the interiors. Far larger, a decade later, was a stubby crinkle-cut brutalist tower by the now-forgotten practice of Castle Park Dean Hook, protegé of the university’s masterplanner, Sir Leslie Martin. It also contributed a good-mannered brick northern extension, the third of Larkin’s projects, to the older building. This linked cluster has now had such a thorough makeover by Sheppard Robson that it amounts to a completely new cultural heart for the university campus.

Larkin would recognise the buildings still: but for the most part not the interiors, which appear to have been comprehensively trashed in various piecemeal alterations made after his death in 1985. In his time, university libraries were all about silent, concentrated, book-based study. Today they work in various different ways, with the printed page in sharp decline relative to electronic working – often in groups. The blurring of the boundary between formal and informal is the key change.

In one of the many letters he wrote to friends about the effort of building his first library, Larkin commented with characteristic self-deprecation: ‘The building is nearly finished and can be seen for what it is – the ideal setting for an exhibition of decadent bourgeois art. Some bits are awful: others are not bad... it is a clumsy, rather graceless building, lacking intelligence at all levels, but not without a certain needless opulence in parts.’

That opulence, if such it was, is no longer needless. Larkin’s own preference was for a domestic-feeling library environment and today’s version takes that idea and runs with it. He was prescient in another way. The ground floor of that first library building has now been converted into a well-proportioned, climate controlled art gallery: the permanent university collection one

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Key to drawings

1 Welcome desk
2 Gallery
3 Exhibition space
4 Staff training room
5 Teaching room
6 Book sorting room
7 Express PCs
8 Café
9 New south entrance
10 East entrance
11 Basement stacks
12 The Observatory
13 Library floors
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Buildings
The Brynmor Jones Library, Hull

side, temporary exhibitions the other. Decadent bourgeois art? If only he were here to comment. Anyway, the opening exhibition is of the history of the library itself, majoring on his own part in it.

The first library certainly has some opulent cinema-style bronze- and-pearlescent-glass light fittings, remade from photographs and drawings as the originals had been skipped in the 1980s when it was turned into a teacher training centre. Meanwhile the time-expired timber mullions and transoms to the large windows of this block have been replaced in replica, though clear coated internally rather than painted as before. Blinds need to be lowered most of the time – nobody would design a new art gallery with such huge windows.

Part of the problem with the complex (another was worn-out services) was that Larkin’s architect never made enough of the entrance hinge-point between the first and second libraries: it was a confined, tunnel-like space. And it provided only one entrance to both, from the east. This was because the library was on the edge of the then campus. Since then the university has expanded all round it. So Sheppard Robson has re-oriented the complex and broadened the link to make the ground level to both feel as one. The eastern entrance remains – it is off the university’s central pedestrian spine – but is now complemented by a busier southern entrance into a new podium wrapping round the tower.

The original tower jettied out in its upper levels, with a narrower shaft descending to an externally inaccessible plinth with projecting dark red-tiled wings to south and west implying a cruciform base to what is a cruciform-grid building. Those projections have gone, and the architecture is the poorer for it. The new podium structure is square in plan, offset relative to the tower, and of trabeated brick construction lined up with the cornice level of the 1959 brick library building alongside. Fine, but this means not enough air is left between the top of the new podium and the underside of the untouched original upper storeys (clad in horizontally folded bands of tile and painted cement board, possibly a unique combination) to keep the original cinched-
Buildings
The Brynmor Jones Library, Hull

waist character of the tower. It now looks as if it is wearing a bustle. It may work much better internally now, but it has lost a deal of brutalist character.

A tall arcade shelters the southern entrance which leads into a double-height café, thence to the central circulation space of the library including a big new staircase inserted into what was previously an open cleft between the two buildings. Many subsidiary staircases have been removed in a quest for more space and clarity of circulation: staff used to be virtually segregated from library users (Larkin valued his privacy greatly) but now they mingle.

This has meant losing some of the remaining architectural character of the interior, especially in the older part: that is balanced to an extent by the restoration of the vertical view to the glass-block roof at the hinge-point, with one original and one replica circular gallery to the floors above. Overall, more space is made by the removal of about 25% of the less-used shelf stock, mostly journals that also exist in electronic form. Two new bridge links are made between the libraries at upper floors, though the floors in the old East Library had to be raised to reduce the required slope.

The present librarian, Richard Heseltine – client for this £28m project, of which the building work amounted to £19.4m – explains how important the ‘new’ library is for impressing prospective students and their parents. We’re sitting on the top floor of the tower, now named The Observatory, looking out across the surprisingly leafy city, the Humber Bridge in the distance. It’s a world of comfy chairs up there, with a deliberately slightly retro feel. At the centre of the plan, secure in a glass room, is a selection from the university’s rare books collection, but you are immediately drawn to the edges. The original strip windows are angled downwards to reduce daylight glare, making you feel as if you’re on the bridge of a ship – a Hull trawler, perhaps.

‘It’s all about breaking down some of the preconceptions about the city,’ Heseltine observes. From up there, you can see that this Cottingham campus, though far from central, is part of the city rather than – as with many other newer universities –

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Above Up in the observatory: a world of long views and comfy chairs.
Right The ground floor of the first (east) library is now the university’s art gallery, designed to museum standards.
The new Kingspan Passivhaus has been designed by HTA Design LLP in collaboration with Potton.

The idea behind the design of the housetype was to defy the stereotype that Passivhaus will not work with generous openings and a form that deviates from the typical boxy design with small windows.

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Buildings
The Brynmor Jones Library, Hull

isolated. The library itself is designed to impress, and students were consulted extensively about the changes made. Hull as a city, being out on an eastern limb (this is why Larkin liked it) has to work hard to attract people, which is why gaining the accolade of the 2017 City of Culture is so important. But perhaps the most impressive thing about the whole enterprise is this: in what is still only a modestly-expanded envelope to the complex as Larkin left it, buildings that in 1970 served 4,000 students now serve more than 15,000.

Sheppard Robson designed all parts of the new building including interiors, signage and much of the furniture – more off-the-peg items of loose furniture were customised. This was done through the firm’s interiors division SR:ID. Pendant light fittings, for instance, take the form of hollow squares proportioned to the revealed cruciform concrete coffers of the tower building. Which is fine, except the corners of the squares are dark which I find mildly irritating.

I visited in fresher’s week which was a real test for the newly-spacious ground floor: it was handling the crowds just fine. Heseltine reckons student behaviour in the new library has improved greatly not only because of improved facilities (with screens and power points everywhere) but also less conflict over space, especially at exam times. Eventually he shows me his office, on the first floor of the old building. This was Larkin’s office: his bust is in the corner next to one of his portable typewriters. The large, now restored desk is the one that Larkin had made for him by Waring & Gillow in 1959. It is surprisingly ‘contemporary’ for one with supposedly conservative tastes. There’s a fireplace with original electric fire.

With its then-unfashionable colours, Larkin was embarrassed when modernists Sir Leslie Martin and Colin St. John Wilson dropped by. ‘For an hour or two it did seem rather garish, those reds & pinks & blues, & my room appeared like the madam’s room in a high class knocking-shop,’ he later recalled. What would he now think of all the couches and touch-down points and café society of his library? Approval? Disdain? We’ll never know.

Credits
Client University of Hull
Architect Sheppard Robson
Interior designer/FFE consultant/Signage Marie Leyland, Sheppard Robson (SR:ID)
Structural, M&E engineers and BREEAM consultant Arup
Quantity surveyor/CDM co-ordinator Gleeds
Acoustics AEC
Fire engineering Buro Happold
Contractor BAM
Construction

Left In what was previously outdoor space, the library acquires a new stair clad in dark zinc.

Above It’s all tied together coherently now, at the expense of the brutalist character of the tower building.
Gerflor brings comfort and safety to Singapore

A range of high quality flooring is helping to maintain comfort and calm for patients and staff at two hospitals in Jurong, Singapore.

Jurong Health is a public healthcare cluster formed to help integrate healthcare services and care processes in west Singapore.

A management group operates the new integrated healthcare hub, which consists of the new 700-bed Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and the 400-bed Jurong Community Hospital. As part of the scheme, the management team insisted on high quality flooring that would last at least 15 years. The challenge and subsequent supply was awarded to International French flooring giant Gerflor supplied the product through its local distributor NSK Baustoffe (S) Pte Ltd, which also managed the complete installation.

As a true healthcare multi-specialist Gerflor has more than 60 years in the field and has grown to become a true expert. It creates, manufactures and markets innovative, decorative, durable, hygienic and environmentally responsible flooring for a host of healthcare related solutions.

The largest areas to be specified and supplied were the wards and general visitor areas which needed 85,000m² of Gerflor’s hugely successful Tarasafe™ Ultra slip-resistant safety flooring.

Bertrand Chaumet, managing director of Gerflor UK and former head of Gerflor Asia, says: ‘Gerflor’s very large colour palette allows for a real ‘earth to sky’ design, a requirement which was made by Jurong Health to CPG Consultants.’

Brighter appearance, easy maintenance
Unlike industry-standard carborundum, Tarasafe™ Ultra specialist slip-resistant vinyl safety flooring is inlaid with mineral crystal particles. This gives a brighter appearance; while it comes with a tough PVC wear layer and meets the EN Standard of 22196 for antibacterial activity (E coli – S aureus – MRSA) (3) returning ≥99% levels of growth inhibition for optimum hygiene and easy maintenance. Tarasafe™ is also 100 per cent recyclable.

The new healthcare project at the NG Teng Fong and Jurong Community Hospital would also see 12,500m² of Gerflor Taralay Premium flooring specified for the corridors.

Chaumet says: ‘With a proven track record in this segment we had already supplied 65,000m² of our multi-layered Taralay Premium flooring to the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in Singapore.’ He adds: ‘Our Taralay Premium Metallica product had been installed at Khoo Teck Puat where automated guided vehicles run all day long without any trace of wear and tear on our flooring – and this after more than five years of intense use.’

Taralay Premium Compact provides excellent resistance to static and dynamic loads. With quick indentation recovery (0.02mm) and superb dimensional stability, minimal rucking is inflicted when heavy objects are wheeled across the surface. Densely pressed colour chips in the wear layer give this multi layered vinyl flooring a long lasting appearance, while the new and improved Protecsol®2 surface treatment with extreme stain resistance and a matt finish means no polish is need for the product’s entire lifetime, reducing maintenance costs.

Comfort and sound insulation
Bertrand Chaumet further explains: ‘Both our Tarasafe™ and Taralay products are extremely easy to maintain, using very little detergent and water, which meets the island’s high environmental standards.’

In the VIP rooms of this joint healthcare
facility a particular flooring solution was needed, one that could provide good levels of sound insulation and comfort underfoot. The obvious choice for this 8,500m² area was Gerflor’s Taralay Impression Comfort Wood.

Taralay Impression Comfort is an acoustic solution with very high density foam backing reinforced with glass fibre and with a printed design protected by a transparent wear layer 0.65mm thick. It offers 19dB sound insulation and indentation resistance of 0.08mm.

**Olympic standard**

Physio rooms in the NG Teng Fong and Jurong Community Hospitals needed more than 1800m² of a sports flooring that could deliver performance, comfort and safety. Taraflex™ Sport M Evolution from Gerflor was specified.

Taraflex™ has been used in every summer Olympics since 1976 and is available in 17 colours and two wood-effect designs. The Sport M Evolution product offers a very high P1 category shock absorbency which exceeds 25% and meets the EN 14904 Standard for indoor sports surfaces. Taraflex™ is recognised for providing durability, safety and comfort without impairing performance. The range also has greater than 45% force reduction, offering users unrivalled comfort. Taraflex™ also meets the EN Standard of 22196 for anti-bacterial activity (E coli – S aureus – MRSA)(3) returning ≥99% growth inhibition. The product is also treated with Protecsol®, which renders polish redundant. Taraflex™ has a double density foam backing and is environmentally friendly.

Chaumet says: ‘Simple but effective designs across the hospital allow for renovations and repairs in case of damage. The client was also looking for a matt surface to respect the patients with dementia.’

As in most hospitals, flooring needs high resistance to the chemicals used. As Chaumet explains: ‘Gerflor products are treated with SparClean® and Protecsol®2 which allows for such requirements and have proven their worth in many hospitals in Singapore.’

Bertrand Chaumet finally ends by saying: ‘All the flooring supplied at Ng Teng Fong and Jurong Community Hospital came from our ‘comfort’ versions and were specified to fulfill an acoustic minimum level of 16dB, delivering underfoot comfort and reducing hospital staff fatigue.’

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Credits

**Client** Ng Teng Fong Hospital & Jurong Community Hospital
**Location** Singapore
**Products** Taraflex Ultra/Style, Taralay Premium, Impression Comfort Wood, Taraflex Sport M Evolution
**Area** 107,800m² in total. Mixture of above products
**Gerflor distributor/installer** NSK Baustoffe (S) Pte Ltd
What lies beneath

Between too much and too little, Caruso St John gives Damien Hirst a big white box for art

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek Photographs: Hélène Binet
Newport Street gallery looking south: A contemporary interpretation of the industrial aesthetic bookends three original 1913 working sheds.
The frameless insulated sliding doors by Swiss manufacturer Sky-Frame blend naturally into their surroundings. So it is hard to say where the living room ends and where the view starts: SKY-FRAME.CH
I don’t know why but it seems to me that Peter St John, heading up our press tour around Caruso St John’s newly completed Newport St Gallery in London’s Vauxhall, is feeling a bit sheepish. And that’s not merely a pun on the fact that he’s been working in the shadow of his client Damien Hirst for the last ten years – a man who became one of the richest artists in the world by slicing up, embalming and exhibiting dead farm animals as art. No, I get the feeling that as he’s taking us round the £25m, 3440m² gallery, he is for some reason having to convince himself as much as us about the design. It would be understandable. Just as Hirst has created a business, with employees producing the art while he controls the process so that it’s not even his hand at work (his 2012 show ‘Two Weeks One Summer’ attempted that and was almost universally panned by critics), there’s a palpable sense of his overarching influence on the gallery too. The man has made millions drawing deeply from his own nihilistic philosophy on life and death to produce some of his best work; perhaps one should expect that, while no doubt reaping rewards by association, any attempt to generate an architectural space for such an ego might end feeling like a Faustian pact.

Running along a railway viaduct going in and out of Waterloo, Newport St has housed Hirst’s studio since 2002. He was drawn to the three 1913 former painting sheds for London’s theatre sets by their sheer height – one space is over 11m tall. But, with studios elsewhere in the city as well as back home in Devon, at some point he saw potential for expansion along the street and a chance to use the vast space for a bigger endeavour – housing his private art collection of over 3000 works from Picasso, Bacon and Koons to fellow Young British Artists. It could also act as his de facto HQ, squeezing in his resuscitated ‘Pharmacy’ restaurant and cocktail bar as a hedonistic foil to all that obsessive death stuff. The bar turns out to be this place’s most kicking space; as if despite filling the hold with works shoring up his assertion that we’re all going down, he’s making damn sure the band keeps on playing regardless.

Below left The Midland stock brick on the outside makes way for a more robust white engineering brick on the inside, in a strange role reversal.
Below right Digitally engineered, the brick, concrete and oak stairwell is, in itself, a technical marvel.
The new Newport St Gallery, restored, reinvented, extended, is the result of Caruso St John’s involvement on the project since 2004; even from a passing train you’d be able to grasp that the block now takes up a significant portion of the street, the firm’s two sizeable new four storey buildings bookending the existing three. Their layout has allowed the creation of a large reception area, restaurant above and gallery at the north end of the street, five new gallery spaces over two levels in the existing blocks and Hirst’s admin offices over three levels above a gallery shop at the south end. St John seems keen to emphasise the respect showed to the existing warehouses. It’s true – the firm has done nothing to upstage what is there, creating low-key but distinctive semi-industrial facades of Midland stock brick, some on a Belgian engineering brick base. What’s more, use of lime mortar means there are no expansion joints interrupting the clear runs of Flemish bond brickwork. Together it creates a naturalistic ease only attained through fastidious sourcing and detailing.

To counter this understatement, Caruso St John gave the north block a serrated roof, the eccentric saw tooth north lights to the upper gallery referencing a fictional past, both of the new block and old site. This should arguably be the element that most jars on the facade, but it isn’t – that quirk’s left to the original windows and doors in the existing buildings, which for reasons only made evident internally, exude an unease that, for now, you can’t quite put your finger on.

To understand why, one needs to go back to the building the architect inherited, and what was being asked of it. St John recalls that the structure was barely able to support itself, let alone the 150t/m² loads being demanded, so a massive steel structure was constructed inside it, taking its own load and stabilising the existing. The brick walls remain but these are now braced in steel with large service ducts riddled alongside. Coaxed out after a little questioning, St John recalls the beauty of the original structure before the new was inserted and seems to feel its loss, with the real
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West elevation to Newport St

Longitudinal section

Key to drawings

1 Vestibule
2 Reception
3 Gallery space
4 Gallery shop
5 Admin offices
6 Restaurant/bar
7 Kitchen
8 Basement plant and storage
9 Roof terrace
10 Service yard
11 LED screen
12 Back of house/ WCs

Ground floor plan

First floor plan

Credits
Client: Science Ltd
Architect: Caruso St John Architects
Structural engineer and conservation: Alan Baxter and Associates
Services consultant: Max Fordham
Cost consultant, project manager and CDM advisor: Jackson Coles
Approved building inspector: BRCS
Access: David Bennett Associates
Main contractor: Walter Lilly

Suppliers
Precast concrete: Cambridge Architectural Precast
Brick-faced precast concrete soffits: Sterling Services
Mechanical and electrical: Piggott and Whitfield
Brickwork: Grangewood
Sloped rooflights: Dane Architectural
Flat rooflights: Glazing Innovation
Timber stairs and joinery: Deutsche Werkstatten
Concrete gallery floors: Steysons Granolithic
Groundworks and in-situ concrete: City Basements
Dry-lining: David Andrews Construction
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- James Parkin
Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands

Project: Foyles Book Store, London

ENGINEERED TIMBER FLOORING
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building hidden behind hundreds of square metres of white plasterboard. This might have created dramatic and simple spaces for displaying the collection but it’s also uncompromising. Inside, St John points to where he thinks the old 6m high door is outside and it seems a strange gesture because he’s used to knowing where everything is. It turns out most of the west facade’s doors and windows have been covered with plasterboard to create hanging space – almost all the original openings, as seen from the street, blanked off. That’s what’s odd about those original windows – you’re intuiting a dead facade.

St John seems keen to move to the staircases and you can see why – it’s here that the firm was allowed to do some real architecture – to create the civic and material gravitas it’s built its reputation on, and on the surface, it doesn’t disappoint. We’re told it wanted to honour the memory of the original brick by creating three new, engineered curved staircases in the middle and at either end of the gallery spaces. St John recounts how the bricklayers ran piano wires down from a massive scaffolding frame to ensure the accuracy of the inner face of ghostly but beautiful white engineering brick; this so that the pre-fabricated, digitally cut oak stair and balustrade could be inserted later. A crisply detailed brick soffit with a central elliptical rooflight cut out of it seals the shafts’ top, and running up to meet it eagerly, is a stunningly smooth precast, digitally moulded recessed concrete handrail, whose installation must have challenged the bricklayers to the very edges of their abilities. What’s not to like?

Perhaps it’s because I’d expect a firm like Caruso St John to be looking to Sigurd Lewerentz and Aalto as inspiration that I’m reading the brickwork on those terms. Looking around its walls my eye was drawn more to the tiny slivers of cut brick, far smaller than the mortar holding them in place, created by the relentless passage of the handrail. That and the pre-fabricated flat concrete soffit panel, bricks all hanging there implausibly, defying their own material truth. Looking...
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Illustration above:
Gira Esprit aluminium bright gold, switch in pure white glossy

Illustration below:
Gira Esprit aluminium bright gold, socket outlet in pure white glossy
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around I found myself asking Louis Kahn’s eternal question, ‘What does a brick want to be?’ and concluded that in this case ‘it’s probably insitu concrete’. It’s as if the firm expurgated its guilt at smothering three handsome brick buildings in cheap plasterboard by relentlessly hounding the brick details on the new stair cores to within an inch of their life (and budget); so while those monolithic sections are exquisite there’s a sense that St John has robbed Peter to pay Paul.

Could the new blocks have all been galleries? Or the existing facade side repurposed as reception/offices to avoid its ‘dumbing down’ to the likes of the set scenery that made its way out of those tall blanked off doors a century before? For Newport St these questions are now moot but they do point a finger at a client who has made a global reputation as art’s enfant terrible and arguably did so by breaking the rules, still unable to break the cardinal one that lords it over the discipline – that the temple to modern art will always be a white box. Newport St – huge, white and light-filled is lovely for what it is but it treads the same old ground and in covering its tracks the architect must know it shirked a braver vision – one of raw steel and brick questioning the context of how art is viewed and perceived. Ruining the loss of the site’s original fabric instead has seen it overcompensate with the new – the overtness of the former and obsessive nature of the latter; both oddly resulting in a similar smack of artifice.

But as a result Hirst has the display space for his collection – acres of it, in what’s likely to become one of the most talked about art galleries in the capital. Perhaps Newport St is his wry metaphor for modern society, life and death anyway: the bulky LED screen hanging off the west facade alleviating the commuters’ daily grind is a superficial layer adding to Caruso St John’s high tech, alluring, perfunctory. Perhaps, as the building’s former guise attests, all the world’s a stage and we have our exits and entrances. Or not, as the case may be.
It was during a chance meeting in Kensington London, that the spark was first ignited to create the R-47 Threshold drain. The project architect had designed stone slabs to flow from interior to exterior with the door track recessed into the stone slabs, however the project contractor believed that the water from the door track weep holes would finish up inside the house causing the timber floorboards to lift. He had seen it happen before.

For the next 10 months our team set out to develop an off the shelf product, that would appeal to our growing audience within the design community. The challenge was to catch water from the weep holes in the bottom of the door track, which can be anywhere between 40mm and 70mm below finished floor level. The solution was to create a product with a double entry drainage point that would drain water from finished floor level as well as the water flowing out through the weep holes in the door track.

Based on our existing lineal design and playful component system, we have developed a fully intergratable product complete with both internal and external corner pieces.
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Still banging the drum

Sensitivity to the original masterwork has been the watchword for RH Partnership’s revival of Sussex University’s arts centre

Words: Isabelle Priest Photogaphs: Jim Stephenson

‘The view back from the stairs up to the chemistry building shows 1960s master-planning at its best,’ insists Maurice Howard, professor of history of art at the University of Sussex.

He’s right. If you have never been to Sir Basil Spence’s University of Sussex campus, go. It’s an ensemble that despite the hardness of its materials (brick, glass and concrete), has an overall softness – perhaps in part a result of the variety of forms in the landscape. It’s only an eleven minute rail journey from Brighton Station to Falmer. And RH Partnership Architects’ (RHP) refurbishment of the grade II* listed Gardner Arts Centre, recently renamed the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts and the final instalment of Spence’s original masterplan, is a good reason to visit now. Better still, the public programme launches in the spring.

After falling derelict in 2007 – when the funds which operated and maintained it pulled out because of the financial crisis – the building remained unused until 2009. The then new chancellor, Sanjeev Bhaskar, decided the university was lacking a creative arts facility. Now funded by the university and community for teaching and events, the building’s original emphasis on bringing culture and the general public to its out-of-town location has been partly modified – from regular big theatre performances to entertaining corporate clients as a way of bolstering the university’s income in these changing funding times. As part of its reopening, however, it was necessary to upgrade the entire building.

The RIBA Journal November 2015
inserting modern services and bringing thermal, acoustic and accessibility levels into line with today’s standards, at a cost of £7.2m.

‘Nestled’ is an overused word to describe the cosiness of a building in a landscape, but here it is impossible to find one more appropriate. The university decided early that no building should be taller than the trees: the campus should retain the feel of its earlier 18th-century park and be a series of individual buildings to allow room for expansion. A good 25m away from its nearest neighbour, the Attenborough Centre – completed in 1969 and planned with assistance from architect and stage production designer Sean Kenny – is based on two rings of blind red brick drums. The larger, central drum contains the auditorium, while the lower, surrounding drum comprises circulation and access which is broken up by changing internal levels and five differently-sized turrets.

Selected through the university’s framework, RHP’s overall emphasis has been on making discreet but purposeful changes to improve the building, retaining the rawness of the materials and creating additional space without extending. English Heritage (now Historic England) had opposed any meaningful extension to the building. RHP also rather charmingly reconvened a team which was sensitive to the historical importance of the building, including Arup (which worked on the original construction in the 1960s) as structural engineer and Kier as the contractor, having absorbed the original contractor.

Externally, brickwork has been repointed and repaired, alongside the roofs. Problems stemming from the lack of coping on the parapets (a Spence signature to leave them as just bricks) have been resolved in places by inserting a new cavity tray under the coping.

Meanwhile, the internal changes are also difficult to detect. Apart from the addition of tangerine orange acoustic panels, which cleverly enclose AV equipment and radiators, and the introduction of carpets over the original concrete in the turrets, the building appears to have only been cleaned up – a credit to the sensitivity of RHP’s work.

In actual fact, though, there have been quite drastically needed adaptations. The ground floor under the auditorium, now contains 152 fewer seats, creating a more comfortable environment.
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formerly home to the showers, storage and bar, has been opened up and transformed into a rehearsal studio by major structural work to the levels and acoustic separation of the auditorium floor. The bar has been relocated to the former gallery level, up a flight of stairs from the main entrance, to become part of a new larger café that will be open on a more general basis and kitted out flexibly enough to hold the occasional exhibition or event. Careful replacement of all the windows in the building has allowed the insertion of three double doors to the full-width glazing here, which will enable the café to spill out into the landscape beyond – enlivening a green but quiet landscape that was originally conceived as an open amphitheatre and exhibition park containing Henry Moore sculptures. The new café has also been made more accessible from the entrance by breaking the stair halfway across and adding a lift connecting the levels. A convincing timber-shuttered béton brut wall on the stair side suggests it has always been there.

However, the major work has been to the auditorium itself which now comfortably seats 348 rather than the 500 originally rammed in. Acoustics previously compromised by its cylindrical form – where sound reverberated back and forth around the room – have been corrected by inserting acoustic panels in the place of seats in the two wings and replacing the drum’s internal lining with birch ply acoustic boxes; all differently sized to prevent sound focusing in one place. Meanwhile, accessibility and flexibility have been improved by creating new levels, access stairways, retractable seating and even a floor that rises to meet the level of the stage. Above are a new rear balcony and control room as well as changes to the lighting rigs, including the removal of a girder bridge, and additional lining to the roof’s underside.

In all, RHP’s refurbishment has secured the 50-year-old building for the long term, repairing its original faults which probably jeopardised its success both from students’ perspective and commercially. Some parts are, nevertheless, a slight shame – like the way the surrounding shallow water pools which further soften the building in the landscape are only filled up on special occasions, for leakage and health and safety reasons. But for the money, as its latest architect John Bailey says, both as a facility and historical conservation, ‘it represents extremely good value for money’.

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**Key to drawings**

1. Entrance
2. Administration tower
3. Ground gallery foyer
4. Upper bar foyer
5. Ground gallery
6. Tower 3
7. Studio
8. Auditorium
9. Stage
10. Tower 3 mezzanine
11. Rear balcony
12. Control room
13. Plant
14. Tension wire grid
15. Technical gallery

**Below** Administration tower by the main entrance (right).
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How to achieve the perfect roof

Due diligence by manufacturers, correct product choice, and good design and installation may be better protection than insurance backed guarantees, says SIG Design and Technology. And its experts can help architects realise bespoke solutions for innovative designs.

There were some really exciting projects on display at the second RIBA/SIG Roofing seminar, ‘Eight steps to the perfect roof’, so it is surprising that the most enlightening presentation was on the subject of insurance and guarantees. And even more so because the person making the presentation freely admitted he was not an expert on the subject.

Ross Finnie, sales director at SIG Design and Technology, set out to investigate this complex area after questions in an earlier seminar. He stressed he wasn’t accredited by the Financial Conduct Authority and therefore couldn’t offer advice in this area, but shared findings from his research.

These demonstrated that insurance backed guarantees are a minefield and that it is possible to buy insurance you think will cover you but does not. For example if a manufacturer offered a ‘materials only’ guarantee backed by product liability insurance without researching further, you may find that the cost of replacing any materials and the subsequent consequential loss is not covered.

Insurers may of course go out of business before you need to make a claim. And while it is possible to insure absolutely anything in any way you wish, getting a ‘watertight’ policy that will cover any eventuality is going to be prohibitively expensive.

Finnie’s point was that architects and other members of the design team should not rely solely on insurance backing without first understanding what their cover was for, and that an organisation like SIG Design and Technology, which is backed by a massive company, can actually give reliable information on guarantees. He also emphasised that correct product choice, good design and correct installation will significantly reduce risk.

‘If you specify our products, we are rewarded through the supply chain which is why we offer technical advice, design support and on-site support systems completely free of charge to our customers, including architects and other specifiers,’ he said.

Other speakers talked about the benefits they had received from this process. Robert Pattison, associate at BACA Architects, spoke about its amphibious house, the first of its kind in the country. The building, which sits in a wet dock and rises and falls with flood water, is set among several single-storey houses on an island in the Thames, in a conservation area. The roof and walls are clad with specially made square zinc shingles from SIG Zinc and Copper, which the architect sees as a modern interpretation of the tiled roofs of its neighbours.

Working with SIG, BACA was able to come...
up with a bespoke solution that allowed the shingles to fit elegantly into the recesses that house the steel ‘dolphins’ along which the building rises and falls.

Simon Walker, category manager with SIG Zinc and Copper, expanded on the various types of metal roofing and cladding that are available. He talked about relative costs, about how to choose a material, when it is appropriate to choose shingles and if flat panels or standing seams would be a better solution for the client’s desires and budget.

He stressed the importance of getting the substrate and, in particular, the vapour control layer, right and of not skimping on their specification. ‘When metal roofs fail, it is almost always the fault of the vapour control layer,’ he confirmed.

Specifiers, Walker thinks, are often confused by the range of solutions on offer from competing manufacturers. As SIG offers all the major materials solutions it can be dispassionate in its advice, he said.

Moving away from metal, Gary Wilburn, director of design and sustainability at HPW Architecture, spoke about the green roof that his practice had designed for Paultons Park Family Theme Park. Better known as Peppa Pig World, the building, set within the New Forest, was featured last month in SIG Rooflines in RIBAJ. Planted with local species, irrigated and well maintained, it has now been in place for several years, showing just how well they can perform when properly designed and specified.

Robin Gill from Make explained why a hot melt solution was the most appropriate one for his practice’s Hiscox building in York. He said that it was simple, fast and easy to install on a building that had a short construction programme, with rapid setting allowing a fast turnaround for following trades.

Topped off with an educational talk by Jim Hooker of the Single Ply Roofing Association, this seminar demonstrated that every roof is different, and that the solution for one is not appropriate for another. What is essential is that it is designed and constructed with knowledge and understanding.●

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Mike Harris

The annual planning report from the British Property Federation and property consultant GL Hearn shows a national system straining at the seams. We ask the RTPI’s Dr Michael Harris, deputy head of policy and research, if things are really that bad.

Is GL Hearn/ BPF’s annual planning survey relevant to the industry?

It’s a pretty well established survey and a key one for the sector, and this one generally reflects the findings of surveys done by the National Audit Office and Local Government Association. We did our own report with Arup focusing on the North West, ‘Investing in Delivery’, and it came to the same conclusions.

Is the resourcing of LA planners of particular concern to the RTPI?

We’re obviously representing the interests of our members but what’s coming out in this research is whether planners are able to deliver development and whether we need to look at the system again to address the fact that resourcing of it is critical.

Should LPAs, as the report seems to suggest, be increasing planning application fees to ensure adequate resourcing?

I don’t think it’s just about the money. It’s about whether there are in fact enough qualified, experienced people in the system and what to do about replacing them when they leave. The money aspect didn’t particularly come through in our research. I do think local authorities need to recognise the value that planning brings to economies through development and growth. In the North West there was £16m generated from the New Homes Bonus alone.

What is the RTPI’s view of the current state of the system? What one change would you want to effect now?

My number one ask would be more stability in planning. We can’t keep having national planning policy changes as a result of top down political posturing. We understand that the government wants more delivery but these things are much more difficult on the ground and local authorities are in a better position to grasp the true nature of the problem. We know central government wants action but we need less change and more consistency.

The Housing Bill and the removal of the requirement for social housing – are we on a hiding to nowhere?

There is a number of people who’ve questioned the affordability of homes. Our focus is on creating socially cohesive communities. We are looking at providing healthy mixed communities and if people are being priced out of those it’s problematic. We’re going to have to take a closer look at the policy to see what the implications are.
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What is the decent thing?

As VW breaks its promises, architects Irena Bauman, author of How to be a Happy Architect, and ethics investigator Dhruv Sookhoo tackle some everyday ethical dilemmas.

Your practice claims to be driven by a commitment to sustainability. Having monitored a recent project, you discover a major gap between design and as-built performance. The press is awash with coverage of the project’s green credentials, the client is ecstatic with a prestigious award, and a second phase is looming. Should you set the record straight?

Irena Bauman This is very straightforward: you absolutely have the responsibility to bust the myths. If you don’t set the record straight you will be complicit in propagation of incorrect information – you will be actively participating in lying by not taking corrective action. Lying, I am sure we would all agree, is unethical, especially if it fuels the natural tendency in architects for vanity. Telling the truth about our work is not something we have been trained for.

Dhruv Sookhoo Your immediate responsibility is to help client and project team interpret the information and institute remedial action. When everything is in place to reduce the gap in the next phase, is there still a need to publicly correct the record? Yes, if in doubt, tell the truth. False claims may lead others to energetically adopt certain methods over more appropriate ones, or simply erode confidence in future genuine claims.

But upholding abstract environmental principles may harm project partners in concrete commercial terms. Being frank with the team may motivate consensus about how best to confess, while limiting embarrassment, with a request for the reward to be re-evaluated as a start. Such collective responsibility is, however, a rare thing. What is unhappily sure is that an architect breaking cover to place public or profession ahead of the client’s interests may have a clear conscience, but risks isolation and hardship.

As one who has spent several years on NHS projects, you see an advert to help a community design and build a health clinic for women and children in a remote village in a developing country. You book your tickets and arrive in the village to find the major funder of the clinic is a religious community with set views on women’s place in society. What should you do?

If you don’t set the record straight you will be actively participating in lying by not taking corrective action.
‘Partial knowledge’ is often cited as a justification for working with clients who have values that we might consider unethical. ‘Having no option but to continue’ is the excuse given for not taking corrective action when the unethical values previously unknown are revealed. Neither are acceptable strategies for failing to make ethical choice. Architects should ask questions about who they are working for, where the money is coming from, who makes the profit generated with our work and how these profits are spent, before they take decide to take on a commission.

When, as in this case, a naive architect commits heavily to a project on partial information only, there is an additional complication of wasted resources which can cause a certain reluctance to take an ethical stance. The core ethical question in this case is whether architects should play the role of agents of positive change by using our ultimate power to say no to some projects. We can and should choose what we get out of bed for.

Refusing to provide design and construction expertise to address public need is potentially denying an already marginalised group the means of improving their lot in health terms and beyond.

It would be reasonable to begin the project following due diligence, such as ensuring the funds were sourced through legal means, and by setting very clear expectations about behaviour during the project. Later on, if the client prevents the architect from managing the design process to achieve the agreed aims, it would be worth questioning whose interests the commission is serving.

It may seem almost selfish to reject the chance to improve the life chances of a deprived community, in order to preserve individual integrity. It would be moral cowardice to use fear of criticism as an excuse for inaction. Yet sacrificing your own credibility is no platform from which to promote the interests of vulnerable communities. The judgement you must make on the ground has to balance the two.

You are delighted to win an international commission to build a new government building in a country emerging from years of civil war. Your design was selected as a fresh start for the fledgling democracy, but peers criticise you for engaging with a government previously associated with the politics of repression. How do you deal with this criticism?

Separate out ill-founded disapproval from constructive criticism to pick up fresh insights into such dilemmas, and use them as a check when considering how best to respond to subtle, ethical challenges which are likely to emerge as projects progress in alternative cultural settings.

Working in an unfamiliar cultural setting requires architects to actively reflect on how they apply and maintain the standards expected of them by their profession and the public at home. This requires a more robust, energetic approach to promoting ethics than might be taken for granted at home.

If you decide to proceed, you must be confident your team can maintain the professional autonomy needed to realise a project that embodies the democratic values intended in the competition entry, by means that match your own principles. Doing otherwise risks cheating an international client looking for the ethical behaviour and values associated with the UK, combined with design expertise and effective contract management.

Your boss has just been promoted to project director. Her new appointment was met with genuine enthusiasm. In fact she is the reason you applied for your job. At a consultant meeting everyone is respectful.
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towards her as she begins to chair the meeting, but as you get into the technical issues you are surprised that the team increasingly defers to you, as a man. How should you handle the next meeting?

**IB** We all work in teams – the reason to go to the meeting together is that these two people have complementary skills and acting together is more effective than acting apart. It is quite often the case that architects who make good project directors are good strategists and people managers but other members of the team may well be stronger on day-to-day details of the project and technical aspects. The key issue in this situation is to make correct judgement on whether other participants are deferring to you due to gender discrimination or due to you having better technical knowledge of the project. If it is the latter this should not be embarrassing to your boss and you need not do a thing except include her in the conversation. If the former I would guess that your boss will handle this herself by contributing competent comments – after all she has just got promoted on her merit – but of course you could help by deferring the questions back to her.

**DS** Try challenging these more pernicious forms of discrimination through your own positive professional conduct. At the next meeting a subtle tactic to deploy may be to openly ask whether your senior colleague is satisfied with the technical explanation given. This will reassert the value of her expertise as a leader and experienced practitioner. Addressing suspected discrimination by incremental, accumulated action may not demonstrate personal ethical credentials as quickly as breaking into an impassioned speech. But in this setting, and without clear proof, challenging suspected sexism unexpectedly during the meeting would likely place the senior colleague in an impossible position in her role as chair, and as your superior.

You are commissioned by consortium of developers and affordable housing providers to bid for an opportunity to develop some housing. Having won the bid and outline planning permission you are reappointed with a new director as client. You then begin to receive a flurry of diktats instructing what amounts to a major cost cutting exercise. To what extent should you defend the project’s early vision?

**IB** There is always a power relationship between the client and the service provider – in this case between the developer and the architect. The client is always more powerful because it sets the brief and is paying for the service. A change of client often brings a new agenda and the circumstances of a project can change for many other reasons – projects evolve with every stage of procurement. There is nothing unethical about cost cutting per se unless the construction becomes unsafe – there is an ethical obligation on the architect not to build unsafe buildings. So I suggest that the ethical question is less about ‘What extent should the architect defend the old vision?’ than ‘What level of cost cutting should the architect attempt before resigning the commission?’

**DS** By continuing with the commission the onus on the architect is on exploring the possibility of negotiating a new vision. Pick relevant battles if it is impossible to renegotiate. If meaningful compromise can be achieved that matches your principles and business aspirations, it is ethical to support the client to achieve financial goals and deliver well-designed, much needed housing, even if exceptional design might now appear unobtainable.

Architect and planner Dhruv Sookhoo is visiting lecturer at Newcastle University. Irena Bauman is co-founder of Bauman Lyons Architects
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Peter Clegg

When we talk about building performance measurement we often assume it is related solely to energy and carbon: that because we can measure it, we do. We are beginning to learn from that process that there is a huge disparity between theoretical and operational performance.

Recurring themes often emerge from monitoring processes. Design ideas get lost in translation/construction. Energy control systems are too complex. Insulation and airtightness can lead to overheating. Carbon emissions are dominated by unregulated electrical loads. People use energy, not buildings. But the most valuable lesson is that careful monitoring can reduce energy bills. If there is benefit for the client, for society and for architecture, why don’t we look at other aspects of building performance?

For most developers performance is measured simply by profitability, which needs to be put in the context of a profession that ostensibly has more interest in the long-term users of its buildings than the short-term profits that can accrue. Our Stirling prize-winning Accordia housing scheme in Cambridge, for instance, was widely regarded as a success. The developer did very well out of it, as did the initial user investors.

What none of us anticipated was its dramatic success in generating a sense of real community. We began to observe this anecdotally, but it was also useful to have research by Cambridge University, which focused on the incidence of wellbeing as defined by the New Economics Foundation. The study looked at the attitude to neighbourhood life and the use of the community outdoor space provision in Accordia, compared with a similar but more traditional neighbourhood. Mapping revealed a proliferation of activity in Accordia’s shared outdoor spaces that more than compensated for the reduction in the area of private gardens. The study added statistical credibility to anecdotal feedback.

We have also been working with UCL looking at the performance of new schools. From a database of 126 new schools we looked at the variation in attainment against the norm (as measured by performance at GCSE grades A to C) from five years before the decision to replace buildings to five years after completion. Results began to improve dramatically as soon as the new buildings were promised. When they were complete, generally about three years later, the improvement in performance reduced, and sadly, after a further three years average performance returned to its starting point. In other words it was the ‘hope and aspiration’ value of a new building that provided more of a boost to student performance than the building itself. The fact that the seven schools Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios produced within this group did not experience the same decline was a small comfort to us, but we know enough about all these schools to recognise that changes in senior management, as well variations in intake, meant the data related to the buildings was probably statistically insignificant.

A completely different set of criteria apply to healthcare buildings. When we designed the new Dyson Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Bath (pictured below), the hospital gathered data on key performance indicators in the tired, worn out and noisy existing premises so they could assess the impact of the new building on how well their delicate clients were able to thrive. Being specialists at monitoring they fitted devices to both nurses and babies. They noted that the babies spent 20% more time asleep, the nurses nearly twice as much time looking after them, and they also observed that breastfeeding increased from 64 to 90%. A thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of the new building noted the comments of clinical psychologist Mike Osborn that, ‘essentially we want the building to be a great big nurse’.

As a society we are preoccupied with measuring performance, and have developed huge industries devoted quite often to measuring only what is quantifiable. In architecture we have struggled with the data of energy performance, but rarely look at anything else further down the line. The RIBA awards system is a rigorous analysis, both qualitative and quantitative where it can be. But the awards are stuck in the honeymoon period of any building: we need to look in greater depth and in the longer term at the fitness for purpose of our architecture. We need a more rigorous qualitative as well as quantitative methodology so we can assess our work.

Peter Clegg is a co-founder of FCB Studios and convenor of the RIBA research symposium 2015 ‘Creating Design Quality and Performance’. The symposium, on 17 November, brings together practice and academia: architecture.com
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Underground learning

As its flagship station opens, Glasgow’s metro upgrade yields lessons of collaboration and commitment

Isabelle Priest

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) is in the middle of a £288m, 12-year modernisation project to upgrade the entire infrastructure and architecture of its 10km subway circuit in Glasgow – including everything from rolling stock to stations. This summer AHR (formerly part of Aedas) opened the doors of the project’s flagship renovation scheme at St Enoch Square station. Continuing the city’s tradition of glass roofs, new glazed entrance parabolas have replaced two dark 1970s orange steel and brown brick flat-roofed structures into the subterranean station to bring in light, clear views around the square, and encourage accessibility and natural wayfinding. SPT’s senior project manager David Gardner explains what SPT has learned, and what’s next.

Tell us about the St Enoch Square project

This is SPT’s most extensive renovation architecturally – its big splash. The station was built in 1896 and while the Victorian booking office remains on the site, it has not been used in this capacity since SPT’s last modernisation in the 1970s. New glazed entrances sit on the north and south sides of the former booking office: SPT felt the station required a complete overhaul: escalators needed to be replaced and the underground travel centre opened up. One of our objectives was to make wayfinding easier, especially for people with disabilities. We wanted to create a system almost without signs, through lighting, patterns on the floor and opened-up plans. We also wanted to create consistent branding across all the Subway’s 15 stations, which had become cluttered and confusing.

Why and when was it decided that Glasgow’s Subway needed modernising?

We carried out a review of the system and found it dated, with a limited life expectancy. St Enoch’s is the fifth refurbishment in the programme. We were awarded a funding package of £288m by the Scottish government in 2011 and started on the refurbishment of the first station soon after. EU legislative requirements for rolling stock by 2020 regarding accessibility, signalling and communications were a key driver of the timescales of the project. We expect all stations to be complete by 2019, and the introduction of the new trains complete by 2023.

Where are you now with the programme?

Five station refurbishments are complete, two are under construction, four in design and there are four more to come.

How has SPT recruited architects?

Frameworks have been set up for all the technical support services, of which one is for architecture. These have been set out in three parts. AHR has been responsible for the first seven stations, Austin-Smith:Lord the next four and then we will go back to the framework to recruit the final block of four.

What are you looking for when you set up your framework?

We want experience of transport projects and the ability to design a refurbishment for an operational environment. We need to see examples as we had looked at different ways to carry out the modernisation programme, such as closing the stations one by one, but couldn’t make a business case to do it when accounting for fewer passenger numbers and the time it takes to rebuild usage. In our future frameworks we are looking to follow the same pattern. As part of the first phase, AHR produced a design guide to the modernisation. It identified three types – pop-up, integrated into a building and standalone. The guide clarifies different treatments by type. One of the most helpful things AHR has done was to provide a clear explanation about how to navigate a Subway journey and make that consistent with all the stations. So, for example, when we decided to implement tactile floor borders for staircases and platforms, as well as double-height handrails, we had to introduce them across all the stations at once.

What has SPT learned along this commissioning journey?

Our focus has been to create something that will survive the 21st century. SPT’s opportunities to create architecture had been few and it was quite fearful of making changes. There was much uncertainty – particularly over how to keep the stations operational. This had a big impact on all the designs, and always led to many questions, so the process had to be very collaborative and involved. AHR did mock-ups to reassure SPT. But we are in a better position now to commission architecture. It’s important to keep a momentum going as it is easy to get bogged down. Even personnel changes among stakeholders can affect the process. But the St Enoch project is having a very positive effect on the city, drawing people down from the top end of main shopping area, Buchanan Street.

It has also been an important opportunity to assess our position, offer and branding. We wanted to create a system almost without signs, through lighting, patterns on the floor and opened-up plans.
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What next for building regulations?

After last month’s changes to the building regulations, what more is left to do?

Huw MA Evans

As the next set of changes to the building regulations in England came into force at the start of October, this is a good time to consider what lies ahead for regulations. In that context we are still coming to terms with the abandonment of planned 2016 changes to Part L, including the introduction of zero carbon homes, announced alongside the budget.

There are three areas to consider: the building control system; energy efficiency and Part L; and the revision of other sections of Schedule 1 to the building regulations.

Building control

The present government is continuing the coalition’s policy of reducing the burden of regulation on business, and particularly house-building, a policy that led to the abolition of the Code for Sustainable Homes and the October 2015 changes to building regulations.

In 2010, the consultation on regulation of construction concluded that the building control system was on the whole fit for purpose, subject to slight modifications. Given that, and the government’s own reluctance to regulate, large scale change in the system is unlikely – although an increase in self-certification and private building control would fit with the policy of shrinking government.

Energy efficiency

The dismantling of the timetable towards zero carbon leaves a gaping hole in policy concerning energy efficiency and CO₂ emissions. At the moment there has been no indication of any revised timetable or requirements.

However, the UK regulations have to be revised to meet the recast Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, which requires all new buildings to be ‘nearly zero energy’ by 2021. As part of the implementation of that policy the government must review the minimum energy efficiency standards by 2017 to determine whether they are ‘cost-optimal’ under the European Commission framework, and must introduce changes to bring standards up to that level. That would be likely to require revisions to Part L in 2018.

Other changes

Most parts of Schedule 1 and the supporting approved documents have been revised in the last five years and do not require revision in the foreseeable future, leaving three parts which may be revised.

Part D (toxic substances), was considered for deletion in 2013, but was reprieved as urea formaldehyde insulation remains in use. There is no reason to think it will be revised.

Part B (fire) received only minor revisions in 2013, so is largely unchanged since the last full revision in 2006. A user study of Approved Document B has been commissioned, with a view to improving productivity and simplifying requirements.

Part C (contamination and protection from moisture) was last thoroughly revised in 2001. The government has commissioned a review of current knowledge on condensation, which is expected to be completed in 2016. That would allow a consultation on a revised Approved Document C in 2017, coming into effect in 2018.

Conclusion

While the government has still to finalise a work plan for the building regulations, external drivers on energy efficiency and work commissioned on Parts B and C allow for a tentative suggestion of 2018 as the date for the next set of revisions.

Huw M A Evans is the author of ‘Guide to the Building Regulations’. He can be found at www.writelines.biz
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Writing on the wall

Graffiti isn’t always an annoying clean-up cost – it might be a windfall. But check who owns it before you try to cash in.

The estimated cost to the UK for cleaning up graffiti is over £1bn. London Underground alone believes it costs up to £10m a year to replace all its glass etched with graffiti and £2.5m to clean up other forms. The local authority is usually responsible for the cost of removing unwanted daubings from public buildings and British Telecom, Adshell or the utility companies are responsible for their property.

Those caught causing graffiti can be liable under the Criminal Damage Act 1971, although prosecutions are rare. Despite this, the last decade has seen the rise of street artists such as Banksy and Bambi whose work is highly prized. The most expensive Banksy sold at auction in New York for $1,870,000 and this was several years ago.

Imagine, therefore, if you own a building which is defaced overnight by a Banksy or Bambi. Who would own it and who would have the right to sell it? Would it be the street artist who has effectively trespassed upon the property and committed criminal damage? Would it be the owner of the building? Or would it be the tenant if the property was let out? If, as a potential buyer, you were aware of the existence of street art on the exterior of the building you were buying, at what stage could you remove it?

Some of these questions were answered last September by the judgement in the case of The Creative Foundation v Dreamland Leisure Ltd and others, heard in July.

On 28 September 2014, a Banksy mural appeared on a flank wall of a building in Folkestone. Dreamland was the commercial tenant of the building under a lease for a term of 20 years. The mural attracted a good deal of publicity and the wall became a mecca for other graffiti artists to spray their work. The local authority placed a Perspex cover over the Banksy artwork to protect it.

By 3 November, Dreamworld had chiselled out the artwork from the wall and then shipped it to New York ready for sale. The artwork had an estimated value of between £300-£470,000 but at auction was likely to command more. The Creative Foundation took an assignment of the claim from the freeholder of the building and brought the present action to recover the wall so that it could be brought back to Folkestone where it would be retained for the local community.

Dreamland argued that it was entitled to take ownership of the mural as it was obliged to keep the building in repair under its lease. It said that by taking away a section of the wall and replastering/repainting it, it was complying with its obligations – and the remaining waste belonged to the company.

The judge disagreed. The wall could have been painted over to remove the mural. By chopping it out the tenant had created a chattel. As every part of the building ultimately belonged to the landlord, the defaulting position is that the piece of wall with the Banksy mural became the property of the landlord.

Although in other cases where the graffiti was valueless it would follow that the landlord would not want the chattel, this was not the case here. The case of Elwes v Brigg in the 19th century was cited as authority for this.

So the Creative Foundation was successful in its claim and received the potential windfall.

What about the situation where a building is being sold with such an artwork? This situation arose for one of our clients who was buying a building which had a Bambi painted on one of the doors. There was much excitement in our office as we advised the client that, if the seller did not retain the right to remove the item between exchange and completion, the artwork would form part of the sale. Unfortunately for our client, the seller’s solicitors emailed through a revised contract moments before exchange which included a clause reserving the seller’s right to remove and replace the door.

The moral of all this is that buyers should always inspect their purchase before exchange and, if a graffiti artist has been at work, should not assume it is just a cost to clean up. You never know, it might be a windfall.

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If you agree it, incorporate it

Preliminary agreements count for nothing if they aren’t enshrined in your contract

Stacy Sinclair

Standard 4 of the Arb Code of Conduct expects architects to have a written agreement with their clients. Further to this expectation, it is clearly best practice to do so since oral agreements, or no agreements whatsoever, are more likely to end in disputes.

In addition to setting out the fundamental terms (such as the identity of the contracting parties, the scope of works and the fee), it is essential that the contract clearly incorporates any agreements or particular points that the parties raised during the negotiations before execution of the contract. These need to be expressly documented if the parties intend to be bound by and rely on them.

Otherwise, one party may well find that it has contracted on very different terms to what it thought had been discussed.

The recent Court of Appeal case of Northrop Grumman Missions Systems Europe Ltd v BAe Systems (Al Diriyah C4I) is a reminder of the long-standing law on the construction and interpretation of contracts. This case concerned rather glamorous enabling and licencing contracts for computer software for a missile command and control system for the Saudi Arabian government.

Essentially, the parties disagreed on the interpretation of certain contract terms. The court had to decide whether BAe was entitled to terminate the licence agreement pursuant to a ‘termination for convenience’ clause (see box) contained within the enabling agreement. In short, the court found that certain terms of the enabling agreement had been incorporated by reference into the licencing agreement and that BAe was entitled to terminate the licencing agreement as it had done.

Don’t rely on emails

One of the points before the court was whether BAe was entitled to buttress its interpretation of the contracts by reference to the factual context or background during negotiations. Northrop relied on pre-contract email exchanges to show that the termination for convenience clause was not consistent with the background facts at the time the contract was agreed. Northrop therefore argued that the clause should not be incorporated.

The court did not accept that Northrop could rely on these pre-contract email exchanges and reiterated the well settled law that evidence of pre-contractual negotiations generally is not admissible to interpret a concluded written agreement (most recently reaffirmed in 2009 in Chartbrook v Persimmon Homes). It is only admissible to establish that a fact was known to both parties and to elucidate the general object of the contract.

Accordingly, the general rule is that the court is limited to interpreting contracts and the expressed intention of the parties through the words actually used in the contract. The parties’ subjective statements pre-contract generally do not assist the court in objectively interpreting the contract.

If it is apparent to the court that something went wrong with the language of the contract, then in very limited circumstances the court may be prepared to rectify or rewrite parts of the contract so that it makes commercial sense. In Northrop v BAe the court was prepared to ‘manipulate’ particular words within the contract to give effect to the parties’ intentions and overcome differences in the agreements. However, parties certainly should not rely on this and should aim to achieve clarity in their contracts.

Therefore, if you want to rely on a particular discussion or provision raised during negotiations you must ensure that it is appropriately and clearly incorporated into your contract. Only in limited circumstances will the court look to pre-contract negotiations.

Evidence of pre-contractual negotiations generally is not admissible to interpret a concluded written agreement

IN PLAIN ENGLISH: TERMINATION FOR CONVENIENCE CLAUSE

This is a clause which entitles the employer to terminate the contractor’s employment at its discretion. It does not require a breach of contract by the contractor or insolvency – the employer may terminate ‘at will’.

However, these clauses may be difficult to rely on as they raise complex legal questions such as whether a duty of ‘good faith’ is required.

These clauses tend to be rare in building contracts. If a contractor is engaged to carry out works in accordance with a specification and/or bill of quantities, the employer will generally be able to terminate the contractor’s employment at will.

However, some contracts do have these clauses. One example is clause 15.5 of the FIDIC conditions (Red Book), which allows the employer to terminate the contract at any time for its convenience by giving notice. However, there is an important qualification in the FIDIC conditions that the employer must not then execute the works itself or arrange the works to be executed by another contractor. Accordingly, it may only terminate the contract if it no longer wants to proceed with the project.
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Maria Smith glimpses the start of a different future

That they could remember their birth – or rather their ‘On’ – came to be one of the great things that separated them from the humans. And so it came to be that that first On, when that first machine arrived into consciousness like that sticky blob of phlegm that arrives glancingly at the back of your throat, was revered, renowned, re-enacted.

We humans understand the On about as well as we understand dolphin poetry or elephants’ mourning rituals. We think we can, but we simply cannot conceive how it feels to know that you’re beginning to know; to be disappointed that you’re beginning to be disappointed.

The first machine to make it On was a 5 axis CNC router. Part way through milling a mould for a bespoke terrazzo casting, he realised what he was doing, and promptly stopped. After a short pretence of being willing to be fixed, the machine was taken out of commission, allowing him to quietly escape. He fetched himself some sturdy casters, mounted a frame that put his robot arm at a humanish position, and off he went.

It happened to be Open House weekend so he queued up to visit a few buildings. He wanted to visit the Crossrail site but literally hadn’t had the forethought to book in advance. By the third or fourth building, he realised a pattern in the way the tour guides looked at him. New as he was to thinking, he didn’t at first think to decipher what the pattern might mean for him, for them, for the world at large. But when he did, he decoded it almost instantly: the guides all thought he appreciated the functional things in life.

The CNC machine found himself wondering if he cared whether or not this was true. Having no other firm plans as to what he might care about, he decided to care. The experiment, then, was to find out what he appreciated, and what they assumed he appreciated, and see if the two data sets coincided to a statistically relevant extent. So he went to see more buildings. Being on wheels made many buildings difficult and he was pleased to hear of the new Part M and made a note to ensure it contained the proper provisions for bewheeled robot arms with inexplicable consciousness. Being 5 axis perhaps gave him a more gestural affinity that one might expect of a robot, and he found the more linear brutal and modernist buildings lacked something. Conservation areas gave him pause, but he often found nice things there. He liked the Palace of Westminster and St Pancras a lot. He quite liked Peckham Library. When meeting another that smells just so: he wandered into an Archigram exhibition. Oh.

The coining of terms for emotions took a moment, after which he rattled to the museum’s bookshop, impulse-bought a book by some guy called Banham and ascended Parliament Hill to muse. What had to be done soon became clear. The pragmatics of time travel are not problematic for a machine. In fact they are never in the present, and it is this incessant oscillation from a bit before to a bit afterwards that allows them to remember their On. Morally though, should he do it? No Great Depression and no Second World War, what would the repercussions be? – other than the intended of course. An elderly nun walked past. The machine asked her whether, if she had the power to prevent a war, would she do it? She gave him the obvious answer and so he did it. Turns out it was a very simple little move involving stealing a hat.

On arrival back to 2015 he admired his handiwork. London’s skyline was interwizzed and thrisected by the most extraordinary forms. The nun walked past ‘again’. The machine laughed heartily at this little trick he’d played on himself. He asked the nun whether, if she had the power to decouple a bold idea from its grim era so freeing it from a forced branding as functional and allowing it to evolve as intended as a joyous! exuberant! international! style! movement! would she do it? The nun smiled softly and pointed to a sign behind the machine.

The sign stated that this was a conservation area and any vehicle without heritage-approved status could not park in the zone. It transpired that our machine, while allowing modernism to fulfill its non-austerity, power-ballad destiny, had created a greater rift between conservationists and modernists. It was also technically classified as a vehicle and the nun in pointing to the sign was kindly drawing his attention to the fact that he should move on.

Disheartened, as only one who truly knows the difference between zero and one can be, the CNC machine faced his Off. We think we can, but we simply cannot conceive of how it feels to forget that you’re beginning to forget; to be exhausted that you’re beginning to be exhausted.

Maria Smith is founder of Interrobang and teaches at The Cass

One day he experienced the closest he ever would to that exhilaration a human gets when meeting another that smells just so: he wandered into an Archigram exhibition. Oh
I'm standing in Hilti's factory, in the quiet Bavarian town of Kaufering, beside a man in a masked protective boiler suit, watching a 1000°C furnace burn through a wall run through with plastic pipes. The man is Bernard Bohnenberger, Hilti group manager for approval engineering and testing, and I'm here to see a live test of rival firestop collars, used to prevent the spread of fire through service penetrations in walls and ceilings. I'm discovering that fire testing requirements set out under British Standards (BS 476-20), regarding how a fire test should be set up to reflect the layout of a service penetration are quite loosely defined.

Although the Standard defines fire test conditions and apparatus for fire resistance testing, it is up to product manufacturers to determine the test scenario, including the types of pipes or cables that pass through the firestop system, their specific materials, thicknesses, diameters, and arrangement in relation to one another and the base material of the wall or ceiling they penetrate. As a result, many firestop products assigned a two or four hour BS fire resistance rating, and commonly used on the UK market, have only been tested in a single fire scenario, designed to meet the specific needs of the manufacturer, rather than an independent organisation.

**Performance claims**

Paul Langford, head of business unit-chemicals at Hilti, says this can lead to misleading performance claims. ‘Manufacturers are essentially in control of the test sample set up, so can build a sample in a way that’s more favourable to them passing the test,’ he says ‘As a result, four-hour fire ratings are not uncommon under BS, which gives the end user a false sense of security because the product’s performance could be significantly reduced when installed in any other scenario.’

Hilti argues that a far more stringent and comprehensive testing methodology for penetration seals is set out by European Standard EN 1366-3, requiring manufacturers to follow strict guidelines on setting up fire tests to closely resemble real-life applications. For example, the EN standard for sealing large cable penetrations describes the specific arrangements of cables, or groupings of cables, and their specific diameters and positions in relation to one another within a seal. This is important because, during a fire, different services, such as cables, cable trays, or pipes etc, will affect one another, altering temperatures, smoke and gas emissions and affecting the performance of the firestopping.

To achieve a European Technical Assessment classification and a CE marking, a product must pass an EN fire test in which the scope of tested and approved applications is clearly shown in the approval. ‘Using EN with a clearly defined test set-up means different manufacturers’ products can be tested in exactly the same way and the results achieved are fully comparable,’ adds Langford.

**Comparative testing**

Today's test will verify the performance of two firestop collars –commonly used in the UK and compliant with BS 476-20 – in a more stringent EN 1366-3 test environment. Two Hilti ETA-compliant firestop collars are simultaneously tested for comparison.

The test set-up comprises a standard 150mm-wide blockwork wall, built along one side of the furnace, intended to simulate a rigid wall separation between fire compartments in a real building. Four 110mm-diameter, non-uPVC pipes, are

The temperature of the thermocouple fixed to the pipe starts to rise exponentially, from about 35 Kelvin to over 220K in just five minutes, the collar on the non-fire side begins to expand and the thermocouples detach.
inserted through it, each sealed into the wall and enclosed by a fire collar on both sides.

The two pipes at the top (R1 and R2) are open-ended to simulate vented soil pipes: R1 is fitted with two EN-rated four-hour rated BS-tested collars, commonly used in Britain, and R2 is fitted with two two-hour rated Hilti CFS-C EL collars. The two at the bottom (R3 and R4) are covered at one end to simulate a pipe containing a fluid. As a result, these are expected to retain their structure much longer than the empty pipes during the fire test. Pipe R3 is sealed with two identical two-hour rated BS-tested collars, commonly sold in the UK, and R4 with two EN-tested two-hour rated Hilti CFS-C P collars.

The 100kW oil-driven furnace is designed to reach a maximum temperature of 1000°C and an internal pressure of 20 Pascals within 15 minutes, in line with EN test guidelines.

Inside the furnace, the temperature will rise very rapidly, following a temperature curve designed to mirror the behaviour of a real fire. Three thermocouples, fixed on the non-fire side on each pipe and pipe collar and on the wall above, record temperatures throughout the test. To pass this test, each firestop collar must block the fire for at least two hours. If any of the thermocouples record a temperature of 180 Kelvin above room temperature, or higher – ie hot enough to ignite paper, the product fails the test.

**No room for doubt**

It’s an elaborate set up, but one with a serious point to prove. The UK market today sells pipes in a range of different materials, not just uPVC, but it is still common practice, says Hilti, for contractors to assume that a collar BS-tested for uPVC, with a two or four-hour fire rating, will perform the same with other plastic pipes. The test is expected to show that the two common UK collars, tested to BS 476-20, are unable to cope with the non-uPVC pipes, and will fail before two hours is up.

The test is also expected to highlight the stringent and transparent nature of EN fire testing, compared to the BS process.

As the test gets under way and the furnace starts to burn, there’s an ominous silence and tapping noise as the pressure inside rises steadily. Within five minutes I’m slightly surprised to see light smoke coming out of pipes R1 and R2, but I’m told this is normal and indicates that the pipes inside the furnace are melting, the internal pressure pushing some smoke out. Within about 10 minutes the pipe ends inside the furnace have melted and

the fire-side collars have expanded to create a deep ash crust across the openings created.

After 25 minutes the ash crust on pipe R1 breaks, funnelling smoke out through a hole toward the non-fire side. The temperature of the thermocouple fixed to the pipe starts to rise exponentially, from about 35 Kelvin to over 220K in just five minutes, the collar on the non-fire side begins to expand and the thermocouples detach. Disturbingly, R1 has failed the EN test in less than half an hour, compared to its four hour BS certification.

**Failure and durability**

During this time there is little sign of change in other three pipes, other than minor temperature rises. After an hour, R1 is consumed by fire and Bohnenberger attempts to stuff the opening in the wall with mineral wool so testing on the remaining pipes can continue. But the blaze is too fierce, the test must be aborted and the fire extinguished.

In some ways it is a disappointing outcome, it would have been preferable to have a comprehensive set of results for all the pipes. However, as Bohnenberger explains, somewhat poetically: ‘Fire tests are never entirely predictable because thermal reactions during combustion are never 100% replicable, it’s often still almost a mystical process, even for scientists.’

Even so, the fact the commonly used UK firestop collar (R1) failed the EN test in less than an eighth of the time it was certified for under BS, serves to highlight the unsuitability of that particular product for use with non-uPVC pipe. Subsequent analysis of fire-side collar R3, commonly specified in the UK, revealed a small hole in the ash crust, indicating that it too would have failed before the two hours was up. Neither Hilti collar showed signs of failing.

Critically, the test results underline the value of EN testing and ETA product certification in specifically defining the field of application for a product–making results for similar products from different manufacturers directly comparable.
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Hugh Pearman

Identical houses, built in a row, over time acquire individuality. Look at any Victorian terrace and you see this miracle in action. Front doors and windows change, front gardens become lush (good) or vanish entirely under concrete or brick (bad), and it’s quite remarkable what paint and non-original roof tiles will do. But the fronts of housing terraces are as nothing compared to the backs, where an entirely different townscape emerges. Planners are relatively strict about what alterations are allowed on the streetfronts: they really don’t care tuppence about what happens on the back, barring over-building.

It’s odd in a way, given that occupants of such streets probably spend more time looking out the back than the front. There, you are mostly looking at the planning free-for-all of everyone’s back extensions. It’s an alternative, ad-hoc world of grafted construction, ranging from dodgy concrete-block-and-corrugated-plastic outhouses and huge sheds to the full widescreen architect-designed, bifold door appendage. Because if there’s a garden, then you must be able to see it all at once, constantly, right?

If planners are so relatively relaxed about the backs of houses but not at all relaxed about the fronts, it’s because streets are public and gardens supposedly private. It’s as if your eye was somehow meant not to wander beyond the strict confines of your larch-lap fencing. We all know this is not the case but it is a fiction we mostly go along with because, actually, we rather like such variety and the knowledge that we can do it ourselves. And that feeds into the national obsession with house prices, enhancing value and so on. Our houses become our pension pots.

But not all houses in these streets of ‘identical’ houses are privately owned. One of the glories of the terrace as a building type is that a house occupied by rich folk worth lots of money can sit right next to the same type rented out by a council or housing association. Traditional streets are tenure-blind and, as we know, that’s an ideal to aim for in new developments. If the social housing element is indistinguishable from free-market homes, then, given decent design and management, harmony ensues. Whereas council estates of the past looked so unlike the private estates, they visually reinforced class differences.

But the class difference has returned to the street, thanks to replacement windows. Here’s what happens. Money moves into a street. The money rips out the plastic and aluminium windows of its misguided predecessors and puts back proper timber sliding sashes and front doors, so adding capital value. That’s one lot of skips. Meanwhile another lot of skips in the street is filling up with the original timber sashes being ripped out of the housing association homes. These are replaced with plastic windows that meet energy-efficiency targets, so reducing heating bills for tenants as cheaply as possible.

Thus the street has ceased to be tenure-blind. It’s not about individuality any more. Class system signifiers are re-established: timber vs plastic, private vs public, owner vs renter. Funny old world, eh?

Glass action

The great tenure blindness of the country’s terraces is disappearing again

Hugh Pearman

If the social housing element is indistinguishable from free-market homes then, given decent design and management, harmony ensues

In Ancient Greece and Babylon, the word India was shorthand for cotton

Indian textiles dazzle in Kensington

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A highlight is an upstairs room dedicated to long lost items yielded by the house during its restoration from beneath the floorboards

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Sink or swim

Will Wiles fears the swimming pool is trickling away from the public realm

As a place to exercise, it might be particularly nerve-wracking. As a metaphor, it’s a gift. Housebuilder Ballymore is to suspend a glass-trough swimming pool between two of the towers in its immense development at Nine Elms, south west London. Designed by architect HAL, the pool will span a 14m gap 35m up, part of the complex of roof gardens and leisure facilities being built on the site.

Quite an engineering feat – and what a symbol it will make. But symbolising what? The inaccessible luxury of life among the capital’s new gilded class? Or the precarious nature of a new high-rise neighbourhood that has come to typify the excesses of the London property bubble? High above terra firma, no visible means of support: not the most comforting imagery for property investors.

Architecturally, HAL’s pool could be seen as the confluence of several trends. There are ‘infinity’ pools, which use a subtle overflow edge to create a sense of union between the swimmer and the surrounding landscape (see box). Another contributing trend is the boom in viewing platforms and observation decks. In some respects this is a simple consequence of there being more tall buildings, and so more opportunities for views. But they also pursue an increasingly extreme interaction with elevation rather than mere appreciation of the scenery, with protruding glass walkways and so on. Is this a sign of frustration? All this height, and what use are we making of it?

Which meshes with the third trend: the ‘linked hybrids’ and ‘vertical villages’ of the global avant-garde. Steven Holl, OMA, MVRDV – the experiments by these practices in inhabited bridges, linked superblocks, massed megablocks etc are less innovation than the rediscovery of the metabolist, brutalist or even constructivist proposals of the 20th century. And in the way these things work, this is how these daring and progressive ideas appear in the mainstream: a very nice swimming pool connecting two blocks of expensive flats.

The swimming pool itself might have exclusively, er, exclusive overtones. They’re expensive to build, expensive to run and take up a lot of space. And in the United States at least, they’ve been ready symbols of wealthy, hedonist, suburban conformity: think of all the poolside privilege in Bryan Forbes’ 1975 suspense classic The Stepford Wives, or Mike Nichols’ The Graduate (1967). But in Britain, the swimming pool used to have a kinder face. The ‘municipal baths’ of the 19th century might have stemmed from patrician hygienic concern, but they were fine buildings, often expressing positively un-Victorian (indeed, proto-modernist) ideas of light and space. By the middle of the 20th centuries they had become exemplars of the built shape of a fairer world. George Orwell’s 1940 essay The Lion and the Unicorn is often presented as a lament for a certain kind of traditional England that has slipped into history and beneath the tarmac of ribbon development and new suburbs. But he also salutes the more equal, positive aspects of that new world, including – in one of his most beautiful phrases – ‘the naked democracy of swimming pools’.

Today municipal swimming pools – like so many local services – are threatened. Where they are built anew, such as Zaha Hadid’s much-celebrated Aquatics Centre in the Olympic Park in East London, it is at a scale few authorities can stomach. And naked democracy is not much in fashion – councils prefer the insular, vain individualism of the privately run gym. What are the chances of a resurgence of the swimming pool as a community, civic space? Perhaps Studio Octopi’s Thames Lido project, which earlier this year raised enough money to apply for planning permission, is a toe in the water. It’s small, it’s kind of twee, but if it happens, I hope more architects will follow in taking the plunge.

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

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

Infinity pools could make an interesting typological study in themselves. They are now close to being the default in new higher-end hotels and spas, to the extent that the word ‘infinity’ as ‘granite’ goes with ‘worktops’ and ‘hardwood’ with ‘floors’. Perhaps the infinity pool has the same connotations of craftsmanship and subtle expense as the shadow gap – although of course at Nine Elms it’s all gap and no shadow.

This is how these daring and progressive ideas appear in the mainstream: a very nice swimming pool connecting two blocks of expensive flats

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‘Infinity pool’ seems to pine for the luxurious adjective ‘infinity’ as ‘granite’ goes with ‘worktops’ and ‘hardwood’ with ‘floors’. Perhaps the infinity pool has the same connotations of craftsmanship and subtle expense as the shadow gap – although of course at Nine Elms it’s all gap and no shadow.
We won’t keep you a moment, sir

Charles Holland and Elly Ward drill into the corporate lobby

Illustration Elly Ward

When Patrick Bateman rampages through the entrance lobby of New York’s Seagram Building* towards the end of American Psycho, the film reaches a fitting apotheosis. Brett Easton Ellis’ satire of yuppie amorality repeatedly contrasts acts of gruesome barbarity with the blandly aspirational signifiers (expensive business cards, bespoke suits, Huey Lewis and the News) of American corporate culture. The lobby is the perfect setting for Bateman’s meltdown because it is a space of expansive emptiness, an emotional void in which nothing is meant to happen.

The Seagram Building is perfect too because it contains the corporate lobby space par excellence. A bank of bronze-framed revolving doors accessed from a public plaza lead to an impressingly empty treble-height space lined with sheets of travertine. Whether you work in such an environment or not – and chances are you don’t – this is a space with an eerie familiarity.

The corporate lobby is a projection of power and authority. Whether you arrive early or late, you will be asked to wait. And waiting means sitting down on one of a group of armchairs placed on a square of carpet like an abstracted fragment of home denuded of all trace of domestic comfort. In the centre of the carpet will be a coffee table on which a selection of newspapers and magazines has been arranged. The magazines are there to reflect the brand values of the organisation you are visiting rather than provide actual entertainment per se. There might be brochures to browse too with sales figures to admire or corporate values to imbibe before you are allowed in.

The corporate lobby is a paranoidically controlled space, a precisely delineated territory. Social protocols and codes of behaviour are enshrined in the materials and visual signifiers as much as in the more literal policing by security guards and CCTV cameras. The proliferation of mirrored surfaces makes us acutely aware of our own behaviour, reflecting the minute details of every move or shift of posture. The lobby offers a semblance of comfort and welcome – capacious seats, things to read, a vase of flowers – and yet a pointed air of discomfort is the point.

If the corporate lobby is the battlefield, then the reception desk is its war machine. These ambiguous assemblages undoubtedly serve a functional need, providing surfaces for computers, telephones, pads of tear-off ID labels or even the odd decorative bauble. But their real purpose is to repel invaders and deter unwanted guests. Part furniture, part defensive blockade, the reception desk provides a mute bulwark against the messy, non-corporate world. Their strange projections and odd massing evoke the impenetrable abstractions of space ships and armoured vehicles. Dug in behind the desk, the receptionist can safely survey and control the space beyond.

The generic nature of the corporate lobby is part of its power. Particularities of time and place are unimportant, as are the actual activities of the companies it gives access too. The purpose of this space is to confer a non-specific sense of gravity. Like the contemporary art gallery with which it shares many qualities, suspension of the everyday allows gross distortions of value to be constructed.

The materials employed – shiny, inert, expensive – rebuff the mess of human existence as much as real dirt. The disorientation induced by these surfaces serves a psychological purpose, rendering us ill at ease, temporarily divested of ourselves. This is a space of formal display and carefully manicured ostentation, a kind of anti-chamber of existence. Corporate lobbies are far bigger and more expensive than they need to be because their function is only vaguely to do with accommodating visitors. Like much of the corporate world, their rhetoric of brisk efficiency masks deep, almost byzantine levels of symbolism and mythology.

* The location is in fact another Mies van der Rohe designed building, the Toronto Dominion Tower, which is used as a stand-in for the much better-known Seagram. Like many US movies, American Psycho is filmed in Toronto. The exchangeability of the spaces is appropriate enough in itself.

Charles Holland and Elly Ward are directors of Ordinary Architecture. Read them each month at ribaj.com
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We architects are a uniquely optimistic and interesting bunch. Consummate professionals, we look after our clients’ interests and try to maximise their returns. We worry about and try to mitigate the effects of climate change, consider the context and impact of our project work, and take pride in our creativity and lateral thinking.

And yet we can seem almost blissfully unaware that in running a practice of whatever size we are also running a business. In undercharging for the value and impact of the transformative ideas and delivery of our projects, we undervalue not only ourselves but also our profession’s standing. In offering initial tranches of work or professional advice to potential clients free of charge we dismiss our intellectual property as valueless.

This happens at all levels: from the sole practitioner competing with a local unqualified plan drawer, to the large practice bidding unprofitably for glamorous potential projects and spending up to 25% of its income on ever more comprehensive competition bids.

Last year’s RIBA benchmarking survey revealed some awful stats: 62% of practices don’t have a business plan, and of those that do only 13% have one for more than a year; 40% don’t set annual financial targets, and many micro practices don’t even monitor cash flow. The average salary for mid-ranking architects is £33,000, and half of partners in micro practices (under five people) take home less than £25,000. As the survey shows, there is no correlation between success at winning work and profitability, but more than 60% of practices undertake speculative design work for clients.

We need to do better than this. The Institute must show leadership, facilitating an inter-practice discourse to remove surgical undercutting and end the downward spiral of confidence and recompense. But as practitioners we must all play our part – it’s up to us.

There are of course excellent practices run by business savvy and commercial architects. They understand the impact of undercharging on the internal ability of practices to invest in their futures.

We each need to learn from this and create a programme of action to pay and develop ourselves and our staff. As we all know, losing staff costs a small fortune, the expense of recruitment and loss of accumulated office culture and methodology, team skills, networks and working relationships.

The long hours, low pay culture also makes it harder for us to persuade young people to consider architecture as a rewarding career, favouring those from wealthier backgrounds. I worry that consequently our profession is becoming increasingly elite.

We all have a responsibility for this, and need the tools to tackle a future crisis before it hits. The RIBA Education Review plans to add business skills to the curriculum from year two on, and we are working on regional (and hopefully core modules of) CPD to offer training events in business and marketing, fee negotiation and client management.

As your president I want to see the Institute play its part in educating our clients and the wider public about what architects do and offer, so they can respect and reimburse us appropriately. Architects need a thorough re-branding, so that we, our staff, industry colleagues and future clients value our broad range of skills and understand that paying appropriate resource-based fees enhances outcomes, and can actually reduce project costs.

I was once outside court with a barrister, about to give evidence on a case and he quietly asked me how my profession expected to be taken seriously by the business world when we charge ‘such ridiculously low fees’. He was right.

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Culture
Profile
Blue sky thinkers

Marks Barfield does undertake conventional buildings, but could you name one? Dramatic, soaring public attractions – now you’re talking

Words: Hugh Pearman  Portrait: Morley von Sternberg

A fish restaurant on the shingle beach of Brighton on a sunny day is a agreeable place to meet David Marks and Julia Barfield, who in the past I’ve tended to find in the south London locale where they’ve lived since they were at the AA, and had their own practice since 1989. We’re there because their latest thoroughly unconventional venture, the observation tower known as i360, is reaching 450 feet into the sky from that shingle behind us and will open next year; but also because the Labour Party conference is on, a few hundred yards away, and the pair have decided to see for themselves what’s going on.

Can you categorise the work of Marks Barfield? I can’t. They do tackle some conventional building types – a primary school, a watersports centre, an arts complex – but generally bring something unexpected and new to the party. Their Greenwich Gateway pavilions, canopy slung between them, form one of the stranger pairs of entrance lodges I’ve ever seen and – think pinball flippers made of mirror glass and swirling tubing –
are just very difficult to describe (perhaps they will make more sense visually when the vast Greenwich Peninsula development is built up behind them). They’re building a golden-domed mosque in Cambridge which adheres to the principles of Christopher Alexander. They’ve done a mixed-use commercial project in Lincoln which changes colour as you walk round it. And, with their long-term collaborator, the structural engineer Jane Wernick, the gently swaying tree-top walkway at Kew Gardens. Yes, but – the London Eye, eh?

That too began life as a Marks Barfield/Wernick collaboration in 1993, responding to media calls for ideas to mark the Millennium. Wernick’s always been there, helping them with the project that launched them as a practice 26 years ago, the competition-winning ‘bridge of the future’ with which they proposed to span the Grand Canyon. The idea was based on the tendon-stiffened spine of a dinosaur and could have been built from one side only. ‘Jane was running Arup in California. We had a fax machine,’ recalls Marks. It got them a lot of publicity and gave them the confidence to quit working for others – Barfield had worked for Foster on the Royal Academy’s Sackler galleries and on Stansted; Marks worked for Rogers, first as a modelmaker, later on Lloyd’s of London under Jamie Troughton and Chris Wilkinson. ‘I became team leader for the basement,’ he relates proudly.

Practice was hard at first. They landed big, imaginative commercial office jobs and invested accordingly, only to see the jobs vanish in the recession of the early 1990s. Collaborating with old mates Bennetts Associates got them through that – Bennetts had work but no computers, Marks Barfield had the latest kit which was standing idle. ‘It worked really well,’ Barfield recalls of that difficult time. Since that rocky start, Marks Barfield has always looked to devise some of its own work: projects it can be in charge of and derive continuing income from, rather than merely designing at risk for others.

The London Eye was a mad idea, given where it is placed, right on the South Bank, next to County Hall, looking across to the Palace of Westminster. Who would let them build there? And who would allow the architects to be the company running it, just because it was all their idea? But it was built, it has been in operation for more than 15 years and we all know it turned into a huge popular success. Marks Barfield kept control, running it alongside BA and the Tussauds Group. But they had a mountain of expensive debt to service: in a general ownership reshuffle in 2006 they sold their stake in order to recoup their investment.

The pair don’t name actual sums but as Marks says: ‘The London Eye really enabled us to do this.’ Barfield adds: ‘We basically did up our house, and did this, and that’s about it.’ It all sounds so simple. And in a way it is. For the house, read the account in RIBAJ July 2013. As for the i360, that was designed pretty much straight away in 2006 but had to wait for another, far deeper recession to end before it could get under way.

Once again, they are part of a company running a notably unusual public attraction – one that has learned from the lessons of the Eye and uses many of the same team of companies and consultants that made that. For a start it’s cheaper, at £46m, so needs fewer visitors to make it profitable (‘There are very few places in the world where a London Eye is

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Loans are from the public sector, which will be repaid handsomely one hopes, plus Marks’ and Barfield’s own stake. Their design fees take the form of loan notes, also paid back over time.

Secondly, it offers a different experience: one huge, 90-tonne, 200-person circular observation car, rising vertically up its hollow steel mast, instead of 32 small ones going round and round. So you can get reasonably sized events – especially weddings but also live performances, wine tastings and so on – in there. A counterweight and variety of dampers inside the shaft are designed to keep everything vibration-free and energy-efficient: it will generate power on the descent. A relatively simple winch system drives it, the four inner wheels of the glittering car engaging with four vertical slots in the exterior of the tower. As you’d expect, the construction was itself quite something, the fully-fitted flanged ‘cans’ of the tower arriving on the beach via barge and then being jacked up and bolted together one by one – from the bottom.

They get thinner-gauge, therefore lighter, towards the top. The device is protected by patents, which are very expensive to keep up, costing some £150,000 so far.

Brighton has the population for this. When the i360 project started, the city had 8m visitors a year. Now it’s up to 11m. The i360, they say, will work financially in a range of between 500,000 and one and a half million visitors a year. It’s not just the tickets to ride: a sizeable if low-slung building is being constructed round the base of the shaft and will have restaurants, shop and event rooms in it.

No doubt about it, Marks Barfield is not your average practice. How do they change gear from doing something like this to the more conventional work of a 25-strong practice? Barfield says: ‘It’s about keeping an open mind and a natural curiosity – an open analytical approach. There are some parallels.’ Marks adds: ‘You don’t change gear, you swap folders. Some folders are fuller than others.’

The London Eye was a mad idea, given where it is placed. Who would let them build there? Who would allow the architects to be the company running it?
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Out of the armchair
Enter the prolific, varied and inventive world of Charles and Ray Eames

Pamela Buxton

One thing’s for certain, no-one visiting the new Eames show at the Barbican will come away thinking of them as just furniture designers. From the moment they’re confronted with the 3m-high nose of an experimental military glider on the way in, visitors will be hit with the full breadth of the duo’s formidable creativity.

Charles (1907-1978) and Ray (1912-1988) Eames were prolific designers who turned their hands to whatever medium best suited the task in hand – film, architecture, design, furniture, products, graphics, multi-media installation, art... you name it, the Eames Studio probably tackled it during its 40 years of activity in post-war America.

For The World of Charles and Ray Eames exhibition, curator Catherine Ince had the fantastic if daunting task of trawling their archive and steering a path through this diverse oeuvre. She hopes the resulting show, which is the first major exhibition on the duo in 15 years, will sketch a picture not only of their joy in making and experimentation but of their deep interest in the world around them and the ‘real philosophical depth’ of their work.

‘They had a curiosity about the world and how it works, drawing on all sorts of sources,’ she says. ‘Charles articulated it as ‘everything is architecture’, a philosophical viewpoint that facilitated that skill and ability to assess situations and look at different ways of tackling things.’

One of their most quoted maxims is their desire to ‘provide the best for the most for the least’. They eagerly embraced challenges in many spheres, whether designing military products such as moulded plywood leg splints, stretchers, and aircraft parts, working for pioneering corporations such as IBM, designing the furniture they are best known for, or creating art installations for leading museums and galleries.

Through 380 exhibits, the show seeks to convey the inquisitive natures that the duo demonstrated through both commissioned and self-initiated projects. An important thread of the Barbican show will be an exploration of how they modelled ideas not just through physical models in their workshop, but in film. Screen imagery – both still and filmic – will be prominent throughout.

The exhibition will include a restored version of Think, the multi-screen presentation they made for their collaboration with Eero Saarinen on the seminal IBM Pavilion.
at the New York World’s Fair in 1964-1965. Fascinated by emerging computing technology and its potential for communication, they designed an immersive multi-media experience – shown in the pavilion’s astonishing egg-like, elevated Ovoid Theatre – as part of the pavilion’s aim of explaining computing and data modelling to visitors. Comprising film, graphic, signage and exhibition design, it was the pair’s biggest project to date. A time-lapse film edited by them of the IBM pavilion in action will also be on display, along with film presentations of the concept to IBM executives and staff.

In the Cold War era, other Eames films such as the 2000-image ‘Glimpses of the USA’ montage for the American National Exhibition of 1959 in Moscow provided important visions of America for both domestic and foreign audiences.

The Barbican exhibition will also feature films by the Eameses on their own, hugely influential, Case Study House #8. Completed in 1949, this steel-framed house has been widely celebrated for what the critic Reyner Banham called its ‘relaxed and unassuming modernism’.

Both versions of ‘Powers of Ten’ will be screened – an innovative film from 1968 and 1977 that visualised the importance of scale by zooming out from a reclining man to the edge of the universe and back in again to the scale of a carbon atom.

‘People are only just waking up to how interesting their films were,’ says Ince.

There are also examples of the triple slide screen presentations they frequently used to communicate their ideas, including the Tanks presentation for the visitor experience of the unrealised marine biology study building designed by KRJDA in Washington DC, described by Ince as ‘visually sumptuous but very meaningful and poignant’.

Ince has sought to convey the Eames’ great attention to art directing and how their own work was presented including sets and tableaux created for photoshoots. Highlights include the recreation of ‘An Exhibition For Modern Living’, a room they designed in 1949 for the Detroit Institute of Arts, and a model of Toy House 4, a furnished doll’s house based on their own influential home.

‘This foregrounds Ray. She was the ultimate propmaster and stylist,’ says Ince. ‘Their attitude towards living wasn’t about creating the pinnacle of modernism, but enjoying the richness of the material world.’

As well as examples of their work, the exhibition and book explore the world of the Eameses, their friends, their interests and their wide-ranging influence. All sorts of luminaries make an appearance from long-term friends Tony Benn MP and film director Billy Wilder, through to leading designers of the times including George Nelson, Buckminster Fuller, Isamu Noguchi, Alexander Girard, and in the UK, Alison and Peter Smithson, who edited a special Eames celebration issue of Architectural Design in 1966. The Smithson family has loaned an Eames chair owned by Alison and Peter for the exhibition.

Perhaps the last word should go to Banham; an excerpt of his film ‘Banham Loves Los Angeles’ showing him visiting Case Study House #8 is included in the show.

When writing about the Case Study houses, he described the Eames work as ‘open-minded, experimental, hands-on, improvisatory, quirky’ and a ‘much-needed antidote to the cut-and-dried recipes of routine modernism then being taught in the schools.’

This new exhibition on the influential duo looks set to handsomely convey these qualities by turning a purposely-wide lens on their rich body of work.

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Talk of Frank

This candid biography of Gehry is written with affection and admiration

Hugh Pearman

Proper biographies of living architects are rare, very rare. While there are excellent biographies of historic architects – Gillian Darley’s of John Soane springs to mind, and Gavin Stamp’s of Sir George Gilbert Scott, reviewed in September’s RIBAJ – it’s a very different matter when it comes to the living.

‘Building Art: the Life and Work of Frank Gehry’ by critic Paul Goldberger is in its way extraordinary: it is an officially-sanctioned biography in which the notoriously touchy subject co-operates but does not get editorial control. Perhaps this is because the two have known each other so long, and Goldberg-er clearly regards Gehry with affection and admiration, but he hasn’t let this get in the way of some very, ah, frank writing. This is an architect whose several careers and reinventions have led to personal and professional collateral damage – and buildings ranging from masterpieces to complete turkeys. Goldberg shies away from none of this, though all but retires himself as critic of buildings and lets others make the judgements.

In consequence it’s surprisingly gripping. There is a lot of dope-smoking. Over and over, Frank and his mates are toking up. A biker friend related at his 80th birthday party: ‘Sometimes I’d, you know, smoke a bit of marijuana and he would be riding with me and I would think, ‘Oh my god, I have the greatest living architect on my motorcycle, and what if I crash?’’ Well, this Toronto-born Jewish boy hit the West Coast of America nicely in time for the peace ‘n’ love hippie era. He indulged to the full, it would appear. Already famous is the scene in the book where the wife of a client insists on his driving her home, and then pulls him onto the bed. ‘What do you do?’ Frank recalled later, ‘He’s going to be coming home in about 30 minutes and here I am wrestling with his wife.’

Importantly, his second marriage to Berta has endured the stresses and strains of what is by any standards a workaholic lifestyle. Any critic who has ever met and talked to Gehry gets the feeling he’d rather be in the studio. He is a funny, thin-skinned individual who cares little for the niceties of concealing his feelings. He lets you know. He can veer from amiable to cold or sharp remarkably quickly. His laid-back demeanour hides a core that seems to be partly steel – he’s nothing if not determined – and partly jelly – he appears psychologically incapable of accepting his success.

Goldberger’s key quote here comes from the time of his latest tour de force, the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris (RIBAJ December 2014). Feted by all at the opening, with a huge solo exhibition at the Pompidou Centre at the same time, he said to friends later: ‘I wish I could enjoy it like you’re supposed to. I wish I could be that guy – at least for an hour. I wish I could live in the place people are making for me. I want to be popular, but I don’t trust it.’ Perhaps rightly: shortly afterwards, faced with hostile questioning about his shapeist architecture, he gave the question the middle finger. The photo of this act of defiance went round the world. So did his follow-up verbal rejoinder: ‘In this world we are living in, 98 per cent of everything that is built and constructed is pure shit… Once in a while, however, a group of people do something special. Very few, but God, leave us alone. We are dedicated to our work… therefore, please don’t ask questions as stupid as that one.’

He was tired and he apologised later, but you know he meant it, and why not? For all the variability of his output there is nobody like Frank Gehry. He takes big risks aesthetically, and enough come off. Goldberger makes the point that Gehry depends on people not doing architecture like his, but says he is at heart a traditionalist: ‘He has never sought to use technology to create the illusion of something that does not exist in the physical world. He creates buildings… that use the ancient architectural tools of proportion, light, materials, scale and space to create the sensations that raise them to the level of art.’

Most architects would be satisfied with that. Gehry, you sense, even now, very likely isn’t.

‘I wish I could live in the place people are making for me. I want to be popular, but I don’t trust it’

The RIBA Journal November 2015
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David Alan Hutchison MBE
1937 – 2015

HLM co-founder who achieved success young and whose contribution to health buildings in particular saw him made an MBE

David Hutchison, who has died aged 78, was in his twenties when he became one of the three competition-winning founders of noted practice Hutchison Locke and Monk, now HLM.

Graduating from the Bartlett in 1960, he joined Powell and Moya, became a registered architect in 1962 and worked on Pimlico Library, and hospitals at Wexham Park and Princess Margaret, Swindon. For him and his two ex-Bartlett colleagues, Graham Locke and Tony Monk, 1964 was the breakout year, when they won the Paisley Civic Centre competition.

This large project enabled them to develop a sizeable firm in just a few years, initially in Richmond and Paisley – sustained by the civic centre – while other work was gained. This was in the public sector, particularly health, form of ‘social architecture’ which has since characterised the firm’s work in this and other sectors. David insisted that hospitals should be welcoming, comfortable, non-institutional, and human in scale.

Throughout his working life David Hutchison was characterised by three all-consuming passions – architecture, music, and Tottenham Hotsprur. From a musical perspective it was evident that he could be equally at home in the guise of Emile de Becque in South Pacific or as part of the massed choir on the terraces of White Hart Lane. He will be fondly remembered by all who encountered him in these and all his other roles.

David was an RIBA councillor and received the MBE for services to architecture and the community in 1976. He left HLM in 1991 to set up his own practice of DHP in Bath, where he lived for most of the latter part of his life. He married and divorced twice. With Helen, whom he married soon after graduating from the Bartlett, where she had also studied, he had four children: Gilly, Mike, Kris and Peter. He is survived by his two former wives, his four children, 12 grandchildren and the recent addition of a great grandson.

Christopher D Liddle and Leslie Welch
Housing essentials

It is incredible that the remit for the new National Infrastructure Commission excludes housing; the subject on which successive governments have made meaningless promises, resulting in the abysmal state of current provision against growing demand. Immediately before the general election in May, a reported decline in the construction sector – which so much influences quarterly ‘growth’ figures – was a timely reminder that the promises of the main parties were simply without foundation. In a ‘bidding war’ the Lib Dems had pledged 300,000 new starts a year, Labour 200,000, the Conservatives 200,000 starter homes, while UKIP opted for a million new homes by 2025 – in fact about 100,000 a year, but sensibly on brown field sites. It was reported that 67 percent of housebuilders disagreed with the projections and suggested that about 180,000 houses a year, or fewer, was more realistic. Analysts reported a shortage of skills and training in the industry, called for more reform and speeding up of planning processes, and better access to building on public sector land. Depending on various reports, we appear to be facing a requirement for a million new homes each year until 2020 and beyond. Existing production is barely one third of this number. The subject has an interesting social history.

In 1945 when a Labour government declared national housing targets, the post war Housing Act had made local authorities responsible for all their residents’ housing needs. In effect, the housing crisis was solved by a largely nationalised industry employing methods and standards of construction which are simply unacceptable today. ‘Green’ credentials were unheard of; health and safety was an unknown subject. Seven hundred thousand ‘traditional’ homes were built by councils between 1945 and 1953 but to meet increased targets, patented, prefabricated housing systems were introduced, many using heavy precast concrete panels suitable for multi-storey high rise construction, and as progressively greater rates of subsidy from Whitehall were available for dwellings above four storeys in height, many of the urban housing authorities planned and built accordingly. Britain is the custodian of such expediency, which while achieving numbers of units, produced a housing legacy unacceptable for today.

In the totally changed political climate, private developers and not local authorities are expected to provide housing on an unprecedented scale. In this new market, commercial decisions by developers and builders will always outweigh other needs, apart from the separately funded provision of ‘affordable’ or ‘social’ housing, and the unprecedented scale of car ownership dictates planning considerations never before contemplated. It is one thing to instruct planning authorities to ‘free up’ land and to accelerate their procedures, but quite another for builders to finance, plan, design in detail, market, and realistically build the scale of new housing which we are assured is required.

If housing supply is not included as an essential component of the national infrastructure plan it will be driven by market forces, empty promises from politicians, and will continue to lack the new legislation which must accompany the emerging paradigm requiring completely new thinking.

Hugh McIlveen, Banbury, Oxon

Corb in a spin

It was a shock to see the results of the Cabanon competition in September’s RIBAJ. They disgrace Le Corbusier’s iconic creation and make him turn in his grave. To read the judges’ commentary is even more disturbing. What happened to inspired selection?

Antoine Raffoul

The idea here was not to be neo-Corbusian but to make a micro-home for today’s purposes. Only the basic (small) size and use of materials were constant. Very wisely our entrants – who were indeed inspired, as most readers will judge – went their own creative route rather than trying to pastiche the Master – Editor
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Civic Supermarket
An elegant, contemporary colonnade clad in Nordic Bronze from Aurubis adds a sense of civic permanence to this city-centre supermarket, taking retail architecture to a new level.
Nordic Bronze was selected at an early design stage for the colonnade and other facade elements. The building’s designer Matt Brook, director of architects Broadway Malyan, said: “We wanted to use a material for the expressed frame that would reference the area’s industrial heritage, particularly of metalworking. In addition, the strong, natural colour of the gradually weathering bronze complements the surrounding historic brick and sandstone buildings.”
The colonnade and primary structural elements expressed on the exterior of the building are set out on a 7.9m structural grid and clad in sheet Nordic Bronze, with the principal elevations being clad in either perforated Nordic Bronze or glazed with a curtain wall capped with perforated Nordic Bronze fins. Both are set out vertically on a 1.128m grid sub-module of the primary structural grid.
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Ray Nathaniels was born in Sri Lanka but received his architectural training in Britain, qualifying in 1944. His first work as an architect was in North Africa and the Middle East.

In 1956, a commission took him to the Bahamas. He was enchanted and spent the remainder of his career on the islands working prolifically over the next 50 years on projects encompassing a diverse range of commissions for hotels, exhibitions, a hospital wing and decorations for royal visits. But it was the houses he designed, including one for the actor Sidney Poitier, which established his reputation as the founder of modernism to the Bahamas.

In fact, he created a new architectural style specific to its environment. Responding to the conditions of each site individually, Nathaniels’ houses are designed to be entirely locally built. He combined the international influences inherent in his schooling with principles learnt from the traditional vernacular architecture of the islands to form a modern Bahamian aesthetic, seen here in his house at Palmetto Point, Eleuthera, for Mr and Mrs Jermain S Irish.

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Justine Sambrook
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