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It can be a strange feeling, encountering buildings where the shell and core is by one architect and the interiors by another. It’s been common in spec offices and retail for ever, of course, but is increasingly the case in housing – especially upmarket housing. Take the high density Abell and Cleland blocks in Westminster by DSDHA with interiors by Project Orange on page 24. Or, much more unusually, take the new Bridge Theatre on page 8, built by Haworth Tompkins in a space left for the purpose beneath a superluxe apartment complex at Tower Bridge by Squire and Partners. Then there’s retrofit, where you find yourself inhabiting (and healing) the skin of an architect from the past (page 33). It seems almost old-fashioned, then, to find an exemplary new, freestanding building such as Page\Park’s Hawkhead Centre in Paisley on page 16. All by the one architect, throughout. A rare treat. •
Changing places

Bridge Theatre’s unusual location enabled Haworth Tompkins to make some unconventional moves and create a flexible, intimate space

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Philip Vile

Most modern theatres have quite a presence. They are often civic buildings and their form and massing will speak of the programme with a fly tower reaching up and clues to the rake of the auditorium on the street frontage. Haworth Tompkins has worked on a few of those, but has also proved it doesn’t rely on external appearance to make a great theatre. It can make theatricality come from within – the convivial entrances, bars and cafés, the focused, unfussy auditoria.

But still, sliding past the shiny limestone of More London, high end offices and super-luxe flats, I wondered at One Tower Bridge how embedding a theatre into all this would work. Because it really is embedded. It fills the hole that on many blocks of flats would be ‘activated’ by a supermarket. The signage recognises this, spelling out the theatre’s name in glowing letters. Next to Tower Bridge, facing a plaza onto the River Thames and Foster’s Greater London Authority headquarters, this position now reeks of money, though it may be a thin, riverine skin on the deprivation elsewhere in Southwark.

But let’s get inside. Steve Tompkins is already settled, glass of red in hand, when I arrive. He is at home here. The creative forces behind the theatre were long standing collaborators with Haworth Tompkins: Nick Starr from the Almeida Theatre’s takeover of Gainsborough Studios in 2000 and both Starr and Nick Hytner at the National Theatre (RIBAJ April 2015). With a track record at the National for creating commercially successful productions, the pair had plans for

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Tompkins’ concern was ensuring this space was not too big: ‘It will be rammed,’ he promises.

The hubbub around us is building as people arrive for the evening’s performance of Julius Caesar. Tompkins’ concern was ensuring this space was not too big: ‘It will be rammed,’ he promises. The wide glass frontage and unclad concrete columns still need the ‘glamour and lustre’ that theatre deserves. So the cabinets of Douglas fir ply that line the walls like an empty library gleam with reflective paint. And the fabric language has a costume drama of its own. The huge rooflight is lightly baffled with fabric, elsewhere stiff folds of felt create a warm sense of enclosure. Hanging bulbs are dressed in skirts of copper mesh. The dark timber stair has the simplest light oak wreathed handrail – each joint section the same perfectly judged dimensions as it flows down to the dark lobby and seats.

Questions in the theatre press about locating a commercial theatre off the West End seem irrelevant in this buzzy context. Certainly the West End, with its historic theatres crammed into busy streets, offers nothing like the design freedom of this theatre. And with the programme of productions specially designed for the space (rather than receiving productions from elsewhere) the lack of fly

A wide glass frontage facing on Potters Fields Park and the river.
The RIBA Journal April 2018  ribaj.com

The auditorium works in thrust, end on and in the round

air handling through the walls and CNC-cut balustrades to the galleries. It was brought to site in lorry-sized chunks. Each module was split mid column so each was self supporting as it went in. It was a revelation to Tompkins. ‘They were used to machine tolerances, not building tolerances.’ Not only that but architects Tompkins and Roger Watts drew instinctively, relying on their university engineering training. From that Stage Technologies calculated everything to ensure efficiency, with resulting very slim steel cantilevers on the galleries.

Coming out to the majesty of Tower Bridge I realise that the presence of the Bridge Theatre will, like the best theatres, be in the minds of those who come to a show here. And more than that, the ebb and flow of those people and how they redraw the sometimes soulless public space with their visits might feed into the huge southern tracts of Southwark. And if the Bridge elevates the typical position of a supermarket then all the better.

Credits

Client London Theatre Company
Architect Haworth Tompkins
Technical design manufacturer Tait Stage Technologies
Project manager Plann
Services engineer Skelly & Couch
Acoustic engineer Gilleron Scott Acoustic Design
Contact Paul Gilleron
Cost consultant Bristow Johnson & Partners
Fire engineer Trenton Fire
Structural engineer Momentum Engineering
Approved inspector Approved Inspector Services
Main contractor Rise Contracts

Theater shouldn’t cause problems. Here the auditorium works comfortably in three basic configurations, thrust, end on and in the round. For Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar the set design closed up the circle of galleries, and a crowd from the audience standing in the centre became part of the highly charged action as characters strode on and off, the stage itself shifting shapes as it lifted and lowered.

This sort of stage engineering is integral not just to the performance but also to the auditorium itself. With tight time on a 15 year lease, tight space with just 20mm tolerance on the 10m high space and the potential for it all to go wrong at the last minute with a clash of house and theatre electrics, Haworth Tompkins and the theatre went for rock show technology. Tait Stage Technologies took over the auditorium build after shell and core (‘there are stretch marks there,’ admits Haworth). The architect drew up a very detailed CAD model – sitting in every seat digitally along the way and calibrating knee and toe room. From this Stage Technologies built the steel walled box-in-a-box to go on top of the floating slab. It was wired, with built-in

Above Auditorium configurations.

Narrow galleries give a sense of being close to the stage and the theatre can reorient seats by up to 40° to avoid uncomfortable viewing angles.
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Putting down the phone to Rasmus Hjortshøj it seems obvious he would choose Norwegian architect Reiulf Ramstad’s 2012 Trollstigen Visitor Centre as one of his favourite shots. An architect by training, Hjortshøj developed an obsession with documenting in pictures the Romantic frisson between natural landscapes and man-made structures; one that had him – less romantically – kipping in his car as he traversed the desolate coasts of Jutland and the Faroe Islands recording it. The commitment was recognised when he was offered a scholarship from the Danish Arts Academy to pursue a doctorate analysing this contemporary landscape condition.

So for someone investigating the nature of Edmund Burke’s ‘sublime’ – ‘that thing larger than yourself’ – and drawing inspiration from the awe-imbued paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, there are few better places to go than Norway’s Trolls’ Road, an epic Wagnerian ensemble of mountains, waterfalls and woods, climbing nearly a kilometre to the top of Stigrøra peak, where Ramstad’s intervention sits vertiginously overlooking the Stigfossen Falls and the valley.

Visually, there seems a strong link with this building and BIG’s Tirpitz Museum in Denmark, which Hjortshøj also shot; but while he calls the latter ‘direct and ingenious’, he sees Ramstad’s work as more ‘contextually driven’, and hell, ‘poetic’. Criss-crossing planes of concrete and glass rise from and into the rock, forming the building into a pointy crown which looks out to the ‘Trolls’ Wall’ as the mist insinuates up its mountainside; a line drawn between the Cretaceous and the Anthropocène.
A strength building activity in the double-height sports hall.
Is it anyone’s business but the client’s how a building is funded and how much it cost? Does it matter in a review of the architecture? Is it fair if the client wants to keep that information quiet?

These are questions often discussed on architecture magazines. Architects, clients and developers often want to keep such information hidden. The issue arose again after I visited Page\Park’s new Hawkhead Centre, a health and activity hub on the outskirts of Paisley for the charity Scottish War Blinded (SWB). It’s a day centre for ex-service people who have visual impairment, and is an incredibly generous building.

The client of Page\Park’s day centre for visually impaired veterans had no need to be so coy about its cost. It’s worth every penny.

Words: Isabelle Priest
Photographs: Keith Hunter
Critique
Hawkhead Centre

The cost of a building is an important component in its assessment

convenient fact that this day centre was delivered alongside a specialist blinded persons nursing home next door for SWB’s sister charity Royal Blind, which is much more open, we know that the combined complex cost £12 million. We also know that the nursing home part cost £6m, so we can assume the Hawkhead Centre cost about the same. At 1530m², this works out at £3921 per m² – not that surprising a figure given the specialist nature of the building.

It’s a shame, though, when organisations hold back such information. We are, after all, used to seeing expensive buildings – take the Bloomberg HQ and the American Embassy in the last six months alone. They both allegedly cost $1 billion. We would rarely critique a building on the basis of cost alone. But when it comes to charities, perhaps more scrutiny is required. The building may have been funded out of reserves, but that money would have once been privately donated I assume. And after the visit, Rebecca Barr, the head of SWB, retracted her statement about the cost being comparable with other builds.

Knowing the cost of a project is an important component in its assessment. It isn’t always mentioned, but it lurks in the background. The schemes we cover need to be useful to readers to justify their publication. But it’s more than that. The kinds of facilities at Hawkhead are not being provided for visually impaired people equally across Scotland even by SWB, and of course not across the UK. Nor are they part of ordinary health and community care. Although the Hawkhead and Linburn buildings serve Scotland’s largest population concentrations, and one veteran travels in from the Isle of Bute, like any day centre they function for a narrow geographical area. For these reasons it is important to know whether they could in any way be replicable by welfare institutions and other, perhaps less well-endowed organisations, and that this money, which attracts all sorts of public relief, is being duly spent.

Why is this so important? Well, it wouldn’t be necessary to talk about it if the Hawkhead facilities and function weren’t so splendid. In the past I’ve written about problems in health facilities, but also about one of my favourite hospitals, the Hospital de Sant Pau in Barcelona, which is light and airy as well as full of joy and wonder (PIP Nov/Dec 2016). The Hawkhead Centre shares these qualities though it has a different appearance. Walking around on a late Monday afternoon after all the members have gone home, it’s easy to forget this is a building for people with specialist needs.

Shaped like a hawk’s wing in deference to its

Credits
Architect Page \ Park Architects
Client Scottish War Blinded
Main contractor CCG Scotland
Structural engineer Jacobs
M&E consultant Atelier Ten
QS NBM
Acoustic consultant Sandy Brown Associates
Landscape architect Ian White Associates
Form of contract or procurement route SBCC Standard Building Contract With Quantities, 2011 Edition

Right The internal avenue through the middle of the building has places to sit and rest.
Below The entrance offers an obvious way in for visitors.
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namesake town, the new building combines workshops, classrooms, a gym, sports hall and dining hub under a great curving canopy that sweeps from the taller bank of the passing parallel road down to the nursing home. Visitors enter the Hawkhead Centre at the eastern end, encouraged in by a geometric forecourt sculpted out of the building’s volume using a composition of contrasting planes of white-stained larch timber-boarding, natural birch slatted soffit, dark Scottish whinstone paving and glass curtain walling framed by zinc fascias.

Inside, this generous, clear sense of space continues. The birch-slatted soffit from the entrance portico continues down the tall, 55m length of a wide internal avenue, and then out through the other end wall to form a protective canopy from which to enjoy a newly planted garden. From this avenue the double-height sports hall, gym and upstairs staff area are off to the left; the single-storey workshops, classrooms and a lounge to the right. At the end it opens out into a huge dining area where members are served free lunches and can pick up tea and coffee all day. The entire end wall is glazed to make the most of a new landscape designed by Ian White Associates. A curved timber potting shed at the back of the garden helps contain the building’s privacy. Members can enjoy a circular walk in the sensory garden where some plants rattle, others have been chosen for their perfume and some are planted at eye level to allow close inspection.

Without doubt, the ceiling is the most crucial and successful aspect of the project. Combined with the clerestorey windows between all the side rooms and central avenue, it unifies the spaces to make them feel interconnected and free-flowing. It means few rooms are single-aspect, admitting daylight from multiple directions to prevent dimness, which is particularly disabling for visually impaired people. What’s more, five triangular dormer windows along the centre, like feathers in the hawk’s wing, bring light into the plan, act as ventilation shafts and give the interior an even more exciting architectural dynamic. This additional imaginative thought as well as its aesthetic interest over an ordinary plasterboard finish lifts the project from the good to the extraordinary.

While the overall plan and grand design gestures help create a light and enabling environment for people with visual impairment, great care has been taken with the details too. Light maple wood doors are surrounded by dark walnut frames and fitted with black
Attention to detail extends far beyond visual contrast and lack of clutter

enamelled ironmongery to create visual differentiation for the partially sighted; coats are tidied away in a long cupboard opposite the reception and fire extinguishers are recessed into walls so people don’t bump into them. In the teaching kitchen, the white units have black edged work surfaces and handles. There is a huge emphasis on storage to clear the paraphernalia of the centre’s daily life away too.

This attention to detail extends far beyond visual contrast and uncluttered floors. One of the main takeaways from Page\Park’s work on the Linburn Centre was the need to consider the impact of visual impairment on the other senses. For example, to improve the acoustic environment, the architect has incorporated a stretched black fabric between the slats in the ceiling, acoustic panelling along the avenue, cork flooring and more natural, sound dampening materials, as well as closing off the open servery in the dining hall from the clanging catering kitchen. And for architecture fetishisers, Page\Park even found budget to incorporate flush recessed skirting details too.

Having only opened six months ago, the building is already helping 111 of the SWB’s 1000 members, which means 20-30 people visit the centre each day. Members do activities from woodwork, art and cooking to gardening, ICT, strength training and indoor curling. There is also a quiet room overlooking the garden for people to listen to music and watch films, while the sports hall doubles as a multipurpose space for events such as Burns Night Supper. The centre’s ethos is about empowering people living with visual impairment, and has a non-institutional feel that owes a lot to Maggie’s – Page\Park has in fact designed two of those. Into the healthcare and community building mix the Hawkhead Centre also adds education, leisure and creativity, with SWB believing strongly that the latter encourages wellbeing.

There are 15 permanent members of staff and Barr reports that many have noticed the abilities and demeanour of attendees improving in a short amount of time – some even look younger.

Over the past 10 years SWB has undertaken a significant building programme, transforming itself from primarily a hostel-style support service into a day centre offering a more modern way of providing care, so it is not likely that it will commission more buildings, but the Hawkhead Centre is part of its ambition to open its services to more people.

‘There are a smaller number of war veterans now,’ explains Barr. ‘So in 2007 our constitution was changed to include people with age-related eye conditions and people who did national service.’

So while the oldest member at Hawkhead is a 102-year-old Dunkirk veteran, most are in their mid-70s, and SWB is expecting a 10-year expansion with the population bulge of baby boomers. All would like a centre at the end of their road. Membership is free, as is all of the in-house and outreach support, including meals and day trips. The organisation will even provide members with talking microwaves for their homes, as well as talking mobile phones.

‘It’s now that we need to spend our money,’ concludes Barr. It would be great to see both Hawkhead’s programme and its architecture replicated for more people, whatever the cost. •

Below ‘Feather’-like triangular dormer windows and soft natural materials create a peaceful environment.
Central Westminster is about more than government buildings and the Abbey complex at one end and tacky retail around the great railway terminus at the other, counterbalanced by the nearby Tate Britain. This is where MPs, clergy and spies meet commuters and commerce. It’s also about a surprising amount of housing. The backstreets range from early Georgian (especially around Thomas Archer’s St John’s Smith Square) to modern, but are noted especially for one typology: the mansion block. Some of the blocks are social housing, some are stuffed with the great and good, and there is a satisfying sense of shared high density streets. It is here that DSDHA has inserted a pair of new residential buildings that aim to reinvent the mansion-block genre.

‘Here’ is in John Islip Street, a relatively late-developed section originally bordering the marshland that contained the 19th century Millbank Penitentiary, later demolished to make way for the Tate. The twin sites were previously occupied by broodingly hermetic ministerial blocks with the same names as the new ones – Abell House and Cleland House. In the 18th century this was also where Peterborough House, home of the Grosvenor family, stood in its gardens on the edge of London. The idea of bringing back some openness and green space to what had become a locked-down streetscape took root.

It is unusual to be able to build an architectural dialogue across a street – though the plots are staggered,
connecting visually on the diagonal and in the long views down the road. This is achieved here through carefully-modelled structures that share a common system of external precast facade components but with detail differences that most passers-by would be unaware of. I met Deborah Saunt over a coffee in the crypt café of St John’s Smith Square. Archer’s exuberantly Baroque towers are glimpsed along the streets from here and she explained how this influenced the designs of the new blocks – specifically their upper reaches at penthouse level where the rectilinear facade grid starts to distort somewhat fancifully, including a set-back ‘casino’ or loggia at high level on the Cleland block. Baroque flourishes? Up to a point. Saunt says: ‘There’s something unsettling about what we do here – why is it architecturally so frilly at the top?’

DSDHA is known for its high levels of contextual analysis and – in some recent projects – a leaning towards classically-tinged forms. Here you have buildings with facades organised into the traditionally different treatments of base, middle and top, with the base extending to three or four storeys – the general limit that the eye takes in from pavement level. And although there is no particular visual external difference between the market housing and the 25% affordable housing – which makes up more than half of the Cleland block – the affordable units get a distinctly plainer and narrower entrance round the back on Thorney Street – right behind the MI5 building, in fact, on the service/entrance side of things. Tenure blind? Not quite. The market housing gets the full lush hotel-lobby-style treatment on either side of John Islip Street.

The interiors – both common areas and apartments – are by Project Orange while the enabling architect for the whole building was EPR. This is a not uncommon arrangement on such large commercial developments and Saunt expresses herself generally satisfied as we walk round, but for one or two of the usual places such as handrail details which can change when one architect takes on another’s designs. You also get that shifting of aesthetic gears that you find with many a spec office block or retail mall. When one architect does shell, core and common areas and another does the fit-out, you get this feeling of moving between design approaches. You certainly do here, where the exterior is a cool, trabeated assemblage of precast, bronze and ceramic or pale brick components and the interiors take you into something with much more of an Art Deco club feel. Or even an...
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institution – I was delighted to find fat fluted columns in
the foyers that Project Orange appears to have modelled
on Grey Wornum’s in the RIBA building at 66 Portland
Place. But overall this is an interesting pairing of two
practices who are both interested in richness and texture,
and a third working on the delivery side. There’s a gym,
pool and business centre – you’ll have to take my word
for it that the interiors are good. But with the penthouses
priced at up to £8.5 million, you’d hope they would be.

Porosity is the thing, Saunt explains – visually the
mass of the buildings break down and at street level
you get glimpses of the gardens – in a courtyard in
the case of Cleland, behind in the case of Abell. The
gardens are well landscaped and the one behind Abell
House provides a setting for a substantial red-brick
old-school mansion block behind. Cleland House is also
pulled away from its street corner, with a substantially
engineered overhang sheltering its entrance, to provide
generous public space at this point where the planted
area inside the lobby continues out into the street.

I’ll come clean though: at no point did I feel much
of a sense of engagement with these buildings. They
are clearly a very considerable cut above the more
usual luxury-apartment fare, with budgets on such a
prime site allowing for a very high quality finish. Those
sophisticated and costly facades acting as a kind of

Visually the mass of the buildings
break down and at street level you
get glimpses of the gardens
loadbearing veil, subsuming balconies within them to preserve the overall unity of appearance, are admirable. The affordable-homes element – social rented and shared ownership – is of course welcome here. Some enlightened urban moves have been made, and what was a claustrophobic corner of town has now got more of a sense of light and space to it. The high-density mansion block typology has clicked forward – these mid-rise buildings are more than twice as dense as Goldfinger’s lofty Trellick Tower. But some housing you just don’t warm to or remember with any great interest or affection. Abell and Cleland are like that for me because the exteriors feel like offices and the interiors like hotels. •

Left A glimpse of Project Orange’s hotel-like lobby from the courtyard of Cleland House.
Below left Lobby to Cleland House takes greenery through the glass to the street corner.
Below Gardens behind Abell House showcase a more traditional mansion block.
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Sheppard Robson’s glass-skinned link building and rejuvenated Portland stone facades make an imposing extended home for London Business School

Words: Eleanor Young

Not so long ago the Portland stone of the piers and corners of Old Marylebone Town Hall’s Council House Annexe was riddled with alarming cracks. The town hall had housed a library and local administration, most famously conducting the weddings of Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and Antonio Banderas. But with the offices of Westminster Council now elsewhere and the grade II listed buildings in urgent need of repair, the council was looking to lease it, ensuring the investment it needed.

Sheppard Robson had been assessing the town hall as a decant option for London Business School while it had work done on its John Nash base. It soon became clear that it was a serious contender for a more permanent expansion of the school, but the facades would need immediate attention. This and two other concerns drove the design of the envelope: the Council House and annexe needed to be brought together across the dark chasm that ran between them, and a sizeable lecture theatre was needed – both to gather students and to continue to accommodate Westminster’s peripatetic council meetings.

But first, the original buildings. Both are designed by architect Edwin Cooper but speak of quite different eras, one the grand town hall from 1914 with flourishes of decoration on its loadbearing facade, and containing a marble-clad stairway where the weddings spill out. The annexe is a 1930s addition that has an ostensibly simpler approach, with modernism starting to make inroads into the Edwardian classical tradition. It held a health centre and library among other things. Here new building techniques were tried, with a steel frame behind the stone facade.
Recladding came out at £1 million more than cathodic protection

The annexe had what is sometimes known as Regent Street Disease, or in Manchester Deansgate Disorder. During the early 20th century, steel frames were embedded within stone facades without cavities and the results of any water getting in can be catastrophic. On the town hall the 10mm steel flanges had expanded up to 50mm with corrosion pushing the Portland stone out of place and causing it to crack. Recladding, with the potential of undamaged stone being fractured in the process, came out at £1 million more than the alternative, cathodic protection (see box). Running a positive charge through the metalwork prevents further corrosion and can also be used to monitor further movement. All you can see from the outside is tiny insertions into the stone.

Cathodic protection doesn’t obviate the need for stonework repairs. New stones have been spliced into place and of course the roof has been repaired to stop further water getting in. Water ingress had also distorted the frames of the cast iron panels above the windows, which had suffered badly over time, particularly those facing west. The planners were keen the windows be retained rather than replaced, but surveys revealed that many were already replacements from the 1940s. Specialist restorer Hall Conservation brought the frames for the cast iron panels back into alignment while also working on around 300 new double glazed windows. There were so many window handles that it was cost effective to rework the originals. The best of a variety of shapes was picked out, very slightly adjusted for ergonomic reasons and used to cast new bronze-finished brass handles.

The space between the two buildings was dark, with bin stores and a high stone bridge over it. Sheppard Robson saw the possibilities of joining the two buildings using a set back glass link with a sunken entrance which would bring students into a spacious foyer on the lower ground floor rather than at street level. This had the advantage of making access controls and the reception desk less intrusive, and brought light into the opened up basements. But when it came to deciding where to place the structure for this glass skin it was a little more complex. Initially, a rational concept put a structure straight across between the two buildings. But the almost-rational approach meant it was uncomfortably trapezoidal, while still colliding with window jambs. So instead Sheppard Robson allowed the structure to be ‘designed by the existing buildings,’ as associate Paolo Longo puts it. An irregular diagrid was created by joining the middle point of every structural element on the historic facades, such as the pilasters. The most efficient spans were

How cathodic protection works

Steel corrosion is an electro-chemical process requiring the presence of water and oxygen. On a microscopic scale electrons move from negatively charged areas of the surface (anodes) to positively charged areas of the surface (cathodes), a subsequent chemical reaction forms hydrated ferric oxide or rust. Rust has between six and 10 times the volume of steel, and on the annexe it is this expansion, mainly on embedded column lines, that caused the cracks in the Portland stone.

The cathodic protection system introduces a very small electrical charge and a sacrificial anode that turns the entire steel surface into a cathode, and the electrons migrate primarily from the sacrificial anode, controlling the progression of rust on the steel. Anodes were spaced at approximately 450mm centres close to the embedded steelwork. To preserve the stonework we ran – unusually – most of the associated cabling on the internal face of the building behind the finishes. A monitoring station enables the contractor to periodically inspect system performance.

Mike Mittendorfer, Ramboll
MAKING A MONUMENTAL BLOCK

Inserting the new, larger lecture theatre into the existing fabric presented a challenge and required the demolition of the existing 1960s infill (inserted following bomb damage during WWII). The new structure featured increased floorplates on the upper levels, that project by 1m from the original building line, overhanging the perimeter light well.

The layout of the larger lecture theatres on the upper levels meant that a solid facade was required, which was expressed as a new intervention. Physically separated from the existing structure, the solid stone plane (30m long by 10m tall) projects from the building, dramatically suspended above two storeys of curtain walling.

This stone facade has a chamfered edge physically separated from the period elevation by a glazed strip on both sides and on the soffit of the protrusion. These also provide indirect natural daylight to the lecture theatres.

Giving the stone-clad facade a monolithic appearance was achieved by expressing it as a series of large panels, made up of individually set Portland stone vertical slabs, 1m tall and 330mm wide, with only the vertical joints pronounced between them.

Precast concrete panels, each weighing 4.2 tonnes, form the cladding support, installed as six stacks of five. With each panel weighing four and half tonnes, this tested the limitations of the site crane. In order to negate the need for horizontal movement joints in the stone cladding, each stack had to behave as one solid concrete panel and therefore required deflection values close to zero. This was achieved by fixing these to the structural steel columns only with specially designed stiff brackets.

In order to deal with differential movement due to wind loadings, the precast support panels were dowelled together, minimising movement to small incremental values within the parameters required for the stone cladding.

Paolo Longo, Sheppard Robson
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Meejin Yoon

For the fourth consecutive year, America’s MIT has been ranked the top university for architecture in the world. What does head of architecture Meejin Yoon think is its secret?

How would you characterise MIT?
Few departments of architecture are in a research institute like MIT with its reach and mission to bring social and technological together. Our role is to bring design to bear on the challenges of the world. It is not just architecture, it includes computation, urbanism and art.

How important is research?
What makes MIT unique is the proliferation of labs, winning grants to research urban risk, materials or climate change and resilience. So the coverage of architecture is both broad and, in areas of research into contemporary issues, very deep. If a studio is a place for students to do self-driven theoretical projects, then labs are topic specific to faculty members’ expertise.

MIT is famous for its Media Lab. Do you have innovative ways of teaching architecture too?
The Media Lab started life as part of the architecture department, as the architecture machine lab! MIT is more collaborative than other universities and we have workshops and courses that draw people together across the faculty and institute, as well as visitors. Even in the professional degree we have cross studios and last year worked with an artist and a structural engineer.

Where do your students come from?
All over the world, 50% international students on the MArch and 70% on the advanced masters. It is extremely competitive to get in: we have around 200 students take architecture as a minor in their first year but our programmes are small; we have maybe a dozen undergraduate majors and 20-30 on each masters programme.

Tell us a famous MIT graduate
Gordon Bunshaft with his incredible works of architecture at SOM, and I M Pei, who represents technology and form coming together and many innovations.

What characterises the work that comes from MIT alumni?
That bringing together of technological and social through building form. When I started I thought it was technology affirmation but it is not; in the 60s and now again it pushes on many environmental fronts.

Does the collection of remarkable buildings at MIT give the school a boost?
An institution’s values are reflected in its built environment, so Maki’s media lab, Holl’s Simmons Hall, Baker House Dormitory by Aalto and Saarinen’s chapel are gems on our campus. They show an institution that is not conforming but embracing each building as pushing the values and technologies of our time.

MIT was ranked top university for architecture and built environment in the QS World University Rankings 2018

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Let’s all go shopping

Oxford’s Westgate shopping centre is so huge it took five practices to design it. How did the teams make that collaboration work for them, and for the scheme?

By Eleanor Young

Westgate shopping centre has had more than one false start but that is hardly surprising for a 76,000m² shopping precinct in a precious historic town. For a start there was the land assembly which included the compulsory purchase of some sheltered housing, although mainly it is replacing an unloved seventies arcade and a couple of car parks. Land Securities, Crown Estates and Oxford City Council got together to make the scheme happen as the Westgate Oxford Alliance. The council’s planning department – its fingers recently burnt as views were lost to an earlier development on the edge of the city – geared up to work exceptionally closely with the Alliance and masterplanner, BDP.

Peter Coleman, BDP head of retail, has worked on retail schemes throughout his career, including Chapelfield in Norwich and on the city-defining schemes in Manchester after the IRA bomb. BDP also masterplanned Liverpool One, which used 21 practices to transform a quarter of the city. When Land Securities asked him to join this project he did, happily, full time for five years. Walking around the shopping centre he has an amazing grasp of dimensions, brick types, bus shelter models and the many decisions and refinements that go into to making such a project.

With five practices involved – BDP, Dixon Jones, Allies & Morrison, Panter Hudspith and Glen Howells – the complex dynamics of collaboration could be instructive, intricately bound up in the nature of the building itself. The masterplan suggested it should be a piece of the city, if not in scale then in airiness and cross-cutting routes that allowed the local lanes to squirm through the shops unimpeded except by pedestrianisation. These lanes define the block boundaries.

Each block was awarded following practice interviews. Some were to have ‘feature’ buildings: at the entrance from the city centre and Bonn Square, on a critical corner, and at the terminating point of the John Lewis anchor store. Others were to remain more recessive and all were to be built out with brick faces on what was rapidly established would be precast panels. The block architects had an influence on the roofs outside their buildings but BDP designed most of these and the shared spaces, including three larger ‘squares’. Stashed underneath the layers of shops are almost as many parking spaces as before (1000 compared to 1030). On top, looking over the spires of Oxford on one side and gentle hills on the other, are rooftop cafés and sunny terraces.

The architects met weekly during RIBA stage 2 – once a fortnight with the client and in between just as architects. Those meetings were a chance to honestly and positively critique each others’ work and come up with solutions together. However, some underlying issues, as raised by Jeremy Dixon of Dixon Jones, were beyond this group to fully respond to. First, whether the centre of Oxford is indeed the right place for such a large shopping centre and secondly (perhaps more in the architects’ remit) the dilemma of shopping centres, which are inward looking so the outside face is always on the back foot.

Above From the city centre a new Oxford wall marks the most modest entrance to the Westgate shopping centre (below, far left).
The architect’s weekly design charrettes avoided being too technical but brought together a plethora of references from the city, sharing ideas and coming up with elevations, says Simon Fraser of Allies and Morrison. Milestones would be set, such as having the general arrangement drawings by a certain date. Simon Hudspith of Panter Hudspith talked about the value of regular meetings. ‘It is the sheer fear and paranoia of getting it wrong. Some monsters have been built over the last 10 years. We were lucky to have a group of people we could be honest with on something that is, in one sense, very alien to the character of Oxford.’ There were also weekly meetings with the planners on aspects of the scheme, heights, or a particular block say – with different architects pulled in – and over 100 planning conditions to discharge.

Hudspith saw one of the greatest challenges as the condensing of history into one tiny window of development. ‘Consistency and richness grow over time,’ he said. ‘The problem with a development like this is that it has immediate impact.’ The practice attempted to imbue its external section with this chronological depth. And though there is no evidence of such approaches in the other practices’ work the chance to air opinions was essential. ‘It was a forum for bouncing ideas freely, without getting the sack,’ Hudspith explained. ‘We were allowed to develop a confidence that tested concepts.’

This is exactly what BDP’s Coleman had hoped for when the teams were brought together. And at the early stages a minibus out around Oxford to look back into the city from key viewpoints (there were 27) helped
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the whole team understand the strict limits to the height of the building. Where the architects seem to have worked most visibly together has been in the materials. Places where more joined up thinking might have been useful were in the two covered squares, which architecturally seem to fall between buildings trying to do different things – bridges cross-cutting and a sense of the space somehow bleeding away. The other area that an intense critique might have been able to make more of is the road alongside Westgate. Re-routed for the development, it has up to 150 buses an hour. But since it has bus stops too, with people hopping on and off, the architectural moves here seem formal rather than humane.

So could this orchestrated collaborative process be a template for such largescale city centre designs in future? It seems a positive development following the event-ridden complexity of Liverpool One and its many designers. But it is still not perfect. ‘I don’t think this is a formula that could be applied elsewhere,’ says Coleman. The fact of it being in Oxford and with the planners’ eyes on it strengthened the argument for good design; the detail has had to be held on to. There and in the architectural ambition there was an element of ‘constructive carefulness’, says Dixon. But some fundamental design questions still have to be cracked, says David Henderson of Glenn Howells. There is little to give the outer edges of a shopping centre life, even with housing part of the mix. ‘How to skin deep-plan buildings to generate active frontages is still a question for the future.’

WRAPPING THE ANCHOR STORE

John Lewis stores have been the excuse for dramatic facade treatments in recent years. Here Glenn Howells Architects avoided that and went back to the idea of drapery – in brick. The brick ‘folds’ with their dark mortar are interrupted by bands of string courses in reconstituted stone. The drapery concertinas back on the occasional windows. At the base is a sharply cut granite plinth.

IMBUING BACK OF HOUSE WITH CHARACTER

The block designed by Panter Hudspith was conceived as a series of houses on the outer facades, the St Ives Rustica bricks sorted into different colours and interestingly misaligned string courses. The granite plinth uses a rough cut version which occasionally shifts mode as a bench for a bus stop. Window blanks and the occasional window through to Next enliven the facade and vertical panels separate the ‘houses’. Inside Westgate a first floor colonnade reaching up to the roof modulates the new square while an escalator to its low-level roof top pavilions has a real drama.

Right The rooftop restaurant at John Lewis was a late addition.

Left Restaurants on top of the ‘house facade’ are just visible from what is effectively the inner bypass.
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Industry faces fundamental change

At the latest meeting of the RIBA economics panel the impacts of Brexit, Carillion, Grenfell and offsite construction were seen as creating a turning point for architects and the wider industry.

Adrian Malleson

Another significant shift in the ground on which the UK construction industry is built seems to be facing the architectural community. There have been a few such moments in recent years: the 2008/2009 crash, the Brexit decision, and the government’s BIM mandate.

The RIBA economics panel met at Portland Place in late February, with a feeling that the profession’s parameters are on the move again.

The Brexit negotiations are under way and the panel pulled no punches. The trajectory of the negotiations is unclear, and we’re in danger of sleep walking into a position that’s deeply damaging to us. We have around six months to get a deal before we move to implementation and transition.

Like many industries, construction is undergoing, and leading, a process of digital transformation. Of course there is BIM, but alongside that we are also seeing offsite modular construction pointing to a different, more standardised and replicable way of creating buildings.

Carillion has ceased to be. In the process, the non-functioning business model of at least one Tier 1 contractor was exposed.

Following the Grenfell disaster, Dame Judith Hackitt’s interim report ‘Building a Safer Future’ patiently describes an industry that failed to provide safety, and points towards a better way. This will have radical implications for all those involved.

At the meeting the panel examined these themes and described the thread running through them; the need for transparency, to create better design and an improved construction industry.

We face real, significant challenges. However, panel members were quick to point out that in times of change there are significant opportunities for those who can spot and act on them early.

Let us look at each of these themes in more detail, and their implications.

Impact of Brexit

The issues presented to us by our exit from the EU are well rehearsed: labour and skills shortages, increased cost for construction products, and a weakening of capital investment due to increased uncertainty. There is also a threat to the UK as a global hub for architecture, as architects from the EU, who play such a significant role, are unable or unwilling to come to live and work in the UK.

Time is increasingly against us. With a lack of clarity on the outcome, or even the government’s desired outcome, businesses will have to take irrevocable decisions now about what they will do after the Brexit date, Friday, 29 March 2019. Already we are seeing some firms make decisions on whether to relocate or move production outside the UK.

The latest RIBA Global by Design survey shows what this means for the profession. There has been a significant drop in architects’ confidence. They are yet to fully prepare for Brexit with, for example, business

In times of change there are significant opportunities for those who can spot and act on them early.

Construction output: volume seasonally adjusted by sector 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
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<td>Public non-housing excluding infrastructure</td>
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planning and scenario modelling. They are not investing the time needed to explore the possible impacts of Brexit and so to plan accordingly.

Architects are not alone here. There is a sense that as the market remains relatively robust, people are so busy in the day to day delivery of projects that there’s little time to make this important longer term assessment. This is as true for clients and contractors as it is for the design professions. It is difficult to model the future when it’s so uncertain, but without a satisfactory transition deal on Brexit, we may quickly find ourselves in a very different trading environment.

Is one answer to the challenges of Brexit technological? We’ve seen it suggested that the Northern Ireland border problem may be overcome by smart tech. Could this be true for the construction industry?

**Modular construction**
Offsite modular construction offers a potential solution to the difficulties of poor productivity and low labour supply. It is not about moving the existing construction process indoors and then shipping output to site for final assembly. Rather, it is about transforming the process so that it becomes data and technology led, more standardised, more efficient, and faster.

That said, a significant part of architectural market is not suitable for off-site manufacture – high-end residential, much office work, universities, or historic conservation or refurbishment, for example. But much is. Buildings like schools, hospitals and prisons seem good candidates for an offsite approach, although offsite construction has yet to clearly demonstrate increased profitability.

Does offsite, modular construction mean that architects will have a lesser role, and less work? The panel thought this possibility should not be discounted.

Offsite construction will be disruptive. If it is about repeating often what has been designed once (with some configuration for each instance) then there are fewer times where design value can be added and fees charged. But other industries offer a clue. For new, architects charge a fee for each instance, for each building; in other industries, design charges are made for each type of thing (a car model, an engine or an aircraft, for example). The design work for each type is much more extensive and so there is more design work to be paid for (how much more would a car or bicycle cost if the design was just for your own car, or your own bike?).

For architects open to adapting there may be new opportunities in offsite, modular, manufacture. Indeed, it may be a natural progression for those who, through BIM, are already producing data rich designs.

**Carillion and Grenfell: areas for reform**
The demise of Carillion emphasises the need for change, particularly in the business models of Tier 1 contractors. In the financial year 2016/2017 the average margin of a major contractor was -0.5%. In the last four to five years construction productivity has seen no significant increase, but costs have risen. Clients are paying more for the same stuff.

Carillion’s demise was due to a combination of general problems for Tier 1 contractors and problems specific to the company (some big projects with large delays, overruns and cost miscalculation). But Carillion points to a broken business model that everybody’s tied up in.

Contractors may have failed to get designs to the right level, with insufficient specialist design work at an early enough stage leading to late changes. Are designers empowered by the large contractors to design to right level and detail, and are the designs then properly co-ordinated? Has margin been considered too often in design decisions and product choices made late in the process, or even on site?

What lessons are to be learnt? The panel noted that some firms reduced their exposure to Carillion from early last year, as the warning signs grew. The least likely to reduce their exposure were smaller contractors or designers.

There’s a lesson here; remember that contracts are there for when things go wrong. Understand the terms of your appointment and make sure there are no ‘skull and cross-bone’ clauses that pass risk and liability to you, beyond the limitations of your indemnity insurance. Ask yourself ‘what am I signing up to, how will I get paid and what is my liability?’ It is worth taking professional advice.

The panel felt the importance of this will strike home as the aftermath of Grenfell unfolds. Legal proceedings will be significant.

But, as Dame Hackitt suggests, there is an opportunity for reform. Accountability will increase. All players in the construction industry, including architects, will need to demonstrate that they have done a job of sufficient quality; designers will need to provide evidence of this through well-developed and accurate designs, specifications and Building Information Models. Designs may need to be validated against agreed Levels of Detail and Levels of Information at each stage. Further, there is likely to be a need for traceability of design and construction decisions throughout the building lifecycle.

While change is going to come for architects, there is a different way, the panel suggested, and it will increasingly be about transparency: for the client on what will be delivered; of information about what will be, and what has been built; of goals (including where the profits lie) among collaborating parties: transparency of, and adherence to, payment terms, so cash flow doesn’t bring down businesses; and finally, transparency of contractual terms, so risk is clearly described and allocated.

And soon, hopefully, there will be transparency from the government on future trading relationships, so we can better prepare for Brexit.

**PANEL MEMBERS**
- Simon Rawlinson, head of strategic research and insight, Arcadis
- Sue Foxley, research director at Bidwells and ThinkBarn
- Sarah Davidson, head of research and development at Gleeds
- Noble Francis, economics director, Construction Products Association
- Lucy Carmichael, director of practice RIBA
- Adrian Malleson, head of research, NBS

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How’s BIM working?

The recent seminar Working in a BIM Environment in 2018, organised by RIBAJ and ASSA ABLOY, considered how to harness BIM’s potential, and how to deal with the issues that increasing digitalisation throws up.

BIM has been with us since the start of the century yet its potential is still to be fully harnessed. While the 2016 mandating of BIM for all government procured assets was a major step, more still has to be done to maximise its full scope.

At the same time, the impact of digitalisation on the built environment brings new challenges. Who owns the digital assets? Who is responsible for managing them? And what will we do with all that time that BIM could save? These and many further issues were discussed at the seminar Working in a BIM Environment in 2018, an RIBA Journal event in association with ASSA ABLOY.

Chair Neil Thompson, a director at Atkins and chair of the IET Digital Built Environment Board, talked about the transformational potential of digitalisation in the built environment and the challenges of applying it consistently as ‘business as usual’ in order to maintain its forward momentum. It’s a process that has been particularly difficult in construction, he said, because of the complexity of a sector that involves so many stakeholders.

The BIM champions on the architects’ panel needed no convincing of BIM’s benefits. Working in BIM is now the new normal on large projects, according to Hawkins\Brown architect Kimberly Scott, who has been using BIM Level 2 on the Tottenham Court Road Crossrail station in London, where it has been invaluable in negotiating the intricacies of the interface with the Central and Northern lines.

However, she feels that BIM is ‘still in its infancy’ in terms of what can be achieved over the whole construction industry. She predicts an increasingly important role for the BIM information manager.

‘We have a great big BIM model but not everyone knows exactly how to find the information they are looking for,’ she said. ‘It’s about being a bit more intelligent about how we organise that data.’

According to Casey Rutland, UK digital...
director at engineering consultancy Royal
Haskoning, while the full ‘utopia’ of BIM
Level 2 has not yet been reached, there is too
much focus on negativity rather than the
opportunity for BIM to improve a company.

After all, there can be no going back for
the industry: ‘But you wouldn’t want to.
You’re in a much better place to collaborate
and to grow into different services.’

According to Haskoning, ‘the age of
guessing’ in architecture is over, with
architects now able to use BIM to give clients
the ‘proof’ and reassurance that things will
perform in the way they want.

Linda Thiel, leader of White Arkitekter’s
London studio, expects BIM to drive change
in the procurement process, potentially
cutting out the middle people from
specification to delivery. This could promote
more local sourcing and more reuse of
materials such as bricks through the tagging
of products.

‘Everything isn’t just [about] going faster.
It’s actually using that extra time to focus
more on the design, and help the design be
more efficient, and use that time to add value
to the project,’ said Thiel, citing White’s use
of the 3D environment with stakeholder
doctors to review and improve the design of
rooms on a hospital project in Stockholm.

Certainly there was hope that for
architects, BIM could be liberating if the
time it saved was used positively. A case
study by Eric Spooner, BIM manager
at ASSA ABLOY, demonstrated how its
Openings Studio software supported
the development of the specification and
schedule for 1600 door openings for the
Banner University Medical Center in
Arizona, and then enabled the input of the
final specification on the BIM model in a
matter of minutes, thus potentially saving
the architect many hours of data entry.

‘We need to identify the boring tasks
that no-one likes and look at automating
those… You now have some free time – what
could you do now that’s more inspirational
and creative? That privilege of time is
massively valuable and could transform our
industry,’ she said.

Participants also saw the potential for
greater use of BIM in relation to FM, which is
yet to fully engage.

‘The construction and design side
has matured but I think the FM side is
way behind as far as I can see… many FM
contractors are still set in their ways,’ said
Martin Quinn, senior project manager at
developer Great Portland Estates.

Kemp said that the UK BIM Alliance
was seeking to tackle difficult challenges
relating to product data.

‘There are clearly different views, with
some clients wanting to retain all of the data
and keep control of it, and manufacturers
being very nervous about that and wanting
to keep ownership of it... Guidance is
massively important,’ she said.

All seminar participants agreed that
the client should be the one who owns the
BIM model information, but that the lead
designer should be the BIM manager. Kemp
feels that architects have a key role to play in
influencing clients in their understanding
of BIM.

‘We need to help clients be more
informed... How can we collaborate more
and start to break down the silo-ed approach
of architect versus supply chain?’, she asked.

With the ambition for public and private
industries to have embraced Level 2 BIM
by 2020, followed by the prospect of Level
3 fully collaborative BIM by the mid 2020s,
there should be ample opportunity to do just
that.

We need to identify the
boring tasks that no-one likes
and look at automating those
because you’ll make efficiencies and harness
the extra productivity.’

Such efficiencies should be seen as a
massive opportunity to improve the overall
design, according to Anne Kemp, Atkins
director and fellow for BIM strategy and
implementation, who also heads the UK BIM
Alliance.

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informed... How can we collaborate more
and start to break down the silo-ed approach
of architect versus supply chain?’, she asked.

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What is public space?

There is a strong case for arguing that ownership matters less than the quality of such places, the access we have to them, and what we can do in them.

David Littlefield and Mike Devereux

Considerable disquiet over the issue of privately owned public space (POPS) has been around for some time. Commentators have drawn attention to the erosion of citizen rights in such ‘quasi-public’ urban spaces, where the private owners appear to call the shots. If they do not want activities such as protest, skateboarding, gathering of signatures, evangelising or sleeping taking place there, they can ban them.

Private ownership of publicly accessible space is not new; it is embedded into urban life in North America. Large, complex regeneration projects are often a matter of some sort of public-private partnership. Developers will understandably be keen to look after their assets, while local authorities will often queue up for the investment.

There is justifiable concern, though, when the inhabitants of, and visitors to, the city feel they cannot exercise the freedoms they expect. However, the critiques can be shrill and partial, missing much of the nuance that weaves through the subject.

Concern has focused on the perceived ‘privatisation of public space’. However, some of those worried about such a shift do not appreciate that many spaces (such as London’s King’s Cross and Liverpool’s Albert Dock) were privately owned in the first place; the only change, apart from redevelopment, has been the granting of public access.

This important debate must avoid the polarities of public = good and private = bad. Any meaningful investigation into the role and nature of POPS would benefit by embracing concepts of ownership, belonging, safety, expectation and access.

Publicly owned spaces have rules and restrictions too. Without them, public places become insecure, unsociable spaces unusable by the majority. Many publicly owned spaces – our assemblies and other corridors of power – are highly restricted in terms of access, as are schools. The issue is not helped by diverse opinions as to what constitutes public space anyway. Is a space public only when under public ownership? Public space surely goes beyond outdoor civic squares and streets; publicly accessible spaces include interiors such as museums, galleries, theatres, cafés, cathedrals, railway stations, airport terminals and supermarkets.

Ownership, too, requires definition. The citizen may not own the land, but might feel a rightful sense of ownership. Consider the heritage site. UNESCO’s website is explicit: ‘World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located.’ This interpretation of a public space, based around ideas of cultural identity, can be problematic. Liverpudlians might be rightfully proud of their city’s architectural heritage, and the iconic status of the Liver Building; but that building is in private hands, and they will rarely, if ever, be permitted to enter it.

Ownership has several facets. There is literal ownership (‘it’s legally mine’); a sense of belonging (‘I identify with this place, and feel comfortable here’); and control (‘I can make rules, even if I don’t own the land’). No property owner can do as they please.

Might public space be defined as a space used by the public? Private wifi-enabled cafés facilitate social gatherings and act as informal alternatives to the workplace. They are more accessible and less restrictive than other interiors, such as museums and galleries. Which begs the question: can a place be truly public if there is an entrance fee? Is a cinema a public building? A supermarket? None of these would last very long if members of the public ceased to use them. The right to enter these spaces is implied; their design explicitly invites people to enter.

The definition of ‘public space’, then, is not at all clear; but it is important to define it – with access to space goes an expectation of behaviour. Perhaps land ownership, when it reaches a certain scale and degree of public access, should be accompanied by certain guarantees of citizen rights.

UCL’s Matthew Carmona has argued strongly that how spaces are managed, rather than who manages them, is the key. And the ‘how’ of managing public space is actually a relatively simple matter. As the terms of any development are negotiated, there is nothing to stop a local authority from insisting that any development is governed by covenants and conditions favourable to the public. Carmona also argues that if all spaces were designed to appeal to everyone at all times, they might appeal to nobody.

In response, architects would do well to consider that ‘public space’ is internal, as well as external (and that behavioural codes undergo a profound shift when moving from outside to inside – in western cultures anyway). That public space is not necessarily civic space. That it may be appropriate to make legible, in design terms, any shift in legal ownership; alternatively, such legibility may be entirely inappropriate if the overall intention is to create a sense of integration and continuity with the wider context. This requires a deep and honest conversation with the client, who might trash a beautifully integrated scheme with thoughtless restrictions or over-zealous security measures.

Littlefield and Devereux teach at UWE

See a longer version on ribaj.com/pops
Remix to the vision

There’s a subtext from the AA directorship candidates

Maria Smith

Amid the politics and excitement surrounding the search for a new director for the Architectural Association – the chosen one being Eva Franch i Gilabert – the vision statements of the three shortlisted candidates provide a fascinating status report on the current architectural culture.

They were not written for this purpose of course, and I acknowledge that had that been the brief, the three candidates would have likely put forward different agendas, though perhaps not. Nevertheless, in their propositions for how the AA should be led, they all of course comment on how the AA should be led given our current architectural context.

The individual approaches inevitably vary, but there is also strong commonality and it is here that we can deduce that they’re speaking to a wider consciousness, and as Robert Mull writes in his statement, ‘in the face of pressing social, environmental and human issues... we must define, articulate and defend common values and beliefs.’

So what can we learn from this litmus test of the mood in architecture today? Or perhaps more interestingly, what can we learn from the language used to describe the mood in architecture today?

‘We are living in a time’ of ‘seminal urgency’. ‘As a result of new forms of’ ‘almost everything’, ‘the challenges that we all face today’ ‘are growing in scale and complexity’. ‘We are in more need’ ‘than ever’ and yet our ‘intellectual wealth’ is ‘becoming less and less accessible’ as ‘architecture’s power and agency’ is ‘narrowing’.

‘Local and global society’ is ‘undergoing radical changes’. We have seen an ‘acceleration of hyper-capitalism’ bring forth ‘omnipresent market forces’. ‘Increased global mobility’, ‘the expansion of the so-called culture industry’ and ‘so much privilege and freedom’ has ‘been used, abused’ and has left ‘a younger generation disenfranchised by the carelessness of ours’.

We have ‘a role to play now more vital than at any moment’ ‘to be caring citizens and effective professionals’ and ‘to advocate for those who are unable’ but we ‘too often fail’ ‘to engage with the most pressing issues affecting the planet today’. We have become ‘too satisfied’ and ‘too hermetic’ ‘over the last decade, and as a result’ ‘architecture’s culture and knowledge production’ ‘has languished’.

‘Commonplace formulations such as sustainability, participation and bottom-up practices’, ‘survival instinct’ ‘in the face of’ ‘market processes’, and ‘pressing aesthetic, social, political and environmental realities’, ‘push architecture graduates towards the very opposite roles’ ‘on one hand’ ‘neutral agents’ ‘devoid of any social or political currency’ or ‘on the other’ figures of ‘self-proclaimed avant-gardism and meta-discursive narrative’ ‘devoid of any social or political currency’.

‘Architecture has been slow, very slow’ ‘to react to such challenges’. ‘Very well managed’ professionals who are very successful in the market” do not ‘depend very much’ on ‘very limited budgets’. ‘Very few organisations’ have ‘a freedom that results in the bravery and independence to change things for the better’ on ‘very limited budgets’. ‘Very few organisations’ ‘push architecture graduates towards the very opposite roles’ ‘on one hand’ ‘neutral agents’ ‘devoid of any social or political currency’.

‘It is now time’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to convey the full spectrum’, ‘to further the mission’, ‘to set a new paradigm’. ‘It is now time’ ‘to know what to do’.

‘It is now time’ ‘to articulate what architecture can contribute to the world we live in’, ‘to make evident the important role that architecture plays within culture’, ‘to regain momentum and communication power’, ‘to envision new forms of governance’, ‘to push the boundaries and the status quo’, ‘to ignite a productive forum for debate, discussion and action’, ‘to preserve the subversive, public role of architecture’. ‘We live in a time that works in seconds’ and ‘these are the tasks of our time’.

‘It is now time’ ‘to be relaunched, strengthened and supported’, ‘to be celebrated and recognised’, ‘to be constantly redefined’, ‘to be background and foreground, to be student and quiet’, ‘to be a citizen of the world’. ‘It is now time’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to produce’ ‘to the benefit of all’.

‘It is now time’ ‘to start a new habit.’ ‘The issues are urgent and time is short.’

Maria Smith is a director at Interrobang architecture and engineering and Webb Yates Engineers, and is co-chief curator of the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019.
Guest content
Arena Property Services

Better all round

It’s not just BIM that benefits from 3D laser scanning – there’s a whole host of advantages for both the client and other professionals

Arena Property Services was founded in 1994 and continues to be a company of chartered building and land surveyors. It provides a wide variety of geomatic surveys, 3D laser scanning and GPS services, and specialises in all aspects of surveying. Most of its work is measured building surveys which are undertaken worldwide.

Clients generally associate 3D laser scanning only with the creation of a 3D model for BIM. However, on smaller projects when the client cannot justify the additional cost involved in creating a 3D model, it is still worthwhile to seriously consider commissioning a measured survey using a 3D laser scanner for the production of 2D plans, elevations and sections. There are five reasons for doing so:

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• Capturing the Point Cloud data helps to eliminate human error over traditional surveying methods and shows as much detail as specified to be shown on the drawings. Additionally, accuracy of less than 1mm precision can be achieved.
• Surveying a building using traditional techniques may involve measuring 150 points to create the drawing, whereas a 3D laser scanner will collect 10 million points per room, thus providing more information to create an accurate representation of the whole property. This can be easily demonstrated when a section is produced which shows the ceiling contains undulations, that would traditionally be drawn as a horizontal line.
• A laser scanner will also eliminate costly return visits, should additional information be required, as the whole property is contained within one Point Cloud file. From this information can be extracted from any point in the building to produce any additional drawings.
• Since much less time is required on site there is less inconvenience should the property be occupied while work is being carried out.

The overall cost of the measured survey is generally 15% lower than one undertaken using traditional surveying methods.

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Eye Line 2018: call for entries

We want to see your best architectural images. This year there’s a new category for practitioners and a link with the RIBA’s world-famous Drawings Collection.

Eye Line, the RIBA Journal’s acclaimed annual award for architectural image-making skills, is now open for 2018 entries. Once again we are delighted to be in partnership with architectural visualisation experts AVR London. As ever, Eye Line is free to enter online.

In its sixth year we are expanding Eye Line in three ways. We are launching a category exclusively for practitioners. We are setting up an Eye Line Gallery at the RIBA HQ in London to exhibit our winners and commendations. And from this year onwards we are also partnering with the RIBA’s world-famous Drawings and Archives Collections (DAC), based in the Victoria & Albert Museum. The DAC will approach prize winners to discuss the possibilities of adding their entries to the Collections.

We make no distinction between ‘hand drawing’ and computer rendering skills – not only because both are of equal value in our view but because so many architectural depictions layer several techniques to produce the final image, so making such distinctions meaningless.

We also want to encourage more practitioners to enter. There is a great difference between a tutored student producing a stunning image of an imagined world, and a busy practitioner producing a competition entry or rendering for a real-life client – or drawing imagined possibilities.

So we now have two categories:

- Student category: images made by those in architectural education or submitting images made when they were studying.
- Practitioner category: images made by those fully qualified and working in practice, either for real-life projects or done to explore ideas and experiences.

Of course practitioners have always entered Eye Line alongside students, but we want to foster the skill of communicating architecture through the image on a practical level.

Last year’s overall winner, Matthew Kernan of Queen’s University Belfast, brought richness, humour and allusion to the images of his Tower House project. Other winners and commendations ranged from the ultra-traditional (Robert Cox of Adam Architecture) via Deimante Bazyte’s evocative depiction of a spa for elderly people in Copenhagen (above), to the accessible humour of Jonathan Shekon Chan of Hawkins\Brown, using graphic novel techniques for a museum competition entry.

Joseph Robson, founding director of AVR London, says: ‘Having recently completed CGIs for two major public realm projects – Oxford Street’s pedestrianisation and the proposed, light artwork illuminated River by US artist Leo Villereal, to illuminate 15 of central London’s bridges – one is reminded of the incredible charge of architectural drawings to explain, convince and seduce. We’re excited to discover how Eye Line’s entries will beguile again this year.’

You heard him. Practitioners and students – get image-making, and enter! *

Winning and commended entries will be published in the August issue of RIBAJ as well as exhibited at RIBAJ HQ.

**RULES**

We seek the best 2D representations of a building design or concept through visual means. They may be hand or digitally drawn, incorporating collage or any combination or overlay of methods. Video and straight photography excluded.

Enter in either the student or practitioner category. The RIBA Journal reserves the right to reallocate to a different category if deemed necessary.

Maximum of three images per entry, which can be from different projects, or all from the same project.

Joint entries on which more than one person has worked are permissible.

All entries must be uploaded via the link below. We cannot accept physical works.

Images must be at 300dpi, file size maximum 25Mb.

The work must have been produced within the three years up to the closing date of 23.59 on Tuesday 12 June, 2018, and must not previously have been entered for Eye Line.

**Information required**

Title of work(s) if applicable, and medium. Name of the author(s) of the work. Name of organisation where author works or studies. Email, postal address and phone number. Dimensions of the original work as presented (or as you would wish it to be presented) in mm. Date it was completed.

**Key dates**


**Above** Commended 2017, Frigidarium, Deimante Bazyte.
3: Culture

Doing our best

We have a new project: identifying the No 1 award-winning practice in the UK

Hugh Pearman Editor

As you can imagine if you’ve looked at our ‘Besties’ special section on page 71, the matter of awards is much on our minds. This is still a growth industry – yet another ambitious awards scheme including architecture was announced by multi-discipline design media organisation Dezeen as we went to press.

The fact that Firm A wins a lot more awards than firm B and so scores higher in our agglomerated Besties rankings does not, of course, mean that Firm A is necessarily a better architect than Firm B. It might just mean that firm A, this year, had a lot of high-profile completions that did well across the awards board while Firm B, say, had just one awards-worthy building. That building might even win the Stirling Prize but on its own win fewer points overall. So it is in our inaugural Besties: our winner does not have the Stirling Prize in its awards tally (although it has won the Stirling Prize previously and been shortlisted several times). But it does have several excellent multiple award-winning buildings and so picked up the most points on our system – 190 – for the past year.

In contrast the present Stirling Prize holder has not, this year, collected enough other awards for that and other buildings to come higher up our rankings than its very creditable score of 120. It’s all a bit of fun really but the Besties has an underlying purpose as well: to find out which the consistently good practices are, when judged by the broadest spectrum of people in various different ways. To find that out properly of course, you have to look at more than one year, which is just a snapshot. This is a picture that builds up over time.

If we decide to re-run this, we could refine it in various ways. We’d certainly widen the field to include some other more specialist awards. We’ll consider the practicality of introducing a handicap system that adjusts for size of practice. Could we do anything to allow for the fact that traditionalist and conservation architecture often gets overlooked – or just not entered – in conventional awards systems? Are the weightings we give the various awards fair? Just how many sub-categories should we take into account?

Behind all this is a more persistent question. What’s the point of awards for architects? They’re nice to get, sure, but there was a time, within living memory, when architecture seemed able to flourish perfectly well without such completed-building-and-project gongs. Well, I know that most clients take awards as a mark of quality, helping them to refine their shortlists. I know that many practices are assiduous about entering awards as widely as possible for this reason, regarding the cost and time involved as necessary marketing. And I know, as do clients, that the most valuable awards are those where you are judged by your peers as well as interested clients and outsiders – and are properly visited. So if you enter only one awards programme, make sure it’s the RIBA’s.

To help us develop the Besties we invite your feedback on this, their first outing. Comments please to letters.ribaj@riba.org.

ONLY ON RIBAJ.COM
Don’t be surprised if the person next to you in the gallery suddenly launches into a speech or climbs inside a large basket

Pamela Buxton settles in to Yto Barrada’s show
Agadir: ribaj.com/agadir

Immortalised aims to record and publicise little-known, forgotten or even secret tributes of local significance, and in certain cases acquire listed status for them

Michèle Woodger investigates HE’s interest in memorials: ribaj.com/hememorials
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Moveable feast
The ups and downs of architectural gadgetry

Rem Koolhaas was conspicuously absent from the press view of his first built project in Paris this month – Lafayette Anticipations, his new €21 million space for the art foundation of Galeries Lafayette, the luxury French department store chain. But it was also strangely fitting, given what he writes in the building’s accompanying catalogue.

‘In our work, we have long been experimenting with the possibility of disappearing as an architect,’ he says. ‘This project could be interpreted as an impeachment of signature.’

From the outside of the 19th century warehouse, which stands innocuously on Rue du Plâtre in Le Marais, around the corner from the Pompidou Centre, it’s impossible to tell that a Pritzker Prize winner has been at work. While Rogers and Piano’s hi-tech art refinery flaunts its aesthetic of ‘flexibility’, Koolhaas has hidden his own essay in adaptable display space – complete with moving floors – behind a sober stone facade.

Project architect Clément Périssé explains: ‘After two years of studying what was possible within the rules of the historic conservation area, the conclusion was that we were not allowed to do anything.’

The constraints proved a boon. They focused the architect’s attention on the courtyard at the centre of the site, where it has inserted a four-storey steel and glass tower, in which four platforms are suspended on a rack-and-pinion system, allowing them to shuttle up and down in a reconfigurable way. It is an appropriately 19th century mechanism for this handsome old storage building, with the sharp steel teeth of the racks left exposed, fitting with the functional palette of anodised aluminium, galvanised steel grating, raw plywood and end-grain oak flooring.

François Quintin, the gallery’s director, describes the project as a ‘curatorial machine’, a ‘tool’ that artists can experiment with, and OMA’s seductive diagrams show a thrilling menu of 49 different possible configurations, with a range of double and triple height spaces and intriguing scissor sections that can be summoned at the touch of a button. There is an air of satisfaction that this little building might achieve what the Pompidou once promised, but never quite fulfilled.

I would like to share their optimism, but it’s hard to shake off the niggling feeling that neither the curators nor the artists have ever yearned for the floors of their gallery to move. For the opening show, it feels like American artist Lutz Bacher has actively shunned the gadgetry, leaving the central floors empty and simply projecting films onto the walls.

Koolhaas writes that it is ‘thrilling to see the physical manifestation of the building’s changing proportions right before your eyes, accompanied by all its noises.’ No doubt, but sadly this is not an experience that the public (or press) will ever have: the city’s health and safety regulations mean that the floors cannot be moved when people are in the building.

Quintin insists the kinetic aspect of the gallery is ‘neither spectacle nor attraction,’ but something visitors will be able to derive satisfaction from just by knowing it is possible, like knowing there’s a well-equipped workshop in the basement – which is also off-limits.

‘Besides,’ he adds, ‘it’s quite an operation to move the floors.’ The transformation entails cumbersome manual removal of steel balustrades around the edge of each floor, before bolting them back into place. Still, since when did practical concerns get in the way of a well-heeled private foundation indulging its desire for a unique architectural gimmick?

I ask curator Anna Colin when the floors might next move, or if forthcoming artists have engaged with the building’s adaptable potential. ‘I’m not too interested in the platforms moving during the course of a show, and nothing has yet come up from conversations with the artists that would justify moving them,’ she says frankly. ‘We shouldn’t be distracted by being proud of our gadget.’

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

Since when did practical concerns get in the way of a well-heeled private foundation indulging its desire for a unique architectural gimmick?
A joint venture

The Institute and ARB will collaborate to deliver our respective aims in a complementary way

Ben Derbyshire and Nabila Zulfiqar

Architecture is the only independently regulated profession working in the built environment. At a time when society is looking for reassurance that its safety and wellbeing is in competent hands, we are keen to demonstrate that the relationship between the RIBA and the ARB is effective and well understood by the profession, the public and our clients.

We, the President of the RIBA and the Chair of the ARB, want both organisations to engage constructively to share ideas and deliver our respective aims in a complementary way. We are committed to being as effective as we can by demonstrating shared values, collaborative leadership and working for mutual benefit. Where possible and appropriate, we will align our approach to delivering on the promise of a safe, high quality built environment that truly contributes to social wellbeing and safeguards the public.

We share a belief that a high quality, well-regulated profession with an ethical framework in the public interest is required to deliver the built environment the public demands and deserves.

Our complementary roles are clear: the RIBA promotes the profession, advancing civil architecture in the public interest, and the ARB maintains and raises awareness of the Register of Architects so that clients and the public can make informed choices about who they instruct. Both are important and working together we support the maintenance and improvement of standards of behaviour and conduct in the profession.

We each commission research to build evidence on the needs of stakeholders, identify the benefits of employing well trained and regulated architects and inform our policy and decision making. The RIBA has undertaken detailed research with clients which shaped subsequent work, including a new Memorandum of Understanding with the CIOB, and a recently appointed Vice President for Research will implement a standard methodology for post-occupancy evaluation. Following engagement with a range of stakeholders, the ARB recently launched a welcome pack for new registrants. The ARB will also undertake comprehensive research into its stakeholder relationships to help inform strategic decision making in this area over the next three years.

We have different roles when it comes to the prescription (recognition) and validation of qualifications in architecture. Our aim, however, is to try and retain criteria in common to facilitate our respective processes and minimise any burden on institutions. The RIBA plans a more radical rethink of the curriculum and course structure and the ARB Board is committed to reviewing UK routes to registration at an appropriate stage in Brexit developments. We plan to hold joint working sessions to retain an effective level of alignment in this area.

In addition to reviewing its Code of Conduct, the RIBA is establishing a Commission on Ethics and Sustainable Development. In its first year the Commission will consider how the profession can best reflect its core values of public interest, social purpose and sustainability. The ARB revised the Architects Code in 2017 with updates to better reflect modern practice. Both the ARB and the RIBA are committed to looking at whether greater alignment of our Codes would be appropriate to remove inconsistencies and introduce greater clarity for the public and the profession.

We plan to work together on practical measures for protecting the title ‘architect’. While the ARB already raises awareness of the Register and tackles about 300 instances of misuse of title annually, we agree that more can be done to raise awareness of title restrictions and deter transgressions of the Act.

Finally, as part of a programme to broaden the horizons of debate at the RIBA Council, the institute will host a series of discussions, with ARB’s input, about the future of the profession. We look forward to this collaboration and encourage registrants and members to engage with us.

@ben_derbyshire or president@riba.org
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AWARDS SHORTLIST

Congratulations to all of the projects across the UK that have been shortlisted for the RIBA Regional Awards. Each of the regional shortlists showcase our best new buildings and demonstrates the unique and innovative talent of the UK’s architectural sector. We now enter the visiting stage where projects are assessed up and down the country by our expert juries. The RIBA Regional Award winners will be announced in May.
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In contrast to most other professions in Britain, the average age for doctors in the NHS to draw their pensions is decreasing. Seven years ago it was 60.4 years, last year it was 58.5. It’s kind of ironic then that all of Amin Taha’s discussion about why he is an architect is framed around how he could have, more easily perhaps, been a doctor. Both of his parents were, the rest of his siblings are, and he looked for a different career because he didn’t like the way his parents were completely absorbed in their jobs and he ‘wanted to find something where I could do regular working hours, sit at a drawing board and colour in trees’.

He’s sort of kidding, but from the outside, teenager perspective, architecture can look like that stable profession. Now, aged 52, if Taha had chosen medicine, he would likely be within six years of retirement. Yet in the alternative reality of architecture can someone so near to pension-drawing age be so close to being ‘one of the most promising, interesting young architects working in the UK at the moment’.

Let’s not build on architecture’s self-pity foundations here though. Taha and I are sitting in a glass and bronze box perched mid-air over a huge newly excavated basement in Clerkenwell, east London that has just become his new office. Walls and steel beams have been smashed through to make way for a bigger, open sunken concrete-lined tank below us. We’re sitting on a handsome set of mid-century modern chairs at an opulent long art deco-style table. Through the window, beyond an engraved stone column propped on its side, the magnificent Georgian St James’ Church dominates the view.

Taha bought the plot outright seven years ago, moving eventually to architect-loving Clerkenwell from, initially, the increasingly quiet and unfashionable Westbourne Grove. He put up with the 1950s building for a while, moving in his practice before getting planning in 2013 to knock it down and redevelop the lot. In its place he’s built eight flats, including a penthouse for himself and his family (he’s recently become a father), and a two-storey office at the bottom. Basically, you get what I’m saying; Taha could no doubt retire if he wanted.

Yet to some extent Icon is right. Taha’s life position doesn’t seem that ‘young’, but his practice, and work, is only just coming of age. Most architects would not recognise a photograph of him straight away and even though his practice is notching up acclaim, with its Barratt’s Grove shortlisted for the Stirling Prize last year, it remains a mysterious entity. That’s why we are here – and the fact the firm has completed several projects in quick succession: a mixed-use scheme on Upper Street, Islington for the furniture shop Aria; Clerkenwell Green where our interview takes place (and which architecture news followers might remember from the hoo-ha about whether it is bigger than the building it received planning permission for); and Caroline Place, a 1970s private house refurbishment in Bayswater that had £600,000 more in the budget than the whole of Barratt’s Grove.

Taha attributes Clerkenwell Green to being ‘in the right place at the right time’,
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but he’s been on quite a journey to get to this point. Only a complex character can contentedly weave together successive years working at such diverse practices as Andris Bersins & Associates, Rick Mather Architects, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands and Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA) before setting out alone. He even worked for four years at Chris Wilkinson Architects (Wilkinson Eyre) on the bridges team.

So who is he?

Coffee in hand and flicking from interview to photoshoot to regular work during the afternoon, Taha is steady-spoken with a cut-glass British accent and a relaxed and affable manner. He was born in Berlin, his parents Iraqi and Sudanese, but came to live in Southend-on-Sea aged seven. ‘That was our introduction to England,’ he says wryly. When he was a teenager, his parents moved to Abu Dhabi, leaving him to continue his education here, observing the Middle East’s transformation from afar and completing both his Part 1 and 2 at the University of Edinburgh. He’s keen, unlike other profile subjects I’ve researched, for me to settle in, speak to others in the office and get to know it well. That includes the office rescue dog, Moo, which potters around with a similarly gentle and inquisitive demeanour.

Taha’s enigmatic persona is apparently not deliberate. He appears most concerned by press coverage that applauds big media-friendly personalities whose own work doesn’t stand up to the scrutiny. ‘It’s best the work has its own quality,’ he says.

This goes some way to explaining the phenomenon. Taha’s own work has been evolving, gathering depth and conviction, since he set up in 2004 and he now has between 12 and 16 employees at any one time. It started off the back of winning three competitions he entered in his free time when working at ZHA – Europan in Manchester, a strategic masterplan in Barking and an arts centre in London Fields. Interestingly, there doesn’t seem much direct evidence of this heterogeneous architectural heritage in the output of Groupwork + Amin Taha (the full name of his practice) today. Clerkenwell Green is, for example, a tough-textured but luxurious space full of bare state materials, while Caroline Place is a super refined scheme with a Mies and Scarpaesque palette of materials and level of detailing – the project architect even designed a built-in make-up cabinet.

Nevertheless, for Taha, Andris Bersins was ‘a fantastic lesson in detailing’, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands taught him the importance of managing a contract, and ZHA showed him how to develop ideas for competitions by splitting up into teams that work individually on ideas that then get progressively disposed of and distilled. But overall it seems the largest lessons these practices had for Taha was how not to do things, one effect being that once Amin Taha Architects expanded, it became an employee ownership trust with its own name. Indeed, Taha is remarkably scathing about the situation of architecture now, particularly objecting to how buildings are built, and the way he describes the practice’s work seems to be in opposition to other architects rather than in parallel:

‘You look at most architecture, how it is taught is you draw it in plan, section and elevation and you are always initially sketching those lines that start off with a form and define the space. Very rarely are you beginning with what those forms are made of that give it its atmosphere, tactile nature and its structure. What tends to happen is you draw the stuff and the design team begins to dictate for you whether it’s a steel frame, etc. As an architect you are then to colour the facade and plasterboard the inside, and those things can be dictated by the fashions of the day – today the fashion is for brick vernacular, used like a kind of brick wash. That brick wash will not have lintels, for example, because no one
Architecture is really born of structure – why have we forgotten that?

has understood it is a piece of structure. It’s just a finish and inevitably manufacturers encourage the thinking of – why bother with real brick when you can stick on something that is paper thin?’

If there’s one period that positively influences how Taha designs today, though, it is his time with Wilkinson Eyre, where he worked on the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, the Royal Victoria Dock Bridge and the Hungerford Bridge, among others.

‘Working on such a fundamental level of structure to form the architecture is not something you get exposed to normally,’ he explains. ‘It changes the perspective because occasionally a building comes your way and you would look at it from a structure-first perspective. It makes you realise that architecture is really born of structure and you question what is all this other stuff we are layering onto buildings?’

As a writer on architecture, it’s refreshing to hear architects questioning these things. At Groupwork it’s part of an approach that treats buildings as holistic entities; every element, every material contributes to the health of the whole. The suggestion is once you work like that, there’s no going back. And when you look closely, many of the practice’s buildings, from the brick rainscreen at Barratt’s Grove to the stone grid shell at Clerkenwell Green, use loadbearing structures. It’s a method that Taha says saves time and money because it doesn’t split the budget into components – structure, finishes, etc. They can often be the same thing. On a smaller scale, in Taha’s flat, the fitted furniture becomes the partitions; some things are static but many things move. At Caroline Place, a wall is a fold-down bed, cupboard and fire lobby.

As part of that approach Taha uses a building’s history like a patient’s records. He doesn’t believe in face-lifts but rather the surgical removal of a beam here, and a wall there, ignoring aspects that pose no overall threat. For a refurbishment, he scrapes away the layers of architectural toxicity that have accumulated, while for a new-build he designs with that in mind too; cutting the fat of both the process and the architecture not for some aesthetic or moral reason, but because it makes the building cheaper to construct and run, creating architectural wholesomeness and a better place to live.

To this process of splicing, isolating and reassembling, Taha imprints a psychoanalytical dimension too – the what ifs, imagined pasts and scarred memories. This layer of scrutiny materialises as interesting idiosyncrasies and meaning, drawing in references and qualities far and wide, and to achieve it he follows a rigorous method: first ‘explore’, second ‘restore’ and third ‘ignore’. Explore by drawing long context studies, reading and speaking to local people, anything ‘that might add a bit of poetry to fundamental aspects of the design, to small areas that make it physically more relevant and culturally deeper’. Restore is about reinstating the idea of a narrative, while ‘ignore’ is about decisions to leave things as they are with positive effect. At Upper Street, at the end of a Palladian-mannered parade of shops, on a bombsite from the second world war, this approach meant reinstating the missing block as a 1:1 pigmented concrete monument to the vanished past and misremembered memories – ‘as monuments so often are’. It is deliberately contrasting, windows and ventilation panels punctuated in an almost alien fashion, the formwork made to slip and panels in the wrong place.

Taha says he didn’t take up medicine because ‘creatively all bodies are the same’. However, he simultaneously describes architecture as a language with a vocabulary and alphabet: ‘All you have to be is literate in the alphabet and vocabulary to make a literate piece of architecture that says something and is readable.’ A mystery remains about how the practice sustains itself in terms of workload – there are apparently hotels and shops as well as some 10-storey housing for Finchley Road – but intellectually at least, it seems to me, for Taha the building is the body, and what it speaks of is its soul. With the hours, of course, maybe Taha is a doctor after all.
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Room within a Room

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Antonello da Messina’s 1475 painting of St Jerome in his Study was not only a great Renaissance perspectival study but presented viewers at the time with a novel notion of space – that of ‘a room within a room’.

St Jerome sits within a raised wooden structure, a carrel: his study. His slippers are at the foot of the steps, a cardinal’s hat behind him. Around him is his lectern, writing desk, plants, bookshelves and all the appurtenances of his status and biblical meditations.

The overall idea is of a small space of intense study within a much larger architectural volume. But in depicting it, did Antonello da Messina have, in fact, created the first hot-desking workstation?

The brief
RIBAJ/SterlingOSB’s Room within a Room ideas competition invites proposals for a portable, transformable workspace made from SterlingOSB in a room within a house, public building, school or office.

It is to be a space for study and will require a desk and bookshelves, perhaps with a seat or day bed as part of the design. It will require some hanging space to allow our Renaissance person to display their work and ponder it, away from prying eyes. It may have openable windows and moving shelves or levels. All this is open to the imagination of the designer.

This will also be a space that critically transforms to become a stage for exposition of those same ideas. Our modern day Room within a Room may be able to turn inside out – to go from private study to public forum.

It may be like a reversible jacket, itinerant architecture, transforming wagon for a Wild West snake oil salesman. Hinging, reversing, sliding or folding open, it will at once be a place of solitude and ultimate revelation – all formed from SterlingOSB.

CRITERIA

- Design a space of no more than 8m², predominantly from SterlingOSB, in which people may emulate the concentration of the beatified Jerome; a space within a larger architectural volume to which one may retreat to study. It may be roofed or not – the point is that it facilitates a level of separation from the space in which it sits.
- Entrants will demonstrate how SterlingOSB can be employed in the design of a small building or installation, how the space is used and how SterlingOSB’s bespoke and high strength features are an integral part of the design.
- Designs are likely to be wholly internal, but may be partially external. If so, the cladding material must take account of its exterior context. Internal cladding materials, if used, should also be explained.

JUDGING

- Chaired by RIBA Journal, judges will be looking for imaginative uses of SterlingOSB and innovative spatial propositions. Any proposal should consider the structural, acoustic and thermal demands of the design. Prefabrication, panels or CNC fabrication may all be considered. Other materials may be used to both clad and fit out the proposal but structural integrity is to be predicated on the use of SterlingOSB.
- The winning proposal will be the one that, in the minds of the judges, produces a solution that is spatially powerful, has a logic if transformable, and which best accommodates the demands of the modern day Renaissance man/woman, while making best use of SterlingOSB’s properties.

ENTRY FORM

Please go to ribaj.com/roominaroom

SUBMISSIONS

- Entries must include the following and be laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied electronically as pdfs:
  - Plan and sections explaining function.
  - Elevations showing the external look of the intervention.
  - 3D axonometric showing construction methodology and/or components.
  - Any supplementary images you might consider helpful, for example showing spatial configurations.
  - An explanation of no more than 400 words describing the nature of the proposal.

NOTES

- The jury’s decision is final.
- No correspondence will be entered into by the organisers or judges regarding feedback on entries.
- Shortlisted entries will be notified in writing.
- Shortlisted entries will be invited to the prizegiving event on 20th September 2018.
- Please email questions to ribaj.roominaroom@riba.org

Deadline for entry: 19 June 2018
Please email your entry to: ribaj.roominaroom@riba.org
Round the houses

An opportunity for passion and commitment to the housing cause feels lost

Jan-Carlos Kucharek

As far as I can gather from this history of council housing in the UK, the apotheosis of genuine community involvement in development planning seemed to come with the publication of Patrick Abercrombie and JH Forshaw’s City of London Plan in 1943; a ‘lavish tome’, which despite wartime, apparently sold 10,000 copies, went out to school-children and the armed forces, and drew 75,000 people to its County Hall exhibition. It was even discussed by British POWs just before they made their Great Escape in 1944.

But beyond this galvanising moment, one takes away from John Boughton a sense that social housing was – and is – characterised by top-down social engineering and political and economic machinations that fail to address the working classes’ actual needs. Boughton, a left-wing historian and self-declared ‘Labour foot soldier’ may well disagree with that assertion; in an interview he hoped readers would take from his work ‘renewed belief in the positive and necessary role of the state in securing a fairer and more equal society and an appreciation of the enormously constructive role played by local government over many years’. That may be reflected in chapter three’s Utopic idealism emanating from William Beveridge’s 1942 notion of ‘social security’ for all, but it ebbs away further in – along with the concept of housing for the ‘general classes’ being eroded back to a last resort for the most vulnerable, dependent on a far less benevolent ‘welfare state.’

And that shift is well covered. Boughton takes us from the Boundary Road estate (1900), built on Old Nichol’s cleared slums, up to 2017’s Grenfell fire, in encyclopaedic detail. Chapters are well end noted, drawing from a wide range of academic and reported sources; but it’s not a dry read. Far from it – notorious episodes involving T Dan Smith/
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Value-added awards
If industry prizes are the marker of success, which practices came out on top this year? We thought it was time to find out.

Words: Hugh Pearman  Research: Michèle Woodger

We live in an era of ever-proliferating architecture and design awards. Every year brings a fresh crop. Some are specialist, some generalist, some promote a trade organisation or manufacturer. Most of the newer ones – especially those launched by media organisations – are intended mainly as money-makers, to compensate for the steep decline in conventional advertising revenues that has affected the publishing industry. So the publishing industry has morphed into an awards industry.

You can always spot the ultra-commercial ones. They have the most categories, because the more categories you have, the more people will pay to enter and the more people will shell out to buy an expensive table at the awards ceremony hosted by this or that comedian or commentator. Yet, as with café culture, there seems to be almost limitless demand for awards of all kinds – the customers keep on coming. And the more awards a practice collects, the better it cumulatively looks. They are not all of equal value however.

So as a journalistic exercise we decided to see what happens if you put all the main awards together, weighted according to relative importance, and see which practices pop out with most ‘awards value’ over the past year. We fondly call it the ‘Besties’. Easy, yes?

Oh no, not at all easy. There are challenges, and here are the main three.

Subjectivity
Who does the weighting? We do, here on the Journal. For us the RIBA Awards are the gold standard with the Stirling Prize at the top, and so on down through the various categories of RIBA and other awards, ending with the lowest-scoring which are those of trade associations. We do this in good faith but others would certainly come up with different scores, or have a wider spread from top to bottom. Awards organisers might feel they have been unfairly ranked, or unfairly excluded. We hear you. We welcome feedback. We are prepared to negotiate and re-
fine for next time. But this is not an award for awards. It’s a celebration of successful practices overall.

Which awards do we include?
Different people would compile different lists. We cover some 20 awards programmes. Some, such as the RIBA, Civic Trust and the various awards run by us and our fellow architecture magazines, demand to be there; some are optional. We decided to concentrate on awards for buildings or practices in the UK and to include one or two more specialist ones. We cover general, sector specific and任何 kind of official RIBA pronouncement on the matter of awards. It’s just us being inquisitive in a what-if manner and then realising too late that it involves loads of fiddly work and will probably make some people hate us. In the end, though, it’s another way to celebrate the best and most successful practices in the UK. Of course this favours the better larger firms who do most work and who are most assiduous at entering awards. Perhaps they can teach us something. Don’t just look at the top – scroll down the list and see who features.

Interested? Amused? Outraged? Let us know what you think at letters.ribaj@riba.org with criticisms and suggestions. Informed by those, we are fully prepared to do this again next year. •

RIBAJ BEST OF THE BEST
Winner
p74
Top 10
p78
Full List
p90

Awards weighting scores
(for projects and practices in the UK only):
50 The RIBA Stirling Prize
30 Stirling Prize shortlist (if not the winner)
30 Stephen Lawrence Prize winner
30 RIBA House of the Year winner
30 RIAS Andrew Doolan Award (Scotland)
30 Civic Trust Awards: National Panel Special Award
30 World Architecture Festival overall winner
25 RIBA National Awards winners
25 RIBA MacEwen Award overall winner
25 RIBA Rising Stars overall winner (practice)
25 BD Architect of the Year Schueco Gold Award
25 British Council for Offices (BCO) overall winner
25 World Architecture Festival special commendation
20 RIBA Regional Awards winners
20 RIBA House of the Year shortlist
20 Wood Awards Arnold Laver Award
20 AJ Awards Special winners
20 AJ Small Projects Award overall winner
20 AR Emerging Architecture Awards winner
20 Beazley Designs of the Year (Design Museum) architecture winner
20 BREEAM Awards winners
20 British Construction Industry Awards Building Project of the Year categories
20 Brick Awards overall winner
20 Concrete Awards overall winner
20 Structural Steel Design Award overall winner
15 AJ Awards category winners
15 AJ Retrofit of the Year
15 BD Awards category winners
15 Housing Design Awards winners
15 Civic Trust Awards winners
15 GAGA architectural galvanising awards winner
15 RIAS awards
15 RIBA MacEwen Award commendations
15 RIBA Rising Stars shortlist
15 Stephen Lawrence Prize shortlist
15 Wood Awards category winners
15 World Architecture Festival category winners
15 World Architecture News awards UK category winners
10 AJ Awards category winners
10 AJ Retrofit Awards category winners
10 AJ Small Projects shortlist
10 AR Emerging Architecture Awards shortlist
10 Beazley Designs of the Year (Design Museum) architecture commendations
10 BREEAM Awards shortlist
10 BCO national winners
10 All trade association award categories and commendations

Left It could be our Besties award statuette but actually it’s the restored ‘Helios’ sculpture by T B Huxley Jones at Television Centre, rethought by AHMM. See P74.
Winner: AHMM

From its formation to a £33m business in under 30 years – it’s no wonder that AHMM is the most highly decorated practice

Words: Hugh Pearman Photographs: Timothy Soar

Get any group of architects together and they’ll always have a view about AHMM, which has won our Besties with an aggregate score of 190. It appears to combine size and commercial savvy, while retaining youthful vigour and pizazz when it comes to its design credentials. And then it enjoys close long-term relationships with many blue-chip clients and other architect and design collaborators AND got to design its own genuinely impressive offices in Clerkenwell. It’s all so unfair.

But as you’d expect, other views are available. As with any practice that starts off small, young, funky and hungry and then appears to get all the pies, it’s easy to find people who will fault some of the later work. Was AHMM responsible for design tics such as the ‘barcode facade’ or the coloured-balcony look or the now-standard London pale-brick residential block or the 1960s curtain-wall revival? Hard to say: perhaps it popularised these looks. But it also has a history of more fundamental innovation – for instance on volumetric prefabricated construction. Can they still surprise?

To that, I’d answer: ‘Stirling Prize winner 2015’. Come on, you don’t land that gong unless you are seriously good. Burntwood School in Tooting (ribaj.com/buildings/burntwood-school), a state girls’ school that also contrives to be a homage to Marcel Breuer in deliciously smooth pale precast concrete, followed appearances by the practice on the Stirling shortlist, for buildings from a health centre in Kentish Town to a radically renovated office block, the Angel Building, in Islington for one of its most loyal clients, Derwent London. Yes, it is a very London practice, though these days it also has offices in Bristol and – somewhat unexpectedly – Oklahoma, USA, and overseas projects including the Uni-
25  RIBA National Awards: New Scotland Yard
20  RIBA Regional Award: 1 King William Street
20  RIBA Regional Award: Barns Road
20  RIBA Regional Award: Grand Union Studios, Ladbroke Grove
20  RIBA Regional Award: New Scotland Yard
20  RIBA Regional Award: The Library at Willesden Green
15  AJ Awards Category winner: One King William Street
15  Housing Design Awards winner: The Vincent, Bristol (not completed)
15  World Architecture Festival category winner: Westminster Bridge Road
10  AJ Retrofit Awards category winner: New Scotland Yard
10  BREEAM Awards shortlist

Opposite  Left to right: Peter Morris, Simon Allford, Paul Monaghan and Jonathan Hall do the album cover look.
structure of the firm. Allford and Monaghan lead a design studio each, Hall leads the technical design studio and the legal team, while Peter Morris is the overall manager. A fifth non-founder, Nigel Harris, is finance director.

All this means that – though Hall also directs projects and Morris crits across the studios – from a design point of view, it is essentially two practices in one, the Allford one and the Monaghan one. Stirling winner Burntwood, for instance, was from the Monaghan studio, the Stirling-shortlisted Angel Building from the Allford stable.

So let’s consider two more recent examples, yet to pick up awards: the massive Television Centre complex in west London for Stanhope Properties by the Monaghan strand, and the White Collar Factory in east London for Derwent London by Allford’s. Both mixed use, both including offices, housing, retail and landscape…..but not directly comparable because Television Centre is a large masterplan including, obviously enough, an excellent 1950s building, Television Centre. Converted into apartments now, but still with three big active studios plus a new office block and retail, it demonstrates another of AHMM’s characteristics, pulling in other architects as collaborators. The practice lists nine firms it works with: Coffey Architects, dRMM, Duggan Morris, Haptic, Maccreanor Lavington, Mikhail Riches, Stanton Williams, Piercy & Co and long-term graphic/artist friend Morag Myerscough – who has gone to town at Television Centre, inspired by the graphic legacy of the BBC. This is an important aspect of AHMM – it is a patron of other architects and designers. And Allford chairs the Architecture Foundation. They are powerful, well-connected players.

The White Collar Factory is primarily offices, but advanced offices, the result of a great deal of cross-discipline research during the downtime of the last recession into a new kind of creative-industries office environment that, counter-intuitively, drew on the lessons learned from its previous conversions of industrial buildings for the same client. So it is a brand new building which is not over-specified, with high ceilings, openable windows, list of options from basic to luxe, and a thoroughly industrial vibe derived from Jean Prouvé, most apparent in its perforated-aluminium cladding but also throughout the interiors. One might ask questions of the White Collar Factory, such as – what has Prouvé got to do with London, and isn’t it all a bit artful for the sake of artfulness? But then you are beguiled by the door handles or the rooftop café and terrace or the huge pre-existing basement re-used as a restaurant and you notice that the place let in a jiffy. If only all spec offices were up to this standard.

So, no surprise that AHMM is winner of the RIBAJ Besties. It works across all sectors and – as its impending Alder Hey Bereavement centre in Liverpool shows – it can still turn out a very considered smaller building. •
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Stepping out of the car into the parking at Oriam, Scotland’s national sports performance centre at the Heriot-Watt Riccarton campus in Edinburgh, I could have been teleported to Finland. I’m in the middle of a pinetum; parking spaces are weaving between the spindly swaying trees. It’s lunchtime. Just beyond the pines, the sun is shining, but in the middle of this carpark, it’s dark and shady, as if a Moomin might walk out from between the trees and lurking vehicles.

Architects don’t often design car parks, but here it was part of Reiach and Hall’s competition-winning 17,000m² facility built to improve Scotland’s success in football and rugby particularly. As part of the proposal the architect provided a template for the parking, as well as deciding where the centre should be geographically located too.

The Finnish connection is not obscure. We’ve nipped over here from Reiach and Hall’s Edinburgh New Town office, where it has been based since 1970. We’d been discussing the practice’s influences and Scandinavian references come up a lot – the usual suspects, but also a layer known only to connoisseurs: Timo Penttilä, Bengt Edman, Kaija and Heikki Siren.

I’m visiting while RIBAJ’s vast accumulator number cruncher is milling the data for this ‘Best of the best’ edition marking our 125th anniversary. It’s an opportunity to speak to practices about what they have been up to and what tactics bring success. Oriam is one of those projects. It finished in 2016 and has picked up the BCI’s Building Project of the Year, a Civic Trust Regional Winner and the Structural Steel Design Overall Winner. I understand why. Online I thought the project looked great – cavernous airy space captured in a giant bubble. But on the ground,
Reiach and Hall is perhaps realigning British architectural culture

Left Oriam, Scotland’s new national sports performance centre to rival England’s St George’s Park.

The firm has seven directors now and I’m talking to Gillespie and James Grimley. Disappointingly, I hear all the others except one are men too, although the practice is 50-50 women to men otherwise. Associate Laura Kinnaird is here though and she has clout. The directors call the work ‘generalist’, with many university projects. It has a low staff turnover, with 50% trained in Scotland. And while most people would say Reiach and Hall’s reputation is having a surge, perhaps realigning British architectural culture, Gillespie talks about how being on the periphery gives advantage: ‘It knows the centre but sees around it too.’ Gillespie and Grimley’s reference book of architects is no name-dropping exercise either. They’ve read the biographies and visited the sites. It makes you wonder whether there’s less of a rat race here that means it’s possible to delve into architecture more deeply and thoughtfully.

Putting aside recent winners, the practice has many interesting schemes on the horizon. In Inverclyde there’s a sports centre where 120 people in wheelchairs can arrive at once; the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service building in Edinburgh; and the National Nuclear Archive in Caithness. There’s also a huge film production site outside Milan. There won’t be much to enjoy in the rest of the UK though – only the UCLAN Engineering Innovation Centre in Preston, a venture with SimpsonHaugh. It isn’t through a lack of trying, more that ‘it’s easier to win projects in Scotland because people know us’.

But a new problem is emerging: Reiach and Hall is seeing firms that wouldn’t usually be hunting for work up here. ‘People think there must be good work,’ explains Gillespie. These awards appear good for Scotland, but less so for the practice. They don’t think Stirling success has helped win any more projects because some clients assume the buildings are expensive. However, the firm’s light industrial building methods look and feel more expensive than they are. Oriam, for example, cost £1500 per m². The downside hasn’t put them off awards yet. Kinnaird says ambitious students want to work for them more now and that feeds the cycle, making future projects potentially award-winning.

Despite all of this, Gillespie and Grimley give off a dour impression of architecture in Scotland – that it lacks mission, public projects are poorly funded; there’s Grenfell, Carillion and that falling school cladding episode a few years ago. They need not feel so bleak though. This is not architecture overcoming budget constraints through programmatic gimmicks or paint jobs. This is architecture, like Oriam, like that car park, made of the highest quality and longest-lasting materials: light and shadow, solid and space, intellecction and imagination. There are more generations in that.

it’s even better and more contextual than the images show.

Reiach and Hall put it here on the site of a former Victorian manor, complete with 4m tall brick garden wall. The building straddles that, using it as a backbone, billowing PVC roofs landing on both sides like a cloud that’s drifted down from the sky. The building’s conceptual clarity is key; its engineering prowess most apparent on the indoor/outdoor artificial turf pitch where lightness is met by mighty steel piers reminiscent of those below deck on a ship. The weather outside plays on the sculpted stretched fabric; those trees form shadows on the polycarbonate barrel end in the morning; the whole place glows orange at sunset.

Of course, Oriam is actually one of Reiach and Hall’s more ‘minor’ recent projects. That we get to this point without mentioning the practice is one of only three firms shortlisted for the Stirling Prize three years in a row is telling. The others are Fosters and Chipperfield. It’s astonishing given that Reiach and Hall oscillates between 20 and 70 employees. In 2017 and 2016 it made the list for its two-part City of Glasgow College with Michael Laird Architects and for its brick essay Maggie’s, Lanarkshire in 2015.

Yet what is interesting about Reiach and Hall is that neither of the partners’ names on the door are still in the practice. Alan Reiach and Eric Hall founded the firm in 1965 and it has been through three generations since. ‘The star architect has always sat uneasily in Scotland,’ explains current director Neil Gillespie. ‘You could say it tries to be democratic, or it could just be mediocre... There’s a sort of levelling off, a social modernism.’

Despite all of this, Gillespie and Grimley give off a dour impression of architecture in Scotland – that it lacks mission, public projects are poorly funded; there’s Grenfell, Carillion and that falling school cladding episode a few years ago. They need not feel so bleak though. This is not architecture overcoming budget constraints through programmatic gimmicks or paint jobs. This is architecture, like Oriam, like that car park, made of the highest quality and longest-lasting materials: light and shadow, solid and space, intellecction and imagination. There are more generations in that.
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BDP has quite some pedigree. Founded in 1961 as the multi-discipline Building Design Partnership, it had already existed in various forms since 1937 under the name of its founder, George Grenfell-Baines. Son of a Preston railway-worker, Baines was a lifelong socialist who – inspired by the work of Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus – put his theories on equality and fairness and inter-professional collaboration into practice. The north-western firm soon started a London office and others, UK and international, proliferated.

BDP these days employs some 1000 people and has a turnover of £82.5 million. With six UK and six overseas offices it maintains a determinedly democratic profile – the cult of personality having been expunged by Baines decades before anyone else talked about ‘succession plans’. The practice has ridden the economic ups and downs better than most – not least its Welding Institute near Cambridge whose huge industrial workshops, ingeniously camouflaged with thousands of multi-coloured ceramic baguettes, were sunk elegantly into the landscape.

Corten wouldn’t seem to sit easily among Somerset’s honeyed stones, but it’s somehow helped nestle Wells Cathedral School’s music block in its context. The Music block at Bright-on College, a symphony of timber, piqued the interest of both the RIBA and the Civic Trust.

Parry continues to revel in internal detailing too, exemplified at 5-7 Helen’s Place with Leathersellers’ Hall in the City, merging traditional leather detailing with contemporary forms. Its unapologetic brashness almost pushes the whole into the realm of bachelor pad schlock (leather walls anyone?) – but suddenly a subtle deference to context, as also manifested at its Charterhouse intervention, maintains it all within the boundaries of good taste.

This drive to dare and treat every project as a unique challenge, with the accolades it confers, confirms Eric Parry as a solid design practice, rather than merely a commercial one. •

For a practice that has only 76 architects, Eric Parry Architects not only punches above its weight in terms of awards, but also occupies the same league as much larger firms. Perhaps it was Parry’s skills as a consummate networker and member of numerous advisory panels that landed him the enviable One Undershaft job – the 73-storey tower that will crown the Square Mile on completion in the early 2020s. Either way, the firm is in the major league.

But big office buildings are not what won it accolades in 2017 – and Parry’s office seems singled out in the breadth of projects it netted awards for this year. All have a tailored delicacy – not least its Welding Institute near Cambridge whose huge industrial workshops.

Either way, the firm is in the major league.

25 RIBA National
Awards: Blackburn Meadows Biomass
20 RIBA Regional
Award: Blackburn Meadows Biomass
20 RIBA Regional
Award: Boxpark, Croydon
20 RIBA Regional
Award: Oldham Town Hall
15 Civic Trust regional:
Blackburn Meadows Biomass
15 Civic Trust
regional: National Army Museum, Kensington & Chelsea
10 AJ Retrofit
category winner: Oldham Town Hall
10 AJ Retrofit
category winner: Smythe Library, Tonbridge School
10 BREEAM Awards shortlist

25 RIBA National
Award: The Welding Institute
25 RIBA National
Award: Wells Cathedral School, New Music Facilities
20 RIBA Regional
Award: 5-7 St Helens Place with the Leathersellers’ Hall
20 RIBA Regional
Award: Brighton College Music School
20 RIBA Regional
Award: The Welding Institute
20 RIBA Regional
Award: Wells Cathedral School, New Music Facilities
15 Civic Trust regional
winner, The Charterhouse, London

Below RIBA National Award: new music facilities at Wells Cathedral School.
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Young and refreshing, 6a has confidence beyond its years

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek

It’s an unexpected mark of the confidence of an architectural office that it happily talks at length about another one; but then, with 6a architects we’re not talking about an ordinary office. We’re not even sitting in its current office but its former one; which, over time, accretion and the conscious revealing of its past layers, has morphed into both partners’ home. Within its 19th century boundary walls it’s light and warm, a Gehry-like timber extension here, a Dan Pearson courtyard space there. A stack of timber skirtings in the kitchen seems to be waiting for an as yet un-built wall and Tom Emerson, one half of the two-partner practice, has just disappeared up an aluminium scaffold stair to look for a book. Stephanie Macdonald tells me it had been ‘a temporary measure but it felt right so ended up staying.’ Unlike the highly conscious nature of 6a’s output, its own space seems, on the surface, delightfully contingent.

We were discussing the work of Flemish practice De Vylder Vinck Taillieu, whom Emerson befriended at Zurich University’s ETH before they ever worked together. ‘They joke that our home is like a doppelganger of theirs,’ Emerson says. ‘When Jan (de Vylder) came over he said, “Gosh, this is just like our place.” “What, the architecture?” I asked and he replied, “No – the mess!”’ 6a’s self-effacing nature is part of its indefatigable charm.

But there’s neither disorder or contingency in the firm’s upward trajectory – the result of recent awards and successes – not least its work with DVVT with whom its been short-listed both for the Antwerp Maritime Museum and the 25,000m², €125 million Citroën Cultural Centre in Brussels. It seems a far cry from the tiny, precious, grade I-listed Raven Row gallery in London’s Shoreditch, that brought it to prominence 10 years ago. Macdonald acknowledges that without the faith their initial institutional clients, like the South London Gallery and, more recently, Milton Keynes’ MK Gallery had shown them, they’d never have been considered for these serious commissions against big-hitters like Diller, Scofidio+Renfro and OMA.

But then 6a seems unwilling to make any distinction between the nature or scale of its projects. MK Gallery, going on site this month, ‘is a big steel shed with a massive round window,’ says Emerson, and while it’s clearly not ‘as forensic’ as Raven Row, he sees them as very much of the same semantic stable; one wrought delicately from historical fragments, the other by the big grid thinking of the modern American city, though ‘ultimately they’re both products of a context and budget.’ Likewise, while noting how fortunate they’ve been to work with enlightened clients, even their singular natures seem to be unifying rather than divisive. Emerson recalls a time when ‘in the morning we’d be meeting a few quirky Cambridge dons for Cowan Court and in the afternoon have ideas bounced off us by Juergen Teller.’ But 6a saw no schism there, or any difference in values. ‘Oddly, if we’d put the lot in a room, I imagine they’d get on famously – they’re all on some kind of edge,’ remarks Macdonald wryly. You feel that a healthy client dynamic is key to how 6a generate work.

But the adulation that follows awards seems almost antithetical for the office – the Teller studio Stirling shortlisting was six years in the making and Cowan Court’s RIBA Award nearly 10; instead you feel the pair are more absorbed with future work – their Hamburg Hafen City housing or a new contemporary art space in New York – though they acknowledge that ‘awards have seen us added to shortlists we have otherwise never managed to get on.’ But the value of awards in recognising the input of clients in the design process doesn’t pass them by either. Speaking of their arts clients, Emerson feels: ‘It brings attention and visibility to them as institutions, which is crucial now.’ What is noticeable, however, is the similar level of attention they allocate to everything they touch. A mixed-use social enterprise tower proposal in a regenerating area of Melbourne – ‘we got offered it precisely because we’d never done a tower’ – for an enlightened arts client gets the same time as an old gymnasium refurb they’re doing, almost as a favour. Macdonald talks excitedly of a collaboration here with artist Caragh Thuring for a ceramic wall entrance. Perhaps what keeps 6a thrilled by what might come out of experimentation and collaboration is that early and continued link with academia. ‘Like the Paul Smith shop we could have designed the facade,’ says Macdonald, ‘but we felt this little project was about stepping back, letting go and handing it over to Caragh; it just seemed more appropriate.’ Confidence indeed.

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**Images:**
- **Left:** 6a’s MK Gallery, about to go on site.
- **Above:** Courtyard in Juergen Teller’s studio.

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**RIBA Awards:**
- **RIBA 2017 Stirling Prize shortlist:** Studio for Juergen Teller
- **RIBA Regional: Cowan Court, Churchill College, Cambridge**
- **RIBA Regional: Studio for Juergen Teller**
- **RIBA Regional: Cowan Court, Churchill College, Cambridge**
- **Wood Awards overall winner:** Coastal house, Devon
- **Wood Awards category winner:** Coastal house, Devon
- **Wood Awards commendation:** Cowan Court, Churchill College, Cambridge
Mole Architects
Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Mole, headed up by former Manser Medal winner Meredith Bowles, has never been a practice to shout about itself; far from it, its reputation seems consolidated more by its collaborations – with the likes of Peter Salter on Walmer Yard in London, Peter Zumthor, Jarmund Vigsnaes Architects and MVRDV on Living Architecture’s high-profile one-off homes – than it has been about developing a specific profile for itself, but it’s certainly earned points by association.

But Mole may be coming up for air. This year saw it win the RIBA Stephen Lawrence Prize for projects under £1 million as well as a Regional award for its Houseboat project for Solidspace owner Roger Zogolovitch; and its bold, contemporary Marsh Hill House in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, also picked up a Regional award. Its external simplicity of white-painted brick and zinc belies a far more nuanced internal treatment that makes distinctions between public and private areas.

Perhaps next year will see the firm with a clutch of awards. It has worked with Wilkinson Eyre on a health centre, estates office and postgraduate apartments, part of the central masterplan of the new North West Cambridge development; a custom-build, also in Cambridge; and a ‘Design District’ on the Greenwich Peninsula for major developer Knight Dragon. Mole, it seems, is coming out of the shadows.

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| 30 | Stephen Lawrence Prize winner: Houseboat, Poole, Dorset |
| 25 | RIBA National Award: Walmer Yard, London |
| 20 | RIBA Regional Award: Walmer Yard, London |
| 20 | RIBA Regional Award: Marsh Hill, Aldeburgh |
| 20 | RIBA Regional Award: Houseboat, Poole, Dorset |

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Above
Last year’s Stirling Prize winner, dRMM’s Hastings Pier.

Below

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dRMM
Jan-Carlos Kucharek

dRMM’s Alex de Rijke was right when he stepped up to accept the Stirling Prize last year; what was intriguing about the eventual winner was the fact that it was awarded more to a non-building than a building. That’s taking nothing away from the ingenious design of Hastings’ new visitor centre – a passing homage to Adalberto Libera’s Casa Malaparte – but the fact that most of the restoration involved the generation of empty space on the seafront that could be ‘occupied’ with events. It caught the imagination of the judges, winning the RIBA treble to finally scoop the 2017 Stirling Prize.

Coming in past the deadline for the RIBA Awards but in time for the Wood Awards was the practice’s less vaunted Maggie’s Oldham – a building no less designed for its users than Hastings. Executed in CLT hardwood tulipwood, the building floats on slender stilts in a garden, with all the interiors formed of the same warm, yellow timber as the exterior. Since those undergoing cheemo-therapy can experience pain when touching cold objects, even door handles were made from timber – small details that made it the Wood Awards’ Education and Public Sector winner.

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| 50 | RIBA Stirling Prize winner: Hastings Pier |
| 25 | RIBA National Award: Hastings Pier |
| 20 | RIBA Regional Award: Hastings Pier |
| 15 | Wood Awards category winner: Maggie’s Oldham |
| 10 | Wood Awards Commendation: Hastings Pier |
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RSHP
Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Long ensconced on the banks of the Thames at Hammersmith, RSHP emanates a new-found sense of purpose having moved east to the City into its own Leadenhall Tower – looking down over the Lloyd’s Building, the edifice that cemented Richard Rogers’ global reputation back in the eighties. If there was ever an architectural equivalent to ‘Football’s Coming Home,’ this is it. But the 150-architect-strong practice has always had something of the sense of a social enterprise, where power moves slow and transparent like estuarial waters; so while Rogers’ name will drop from the office acronym at some point, you sense that the style he defined for the firm won’t.

Despite teething problems, Leadenhall’s structural logic saw it rewarded as overall winner of the Structural Steel Awards. The pre-fabrication so key to that project was also employed in its Guy’s Cancer Centre in south London, a building whose expressed cores and ductwork seemed a bold-as-brass reference to Rogers’ own Pompidou Centre decades before. The £90 million WCEC for the British Museum however, was a very different beast, squeezing in both state of the art conservation labs and contemporary exhibition spaces on the side of Sir Robert Smirke’s temple to culture in Bloomsbury. It was an effort that each tier of the RIBA judges recognised, taking it all the way up to the Stirling 2017 shortlist.

Below RSHP’s British Museum World Conservation & Exhibitions Centre.
To whom does one entrust the design of the Bartlett School – which, according to QS’s 2018 University rankings, is the second-best architecture school in the world after MIT? It turned out to be Hawkins\Brown, whose decision to peel its much-loved but failing 1970s Wates House back to its bones and reconstruct it in a contemporary guise earned it an RIBA Regional as well as a Civic Trust award, generating a bold public face for both school and college at the north end of UCL’s campus on Gordon Street.

The firm’s delicate refurbishment of Hackney Town Hall also garnered a plaudit from the Civic Trust, while its ability to deal with education buildings – new build this time – was exemplified at its Living Systems Institute for Exeter University. The RIBA regional judges called it a ‘world class facility’.

There’s delicacy to its solid to void relationships and a tip of the hat to expressed sustainability credentials with its ventilation stacks; though this failed to capture the imaginations of the National awards.

You feel this doesn’t concern Hawkins/ Brown. The 240+ firm has developed into a mature practice that yet retains a youthful edge and exuberance. The ghostly debossed brick details of its St John’s Hill Estate speak of an awards Christmas yet-to-come.

It’s a mark of respect for a firm when James Dyson asks the practice that designed his factory nearly 20 years ago to do the extension. Last year Dyson’s D9 building completed on the Cotswold campus he opened in 1999 – 10,000m² of new R&D space with a very nice café and gym added for good measure. The quality of the highly glazed yet discreet new build, an updated version of the ‘Supershed’ concept that won Chris Wilkinson the original commission in 1991, impressed the judges too, netting it both RIBA Regional and National awards.

Other recent UK projects from this international practice include the complex servicing demands of the Bodleian’s Weston Library, re-purposing of the listed gasometers at Argent’s King’s Cross development and the next phase of the Lord’s cricket campus at Marylebone. 8 Finsbury Circus too, a symphony of Portland stone, bronze and walnut providing 15,000m² of Cat A office space and scalloped stone reception areas on the edge of the City, highlights the firm’s broad expertise and gained recognition last year from RIBA judging panels at Regional and National levels.

With nearly 200 staff in total, the firm is itself a corporate entity ‘Chris has always understood the importance of awards to the firm,’ says head of comms Michelle Lewis. ‘Both in terms of job satisfaction for individuals and the public perception of the office, it is a key aspect of our company’s ethos.’
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### Total points (position)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Position</th>
<th>Practice Name</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>6A Architects</td>
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<td>dRMM Architects</td>
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<td>Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners</td>
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<td>Allies and Morrison</td>
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<td>Niall Maxwell</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>James Macdonald Wright</td>
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<td>85 (22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RIBA Best of the best

- **Allford Hall Monaghan Morris**
- **Reiach and Hall Architects**
- **Eric Parry Architects**
- **BDP**
- **6A Architects**
- **Mole Architects**
- **dRMM Architects**
- **FaulknerBrowns**
- **Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners**
- **HawkinsBrown**
- **Wilkinson Eyre**

### Highlights

- **Paradise Gardens, Ravenscourt Park, London**
  LDS has been carving a niche for itself in the high-end residential and education sectors and was crowned ‘Architect of the Year’ 2017 by the AJ. It also awarded the firm Best Housing Project for Paradise Gardens, a bijou private development of six houses in West London, while on a bigger scale, LDS undertook the urban place making of Fitzroy Place on the central London site occupied by the former Middlesex Hospital.

- **Caring Wood, Leeds, Maidstone**
  Macdonald Wright’s parents-in-law were the client for this indulgent 1400m² second home for an extended family of 15. The result is a slowly matured contemporary design in the modern picturesque tradition that scooped him and Niall Maxwell the RIBA’s House of the Year. It wasn’t just the quality of materials that impressed the judges – the carbon-neutral, low energy design also netted it an RIBA Regional sustainability award.
Despite an output that almost guarantees the former Stirling Prize winner coverage in the national architectural press, Caruso St John is a relatively small practice. Last year saw its bucolic gallery for Downing College and, in a grittier urban context, the £8.5 million refurbishment of Herbert Rowse’s grade II* listed Liverpool Philharmonic. The former won a RIBA Regional award, the latter a RIBA National accolade.

With a string of design awards, Haworth Tompkins has joined the big league, particularly in arts, education and housing. The tenure-blind £26 million Silchester development for Peabody near Grenfell Tower provides 112 new homes and absorbs an existing 20-storey tower. With RIBA National and Civic Trust awards, the design quality, by sheer proximity, leaves unanswered bigger questions about social housing provision.

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Young practice ACG has expanded rapidly over the last year, and last month won Practice of the Year at the World Architecture News Awards. Winner of last year’s RIBAJ MacEwen Award, the firm is in the running alongside much more established practices in the high-profile £1 million transformation of the Old Street roundabout. It might have been just one project they won for this year but this feels like a start.
Feilden Fowles’ Studio, Lambeth, London

It might have built its own 12-person, £200,000 office but 2016’s BD YAYA winner punches above its weight in the wider world. Beyond its Yorkshire Sculpture Park visitor centre it has won competitions for a £7 million refectory for Homerton College in Cambridge and a £12 million extension to Green Templeton College at Oxford’s Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. Feilden Fowles is, like its own small office, a practice to watch.

Feilden Fowles’ Studio, Lambeth, London

The Echoes, Grays, Thurrock.

Winning an RIBA Regional award for the Echoes, 53 flats and a community centre for Thurrock Council with idiosyncratic pointy balconies facing south to the Thames, Bell Phillips seems at home with residential design for both councils and registered social landlords. Bracelet Close in Corringham, Essex, is a £2.3 million development of 12 two and three-storey houses, the build quality of which saw them win a Civic Trust award.

West Croydon Bus Station.

Unusually, TFL appointed its own in-house architects for this small bus station, led by Martin Eriksson who trained at Herzog & de Meuron. Interestingly, there’s less of the Swiss big cheeses’ influence here than Arts and Crafts in this delicate, humane brick, timber and Corten intervention amid the UK’s iteration of Godard’s dystopian Alphaville. The contrast earned it a RIBA Regional award and a Brick Awards category win.
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Ivor Smith 1926 – 2018

Architect and teacher, renowned for Sheffield’s now-listed Park Hill complex and the ‘flying circus’ of eminent architects he gathered to teach at Dublin

In 1953 he started in the city architect’s office in Sheffield, soon taking on large projects. Park Hill was built between 1957 and 1961 but in 1960 he left to join Tom Lupton and John Morton in a practice in Wallingford. They soon moved on and the practice became Ivor Smith Architects.

At this time Ivor began to teach architecture in Cambridge for one or two days a week. He felt strongly that those who taught should also be practising architects. In 1968 he was appointed professor of architecture at University College Dublin, and it was here that he put those ideas firmly in place with a team of eminent contemporary practitioners visiting Dublin to teach. It became known as ‘the flying circus’. Among the many he valued were Andy MacMillan and Isi Metzstein.

He also taught in Edinburgh and as professor at Bristol, where he opened a second architectural practice. But by this time differences were developing between the partners in his firm about his teaching/practice balance. In the mid 1980s Ivor left to devote the rest of his life to teaching. He was invited by The Commonwealth Institute to establish the first school of architecture in the Caribbean.

Ivor had a special gift to be able to read buildings: his analysis often referred back to the principles of classical architecture and its underlying principles of space and place-making. In the final years of his life he wrote ‘Architecture – an Inspiration’, drawing together the key principles of his architectural thinking. Late in life he returned to Park Hill several times at the invitation of Jonathan Falkingham, architect and Urban Splash director, when they started refurbishing the complex. Falkingham recalls: ‘His insight and take on what we were doing was incredibly useful and helped us navigate the design tensions between conservation and reinvention.’

Ivor is survived by his wife Audrey, his four children, eight grandchildren (two of whom are also architects) and five great grandchildren.

Nicholas Pawlik and Hugh Pearman
1928 rolled round, and in the pages of the RIBA Journal it at first seemed business as usual: learned articles about the Parthenon, correspondence about the structural and aesthetic rationale of Chinese pagodas, and a member proudly describing how he had made a bamboo rod in five sections stretching to 25ft 9in with a hook at the top ‘to which one may attach the ring of a measuring tape. This I find is the easiest way of measuring buildings without the bother of ladders, etc.’

But outside this cosy world, something momentous was happening: modernism. It was affecting Europe, Scandinavia, and even, transitonally, England: Peter Behrens had recently completed ‘New Ways’, a house in Northamptonshire for the Bassett-Lowkes. The RIBA could ignore the phenomenon no longer: in May 1928 it called a debate. Speaking in favour of modernism: the free-thinking, witty Arthur Beresford Pite. Speaking against: stuffed shirt Sir Reginald Blomfield, RA (‘a close student of the Greeks and their work’). In the audience: at least some younger people, as noted by President Walter Tapper.

Pite, well into his sixties, was evangelical about the coming change. Goading Tapper, a noted old-school church architect, he said: ‘When St Paul’s burned down, it was rebuilt in the modern style, though I suppose you, sir, would have urged the Institute and every member of it to petition the government that it should have been rebuilt as it was before.’

Then he laid into the whole profession. ‘Our difficulty is that we have been entirely submerged since that date by an effete and feeble striving after antiquity. Our eyes are in the back of our heads, instead of in the front; we can see nothing straight… We want waking up; we want stirring out of this absurd reactionary want of courage, this inability to design, which has tied us down to the past for many generations.’

The Continent, averred Pite, was ‘striving with violence to get rid of the classical tradition and to create a style which is indescribable. The Germans have invented a word for it – ‘Sachlichkeit’.’ For Pite, this had all started in England with Morris, Crane and Burne-Jones. ‘It is for us to develop it; resolutely turning our faces forward, instead of backward.’

Blomfield, in his early seventies, lapsed into French, Greek and Latin quotes and rhapsodised over the Eclogues of Virgil. ‘I would urge our ‘modernists’ to think again. They have plenty of energy and ability, and we older men take a genuine interest in what they are doing, but to us it seems a pity that they should waste their labours on experiments which our wider experience leads us to think may end in smoke.’ Shudderingly, he added that modernism was like the ‘atonal’ music of ‘Herr Schoenberg’.

And what did the young ‘uns in the audience think? One JW Mackail remarked: ‘Only the other day I saw, not a hundred miles from London, a building – if I may so call it – which had proportion and had a strange beauty. It was a gasometer.’

But the atmosphere was thick with compromise. Le Corbusier? Nobody had a good word for him, least of all the youngish Harry Goodhart-Rendel. ‘I think he is one of those men who are born old-fashioned. I think he has the worst Victorian ethical view of architecture, and he only manages to be heard because he talks a great deal and is very noisy.’

Everyone ignored Behrens, then 60, as a forerunner of the modernist tide. But some of his drawings for New Ways found their way eventually into the RIBA collections, so for context we reproduce one of them here.
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The development of film set design in the 1920s and 1930s benefited from the input of professionals with an architectural background, and achieved its most remarkable results in France, Germany and the US, where art deco and modernism often influenced the aesthetic of film decor. Of the other European countries, Italy arguably produced the most interesting examples of modern set design, while Britain’s most renowned contribution was given by the 1936 science fiction film Things to Come, adapted from a novel by H G Wells.

The author first approached Fernand Léger for the effects and modern settings, but the French artist’s drawings were rejected and the sets eventually designed by the producer’s brother, art director Vincent Korda. To create his futuristic world, Korda employed a new display plastic called Rhodoid, which was available in many different formats and colours. László Moholy-Nagy, then living in Britain, was commissioned to create the special effects; however, only a few minutes were eventually used, perhaps being considered too experimental and abstract. • Valeria Carullo

The exhibition Rationalism on Set: Glamour and Modernity in 1930s Italian Cinema, opens at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London, on 18 April.
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